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GLOCALISING A SUBCULTURE: JAPANESE DJS IN THE LOCAL GOTH COMMUNITY

Abstract

The article describes the culture of Japanese Gothic DJs and analyses their figures. The Gothic DJs are a part of the general Gothic art, and Goth subculture intercultural movements, taken from the West and re-invented in Japan. In Japan, those movements are a strong reaction towards the dominant, conservative culture, whereas, in the West, this classical opposition (described by, for example, Dick Hebdige) is not that strong nowadays. Japanese social collectivism is often seen as oppressive towards some artistic and free-spirited individuals. Artists like those DJs are the opposition to this collectivism, and their sets at the parties make a space for other Goths to express themselves in their safe space. This movement is also very innovative due to mixing different aesthetics (*keis*) and minimising the problem of subcultural gatekeeping. The paper describes the rebellion led by DJs' performances, music sets, and visual style. It is based on the bigger field research done in 2019 and 2023, where the method used was participatory observation.

Keywords: Japanese DJs, Gothic, Goth subculture, Glocalisation

A man dressed in a black witch's hat, a long black costume, and white make-up climbed onto the console stand next to the bar at the small venue of Otsuka Chitei. The first sounds that emanated from the amplifiers were the tolling of a church bell, soon joined by the haunting tones of an organ. The man spread his arms wide to welcome the entire club into the ritual he was about to lead. He gazed around the room, sweeping his hand over the crowd as if casting a spell upon the dancers. He smiled and flashed a deep grin towards a woman standing below. It was later revealed that

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the opening theme of his performance was the *Graveyard Symphony*, also known as *The Undertaker Theme*, a song famously used by the wrestler Undertaker for his ring entrances.

As the church bells faded, an upbeat tempo of aggrotech electronic music began to pulse through the speakers. The man's movements became more energetic, and soon, the dance floor was alive, with people following his lead. The setlist started with *Krank* by the German band Agonoize, followed by *The Great Depression* by the American band Aesthetic Perfection.

The aggressive vocals and pounding beats of aggrotech started to blend with the melodic and calmer tones of dark electro during *Schlusspoetik* by Schwarzblut from the Netherlands. The energy then surged back to the intense beats of industrial electronic music with *Just One Fix* by Tragic Impulse from the US.

The set took an intriguing turn with hard rock and Gothic rock anthems. The first commercial hit was *Du Hast* by the German giants Rammstein. This marked the introduction of Japanese bands into the mix. *All I Want* by Poison D'Hermes showcased classic Gothic rock reminiscent of European bands from the 1990s like Closterkeller. The local flavour continued with *Witch Hunt* by 13th Moon, an innovative take on the genre.

Returning to German influences, *Globalized* by De:Ad:Cibel filled the venue, followed by the aggrotech classic *Schwarze Fee* by Centhron. The energy continued with danceable tracks from Blutengel (*All These Lies*) and SynthAttack (*Call Me Insane*).

The DJ concluded the set with an unexpected choice, a Japanese band with deep underground roots: Automod, performing their Gothic-punk-metal hit *Devil Dance*. This eclectic set was a masterful blend of various Gothic musical styles and artists from around the world, creating a dark and complex auditory experience that seamlessly intertwined electronic music with classic Gothic rock and metal.[2]

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[2] The whole DJ Set from DJ Kihito was:
1. *Graveyard Symphony* by WWF (Undertaker Theme);
2. *Krank* by Agonoize;
3. *The Great Depression* by Aesthetic Perfection;
4. *Schlusspoetik* by Schwarzblut;
5. *Just One Fix* by Tragic Impulse;
6. *Du Hast* by Rammstein;
7. *All I Want* by POISON D'HERMÈS;

That mix was a perfect one for the Gothic club – and the feeling was familiar for a foreigner like me. Those kinds of sets, mixing electronic, dark wave, EBM, aggrotech with Gothic rock, hard rock, and metal, are popular for Gothic parties in the 21st century all over the world, even in Europe. Thus it reminded me of the Gothic disco parties I have been to in Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic. The elements of Japanese music were the main difference and made the whole performance interesting.

The DJ's persona was also very unique, with the magical introduction and a specific entourage with his makeup and contact lenses, resembling a corpse or a ghost, which made a perfect fit with his long, black outfit. In a later interview, it turned out that playing Poison D'Hermes was not a coincidence – for it was the band of the performing DJ. He was none other than the famous Tokyo artist called Kihito.

Blending the foreign musical and visual influence, he made me wonder about how a conservative but also very complex society like the one in Tokyo could make a place for such an intriguing show. This article is an attempt to capture the reality of Japanese Goths and DJ clubs.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The aim of this article is to analyse the role of the DJ in Japanese Gothic nightclubs. First I will discuss theoretical aspects of glocalisation, then present some of the DJs' artistic and aesthetic profiles and how they feel about their work and art. Next, I will discuss how glocalisation influences the subculture in general.

> *So, the main research questions in this article are: how do the DJs present themselves within the Gothic community in Japan? How do they glocalise the Goth subculture?*

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8. *Witch Hunt* by 13th Moon;
9. *Globalized* (Remix by K-Bereit) by [De:Ad:Cibel];
10. *Schwarze Fee* by Centhron;
11. *All These Lies* by Blutengel;
12. *Call Me Insane* (90s Tribute) by SynthAttack;
13. *Devil Dance* by Auto-Mod.

See: DJ Dark Castle.

This research took place in the country's four largest cities – Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, and Nagoya – located on Honshu Island, and was qualitative in nature. While this approach did not provide a comprehensive overview of the entire Gothic culture in Japan, I am confident that it revealed a form of Japanese Gothicism in the 21st century that serves as a significant source of inspiration for other countries in Asia and beyond, particularly the USA and Europe. The research involved participant observation and in-depth interviews with members of the Gothic subculture, local artists, DJs, and designers.

In total, I conducted 14 interviews lasting from several minutes to over two hours. Unfortunately, only one individual agreed to the recording and sharing of the full interview. The remaining participants consented to the interviews but did not permit recording or video sharing. Nevertheless, I prepared detailed notes for each interview afterwards, enabling me to utilise the information gathered to communicate my research findings.

The interviews were mainly expert ones, with the artists. During my second field research work time (March and April 2023), as stated above, I have conducted 14 deepened interviews, 10 being with local DJs. Some of them have been onstage since the 1980s and 1990s. All of them have been re-written from recordings and analysed after the field work with the scientific literature and modern Internet discourse.

While in Japan, I visited numerous venues and events associated with the Gothic subculture and conducted extensive audiovisual documentation, as many locations allowed me to record and take photographs. My research occurred during a particularly significant period, as the Gothic subculture in Japan experienced a severe crisis during the lockdowns related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was reflected in the collected material and suggested specific interpretative directions. In 2023, following the end of enforced isolation, members of the Gothic community strongly desired to reunite within their own underground cultural world. This was achieved through the organisation of Gothic dance events in small clubs and bars – an essential aspect of Gothic subculture worldwide, particularly since the golden years of London's Batcave club in the 1980s.

The contemporary Gothic subculture in Japan, following the pandemic-induced crisis, also returned to its roots in the form of Gothic club dancing. My research highlighted its crucial role in reuniting Goths in intimate venues with exclusive atmospheres and semi-private marketing, which brought together closely connected individuals who often travelled across

Japan to participate. Gothic dance itself serves as a vital medium for individual expression and integration within the subculture, an aspect I plan to explore further in an upcoming publication.

While in Japan, I visited numerous locations and events related to the Gothic subculture and extensively documented them audiovisually, as I was allowed to record and take photographs in many places.

The research is based on the theoretical achievements of cultural studies, along with the foundations of the philosophy of culture, anthropology, and analytical aesthetics. The study adopts a constructivist paradigm, which involves exploring the world of experiences and the construction of individual meanings as a social construct (Lombardo & Kantola 2021).

The theory used in the study and article is also connected to the subcultures' social and cultural research. I will be referring to the most important works about the subcultural structure and the aspect of rebellion, which is very important in the Japanese Gothic nightclub realm. The role of the Disc Jockey would be analysed according to those. To do that, we need to understand some concepts and how they work in a Japanese realm.

GLOCALISATION IN JAPAN

Japan is a country that combines local and global in a way that the "global" or "foreign" elements are becoming much more extraordinary, visible, and unique. Japanese culture is the one that takes a phenomenon, changes and exaggerates it. The glocalisation process is very special in Japan (Khondker 2004).

Glocalisation itself is "the ability of a culture, when it encounters other strong cultures, to absorb influences that naturally fit into and can enrich that culture" (Friedman 2000, 326). So, if a culture takes a foreign phenomenon and incorporates it into itself, the phenomenon becomes a local one. It is also changed to be more acceptable for a local community or nationality. So, the foreign phenomenon becomes a familiar, local one and has a more local style to it.

An interesting fact is that the term "glocalisation" was originally something used by Japanese marketing experts around the 1980s. They were using it to describe a process by which products of Japanese origin should be localised in foreign cultures and regions. While the products were global in the application and reach, they should be suited to local tastes and interests – so they created a new term, "glocalisation." This phenomenon

was first scientifically described by Roland Robertson, a British-American sociologist who had an interest in comparative sociology and modern Japanese culture (Robertson 1995).

Erik Swyngedouw (1997) furthered this by examining the political and economic aspects of glocalisation, emphasising how global forces manifest differently across local scales. In the realm of cultural industries, Giulianotti and Robertson (2004) applied glocalisation to the world of sports, illustrating how global trends in football adapt to local cultures. Marwan Kraidy (2005) and his work on cultural hybridity also provided important insights into how media content is localised for different audiences. More recently, studies like André's (2020) analysis of Netflix show how glocalisation impacts modern media and entertainment, with global platforms adapting content to resonate with local markets while maintaining global appeal. These works highlight the versatility of the concept and its application across different sectors, from sports and media to politics and commerce.

Japanese Gothic culture and goth subculture are heavily influenced by Western Gothic traditions, particularly those originating in Europe, for example, the UK. Elements such as dark, Victorian-inspired clothing, lace, corsets, and an overall aesthetic of melancholy and romanticism are deeply rooted in the global Gothic scene. However, in Japan, these influences are reinterpreted and localised, giving birth to something distinctly Japanese. The most prominent example of this is the rise of Gothic Lolita fashion, which combines the macabre and dark tones of Gothic style with the kawaii (cute) culture of Japan. This fusion creates a look that is simultaneously elegant and playful, often featuring doll-like dresses, intricate accessories, and make-up that reflects both darkness and innocence. Many other styles and local subcultures have raised throughout the Gothic glocalisation of global aesthetics in the Japanese Gothic realm, such as Jirai kei, Yami kawaii, Japanese Gothic Belly Dance, and Japanese Fetish Goth. Those stylistics are also influencing what is crucial to the Goth Subculture – the Gothic club dancing parties.

THE ROLE OF DJS WITHIN THE GOTHIC CLUB COMMUNITY IN JAPAN

Gothic clubbing has been popular from the very beginning of the Goth subculture – from its roots at the 1980s Batcave club in London. Some

members of the subculture like to stress that it was not the very first Gothic club – the first one in the world was Le Phonographique (also called the Phono), which opened in 1979 in Leeds (Dawson 2016). However, established in 1982 by Ollie Wisdom, it was the Batcave that quickly became the epicentre of the emerging Goth movement and a music legend. It was more than just a nightclub; it was a haven for individuals drawn to the darker, more melancholic aspects of post-punk and new-wave music. Bands such as Bauhaus, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and The Sisters of Mercy found a dedicated audience at the Batcave, and the club's atmosphere, characterised by its macabre decor and theatrical performances, helped define the visual and cultural ethos of Goth. The Batcave provided a space where music, fashion, and performance art converged, allowing the nascent Goth community to cultivate a shared identity and aesthetic (Young 1999).

Gothic clubbing, as it evolved from the foundations laid in the Batcave, became an essential aspect of the subculture. These clubs offered more than just a venue for listening to music; they were immersive environments where Goths could express themselves freely through elaborate fashion, dance, and social interaction. The music played in these clubs – ranging from dark wave and industrial to Gothic rock and ethereal wave – served as the soundtrack to a lifestyle that embraced the beauty in darkness and melancholy. Gothic clubbing provided a sense of belonging and community as club-goers connected over shared tastes and experiences. This culture of nocturnal gatherings and performances played a crucial role in the propagation and sustainability of the Goth subculture, fostering a global network of Goths who found solace and solidarity in the clubs that echoed the spirit of the original Batcave (Young 1999).

Thus, club dancing and Goth disco parties are crucial for the Goth subculture all over the world. And we cannot miss out the central role of those dance, musical, and fashion gatherings – the DJ. The art of DJing serves as both a social and cultural conduit for the goth community. DJing, as an artistic and performative practice, holds a significant place within the global goth subculture. It involves the selection and mixing of music that aligns with the aesthetic and thematic elements of goth culture, including dark wave, industrial, post-punk, Gothic rock, EBM, aggrotech, and much more. In the context of Japan, DJing not only facilitates the dissemination of these music genres but also plays a pivotal role in the formation of communal bonds and the reinforcement of subcultural identities.

Japanese goth DJs curate and create immersive experiences that resonate with the emotional and aesthetic sensibilities of their audiences. The DJ's role extends beyond mere entertainment to becoming a central figure in the cultural and social life of the community. The interplay between music, visual elements, and performative acts at these events underscores the importance of DJing as a medium for expressing and experiencing the Gothic ethos. The styles of their personas and performances, strongly rooted in the Japanese Gothic glocalisation, are what influence the local Goths; the Gothic community in Japan. This research aims to explore the styles of Japanese Gothic DJs within the aspect of glocalisation.

When I asked DJ Sisen Murasaki about the social role of the DJ and how he feels about conducting an event or a DJ set, he told me that it "provides healing and awakening through dark tones, sometimes embodying a rebellious spirit."[3]

And this is truly what the Gothic DJ is about. It has to be mentioned that, from a young age, some Japanese people are labelled as 'strange' and pressured to conform to societal norms. The Japanese education system promotes conformity and discourages standing out. In a collectivist society such as Japan, blending in is seen as the perfect behaviour (Azuma 1998). The Japanese are very conservative and avoidant of morbid or dark topics, thus, Goths tend to feel lonely and excluded there. They love darkness and decay, they are attracted to the unknown and the eerie, and they seek poetry in ghastly and grotesque images – something that is seen as a taboo or a strange aberration by the majority.

Also, incorporating numerous foreign influences was always a part of Gothic, no matter the country. In Japan, it is a part of the subcultural rebellion against the dominant culture and conservatism. The DJ is part of a special order – they lead the local goths, mix transcultural elements, and localise the Gothic, making it suitable for people that rebel much more than Goths in European or American countries. The Goth subculture provides a sanctuary for those who fail to blend into society and who do not feel safe or "at home" in it. It allows them to express themselves freely and connect with like-minded personas. The DJ, a crucial role in the club, leads those individuals to express themselves, rebel, and fight against oppressive social expectations. To me, their phenomenon is, of course, one worth researching.

[3] JN: 暗い音色での癒しと目醒め 時に反骨精神も。

RESEARCHING GOTHIC DJING – STATE OF THE ART

The academic exploration of Gothic club culture and dance parties has seen a degree of scholarly attention, though the specific role of DJing within this subculture remains under-examined. Notable works include Tricia Herny Young's *Dancing on Bela Lugosi's Grave: The Politics and Aesthetics of Gothic Club Dancing* (1999) and Isabella van Elferen's Dances with Spectres: theorising the Cyber Gothic (2009). These studies primarily focus on the aesthetic and political dimensions of Gothic club dance rather than the nuances of DJing or the DJ's role.

Isabella van Elferen's book, *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny* (2012), incorporates a few interviews with DJs about music. However, it does not delve deeply into the DJ culture or the specific practices and significance of Gothic DJs. The primary focus of the book is on the broader sonic landscape of Gothic music rather than the DJing aspect.

In *Goth Music: From Sound to Subculture* (2015), van Elferen and Weinstock analyse DJ sets in one chapter to illustrate the diversity of Gothic music, demonstrating that some bands and projects have achieved global recognition. This analysis, based on two events from different cultural contexts, highlights the variability within Gothic music but stops short of a comprehensive examination of DJing practices.

Similarly, Agnes Jasper's '*I Am Not a Goth!*' *The Unspoken Morale of Authenticity within the Dutch Gothic Subculture* (2004) includes interviews with Gothic DJs as part of a broader cultural description. However, Jasper's research does not specifically address the practice of DJing or investigate the roles and experiences of Gothic DJs.

DJing itself has been researched for many decades now, but while its roots are not essentially Gothic, most of the books and papers are about dance music and hip-hop disc jockeys. Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton (1999) wrote the most complex and important monograph about the history of Disc Jockeys, while the first popular university article about DJing was The Walkman Effect by Shuhei Hosokawa, focusing on the impact of portable music technologies on listening practices, paving the way for DJ technology evolution. From the early researchers, we can also recall Ulf Poschardt (1995) and Kai Fikentscher (2000), who focused on how the role of the DJ shaped the underground dance music scene and audience interaction.

Some of the most interesting gender-focused works were the ones of Tara Rodgers (2010) and Liz Pelly (2017).They focused on how female DJs were becoming more and more accepted and crucial to the scene.

While these works contribute valuable insights into the DJ and Gothic cultures and their musical dimensions, the academic field needs more focused studies on the role of DJing within Gothic clubs, which has yet to be done. There remains a need for detailed research that investigates how DJs shape Gothic nightlife, influence musical trends within the subculture, and contribute to the community's cultural cohesion and identity. The gap in the literature presents a significant opportunity for future scholarship to explore the intricate dynamics of Gothic DJing and its impact on the subculture.

This article provides a study about Gothic DJing in Japan which might fill the aforementioned gap in the context of this country. To begin, I will need to describe the profiles of selected DJs, beginning with one very special figure.

RESULTS – THE DJS AND THEIR PROFILES

Sisen Murasaki

The ARTIST – this is how I would describe Sisen Murasaki, the most adorable and helpful Japanese friend I have ever had. Sisen is a DJ, a dancer, a model, a visual artist, and sometimes even a bartender at parties. A very flexible person who fills every role at the party or event. His clothing, makeup style, and public behaviour are part of a character he created many years ago. In one of the interviews, a friend of Sisen; a fetish model Elizabeth, mentioned that he is the type of person that sticks to this character. That means his style and performance fluctuate around this specific artistic persona.

In an interview from 2020 conducted by Kat Joplin, Sisen said "Even as a child, I prepared for the fact I couldn't walk a respectable life" (Joplin & Murasaki 2020). He describes how he has always felt the queer element inside, which made him feel alienated from the traditional, conservative society that Japan is. His early art was based on feelings of gender misalignment and the influence of drag queens in Tokyo. After that, he moved to Germany, which allowed him to see the bigger picture of the artistic

and LGBTQ+ world, which made him understand the complex aspects of his personality and gender. Moving away from the traditional drag style after coming back to Japan, he now embraces a gender-fluid presentation, finding it liberating. Sisen is proud to support others in finding their identity and self-expression within the vibrant subcultures of Tokyo.

During my second visit to Japan, I could learn more about his story in a friendly conversation or a more specific interview. Sisen's aesthetic is an evolving blend of gender-subversive, androgynous, and gothic elements. Early on, he mimicked drag but eventually developed a unique style that resists strict gender categorisation, describing himself as a boy with androgynous charm or a person who likes to play with gender aesthetics. He often highlights how fashion allowed him to embrace his queer identity, supporting individuality over societal norms. He sees club culture as a medium for self-transformation and encourages others to express their freedom.

"You can live within a subculture and an underground scene and satisfy your desire to transform," he says. "You can have the confidence to say, 'I'm glad to be myself" (Joplin & Murasaki 2020). This is a very important aspect of his social role – as a DJ and a performer, he leads people to show their individuality and rebel against the dominant culture.

Sisen's character reflects a deep connection to gothic and underground club culture, blending music, fashion, and performance art to express his individuality. His style is an evolving mix of dark, avant-garde aesthetics and rebellious energy, influenced by goth, industrial, and dark wave sounds. Sisen's fashion choices align with his emotional state and event themes, often blending androgynous, futuristic, and gothic elements. His movements while DJing highlight his focus on authentic self-expression over performance perfection, as he told me: "While it's essential to consciously make movements appear graceful, I prefer those that arise from within, similar to contemporary dance or Butoh."[4]

He values transformation through both fashion and music, using these mediums to create an inclusive space for others to explore their own identities. His experience living in Berlin significantly shaped his understanding of rhythm and groove, giving him a new perspective on DJing. As he says about the musical style, we can hear that Sisen has been influenced by artists like the Japanese Malice Mizer, Velvet Eden, and Art Marju Duchain,

[4] JN: 意識してきれいに魅せることも大事ですが、内面から湧き出るような動きが良いと思います。コンテンポラリーダンスや舞踏のような。

but also foreign Lingouf (from France) and Lamia (from Argentina).[5] His work remains firmly rooted in the intersection of music, art, and cultural subversion.

Hyobu

While talking to Sisen at the bar in Otsuka Chitei, another person comes to join us. A tall and thin man in a minimalistic, dark, asymmetrical jacket greets us. Sisen introduces us to each other – his name is Hyobu Kurata, and he is another famous DJ, often performing in Tokyo and Osaka.

DJ Hyobu's setlist is a diverse mix of dark and atmospheric music, combining elements from different subgenres for a unique listening experience. The first song, Tearful Moon – *Love You More Than Death*, has darkwave and coldwave influences, with haunting melodies and ethereal vocals that create a melancholic soundscape exploring deep emotional connections and the themes of love and death. Moving into Isotropia – *Are you the King* features the distinct driving bass lines and angular guitar riffs of post-punk and darkwave. The introspective lyrics explore existential themes and offer social commentary, adding complexity and contemplation to the music. Featuring a Gothic rock and darkwave fusion, *Nyctophilia* by Dark sets a moody tone with deep vocals and atmospheric instruments, reflecting a love for the night. Dark Door's *Inferno* continues the exploration of intense emotions with its Gothic rock and industrial sound. The powerful, rhythmic structure and the mix of electronic and rock elements evoke themes of darkness and inner turmoil, adding a fiery intensity to the set. In 13th Moon *Witchhunt*, the fusion of deathrock and Gothic rock creates an eerie atmosphere and likely blends punk energy with Gothic aesthetics. The lyrics deal with persecution and fear, enhancing the overall macabre feel of the track. Then, adding a playful twist, Zombina and the Skeletons – *Mega Madness* brings the high-energy vibe of horror punk and psychobilly. This fun yet spooky track mixes rockabilly influences with punk rock, offering playful, macabre lyrics that lighten the mood without losing the set's dark edge. Tragic Black's *Suburbian Dystopia* delves into urban decay and dystopian futures through a mix of deathrock and Gothic rock, blending raw punk energy with a Gothic atmosphere to reflect societal

[5] The whole whole DJ set from Sisen Murasaki can be accessed here: https://youtu.be/J36Xez2rm0s?si=ShhBs3JHECsFbPxk.

disintegration. Madame Edwarda – Princess Reta concludes the performance with a powerful mix of Gothic rock and post-punk. The vivid vocals and eerie tunes create a dark, romantic atmosphere, wrapping up the music journey with emotion and grandeur.

In general, Hyobu likes to explore the themes of love, death, existential angst, nocturnal longings, intense emotions, persecution, playful horror, urban decay, and Gothic romance through a blend of darkwave, coldwave, Gothic rock, post-punk, deathrock, industrial, and horror punk music styles. The diverse yet cohesive atmosphere invites listeners into a world of melancholy, intensity, and a hint of macabre, appealing to fans of dark and atmospheric music.[6]

The last time I saw Hyobu live, he was in a long, faux-fur, black fluffy jacket and dark, smokey eyes makeup. His hair is always put on one side, sometimes a bit combed to make a messy effect. He is an individual who enjoys experimenting with his appearance. He usually has striking black smokey eyes; however, he occasionally incorporates some colours and bold contouring into his makeup, resulting in a playfully feminine look.

The expression of Hyobu performing live is really simple while he focuses on the mixes. He sometimes nods his head or moves his shoulders back and forth, trying to feel the rhythm and vibe of the song. Meanwhile, he's usually looking down at the console, sometimes moving his head up as if controlling the crowd at the party. After the set or in small talk, he acts friendly and relaxed, as if he's not that far privately from his onstage persona.

Kihito

DJ Kihito, whose performance I described in the introduction, is a prominent figure in the Japanese gothic and alternative scene, playing an active

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[6] The whole set, that Hyobu shared recently on his X profile, was:
1. *Love You More than Death* by Tearful Moon;
2. *But Are You the King* by Isotropia;
3. *NYCTOPHILIA* by DARK;
4. *Inferno* by Dark Door;
5. *Witch Hunt* by 13th Moon;
6. *Mega Madness* by Zombina and the Skeletons;
7. *Suburbian Dystopia* by Tragic Black;
8. *Princess Reta* by Madame Edwarda.

role as both a DJ and event organiser. He is deeply involved in the Tokyo Dark Castle event series, which has been a cornerstone of Japan's gothic and industrial subculture since 2003.

He is deeply connected to the Gothic subculture, drawing influences from European and Japanese Gothic and Positive Punk music. His music roots stem from 80s British Gothic bands like Bauhaus, The Sisters of Mercy, and The Mission, as well as Japanese bands like Auto-Mod and Sadie Sads. He also finds inspiration in classic horror films like Nosferatu and horror icons such as Boris Karloff and Christopher Lee.

Loneliness is a central theme in Kihito's life and art, driving his connection to Gothic culture. He views Gothic not just as a style but as a representation of outsider status and alienation from society. Despite feeling isolated, Kihito finds creative energy in being outside the mainstream. He once told me comprehensively in an interview:

> My inspiration comes from my loneliness. No matter which organisation or group I belong to, I always feel lonely. I constantly struggle between feeling isolated and strongly craving connection. Gothic, to me, is perhaps the loneliness and isolation of outsiders. Even when we belong to a social organisation, there's a constant feeling of alienation and, within that, a paradoxical sense of superiority. Many people eventually "graduate" from the Gothic scene, which is healthy. It means they've found a place in society where they belong. However, some of us, even with age, continue to feel this isolation. For me, Gothic is a refuge for people who never found their place in society.[7]

What is important to Kihito, as well as the other DJs I talked to, is a dissociation between the daytime life in a strict society and the nighttime profession of a DJ. Other than Sisen, Kihito was not so lucky to only make a living out of his artistic career and underground gothic activities.

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[7] JN: 俺がインスピレーションの源泉は、自分の孤独です。どんな組織、会社、仲間といても、常に俺は孤独です。寂しさと、自己否定と、その逆で、仲間を強く求める、心の間で葛藤します。ゴシックとは何か。それはきっと、アウトサイダーの孤独と寂しさなんだと思います。どの組織、社会に属していても、常に疎外感を感じながら、逆説的にそこに優越感を感じる矛盾と苦しみ。だから、皆、ある程度の年齢でゴスから卒業する。それは、ある意味健全で自分を受け入れてくれる、自分が生きる居場所を見つけられたことなんだと思う。それでも、我々のように、年齢を重ねても、常に疎外感をいだき続けている孤独な人間がいる。ゴシックは、そんなアウトサイダー達の、社会的な居場所を見つけられなかった孤独な人間の居場所なんだと思う。

He works in a company – completely separating his salaryman career from the nighttime DJing.

While we have a longer conversation, he tells me "since Gothic is my way of life, I always dress in black. When I go to work, I wear a suit though. Fashion is an important form of self-expression for me."[8]

While talking about wearing a suit, he makes a funny facial expression, suggesting it is even a kind of tomfoolery for him. He mentions that the work at the company he has is a kind of play where he wears a metaphorical mask so nobody sees the real person:

> I've established my place, but the loneliness remains. This persona I carry is not the real me – it's just a mask for the loneliness I constantly feel. Not all outsiders are drawn to Gothic culture, but those who are tend to share a particular aesthetic. It's very spiritual and requires a certain sensitivity.[9]

Kihito shares a deep bond with the Gothic community, collaborating with artists and musicians like his band Poison D'Hermes. By transforming his personal struggles into a successful artistic career, he provides a platform for those experiencing similar feelings of alienation. DJ Kihito not only embodies the Gothic aesthetic but also encapsulates the emotional depth it represents. He does this through events like Tokyo Dark Castle, he merges Gothic, EBM, Dark Electro, and Industrial music, bridging European and Japanese subcultural elements.

DJ DARK CASTLE

The events Kihito co-organises; famous DJ Dark Castle, are now a brand on their own. The name does not only refer to the cyclical parties but also the DJ collective he is a part of. Conceived by Genet, the vocalist of the band Auto-Mod, Tokyo Dark Castle has been active since 2003, attracting Goths

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[8] JN: ゴシックは人生なので、普段も黒尽くめです。会社に行く時はスーツだけど　ファッションも自己表現の重要な一つだと思っています。

[9] JN:　俺は、年齢を重ねているので、社会的な居場所は既に確立しているけど、常に孤独感を抱えて生きています。でも、それはペルソナ。本当の俺ではない。俺はずっと孤独を抱えている。アウトサイダーが全てゴシックに引き寄せられるかというと、そうではない。ゴシックには一定の美学があり、それに共鳴できる者しか受け入れないし、引き寄せられない。とても精神的で、美意識が求められる。

and industrial music fans from all over Japan and the world. As their official website states:

> Since its inception, Tokyo Dark Castle has hosted performances by the edgiest, spookiest, sexiest goth, post-punk, new wave, darkwave, Batcave, deathrock, industrial, and hardcore artists and DJs from Japan and overseas – veteran talent and new blood both. (Tokyo Dark Castle).

One of the most memorable people from this collective is Chihiro. He usually plays at the opening of Dark Castle parties and has a tradition of starting his set with Bauhaus's song *Bela Lugosi's Dead* – the worldwide Gothic anthem. His appearance is very unique – he mixes the old-school styles of a deathrocker with trad goth. His big, spiky mohawk hair, classic black and white makeup, and studded clothing accessories make a distinctive look everyone recognises. His music and image are strongly inspired by the 1980s European Goth aesthetic, while he is a Japanese person.

He usually plays along with the famous DJ pair called Gotediener. Those are Kuta and U, known for mixing Western industrial, rock, and Gothic with well-known Japanese songs. Kuta is a woman with a cute, girly image with long black hair, mixing the style of gothic lolita and kawaii with numerous clothing influences. Sometimes, we can see her in another role, as a Gothic Belly Dancer, dressed in a special dancing suit and dancing to the mix of industrial electronic beats with Hindu and Egyptian-inspired tones. Alongside U, the tall, long-haired man, they make interesting sets comprised of songs from European bands like Grendel, Agonoize, C-Lekktor, Faderhead, Neuroticfish, Paradise Lost, The Sisters of Mercy, Bauhaus, Rosetta Stone, Sex Gang Children, Christian Death, Suspiria, New Order, The Cure, Depeche Mode, Apoptygma Berzerk, and also the local Japanese, such as And One, X Japan, Luna Sea, Blam Honey, Auto-Mod or The Zolge.

While going to the Dark Castle event, we might spot another very interesting artist – Elmina. They are a mysterious individual in the mask of a zombie rabbit, someone who never takes it off, even while snoozing after a rave. While being in public, the mask is always on, and the person never talks to anyone with their voice. However, they are very charismatic behind the console while maintaining total privacy. This makes DJ Elmina much more intriguing, making them not only an artist but a famous Tokyo mystery.

The collective also plays with other famous DJs, inviting them as guests. Those are, for example, Nao12Xu (privately Naohiro Yamada), the

vocalist of 13th Moon band, one of the underground Gothic rock legends in Japan or one of the longest active Gothic DJs in the Tokyo scene, Taizou, who make a significant, decadent look with a red bonnet.[10]

While Tokyo has DJ Dark Castle, Osaka is famous for another club series, the Black Veil. However, nowadays, they do not tend to have a specific DJ collective. Black Veil in Osaka is a well-known goth and industrial event catering to fans of dark, alternative subcultures. It features a mix of gothic, EBM, industrial, and darkwave music and attracts a dedicated crowd of enthusiasts. Established by DJ Taiki in the year 2000, it became a significant event for Goths, where you could even meet stars like Kozi from the band Malice Mizer and Fu-ki from Blood. That added to its reputation as a must-attend for goth scene followers. Unfortunately, Taiki has passed recently, but the legacy of Black Veil continues.[11] The DJs that play there more frequently are Satosick, Lucien, and Doom Spider.

ANALYSIS – THE MATTER OF GLOCALISATION

While looking at Japanese Gothic DJs and the parties they conduct, we can have an idea that they are not that different from the Western Goths. They listen to similar music, often even the same European and American bands and projects. They tend to mix Gothic with Industrial and other types of electronic music, they are usually dark, spooky, and grotesque, gathering around local club events. However, there are a few more issues the Japanese have to face, and therefore the glocalisation process is there a special one.

While the Japanese invented the term for fitting the foreign standards to outsource Japanese goods, right now, this phenomenon complements their heritage and culture itself. The first aspect is different from the Western Gothic, which brings us to why the Gothic had to be glocalised in Japan and understood differently than in the foreign West is the need to rebel against the dominant culture and social norms. Japan is a very conservative society, which has a tradition of *mizaru, kikazaru, iwazaru*. The saying translates into *see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil*. It comes from

[10] Taizou, unfortunately, eventually refused to talk to me in an interview because of the privacy matter.

[11] I described Black Veil events and Taiki's story in my other article *Down into the Batcave – Gothic Club Dancing in Japan*.

the legend centred around the free monkeys from the Tōshōgū Shrine. This creates the behavioural standard for Japanese kids to never discuss or have any interest in the topics of evil, death, or anything related to the dark side of life (Smith 1993). It also connects to the aspect of Japanese collectivism. The Japanese education system promotes conformity and discourages standing out. In a collectivist society such as Japan, blending in is seen as perfect behaviour (Azuma 1998).

Goths do not conform to any of those standards, and in Japan, they are seen as *hen-na*. This is a very negative word for something 'strange' in the Japanese language. It even has a meaning of something that is an aberration or a perversion. Japan is a very strict country for tradition, propriety, and prudence. We have to say the Japanese are not in the slightest as tolerant as in most European and American societies for any minorities – subcultures, queer communities, national and ethnic minorities, or even some professions. Thus, any Japanese subculture is still very close to the classical meaning of this term.

Dick Hebdige, in his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), explores the relationship between subcultures and dominant culture. Hebdige argues that subcultures are symbolic forms of rebellion against the dominant culture. His theory focuses on how subcultures use their style as a form of resistance against mainstream norms and values.

Today in the Western world, this theory is being criticised. One major critique is that Hebdige overemphasises the idea of subcultures as forms of resistance to the dominant culture. While his analysis of style as a tool for rebellion is insightful, critics argue that not all subcultures are motivated by direct opposition to the mainstream. Some groups may be more focused on personal expression, identity formation, or community building rather than resistance. Scholars such as Sarah Thornton (1995) have argued that Hebdige's focus on resistance overlooks the ways subcultures also engage with consumerism and media.

In contrast to Hebdige's view of subcultures as forms of resistance, post-subculture theorists see them as more about participation in a shared culture, often with less emphasis on opposing the mainstream. This shift reflects broader changes in the way culture is consumed and produced in the digital age, where individuals mix and match elements of different styles and genres (Muggleton & Weinzierl 2003).

While in Japan, it may be true that subcultural fashion and style are easily accessible commercially in big city malls, it is not entirely true that

subcultures smoothly blend in or participate in society. In Japan, the subcultural resistance against the dominant culture and conservatism is still very strong, and the DJs are leaders of that resistance movement. We can say that while Goths in the West is a post-subculture, in Japan, they are still closer to the primary form of a classically understood subculture (with just a few, not very essential differences). So, the fitting of a global Gothic aesthetic or a global Goth subculture needs to be done adequately to this original resistance of a much more primary cultural form.

Another important aspect of Gothic glocalisation in Japan is that the artists and members of the subculture sometimes heavily defend their privacy. They might be because of a similar situation to Kihito's – they have a salaryman corporate job and a second, real life as an artist or a subculture member. Or, maybe they are like Elmina, and that comprehends their artistic image and aura while defending the privacy of family life and friends. In the West, Gothic artists are much more openly visible in the media, focusing on commercialisation and advertisement (especially social media like Instagram or Tik Tok). So, being an artist in a conservative and collectivist Japan is often connected to having a double life or hiding their identity in public.

The aspect that is probably the most visible and the most vibrant is how Japanese people treat the Goth as a subculture and the Gothic style. Japanese tend to mix many styles, subcultures, and aesthetics due to their different understanding of those. Their main term is not a subculture but rather a *kei* (系). The suffix is used while describing different artistic and stylistic phenomena and can be translated into *type* or *style* (like Visual-kei, Fairy-kei, Lolita-kei, Menhera-kei, Jirai-kei, and more). The term kei is not as strict as a European or American *subculture* and does not imply any kind of wrong devotion to the social group or any cultural section. So, while the Western term *subculture* implies strong stylistic borders and everyday life devotion to it, the term kei is much more open and playful. So, the *keis* mix together more freely, and even when it meets Goths in the form of classical Hebdige's rebellious *subculture* as the one represented by the DJs described, it can add to their aesthetic and is possible to be incorporated and mixed with other *keis* inside.

That being said, original Japanese keis mix with Goth subculture and Gothic aesthetic, and the problem of gatekeeping or strict borders is almost nonexistent in Japan. When looking at the global Goth subculture, it's clear that some gatekeepers emerge in the European Goth community. These

individuals claim authority over the subculture and have a strict, exclusive approach. They often oppose including industrial music in the Goth subculture, stating that Goths don't listen to electronic music and that, for example, even the well-known Cybergoth culture isn't a valid subset of Goth.

However, the Goth subculture in Japan, particularly within its vibrant club scene, alongside the influential role of Japanese DJs, challenges these restrictive notions. Japanese Goth culture exemplifies a more inclusive and diverse understanding, where electronic music and industrial influences are embraced and integrated.

CONCLUSIONS

The DJs present themselves within the Gothic community in Japan as people open to different influences, mixing styles and musical waves. Therefore, it is for consideration for the broader Goth community to adopt a more humble and open-minded perspective, acknowledging the contemporary developments and varied expressions of the subculture worldwide. The Gothic DJs in Japan, who are the leaders of a cultural movement and resistance do glocalise the Goth subculture as a very multi-style and open one. This approach not only enriches the Goth subculture but also fosters a more inclusive and dynamic community where artistic individuals can feel safe. The main aspect of being Goth is having a kind of sensitivity and love for darkness and grotesque, finding love and beauty in morbidness and taboo topics (Young 1999).

The glocalisation in Japan creates a unique cultural occurrence. The Japanese Goths are a very primary version of the rebellious subcultures, and their resistance is led by DJs at club parties. But yet, this subculture is also very innovative due to incorporating different *keis* and open-mindedly mixing aesthetics against gatekeeping.

NOTES

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