



Community

Young-G

My first direct contact with hip hop in Southeast Asia was in 2011, in the Tondo district of Manila in the Philippines at the *RAP IN TONDO 2*, an event that was held collaboratively by cultural exchange institutions of Japan, France and Germany. The event included workshops for hip hop music and dance for the children of the Tondo district.

RAP IN TONDO 2

At the time, hip hop in languages other than Japanese or English were hardly introduced in Japan. Thus hip hop in the Tagalog language that I encountered in Manila came across as very powerful and shocking. I then started to search the Internet for hip hop music from around the world, particularly of Southeast Asia. While searching, I was able to realize anew the differences between Southeast Asian hip hop and Japanese or American hip hop, as well as religious and regional differences. The hip hop music of the Philippines, Manila and Tondo in particular, possessed a unique regionality. Tondo, of course, is known for the world famous Smokey Mountain, the largest slum in Southeast Asia. The presence of gangs also cannot be overlooked. There are various forms of gangs, each with its own history, widely present even among vigilance groups, youth associations and community service groups. Unlike in Japan, gangs in America and South America are more openly acknowledged. I also felt that this was the case in the Philippines, which was once under American rule. OG SACRED (OG stands for Original Gangster, a title granted to gangsters), who once belonged to the largest gang in the Philippines TBS13 and rose to the top of the group, was

only a young boy when he started off as a gang member. Gang and hip hop are closely connected to each other, as Afrika Bambaataa, one of the earliest founders of American hip hop, once said—“we developed rap, dance, graffiti, in other words, hip hop in order to stop gang warfare.”

The song *Man from Manila* by Francis M, a legendary rapper of the Philippines, was a chart hit in the 1990s which elevated the foundation of hip hop to the level of popular music in the Philippines. Influenced by such hip hop songs, OG, while being a gang member, also started to build a career as a rapper. OG was also chosen as one of the main characters in the film *Tribu*, directed by Jim Libiran, which portrays street gang life in Tondo. OG’s real life experience as a gang was put into the movie and attracted much public attention.

The film *Tribu* (2007) Trailer

OG Sacred has continued to build his career as a rapper and expand the scope of his activities through the group Tondo Tribe which he formed with the young people of Tondo. The RAP IN TONDO discussed earlier was one such activity and that is where my personal encounter with OG started. OG is the front person for the Velasquez district in Tondo and tackles problems in the community by taking part in gatherings and campaigns related to issues such as poverty, drug pollution and garbage. According to him, “Tondo is poverty stricken but filled with love, a historical city that has given birth to many musicians, artists and revolutionaries.” I had the opportunity to interview him about Tondo and the things that constitute his backbone as a rapper. I hope you have the chance to read it.

The interview is below.

STOP IT! music video - Les Coudes Production and Tondo Tribe

Buhay Ng Gangsta - Hukbalahap, OG Sacred & Braduzz

Mail interview

Interview with OG SACRED

Interviewer: Young-G

Translation from Tagalog to English: Hirano Mayumi

—What is Tondo area like? Please tell us the characteristics of Tondo based on its history and culture...etc. Could you also tell us about revolutionaries and artists from Tondo area?

OG: Tondo is known as the scariest place in the Philippines because of the number of infamous gangsters that were born and grew up here, many of their lives were also turned into films, despite this, many great artists also came from Tondo, you will find many talents and good stories around you. One of the most notable brave heroes of the country, Andres Bonifacio (father of the Katipunan), also came from here.

—What does the young generation of Tondo think about the Philippine Revolution (1898)?

OG: This was the struggle of the entire country against the colonizers where resilience, courage and intelligence of the Filipinos were tested to fight for the freedom of the nation and its people against the foreign conquerors despite the lack of weapons and the number of fighters.

—Please tell us about the history, activities, and roles of gangsters including their meaning as vigilantes as far as you know.

OG: With the number of famous gangsters and groups in Tondo, according to the story of the elders, it is said that gangsters lived through evil deeds like robbery, extortion and billing of protection money, endorsing politicians in exchange for money, riots and killings with rival gangsters related to territory. Despite this, they were also openly helping the poor community of Tondo.

—What does rap mean to you and your community? How did you and your community start rap, and what role does the music for your community today?

OG: For many rap is a form of music or a genre that is powerful and trendy nowadays. But for me rap is the modern way of poetry that goes along with

music, it is a way of expressing emotions, of giving inspirations and an effective guide, sharing lessons, inspiration and hope, it is an occupation and life.

—What do you think about the current situation of gangsters compared to the old days?

OG: Many among my contemporaries and peers have changed, some have improved and others have worsened. Others became professionals and went on to the right path, some became quiet but deeper, and some became bigger but more dangerous, yet you can see that each of them has a unique strength in the present that came from their past.

—What do you think you want to be in the future?

OG: Still as a Leader and an inspiration a good man who came from a bad past. someone who fulfills his/her dreams that are too impossible for others; a person who is always ready to fight in any battle and hardship of life; and someone who is willing to guide others and be a good example.

Related Links

- Tondo Tribe FB <https://www.facebook.com/tondo.tribe>
- Tondo Tribe on BBC <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180525-the-inspiring-rappers-from-the-manila-slums>

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