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Hip-Hopping Over the Great Firewall of China: Authenticity, Language and Race in the Global Hip Hop Nation

Matice F. Maino
Bard College

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Hip-Hopping Over the Great Firewall of China:
Authenticity, Language and Race in the Global Hip Hop Nation

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Matice Maino

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Thesis.....	3
Methodology.....	6
Literature review.....	13
Background.....	23
Chapter 1.....	34
Chapter 2.....	60
Chapter 3.....	82
Conclusion.....	99
Bibliography.....	110

Introduction

The orb of light towering in the sky finally showed its face on a surprisingly warm afternoon in late February. It felt as though the student body had finally emerged from our long, arduous, socially distanced hibernation, and was learning, once again, the marvels of the outdoors, as a newborn child first discovering the world. My newfound friends and I sat on the grass as we overlooked the beautiful Hudson Valley. As the sun moved closer to the horizon, our conversation gained more depth and pace. At every bend of uncertainty within the discussion, my interlocutors turned to each other and spoke Mandarin. We had gathered on this sunny afternoon to discuss the ways in which my interlocutors navigated the burgeoning Chinese rap scene as they were studying abroad in the United States. Our conversation bounced from censorship and data privacy to subjects of authenticity, race, and gender. I was overjoyed at their willingness to assist me in my research, as the points they brought up in conversation were so poignant.

Up until writing this paper, I had blindly embraced the benefits of a technology that had irrefutably changed the social fabrics of my generation. But as I learn more about the subject, I realize that this free globalized platform is far more complex and contended than I had envisioned. It seems as if platforms for free speech and expression come with the circulation of dangerous ideology and misinformation. Additionally, learning about the dangers of data tracking and surveillance capitalism added a layer of digital paranoia. My generation was amongst the first to have grown up with the Internet since childhood. As is the case amongst people of my age, I use the Internet daily; from school work to communication to entertainment. I am thus resolved to study ways in which the Internet serves as a pathway for the increasing

globalization we are witnessing, and how younger generations' connections to the outside world have changed.

As you may have inferred from the title, I decided to focus on the rise of Hip Hop within China, an ongoing phenomenon that has skyrocketed since 2017. As an avid musician and Hip Hop lover, I strongly gravitated to the area of study of Global Hip Hop and how culture has left its U.S. original home to serve as a platform of expression for youth around the world. Through the lenses of Hip Hop, we can trace ways in which youth around the world interact with global trends, and how senses of locality and globalization are navigated with the assistance of the Internet. China serves as a fascinating case study as the government has a history of censoring forms of media that don't adhere to Chinese values. Political propaganda and censorship often occur through art, and advancements in technology appear to make the process of censorship more dynamic and nuanced. The Internet and social media present a more fluid and porous platform for community building and self-expression, and the Chinese government has struggled to completely silence the rebellious voices of the rappers who dared criticize them.

M smiled as she peered pensively at the clouds drifting over the mountain. After a silent instance of reflection, she turned to the group and stated: "I think the Internet makes our generation feel closer to cultures abroad." She is referring to ways in which the Internet has been a catalyst for change within the younger generations, and has led to a wider sense of globalization amongst the youth. She pointed to the fact that the first public recognition of the LGBTQ+ community stemmed from an Internet forum, or that tattoos and dyed hair are becoming increasingly accepted and popular within the Chinese youth today. M and her friends seemed to have a hopeful stance about the future of freedom of speech in China and hope to

return one day to spark change. They highlighted that Westerners have a flawed misconception of Chinese youth as being brainwashed and isolated from outside culture, who never dare talk politics in fear of government surveillance. Instead, they pointed to the ways in which their generation is still widely connected to the Internet outside of China, and that political expression happens prevalently, but within nuanced and disguised forms. I wanted to understand how they connected and related to this wider culture, so I jotted down some notes and proceeded to ask my next question.

Thesis:

Music and censorship have long been in contention, authoritarian governments have always tried to control the expressive agency of their people, in search of quelling rebellion and dissent. Hip Hop culture, from its inception, has had deep ties with race, class and anti-authoritarian sentiment that connects marginalized minorities. Technology has been rapidly increasing, and in the age of computers and smartphones, we have witnessed an exponential growth in world Internet users paired with a drop in prices for new technology.

I argue that the Internet is one of the first globalized platforms, though it is not devoid of political agendas and governmental forces seeking to use it for their benefit. Ever since the inception of the Internet, China has closely monitored its netizens. In more recent years, they have created a “great firewall” using software (Lee and Liu 2012, Sechenova 2016), where most western websites are blocked - though they can still be accessed through Virtual Private Networks - and there is a whole set of Chinese social media and search engines acting as their national version of the Internet. Taneja and Xiao argue that these restrictions could be an act of

cultural and linguistic preservation against the forces of cultural imperialism in the west (Taneja and Xiao 2013), but could also be viewed as a means to further control and monitor the population in the offline world.

Meanwhile, at a parallel rate, we have witnessed the Global spread of Hip Hop. This is closely tied to the rise in popularity and usership of the Internet's interconnected streaming platforms, as well as the long documented international presence of American cultural exports. As this culture became mainstream in the 1990s through the US, its presence was heard all around the world. There is documented research on the formation in the last twenty years of a “Global Hip Hop Nation”(See Lit review), which undergoes a plurality of forms, hybridized uses of language, and fascinating relationships of local and global within the process of youth identity formation. In doing so, some of the more racial and class aspects of the original elements of Hip Hop may get lost along the way. There remains an overarching sense of connection amongst a forming “Collective marginality” made up mainly of youth around the world who connect with the message and meaning played by the rebellious sounds of Hip Hop. With its spread, we are witnessing the creation and modification of many different forms of Hip Hop, with different interactions with English and historical tensions that underpin the genre.

China has had Hip Hop ever since the late 90s, but it remained strongly silent within the underground scenes of various metropolises. As it gained increasing popularity among the youth on the various streaming platforms of the Internet, the government made several unsuccessful moves to ban it. In 2017, the government decided to make a mainstream “idol” show which served to popularize a modified “Chinese censorship friendly” form of Hip Hop (Zou 2019, 6). This led to a mainstream Chinese acceptance of Hip Hop, the formation of varied music scenes

around different cities, and the explosion of a unique Chinese Rap culture. Meanwhile, the underground “real” Hip Hop didn’t stop, and many artists to this day are still affected by their songs being banned, and thus move to the larger “Global” web to preserve their audiences and platforms.

Chapter 1 deals with the shifts in the Chinese Hip Hop culture, introduces concepts of authenticity and begins to shine light on the complexity of this concept within the larger global community. Chapter 2 discusses the linguistic aspects of Chinese interpretations of Hip Hop, and deals with ways in which concepts of language need to be more fluid in the age of the internet. I also analyze how Mandarin has created an alternative value system, but ways in which some rappers overdependence on english actually reduces their sense of authenticity. Chapter 3 starts to explore the tensions of cultural appropriation and appreciation, as well as ways in which Chinese Hip Hop reveals how members of the global Hip Hop community relate to the U.S. Black experience. We briefly touch on commodification of Black vernacular and style, to understand how Globalization has disconnected Hip Hop from its historical roots, which in turns leads to global mischaracterizations and stereotypes regarding Americans of colour.

My study is grounded in exploring how Chinese youth interact and relate to this form of music and culture, and what this adaptation reveals about authenticity, class, race and regionalization in the age of digitized communication. For this paper, I ethnographically observe how participants experience Chinese Hip Hop as part of the Global spread of Hip Hop, as a cultural phenomenon that relates cosmopolitan marginalized youth identity, digital censorship, shedding light on relations to race, class, nationality and globalization among college aged international Chinese students studying at Bard College in Annandale-On-Hudson New York.

Methodology:

My research process began with reading academic journals and various segments from books regarding the experience of Chinese students in America and of China within the age of technology and the Internet. My research shifted over the course of the two semesters. It seemed that the more I looked into the subject, various clues would lead me in multiple directions. I had begun my research over the summer, reading about the larger elements of algorithms, censorship and misinformation. This subject and its increasingly nuanced ties to government, statehood and power have often elicited my attention before deciding on a research topic. I went about reading into the larger literature on new media and actor network theory, as I also looked into contemporary interpretations of Foucault, Chomsky and McLuhan's theories within the framework of technology. As my semester began, I was preparing to focus on three different case studies around the world, but realized with the help of my advisor that this would be stretching myself very thin.

My senior project took a particular turn, one fall night, as I went to eat dinner at the dining hall. I sat with my regular group of friends, all deep within the senior project writing process. There was one new face I did not recognize, but upon introducing ourselves, we dove into a conversation about research. Diyang was a Chinese international student, he had moved over two years ago from China, and was studying sociology and history at Bard. He listened attentively to the brief summarization of my work consisting of reading on censorship and fake news; and began sharing some of his personal experience with censorship in China, youth and

social media usage. He was very well spoken and gave me very thoughtful insight. Diyang was instrumental in helping me shift my attention to one particular case study- one country where I could study a particular phenomenon more profoundly and carefully, which could then apply generally to the wider world.

For the sake of specificity, I decided to follow the lead of my dinner conversation with Diyang and to focus on China as a case study country under which I could study the impacts of the larger transnational phenomenon of the Internet. I still felt as if I was embarking on writing an ambiguous paper on a subject which many researchers had approached before me. The overwhelmingness of this task and the guiding words of my advisers led me in the direction of a more specified ethnographic writing process. During this transitional period of my project, I spent a lot of time looking into both academic journals and online news articles to understand the nuances between news portrayals online in both countries.

I began speaking with Chinese students in America by doing weekly interviews with two interlocutors, whose guidance and insight was crucial in guiding my writing process. They taught me about Chinese history, subcultures, youth experiences and Internet use. My research was progressing and I was learning everyday about the nuances and complexities of writing about Chinese social media censorship. I was afraid that my Western background would make my interviews biased. For this sake I devised a list of questions relating to Internet use with my interlocutors. These questions helped me get more clarity on the overlapping interviews I had been conducting. A lot of the Chinese international students I was meeting were thrilled to hear about my interest in their country and culture, and were very welcoming to me - taking time and effort to respond accurately and in depth to my questions. Despite their support, I still couldn't

help but feel disoriented within the vastness of my subject. I arrived in the second semester unsure of the efficacy of my research as it seemed so broad and wide spanning. I needed to focus on a particular cultural phenomenon which could speak in a larger way to the research I had been reading and analyzing in the past couple months.

A key turning point within this writing process occurred on one of the warmer nights in December. The air was brisk. I was covered from head to toe in winter clothes as I skateboarded in the cold. The sound of polyurethane and pavement was carried along with the breeze, announcing the arrival of another skateboarder. J walked around the building, dressed in fashionable street wear. We introduced ourselves, and got to know each other as the evening progressed. He informed me that he was a Chinese international student, which in turn sparked a conversation about my ongoing research. When I was mentioning the tropes of my study, he explained that he had also been very caught up in studying the age of technology and social media within the world. He began to speak passionately about the rise of Chinese Hip Hop and how his time spent at Bard College had given him a new contrast to better understanding this phenomenon. I was thrilled upon hearing him speak of this fascinating subject. As a musician and hip hop lover myself, I was always passionate about incorporating these passions within my final year at Bard.

This new encounter seemed to provide the perfect opportunity and jumping point to this area of study. J had finally helped me narrow my subject down. This would be the first conversation of many, as I often met with him to skateboard and recorded all of our conversations. Upon learning about this new topic, I shifted the focus of my readings to learn about the ethics of the Global Hip Hop Nation as a way of learning about musical censorship in

the digital age. I had finally arrived at a topic which deeply engaged me. Around the same time I met J, I also reconnected with a friend I had made in my first year music production course, who was a Chinese producer and artist who shared very similar passions. I reached out to him asking if he would like to participate in the study, and he very excitedly agreed to help me. When I first met Y to interview him at Blithewood, he brought two of his friends with him, M and L. We sat for about 3 hours diving very deeply into the subject. I got to witness them discuss and respond to some of the questions I had outlined. Overjoyed, I transcribed our conversation and began to speak individually with each of them for more in-depth interviews. These four interlocutors are my main source of ethnographic data. I use their perspectives and inputs to guide this research paper, as I attempt to analyze their transcribed words, and put them into comparison with all of the relevant literature I have been engaging with.

Finally I have also used a variety of songs as data by looking at the lyrics in particular of Chinese Hip Hop songs. I found the list of songs banned in 2015 by the government and listened as attentively as I could, while finding translations to help me understand their lyrical expression; I will be using many of these songs as evidence to showcase the points brought to light by these case study interviews. I also watched the first two seasons of the show which situates itself at the center of this study, the Rap of China. This in turn helped me discuss it with my interlocutors from a clearer perspective. In order to provide some contrast, I have also analyzed some more mainstream songs that emerged from artists who won the Rap of China, thus looking at the changes in the commercialized industry. I used as many of the resources I could find on the Internet, going on some Chinese social media platforms with the help of my translating software, browsing forums and Youtube comments sections. In his paper, Barrett points to the role that the

Internet can have as a site for virtual data-collection and fieldwork. She explains: “The web offers public access to promotional materials for local hip-hop events, discussion boards, music blogs, and social media profiles, the latter sometimes enabling users (and researchers) to communicate directly with artists. Such methods of e-fieldwork are used either exclusively or as means to accompany and enhance traditional forms of qualitative data collection”(Barrett 2018, 2) In no way did I rely on these methods of research as primary sources, but used them to help compliment the songs I was listening to, and the conversations I was having.

My interlocutors also shared a lot of songs with me, both from contemporary and old school Chinese Hip Hop artists. With all of these lyrical pieces of evidence, I was overwhelmed with musical examples, and so I did my best to narrow it down to certain songs which best characterize the subject at hand. With all of these elements in consideration, I wrote the following paper, in which my interlocutors and I discuss the state of Hip Hop in China; as I try and place their perspectives and words within the larger framework of academic literature on the same subject.

- Meet my Interlocutors:

J is a first year student studying Art History. He is originally from Shenzhen 深圳, in the southern province of China. He decided to study in America because he was tired of the cut-throat school system in his home country. He felt as though the standardized scores and sheltered studying environments offered him no freedom, and hindered his passion for learning. He had always been interested in going to America or Europe, and decided to come study art history at Bard as a way of learning a new culture and improving his English. He claims to have

changed quite drastically after arriving at this institution. He began to skate and dress differently, and lost the stigmatized fear he had around drug culture in China. He explains that though he knew about Hip Hop at the time of the Rap of China, he truly started to learn about American Hip Hop, and Chinese underground Hip Hop when he came to this institution.

M is a Junior studying Film. She is originally from Beijing. M has always been interested in American culture, but she explains wanting to study here as she went through the Chinese school system. Her life-long dream had been to become a painter and to study visual arts; but her family was not supportive of her following this route. She then decided to come to a Liberal Arts school in order to have more freedom in choosing her major and field of study. She explains that she prefers the creative environment in the United States as it is less restricted, but she still likely wants to return to China throughout her artistic career so she can help spread progressive messages through her art. She explains learning about Hip Hop from a very early age, and having listened to both American and Chinese hip hop ever since elementary school.

Y is a Junior studying economics. He is also originally from Beijing北京. Though he has chosen to study economics as his major, Y is an avid musician and producer. He explained that the first time he became curious about the United States was upon hearing music on an international radio in his mother's car. The songs were from various genres, many which weren't as popular in China at the time, and it filled him with a sense of curiosity and wonder. This passion spread to a larger interest in Western cultures, and he then decided to come to Bard

unsure of what major he would choose. Like M, Y has had a long relationship with Chinese rap, listening to it ever since middle school.

L is a Junior studying photography. She is from the large city of Chongqing重庆市. She joked about the first moment she wanted to study in the US was when she held her first Dollar bill; the form and color of the currency was strangely appealing to her and she knew she wanted to collect many more of these within her life. This original intent of international education was progressively replaced by a real yearning to study in the US, as she explained she was truly seeking a chance to get to know herself better, and grow as a human. She also points to the education and examination standards as discouraging her from studying in her country of origin. She has had a long time relationship with American Hip Hop, ever since she discovered it with her peers in school, but on the other hand, she only learned about Chinese Hip Hop after she started to watch the show “Rap of China”.

Now that we have briefly met my interlocutors, and you are more familiar with my research methods and sources for this research: it is time to take a brief journey through the history of Hip Hop, both American, Chinese and global. So let’s turn on the boombox, spin the records and get ready for some lyrical expression as we dive into a sea of rhymes, metaphors, meanings and historical events which would in time come to form this culture still in the making.

Literature review:

- China and Internet Censorship:

Scholars have studied the Internet since its inception. However, the general attitude has recently shifted from a hopeful idealism - that this platform could facilitate cosmopolitan free speech and expression - to a more realistic skepticism. The Internet serves as a double edge sword: while providing virtual global platforms facilitating community building, it has also introduced us to surveillance capitalism, constant government surveillance, and the rise in extremist and conspiratorial groups around the world. It cannot be denied that “The Internet has unarguably changed our paradigm of social interaction, perceptions, and norms, and will continue to affect future generations as it evolves. (Sechenova 2016, 283)” We are seeing these changes enacted in a variety of ways. Scholars have become more dubious about the benefits of social media and the Internet, and have been studying the ways in which governments use the Internet as a means of control and propaganda.

In “Fahrenheit 451: Burning through China’s Great Firewall”, Marina Sechenova explains how China seeks to control its cyberspace, explaining that “Through content regulation, nations are able to manipulate the way that paradigm shifts and thus, both directly and incidentally, control our future.”(Sechenova 2016, 283). China’s mode of cyberspace censorship relies on blacklisting a variety of websites, from Western search engines to social media platforms. China also regulates an Internet Police force, which was said to be attempting to limit the amount of “negative news”. She points to the “Fifty Cent Party” which consists of about

300,000 web commentators who are paid to virtually support and endorse the CCP (Sechenova 2016, 290). Sechenova is one of many New Media scholars who view this large scale censorship as problematic, and many of the other scholars I acquainted myself with within the field echoed similar sentiments of concern over the freedom of speech of Chinese web users (Sechenova 2016; Lee and Liu 2012).

In “Forbidden City Enclosed by the Great Firewall: the Law and Power of Internet Filtering in China”, Jyh-An Lee Ching-Yi Liu discuss how regulation and software can shape culture, and stress the importance of regulation. They primarily focus on Lawrence Lessig’s theory of “Code-is-law”. This theory, based off of Lessig’s 1999 book “Code and other laws of Cyberspace” explains the ways in which software and hardware regulates the infrastructure of the Internet. He pointed to the potential of open-source software and regulatory actions that could act as a guarantee for substantive protection, and called for digital reform to use software to create a safe and free platform of the Internet. Meanwhile, Lee and Liu analyze how this infrastructure can shape behavior, and serves to pacify the populace as they explain that “Internet filtering has, to a certain degree, shaped Chinese citizens’ online behavior according to the government’s preferences.(Lee and Liu 2012, 151)”.

In “The pursuit of the Chinese Dream in America: Chinese Undergraduate students at American Universities”, Dennis Yang illuminates the hopes, expectations and aspirations of Chinese students coming to America. He highlights the importance of teachers and a strong support network to the accommodation of Chinese Students in these foreign academic settings, while focusing on how cultural, social and economic capital affects their ways of relating to the United States (Yang 2016).

In “Remote Control: How the Media Sustain Authoritarian Rule In China”, Daniela Stockmann and Mary E. Gallagher seek to examine the role of the media in sustaining regime stability in an authoritarian government, viewing entertainment media from a more politicized perspective. They point to the ways in which the Chinese government has been utilizing alternative techniques of propaganda within the media, and used positive stories to help change widely held opinions about labor laws (Stockman and Gallagher 2011).

In “Does the Great Firewall really isolate the Chinese?” Harsh Taneja and Angela Xiao Wu’s provide an alternative narrative to this critical approach of Internet censorship. They explain the importance of cultural proximity rather than access blockage in defending the actions of the Chinese government. They question the assumption that “If given access to the whole web, Chinese people would use all websites. (Taneja and Xiao Wu 2014)” Through their research, they tracked Internet users of the 1000 most visited websites, and found that users tend to stick to sites that range in language and geography. Thus, they posit that China is almost putting these restrictions up as an act of cultural protection, as opposed to a push to control even further their population and breach the next level of privacy.

Within this context, this ethnography of Hip Hop within Chinese youth speaks to larger themes within academia on alternative forms of censorship by the Chinese government, and it also points to ways in which an iron-clad grasp on a country’s Internet is virtually impossible, as we are seeing the prominence of software allowing people to bypass these restrictions.

- **Global Hip Hop Scholarship:**

Hip Hop began to gain greater academic international attention around the early 1990s, in a time when it was becoming accepted by the mainstream, and began to spread not only across America, but around the globe (Alim 2009; Barrett 2012). Some of the earliest academic writing on the subject can be traced back to the mid 90s, with an ethnographic book written by Tricia Rose entitled “Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in contemporary America.” In this book, Rose points to the cultural complexity and merging of worlds occurring within Hip Hop, and points to the “musical, social, and cultural relationships between rap music, Black culture, and American society. (Rose 1994)” This book was an early predecessor to a whole discipline which would come to be coined as Hip Hop studies in the mid-2000s, with the publication of *That's the Joint!: The Hip Hop Studies Reader*. For my history of Hip Hop, I used a more recent text written by Eric Reese, called the “History of Hip Hop”, as well as a documentary series entitled “Hip Hop evolution”, which retraces the culture's early history through interviews of founding members. I also refer throughout the paper to a paper by Katina Stapleton entitled “From the Margins to Mainstream: the Political Power of Hip-Hop” in which she recounts the early history of the culture and juxtaposes it with concepts of Black emancipation (Stapleton 1998).

As Hip Hop made its way to loudspeakers around the world, scholars began to acknowledge that we were witnessing the Global spread of Hip Hop, as this music and culture provided a case-studies of cultural globalization. This field of study was strengthened with the creation of an official academic journal which deals with the subject, called *Global Hip Hop Studies (GHHS)*.

China was a part of the initial spread of Hip Hop starting in the late 90s, as certain members of the international community within Beijing brought the concepts of rap battles to the underground bar culture. This led to a subculture of rappers, who gained in popularity within the city, but never gained national recognition within the mainstream (Variis and Wang 2011). Meanwhile, Rapping as a form of singing became more prevalent within Chinese pop music, although never merging lanes with the International phenomenon of Hip Hop. Due to the novelty of this culture within China, I could not find a book which discussed the characteristics of the Chinese rap scene, seeing that it only became mainstream in 2017. I still found several academic papers on the subject, from authors with various specificities within the Hip Hop studies, and found a wealth of new articles emerging after the start of mainstream rap in China.

In “Translocal Style Communities: Hip Hop youth as cultural theorists of Style, Language, and Globalization”, H. Samy Alim focuses on the larger linguistic and cultural phenomenon occurring around various Hip Hop scenes around the world. He explains the role that participating youth play in theorizing the changes in contemporary society, as they use Hip Hop to “locate themselves at the intersection of the local and the global.(Alim 2009, 103)” Through a more fluid and hybridized understanding of language he describes a concept of “mobile matrices” which define various regions, sets of ideology, aesthetics, and styles which move in and out of localities, and connect youth around the world. He also alludes to a “Global Hip Hop Nation” (Alim 2004; Alim 2009), connected by the translocal rhythms and flows of this new hybridized language; this phenomenon shows the fluidity of identities in a digital age, and points to language as one of the main grounds for conflicting cultural and social influences.

Many linguists studying Global Hip Hop culture juxtapose it with concepts of “World English”. Catrice Barrett for example, in her study of “Global Hip Hop and the role of English” connects the importance of the Global Hip Hop nation and of the increasing prevalence of English, and highlights how Hip Hop and rap are a ground of contention and hybridization within the youth’s connection to English and America around the world. She also points to the way in which popular culture plays a central role in the identity formation of youth around the world, and emphasizes how the African American vernacular has been broadly adopted by members of the Hip Hop community (Barrett 2012, 249).

She also focuses more particularly on China in “Hip-Hopping Across China: Intercultural Formulations of Local Identities”, in which she focused on the hybridization of language and culture in relation to authenticity and senses of locality. She finds that even though early Chinese Hip Hop was characterized by strong English cultural and linguistic influences, the culture was evolving in its own way, coming to find its own cultural identity influenced increasingly by various actors from within the Hip Hop community. She also points to the implications of Chinese use of the N-word in these hybridized scenarios, and the ways in which this appropriation fits into a modified definition of authenticity and realness (Barrett 2018, 3); alluding to the possible risks and misunderstandings of this globalized trend.

In “Language, Localization, and the real: Hip Hop and the Global spread of authenticity” Alastair Pennycook follows a similar path of engagement as he focuses on the contested and complex concept of authenticity as a uniting factor of this global community. He urges us to analyze the ways in which this globalized spread of culture comes into conflict with appropriations and mischaracterizations of African American culture (Pennycook 2007, 102).

Most importantly, just like Barrett and Alim, he focuses on the use and navigations of language as means of identity formation. He uses the idea and concept of localization as a way of understanding how youth relate to their home culture and language, as they attempt to fit in to this global phenomenon. In this way he also views the rappers and Global Hip Hop participants as the theorists and subjects of the same matter, forming and modifying an ever-changing relationship to reality (Pennycook 2007).

In “The Global Hip Hop Diaspora: Understanding the Culture”, Carol Motley and Geraldine Henderson found that Hip Hop is a framework that acts as a tool which is highly malleable and adapted to connect with members of multiple national cultures and socio-political conditions. They explain that Hip Hop stands both as a countercultural youth phenomenon, but it is also the place for tension between corporate commodification and rebellious expression (Motley and Henderson 2008, 251). Motley and Henderson point to the element which aligns all members to the allure of Hip Hop is a sense of connective marginalities, who relate to the global rebellious themes through combining rap with local elements. In this way they find that “the meaning of hip-hop differs among various host cultures.(Motley and Henderson 2008, 252)”

In “Music as Propaganda: Art at the Command of Doctrine in the People's Republic of China” Arnold Perris looks at writing from Karl Marx, Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Lenin and Mao tzedong to better understand the relation between authoritative communist governments and music censorship. He points to the importance placed on music and art censorship in each government, and Mao’s opinion in particular pointing to the inherent political ideology within art, explaining that Art should represent Chinese values (Perris 1998).

In “The world is yours’: the globalization of hip-hop language” Marcyliena Morgan analyzes the ways in which this youth culture found solace in the wider sense of marginality, and connected across racial and national boundaries; while still honoring their diversity, complexity, intellect and artistry (Morgan 2016, 145). She points to instances in Brazil, France, Morocco, Cuba of marginalized Black communities re-configuring the culture and wielding it in their own terms, and aims at the political significance this movement came to embody for them. Morgan highlights that Hip Hop is intrinsically connected to Black culture in America, and that there seems to be a general sense of subconscious awareness when relating to it, though it is increasingly disconnected from its historical socio-political roots

Yvonne Bynoe also wrote about the implications of cultural appropriation within this cultural phenomenon in “Getting real about Hip Hop”. In it she points to the ways in which concepts of authenticity and “real Hip Hop” are deeply intertwined with African-American significance and culture. In this way, she sees the formation of the Global Hip Hop Nation as a variety of people from around the world mis-interpreting and reconfiguring popular understandings of Black culture to fit their own narratives, thus drastically distorting the nature of Hip Hop (Bynoe 2002, 77). She views the global distortion of Hip Hop to be a continuation of Black silencing, which facilitates the spread of racial stereotypes and undertones. In this way, the mainstream adaptation of Hip Hop and rap around the world fits into a larger trope of the commodification of Blackness.

In “Superdiversity on the Internet: a Case from China” Piia Variis and Xuan Wang also write about senses of authenticity and Blackness on early Chinese Internet within the underground scene. They focus on portrayals of African-American culture and language in

virtual profiles, in search of understanding how early members of the Beijing rap community navigated socio-economic tropes present in American Hip Hop (Variis and Wang 2011).

In “From Underground to Mainstream and Then What? Empowerment and Censorship in China’s Hip-Hop Music” Mengyu Luo and Wei Ming’s speak to the tensions between artistic forms of expression and the government before 2017. They found that this punitive mode of repression actually encouraged the underground Hip Hop community’s growth as it added to their sense of marginalization. They then propose that Hip Hop’s mainstream debut in China was an act of covert propaganda through popular media, with joint corporate interests. The government seeks to redefine rap and incorporate it within Chinese characteristics, while the corporations want to tap into the huge potential audience (Luo and Ming 2019).

In “The politics and aesthetics of featurig in post-2017 Chinese hip hop”, Cheuk seeks to add some nuances and contrast to the concept of Authenticity as he builds onto previous scholarship on the subject. He points to the way in which many rappers take advantage of the opportunities presented by this mainstream arrival of Hip Hop; and ways they experiment with their lyrics to define the limits of censorship. He points to the regionalization of Rap cultures, and the subsequent valuation of dialects, while emphasizing the importance of featurig and competition within navigations of authenticity (Cheuk 2020).

In “When nationalism meets hip-hop: aestheticized politics of ideotainment in China”, Sheng Zou writes about the implications of going mainstream in China. He explains that the show in itself is re-defined as an effort to be sanitized and localized, in order for it to meet Chinese values. By co-opting Hip Hop values and maneuvering cultural expressions, the Chinese

state successfully is modifying the nature of Hip Hop and of Chinese relations to localizations. He also analyzes certain groups that have emerged after the mainstream stars who directly rap about Chinese socialist propaganda. Zou points to an idea of aestheticized politics, and subconscious ideological manipulation through forms of mainstream entertainment (Zou 2019). Rappers can reinvent themselves and unapologetically portray Chinese values in order to stay relevant within the mainstream.

- **Other notable influences:**

These main pieces of academic literature stand as my primary sources and backbone of this study, but I hope that this paper touches upon other fields of scholarship relating to technology and new media. I rely most strongly on contemporary interpretations of Edward Bernays' writing on propaganda. Authors like Samuel Woolley seek to renew his view of propaganda on social media and Internet news portrayals. The analogy of "invisible rulers who control the destinies of millions" seems incredibly fitting for censorship in China (Samuel Woolley 2018; Renee Diresta 2018; Edward Bernays 1928). Modern interpretations of Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's "Propaganda model" also come to mind, as this paper deals with mainstream media's influence on the general Chinese Public. I am thus influenced by contemporary writers' interpretations of this model considering the globalized and decentralized character of the Internet (Castells 2009; Pedro; Sparks 2007; Fuchs 2016; Chomsky and Hesse 1988). These authors emphasize the need to re-shape this theory to accommodate for larger corporations who are also becoming global players. This paper touches on aspects of Actor-Network theory, refined by Antoine Hennion and Bruno Latour; as it was put into

contemporary musical context by Mads Krogh (Krogh 2019; Hennion 1995; Latour 1999). Finally, McLuhan's theory that "the medium is the message" is taken to new heights with the example of Hip Hop, as writers like Kappelman find a new meaning to his tetrad framework (Adam 2015; Boulding 1965; McLuhan 1965).

Background:

- A Brief History of American Hip Hop

Hip Hop origins take us back to the Bronx during a time of extreme crisis. It emerged in hybridized African American, Jamaican American, and Latino American communities, and quickly spread around the United States, before leaping across borders and oceans (Morgan 2016). I will attempt to provide a short summarization of the history of this art form by focusing briefly on the six periods in which the culture's history has been divided. I am basing this history off Eric Reese's "History of Hip Hop vol. 1" (Reese 2017) as well as off the documentary series "Hip Hop Evolution" (Wheeler and Bascuñán 2016) which traces the style back to its roots through interviews with founding members. Furthermore, I am also sourcing this history off of Katrina Stapleton's paper "From the Margins to Mainstream: the Political power of Hip-Hop" in which she connects Hip Hop to a larger historical trend of Black musicianship (Stapleton 1998).

Early years:1970-1979

Riding off the tail end of the civil rights movement, America was in a state of political and racial tension, as institutionalized racism, inequality and police brutality gravely impacted African American communities. In 1970, New York City was experiencing a financial and social

crisis as the Bronx was burning. Hidden amidst the decay and gang life was the birth of a music and culture which would soon take over the world. The iconic drums breaks were first heard at block parties organized over the summer, where several DJs are credited as defining the style. They used “breakbeats” from popular disco songs, which they looped over to give a continuous drum groove. Amongst the most renowned original members of the Hip Hop community we must mention DJ Kool Herc, one of the original Hip Hop DJ’s credited with the genre; he and his fellow MC/DJ Afrika Bambaataa had organized a community group called the Zulu Nation, where youth from various levels of the community came to dance, forego their differences as they competed to see who could be the best rapper. MC’ing, which means being the master of ceremonies, originated as a way of party promoting, but gradually began to shift over to lyrical rapping as the genre became more prominent. Lyrical rhythmic singing has long been in the African-American musical repertoire, from Cab Calloway to R&B; which is why it is very complicated to pinpoint the creation of rap singing. These first years were a time when the community remained very much so underground, as the style and culture became more refined, more and more surrounding community members were becoming “Hip Hop Headz”.

Old school Era 1980-1983

Due to the increasing popularity of the culture, more and more musicians and industry members were recognizing the popularity and potential mainstream success of this genre. Sugarhill Gang’s “rappers delight” was the first published record in which three MCs rapped successively over a more disco-influenced instrumental. The song was a hit, even though it was widely disliked amongst the Bronx Hip Hop community, as a large part of their identity was being underground, focused on live performance. Even though this group was controversial

within the Bronx, this single was widely acclaimed all over America, and was a presentation of the new poetic form of singing. Around the same time, “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five was the first Hip Hop record to have been produced by members who were from the original Bronx Hip Hop community. They made a rebellious song confronting the issues and inequalities they faced in the streets of the Bronx. This was a sign that this was more than just a genre, but could be a platform and culture that would facilitate change for African American communities.

New school Hip Hop 1983-1986

Around this period Hip Hop began to spread across all parts of America, making its way past the boundaries of the Bronx, and into all segments of American life; these are also the earliest examples of the start of its international presence. This era saw the birth and rise of Gangsta rap, which is credited to a Philadelphia rapper called Schoolly D, but soon took over the gang governed streets of L.A. Rappers like Ice-T began to rap about the daily experience of “the hood” and portraying life as a Black man, reliving tropes of violence, drugs and money. Hip Hop record labels are founded, and the culture establishes itself within the corporate music world. Rappers such as Rakim make their east coast debuts, bringing more politicized topics to rap music. The raps that define this period are categorized as almost aggressive, self-assertive raps, which range from sociopolitical commentary to competitive braggadocious boasting.

1986-1997 Golden Age

This period of Hip Hop music witnessed the birth of many rap styles around America as well as the intensification of the East/West rivalry. By this time American rap music had made its

way into almost every record store around America, and was widely embraced by Americans of all cultural backgrounds. This is why this time was when more and more conservative political actors became vehemently opposed to the popularity of Hip Hop, due to the vulgarity and at times graphic drug/sex/violence contents. This era saw themes of sociopolitical rap rise to popularity, as rappers took activist stances on issues affecting the Black community. Morgan explains that in the 1990s:

“the entertainment media in the U.S. declared: ‘Hip-hop is dead’ — again. They insisted that there were too many regional wars as the East coast – and birth- place of hip-hop – worked to protect its claim to be the source of real hip-hop. The West coast of the U.S. unexpectedly catapulted onto the scene as a contender in the game of linguistic play. Around the same time, the West Coast was witnessing the raging popularity of Gangsta rap, with often incendiary messages speaking about police brutality and inequalities within their communities.(Morgan 2016, 133)”

As this coastal rivalry emerged, a form of braggadocious party Hip Hop was forming within the streets of Miami. To represent the despotic party lifestyle of the youth around this area. Amidst this context, a group called the 2 Live Crew entered controversy, as they were said to make obscene and vulgar music. They were subsequently banned from performing around their city of origin by the police. In an act of protest, the musicians still performed, and their leader was sent to jail. What followed was a legal court case that determined the freedom of expression within rap music: 2 Live Crew won the case, a leap forward for Hip Hop. From this point on, all rap songs with swear words or obscene content had to be marked with the Parental

Advisory mark, but the freedom of speech of the culture had been legally preserved (Wheeler and Bascuñán 2016).

The coastal rivalry climaxed with the tragic deaths of Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. rappers who respectively represented each of their coastal communities in a tense rivalry. Both were killed in drive-by's the same year, considered to be the culmination of tensions in the polarized Hip Hop scene, as gangs also played an important role. Their death marked the end of this era of Hip Hop, which would come to be characterized by strong themes of Afrocentrism and political militancy in the lyrics. The music was experimental and electronic music influences began to appear more prominently.

1997-2006 Bling era

Rap up until this point had proven to be very powerful both politically and socially, as the culture had come a long way from its original Bronx block parties. The Bling era is considered to be the final step in the commercialization of Hip Hop. Whereas up until this point, Gangsta Rap had been about portraying the strife on the streets and the African American experience, rappers who would define this period began to rap more ostentatiously in their lyrics, bragging about their fancy eccentric lifestyles. This was the result of a wider acceptance of Gangsta rap and its popularity. Hip Hop seemed to be settling within the American music industry, as it embraced more materialistic themes and R&B collaborations. Furthermore, it was around the end of this era that rappers in the south came to define Trap Music, a style defined by its dominant 808 bass, 16th note hi hats and its content matter. A “Trap House” is a house used to traffic drugs as well as other illegal gang-related activities, and this style of music is said to portray what life in the “Trap” is like: full of violence, sex, money and drugs (Reese 2017).

2006-present: Internet Rap

This period is still in production; it is defined most prominently by the rise of the Internet and social media; as streaming services and online music platforms drastically changed the music industry. We have since seen the emergence of a multitude of genres and styles that emerged, as people had increasing access to technology and software to make and produce their own music. Trap music and mumble rap have stayed dominant, though their characters have changed. This period sees the emergence of “SoundCloud rappers”, artists who rose to prominence after posting music made in their bedrooms. Hip Hop still comes to play a very political role, but it has become such a large phenomenon with such varying aspects and iterations that it is complicated to summarize with brevity.

- **Hip Hop goes global:**

As Hip Hop began to develop within the first Bronx block parties, few could imagine the global power that this culture would wield around the world. American music and mass media had been exported far before the arrival of MC’s onto the scene, but the political outset and intent of Hip Hop made it a particularly controversial culture as it took off within the United States. Motley and Henderson explain that “by the early 1980s, hip-hop had gained commercial success, began to enter the mainstream musical environment in the U.S., and spread around the world (Stapleton 1998, Motley and Henderson 245).” Around the same time as mainstream America began to embrace this culture, Hip Hop appeared overseas.

The late 80s and early 90s are seen as the time when Hip Hop went global, as we began to see MC's rapping around the world. Morgan explains: "Conflicts and competition between the West and East coasts of the US were not the only things happening in hip-hop in the late 1990s. There were also multiple reports of hip-hop cultural sightings throughout the world (Morgan 2016, 133)." Witnessing the struggles of disenfranchised Black communities in America, and the strength of their musical expression through rhythmic lyricism introduced the rest of the world to Hip Hop, as it was steadily adopted by youth all around the world.

Morgan foregrounds ways in which America's global cultural influence allowed for the echoes of Hip Hop's emancipatory potential to resonate around the world. She writes that: "Hip-hop earned its place as a new lingua franca of global youth because it focused on language, culture, science, practice, art, disguise, play and power. It is an impossible ideology that unifies young people across racial and national boundaries while honoring their diversity, complexity, intellect, and artistry.(Morgan 2016, 145)" In this way, Hip Hop leaves its cultural origin and travels around the world, as different contexts and cultures interpret it and perform it in various ways. Morgan refers to Hip Hop as a language, which as we will see in later chapters, comes to be defined by style and authenticity, as a platform for language play and identity formation. In this way, as the 1990s progress, we begin to see more and more examples of Hip Hop serving socio-political functions in the lives of the youth. Let's take a brief look at countries where Hip Hop left its mark.

American Hip Hop made its way to Cuba relatively early, and it was quickly embraced by Black Cubans who related to the disenfranchisement of African-Americans portrayed in rap songs. But Motley and Henderson emphasize that "in Cuba, rappers often level critics at society

and at individuals rather than at the government.(Motley and Henderson 2008, 250)” Within this context, and the heavy-handed rulership of Fidel Castro, the government was initially opposed to the rebellious undertones of the music. But this all changed when the Cuban government instored the Cuban Rap Agency, which organized festivals and promoted rappers. Castro’s socialism came with the official abolition of racial discrimination, but this was far from being the reality in most Black Cuban lives, which explains the significance of the government’s acceptance of the artform. Cuban youth “used hip-hop as a political voice in attempts to promote racial egalitarianism. Cuban rappers wrote lyrics that promoted inclusion of marginalized sectors in processes of economic and political change. (Motley and Henderson 2008, 250).” The format of American Hip Hop was broadly followed, but the Cuban Youth found their own interpretations as elements of context and national identity came into play through the loudspeakers. Race and class still play prominent roles in shaping their sound. Within this environment of very socially proactive rap, Bynoe does point to the fact that some other Cubans were still attempting to mirror the “gangsta rap” attributes within their music, but this was not accepted by the larger Hip Hop community, which chose to follow the proactive and socially engaged topics in their lyrics (Bynoe 2002, 81).

How do countries who do not share the same ethnic and cultural diversity connect with the original tropes of race and class deal with these tropes when they interpret this cultural style? This points us to a huge divide which still persists to this day relating to non-African-American rappers. Bynoe writes that “although the chief tenets of hip hop culture are unity and inclusion, in light of real differences among youth around the world, it seems irrational that a cultural expression that was born and bred in the US and heavily emphasized black American vernacular

and American references can speak for everyone, regardless of the amount of cajoling and stretching that is done to it. (Bynoe 2002, 79)” Though this approach is one which still heavily relies on nation-centric ideas of culture, it does word the concern behind the misinterpretations of blackness in other countries which don’t have the same diversity or references. As Bynoe further posits in her paper: “The chief issue relating to the supposed globalization of Hip Hop culture is whether it can be transported and adapted beyond the United States. Are the permutations of Hip Hop culture developed abroad merely branches of the original tree, or do they constitute new cultures in their own right?(Bynoe 2002, 75)”

Japan is a rather ethnically homogenous population, and due to this lack of diversity, many of its citizens may hold more bigoted beliefs about African-Americans based on racist stereotypes. Bynoe explains that many people in Japan honestly believe that being of African American descent automatically ensures sports supremacy, intellectual inferiority, criminal tendencies and sexual prowess. The “Black” craze seems to have little to do with real Black people, but instead with fetishized notions of characteristics Black people are presumed to possess (Bynoe 2002, 82).” The fetishization of blackness proved itself rather problematic as young MC’s began to listen and perform Hip Hop within their own national context. They remodeled Japanese speech to be able to match closer the intonations of English, but at the same time based their understanding of authenticity off of a biased and often mischaracterized appropriation of blackness (Motley and Henderson 2008, 247). Hip Hop was associated with Black culture, and was enacted in ways which would likely make many African-American rappers uncomfortable.

Bynoe points to an example of this occurrence, explaining that “Hip Hop culture wasn’t recognized in Japan until about 1995. At this time, hardcore supporters of “Black culture” and “Hip Hop” invested in Dreadlocked hairstyles. They also frequented tanning salons and purchased expensive skin darkeners. “Black darkness” became a fad to be consumed, without the obligation of learning about or understanding Black people(Bynoe 2002, 82).” This deep association proves that issues arise within the spread of this politically charged musical expression, for the culture that goes along with it is often misrepresented, stereotyped and brashly appropriated. In the same paper, she continues to make this point, by differentiating “rap” as a singing method from the larger culture of Hip Hop, which comes with the socio-political history intrinsic to its original American form. She explains that “Thus while “rap” as a creative is portable and adaptable, it belittles Hip Hop culture to continue to insist that as a cultural entity it can be disassociated from its roots and dissected at will(Bynoe 2002, 83).” The differentiation between rap and Hip Hop will return later in this paper, but we see here some of the early contentions within the field of Global Hip Hop. Rap, instead of Hip Hop, has undoubtedly left the U.S. border, and is in use all over the world by marginalized youth, but how does the larger culture of Hip Hop transfer and adapt to its newfound cosmopolitan character?

Morgan refers to this phenomenon of Hip Hop adaptation as a process of Glocalization she explains her navigation of this terms complexity in the following passage “To the scholar, the situation is sometimes described as translocal because artists so often incorporate cultural, artistic, and political dialogues, transcultural representations, as well as interactions between local scenes and U.S. based hip-hop media. The language style and speech community representation is also described as ‘glocalized’; because it simultaneously engages the

intersections of global and local language and cultural dynamics.(Alim et al., 2009; Mitchell, 2001,Bennett & Peterson, 2004,Alim et al., 2009; Androutsopoulos & Scholz, 2002; Morgan 2016 138)” This concept of “Glocalization” and of youth navigating both a localized community can reveal a lot about the character of globalization in the digital age, shining a light on language, shared community and cultural pride. I will be referring to these terms further throughout the paper, as glocality is a thought provoking concept to formulate navigation of identity within the globalized digital reality my generation is living in.

Hip hop has leapt out of its original context, and I seek to explore how this internationalization of an African-American politicized genre can adapt to it’s various glocalized contexts, and how this can reveal global relations to technology, media and censorship. Despite academic concerns that this re-contextualization could lead to a mis-interpretation and distortion of African American marginalized culture, Morgan emphasizes that this global musical phenomenon retains its character, and has served the larger African diaspora as a whole. She writes that:

“Global hip-hop cultures retain many qualitative features of African Diasporic cultures as well as features of the U.S. based hip-hop. In addition, they simultaneously engage in dynamic and prolific processes of aesthetic innovation, production, and diversification. As Perry argues: ‘promiscuous composition does not destroy cultural identity . . . The African aesthetic origins of hip-hop, as with all Black American music, allow for it to have a shared resonance among a wide range of diasporic and continental Africans.’ (Osumare 2008, 2004, pp. 12–13; Morgan 2016 135)”

The specifics of cultural distortion and appropriation come to have controversial and surprising interpretations, and to be blurred with a sense of confusion. In any case, the Global Hip Hop Nation (Alim 2004) has spread around the globe, connecting marginalized youth around the world, despite the pushback from older generations. The role that this music is playing within youth is a fascinating example of the powers of music and of the Internet, offering a platform for expression, rebellious dissent and connection across state borders. There seem to be clashes occurring oftentimes within this community between the musically empowered youth and the forces of authority: many governments believe Hip Hop to be “immoral”, of bad influence, distasteful and sometimes downright dangerous. China’s government is renowned for its authoritative censorship and media control. Despite the regulations established to limit the spread of American cultural imperialism, this music and culture still Hip Hopped it’s way way over the Great (fire) Wall and into the Forbidden City. The rest of this paper seeks to explore the ways in which Chinese youth studying in America relate to this rapidly changing Global Hip Hop culture, and ways in which they relate to it, in order to get a better understanding of the power and scope of this global movement, and how successful governments can be in limiting the expressive potential offered by rap.

Chapter 1:

This chapter explores how Chinese rap went from underground to national phenomenon, and how this can give us insight into constructions of self-hood and identity within the Global Hip Hop network. This serves as a case study for the role of the internet in the continued

resilience of the underground rap community, which in turn led the government to change its method of censorship and embrace Hip Hop on its own terms.

No matter whether these are underground or mainstream hits we come with no harm

But never forget, many MCs may outrank you.

They might be able to copy us using our lyrics as sample

But they can never stand still when watching us perform live

- C-Block, “Power to the People” (以下范上)

C-block is an Rap collective from the city of Changsha长沙 consisting of three members. In this controversial song, Damshine 大傻 raps about the divide within underground artists within the Chinese rap scene, and sheds a light on the division within the popularized mainstream rap market. This hints to how the involvement of government and corporate forces within the growing rap industry has changed the ways in which rappers express their sense of authenticity. Within this lyric, however, we see Damshine emphasize the importance of style and originality in marking his sense of “realness”. Throughout the song, Damshine points to the importance of rappers as being the voice of the people, and of the rise of mainstream Chinese rap. In my discussions with Y, he mentioned that the start of the show “Rap of China” created tension within China’s musical world. He explained that “What I remember clearly is that as a first season, the rap of China, a lot of rappers are blaming those rappers who go to the show, because they think they are not loyal to the people or something. They just want to get rich or something.” It seems that after attempts by the government to censor this culture, they have decided to use popular entertainment media as a means of reshaping and controlling Chinese rap

within the mainstream (Zou 2019). In turn, some rappers have accepted the changes to the community, and taken advantage of these new opportunities, despite the added restrictions. This was not devoid from criticism within the underground community, and is still a topic of contention in Chinese Hip Hop circles to this day, particularly with regards to what is considered “real” and authentic.

“Real” censors:

Chinese Hip Hop is our own patent

The bureau of culture does not allow it, In3 keeps going...

I don't care this is In3 forever publishing

I don't care, In3 is rebelling

-In3(阴三儿), “I do not care”(我不管)

A peculiar aspect of Chinese Rap is the intensity with which the Chinese government censors both online publications and the arts in general. In this song, Beijing Hip Hop group In3 challenges the ways in which the government criticizes and rebukes their style of music, and how they are seeing new rappers rise to success based solely on bragging, which they explain is “killing the art.” J commented in a very straightforward manner that “in China, definitely there's no freedom of speech, because it's restricted. So all the topics about politicians are restricted in China. So like, you know, you can definitely talk about politics in public and not get into trouble. You can even talk about like, President Xi or whatever. But if you post those online, the police will find you”. In this sense, J challenges the western stereotype of Chinese citizens under

constant surveillance, but still highlights the limitations and restrictions imposed on speech by the government.

Current Chinese ruler Xi Jinping is notable for his reshaping of Chinese internal and external politics, as he is seeking to bring his country into international political and financial hegemony. In the process of achieving the “Chinese Dream” (The Economist, 2013) , he has intensified government censorship and returns to historical themes in an attempt to bring “Socialism with Chinese characteristics”, a concept termed under Deng Jiaping, into its rightful place as a world leader. As a part of this, he has emphasized the importance of the media representing Chinese ideology and straying away from “negative energy”(Sechenova 2016). The BBC reports a 2014 conference, in which Xi Jinping addressed a group of the most influential artists of China explaining the importance of making art that only accords to Chinese values. They state that: “Xinhua reported that Mr Xi said artistic creations should inform the public in a "covert but influential" way about what should be praised and what should be denied” (BBC, 2014). This governmental push to control and monitor the cultural and artistic expression of its citizens speaks to the covert tension of artistry within China. The rebellious underground Hip Hop artists were directly targeted by this change in approach to digital censorship, as China also sought to exert control on the virtual spaces of the Internet (Mai, 2017).

Many have since claimed that this speech echoes a speech given by Mao Zedong, the founder of the communist party in China, in 1949 (RSF 2019). Arnold Perris contextualizes the revolutionary leader's approach to censorship by explaining that: “In Mao's theory, all music (and other art) must state an official message. This implies there can be no "innocuous" music.” He continues by explaining that “Lenin and Stalin, and subsequently Mao, discerned the potential of

the arts for their new and vulnerable societies. They early commenced control of "negative" music and of those who taught it and performed it. The complementary need was also perceived: music of high quality and correct ideology must be created to replace music that in any way, overt or subtle, suggested a counterculture or might become a vehicle for unsanctioned criticism. (Perris 1983, 2)" These broader criteria for a style of music show the importance that is placed on the arts and self expression within these governments as an inherently political form of ideology. This particular emphasis on the revolutionary power of music in the face of a vulnerable society, can help us grasp why China is taking to the task of silencing rebellious rappers' voices.

- 2014 Hip Hop ban

"It's appearance is to make Chinese rap purer"

Now you are intoxicated only for your obnoxious fans and corporate benefits

Congratulations that you ruined Hip Hop

-PG One王昊, "Kill the One"

Hip Hop existed in China long before the start of the show, Cheuk explains that it has been around for over 25 years, but never expressly made for mainstream consumption(Cheuk 2020, 4). The original influences of the American Rap phenomenon were felt in the early 90s, with the arrival of Dakou's ((大口)functioning CD's broken off by customs), and the formation of an urban underground community, most resonant in Beijing. Detroit native MC Showtime was credited with bringing rap battles to bars as banned music genres merged and more Chinese locals were introduced to MCing (Luo, Ming 2020, Cheuk 2020 3). Cheuk explains the role that

this community played in gatekeeping the culture, as well as defining and preserving the sense of “realness” which would come to define underground Chinese rap “the pre-2017 Chinese underground hip hop community was bound by a ‘mythology of authenticity’ that shared similar roots to the Chinese rock scene: an expression of authenticity that bound together producers, musicians and audience of a particular form of music (De Kloet 2010, p. 26, Cheuk 2020, 3)”. This mythology of authenticity is one we see re-modulated and interpreted differently in various embodiments of global Hip Hop. In Beijing underground rap, criticism against the actions of the ruling party, social commentary and “realness” were some of the necessary requirements for musicians to earn this “subcultural capital.”

Around the same time, J explained that a Taiwanese singer was using rap within his pop hits. He explained that “In China, there was this guy called Jay Chou. He was really famous, everybody knew him and everybody, at least, has heard several songs from him. He is mumble rap. He sings this mumble rap before hip hop was even introduced to Chinese culture.” Rap as a singing style has thus existed before the “Rap of China” in environments related to Chinese music, but had never taken a central role within the industry until 2017 (Mind, Luo 2020, 2). This connects to a point made by Anthony Fung, in which he explains that “Chinese mainstream media appropriated the apolitical side of hip hop cultural elements like music, fashion, dancing, and lifestyle since the early 2000s... Apolitical hip-hop music actually functions to soothe social upheaval and maintain the status quo” (Fung 2008, p. 97). Some music in the Chinese mainstream industry thus is reminiscent of influences from Global Hip Hop, but it never took on the political and social role it seems to embody around the world.

Life for the underground Chinese rappers changed after 2014, when Xi Jinping swore to reform his country's cultural hegemony, swearing to promote it's soft power to disseminate Chinese values to the world (China.org). This renewed critical approach to “immoral media”, thus led to a massive banning of Chinese music, many of which were Hip Hop songs coming from Beijing. This ban, which was established and still is being enforced by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPREF), which is responsible for drafting laws and policies, while regulating media services and content (Luo and Ming 2020, 1). However, this has not stopped the artists from posting their music on Western social media platforms like Youtube where China has less control. In this way, some of these Western companies seem to act as semi-democratic cosmopolitan platforms for expression and connection.

As the unofficial Hip Hop ban proved unsuccessful, Hip Hop kept gaining in popularity both at home and abroad; the Chinese government decided to change their approach to censorship, by allowing IQUI, a large media producer to start a show focused on Hip Hop, called “Rap of China”. This show, acting as the mainstream introduction of Chinese Rap, received huge attention as it's popularity skyrocketed. J explains with a slight tone of disappointment the impacts that this show had on the underground culture, stating that:

“ever since the show went off, the interpretation of hip hop culture has become what I think is, “mainstream Chinese rap”. There may still be people who have their own discipline, that are still doing the real Hip Hop, but their influence is limited because they are not mainstream, they don't have the power to spread their word to convince people. And the Hip Hop culture really is not a match for Chinese society. So there must be some

underground rappers, just like the original ones. But there are way more people who started rap after 2017, influenced by the show, and these people, are what is now considered Chinese rappers. ”

Chinese rappers began “selling out” and going mainstream around the same time as the debut of this show, and it’s overwhelming popularity seems to be silencing the power and influence of the original underground rappers. In it, he points to the way in which Hip Hop culture’s original tropes and themes would immediately be deemed as immoral through the eyes of the government; Chinese popular entertainment is thus attempting to re-define Hip Hop in a consumerist and tame version they can market to the people without the disdain of authorities. One of Cheuk’s interlocutors was quoted stating that the Chinese corporate world is at the center of tension and controversy for this show. He explains that:

“they are getting heat from the government and heat from the hip hop community. It’s because [...] the business community has its own language, philosophy, and approach. It actually is in conflict with hip hop. There is a conflict in values. That doesn’t mean those conflicts, those values, cannot be negotiated. But there has to be a level of respect, communication, and understanding. So when the business community wants to get involved in hip hop, you have to be honest. Do your research, understand what you’re getting involved with. And don’t treat it as something that you can easily exploit. So the big problem, the big blame wasn’t the kids in hip hop, it wasn’t the government, but it was the business community.” (Golden Melody Association Conference 2018, Cheuk 2020)

Ever since rap and Hip Hop entered the Chinese public gaze, several influences have been attempting to shift it and re-define it, and have thus left this public form of burgeoning entertainment as a scene of possible divisions and interpretations amongst the youth. Entertainment media can demonstrably be a source of information and ideological dissemination, serving as a weapon to claim power and legitimacy (Luo, Ming 2020, 4). According to Cheuk and Blåsternes, the underground scene remained active and has actively responded by the efforts of companies to modify their artform: “As such, the underground scene distinguished itself against the mainstream appropriation of hip hop in China by claiming ‘authenticity’ through a series of actions and behaviour to earn ‘subcultural capital’. (Cheuk 2020, 3, Blåsternes 2014, 74)” Through “skills, looks and knowledge” of American Hip Hop tropes and history, members of the underground challenge the larger forces attempting to re-define rap, but thus seem to be pointing to the opposing definitions of authenticity within this formative era of Chinese Hip Hop.

Y, a talented musician from Beijing, also expressed that “the relationship between the people and the government, in the music industry is really interesting. As long as you are not participating in the political war, even though you might be doing some things that are challenging some traditional morals; this would be fine by the government. But if you're directly talking about politics, then you will be banned.” The way in which he mentions the term political war proves to us the contention of the political subject within China. In “Power to the people,” Damshine and C-block allude to this political war discreetly, and point to the importance of rappers in fighting as voices for freedom: “When the firebombs have been thrown it means the war has begun. It means the new age has begun, the rising of new heroes. (Damshine 2017)”

Underground rap has been challenging the powers of censorship ever since it's rise in popularity, but it's expressive and localizing potential mean Hip Hop is a force to be reckoned with. Instead of outright silencing the culture, China was better off taking it within its own - corporate influenced - hands.

In this case, Y points to a grey area in which there is still contended space to enact self expression and localized youth identity formation, but Chinese values and morals will always stand as an obstacle within the Chinese mainstream. Y seems to be expressing that the borders of immoral behavior seem to be blurry, but avoiding anything critical of the Chinese government seems to be the best bet for survival. In this way, the Hip Hop ban in China could be compared to the censorship of mid century European writers: Instead of being told what subjects they could write about, they were informed of all the subjects they must avoid (for example, V the censors of *Rigoletto* around 1850) (Perris 2983, 2). The Chinese have long been opposed to the cultural influences of the west, explaining that in many ways American media is a blind endorsement of Capitalism, consumerism and bad morals (Pennycook 2007, 102), so it is interesting that the show "Rap of China", which contains westernized culture and stands on the edge of permissible media, has been approved by the government. It has thus been met with a great deal of success, and opened a gigantic market within China, which Cheuk writes as a "Hip Hop fever", amassing over 2.68 billion views, making it the most viewed Chinese program of 2017 (Cheuk 2020, 1). This show points to a larger transition in governmental relationship to Hip Hop within the government and mainstream media corporations. The censors eventual acceptance of the tropes of Hip Hop within the larger musical scene was then also the sign of the commodification of Hip Hop, and of a new aspect of being a "real" rapper.

- **Popular culture propaganda**

*We stand on the two sides finding our balance/ So there is reason and excuse
Even though most people would not accept/ I will keep going/ No end, no exit
Only when you stand in the streets do you get this feeling/ We call it freedom*

In3自由式, “Freestyle”

As one of the most renowned early rap groups to emerge from the Beijing underground scene, 17 of their songs were added to the censorship list in 2015 due to their strong anti-authoritative quality. Since the band has been banned from the industry, have no access to performance, and records are prohibited from being sold. Whereas this quote from their earlier song promotes the streets as a place for freedom and expression, the band members felt differently in an interview with Fan Shuhong, they explained that “We used to be on the street, but now street culture is not on the street, it’s only on the screens. This is a problem.” (Shuhong, 2020). In3 are demonstrating the way in which the government and the SAPREF (see page 5) have used street culture and Hip Hop as a platform for Chinese values. In this interview Jahjah Way explains the rise of their group amongst Beijing street culture, and the role of the mainstream in overshadowing their underground platform. He points to the way in which “In China it’s just viewed as a market. All they see is how many young people are consuming it, and that’s the only reason why they’re doing it.(Shuhong)” This cultural re-formulation has allowed for corporations and government officials to modify the culture in a way which satisfies their goals.

Hip Hop mold for Corporate reworking

Luo and Ming put this within a more political context: “These attempts of revamping hip-hop culture for political use have demonstrated the CPC’s strategic turn towards youth and popular culture for propaganda. (Luo and Ming 2020, 5)” The use of popular culture and mainstream media shows a turn in Chinese approaches to foreign cultural imperialism, and speaks to how art forms can represent and embody conflicting interests. This clash of artists and government blurs J perception of rappers that still choose to go on the show. He continues by explaining that: “ So in this case you can see that rapping is being spread without Hip Hop to people who are not related to Hip Hop at all. Based on this tendency probably we can see that in the next 10 years or so there'll be no more real hip hop in China, because the continuity of this culture will be shut down.” This re-working of culture is a serious threat facing the underground community of an ever-changing style. J points to the way in which the “idol format” of the show allows producers to pick and choose people who are willing to “fit the mold,” and that most people in China are unaware of this transfiguration of Hip Hop by corporate and state interests.

While considering uses of media in response to subcultural music cultures in China, Moore explained that “like in many other countries, authorities are in the dilemma of trying to censor and discipline young people on the one hand but recognizing ‘the extremely valuable and coveted demographic of young consumers’ in the entertainment industry on the other” (Moore 2005, 231). This tension between what is acceptable to post to mainstream TV shines a light on the importance played through every form of media, and leads us to question how the younger generations’ ubiquitous internet use may change this. We witnessed one occurrence of online censorship of youth expression with the banning of the Winnie the Pooh meme (MCDonel), along with covert phrasing used to bypass the censorship on certain sayings on Chinese social

media, such as the Grass-mud Horse song which was full of hidden messaging opposing the Chinese Government (Xiao Qiang, 2012).

- **Fake News: Chinese Hip Hop is dead**

“Everything gets corrupted, including hip hop. If you wanna see the corrupted side, it has that side, but everything else has its dark side as well. It depends on which side you want to see. I can see the bad side even when I don’t want to see it, but this makes me want to see the good side even more. It connects people from different corners of the world.” -Jahjah Way, In3 member (Shuhong 2020)

As my conversation with J delved deeper into this topic, he leaned in and spoke in a more passionate tone, I could see that this was a subject of personal import. I asked him about the ways in which the arrival of the show changed the culture which was forming in China at the time. He immediately retorted that “In China instead of a culture, it's become more just a genre honestly. It went from a cultural movement to a style or singing technique. People might be attracted by rebellious figures who have like gold chains, smoke weed or say “f***”; those are still popular, and young people still like the rebellious figures.” This statement echoes Jahjah Way's disillusioned approach to the Chinese rap show. Through commercialization, the producers and corporate executives were able to pacify the character of the subculture and mute it's rebellious character. Here however, J shows that there is a wide-spread appreciation for anti-establishment behavior and attitudes. These sentiments support the survival of the underground community in the face of mainstream influences. This point of contention then

leads us to question how “realness” is interpreted and navigated by my interlocutors, as the “Rap of China” has seemingly changed concepts of authenticity within the community.

Back at the esplanade, M explained the larger implications of the global expansion of Hip Hop Culture explaining that “you know, hip hop is not only music, it's a lifestyle for a lot.” Indeed, the character of the globalized seeps through various aspects of everyday life, from fashion, to language and community building; acting as a tool for youth identification and self expression. In this short passage, she is alluding to a difference which appears to be forming within the Chinese musical community, where the essence of Hip Hop seems to be lost to the powers of commercialization, but there still remains “real” members of this underground community.

Survival of the underground:

Many of the scholars writing on this subject point to “realness” as one of the defining membership traits for rappers within the Global Hip Hop Nation (Cheuk 2020, Lou and Ming 2020, Zou 2019, Barrett 2012). But how is realness changing in response to “the Rap of China”? M indicates that “real” Hip Hop Headz still listen and perform songs which accord to the original underground tropes of Chinese Hip Hop. She explained that many artists from the banned song list still post their music to Youtube, and that her and her peers “still listen to them.” M is opposing currents of mainstream appropriation of rebellious themes of rap, and arguing that the Hip Hop culture is still alive and has remained underground, connected by common tropes and a love for “real” Hip Hop.

What in this case defines “realness” within this Chinese musical environment? Authors on the subject have approached various theories on this matter, but it would seem that “realness”

in Hip Hop is deeply tied to a sense of marginalization and oppression, while others argue whether or not it is intrinsically linked to race, gender and class (Bynoe 2002, Morgan 2016). It would appear that with the spread of Hip Hop across the world, pluralized understandings of the “real” have emerged. My interlocutors even further argue that there are various different “realities” within the Chinese music scene, as they try and relate to different approaches and interpretations of Hip Hop. The following section focuses on searching for grounds to define authenticity in Chinese Hip Hop realness, while shedding light on the nuances brought to the mainstream in 2017.

- **Global “Realness”, variations of authenticity:**

Throughout our conversation, J seemed to be very excited about the future of Hip Hop, even though he was weary of the influence of the government in shaping the Chinese Hip Hop culture. Regardless of these changes, he explained changes within Chinese citizens, explaining that he is “realizing that people are, like, kind of opening their mind right now” and becoming more accepting of various practices. In this way, people who truly get to know and love Hip Hop within China still have the possibility to correctly navigate the obstacles of authenticity within this rap culture. Some thinkers like Alim tied “realness” with concepts of stylistic originality (Alim 2009), while others focus on linguistic and cultural markers to define a sense of reality within the various identities and iterations of Hip Hop. My understanding of the “real” within this context relates to locality and youth identity formation in the face of oppression. The

question of whether or not a rapper loses their “realness” after embracing mainstream Hip Hop comes to the fore.

When I asked M about her interpretation of authenticity in Hip Hop, she emphasized the importance of truth, and the manner in which underground Beijing rappers came to shape her understanding of the “real.” She explains that “Beijing rappers are old school; They are telling real stories. We appreciate people who tell their real stories in the lyrics. I think lyrics are more important for them to express their attitude to talk about the real story. The emotion is real. It's like he was trying to tell stories to people of his own experience.” In this passage, M seems to highlight the politically anti-authoritative and critical nature of Beijing rappers, in contrast to the tameness of the members who go onto the televised show.

Marginality:

A rap battle within Chinese Hip Hop is currently being fought between both the underground and mainstream scenes as they wrestle with defining their realities. At the center of this battle are the Chinese youth, as they negotiate their local and global identities. J points to this difference explaining why “real” rappers aren’t allowed on the mainstream shows in fear of controversies when he said, “But if you get a real hip hop artist, you may actually get in trouble. All these mainstream media prefer more tame Chinese rappers, and this tendency invades the position of so-called “real” Hip Hop within Chinese culture.” Thus we need to find a systematic approach that helps us better characterize a sense of authenticity in China. Motley and Henderson point to those deprived of power, as they aim at marginalization and

disenfranchisement as a core characteristic of Global Hip Hop membership (Elflein, 1998, Motley and Henderson, 2008, 147)

Local Identity:

Pennycook describes the role of regionality in forming a cultural identity for a minority group, writing “Global real talk, which, while easily glossed as keepin’ it real, is better understood as a global ideology that is always pulled into local ways of being. By looking at authenticity in this way, we can understand the hip-hop ideology of keepin’ it real as a discursively and culturally mediated mode of representing and producing the local”(Pennycook 2007, 112). This definition concisely points to the plurality of interpretations of realness, and ways in which rapping actually situates one as a performer of a local and with a distinct cultural identity interacting within a larger Global trend. There is a particular emphasis on claiming Hip Hop, disconnecting it from Black American roots, and instead focusing on what is “already local”(Barrett 2018, 2). Morgan paints “real” global Hip Hop as a system of symbols and tropes that can be applied to local cultures, and it’s transformative nature and truth representation of socio-political life have become it’s markers, echoing that “irrespective of where in the world one finds hip-hop, it incorporates local and national languages and varieties as well as nationally and culturally marked symbols that represent space, place and context (Morgan 2016, 135).” This passage points at the natural hybridity of Global Hip Hop, and the way in which my interlocutors relate to it speaks of the way in which they navigate their context and environment, both socially and politically.

Connective marginalities link class, culture, and historical oppression amongst youth through music while incorporating their local background and identity. Osumare emphasizes that “although many of these global hip-hop sub-segments take cues from African–American hip-hop, they also imbue it with an inventiveness and creativity so it becomes uniquely theirs, and represents their pains, struggles and political issues. (Osumare 2007)” As I will discuss in chapter 3, the way in which GHHN members relate to blackness is a dividing subject within the academic field. It would seem that this concept of realness from the GHHN standpoint still includes a broad knowledge of African-American history and relation to the music, as an underpinning to re-shaping the culture through local lenses. But how do the mainstream Chinese embodiments of Hip Hop reflect this ethos of “keepin’ it real” in the face of mainstream influences?

- **Authenticity with Chinese values:**

How is the project of “real” localism (Pennycook 2007) enacted within the face of cultural forces seeking to unite and pacify a counterculture? Within the aforementioned interpretation of globalized Hip Hop authenticity, how are the Chinese media modifying the relation to authenticity amongst show participants? J explains that the government and corporations have taken advantage of globalized ideas of “coolness” by re-defining them from their own sake. He explains that “they're trying to present a pure symbol of, say, ‘cool’ you know because, in the show, the rappers aren’t dressed like the rappers here (in the U.S). If you drag an typical rapper image, you can see like: gold chains, or, you know, loose pants or whatever, right? But in China, This rapper's appearance is replaced by trending. So even the show wants you to understand rap, even if you haven't even heard rap before." Companies in China have taken the

platform of “Rap of China” and turned it into an advertising medium for what they want to make trend. Meanwhile, the new way Rap is being sold to the audiences is through focusing on Chinese references and concepts, centered around themes such as peace and love, while avoiding the “four don’t” of this Culture.

Peace and love:

It would seem, according to Morgan, that ever since its inception Hip Hop has been portrayed negatively within the mass media. She explains that: “Too often those who report on the hip-hop speech community are unfamiliar with hip-hop culture, or refuse to believe that hip-hop culture exists at all.... their perspective consistently focuses on hip-hop as a negative influence on society in general and young people in particular.” Up until the show, the Chinese government approached the culture similarly, but in recent years has switched to attempting to accept the culture by modifying it to fit Chinese morals and values. J explains that the most important change within this mainstream understanding of authenticity as it is pushed by the government focuses on “peace and love” and Chinese values, as opposed to the previously mentioned navigations of GHHN reality. M also emphasized the way in which Chinese Hip Hop seeks to find it’s own identity and sound as artists try to incorporate as many local references to add to the sense of locality. These symbols serve as a way of reinventing a sense of unity, which allows for regionalized contrasts to be made prominent and acknowledged, if not respected. She said that “It’s really interesting actually, to hear a lot of rappers using the ancient Chinese quotes, references and memories; it’s a really special part of Chinese Rap.” By emphasizing national pride and implementing culturally significant phraseology in their lyrics, Chinese rappers

contextualize their singing practice while participating sonically in a larger phenomenon, sharing rhythmic commonalities, and oftentimes articulating a sense of collective marginality.:

This understanding of the negative portrayal of Hip Hop helps us understand why J thought that it was never a good fit for Chinese culture. We seem to be viewing a struggle between top down and bottom up influences, as both the state and the people seek to define the style within their own terms. Though the state in no way fits the requirements of marginality to fit the aforementioned GHHN authenticity guidelines, it still seeks to use locality and national traits to redefine itself into the genre. Within this perspective, we begin to see that “the notion of authenticity, however, can be understood not so much as an individualist obsession with the self but rather as a dialogical engagement with community” (Pennycook 2007, 103). This idea of broader engagement helps us understand that there are a multiplicity of interpretations of authenticity, while similarly there are many different ways to engage with the state and with culture. Thus, this alternative corporate version of Chinese rap could suggestively be held to its own standard of authenticity, serving as an alternative to the globalized phenomenon. China is in no way new to cultural imitation in its own terms, we saw it before in the form of copycat cities (Hoeller). In order to conclude this chapter, I will point to a controversy that occurred after the first show, which shows us the role of the government in shaping understandings of authenticity.

- **GAI周延 and PG One王昊,**

Riding in a Maserati with my mouth full of money

Only Versace in my sight and they all become my Barbie dolls

-PG one, “Christmas Eve”

The year is 2017, and the final episode of “Rap of China” is coming to an end; finally the winners are announced: GAI and PG One are officially the winners of the first season of the show. Both were members of the underground communities in their respective cities, Chongqing and Chengdu, and were members of rival groups leading up to the show. Their participation and success on the idol style TV program led them to achieve widespread fame and recognition across China. Both of these rappers point to strong influences from US Hip Hop, and had long musical pasts preceding their debuts on the show. After winning the show, their past was subsequently scrutinized by the online community. People quickly discovered that both of the rappers had made songs with controversial content, and both of the rappers had to respond to the public about these accusations. PG One had posted a song he recorded with other members of his rap group entitled “Christmas Eve”, in this song, he refers to his wild lifestyle full of sex and drugs and money.

Christmas eve:

He raps lines along the line of “*Pure white powder walkin’ on the floor/ Countin’ money in a party, kush kush kush burn them all/ Good chicks approach me, so I don’t bother making a move*”. The song continues, full of allusions to cannabis and cocaine use, all the while bragging about his wealth and sexual life. These lewd lyrics and direct drug references caught the eye of the public, who accused him of straying from Chinese morals and spreading “negative” values in his music. I explained that from his perspective “He is so called ‘real rap’, an interpreter of real Hip Hop,” revealing the way in which people related these recurrent themes of “Sex, money and weed” as traits inherent to “real” Hip Hop, even though these concepts are not flouted by Hip

Hop connoisseurs from around the world as being intrinsic to this art form. J explained that a lot of the negative pushback PG One received was due to his direct vivid references to drug use, as J explains that “Chinese people are very strict about that.” The Chinese public’s response to PG One’s drug references in his lyrics is but one issue that people in China have with the content in Hip Hop songs.

J seemed a bit unimpressed with PG One, explaining that he is “full of excuses” and that his music wasn’t that good. This is because as he was in the process of dealing through this scandal, he released several tweets which could be viewed as placing the blame on Black culture. In one apologetic tweet, he explains that, “I was deeply influenced by Black music in the early days when I was exposed to hip-hop culture, and I didn’t have a correct understanding of core values of hip hop culture.(Global times 2018)” This message shows that PG One attempted to avoid public scrutiny by attributing references to sex and drugs in Hip Hop lyrics as characteristic of the influence of Black American culture on the art form. J characterized his overall attitude towards the scandal as unapologetic and self-centered. Finally, PG One received even more backlash when it was revealed that he had an affair with a married woman; this extramarital tromperie led to him being fully banned within China. J explains that he still has “power and influence, and he’s still rich”.

Gangsta:

GAI, a rival of PG One, also went through a very similar scandal. One of GAI’s early rap videos emerged and ignited public scrutiny. In “Gangsta” (超社会) the rapper is portrayed shirtless as he menacingly wields a machete. He and all his crewmates are covered in tattoos,

which are, traditionally, negatively viewed in China. His rap speaks to more general themes about the way in which he and his friends live a “gangster lifestyle,” emulating the themes of the West Coast United States rap scene started in Compton. One of the major differences between GAI’s song and PG One’s is that GAI includes many local elements, from symbols to phrases, as he raps in his native dialect. In this sense, he seems to be representing his city rather than rapping for the effect of emulating a foreign lifestyle. For example he raps: “*We gangsta, everytime we smoke, we smoke Zhonghua cigarettes, we worship Guan Yu.*” In his lyrics, he alludes to his sense of “gangsterness.” He also places himself within the localized context, referring to an expensive brand of Chinese cigarettes and praying to Guan Yu 關帝, a historical Chinese military figure who is of great cultural import in China today. He also makes less direct allusions to drugs and women, though they appear less centrally than his competitor.

He raps that “*I’ve had many drugs just never used needles,*” as well as “*Everything I do is enough to get me arrested and tried by police,*” even cussing out hypothetical audience members’ relatives. This broad portrayal of localized gangster life brought the forces of cultural authority down upon him. Through portraying the realities of lower class living in his native city of Neijiang 內江, he shined a light on gambling, fighting and jails. In many ways, this song can be situated into the larger quest for global authenticity within the GHHN. However, J explains that GAI’s song was less problematic because it was more authentic to his background. He explained that this “gangster style was popular long before this music video. You know this kind of rebellious figure is usually like young people in, like, villages, doing nothing.” GAI then could be viewed as a more truthful portrayal of reality within his context, and J further stated that this song was undoubtedly “real Hip Hop.” He points to the allure of the counter-cultural rebel,

who stands up to authority and lives life according to their own rules; and points to the allure that this character has on the youth. I also emphasized that this Gangster imagery and ideology is not new to Chinese pop culture, in that it echoes the Hong Kong film scene in the 90s, and that many themes from GAI's music video reference this era of Chinese film making.

After this scandal arose within the public, GAI was pulled from the show he was currently shooting, but owned up to the consequence of his actions, and took full responsibility. Lou and Ming pointed out that “before GAI joined the show, his Weibo posts were mainly about underground hip-hop culture” and that he was proud when he found out his song “Gangster” was banned in 2014. (Lou and Ming 2020, 6)” In this sense, he felt very much so attached and a part of the “underground” real Hip Hop scene. But this all changed when he won the show, after which the subject of all his Weibo posts was commercial endorsements. He subsequently took down all his old music and now focuses on “positive energy” in Chinese culture and society. He still raps in his native dialect, but his background and story are revamped as mainstream media success stories through his personal strivings. Upon cleaning up his act and woefully apologizing, GAI remained within the Chinese mainstream rap community, and still raps to this day.

The contrast between these two examples of mainstream fame within Chinese Hip Hop shows the nuances in the approach to censorship and government banning. Luo and Ming write about this trope as they explain how the government is seeking to limit the spread of songs with “negative energy,” that don't really promote Chinese ideals. They explain that the banning of music depends more on an individual's actions than the direct ideological content of their music. Luo and Ming explain that there is a surprisingly high tolerance to more provocative themes than

the West would come to believe; despite music that challenges political authorities, songs with “negative energy”, such as misogyny and violence, are relatively palatable (Luo and Ming 2020, 7). Chinese authorities do not favour songs with “negative energy,” but the future of these songs is more dependent on their performers’ behaviour.” This passage thus directly relates to the scandal where both of these artists were denounced as a result of using similar lyrical behaviour , but each responded to it in different ways. This example gives us a clearer understanding of how mainstream authenticity is more nuanced than it may appear, and how this blurs the lines of underground rap.

GAI and PG One today:

If we look at the music that these two artists are posting, we see the ways in which they have progressed with government involvement. PG One recently released a music video entitled “Kill the One”, where he reflects on his reaction, admits to his mistakes, but critiques the cut throat censorship of the government and mainstream media. He raps from the perspective of web-users, showing their disappointment stating that they “*Claim that I destroyed the culture, exploded it’s foundation and demolished the edifice. But these double dealing hypocrites donned their new outfits and also criticized you B****.* (PG One)” This passage highlights how the government strategically made an example out of him, but shows that he understands how the mainstream functions. In this way he talks about being scapegoated even though he apologized, and targets the mainstream for trying to re-define rap and in doing so expelling him from the rap scene. He also asks the listener “*ShenDanye[Gangsta]’ and ‘ChaoSheHui[Christmas Eve],’ which one is more terrifying?* (PG One)” as he points to the different treatment that his rival received. He explains the pain and hardship that he went through as he tried to make things right,

but explained that he rather be “*tortured than be despicable.*” This music has a very rebellious and expressive political meaning, but J still pointed that in it PG One still places the blame elsewhere, and seems to still be angry, appearing childish and unlikeable to the larger public.

GAI on the other hand has been at the forefront of mainstream Chinese rap music. He helped start GO\$H, a Chongqing Rap group that has been instrumental in defining C-Trap and has been an important figure in Chinese Trap ever since the end of the first season. In one of his most recent songs, he raps alongside other members of the Chongqing group C-Block about the larger rap community in China and the importance of dialects as he connects it to larger Chinese themes. He raps that, “*The entire Jiāng hú is allowing me to break through freely/ Nothing can take it away, karma comes and goes in the flow of Taoism.* (GAI and C-Block)” By bringing up Jiāng hú, a key concept in Chinese martial arts culture which I will explain in the next chapter, and alluding to karma and Taoism, GAI places himself within the safe boundaries of acceptability within Chinese rap. In this way, he is bringing authenticity in his experience and engagement with China, as he prides himself on his dialect rap, and places himself contextually. He alludes to the differences within the Chinese rap environment, but instills a sense of commonality amongst all the rappers. GAI seems to be experimenting with the boundaries of Chinese censorship, understanding what is acceptable, while taking advantage of the opportunity presented by mainstream rap.

He still does mention cannabis use, which is interesting considering his previous scandal “*From southside to northside green shit is mixed with our rolling papers.*(GAI)” This song seems to blur the boundaries between mainstream and underground, as he tries to assert his “realness” while adhering to the guidelines proposed by the government. GAI then is an example of a

rapper from an impoverished community taking advantage of the platform of the rap of China to earn a career and have a more important voice in the Hip Hop community. This leads us to question which of the first season winners is the “realist”? A question which proves itself to lack a credible answer, as the criteria of authenticity could still apply itself to mainstream rappers, but by doing so it adds increased nuance and tensions within the musical scene. A sense of general cultural identity separate from American Hip Hop seems to be unquestionably tied to the “Rap of China” show, for better or worse. Chinese Hip Hop is now it’s own cultural phenomenon, torn internally by varying ideas of authenticity and realness, connected by culture, language and a shared sense of marginalized youth identity.

Chapter 2:

Building off of the division between mainstream and underground culture, this chapter aims to characterize the ways in which Global Hip Hop has changed the youths relationship to language, as a means of self-identification to relate local character in global terms. This in turn alludes to the way in which we can view Global Hip Hop as a translocal stylistic language which pierces through boundaries. Finally we analyze how the “Rap of China” has shifted the standards of rap value, and how participants in the show responded by shifting their usage of mandarin.

- Jiāng hú 江湖 :

Jiāng hú is everywhere as long as human life exists

We praying for each others ancestors

-GAI and C-Block, “Flow of the Jiāng hú”(江湖流)

Jiāng hú is a traditional Chinese concept which has been reworked into Hip Hop culture over the last ten years. Directly translated, it signifies Rivers and Lakes; within its contextual meaning, it refers to a symbolic brotherhood of outsiders within China. These members make up the working class of China through constant hustle, composed mainly of “craftsmen, beggars, thieves, street performers, fortune tellers, wandering healers, and many martial artists. (Daoist)” It refers to a concept of hard work for the betterment of one's life, of using your two hands to improve your lifestyle, while alluding to a larger sense of community between those undergoing this struggle together. M explained that it “is a concept like people are living inside of this community, and people are doing whatever they can. No one is settling.” This concept lacks an English equivalent, and seems to connect the youth around a central sense of responsibility towards an invisible larger community. There is a sense of boundlessness of this term which all my interlocutors stressed, in a way the community which makes up the Jiāng hú is ever changing, or varies depending on the individual. Since the idea of fluctuation is integral to the meaning, they explain it as a sense of traveling brotherhood. M stresses that it runs through various communities and people similar to the way a river slices through various established borders.

Jiāng hú as Hip Hop:

Originally, this concept was very prevalent within martial arts culture, as a means of opposing more traditional Confucian models of living. Students would train with a professor for a couple years, before “going out” into the Jiāng hú. Today, the term has shifted from a more particularized element of Martial Arts culture, and as my interlocutors expressed, it has come to

represent the imagined communities that define “Chinese Hip Hop”. They express it as a sense of a belonging to a group of outsiders from within. In this song lyric, GAI pledges his allegiance to Jiāng hú, as he highlights his sense of Jiāng hú rap unity at the same time as emphasizing his “realness.” There is a resounding fraternity that appears to connect those within the Jiāng hú. In this lyrical passage, we also see that he directly admits to hustling within the Changsha area even though he is not from there. GAI and C-block portray Jiāng hú as a unifying force within a pluralized rap scene. Concepts such as Jiāng hú add to a sense of cultural uniqueness and identity, and witnessing rappers and interlocutors refer to it with such emphasis, it would seem as though this idea connects both the underground and the mainstream rappers. My interlocutors repeatedly stressed the population size as an important factor to consider when discussing China: there are a plurality of opinions and views, a multitude of approaches to Hip Hop.

Rivers, Deltas, Oceans:

My interlocutors explained that in recent years, this term has become increasingly popular throughout Chinese Hip Hop culture. Y explained that, “before hip hop came to China, martial arts were the style that translated the Jiāng hú culture. And then hip hop comes like and the idea just moved to Hip Hop.” Jiāng hú serves as a concept to connect youth to their past, to the cultural significance of their country’s “outsiders,” and ultimately creates a sense of widespread unity and brotherhood. M and GAI (in the lyrics above) even hypothesize that with the advent of the Internet and social media, the borders of Jianhu have expanded to the larger world. Through this approach we could understand the GHHN to be a form of Jianghu. The Jiāng hú is the symbolic state of brotherhood shared by marginalized collectivities, such as the youth using Hip Hop to carry over political messages, or for others as a way to make money and get

rich. Rappers belonging to the Chinese diaspora, or to the Hip Hop Nation then could possibly be considered members of this “River/lake.” It seems that with the increasing success of Hip Hop, this Jiāng hú is now beginning to resemble an ocean connecting disenfranchised youth around the world.

Hip Hop and Chinese rap presents a new medium through which young members discover their place within a larger imagined community, as they formulate a localized identity through dialect, style and language. With the incredible rise in popularity of the artform, and the parallel spread of the Internet and social media, it seems that Jiāng hú is in constant fluctuation. Jin Liu comments on the importance of locality and regional pride in the Chinese raps circulated on the Internet, pointing to the importance of using native dialect, and highlighting that these songs “are characterized by strong social messages, which thus enable Chinese youth to construct an alternative subcultural space outside that defined by adult culture and hierarchical institutions’ (Liu 2014, p. 266)” This alternative subcultural space is the crux of my fascination with global hip hop, and I posit that this academic wording is just another way of defining Jiāng hú. The character of Chinese Hip Hop and pluralized definitions of authenticity are informed and supported by localization and the use of varying dialects. Chinese Hip Hop culture is articulated by Chinese youth navigating the restrictive beliefs of older generations who may view Hip Hop music and its corollary stylistic elements negatively.

- **Hip Hop as Global Language:**

“And you know, Hip Hop is a universal language, it’s a universal family, you know what I’m saying? That’s what we can’t forget. No matter if it’s east, west, north or south. It’s all one.”

-Masta Killa, Wu Tang Clan member, interview (Brolin 2006)

Linguistic flows:

Alongside our increasing cross-cultural connections on the world wide web, Hip Hop has also come to redefine the currents of the youth around the world, that is, with far more space for interpretation and re-invention to fit the particulars of locality and identity around the world. According to Morgan, Hip Hop holds the unique value of contrasting a sense of local and global: “As it has moved around the globe, hip-hop language and discourse style has become a model of how to simultaneously represent culture and society while celebrating and challenging traditions, the nation state, and identities. It is the lingua franca for artists throughout the world who perform their raps/messages in local and national languages, with hands raised as they ‘shout out’ to their villages, crews, neighbors, governments, and ancestors. (Morgan 2016, 134)”. Hip Hop and rap have become a tool, a language of its own used and modified by the youth to celebrate their identity while symbolically defying other cultural moral standards. Alim and Pennycook argue that this recontextualization of stylistic resources in rap through localized contexts marks an era of “Global linguistic flows”, in which cultural and linguistic material travels around the world to produce not global languages but global and translocal styles (Alim

et al. 2008, Pennycook 2007). This idea of global linguistic flows extends beyond concepts of language associated with nation state boundaries.

J explained this phenomenon with a hint of dismay as he reflected on the state of mainstream Hip Hop back home. We were sitting at the desk of my darkened room, with my monitors humming lowly as we transitioned to the next song fit for analysis. He explained that he feels as though the art form is slipping out of the hands of the youth, and is becoming something that doesn't resemble the sonic poetry which connects youth across the world. He feels as though Chinese Hip Hop is becoming disconnected and whitewashed to be a harmless product. He explained that "rap culture has become really popular, famous, mainstream whatever you call it. As long as we have a taste for this music, people can "build" this taste. I think that by banishing these kinds of groups like In3, real Hip Hop rappers, the Chinese government is kind of establishing this new definition of rap. Of course they shape it by avoiding all hip hop that is not appropriate for Chinese culture." The Chinese censorship would then be trying to dull the sharp knife of globalized Hip Hop, in an attempt to re-define the character of their country. By doing this, J also points out that the government is re-modelling the youth identity, and need to tread very carefully as the younger generation is increasingly aware of these changes. J explains how new Chinese rap sounds dull, fake and insincere, as he feels it silences the only forms of "real" expression echoing through China.

- **Regionalization:**

Keep it real is my motto

I'm from 0734 but I hustle in 0731

My flow is mixed with my hometown dialect

-GAI and C-Block, “Flow of the Jiāng hú” (江湖流)

The arrival of Rap in China long precedes the mainstream debut of the “Rap of China,” during the original birth of the subculture in China. Rap, then a burgeoning art form, was most popular in Beijing, the country’s sprawling capital; as foreigners and locals met in crowded underground bars, the forbidden city began to resonate with cyphers and rap battles. This Beijing underground scene was highly controversial, as it grew in influence and membership it became of increasing concern to the censors. But after the “Rap of China”, Chinese Hip Hop has risen to cultural prominence in multiple different locations around the country, as L explained: “it’s really regionalized in terms of rap scenes. Each city kind of has its own rap culture and our own rappers.” This sense of regional rap intersects with the trope of “Glocalization” intrinsic to the Global Hip Hop Nation, as youth toils with larger Hip Hop tropes through their localized framework. This allows for a variety of styles to emerge, of rivalries to develop, and of linguistic changes to occur. This process of regionalization we are seeing in China emulates the way in which after Hip Hop culture became mainstream in the United States, several regions and cities developed for their own unique sound and style. In a similar vein, Global Hip Hop is largely concerned with re-contextualizing certain stylistic themes that reflect their local identity. This aspect of localized hybridity throughout the spread of Hip Hop is one of the defining elements tying its members together (Alim 2009, 122).

- **Beijing Hip Hop:**

Beijing evening news

People sleeping in the tunnels underground

People wining and dining on the country's dime

- In3 Beijing Evening news

Revisiting Shuochang:

The music emerging from Beijing is influenced by its cosmopolitan culture and chic lifestyle. As more expensive cities to live in China, Beijing is home to a wide range of individuals living there, from government officials to beggars on the street. M and Y are both from Beijing, and they showed a particular love for the underground culture of their native city. J also showed a particular respect for rappers that came from this city. He explained that, “before the ‘Rap of China’ there were people rapping against the government. There are people from Beijing, from the capital, rapping against the government; rapping to reflect their life which was different from propaganda. Of course though they were banished by the government.” Beijing rap is inherently political, given that the city itself is the seat of the central government. It stands in opposition to the political authorities; Beijing Hip Hop is characterized by its rebellious counter-establishment ideology.

M referenced the group In3 and explained how it was culturally significant to her whole generation. She explained that, “when I was in primary school, it was the biggest, biggest rap group in Beijing. Every student heard about it. They were saying some swear words, their lyrics were really nasty, and basically: they were challenging the authority. It got really big, everyone

knows about their songs.” She explained that when they were in middle school, students would chuckle as they recited the pledge to the teacher and the state. This was a reference to an In3 song entitled “Hello Teacher” which speaks to the ridiculousness of the Chinese school system, and of the cruelty of teachers. Listening to this music gave Beijing youth an external view of the systems they were subject to, and engendered a bond within her generation.

In3 are widely regarded as pioneers within the Chinese rap world. Liz Tung explains that they adapted a form of traditional Beijing music Shuochang, a traditional form of story “singing” which existed in China for over 2000 years, and used Hip Hop to modernize its themes (Tung 2012). By doing this, In3 uses existing cultural practices and the contemporary political moment to adapt the expressions of Hip Hop culture into their own setting. This resulted in praise from the people, but discontent from within the government over their outspokenness. Thus, In3, as well as other Beijing rap groups who followed their lead, were using global forms of expression within a localized context, ultimately creating, to borrow Alim’s term a glocal form of Hip Hop (Alim 2009).

Mutual Influences:

The emergence of a distinct Beijing rap and musical subcultural identity is in many ways a response to the city’s cosmopolitan urban status. The use of Hip Hop as a tool for youth to navigate this larger world in their own way offers a fascinating look into the formation of an identity by disenfranchised youth. Pennycook explains that while the city has an impact on the music, the localized forms of Hip Hop also have an impact on the city, explaining that Hip Hop “is itself a space creating these identities and cultures, as well as codes and linguistic units that will ultimately be put into circulation beyond the songs. Rap reveals and participates in the

unifying gregariousness of the city's activities, and works with the city on the form, functions, and values of its languages. (Pennycook 2007, 120)" Pennycook is highlighting the role that Hip Hop has on localized language within youth, and thus within the larger urban context as a whole.

Despite the government's disapproval, these musicians still have a strong influence, as M explained that her friends are still listening to these groups, either by using some underground Chinese Hip Hop websites that bypass censors or using a VPN to listen to it on Youtube. She explains that even though the Hip Hop ban exists, people who know about the existence of this music will always find it, alluding to an insider group of "real" Hip Hop headz. She said that, "there is this rule in China if you want to find something: if you know it, you can find it; but on the surface, it's not easy to catch. Which is why more and more Hip Hop is going underground." It seems that the actual governmental ban on the 120 songs of 2015 has only served to promote the rebellious aesthetic of Hip Hop in Beijing, and that the use of VPNs and certain Chinese streaming platforms is leading to the creation of an in-group within music lovers, who are aware of what music is banned, and continue to listen to it. It is important to note that since the "Rap of China", Beijing rap has dropped in mainstream popularity; It is no longer seen as the Hip Hop capital of China, but real fans and connoisseurs will realize and acknowledge its importance in shaping the Chinese sound.

- **Chongqing vs Chengdu:**

Counting stacks when I'm on tour

You want my life but you can only dream

No future regrets, I travel around the world, pay to buy a pass

I take out my stacks like Monopoly, building GDP, I'm enjoying it

-Higher brothers, "Nomadic"

Trap cities:

After analyzing Beijing rap, which has remained underground within the Hip Hop counterculture, I must write about the two cities which are the clashing titans of contemporary Chinese Rap. These two cities, both large sprawling metropolises, though close in geographical proximity, have their own identities and cultures which is embodied in the music. Both of these cities have strong local dialects, and have thus maintained a close Hip Hop rivalry. When I asked my interlocutors about the main difference between these two styles of rap in comparison to Beijing rap, L (who is from Chongqing) explained that these communities oftentimes see rap less as a political tool, and more as a means to achieve social and financial success.

Chengdu and Chongqing are renowned in China for their "Trap" sound. Trap music, which originated in the Southern US, referring to a Trap House; is an 808 heavy rapping style where rappers rap about money, drugs and sex, the most prominent topics (Setaro 2018). Within this different context, it seems that the rappers from these cities employ the same tropes and messaging in their songs, but play with the depiction of these themes in the lyrics. This is because sex and drugs are extremely taboo topics within traditional Chinese culture, and are some of the most censored aspects of mainstream music. Therefore, according to L, the Chengdu and Chongqing rappers focus on flexing their money and financial success. She explained that, "it's probably because the area has been poor for over 50 years." Given this, one could view the trope of braggadocious statements about financial success in their lyrics as newer generations' redefining the city's identity. Instead of it being a port city full of working class families, these

cities are now also seen as hubs of young aspiring musicians, who in turn rap about their reality and hope to achieve financial success.

Stylistic Rap idioms:

They rap in their own specific dialect, which my interlocutors showed me was easier to mumble and speak rhythmically than regular Mandarin, make allusions to larger Hip Hop trends, and rap about the daily yearnings of youth within their city. L explains that one of her favorite artists, Masuwei, is a good embodiment of these themes. She points to one song in particular, “It’s basically about, like, wanting to date beautiful girls, having those fancy cars and things like that.” Masuwei is rapping about his aspirations, echoing the sentiments of many other young people who come from the same background, but includes topics that do not arouse unwanted attention from government censors. In *Made in China*, Masuwei’s rap group Higher Brothers, raps on a trap beat about the greatness of China, and its cultural exports. They rap that “*Yin and yang, feng shui, made in China/ From tai chi to I Ching, made in China/ The Great Wall, made in China/ From Qinshihuang to the Forbidden City, made in China* (Higher Brothers)” These cultural symbols, marks of cultural pride, speak toward the emphasis that some of these artists place on maintaining a sense of cultural and regional pride, both as Chinese rappers in the global scene, and as Chengdu rappers within the larger Chinese rap environment.

L points to the historical role of gang life in her city of origin, and how this carried over into the popularity of Trap music. She explains that, “those people are still there, and they’re trying to make a living for themselves. So when the show “Rap of China” came out, I think some people seized the opportunity in that.” In this way, the marginalized rebellious counter-culture, involved in drugs, money and crime, was still dormant. These are the same themes and

characters that we witness in GAI's song and music video "Gangsta", which characterizes his city as he reimagines it through the framework of Trap music. In this sense, L almost views rap as giving people from lower income areas a second chance and allowing them to re-invent their lives, using music to make money instead of joining gangs. She mentions the show of the Rap of China as giving them an opportunity, and that even though their raps are more materialistic, they still very much could be tied to their own localized definition of authenticity through the socio-economic struggles within their city.

- **Authenticity of different realities**

One stack, two stack three stacks.

Everything I cop and flex is different

Why they looking at me so differently

I just feel like they can't understand

-Bohan Pheonix, "No Hook"

Pluralistic Truths:

Drawing a comparison of both the cities' Hip Hop cultures, as she tries to understand and navigate their various interpretations of authenticity. She does this by drawing on the wealth of most residents of Beijing, explaining that they do not have to worry about the finances, allowing them to be more politically involved: "kids in Beijing, they got the place their parents have. They might struggle with their life, but they won't be poor. They will have a place to go back to in the city." There is a sense that the socio-economic privilege of Beijing youth almost allows them to

focus on social change instead of a survivalistic hustle. M then expanded this idea, explaining that “for Beijing kids it's more, like, ‘I'm gonna have my attitude because I have the essential things for my life,’ so I can have an attitude towards the authorities and tell stories, but in Chongqing, it's different.” Here, my interlocutors are commenting on the audience's perception of these different artists and the relationship between financial and social elements shaping their sense of authenticity.

Not only are regionalized senses of identity and authenticity impacted by language and dialects, but financial and social normative standards also lead to different interpretations of reality, and subsequent portrayals of “realness.” M explained that the differences between Beijing and Chongqing rap are encapsulated by the topics that artists from these respective cities focus on in their lyrics: “Beijing rappers would be like, fuck trap, why you keep talking about cars, girls? you have to keep it authentic. Tell the real stories, express yourself. They're [Beijing rappers] using this as a tool to let the people hear our voice, to hear our story, to hear about our struggles. That's what they consider as real authenticity.” It would seem that while the Chengdu rappers are portrayed here as materialistic dreamers rapping about their financial success in the industry, Beijing rappers stand as idealist revolutionaries striving for cultural and political reform.

Universal struggle:

In the same way that mumble rap and Trap music have risen through controversial debates in the US, it appears that a similar phenomenon is occurring in China. As artists move away from “conscious rap” and ride the bandwagon of more trendy trap music, they serve to portray ways in which obstacles and problems vary in the Jiānghú. There is an emphasis on

variations of “the struggle” which return through their discussion of localized cultures. In each of the aforementioned rap scenes, realness and the role of fighting oppression, be it financial or social, is a defining role of Hip Hop. My interlocutors thus showed me that there are as many ways of expressing “realness” as there are realities within this large and diverse world. Hip Hop acts as a tool to empower minorities, strengthen their identities, connect them to a larger movement of rebelliousness, while allowing them to redefine it, act and create originally.

The regionalization of realities, rap styles, and Hip Hop scenes is associated with a great deal of identity re-formulation amongst the youth, as they use the platform of Hip Hop to shape their concepts of self-hood and individuality, through their own context. This sense of regional pride and character may have formulated due to the socio-economic conditions, but this mainstream acceptance of Chinese Hip Hop has also changed the way citizens relate to language and dialect. The role of linguistics in understanding rap is instrumental in the process of understanding the nuances of censorship, along with the positive changes that occurred after the “Rap of China” popularized Hip Hop.

- Hip Hopping through Mandarin:

The red sun rises from the east

Let the worlds Hip Hop history begin to record Chinese

Opening the door that decides wins or loses, rescue those who are trapped

-Damshine, Power to the people

饶舌音乐 - *ráoshéyīnyuè* (*rap music in Chinese*)

J shared with me an alternative opinion regarding the state of Mandarin for rap. He explained the ways in which Mandarin is less rhythmically suited for Hip Hop music, but that rappers have been changing the modes of emphasis on particular rhymes to highlight repetition and style in a manner reminiscent of English. He explains that there is a great use of English words to either speak to words that don't translate, or rather just to show the bilinguality and knowledge of a larger English Hip Hop culture. He explains that "some hip hop terminology has no way of being translated; so it's presented in unique English words.... So they either have no direct translation for these terms, or they are just showing off that they can speak another language." Thus, he is emphasizing the importance of English in asserting a sense of globalized authenticity, or "real" Hip Hopness into certain raps. Additionally, Mandarin words use four different tones to express different meanings, signifying that Chinese delivery may require an added level of rhythmical mastery to develop a lyrical flow.

Barrett explains that this linguistic hybridity also occurs as a way of proving musical and lyrical worth by making multilingual rhymes. She explains that "artists use English for poetic effect, as a resource to achieve cross-linguistic rhyme. This can occur at many levels of discourse, from sporadic lexical insertions to more extended English use across multiple lines.(Barrett 2018, 3)" This aspect of English crossover is a symbol of the hybridity of membership within this Hip Hop nation, and the ways in which a certain value is given to the use of English to either add multilingual elements, or as Barrett explained to "represent and engage with audiences in a way that blurs the linguistic boundaries represented in mainstream discourses about language and language policy. (Barrett 2018, 4)" In this way, the use of traditional or

dialectical Mandarin and the use of English in Chinese rap both work to establish authenticity and identity. These can be done on “pragmatic, aesthetic, or commercial grounds, but they are also political decisions (Pennycook 2007, 112)” which speak to a larger formation of a cosmopolitan digital community which maintains and spreads around the world.

New System of Value and Rap Worth:

J’s deep love for Hip Hop manifests itself in the ways he reacts when discussing the subject of commercialization in China. At first, he liked the Rap of China in that it brought Hip Hop to the mainstream, but he was always critical of the ways in which it has impacted the actual practice of rapping. He spoke in depth about ways in which the Hip Hop flows that came from English changed the ways that people value rapping and view rap prowess. He explained that the ways in which the Rap of China showed subtitles, and highlighted rhymes, shifted the ways in which people view good rap by re-defining measurements of skill. He explained that, “they highlight the rhymes, so people started to see it as an external measurement of the quality of hip hop music. For this reason people appreciated fast rapping.” The way in which the rhymes were portrayed on the subtitles then pushed rappers to focus on rap speed and rhyme plentitude; J sees this as a shift away from content and style. He relates the reason for the success of speed was because of Eminem’s popularity in China, and people then understood that “the faster the rap is the better it is.” While speed and rhythm are undeniably criteria for skill in the US as well, the way in which J regards the emphasis placed on these qualities of rap seems to take away from the real talents of lyricists and poets. He talked about one of the rappers who lost on the first year of the show, who realized that the key to winning and impressing the Chinese people was a fast delivery; so he worked on his speed for a year and returned faster than ever, to win the show.

But J commented on his success with disdain, explaining that he had “Trash rhymes” and that the majority of his lines made very little sense, they were just organized to hit as many rhymes as possible. J views this as the rapid process of, “a cultural redefinition that started in the first season.” He explained that the show placed a particular emphasis on “peace and love” being the main characteristics of the rap theme and ideology. So speed, rhyme proficiency and adherence to peace and love “becomes a measurement of whether you’re a good rapper and stay on the show. They have a whole system.” J articulates how the show’s producers and executives have immense power in shifting the actual meaning of Hip Hop to something that is inoffensive and can be disseminated within mainstream Chinese mass media. Due to the general lack of Hip Hop knowledge within the majority of Chinese people, the show-runners get to create a new standard.

J explains that “this system being introduced to Chinese culture is a system of value. So let's say a system of determining the value of rap music. So, because there's no other aesthetic elements to compare with, since these people have never heard rap before; it's impossible for them to know what music is good and what music is bad.” By establishing this value system, executives view Hip Hop as a malleable musical genre, where the public’s perception of it can be manipulated to fit a preordained narrative. The rapper that won the second season, with whom J took issue with, is called Air. He explained that this Beijing rapper took advantage of the new format by putting in as many rhymes as he could into every line, but J exclaimed that “They are actually meaningless! You can see there was one screenshot where that guy has eight 4 rhymes which hardly make any sense.” In this way J views that this rapper was just utilizing this strange format of rap in an attempt to show-off; but he pointed to him as an example of the ways in

which the show producers and the government introduced a system which he thinks was purposefully constructed to re-invent the standards of good Hip Hop. He explains that “rap culture became mainstream at that time” with a slight air of disappointment, due to the fact that he views a lot of the fans of the show as being purposefully misinformed about the nature and essence of Hip Hop.

- **Glocalized realities:**

No One is clean

I put my culture on my back

What I drink is water from jailing river

What I smoke is the smog from my hometown Wudu

-Bridge布瑞吉, Endless flow (长河)

Towards theories of Translocalism:

These examples of regionalized rap scenes, each identifiable through thematic, linguistic and cultural markers, showcases the manner in which Hip Hop authenticity may in the end be more fluidly associated with the contextual reality surrounding it. Pennycook writes that, “the localization of horizons of significance pulls the ideology of keeping it real back toward local definitions of what matters”(Pennycook 2007 103). This sense of locality then comes to form the definitions of realness, as dependent upon a sense of local identity. Youth come to use language, performance, style and instrumentation indicating a hybrid sense of belonging, both to the larger Hip Hop community, as well as to their city’s social and cultural ecosystem.

In this way, superimposed on this concept of Chinese values and government censorship of political dissent in rap songs, Chinese rappers use their personal background as grounding to

their sense of “realness”. From this perspective, a “real” Beijing rapper may be considered “fake” in a Trap circle in Chengdu. Pennycook also writes about the emphasis on authenticity in Hip Hop scenes, which he defines as “a tension between, on the one hand, the spread of a cultural dictate to adhere to certain principles of what it means to be authentic, and on the other, a process of localization that makes such an expression of staying true to oneself dependent on local contexts, languages, cultures, and understandings of the real. (Pennycook 2007, 103)” In this way, understandings and conceptualizations of reality both shape the localized sense of authenticity; meanwhile these contextualized Hip Hop songs serve to change the way they view their reality, thus influencing how youth from a whole region perceive and articulate their identities. Language and locality interact to create varying definitions of realness, but are shaped by the larger currents of Hip Hop globalization and of authoritative efforts to control and artificially define the culture.

- Shift in acceptance of dialects:

My flow is mixed with my hometown dialect

Drinking alcohol smoking grass

-GAI and C-Block “Flow of the Jiāng hú”

Y expressed how local patois adds richness and character to the diversity of the Chinese rap scene. He states that “one great thing that’s really great about Chinese rap in my opinion is that we have so many dialects and every dialect expresses different emotions and vibes”; he explained that each dialect and region is governed by its own dialectical structure and manner of speaking, set with its unique tones and emotions that formulate the regional identity. Alim refers

to this idea in which individuals, “incorporate hip-hop into their everyday cultural lives for varying reasons. This flexibility and pliability is what has led, in part, to hip-hop music being able to crossover into and be adapted within multiple (sub)cultures of connective marginalities. (Motley and Henderson 249)”. When these rappers bring Hip Hop back into their local context, and approach it in their own unique way, they not only bring their own personal experience and influences, but also the invisible community and culture associated with the language. As Woolard (2004) notes, “linguistic ideologies are never just about language, but rather also concern such fundamental social notions as community, nation, and humanity itself” (Woolard 2004 p. 58; Pennycook 2007 109).” Language is so deeply intertwined in various tropes, and one's way of speaking, singing or rapping reveals a great deal about an individual's way of relating to the various forces and influences within their world.

Local identity in a glocal world:

This idea of larger global forces merging with linguistic flows allows us to look past the concepts of nationalized languages tied to borders, and shows that in the age of digitalization and the internet, we are seeing contrasting glocal “style communities” which are both influenced by regional contexts as well as by international cultural events. In this way, the process of localization involves complex relations of class, race ethnicity and language. For this reason observing the incorporation of Hip Hop elements within localized language, in Pennycook’s view, cannot be done “without an appreciation of local language ideologies. (Pennycook 2007, 109)” With this in mind, the way that Chinese youth remold their language into similar yet unique resemblances with this form of speech, connects directly to the way in which these authors refer to the existence of cosmopolitan “flows”. Pennycook accentuates this point

explaining that: linguistic and other semiotic material circulates around the world's "langscapes" (Pennycook 2007) to produce not global languages that function on shared linguistic norms but rather global and translocal style communities operating on stylistic commonalities and contrasts that pay equal attention to the local and the global" (Alim 2009, 110). The proliferation of Hip Hop scenes, and the aforementioned glocalization of these flows and forms of speech, is a sign of the increasing hybridity of youth identity around the world, and is slowly revealing the ways in which youth navigate the multiple forms of community they belong too, while speaking to the nature of ever-changing identity and speech patterns. In this passage, Alim points to the existence of these stylistic trends that travel around the digital world's new communications media, superseding old notions of language.

Alim and Meyrowitz write about how the concept of localized stylization is relevant to changes in relations to society, technology and the wider world. They explain that:

"increased attention to stylization often focuses on the crossing of traditional boundaries, on popular culture and the mass mediation of society, and on large-scale, digitally mediated societies. The growing consensus on the fluidity of identities and the increased importance of stylization has developed, in part, because of the fact that identities are being constructed in a world of increasingly decentralized authority and a proliferation of non-regionalized virtual places" (Meyrowitz 1985; Alim 2009).

When referring to the non-regionalized virtual spaces devoid of centralized authority, he directly refers to the Internet, and the connections offered by the increasing web users, allowing cultures like that of hip Hop to permeate, mutate and spread across the airwaves, without the

involvement of authoritative bodies, such as governments or corporations. Through the use of shared stylistic norms, Hip Hop is a platform which rappers can use to experiment with their identity through language, references and performance.

Changing the national linguistic narrative:

Despite the ways in which the mainstream Chinese rap may be altering the visibility and potency of the underground culture, the television presence and importance of this genre has led to a wider acceptance of regional dialects. Y explains that in this way, not only have the dialects slightly shifted, but they have also gained confidence and representation within the Chinese world. He states that “when I was watching shows when I was in primary school, there was a policy that said: if you are going to speak on a show, you have to speak Traditional Mandarin, enforced by the government. And I think after the show Rap of China, all dialects suddenly become welcome.” This shift in mass acceptance not only connects the youth to a sense of local and national cultural pride, but it also speaks towards the larger element of Chinese unity through concepts like Jiāng hù. After the show, people will “feel more proud” of their language according to M’s affirmative statement. There is a sense in which not only are the youth taking pride in their regional language, they are modifying their “glocalized” identities to in turn shape the larger Hip Hop Nation, and assert their self-hood and definitions of reality, and in turn perform history and locality.

Chapter 3:

In this chapter I analyze how this Global Hip Hop language, and subsequently english can at times lead to stereotyping and commodifying blackness as a distorted measure of authenticity; I also seek to understand the Chinese Hip Hop relation to the Black cultural origins of the movement, which shines a light on the contention between appropriation and adaptation.

- **Trapitalized misconceptions:**

“Supreme, Bape, my whole team is ballin’

Everyone wanna join the squad, all of us in CDC are legit

J. Mag, DZ, Psy.P, MaSiWei, Melo, we don’t just rap in Mandarin,

we rap with that Sichuanese chill flow”

-Higher Brothers, Yah

Trapped in distractions:

The racial political underpinnings of American Hip Hop seem to be easily misconstrued overseas, which can lead to stereotyping and misunderstanding of African-American culture, while further commodifying blackness for profit. As rap music increasingly gained popularity, both before and after “Rap of China”, we witnessed the incredible success of Chinese Trap, or C-Trap, which was fine-tuned within the Chengdu and Chongqing scenes. As previously mentioned, Trap is notable for its 808 bass, recognizable drums, sprinkled hi hats, aggressively delivered lines, and most importantly braggadocious subject matters dealing with sex, money and drugs. This style of rap, which is said to have started in the United States south, has always been

associated with a sense of hustle, gang activities and illicit behavior. A “trap” is slang for a gang house used for partying, prostitution and drug dealing. Y points to the recent prevalence of Trap music in the Chinese Hip Hop industry, and explains that “I think most people really like trap music, because it’s just talking about non political things. So I think it’s okay with the government.” Indeed Chinese trap deals more with tropes of ‘women,’ ‘living a good life,’ and ‘Chinese values,’ as we saw in the lyrics of GAI (See page). L then tunes in to comment on the mind-numbing nature of this style of music, especially after having discovered the power of political rap artists. She exclaims that “it’s kind of entertainment, is basically more for selling, like TV entertainment.” The way in which rappers are embracing trap in China due to its profitability and lack of censorship show the opportunities presented by the style, but also brings up an important issue: the way in which Gangsta rap is so easily mistaken for Hip Hop culture within the larger environment.

Global misapprehension:

Michael Cheuk also writes about relations to blackness within mainstream depictions of Hip Hop. He explains that state censors interpret all Hip Hop in similar ways, as they conjecture that all “hip hop is equivalent to gangsta rap, which is a subgenre of hip hop that is notable for its glorification of violence and sexual themes. More importantly, China cannot have hip hop because its hip hop participants are more often than not from middle class backgrounds. And while post-1980s youths certainly have their own personal and social struggles, the nature of their struggles is vastly different than those of the participants and originators of American hip hop (Cheuk 2007, 5).” Cheuk comments here on the misperception of all Hip Hop as Gangsta rap, and by doing so completely omitting the conscious and political elements which have made

it what it is today. This question about the authenticity of middle class Chinese rappers using a style so deeply associated with lower class Black communities raises doubts about their claims of authenticity, and impels us to dive deeper into Chinese Hip Hop's relation to blackness.

This is a divisive issue within the field of Hip Hop as a whole; as it becomes increasingly popular, and more and more youth from all sorts of backgrounds use the musical style to express themselves, and can have unexpected negative impacts on Black communities. After the show went viral in 2017, and Chinese trap rappers explored their lyrical freedom, Trap took over the music industry. This in many ways could be viewed as commercialization of Blackness—a cultural import to make Chinese rappers appear as “cool” as possible. Cheuk also points to this issue by explaining how black scholars connect with this phenomenon, highlighting the lack of cultural sensitivity shown by the large corporations. He explains that “Burton’s observation of a ‘war’ for (Chinese) hip hop concerns how trap music, a variation of gangsta rap that is adopted by many of the contestants on *The Rap of China*, is an example of the business community’s exploitation of hip hop. While trap music originated from the ‘very dark’ side of the African American experience, like drug dealership and police raids, Burton feels that business companies lack respect, communication, and understanding of these cultural roots when they sponsor Chinese trap rappers. (Cheuk 2007, 5).” In this way, mainstream Chinese corporations are appropriating the dark sides of Trap evocative of Black suffering, and in return Trap rappers are attempting to embody a sense of “realness” which in many ways mischaracterizes some of the intents of the original Black founders of hip hop. In this way, this passage directly highlights how corporate China remixed trauma from the Black American experience and turned it into an idol-styled entertainment show about peace and love.

Hip Hop and the Black experience:

Yvonne Bynoe writes concisely about the role of Blackness and appropriation within the spread of Global Hip Hop. In the following passage, she explains the way in which “real” hip hop is inherently tied to the African-American experience, and that removing it from those scenarios loses all the political and cultural significance. She explains that “Hip Hop culture, therefore, is not merely an entertainment vehicle, but an expression founded in history, common understanding and experience, and attractions, as well as racial and socioeconomic realities existing in America. Thus, purchasing a rap music CD, going to a rap music concert, or donning the latest “urban” fashion does not alone make one part of the Hip Hop culture.(Bynoe 2002, 78)” Bynoe here points to the ease with which corporations are marketing this cultural phenomenon. In this paper, she urges scholars to acknowledge ways in which this cultural spread leads to appropriation and stereotyping. Bynoe explains that in her vision of Hip Hop culture, one needs more than just to fit the capitalistic trends of consumerism, but rather must be connected or at least knowledgeable about the history of Black suffering in America, which is why it would seem she is quite opposed to the appropriation and modification of the style through the lens of other global participants who do not have the knowledge or experience to be able to connect with this.

- **Appropriation or Adaptation?**

“Black people use music as a tool of revolution against racial inequality. I think it’s the correct thing to do that they are defending the rights of their race. In China, people live soundly and peacefully. We don’t need to revolt with music.”

Sun Bayi, Contestant on the “Rap of China” (Zhou)

Cultural Frictions in Adaptation:

The line between cultural appreciation and appropriation has been the subject of fiery debate within the US. When dealing with such a broad cultural example like Hip Hop, it would seem that early on in the global spread of Hip Hop, the African-American significance became more silenced, as Hip Hop forged a life of its own. As we discussed similarities between both cultures, M emphasized with an air of confused disappointment that Hip Hop in China was now far from its original roots. She explained that “it’s their own culture now, it’s different from America.” Hip Hop in China has been taken to new proportions and its public character is changing rapidly in the face of a widening audience who is learning about the culture directly from the mainstream media or from biased sources lacking connection to the underground community. In this manner, Chinese rap is detaching from the larger spread of Hip Hop in its own very unique, isolated way. However, the raps are still full of English slang, as well as references to America.

Scholars speculate about the role of disenfranchisement as a marker of authenticity.

At heart, it would appear that the complexity of appropriation is the lack of power of consumers in the face of a biased picture. Is it the fault of the young Chinese school? If he wants to get dreads, grills, and wear baggy clothes after watching the “Rap of China”? Is he at fault for failing to learn about the history of the culture he is embodying? For many, Hip Hop serves as a platform for BIPOC expression, as a voice for the disenfranchised. From the sociopolitically-conscious raps of Public Enemy, to the rebellious gang life portrayed in N.W.A, Hip Hop has always served as a voice for the marginalized Black community within the United States. In this way, racial and counter-oppressive elements define the original American hip hop culture, and simply listening to serves as interaction with a larger culture of marginalization.

Global Hip Hop's Racialized Tensions

Musical and cultural trends defining Hip Hop seem to be spreading around the world with increasing popularity amongst youth, but the more political and controversial aspects of the music are being misrepresented, and thus, misinterpreted. While addressing the same concern, Cheuk questions how a Chinese rapper can relate to authenticity if they are lacking the cultural and historical knowledge which U.S Hip Hop is imbued with. He asserts quite critically that “if evaluated strictly on cultural and racial terms, all non-American hip hop around the world is imitation. As Ian Condry (2006) asks in his study of Japanese hip hop, how could someone who shares no cultural or linguistic roots with African American culture, keep it real in hip hop?(Cheuk 2020, 6)” Condry’s open ended question points to a shift that is seemingly occurring within the trajectory of this music and culture: there seems to, at times, be a

disconnection to these foundational elements of race and class as it gets further from its cultural origin.

Distanced Realities:

As Motley and Henderson point out, people in many countries divergently reinterpret the ways in which they connect to race in Hip Hop. Authors point to communities in Cuba, Brazil, Tanzania have witnessed people of color taking the expressive power of Hip Hop and using the structure as a platform for political reform and communication (Motley and Henderson 2008). Some cultural communities interpret these tropes in their own ways, but most Chinese youth seem to be disconnected from these tropes and this history, and overall seem to overlook the element of race when interpreting the music. L echoed this sentiment, relating to the wide disconnection between Chinese youth and the BIPOC experience in America. She explains that she learned about these political and social tensions only upon her arrival to America, which gave her more context for realizing some more problematic elements of cultural appropriation in China.

She explains that “before I came to bard I didn’t even know about BIPOC or anything that’s going on in America. So thinking about kids in China, they don’t have any idea about what’s going on here. they know the trends but they don’t actually understand the meaning.” L here touches on a misunderstanding and commercialization of African American culture which has been happening around the world. L recounted how as the show began to gain attention, more and more of her classmates got their hair dreaded. They found this culture to be “cool” but lacked the cultural awareness to understand how their actions might be seen as an act of appropriation, effectively a minimization of Black suffering (Rose 2008, pp. 57–58).

- **Commodification of blackness:**

*G's f***** gang calls me Chigga Chow*

Super dope, Hustle the hustle

-PG One, Number 1

Grabbing the Globalized Musical Means of Production:

Education and knowledge seem to define the line between appropriation and Adaptation. I would argue that Hip Hop is re-adapted in a variety of ways to serve as a platform for connecting marginalities but becomes appropriative once large corporations harness its cultural phenomena for profit and distance the members of the original community from its cultural offshoot. Motley and Henderson express the distinction between adaptation and appropriation explaining that: “Crossover (push) is part of a marketer imposed market growth strategy, and Grier et al. (2006) define ethnic product crossover as when a product intended for one ethnic group is marketed to and consumed by a significant number of people outside of that particular referent ethnic group. Appropriation (pull) of hip-hop might reflect receptivity, initiative, and perhaps inappropriate or undesirable borrowing according to some African-Americans by consumers outside the United States (Kitwana, 2005; Ziff and Pratima, 1997; Motley and Henderson 2008, 249)” This criteria gives us a clearer understanding of the nuances between adaptation and appropriation, and how the actions of the Chinese government in “Rap of China” seem to be completely insensitive to this differentiation

M explained the ways in which corporations market products to be “cool,” yet the majority of consumers will not make the effort to understand the full socio-political ramifications/history/etc. of the new style recently imported from America. In this way, no one besides governments and corporations are truly to blame, and the consequences for this disregard and silencing are still playing themselves out. M goes on to discuss political correctness, and explains that due to the lack of internal diversity, Chinese people are not familiar with the concept of cultural appropriation: “they don't have that kind of culture, so they won't think it's not appropriate. They just think it's cool.” Corporations take advantage of these ideas of “cool” in order to market a pacified cultural product, and in doing so, perpetuate the globalized trend of silencing Black culture and erasing Black voices.

International African-American Cultural Presence:

The marginalized status of African Americans in history, and the propaganda and systemic racism which were set in place by the US government have in no way disappeared. Stereotypes and misrepresentations of blackness abound around the world, and Hip Hop shows how Chinese youth can engage with these harmful tropes, as they often rely on stereotypes and misinterpretations. In her paper on the GHHN, Bynoe makes the point that stereotypes of blackness and African Americans have made their way around the world even to places where other forms of international media were very rare. She writes that “despite being in the backwater of the world, in a country where televisions, movies and music were banned by the government, these young Afghans could easily call up common stereotypes about Black Americans. (Bynoe 2002, 77)” This aligns with a wider trend of United States international cultural and social presence, as both films and music from within the country have made their

way around the world. Barrett points to this continued disconnection vis a vis Black oppression through its fetishization, as she points to earlier musical phenomena such as Blues, Jazz, Rock and Roll and Soul, which left the United States and had immense influence on musicians around the world (Barrett 2012).

Towards an age of digital cultural awareness?

Morgan expands on this idea of the commodification of Black culture as it is distorted for profit: “while the particulars of the hip-hop story may be new, they actually reveal how the African American story has circulated throughout the world through its music and culture. The music and culture has historically traveled when and where African American bodies could not (Morgan & Bennett, 2011; Morgan 2016).” The currents of globalization in the 20th century began to push Black musical styles outside of their geographic origins, as people around the world began to appropriate their style and culture. But what are the implications of reinterpretation of the story when the artform is so contentious and traumatic? Morgan continues, adding that “the impact of hip-hop’s journey has been expanded and problematized in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century by processes of corporate globalization and new technologies, especially computer technologies, of musical production and distribution. (Morgan 2016, 137)” As post-civil rights musical expression becomes commodified and remodeled, so do the voices and stories upon which this message was founded. We are thus unfortunately witnessing what appears to be a cultural shift from Black noise to Global noise.

Black suffering through Chinese Loudspeakers:

A large part of the disconnect between Chinese Hip Hop and Blackness has to do with the limitations imposed on Western websites and virtual sources– if Chinese netizens want to

read about the origins of Hip Hop, they have to truly go out of their way to do so. Hip Hop serves as a cultural ambassador for US free speech, but the historical background of this phenomenon risks being confused, misinterpreted or even silenced if the people lack access to resources pointing them in the right direction. Furthermore, Tricia Rose explains that “commercialized hip hop is an ‘exploitation of Black suffering’ and fails to give a platform for a serious representation of the roots of hip hop: ghetto life and reality (2008, pp. 57–58).” These two points invite us to ponder the ways in which hip hop comes to have many meanings, and various lives around the world. While the mainstream Chinese officials don’t concern themselves with incorporating the Black experience into the “Rap of China”, underground rappers in Beijing may still strive to pay homage to the founding figures of American rap and learn about their stories and struggles. The way in which PG One responded to his scandal is a shocking example of the way in which Chinese youth can “mischaracterized blackness”, as he publicly generalized gangsta rap with the Black experience (See chapter 2).

Westerners tend to have the idea that China is a closed off distant land dominated by censorship and misinformation, but they often miss the ideological power put forth by a lot of new technologies. Motley and Henderson add particular emphasis explaining the ways in which new media and technology have come to shift our relationship to Hip Hop. They write that “hip-hop has been spread around the world by various means of communication: the Internet, music videos, movies and individuals traveling internationally have assisted in the dispersion of not only hip-hop music, but also the other elements of hip-hop (i.e., break dancing, graffiti art), and styles of dress.” These various forms of influence have transformed the ways in which people largely relate and connect to Hip Hop, which seems to be an ever-morphing musical style

and culture. The rising popularity and accessibility of the Internet, on the other hand, is a hopeful sign that we could all be connected to a larger cosmopolitan network, and have access to the same resources of information.

- **Black English as Authenticity:**

Black eyes are no longer telling the truth Everyone is hiding and pretending

Only the true spirit of Hip Hop would never change

In3, Black

African American vernacular and rhythmicities:

By choosing to rap in the first place, or listen to rap, music lovers are unknowingly engaging with tropes of Black oppression and silencing, and bringing their own cultural and linguistic identity and baggage, which then define their interpretation of realness. China's isolationist Internet stance, the propaganda agencies' control over the media and the strong sense of cultural pride all lead to a distancing from American culture. In this way, my interlocutors pointed to rap as a phenomenon increasingly viewed as global, detached from its origins in America, and widely accepted as the voice of the youth.

Alim points to Hip Hop in Japan as a close linguistic relative to mandarin, and writes about the ways in which artists played with language and style in an attempt to participate in the larger Global Hip Hop Nation and relate to Black English. He explains that "Hip Hop artists in Japan have restructured Japanese in order to rhyme and flow (Condry 2006; Davis & Tsujimura

2008), and they, along with artists in Korea (Pennycook 2007: 128) and Italy (Androutsopoulos & Scholz 2003: 474-475), have produced poetic structures such as the back-to-back chain rhymes and bridge rhymes similar to those described in Black American Hip Hop (Alim 2006, 123).” The cultural influence of the African American is felt through language choices within global rap songs. Even though rappers are encouraged to rap in their own languages, Black vernacular and culture still define rhythmic influence within the Global Hip Hop flow.

The original form and content of Hip Hop is imbued with deep significance for Black America. It represented life in the street, political unrest, and was based off of Black American English slang and rhythmicities. Alim further explains the ways in which this form of English came to shape global Hip Hop flows. He writes that the “Global Hip Hop Nation Language as a language variety that relies heavily on the African aspect of Black American appropriations of English; this characterization leans on Brathwaite’s (1984: 13) description of “nation languages” in the Caribbean: “English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English.” Even though it uses the grammatical core of English, this version of Black English fits into a larger specialized research area of world Englishes. But Alim seeks to break past the idea of nationalized languages in an attempt to view language as more polymorphous and tied to style and authenticity. Thus, Alim separates the ‘Global Hip Hop flow’ from the global spread of English, and the increasing popularity of English as the next “lingua franca”(Alim 2009).

U.S. cultural imperialism and appropriation:

My interlocutors all explained that they have felt influenced by US culture since they were little, such as when L held her first dollar, or when Y first heard American music on the

radio. Even though speaking English is not wildly popular within China, there is a strongly felt U.S influence throughout the entertainment media. Omoniyi writes that “the character of contact in contemporary times in both the Outer and Expanding Circle countries has been influenced by a colossal English media enterprise, the content of which permeates all domains of human interaction. Consequently, we have an expanding body of evidence of contact phenomena such as language “crossing” (Rampton, 1995) in various domains including entertainment in general and music in particular. (Omoniyi 2006, 195)” Although millions study English in school, only about 1 percent of China is said to speak conversational english; with the expanding rise of Rap, and a fascination with American street culture, English words have made their way into the rap glossaries of some of the largest rising stars.

English as necessity and bicultural authenticity:

J explains another purpose and importance of using english within Chinese rap as a means of connecting into a larger culture of authenticity and participation in a larger cultural phenomenon. He explains the need for certain words that do not translate well into Chinese vernacular: “there's no word in Chinese for chill. There's no word in Chinese for say, dope. There may be words that are close translations, but they don't contain this specific meaning, or feeling, so they just use English words.” In this way, not only can English fill blank spaces where mandarin may fail, it also seems to connect the rappers to a sense of globality and authenticity in their relationship to english. Whether the Chinese government likes it or not, Hip Hop seems to be uniting youth identity, as they use language to portray their local identity while using Global Hip Hop flows to connect them to largest musical currents existing outside of the closed Chinese Borders. The language hybridity, and commodification of African-American words within an

appropriated style, shows the ways in which Chinese rap truly is a battleground for expression, identity and cultural change, as everyone is an agent in navigating the way class and race seem to play into this.

Eminem: Rap God in China

J alluded with a slight smile on his face that Chinese youth have a particular obsession with Eminem. He explains that “people in China see him as a rap god. Chinese people, they don't really care about racial problems because it's pretty far away from China. And these social structures and features also influence the culture. It's pretty absurd to call a white guy a rap God. As a representation of all rap. But Chinese people don't see the problem with that. They don't see the problem of, you know, a Black originated culture being imitated by a white guy.” J directly speaks about the appropriation of Black culture and the disregard of racial tensions by the Chinese rap community. This passage reveals a great deal about the tensions of globalized culture as it alludes to the role of adaptation and interpretation. The fact that people view Eminem as one of the defining members of American rap, and call him a “rap god” definitely raises a couple eyebrows.

The Detroit rapper is a figure of contention in the United States as well, as he was one of the first solo white rappers to rise to prominence within the Hip Hop scene. His style is characterized by his fast pace, aggressive tone on political content relating to lower class life. J later would explain to me that the main reason people worship his raps are because of his fast rapping pace and accentuations, which sounded very similarly to the value standards set on the

rap of China. The popularity of Eminem, and the subsequent passion for fast rap points to a different set of standards and cultural values, and highlights the previous point of disconnection from racial issues.

Risking Authenticity through Over-reliance on English:

The overbearing dependency on English language to assert a sense of global authenticity quickly becomes redundant. The tensions lay in the fact that the language Global Hip Hop rappers are learning and appropriating is usually Black vernacular and slang, which often carries its own cultural and social significance. As Alim points out, there have always been tensions between American rappers and International rappers' usage of American slang and terminology, as these are often appropriations of African-American English. He points to one example in particular “emancipatory politics of language sometimes lead to direct tension with U.S. and Black American Hip Hop artists. Whereas Hip Hop artists in scenes such as Morocco (Needleman & Asen 2007), Tanzania, Canada, and Brazil, for example, attempt to identify or bond with Black Americans through the use of language (a glaring example in all of these cases being the use of *n****** as a global signifier of oppressed, Afro-diasporic people), the over-reliance on Black American Hip Hop language and style can lead to some sharp criticism from Hip Hop headz at home and abroad. (Alim 2009, 119)” Use of African-American language comes with underlying socio-political significance, and here Alim points to the way in which artists overly dependent on English slang might actually be impacting their perspective of local authenticity, as they try to engage with the larger phenomenon. He also alludes to the way in

which the n***** word, reclaimed by African-Americans, has been appropriated by the wider African diasporic community. Chinese rappers have occasionally used the word (Barrett 2018, 3), while others like PG One used “Chigga,” which is in a sense an adaptation of the American term, but could easily be interpreted in a derogatory way.

There thus seems to be an emphasis placed on using local dialects and language to preserve a sense of authority and cultural identity. Alim alludes to this example within the trope of Nigerian Hip Hop, where English and Wolof were contending languages charged? with their own power dynamics. He explains that “to them, in order to keep it real, the use of language in Hip Hop must be consistent with their understanding of “real” language use in Nigeria. (Alim 2007, 120)” Thus in this example, the use of English can at times be counterproductive to the identification of authenticity. Choosing to rap in a language that is not originally theirs, a language reminiscent of the inflicted trauma in the country’s history; the rappers would then echo subconscious stereotypes through inauthentic self-expression. This in turn could be interpreted as far removed from the process of localization within the home country. In summary, we have just discussed ways in which Chinese Hip Hop culture and language use can easily lead to stereotyping and commodifying blackness as a measure of authenticity.

Conclusion:

The global phenomenon of Hip Hop allows us to gauge ways in which marginalized youth around the world interact with globalization while remaining grounded in their localized identity. My interlocutors revealed to me how as Hip Hop went mainstream in their own country, they witnessed the cultural form become depoliticized and turned into a platform for the Chinese

government to reshape rap in accordance with traditional Chinese values. This shift which is occurring, as more and more political Hip Hop gets banned by the government, has in turn resulted in the rise in popularity of Trap music, a modern form of gangster rap. Throughout this paper, I analyzed the ways in which language and identity come into relation with larger forces of globalization and localized identity. Through focusing on the particular case study of China, we are confronted with differentiating cultural appropriation from adaptation, and understanding how race and class come to manifest themselves through Chinese rap. Even though my interlocutors are worried that the revolutionary side of rap may be disappearing, silenced by the government censors, they all stressed the ways in which the mainstream acceptance of rap was a symbol of acceptance for the marginalized youth. Chinese Hip Hop has become its own culture, as mainstream and underground forces battle over what is or is not appropriate to sing.

Global Hip Hop pushes us to consider ways in which language may be morphing with the advent of the new digitized technology we have at our fingertips. Through the case of Chinese rap, we are seeing increasing linguistic hybridization, as well as a popular acceptance of local dialects. Youth play with language in an effort to assert their identity, and have embraced the global stylistic language of Hip Hop to help them carry their messages. This approach to trans-localized stylistic language communities then pushes to move into a more globalized and fluid approach to language and culture. Hip Hop has transversed national boundaries and become an international phenomenon, uniting an invisible community formed through connective marginalities. In the case of China we see this language and culture gain prominence in underground communities, as it gets adapted and localized; before clashing with government censors. The Hip Hop ban of 2014 shows us how authorities tried to limit the spread of this

musical phenomena, but these efforts were unsuccessful, as members could still use the wider internet to listen to their favorite artists.

As entertainment corporations meshed with the Chinese government, they worked to commodify and transform Hip Hop into a palatable and tame mainstream cultural product. This in turn resulted in a division, which is the “war on Hip Hop” we are witnessing: Underground rappers still use the art form to express political dissent and expound social critiques while utilizing VPN’s to bypass censorship. Meanwhile, the corporations have to navigate both of these sides, as they seek to retain their young audience whilst keeping the government happy. This cultural “rap battle” is driven by conflicting conceptions of authenticity within the Chinese rap scene, as the term becomes increasingly muddled by Hip Hop groups and artists from different metropolitan areas. J explains the nuanced nature of “realness” as it seems to be re-invented every day. He stated: “I think so many people are trying to define it, trying to put their own meanings in it, like in their rap songs. But that just makes it more complicated. By giving it meaning, by giving this word different interpretations they are making it more like a slogan.” J feels that in an attempt to attribute individual meaning to “realness,” rappers in China have diminished the power of the term and used it as an element that can be used to insult others while boasting one’s prowess in the rap industry. So many cultural agents have tried to define Chinese Hip Hop in their own ways that realness has become a multifaceted term which to me signifies the contentions over the globalized spread of culture.

One of the reasons the government had to shift their censorship strategy is in part due to the ubiquity of the Internet. Cheuk explains that, “With the rise of the Internet, a new generation of youths has emerged from within and beyond China’s Great Internet Firewall. They have

access to both Chinese streaming sites like Douban and Western streaming sites like SoundCloud and YouTube via VPN networks (Virtual Private Networking). (Cheuk 2020, 9)” Though the Chinese government attempts to control its cyberspace by imposing a firewall and banning the majority of western websites, youth in China still engage with the global Internet through the use of VPNs. In this way, this paper begins to illuminate the role of the Internet in connecting youth around the world and the great power and threat that it presents to authoritarian regimes. Many writers have often hoped to turn the global digital networks into safe cosmopolitan platforms for expression, devoid of national control and interests. Unfortunately, as we witnessed with the 2016 US presidential election and the Cambridge Analytica scandal, as well as the rise of Internet extremism on social media, the openness of the Internet can also lead to the spread of mis-information, increasing privacy breaches through data tracking, and the formation of dangerous communities. This leaves scholars and tech gurus perplexed about ways to make this platform as neutral and beneficial to the whole world, while satisfying all the invested participants. The case of Hip Hop in China illustrates the influence of the Internet, as it serves as a backbone for the underground rap community, and has connected Chinese youth to the wider world.

Regardless of the Chinese government’s control over the media consumed and presented to the masses, the nature of the Internet makes it extremely difficult for authorities to restrict all content. As Joaquin Serra explains “The openness of the Internet and absence of centralized control make it practically impossible for persuasion industries to silence all voices. With the Internet there is always someone to tell the story, or the other side of the dominant story.(Serra

2014, 308)” From this perspective we can start to see the emancipatory potential of VPNs for Chinese youth, and the manner in which the Internet has fostered underground rap authenticity.

J explained that even though governmental restrictions may at first glance appear as restrictive, it may actually strengthen the sentiment of marginalization already prevalent within the Chinese youth. He states that “even though they wouldn't like to encourage it, this entire social situation is kind of encouraging this culture. I think what they are doing is trying to tell you where is the boundary of Chinese rap that's appropriate in china. They do that by banning those works. On the other hand, people know when they ban those works. They gotta make like a mass announcement or something. Of course people know about that.” This cultural and political awareness of the youth of the ramifications of government censorship hints at the benefits of an international neutral zone for user-based expression.

My interlocutors all emphasized the fact that Chinese youth still widely listen to these banned artists thanks to VPN's; M explained how the Youtube comment section of a song by In3 was abound with messages of support, community resilience and authenticity. The Internet supports the existence and spread of this counterculture. J is not alone in prophesying that the actual banning of the Hip Hop scene may in the end be counterproductive for the government. Cheuk explained in his paper that many members of the underground Hip Hop community thought that the government was shooting itself in the foot by trying to redefine rap, and thus was in turn solidifying the ties between artists within the underground community. He writes that “some members of the underground hip hop community supported the hip hop ban. Chengdu-based hip hop producer HARIKIRI believes the ban could be conducive to the development of Chinese Hip Hop. Although HARIKIRI acknowledges the state censor's

reductionist understanding of hip hop, he believes that the Hip Hop ban is “fighting ignorance with ignorance,” and is “remov[ing] people who are ignorant from the public eye, which is no bad thing” (Hawkins 2018). It seems in this aspect that Harikiri actually views the censorship of these voices to be a counterproductive attempt to silence this community: Instead of staying in the underground bars of Beijing or the streets of Chengdu, rappers now live on the global web, as it provides a digital loudspeaker extending their voices to the marginalized communities inside China, and even beyond its borders. J echoes this sentiment as he states: “The scale of measuring real Hip Hop from China is if it's being banished or not.” By attempting to ban and limit the spread of Hip Hop within the youth, the government is inadvertently adding to the sense of disillusionment already widespread amongst Chinese youth. The anti-authoritative underpinnings of Global Hip Hop live on digitally, as the ban unintentionally casts a spotlight on the restrictive cultural approach of the government.

The failure of direct censorship due to openness of the internet is likely one of the reasons why the government ended up embracing a modified form of Hip Hop, which is, on one hand, a victory for the people, and, on the other, a threat to the underground Hip Hop community. While the government hopes to capture the passions of the youth and engender national and cultural pride through the “Rap of China,” the Chinese Hip Hop scene is still changing, battling, and morphing. Through all of this, one thing is certain: rap in China is here to stay. Y actually points to ways in which this provides great financial and professional opportunities for struggling musicians, despite the restrictions on the show. He explained that, “It’s a good thing for the musicians, because they’re not living like a really luxurious life, I think, for some underground artists. And after they have up to two opportunities to show their music to the public. They just

have more income. So they will keep doing their music.” All forms of media are subject to political power, but Y’s optimism highlights the benefits that this mainstream show offers to musicians. Even though it may be distorting the image of global hip hop, it has offered a platform for many new voices to be heard. In addition, the dialects of the regionalized rap scenes now echo around the Chinese social media platforms. Leaving these artists underground only made the rebellious artform more alluring to the young netizens, now that they enter the spotlight it is their turn to navigate the boundaries of the state-imposed restrictions.

This thesis employed an ethnographic methodology to examine the interactions between my interlocutors and the wider phenomena of artistic expression within Chinese rap. In the future I would like to continue my exploration of how themes such as age, gender and sexual identity come into play within this rapidly changing cultural environment. An additional emphasis on youth globalization through the Internet would be a fascinating topic to discuss in more detail, but that is outside the purview of this project. Now that we are witnessing digital fieldwork sites, we have new insights on the complexity of identity formation in the digital age. Another interest that would follow this paper is the manner in which instrumental and music video production reveal more about a sense of cultural uniqueness of globalized interactions. These are all aspects of music production that I hope I will be able to explore more extensively in the future.

I would like to close out this paper on a positive note. Through my fieldwork, all of my interlocutors expressed how the Internet is connecting the Chinese people to the outside world, and is slowly changing the culture from the bottom up. Y pointed out that, “The Internet changes our relationships, identity and originality.” He believes that both Chinese social media and the wider Internet allowed his generation to feel more connected. M also echoed this sentiment, and

emphasized how this is leading Chinese youth to embrace their individuality and uniqueness. She stated that, “The Internet changed everything. People will try to find others who have the same interest and not have to hide their personality.” This is a cultural shift that all of my interviews revealed: Chinese youth are moving away from cultural homogeneous unity prevalent in the 1980s, and into a period of globalized localizations where selfhood and uniqueness are connected to Chinese youth identification.

Even though VPNs are banned for the majority of the population in China who don't require the software for work, people still find ways to bypass government censors. In M's words: “people will always find ways to do it.” Youth in China are participating in the Global spread of Hip Hop, even though they have the added obstacle of governmental restrictions, they still seem to widely embrace the liberating socio-political tropes that define it. M spoke to this newfound sense of global connection amongst the youth when she said, “I think the Internet makes our generation feel closer to cultures abroad. More people get tattoos now, more people dye their hair.” Internet is connecting marginalized communities around the world, and Hip Hop is the perfect example to understand ways in which youth navigate the various global tropes as they develop and play with their sense of locality and identity. Though there appears to be a multitude of definitions of authenticity, due to the pluralized nature of the contexts and influences, it would seem that Internet has created one of the first globalized digital realities. Only the rhythmic passing of time will reveal how various forces, internal and external to China, will shape Chinese rhymes. Chinese youths' persistence in producing rap and Hip Hop music is a testament to the resilience of the underground authenticity. It showed that the spread of Hip Hop does not flow in a straight line: in the face of authority real rappers will not resign. Chinese

censors cannot control the flow of information on globalized Internet forums. Therefore, Chinese youth will continue to seek out platforms which afford them the opportunity of unfettered artistic expression.

Thesis:

Music and censorship have long been in contention, authoritarian governments have always tried to control the expressive agency of their people, in search of quelling rebellion and dissent. Hip Hop culture, from its inception, has had deep ties with race, class and anti-authoritarian sentiment that connects marginalized minorities. . Technology has been rapidly increasing, and in the age of computers and smartphones, we have witnessed an exponential growth in world Internet users paired with a drop in prices for new technology.

I argue that the Internet is one of the first globalized platforms, though it is not devoid of political agendas and governmental forces seeking to use it for their benefit. Ever since the inception of the Internet, China has closely monitored it's netizens. In more recent years, they have created a "great firewall" using software (Lee and Liu 2012, Sechenova 2016), where most western websites are blocked - though they can still be accessed through Virtual Private Networks - and there is a whole set of Chinese social media and search engines acting as their national version of the Internet. Taneja and Xiao argue that these restrictions could be an act of cultural and linguistic preservation against the forces of cultural imperialism in the west (Taneja and Xiao 2013), but could also be viewed as a means to further control and monitor the population in the offline world.

Meanwhile, at a parallel rate, we have witnessed the Global spread of Hip Hop. This is closely tied to the rise in popularity and usership of the Internet's interconnected streaming platforms, as

well as the long documented international presence of American cultural exports. As this culture became mainstream in the 1990s through the US, its presence was heard all around the world. There is documented research on the formation in the last twenty years of a “Global Hip Hop Nation”(See Lit review), which undergoes a plurality of forms, hybridized uses of language, and fascinating relationships of local and global within the process of youth identity formation. In doing so, some of the more racial and class aspects of the original elements of Hip Hop may get lost along the way. There remains an overarching sense of connection amongst a forming “Collective marginality” made up mainly of youth around the world who connect with the message and meaning played by the rebellious sounds of Hip Hop. With its spread, we are witnessing the creation and modification of many different forms of Hip Hop, with different interactions with English and historical tensions that underpin the genre.

China has had Hip Hop ever since the late 90s, but it remained strongly silent within the underground scenes of various metropolises. As it gained increasing popularity among the youth on the various streaming platforms of the Internet, the government made several unsuccessful moves to ban it. In 2017, the government decided to make a mainstream “idol” show which served to popularize a modified “Chinese censorship friendly” form of Hip Hop (Zou 2019, 6). This led to a mainstream Chinese acceptance of Hip Hop, the formation of varied music scenes around different cities, and the explosion of a unique Chinese Rap culture. Meanwhile, the underground “real” Hip Hop didn’t stop, and many artists to this day are still affected by their songs being banned, and thus move to the larger “Global” web to preserve their audiences and platforms.

Chapter 1 deals with the shifts in the Chinese Hip Hop culture, introduces concepts of authenticity and begins to shine light on the complexity of this concept within the larger global community. Chapter 2 discusses the linguistic aspects of Chinese interpretations of Hip Hop, and deals with ways in which concepts of language need to be more fluid in the age of the internet. I also analyze how Mandarin has created an alternative value system, but ways in which some rappers overdependence on english actually reduces their sense of authenticity. Chapter 3 starts to explore the tensions of cultural appropriation and appreciation, as well as ways in which Chinese Hip Hop reveals how members of the global Hip Hop community relate to the U.S. Black experience. We briefly touch on commodification of Black vernacular and style, to understand how Globalization has disconnected Hip Hop from its historical roots, which in turns leads to global mischaracterizations and stereotypes regarding Americans of colour.

My study is grounded in exploring how Chinese youth interact and relate to this form of music and culture, and what this adaptation reveals about authenticity, class, race and regionalization in the age of digitized communication. For this paper, I ethnographically observe how participants experience Chinese Hip Hop as part of the Global spread of Hip Hop, as a cultural phenomenon that relates cosmopolitan marginalized youth identity, digital censorship, shedding light on relations to race, class, nationality and globalization among college aged international Chinese students studying at Bard College.

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