The hip-hop generation in China: resistance, taste and hierarchy

Yehan Wang

PhD

University of York

Sociology

August 2022

Abstract

Until a few years ago, it was inconceivable that hip-hop would feature on any Chinese mainstream platform. However, what began in China as a mostly underground musical phenomenon in the 80s, has nowadays made it to unprecedented mainstream popularity with billions of online viewers. Despite this extraordinary development, little research has explored how Chinese hip-hop fans and rappers perceive and live the changes brought about by the sudden popularity experienced by Chinese hip-hop culture.

This thesis examines these developing trends after the rise in popularity achieved since 2017. Through the concepts of resistance, taste and hierarchy, the thesis explores how Chinese rappers and fans understand, interpret and embody the emerging practices of hip-hop in China in their musical and subcultural domains, and how these practices differ from the traditional western understanding attached to hip-hop. By drawing from the debate on resistance and power by Foucault and De Certeau, the concept of cultural openness of Ollivier, the use of music in everyday life by DeNora, the notion of cool and the concept of subcultural capital by Thornton and Hodkinson, this thesis explores the research issues of how Chinese hip-hop followers define resistance, what are the taste trends of Chinese hip-hop followers and how subcultural capital is embodied by Chinese hip-hop communities to create stratification.

Based on semi-structured interviews with 42 participants, which include hip-hop consumers, MCs, and rappers, the thesis reveals, firstly, that Chinese hip-hop followers resist the traditional notion of subcultural resistance, hence redefining the concept of resistance itself. Secondly, although hip-hop musical choices suggest a considerable degree of openness to cultural diversity by the interviewees, there exists a bottom line that excludes vulgar hip-hop. Finally, members of Chinese hip-hop communities create cultural hierarchies and position themselves in the hip-hop community based on their perceived level of subcultural capital, engagement, and commitment to the culture.

Table of Contents

List of Table

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

First of all, many thanks to my supervisors Professor David Beer and Dr Ruth Penfold-Mounce for their guidance, supervision and feedback during the development of this project and thesis, I really appreciate it. I would also like to thank my external examiner Professor Nick Prior and my internal examiner Dr Raphaël Nowak, who conducted the final examination of this thesis. I would also like to thank my TAP member Dr Tom O'Brien and progression chair Dr Darren Reed for their advice during the initial stages of this research project.

Thanks to the staff and my peers at the Department of Sociology, who have helped me, maybe even unconsciously. As a Chinese saying goes: 'a bit of fragrance clings to the hand that gives flowers'. I would like to borrow this phrase to wish them all the best in their future endeavours. At the same time, a special thanks to the University of York Library and its staff, where this project was mainly completed. A heartfelt thanks also goes to my family and boyfriend, who have unconditionally supported me during the highs and lows that inevitably characterise a PhD.

I will really miss my PhD time as it may be the last academic role that feels like a student experience. I vividly remember the passion and ambition when I first obtained my student card at the University of York. Although there were some bumps along the way, including a significant part of this research being conducted during the pandemic, the experience taught me the value of research and contributed to making me a better researcher.

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 A visit to the 798 Arts Zone in Beijing: feeling the beats of the Chinese hip-hop culture

In November 2011, I participated with my university cohort in a team-building activity in the 798 Art Zone[1], a renowned subcultural area created around 2000 in the outskirts of Beijing. The area is a gathering place for subculturalists including local rappers, graffiti artists, skateboarders, street dancers and hipsters (Domer, 2013). Think of it as the subcultural vibes

that characterised the development of Hoxton[2], in East London, in the 1990s (Pratt, 2009). This experience left me with a deep impression of admiration of the subculture atmosphere. A few years later, in 2016, I acted as an interpreter and guide for a group of Serbian workers from the Hesteel Group Company (HBIS) visiting the 798 Art Zone and I attended live gigs with some of the co-workers. This was the second time I visited this famous subcultural zone in Beijing, and I realised that, within a few years, a lot of spaces in the area had been developed into music studios, trendsetter clubs, land of graffiti and fashionable markets. Most importantly, I felt that most rap performers and street dancers were relatively unknown and entry tickets to their concerts were usually priced between dozens of pounds to 100 pounds, which is a price that young professionals in China could easily afford for a concert, thus promoting attendance.

Meanwhile, in 2017, thanks to the promotion of the music reality show The Rap of China, hip-hop music and subculture conquered the forefront of popular culture in China, and suddenly become one of the most popular music genres among youngsters in China. Several underground bands and rappers such as GAI, VAVA and Lil Ghost became famous overnight. The market value of these popular rappers' creations and apparel increased to several hundred pounds, not to mention marketing endorsements and advertising incomes that soon followed.

[1] The 798 Art Zone is a subcultural and art zone in eastern Beijing, China, that has positioned itself as a resistant subculture area. 798 Art Zone was founded in the late 1980s and early 1990s by a group of avant-garde Chinese artists. Early 798 artists included Zhang Huan and Wang Guangyi. In the early 2000s, the 798 Art Zone was gradually transformed into a tourist attraction.

[2] Hoxton, in the east of inner London, is part of the alleged City Fringe and is known for new media and art. An article in the Times on November 4, 1996, compared Hoxton to 'the creative melting pot of Britain', which has led to a huge upsurge in culture and the vitality of creative industries in the region.

At the same time, rap music began to be sold by advertisers in China, from street clothes to high-end brands, which contributed to expanding the reach of the hip-hop subculture and music in China. Therefore, from the development of relatively niche and unknown areas such as the 798 Art Zone in the outskirts of Beijing as a subculture gathering place, the development of hip-hop quickly gained momentum. Since its earliest birth in the 1970s in New York, hip-hop has becomes one of the most pervasive forms of music in contemporary culture, basically spreading across the world. As Osumare (2001: 171) puts it: 'Global hip hop youth culture has become a phenomenon in the truest sense of the word and has affected nearly every country on the map'. China is no exception to this trend, where the same capitalistic forces typical of modernity (Beck, 1992; Bauman, 1998) such as neoliberal economics and globalisation, catalysed the continuous development and spread of hip-hop culture.

However, the popular trend of Chinese hip hop, despite its pervasive nature, extraordinary recent growth, and potential societal significance, remains an under-explored field of sociological research. The lack of studies, especially from Western scholars, may be ascribed to an oversimplified interpretation of Chinese hip-hop as a minor outlet of resistant and alternative foreign culture simply 'injected' into subcultural pockets in China. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, this simple reading is not compatible with, and cannot be explained by, the ideological and societal background of China and Chinese popular culture. Indeed, Chinese hip-hop has always possessed its own distinct subcultural traits while, more recently, due to its significant spread and integration into popular culture, Chinese hip-hop has developed new specific traits that make its analysis more complex than it may appear on the surface. Thus, many important questions in the Chinese context remain unanswered, such as how Chinese hip-hop music negotiates for cultural freedoms in the 21st century; how this hip-hop trend influences Chinese youth; how Chinese rap is influenced by globalisation. These aspects need to be explored, thus highlighting the significance of studying Chinese hip-hop, as they may unveil intriguing patterns and interpretation on hip-hop in a cultural context where, until a few decades ago, hip-hop was deemed impossible to thrive.

1.2 Hip-hop travels around the globe: between globalisation and localisation

Although hip-hop may have been considered difficult to develop in China, it is undeniable that hip-hop has nowadays reached most countries on the map. This section provides an introduction on hip-hop as a global cultural product by discussing processes that have favoured its spread across the globe and its adoption in a variety of different countries, including China.

Hip-hop has developed from the spatially limited setting of New York in 70s as an African American subculture to reaching virtually every corner of the globe and influencing popular culture worldwide. While originally hip-hop artists may have claimed authenticity by appealing to the 'extreme local' (Forman, 2002: xvii), the 'global noise' (Mitchell, 2001) of hip-hop now requires different discourses and approaches to understand how it gets adopted in different contexts.

In the same fashion as many other cultural products, hip-hop's spread has been facilitated by the process of globalisation. According to one of the first definitions, globalisation 'refers to the multiplicity of linkages and interconnections that transcend the nation-states (and by implication the societies) which make up the modern world system' (McGrew, 1999:65-66). The reach of such processes is indeed global because they consist of a variety of activities (cultural, political, ideological) that, although native to a certain part of the word, end up interacting with and influencing people and communities in entirely different, and possibly quite far, parts of the world.'

The literature on the effects of globalisation on the spread of culture tends to take three different views on the way cultures interact, leading to different outcomes: cultures around the globe may be converging, eternally different, or creating new hybrid forms by mixing global and local cultures (Pieterse, 1996; Ritzer, 2011:580). The first hypothesis is the theory of cultural homogenisation, or convergent thesis, which assumes that dominant cultures end up replacing weaker ones. The second view, or the heterogenisation thesis, emphasises cultural differentialism, namely that cultures maintain their original distinctiveness upon interaction. The third scenario, based on the hybridisation hypothesis, hold that cultures mix and combine in a creative process of adaptation. The sections below present the three hypothesis more in detail.

One of the most apt examples of the homogenisation hypothesis is the theory of McDonaldisation put forward by Ritzer (1993). The key idea is that the process of globalisation is leading to increasing cultural uniformity and that the forces of global capitalism are simply erasing local experiences and forms of expression. In this view, when cultures interact, one replaces the other until one single prevailing culture survives globally. Ritzer (1993) took the worldwide success of fast-food chains, epitomised by McDonald's, as the prime examples of this process, whereby the global success of McDonald's lies in four characteristics: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. As Ritzer (1993) believed, McDonaldisation is

leading to the fast-food chain model to dominate not only American society (and food culture), but also many other societies worldwide. This conception is akin ideas of Americanisation or westernisation (Pieterse, 1996; Boli and Lechner, 2005), and can be considered an expression of the concept of cultural imperialism by Tomlinson, which holds that political and economic power is used to exalt and disseminate the ideals of a foreign culture at the detriment of the indigenous culture (Tomlinson 1991: 3).

However, a cautionary view is taken by proponents of homogenisation theories. For instance, Ritzer himself warns that although his research focused on cultural convergence, it does not claim that this is the outcome or consequence of globalisation, or that local cultures are completely disappearing. Instead, he believes that global processes are favouring the spread of same or comparable phenomena to many countries of the globe (such as McDonald's venues in over 120 countries), and therefore there is cultural convergence in that sense (Ritzer, 2011).

The second thesis on the outcomes of interaction between cultures holds a rather opposite perception to homogenisation, as it is based on cultural differentialism. This paradigm holds that existing differences between cultures are not reconcilable and are not, or only superficially, at best, affected by forces of globalisation. Cultures are seen as closed to both globalisation as well as other cultures, differences are deemed immutable, and tensions are resolved by conflict. Instead of fostering homogenisation or hybridisation, differences result in a 'clash of civilisation' (Pieterse, 1996: 1389), as articulated in the famous, and controversial, essay Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (Huntington, 1996). Huntington's thesis has attracted significant debate over the years, with many counterexamples showing substantial limitations of his thesis (Fox, 2005; Henderson, 2005).

The third stance, that of cultural hybridisation, stands between the rather divisive and conflictual divergent hypothesis and the homogenisation hypothesis. This paradigm emphasises that the interaction of global and local cultures results in the production of 'unique hybrid cultures that are not reducible to either the local or the global culture' (Ritzer, 2011: 588). In this process, heterogenization is prioritised over homogenisation. One of the concepts at the heart of hybridisation is what Robertson (1994) terms 'glocalisation', which is interpreted as a refinement of the concept of globalisation. Robertson departs from the mythology of globalisation as homogenisation akin to cultural imperialism, as discussed earlier. In his argument, the key limitation of widespread discourses on the tension between the global and the local is that they assume an intrinsic polarity, where local expression is necessarily viewed

against globalising trends, even as a form of resistance of the former against the perceived hegemonic power of the latter. Instead, glocalised interpretations tend to privilege a pluralistic view of the world where social and cultural processes are relational and contingent. Individuals and groups are the creative agents that enact the synthesis between the global and the local in innovative, hybrid and creative ways (Robertson, 1994; Ritzer, 2011)

Closely related terms, such as hybridisation, help make sense of glocalisation and how it is negotiated. In this respect, the work of Pieterse assumes particular relevance. Pieterse sees globalisation as hybridisation (Pieterse, 1995). Pieterse begins by noting that tensions between the global and the local may arise from the indiscriminate use of two different conceptualisations of culture, one that is viewed territorially, as it is assumed to originate from localised learning processes, and another one that interprets culture as a society- (or social group-) specific culture. The latter concept offers a wider understanding of culture, as it is viewed as an inherently translocal learning process. The two concepts are not necessarily at odds in Pieterse's argument, although, he concedes, they originate from emphasising different aspects of historical and societal processes, thus leading to different conceptions of how different cultures interact (Pieterse, 1995).

The tension, in Pieterse's view, is resolved in contemporary society by viewing globalisation as hybridisation. His argument is underpinned by the fact that cultural experiences over the last centuries have not been simply moving towards standardization or total homogenisation, as highlighted by the impact that non-Western cultures had on the West, as well as the role of local reception of Western culture in non-Western contexts. He employs the three historical instances of creolisation, mestizaje and orientalisation as examples of hybridisation that show how, as a general notion, this may aptly describe global intercultural osmosis and interplay. Global 'crossover culture' may be an appropriate characterization of the long-term global melange (Pieterse, 1995:54). This observation serves to show that processes of globalisation have not always been 'empirically narrow and historically flat' (1995: 63). As such, although taking the same observations as Huntingdon on the interactions between Western and non-Western cultures, Pieterse offers a more considerate and peaceful resolution of the cultural mixing. Indeed, Pieterse's thesis offers two important viewpoints: the process of globalization, past and present, can be described as processes of hybridization and globalisation does not necessarily head towards homogenisation, westernization and necessarily conflict.

The case of hip-hop provides a fertile testbed for these debates on globalisation and scholarship on the spread of global hip-hop has flourished, demonstrating complex opportunities of interplay between processes of globalisation, localisation and hybridity (Alim, 2009). On the one hand, Bozza (2003) argues that, though it has become an international language, hip-hop is and always will be a culture of African American minorities. Along the same lines, Henderson strongly affirmed the essentially black roots of hip-hop, preventing any 'White folks' (1996: 323) from producing real and legitimate hip-hop. Despite some of the 'exclusionary' stances above, it is undeniable that hip-hop has become successful in many countries and has taken forms that may challenge or diverge from its origin in the New York ghetto. In fact, issues of authenticity and adherence to the original roots of the culture has become a fertile territory for debate (see section 3.1.3), and the spread of the culture has implied the necessity for hip-hop to interact with a variety of sociocultural contexts.

In light of the many successful adoption examples of hip-hop around the world, it is perhaps not surprising that the majority of scholarly literature sides with the hybridity hypothesis illustrated above. Even Bennett (1999: 94) concedes that, possibly because of its invocations of street culture and its use of improvisation, 'rap appears to be particularly conducive to the process of cultural reterritorialization'. To understand the relevance of this viewpoint and the potential for the spread of hip-hop, it is useful to consider Rose (1994)'s argument, who believes that the key to understanding hip-hop is not necessarily related to its physical space of origin, but more related to the ways in which its flow and rupture characteristics reflect and contest social roles of the inner city youth (Rose, 1994: 72). In a similar fashion, Lipsitz downplays the importance of hip-hop's birthplace, when he affirms that 'the radical nature of hip-hop comes less from its origin than from its uses' (Lipsitz, 1994:34). These arguments point indeed to the potential of hip-hop to travel around the globe, although the process may not be direct and straightforward, as the rest of this section discusses.

Many works on global hip-hop research have also intensively focussed on the exploration of localised hip-hop scenes and the appropriation and adaptation of hip-hop in countries around the world, including Switzerland, France, Italy, New Zealand, some African countries and Japan (Mitchell, 2001; Solomon 2005; Condry, 2006; Charry, 2012; Saunders, 2015; Zhao, 2020).

Tony Mitchell's (2001) collection of thirteen essays, *Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop Outside the USA*, made a substantial contribution to the study of globalisation of hip-hop by bringing

together case studies from France, the UK, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Bulgaria, Spain, Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand as well as Islamic hip-hop in France and the UK. Overall, the collection aim to demonstrate how hip-hop indigenisation has taken place in such a broad variety of contexts. Although Mitchell draws from the seminal works of Tricia Rose and acknowledges her important contributions (even alluding to Rose's book title Black Noise, see section 3.1.3 for a discussion of Rose's works), his work departs quite significantly in that he challenges the view that hip-hop is an exclusive expression of blackness and African American culture. A key argument throughout the book is that the hip-hop has created many glocalised musical and social trends around the world, which have contributed to establishing 'other roots' in different countries, proving that hip-hop has been indigenised rather than simply adopted as a US-centric cultural form.

In fact, a common theme to the essays in the collection is to show how non-USA hip-hop scenes have developed traits that, although initially based US-centric models, developed their own specific features by hybridising language, practices and musical features, beginning to articulate local concerns and adopting local languages and traditions. As such, Mitchell's book is a strong critique of theories of homogenisation and Americanisation and advocates for the need to understand hip-hop in terms of local practises of appropriation and adaptation, given that the analysed scenes have not shown passive absorption or replication of US hip-hop models. As a poignant example, Pennycook, in her book review notes how the Mitchell's (2001) collection tends to exalt individuals and groups who separate themselves from the archetypical aggressiveness of US gansta rap and instead bring into hip-hop themes around language preservation, education, or anti-racism (Pennycook, 2003:195). The book also discusses the important link between the use of language and localisation. One of the most interesting examples is the development of British-Asian hip-hop bands in the UK, which provides a clear demonstration of the innovative use of hip-hop as a means for British Asian rappers to navigate new ethnic identities, thus exemplifying fruitful syncretism of diasporic cultures (Mitchell, 2001: 87). For non-English speaking countries, language plays an even bigger role in the localisation process by allowing artists to voice local concerns. Spanish crews in the Basque regions use local dialects as a political move and statement about nationalism and, similarly, the shift from English to German or Italian, and Italian dialects, represents another significant mode of appropriation.

An effort similar to Mitchell's was put in place by Eric Charry in the case of African hip-hop, in his book *Hip-hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World* (Charry, 2012). The

book is a collection focussing on nine African countries: Ghana, South Africa, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Kenya, and Tanzania. Charry's (2012) study of the new African music in the context of globalisation can also be considered a response to diasporic flows of rap music outside its origins, potentially in an effort to focus more on African rappers in search of a more authentic Black identity.

While accounting for country-specific peculiarities, Charry argues that, overall, African rap was indeed influenced by its American counterpart, though it was not necessarily because of profound historical and cultural ties between Africans and African Americans. In fact, it was only a minority elite of Westernised African youth that initially embraced rap. Thus, first-generation African rappers had little connection with the traditions of their own countries and were heavily inspired by American hip-hop and westernised practises. However, second- and third-generation African rappers, mostly identifiable with contemporary African youth, have actively attempted to reconnect to their authentic roots, adding new musical, linguistical and aesthetic practices with the aim of making African hip-hop relevant and unique. This is often accomplished by digging through local culture, thus signalling localisation practices taking place. This is recurrent theme throughout most of the case studies in Charry's book and develops at different levels. Common rapping themes include HIV/AIDS awareness, government corruption, lack of opportunities and sometimes women marginalisation, thus reflecting contemporary African issues. In this respect, African hip-hop has not lost the critical power toward societal issues, though it declines it to fit the African context. Typical features of African hip-hop are also centred on social consciousness and global vision, which broadly distinguishes it from its American counterpart. Similarly, Francophone African countries, such as Senegal and Mali, that are predominantly Muslims, typically experience less music featuring profanity and aggressiveness. In a similar fashion, patterns of localisation were observed by Pritchard's study of South African hip-hop (Pritchard, 2009), where, although some traits of American hip-hop are adopted, such as clothing items, local hip-hop brands have emerged, and artists who are perceived to copy American rappers are ridiculed for sounding 'too American' (Pritchard, 2009:53). As such, Pritchard also takes issue with the idea of Americanisation in favour of more complex processes of hybridisation that mix original hip-hop elements with local practices and experiences.

Overall, the theme that unites the essays in the book is localisation of hip-hop, the development of hybrid spaces and practices that negotiate the global with the local, a process of 'appropriating, integrating, and transforming a foreign art form into a locally meaningful genre'

(Charry, 2012:300). Interestingly, the book also highlights how African enacted similar processes of appropriation and integration many times over. Many musical genres began as imitations of foreign products that were followed by patterns of localisation of the sounds, words and meanings, and finally innovation. This framework is useful to understand the process through which hip-hop acquires meaning locally as an imported cultural form. As Kruse (2018: 156) puts it, 'transculturation is the first stage of contact between hip-hop and localised cultures, in which the original global culture is accepted in its original form. The process of hybridisation then integrates global and local traditions. Finally, indigenisation reterritorialises global cultures to the point that global and local differences are unrecognised'.

Condry's (2006) account of Japanese hip-hop's globalisation path also illustrates the possibility of diversification in the hip-hop globalisation process. Traditionally, scholars have envisioned globalisation primarily in terms of multinational corporations, powerful media, communication technologies, or government actors; however, Japan's hip-hop globalisation path points to the importance of social networks in the local scene, which encouraged the formation of hip-hop crews and strong social organizations. Condry argues that Japanese hip-hop offers a valuable case study in the process of localisation of hip-hop as it shows how hip-hop culture is becoming popular, while also being 'domesticated to fit with local ideas and desires' (2006:381). This idea is crystallised by Condry in the idea of *genba*, translated as 'actual site', and identified with all-night dance clubs, where hip-hop culture in Japan is discussed, performed, consumed and developed. In the *genba*, Condry notes how Japanese cultural practices do not disappear for club-goers, who still address each other with formal Japanese greetings, for instance. Japanese hip-hop also localises by rapping about topics that resonate with local audiences, such as ridiculing school and television programmes, emphasising the Japanese love for video games or singing about centuries-old Japanese cultural motifs.

The above examples help understand how the globalisation process of hip-hop has led to its increasingly broad spread to more distant places, as hip-hop artists have begun to rap in their native languages and to strengthen the integration between the global and the local. China has not escaped such processes, and indeed China has also experienced the introduction of hip-hop as a foreign cultural form. Hip-hop in China began to emerge as experimental rap music mixed with early Chinese rock in the mid-1990s, as amply discussed in chapter two of this thesis. Subsequently, the reforms, commercialisation, and globalisation that were in full swing in China at the end of the 1990s have paved the way for what may be termed the birth of Chinese hip-hop culture. Illegally imported CDs and cassettes gave Chinese youth and musicians the

chance to be inspired and thus stimulate the rise of new independent record companies. Music and popular culture such as Rock and hip-hop became the symbols of a new and vibrant urban youth culture emerging in the larger cities of China (Amar, 2018).

In comparison with the breadth of studies of hip-hop in various countries, there is scarce material on the study of Chinese hip-hop and its processes of (g)localisation. One of the best accounts is provided by De Kloet's book *China with a cut: Globalisation, urban youth and popular music* (De Kloet, 2010), which, however, is not exclusively focussed on hip-hop but also covers metal, punk, folk and hybrid forms of Chinese popular culture. De Kloet, in his analysis of the emergence of hip-hop in China as a moment of cultural translation, remains fundamentally sceptical about the possibility of localisation. By taking Yin Tsang as a case study, De Kloet describes their popularity as 'pollution' of traditional Chinese culture and takes them as an example of how it is basically impossible to Sinify hip-hop. Only one member of the group is Chinese, two are white Americans and the fourth is an overseas Chinese from Canada. While featuring American crew members places the band closer to the origins of hip-hop, likely in an attempt to confer legitimacy, the group seems quite eager to indigenise hip-hop. They use a Chinese band name, they rap in Chinese, they write songs about life in Beijing. Despite these attempts, De Kloet deems their localisation contradictory and problematic, if not impossible, the group are insistent on staying loyal to the roots of the genre in the face of what group member Josh Hefferman called, 'the McDonaldisation of hip-hop'. In De Kloet's judgements, it is quite ironic that an American rapper wishes to localise hip-hop in China by advocating the roots of the culture while at the same resisting MacDonaldisation. It is this sort of contradictory irony that signals the pollution of Chinese hip-hop, according to De Kloet, and it is also what led him to conclude that hip-hop is inevitably interpreted as a modern westernised lifestyle, regardless of how hard its practises and ideology become localised.

However, it is worth nothing that De Kloet's analysis is largely limited to the pre-2000s Chinese hip-hop scene, which had not reached the level of fame granted by the spread of reality shows and had not experienced the importance of online networks in potentially shaping the localisation process. To address this issue, more recent works such as Zhao and Lin (2020) analysed the online reality show The Rap of China and showed how contemporary Chinese artists have been more successful at localising hip-hop in China through the use of local dialects

and *Jianghu flow*[3] to confer authenticity to Chinese raps, thus to favour the process of localisation. For instance, the most successful Chongqing rapper Gai raps in both mandarin and Chongqing dialects to localise his music and incorporates allusion to classical Chinese literature into his own style of trap rap. In this respect, Zou (2019) clarified how Chinese hip-hop is being reterritorialised, again in opposition to De Kloet's skepticism. Zou argues that new technologies, formats, and agents are mobilised to package popular cultural products into nationalistic propaganda as a coping mechanism in response to cultural globalisation. As a prime example, Zou offers an analysis of the rap *This is China*, by CD Rev. The song speaks against Western prejudices about China by evoking numerous symbols of Chinese tradition and history, musical instruments typical of Chinese opera and cultural symbols such as the Forbidden City, tea, porcelains, and The Great Wall. Thus, although aimed at eliciting nationalism, the case of CD Rev does show that localisation and Sinification of hip-hop are happening.

Hence, in my view, it is crucial to understand music in contemporary China as a product of the globalisation process (Pieterse, 1996; Ritzer, 2011). Through the lens of hip-hop music specifically, it is not difficult to appreciate the importance of economic, cultural, and political background of hip-hop evolution in China and how it began to mirror the indigenisation, hybridisation, variation, and localisation processes. In fact, most of these factors will be discussed throughout this thesis to make sense of Chinese hip-hop practices and symbols. Indeed, I side with the second set of studies that depart from De Kloet's scepticism (Zou, 2019; Zhao and Lin, 2020). In this thesis, I aim to show that Chinese hip-hop does show hybridised and localised elements, where certain elements of American hip-hop are still retained, such as dressing styles and attitudes of 'cool' (see chapter six). Thematically, while Chinese hip-hop enthusiasts interviewed in this thesis declare unselectively in listening choices, they reject vulgar content, thus showing the departure from traditional themes of violence, 'gangsta' hip-hop, misogyny and profanity, in a process that adapts hip-hop to Chineseness (Ritzer, 2011). Many elements of difference with traditional hip-hop will be widely highlighted and discussed, elements that I deem to be expressions of Chineseness and that are ostensibly absent from other variations of hip-hop worldwide, thus signalling the process of appropriation and adaptation of the culture. For instance, the concept of resistance is subverted by Chinese hip-hop followers, which I would argue, represents a strong element of localisation, or Sinification, that is a clear

[3] Jianghu is a community of martial artists in wuxia stories. It was Zhao & Lin (2020) first used the term 'Jianghu flow' to narrate the nationalism elements in Chinese hip-hop, including three key features loyalty, struggle, and compromise.

response to the climate of mainstream societal values and habitus, as it will be argued at length in chapter five.

1.3 The increasing trends of hip-hop consumption

Indeed, since the first season of The Rap of China was broadcast in 2017, it became clear how variety shows produced by major Chinese video streaming platforms have brought underground music genres and independent musicians to mainstream audiences. According to the author's search, from 2019, the production of hip-hop-related shows exploded. 17 new music shows featuring hip-hop elements at different levels were aired since 2017. 7 new music shows in 2020 only involved the participation of rappers as either mentors or candidates. Interestingly, some of these new shows bring on the screen many forms of hip-hop beyond the mere musical performance, such as street dance, graffiti and DJ-ing, which were not featured in the original version of The Rap of China first season. Indeed, the capital and marketing powers are catalysing hip-hop subculture growth, and the three largest media companies, iQIYI, Tencent and Youku, are following this new trend and competing for viewers and online presence.

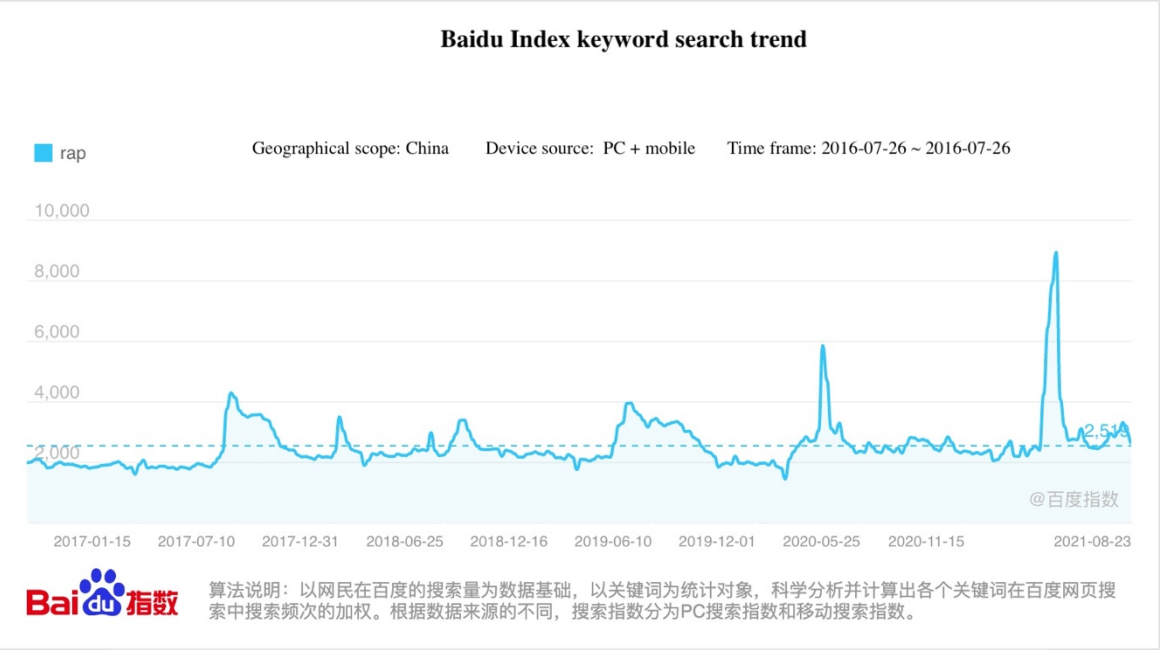

Figure 1 Baidu Index statistical analysis for the buzzword 'rap'

According to the Baidu (the main Chinese internet search engine company) Index statistical analysis (Figure 1) above, online searches for the buzzword 'rap' periodically peak when new

episodes of online hip-hop shows are released. For example, in July 2017, when the Rap of China was first released, and in May 2021, when the latest episode of last season aired. From 2018 to 2020, after successfully promoting The Rap of China, Chinese media giants iQIYI and Tencent also produced other important shows, such as 'Idol Producer' and 'Young with you' and '101'. The success of these reality shows also showcased their potential to create fashion trends, as many rappers participating in the competitions feature brand promotion activities (Adan, 2019). In the context of Chinese popular culture, it is worth pointing out that such online phenomena are quite unusual and unprecedented (Amelia, 2017). Before 2017, it was barely conceivable that hip-hop would feature in popular culture, let alone have so many dedicated TV programs and shows feature hip-hop in China. Although hip-hop performances were first broadcast by the China Central Television for the annual Chinese Lunar New Year Gala in 2009, they never experienced the level of coverage granted by online shows. Along with hip-hop reality shows, many other search trends become popular in social media. For instance, 'Do you have freestyle?' went viral on Chinese social networks in 2019, following Kris Wu using the same sentence in 'The Rap of China'. The hashtag #The Rap of China# reached 9 billion tags on Weibo across more than 44 million users discussing the show (Amar, 2018). Through these TV shows, media companies exploit the potential market of Chinese rap, while also distributing the show widely to other Asian territories, bringing Chinese hip-hop to a broader audience (Amy, 2017). Therefore, all these phenomena demonstrate that hip-hop in China is becoming a significant trend among the young generation and plays a significant role in shaping the trend of lifestyle and entertainment consumption in young people, making the topic worth researching.

1.3 Three key themes of Chinese hip hop: resistance, taste and hierarchy

Although rap music and its spin-off hip-hop reality shows have been popular in China since 2017, current research on hip-hop in China has focused on seeing hip-hop as a trend (Luo & Ming, 2020), a media phenomenon (Amar, 2018), and a form of cultural hybrid that is a translocal process from the African-American hip-hop to the Chinese hip-hop style (Flew, Ryan & Su, 2019). There are few works that have studied Chinese hip-hop with the aim of analysing the development course of hip-hop subculture in China along with the variability, activity and differences between the contemporary Chinese rap scene and some of the roots that originally characterised its development in a western cultural environment. By delving into the Chinese rap scene, this thesis provides a perspective on how the hip-hop subculture is understood, interpreted, and promoted by Chinese rappers, and how it differs from the

understanding in the Western context. In order to understand how Chinese hip-hop as a subculture has developed, evolved and interpreted, this thesis plans to address the following three research questions.

- How do Chinese hip-hop fans conceptualise resistance?

- What are the taste trends of Chinese hip-hop fans?

- How is the hip-hop community stratified?

Therefore, this research examines rap scene in China through the three key themes of resistance, taste, and hierarchy by interviewing 42 participants that include fans (consumers), MCs and rappers (producers), utilising semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data. Firstly, the thesis analyses how hip-hop fans understand and (re)define the concept of resistance by rejecting traditional notions of subcultural resistance. Secondly, the thesis examines how hip-hop followers distinguish themselves from the mainstream and between themselves through music and fashion taste. Finally, it discusses how hip-hop followers create hierarchies and position themselves in a subcultural community. In general, this thesis argues that certain aspects of the concepts of resistance, taste and hierarchy are malleable in the Chinese cultural context. That is, Chinese hip hop enthusiasts are constantly (re)negotiating a space of resistance, reinventing taste trends in the contemporary Chinese rap scene and reasserting the concept of subcultural capital in their communities, through which Chinese hip hop followers are stratified.

1.4 Outline of chapters

This thesis is divided into eight chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, four analysis chapters and conclusion. Chapter one provides a background and introduction to the explosive development of hip hop in China. Chapter two reviews scholarly works on the concepts of subcultural resistance, taste, and hierarchies. In particular, the chapter first surveys types of traditional resistance, the concept of everyday resistance and how resistance interacts with power. Chapter two then illustrates the importance of the notion of authenticity in the hip-hop subcultural debate, for instance, when discussing hip-hop authenticity and how it relates to tensions between authenticity and commercialisation of hip-hop music. The second part of the literature review presents different interpretations of taste distinctions, introduces the traditional Bourdieu school's elaboration of taste, the concept of cultural omnivore, as well as arguments beyond these two perspectives that explain how music taste is subtly differentiated

and standardised by listeners in China. Afterwards, the second part discusses the origin of the notion of cool, its development with respect to hip hop and how to distinguish cool from uncool in the contemporary hip-hop market. The third part draws from Sarah Thornton, Sune Qvotrup Jensen and Paul Hodkinson's arguments on subcultural capital, which are the starting point and basis for analysing subcultural hierarchies in a Chinese hip-hop community.

Chapter three describes the methodology employed in this research. This chapter includes details on how the study was designed, how the fieldwork was prepared and conducted, how interviewees were sampled and recruited, and how the focus of the study was narrowed from an initial broader scope.

Chapters four to seven present and critically analyse the empirical evidence collected during fieldwork and its analysis. Chapter four describes the three stages of development and history of Chinese hip-hop from the early 1990s to 2017. Chapter four is intended to provide the readers with a preliminary and overall description of the development of hip-hop in China, which is key to understanding many aspects of the following analysis and frame the findings within the broader context of Chinese hip-hop development. The first phase of Chinese hip-hop history occurred in the early 1990s when hip-hop began to develop primarily underground. The second period (which began around 2010) saw the birth of rap competitions between rappers and the development of hip-hop labels in different regions, while the third period of Chinese hip-hop began with the successful launch of shows in 2017.

Chapter five examines the conceptualisation of resistance in Chinese hip-hop by focussing on how fans and rappers understand and practice resistance. The Chapter discusses how Chinese hip-hop rejects the traditional notion of resistance typically associated with hip-hop, and how the concept is reinterpreted as a form of everyday resistance. Chapter five also analyses the important theme put forward by many interviewees, that is the themes of peace, love and respect understood as a form of resistance. Finally, Chapter five analyses how respondents relate the hip-hop mantra 'keep it real' to ways of resisting in their daily lives. All these concepts of resistance make Chinese hip-hop a valuable case study to broaden the understanding of types of resistance.

Chapter six discusses the issue of taste in hip-hop. It consists of two parts. Initially, the chapter provides an account of Chinese hip-hop fans who seem to be open to listening to any types of rap. However, subtle yet strong distinctions in taste to certain rappers and lyrics later emerge.

The second part is dedicated to exploring how hip-hop fashion is consumed by Chinese consumers. Here, the concept of cool is conducive to further expand hip-hop consumption in China beyond the realm of music to more personal ways of expressing fashion preferences and attitudes.

Chapter seven analyses the hierarchy of the Chinese hip-hop community and how hierarchies are defined and maintained based on subcultural capital. Three tiers of hip-hop fans and producers are introduced, and their relationship analysed by defining the characteristics of membership and how these characteristics are differentiated within the community.

Chapter eight offers an overall conclusion to this thesis by summarising the key findings of this research and highlighting their significance, while also discussing limitations and proposed directions for future research in the field of Chinese hip-hop.

2.0 The history of Chinese hip-hop

The Chinese hip-hop scene has been evolving since the early 1990s up to 2017, when the streaming reality show The Rap of China[4] produced by iQIYI took the genre to the mainstream audience. If we want to look deeper into the real history of rap in China, a history that goes far beyond the mainstream version exemplified by a hit reality show, we should recognize that the origins of hip-hop culture date back three-decades, to the period during which China had an extensive underground hip-hop scene (De Kloet, 2010), without mentioning that hip-hop in Hong Kong and Taiwan started even earlier (Fan, 2019). Within these three decades, three major phases can be identified. These phases will be discussed in this chapter with the support of the concept of scene to show their evolution over time and their characteristics.

The first phase of Chinese hip-hop began in the early 1990s, when hip-hop started developing mainly underground (De Kloet, 2010). The early roots of hip-hop in China cannot be categorised as traditional hip-hop, instead, they can be characterised more by an experimental hip-hop style. Artists in this period were influenced by American-style hip-hop and nightclubs in urban cities, such as Shanghai and Beijing, which brought creative inspirations to their music (Amelia, 2017). The main hip-hop-styled artists in this period were the Godfather of rock Cui Jian (Beijing), George Lam (Hong Kong), and Harlem Yu (Taipei) (Cheuk, 2018). From the late 1990s, more influential hip-hop artists emerged, such as 'Hi-Bomb' and 'LMF', who began to garner support from record labels. However, this did not mean that these rap albums would become famous. Meanwhile, the Beijing dialect rap crew Yin Ts'ang made hip-hop in China more acceptable since they introduced the Beijing language and culture in their raps, rather than directly indulging the ideology of western hip-hop, which rapidly attracted many fans (De Kloet, 2005).

The second period of Chinese hip-hop (starting around 2010) saw the birth of rap competitions between rappers and the development of different regional hip-hop labels characterised by their own language and ideologies. Since then, more professional and full-time rappers have started making rapping their full-time job and Chinese hip-hop enthusiasts started to gain easier access to rap and hip-hop artists (Shuohong, 2019). For many people, the desire to rap became more

[4] The Rap of China currently has four seasons and the first season started in 2017, which was produced by Baidu-owned streaming platform iQIYI. The first season of this show garnered a record of 3.5 billion views and achieved profits of £15 million. The website: https://www.iq.com/play/the-rap-of-china-2020-2020-08-14-1tozwrtog1g

of a practical possibility as they began to meet peers whom they could make music with, Many rappers' ambitions to rap grew more realistic as they began to encounter people with whom they could collaborate on music via the Internet, which made it possible for hip-hop members to establish contact online and later meet in person. However, in this decade, government censorship was already well in place, which has been considered one of the factors that slowed down the diffusion of hip-hop. Compared to today's censorship, it was more akin to a 'rejection' of the genre rather than a 'prohibition' (Shuohong, 2019).

The third period of Chinese hip-hop occurred after the successful launch of The Rap of China in 2017. The success of names such as GAI, Jony J, Higher Brothers and MC Tianyou in the music market clearly shows the increasing success of the genre. The commercially driven interests have even managed to push, negotiate or dodge the boundaries imposed by state censorship, which culminated in several music shows being broadcast on mainstream media platforms, which changed the rules of the 'game' and popularized hip-hop in China. As opposed to its early years, hip-hop as a new culture trend is earning large space and attention in the Chinese cultural industry.

2.1 Local, translocal and virtual music scenes and the Chinese hip-hop scene

The concept of 'scene' became linked with popular music and was introduced into the academic discourse by Will Straw in the early 1990s (Straw, 1991). Although the term 'scene' was already in circulation long before the 90s in musical journalism (Peterson and Bennett, 2004), Straw is widely credited for having first provided a theoretically grounded model of analysis by defining music scenes as 'actualising a particular state of relations between various populations and social groups, as these coalesce around specific coalitions of musical style' (Straw, 1991: 379). This definition encompasses a much broader range of sensibilities, identities and practices linked to music compared to the forerunner concepts of 'subculture' and 'community'. Scene membership is not necessarily dependant on class, ethnicity, gender, proficiency or appearance, but may work across all these categories. Also, the localised style-based discourse typical of subcultural studies neglects the potential for spatially separated musical practices that may be trans-locally connected (Bennett, 2004; Driver, 2015). The notion of scene, already in Straw's conceptualisation as well as in later developments, admits the possibility of translocal connections. Based on these considerations, the argument of this chapter is that a complete and global understanding of hip-hop, be it in China or in other nations, necessitates the conceptual widening provided by the concept of scene to encompass the variety

of practises, styles, places, individuals and forms of appropriation that hip-hop has witnessed around the globe (see section 1.2 on the globalisation of hip-hop, as well as Alim, 2009; Mitchell 2001; Charry 2012; Condry 2006)

In fact, Straw provides an elaboration of the concept of scene that highlights the characteristics of breadth and interactivity, by further describing scene as a cultural space that accommodates many co-existing musical practices that may interacting with each other through differentiation, processes of change and cross-fertilization' (Straw 1991). As such, the notion of scene allows to focus on situations where performers, support facilities, and fans come together to interact and collectively create and consume music for their own enjoyment. It also enables to empirically place research in specific contexts and spaces (either physical of virtual), while also making sense of how relationships and identities are created and negotiated among participants. The breadth of the concept of the scene and the many invocations that ensued, led Peterson and Bennett to promote a classification of scenes as local, translocal and virtual. Their edited book *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual* (Bennett and Peterson, 2004) offers thirteen chapters that, overall, lay out the characteristics of locality, translocality and virtuality of music scenes.

According to Bennett and Peterson, local scenes consists of social events and activities that takes place in a given, well defined space and time where producers and fans gather to share their common musical identity and taste. In a local scene, they continue, participants distinguish themselves from others by using music and cultural signs often appropriated from other settings but adopted in ways that become representative of the the local scene' (Bennett and Peterson, 2004: 8). This definition emphasises the locality both in terms of delimited physical space and the appropriation of 'external' symbols and practices by the participants. At the same time, the need for participants to 'distinguish themselves' highlights the subcultural heritage of the concept of scene, as typically invoked by earlier subcultural theory and case studies (Hebdige, 1979; Thornton, 1996). As this chapter elaborates on, these characteristics aptly describe Chinese hip-hop, its practices and development throughout its historical trajectory in mainland China.

Although there is a number of studies that draw attention to the music scene in China at different point of its historical trajectory, these works may not explicitly employ the term 'scene' (De Kloet, 2005; Jian, 2018; Li, 2020). In the early 90s, hip-hop was imported into China following the relaxation of barriers and its 'opening-up policy' over a decade earlier (in

1978), when a significant amount of western goods and cultural influences swarmed into the country both by legal and illegal means (Kobayashi, Baobo & Sano, 1999). These goods eventually became bootleg dealers' best-selling goods through the black market and rapidly received a lot of attention from westernized young people in China (Perkins, 2011). In particular, in this early phase of Chinese hip-hop, the spaces and infrastructures of cultural activity that constituted the hip-hop scene were live night clubs and underground venues in major cities, where Chinese hip-hop initially developed (De Kloet, 2010; Fan, 2019). Musical and cultural signs were the early experimental forms of music imported from the West, then enriched by local elements of early Chinese rock and influences from Hong Kong and Taiwan, as described in detail in section 2.2.

Regarding translocal scenes, Bennett and Peterson hold that translocality produces 'affective communities' (Bennett and Peterson, 2004:9) that go beyond the necessity for face-to-face interaction as a prerequisite for membership in the scene. The translocality characteristics of Chinese hip-hop started to develop in the 2000s, when Chinese hip-hop began to assume its own musical characteristic and spread across the country. Lineages of hip-hop based on regional cultural characteristics of mainland China started to emerge, most famously represented by Chongqing Gosh, Xi'an honghua hui, Changsha C-Block labels, Xinjiang and Uyghur rap-rock and Sichuan trap, as detailed in section 2.3. While these developments point to the role of locality, they are also testimony to the flourishing of hip-hop artists in China, the expansion of hip-hop crews and the increasing development of translocal connections. It is in this climate that rap battles gained significant popularity in underground hip-hop scenes, which would attract Chinese rappers from the entire nation, thus providing opportunities to establish and maintain translocal nation-wide networks (Amelia, 2017; Fan 2019).

As Hodkinson's research on Goths in the UK and Dowd's analysis of music festivals in America demonstrate (chapters seven and eight in Bennett and Peterson (2004), respectively), music festivals are a good example of the translocal nature of a scene. Although festivals are local, in that they take place within a limited physical space, they often involve the interconnection of several local scenes given that they attract individuals from disperse geographical locations. Likewise, the most popular underground battle competitions that developed in China around the 2000s, such as 8 Miles Underground, Iron Mic and Listen Up, are prime examples of the translocality of the Chinese hip-hop scene. In fact, these events began to allow Chinese rappers to develop their own industrial infrastructure of (interconnected) local labels, communication channels, media, discussion forums, and festivals (Fan, 2019).

Translocality also enabled some shows to gain some level nationwide viewership, as exemplified by 'Sing My Song', a music show produced by national network CCTV with a large viewership (Chang & Watkins, 2007). These practises and development are discussed in section 2.3. It is also interesting to note how hip-hop, as a globalised cultural form, has also been considered translocal by nature (Alim, 2009). In fact, hip-hop's worldwide diffusion followed by the incorporation in many local scenes, exemplifies the interplay between global music and local cultures and traditions and the ideological and practical connections that may come to be established by different hip-hop communities as a result of these processes, as discussed in section 1.2.

Finally, a more recent evolution of translocal scenes, virtual scenes, also transcend the need for physical presence, since interactions, negotiations, practices and music are mediated by the Internet. Like participants in translocal scenes, members of online scenes may also be geographically separated, but unlike them, virtual scene participants come together in a single scene and share content via the Internet. Indeed, the rise of the Internet and online communication offer new ways to create and maintain music scenes. Although Bennett and Peterson may have been somewhat optimistic when stating that virtual scenes are 'much more nearly in the control of fans' (2004: 11), it is undeniable that online tools have dramatically expanded the scope and reach of musical products and practices. Magaudda (2020) warns us about the extreme power and impact of new technologies. While digital infrastructures and platforms provide a new area for fandom or new ways to connect artists and listeners over the world, they did far more than just that. Because of their ability to redefine how material circulates and relationships are maintained, these infrastructures have the power to redefine the very conditions for music distribution, consumption, and fandom. In fact, technology makes it possible to transcend one's own local experience by providing relatively easy access to both local and translocal scenes and creates entirely new opportunities for engagement with and circulation of cultural products.

In light of the above considerations, it should come as no surprise that the case of Chinese hip-hop has been no exception in developing a flourishing online scene, and that a substantial portion of the contemporary hip-hop scene in China develops virtually. While previous music scenes were limited to being local phenomena, the rise of the Internet, much like in many countries around the world, first kickstarted the possibility to create such virtual scenes. The success of online music shows, spearheaded by The Rap of China, made a more mature cultural-commercial product, with online shows acting as mediators and the most significant

contributors to the development of the virtual hip-hop scene (Flew, Ryan & Su, 2019; Zhao & Lin, 2020). In this scene, much like the virtual communities examined by Rheingold (1994), various agents of Chinese hip-hop, such as hip-hop record labels, reality show promoters, media companies, fans and producers, operate jointly to promote the development of hip-hop while negotiating with external factors like government policies, censorship and the demands of the music industry. Although the impact of policies and censorship on online communities is beyond the scope of this research (see Amar 2018; Luo, 2020; Nie 2021, among others), it is undeniable that the Internet propelled the Chinese online scene, provided opportunities to develop ad strengthen local and translocal networks, promoted the differentiation of hip-hop styles and practices and allowed hip-hop music and culture to reach even the most remote areas of the country (Varis and Wang, 2015).

In addition, it is no coincidence that the method adopted in this study relies on participants' recruitment from Wechat online groups, thanks to the rapid development of China's hip-hop virtual scene, which provides scholars with easy access to Chinese hip-hop enthusiasts in online communities (Son & Chi, 2016; Ma, Hardy & Ooi, 2020). In such virtual spaces, especially WeChat which is the most common social media app in China (see studies above), the importance of physicality and face-to-face interaction is downplayed in favour of fervid online activities such as social media posting, writing and reading music news blogs, watching and commenting on online shows, following artists on social media and music streaming services, creating, uploading and listening to songs on musical platforms like NetEase, subscribing to music apps, thus, in turn, allowing music to transcend physical boundaries and distances. These practices have assumed extreme relevance since the rise of online music shows like The Rap of China, which have brought Chinese hip-hop to the forefront of popular culture, as discussed in detail in section 2.4 of this chapter. Most of these practices will also be discussed in later analysis chapters in the context of interviews.

Overall, exploring the historical development of Chinese hip-hop provides an opportunity to place the Chinese hip-hop scene in the context of previous research (see Straw, 1991; Bennett, 2004; Bennett and Peterson, 2004; Moore, 2005; Crossley, 2009; Magaudda, 2020) and to show that the Chinese hip-hop scene, in its historical trajectory, shows the traits that Straw (1991) identified as locality and translocality, with more recent developments pointing to the virtualisation of the scene (Varis and Wang, 2015; Magaudda, 2020). The chapter also offers a snapshot of the different ways in which the hip-hop scene in China has become localised in

a modern Chinese environment characterised by traditional ideology while also adapting to the rapidly changing social and economic conditions.

2.2 Chinese hip-hop in the underground

Compared to other mature music categories, hip-hop is still an under-researched field despite its enormous popularity and pervasive influence throughout the cultural underground [5] (underground hip-hop). It is surprising that real Chinese hip-hop only emerged, roughly, around the late 1990s– at least 10 years after the rise of rock in China. The music form is becoming increasingly popular among urban youth who have access to it, and it draws large crowds to festivals and underground venues[6], which include underground club, live houses, freelance events organised by local promoters, parties in basements of residential blocks, techno scene run by a core of OGs (Fan, 2019.

2.2.1 Early roots of hip-hop

In the 1990s, Chinese homegrown hip hop was still a somewhat new phenomenon in China. Although American rappers were popular in China, home-grown rap did not begin to gain momentum until a decade later. Hip-hop as a movement in Beijing emerged prior to 1990 via British, Filipino and Congolese DJ's (De Kloet, 2005). This followed China's relaxation of barriers and its 'opening-up policy' over a decade earlier (in 1978) when a significant amount of western goods and cultural influences swarmed into China both by legal and illegal means (Kobayashi, Baobo & Sano, 1999). The hip-hop subculture's infiltration has been aided by liberal import and export trade culture around 2000s, and also enormous flow of foreign CDs and hip-hop items, particularly from Hong Kong and Taiwanese enterprises. Some of the earliest hip-hop influences came from movies such as 'Beatstreet[7]' (1984) and 'Can't Stop the Music[8]' (1980) which entered China on videotape via embassy workers or foreign businessmen and their families (De Kloet, 2005). These personal goods eventually became bootleg dealers' best-selling goods through the black market and rapidly received a lot of attention from westernized young people in China.

[5] 'Underground' refers to underground hip-hop that exists outside of the mainstream commercial canon. It is mainly associated with independent artists with little commercial interests.

[6] "Underground venues" refers mainly to live houses, small to mid-scale venues similar to music clubs: no seats, floor-level stage and open bar setting.

[7] Beat Street is a 1984 American drama dance film featuring New York City hip hop culture of the early 1980s, breakdancing, DJing, and graffiti.

[8] Can't Stop the Music is a 1980 American musical comedy film directed by Nancy Walker.

The first DJ[9] in China who played hip hop music on a daily basis was a resident at the first Chinese nightclub in Beijing, in 1984 (De Kloet, 2005), due to the substantial demand for 'cultural prosperity' and changes in youth nightlife in urban centres such as Beijing and Shanghai. At the time there were no other clubs in mainland China, but earlier DJs were already receiving monthly deliveries of records from London featuring labels such as Sugar Hill, Tommy Boy, and Street Sounds (Fan, 2019). It is difficult to trace how these illegal CDs were transported from foreign countries to China. Since, from a Western perspective, mainland China was (and is) perceived to be a country dominated by strict culture censorship and the western media has tended to perpetuate a one-sided view of China as a culture devoid of 'fun'. However, the fact is that at their peak during 1990s, Beijing, Shanghai and seaside cities, these metropolises ranked as some of the most lively and decadent cities in the world (Song, 1996).

Around the 1990s, there were several events that were hip-hop, disco or jazz-styled. In 1992, China hosted its first regular 'hip-hop nights' at Kunlun Hotel Crystal Disco in Beijing. Later, in 1994, the first nightly hip hop club opened in China at the 'Broadway' club in Shanghai's port area. Later again, in 1998, rap in China became even more popular with the opening of Beijing nightclubs such as 'Vic' and 'Mix'. Underground clubs and nightclubs became the most secretive, indispensable and safest places to experience urban culture in the metropolises (Fan, 2019). With the increasing popularity of hip-hop clubs, small hip-hop 'crews' emerged, which can be considered to be the first wave of Chinese rappers. Surprisingly, this first wave flourished without media company drive, network spread or sponsorship.

[9] According to music magazine Resident Advisor, the first DJ in China could be Yang Bing, a Beijing local, who was the first one to begin DJing.

Figure 2 shows in the 1990s, hip-hop and disco were popular in the night club (Chinese daily headline, 2017)

Early experimental hip-hop styled artists

The first formal song to feature rap style was performed by the rock artist Cui Jian in the early 1990s. Though this was viewed as being experimental as opposed to a credible form of hip-hop in the eyes of enthusiasts (China Daily, 2005). Cui Jian's rap style has similarities with the ballad and rock and exposed fans in China to new ideas and opinions, and his keen interest in rap was evident in his early output as a rock artist (Lee, 1995). However, while Cui Jian brought new concepts and ideas in China, his influence outside the country could be considered to be limited at best. He later continued to develop his interests in his later releases 'Country Surrounding the City', 'Blue Bone', 'Small Town Story v21', 'Network Virgin' and 'Exceeding That Day' (Fan, 2019).

Figure 3 shows the first Chinese rap style rock artist Cui Jian in the early 1990's (Weibo,2016)

Nevertheless, even though the rock and hip-hop artists Cui Jian (Beijing), George Lam (Hong Kong), and Harlem Yu (Taipei) had injected some rap elements into their music, the genre did not really garner the widespread attention of the music market until the release of the album 'Someone' in 1993 by artists Xie Dong, Yin Xiangjie, and TuTu (Fan, 2019). ‘Someone’ was even made into a foreign version and sold to Japan in the 1990s, including four songs that unexpectedly appeared in the hit Japanese film ‘24 hours of Shibuya’ in 1998. Even though some critics considered ‘Someone’ as an unsuccessful attempt to mix rock with the vulgar Shulaibao style, this album literately introduced hip-hop in China (Fan, 2019).

During the same period, the first rap band in China, D. D. Rhythm, was founded by Dai Bing and his girlfriend Tian Bao (Fan, 2019). Dai Bing was already active in the hip-hop circle since 1986 and his educational experience at the China Foreign Affair University allowed him to produce English raps and get acquainted with western rappers (Fan, 2017). D.D. Rhythm began to create some Chinese rap songs such as ‘Ridicule’, ‘Do you want to dance’, ‘She is so nice’ and ‘Hot beat’, which were played in many disco clubs in the 1990s. Even though Dai Bing's contribution to the Chinese hip-hop culture is more significant than just creating the crew. In the1990s, as a nation-wide respected rapper, Dai Bing participated in almost every famous rap style album and music program recordings in China. For example, he cooperated with the famous Chinese rock band ‘Zero Point’, he wrote the rap song ‘Fanatical party’ for the Korean crew NRG, he created ad promotion songs for famous companies such as ‘Back to back’, ‘Li Ning Sweatshirt’ and ‘Snickers chocolate’. Even though Dai Bing mainly contributed to the behind-the-scenes production team of many hip-hop professional experiences, he was still

determined to be a hip-hop singer and maintain the spirit of hip-hop (Jimmy, 2009). In fact, in 2005, he released his own hip-hop single, ‘Everybody’, in ‘China's best MC hip-hop Collection - Longmen array No’. Beyond being a hip-hop artist, Dai Bing also created the hip-hop label 'Club Mix hip-hop Party' in 2004, which made him a famous DJ in the Beijing underground scene.

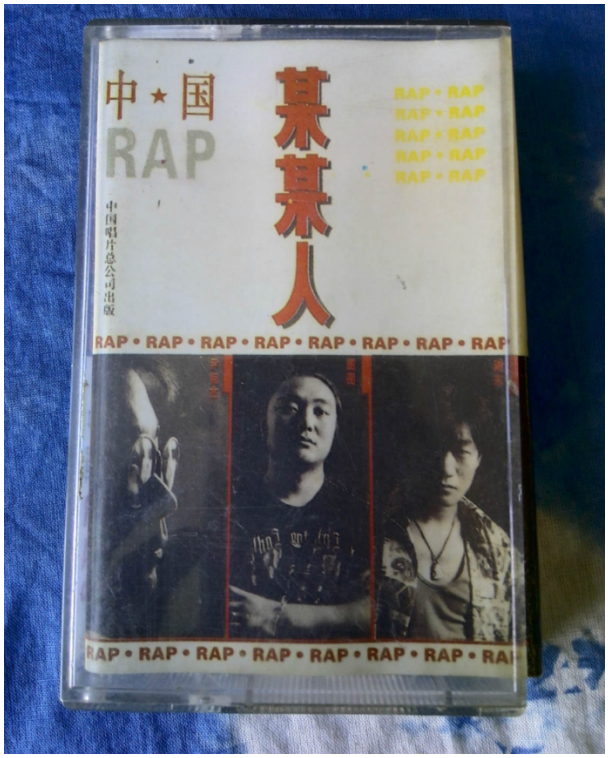

Figure 4 shows the first rap album in China ‘Someone 某某人’ (Douban, 2011)

However, these early rappers and experimental hip-hop crews did not really gain the attention of Chinese hip-hop fans until 1994. In that year, the national sports station CCTV5 began broadcasting NBA games for the first time and the background music of the televised games was hip-hop styled. The NBA players’ fashion style gave Chinese youth a new avenue through which they might encounter hip-hop culture. NBA players wore jewellery and throwback jerseys which are typical symbols of a (Western) rapper (McDonald & Toglia, 2010). Hence, this promotion via official media allowed hip-hop culture to spread quickly in China and attract the first large scale wave of Chinese hip-hop fans in mainstream society (Fan, 2019).

Hong Kong and Taiwan raps

While the hip-hop scene in mainland China was still in its early stages, Hong Kong and Taiwan rap artists had already emerged and spread more rapidly and widely across the world. In fact, back in the 1980s, Hong Kong singer George Lam released his Cantonese album 'Favourite', which featured ‘AH LAM diary’, a Cantonese rap song that is considered the first rap song ever recorded in China (Cheuk, 2018).

Hong Kong

The unwavering passion and undying experimental spirit innate in Hong Kong’s music scene is a fundamental reason why it has flourished and diversified since the 1980s and influenced mainland China (Fan, 2019). A core characteristic of the Taiwanese and Hong Kong scene is the attention dedicated to the mainstream and indie spheres, aided by institutionalized platforms, such as the Golden Melody Awards[10] (GMA) and the Golden Indie Music Awards (GIMA)[11] (Wang, 2015). Numerous pioneering giants in Hong Kong and Taiwan have achieved critical international acclaim and paved the way for 21st century artists.

Since the 1970s, ‘Cantopop[12]’ often known as HK-pop, is a pop music genre rap which and has become a major music scene in the Hong Kong music market. It was then that Sam Hui, Alex Lam and Alan Tam came to prominence and laid the foundation of Hong Kong pop music. Later in 1983, the American movie ‘Flashdance’ strongly influenced the Chinese hip-hop scene. When the film was first released in Hong Kong, it sparked a big interest that led young people to learn to breakdance. Along the same lines, some singers started to incorporate elements of break dancing into Cantopop, such as Mai Jiewen's ‘Dancing Queen’ and Rowan's ‘in the laser’, which won the top ten golden melody awards in 1983; MC Giewen’s ‘electric break dancer’ won the award for the most creative song at the 7th top 10 Chinese golden melody awards in 1984. Against this background, in the 1990s, the hip-hop genre of music began to take shape in Hong Kong. The first generation of hip-hop crews were Hard and Soft Masters and LMP, which had a significant influence on Asian hip-hop and will be discussed in more detail later. ‘Hard and Soft Master’ was led by Ge Minhui and Lin Haifeng, who were also partners of

[10] The Golden Melody Awards, commonly abbreviated as GMA, is an honor awarded by the Ministry of Culture of Taiwan to recognize outstanding achievement in the Mandarin, Taiwanese, Hakka, and Formosan-languages popular and traditional music industry.
[11] The Golden Indie Music Awards is one of the two major music awards in Taiwan. Unlike the Golden Melody Awards, which honor music that is mostly commercially released, the Indie Music Awards emphasize artists' own abilities to write and produce music.
[12] Cantopop is a pop music genre from Hong Kong, with music written in standard Chinese but sung in Cantonese.

RTHK radio 2[13] (Hong Kong) and jointly hold the radio program ‘Road angel’. In the 2000s, Hong Kong's hip hop scene had to face the rising of Canto-pop in Taiwan. For example, Taiwan pop artists such as Jay Chou, Jolin Tsai and A-Mei began gaining popularity both in both mainland China and Hong Kong.

Taiwan

Taiwan is an island geographically situated between mainland China and Japan and culturally positioned in the shadow of both mainland China traditional culture and Japanese music scenes. Under the impact of New York and Los Angeles' hip-hop, the nascent music scenes in Asia, Africa, and Europe, Taiwan hip-hop artists quickly produced their own homegrown raps.

Taiwan’s first notable hip-hop crew was actually imported from the U.S. in 1991, when a trio of Taiwanese-American teens (Jeff Huang, Stanley Huang, and their cousin Steve Lin) formed L.A. Boyz. By the time L.A. Boyz were discovered by the Taiwanese 'pop godfather' David Tao, Taiwan’s youth were keen on hip-hop music and culture. The L.A. Boyz style was a combination of the ‘youthful, innocent’ look prevalent in Taiwanese pop at the time and hybrid of Los Angeles hip-hop (Yu-liang, 2015). Their first album ‘SHIAM! 閃’ in 1992 sold more than 130,000 copies which was a considerable number. In order to make the lyrics suitable for a Chinese-speaking audience, they toned down violent themes and difficult-to-understand slang in their songs. Even though they started in the USA, they have been considered as a local Taiwan hip-hop crew since they became an idol for the Chinese-speaking audience (John, 2017).

Since the late 1990s, Taiwan’s hip-hop has progressed beyond the earlier hip hop-oriented experiments, towards a darker, edgier sound, nodding to trap and hardcore rap (Jimmy, 2009). At this time, the prominent labels such as True Color Music, KAO!INC, and Dwagie’s Kung-Fu Entertainment have already dominated the music market and Taiwan hip-hop artists have bigger stages to place their music (Wang, 2015). There are number of mainstream performances, as well as a thriving underground, with veteran MCs like Soft Lipa and Poetek dedicated to pushing hip-hop into another golden era. In the early 2000s, with the emergence of Pan Weibo, Song Yueting, MC hotdog and others, making Rap develop rapidly (Fan, 2019). At the same time, some hip-hop bands such as Dragonmen and Kungfu band were established.

[13] RTHK Radio 2 is a broadcast radio station in Hong Kong, China, providing Youth Entertainment and Cantopop music.

It is worth mentioning that mainland fans can collect some music, videos and MTV popular in Taiwan through the Internet, and get to know ‘purer’ rap culture, which has a great influence on the formation of rap culture in mainland China (Yu-liang, 2015).

2.2.2 The late 1990s: the emergence of influential hip-hop artists

The late 1990s can be considered a critical period for the development of Chinese hip-hop following an amount of good quality hip-hop crews such as Beijing dialect rap crew Yin Ts’ang, Shanghai dialect rap band Bamboo Crew, Dragon Tongue Squad, China MC brother and Kungfu Band, 大喜门 (dà xī mén). Pioneering contributions to rap began to gain momentum, more rappers started writing verse in different languages such as mandarin, Cantonese and English and this was mainly promoted by the record labels (Amar, 2018). Later on, the popularity of Internet provided amateurs and audiophiles relatively easy access to download songs, express opinions, and freely exchange ideas about music online. As a consequence, some online independent musicians' songs were made into handcrafted CDs from one-man workshops and then entered the black market. In fact, until these individual artists finally found a formal recording company to sign a contract, a great number of illegal and semi-legal bootleg versions of their songs were quickly materialized. During this period, a precedent was set when the Asia Superstar Anti-Piracy Concert was organised in Shanghai in 2003 which campaigned against illegal and semi-legal bootleg music (Fan, 2019).

The first influential hip-hop crew - Hi-Bomb

The first influential hip-hop crew was Hi-Bomb, founded in 1994. Hi-Bomb was formed by two Shanghai rappers, MC Tang and Shang Zhihao. 'Hi-Bomb' was one of the first rap crews to popularize hip-hop within the mainstream music market. Contrary to other underground artists at the end of the 1990s, 'Hi-Bomb' shared their homemade songs on the internet. In their first recorded song ‘No.1’, the two MCs of Hi Bomb talked about their relationship with hip-hop, and their work to translate rap culture in China. They viewed themselves as the ‘Chinese P. Diddy’ in search of a ‘Chinese J. Lo’, trying to import ‘real’ hip-hop into China. Most of ‘Hi-Bomb’s rap lyrics were written in both Chinese and English and reflected the hip-hop subculture environment in China. Most of ‘Hi-Bomb’s rap lyrics were written in both Chinese and English and reflected the hip-hop subculture environment in China in the 1990s (Fan, 2017)

LMF: the first Chinese band to achieve fame throughout Asia

Later, in 1995, another rap crew emerged from Hong Kong, a group who went by the name of LMF that was famous in Asian countries (Cheuk, 2018). Contrary to many commercialized and packaged Cantopop in Hong Kong at the time, LMF wrote and performed their original music. LMF's songs highlighted the economic oppression and social alienation faced by the working classes of Hong Kong's overcrowded public housing, which reflect the background of all members of the crew, who came from a background of poverty. While the group was criticised by the mainstream for their negative influence on Hong Kong youth, it cannot be denied that their contribution to the hip-hop scene and their promotion of the hip-hop attitude were significant (Cheuk, 2018).

Chinese hip-hop artists in America

Asian Power

Between the late 1990s and early 20th century, some Chinese-Americans living in the United States began to create raps on behalf of China with the aim of promoting Chinese hip-hop on the world stage. The most representative ones were Asian Power and MC Jing. Asian Power was established in 1998 by overseas Chinese students Manchu and Mohist in Queens, New York. They moved to the United States from China when they were young, which allowed them to come into contact with hip-hop culture in New York during their study. In 2003, they released their first album 'AP unit one', which aroused great repercussions in the street hip-hop community. Asian power inherited the strong melody of the East Coast and New York hip-hop while switching between Chinese and English, which allowed them to get a high level of attention in the New York hip-hop circle in the 2000s (Lee, 2019).

MC Jing

MC Jing is an American-Chinese rapper who caught the attention of the American hip-hop circle since he broke the record of proclamation as 'Freestyle Friday' champion seven weeks in a row in 2002. He is also a landmark artist in Chinese hip-hop history and he was influential in Hong Kong as a hip-hop artist of the late 1990s. Until now, MC Jing is still seen as an important part of contemporary Asian hip hop trends. He disappeared from the hip-hop stage for several years until recently, when he participated in 2017's rap show The Rap of China. His first single was titled 'Learn Chinese' and its video was the first one to ever be played on MTV Chi (America TV). His other two singles 'The Rest' and 'Senorita' reached the America Record list 54. From 2006 to 2011, he was active mainly in the Hong Kong music industry and

constantly released albums. In 2017, he started to compete in the Chinese rap competition show and since then he has been mainly active in mainland China. In 2018 and 2019 he became a rap instructor in the rap show Idol Producer (Pillai, 2019).

Jerry Lo and Shawn Sung 's contribution to the hip-hop scene

Jerry Lo

Jerry Lo, widely known as DJ Jerry, is a singer, songwriter and DJ who was popular in Taiwan in the 1990s. He also became renowned in mainland China thanks to his album 'Obasan'. Even though most of the songs in this album were electronic-styled, several tracks featured a combination of electronic music and raps. In particular, 'People are walking, I am walking' is a rap with only hip-hop lyrics without any electronic element. Although DJ Jerry was not the first musician to add hip-hop elements to Chinese pop songs, younger hip-hop artists saw him as an important figure and he influenced many other musicians (Lee, 2018).

Shawn Sung

Shawn Sung was a well-known Taiwanese hip-hop artist, lyricist and composer. He moved to the USA to study at a very young age, where he came in contact with the local gangster rappers and culture. In America, Shawn had the chance to cultivate his inspiration for rap. However, it also represented the place that misguided him. He was jailed for 3 months at the age of 19 for participating in a gangster fight, even though he was framed by two other gang members. After his imprisonment, he wrote 'Life's a struggle', which gained big respect by the younger generation rappers. It was this song that led Shawn to be posthumously awarded the 2004 Golden Melody-award's best lyrics in popular music. He had passed away 2 years earlier, at the age of 23, from bone cancer (Fan, 2019).

On the first anniversary of his death a collection of his demos was released by his family, shocking and touching a lot of musicians. As his families said, Shawn was really gifted in music. He had not studied music and he made his songs with cheap music recording equipment. Until now, 'Life's a struggle' is regarded as one of the best songs in Chinese hip-hop and has become a beacon of inspiration in the hip-hop music industry. His biography has been made into a film adapted from his real-life story (John, 2017).

2.3 The 2000s: Hip-hop artists in the new millennium

In the new millennium, hip-hop has gradually gained more ground in mainland China. According to a report in Channel V magazine, 'If the youth of the 80s were obsessed with heavy metal, the youth of the 90s with punk, then from end 90s up to the present moment, it is hip-hop that dominates the aesthetics and even life attitudes of contemporary youth' (De, 2005). In the early 2000s, the first Chinese hip-hop records were produced by Scream Records, an independent Beijing record label, which launched a vital hip-hop crew 'Yin Ts'ang' (Jimmy, 2009). Another famous rap band which can be considered as important as 'Yin Ts'ang' is 'Bamboo Crew', from Shanghai. Other hip-hop crews such as Dragon Tongue Squad, China MC brother, Kong Fu Band and 大喜门 (dà xī mén) also contributed to lay the foundations of the Chinese dialect hip-hop crew culture and attitude.

Beijing dialect rap crew Yin Ts'ang

Yin Ts'ang are widely regarded as the originators of the Beijing hip hop sound which emerged in Beijing in 2000. This began with one of the members in the crew Webber organizing a regular party in Beijing featuring live rapping, skateboarding, street dancing and graffiti called Section 6 (De Kloet, 2005). This was an early Beijing nightlife venue, which further became the home of Section 6, and it was here that Webber would first meet the rest of the Yin Ts'ang crew. Following this, the members of Yin Ts'ang formally established their crew and Yin Ts'ang was the first rap band in mainland China to sign with an active record label and release a full-length album. As the achievement, Yin Ts'ang won two awards at the 1st and 2nd Annual Chinese Hip-Hop for 'Best Group' and 'Most Dedicated to the Art'. Later on, in 2009, they were awarded the title of 'Best Rap Group in China' at the 2009 Kappa-YoHo Pop Music festival (Amelia, 2017). Apart from the award, the influence of Yin Ts'ang was also reflected in the news articles reported by the New York Times, the China Daily and Music Magazine, as well as some TV stations such as CCTV-1, PBS, CTV and Stir TV (cable) (Fan, 2019).

However, in the eyes of some professional rappers, Yin Ts 'ang did not demonstrate their true potential, in the sense that their raps were far from the gangster raps[14]. Instead, their albums merely reflected an insider's look at Beijing's sights and sounds (Wang, 2009). Yin Ts'ang's first hit was 'In Beijing' from the band's debut album, 'Serve the People'. It was co-produced

[14] Gangster rap refers to raps featuring violence in urban slums, which is a strikingly absent theme from Chinese hip-hop culture.

and written by British DJ Mel ‘Herbie’ Kent, while being entirely recorded in his home studio. The title of ‘Serve the People’ was a twist on an old political slogan from Mao Zedong’s period even though the lyrics of this album do not show any critical attitude towards politics (De Kloet, 2005). Yet this era was short-lived, since MC Webber left Yin Ts 'ang in 2005 and another member Sbazzo left the crew and founded another rap group, Bad Blood. After Sbazzo left, MC Webber focused on building a new hip-hop based site with Jeremy XIV and Young Kin. Their site, yinent.com, was the predecessor of hiphop.cn (Qin, 2017), which later became the largest rap site in China in the 2000s. Consequently, the choice of topics and creation in Chinese hip-hop in the 2000s is more mundane, closely linked to the street, rather than street life in the ghettos and gangster themes.

Yin Ts’ang’s first album 'Serve the People’ (2002)

Shanghai dialect rap band Bamboo Crew

Bamboo Crew is a hip-hop crew from Shanghai, with five members who are all Shanghai natives: BlaKK Bubble, Masta Loop, Mummy C, Shout Dogg and Zeero. Of particular importance, Zeero was the first female MC in Shanghai. The team members met in 2001 at a show called ‘Top MC’. The show was Masta Loop's first time on stage with BlaKK Bubble, and a friendship was established in the show. A few months later, the ‘Steel Mike’, China's first MC contest by showtime entertainment, was about to begin. Masta Loop and BlaKK Bubble signed up for the contest. As soon as the MC contest ended, the five team members felt

that they shared the same creative ideas of hip-hop and they decided to form a team together (Qin, 2017).

In 2002, Bamboo Crew released their first album, which was widely acclaimed and also influenced a group of young people to take up rap. In 2003, Masta Loop recorded a song called ‘Beijing thugs’ in collaboration with Yin Ts’ang, and it was included in the Yin Ts’ang debut album 'Serve the People'. This was the first collaboration between the most famous Shanghai and Beijing hip-hop MCs of the time. In 2005, Bamboo Crew recorded two songs with the famous Canadian rap group ‘Bad Blood’, which was the first collaboration between Chinese MCs and Western MCs (Zhang, 2017).

Figure 6 shows Bamboo Crew members (RADII, 2017)

Dragon Tongue Squad

In 2003, MC Yi, Kirby Lee, Crazy chef and Ghost Bone jointly established Dragon Tongue Squad in Beijing. Dragon Tongue Squad later became a recording company who signed in artists such as Wang Bo, Dai Bing, Longfei and others. The name Dragon Tongue Squad literally refers to a folk cultural activity originated in Sichuan, where a group of people get together to make fun of and chat with each other (Xinhua News, 2017). This was indeed the original intention of Dragon Tongue Squad crew, whose mission was to gather like-minded people and talk about hip-hop.

In 2004, Dragon Tongue Squad's first album, 'Dragon Tongue Squad No. 1' was released and contained 13 songs. This album contains not only raps from the crew, but also music from other

rappers such as members from Yin Ts'ang. Dragon Tongue Squad later published two more influential hip-hop albums in 2006 and 2008 and was active both in the public sight, mainly in the form of commercialised performance, and behind the scenes as professional producers. In 2008, Kirby Lee, Crazy chef and J-fever, the main members of Dragon Tongue Squad, went to London to participate in 'China Now', the largest Chinese culture festival in the UK. Their trip to the UK attracted extensive attention from major British media such as BBC, The Times and The Independent, which all took interest and reported on Chinese subculture and music ecology after their performance (Macartney, 2008).

Figure 6 shows the news report of Dragon Tongue Squad on The Times (The Times, 2008)

China MC brother and Kong Fu Band

China MC brothers (CMCB) is a well-known rock and rap band in China that was getting the same reputation in the 2000s as Yin Ts'ang. As early as 2000, they became well-known by releasing the rap 'Fake porcelain'. Band members included the lead singer Xiao Ou, Wang Zheng and DJ Zhang Ran. In 2001, they signed a contract with the Chinese famous rock music company 'Howling Record'. Six months later, they released their first rap album 'Kung Fu', which won the China Gold Record Award[15]. In 2004, China MC brothers and Yin Ts'ang coproduced the album 'Who ate my fried noodles'. In 2008, they released the single 'This is Beijing' soon after the Beijing Olympic Games. Since 2012, they were mainly active in various music festivals and Carnival activities after the release of the final album '2012' (Zhang, 2017).

[15] "China Gold Record Award" is a national award in the field of Chinese music (audio and video) sponsored by China National Record Corporation

Kung Fu Band was founded in 1999 by three college students from Tianjin. They knew each other from the early Iron Mic Competition and jointly created the rap ‘Sunset’ to increase their fame. At the 11th China song ranking party, Kung Fu Band, Yin Ts'ang and China MC brothers were invited as honor guests. In 2005, Kung Fu Band had signed a contract with Xin Feng music company (Souhu Music, 2005).

*大喜门 (*dà xī mén*)*

大喜门 (dà xī mén) was founded in 2001 in Taiwan and soon became a well-known hip-hop crew in China. At present, its members include Brown, Joey and Pig. In the beginning, the crew had only two members, Brown and Joey, who were only 15 years old at that time. 大喜门 (dà xī mén) literally means ‘auspicious’, which is reflected in the bright music rhythm aiming at bringing pleasure to people. Its representative album ‘Big happy door’ includes tracks singing about how people are under pressure during the 2000s because of the depressed economy and negative social news. The crew wanted to bring people pleasure through their simple rhythm and pleasant melody to help people release these pressures. In 2005, 大喜门 (dà xī mén) officially renamed as 大喜门元年 (dà xī mén yuán nián), and reiterated that the crew's creative concepts do not include any beauty, sex, money and violence, but aim to bring joy to people. In 2001, they won the Best vocal performance crew award at the 21st Golden Melody Awards (Sina Music, 2009).

From the discussion in this section, it should be clear that the mainland Chinese hip-hop scene in its emergent phase was dominated by a handful of pioneering hip-hop groups animated by an experimental and avant-garde spirit, and inspired by the resources of Western hip-hop bands, artists from Hong Kong and Taiwan and early Chinese rock (De Kloet, 2010). Most of the early Chinese hip-hop bands were born in the underground as there were no sufficiently well-developed infrastructure or network that could promote them commercially or support them in venues more significant that underground live houses in large cities. In fact, geographically, the scene developed mainly in major Chinese cities, as exemplified by Beijing’s Yin Ts’ang and Shanghai‘s Zhu You Ren hip-hop bands. The number of bands was growing, although they were making a living by playing small bars with meagre incomes and limited opportunities to release albums. Hip-hop fans gained more knowledge about hip-hop music and culture and became increasingly involved in the scene by visiting underground clubs, buying records, and attending small-scale free-for-all events. The mediators of hip-hop culture in this period were

small record stores and live house, which were in a primitive stage and operated mostly amateurly and autonomously from commercial networks (Amar, 2018).

2.3 Chinese hip-hop sweeps the nation

This section discusses how the hip-hop scene has developed and adapted in Chinese society by exploring how different regions of China saw hip-hop emerge with peculiar local characteristics over the years. The section examines how hip-hop has experienced various levels of regional localisation processes and intra-variations in areas beyond the cities of origins Beijing and Shanghai, like Chongqing, Changsha, Guangdong, Shenzhen, Nanjing, Xinjiang, among others. The discussion focuses on representative dialect rappers, and how the culture and vibe in different regions influenced their hip-hop production. During the 2000s and 2010s, hip-hop bands and local labels expanded in China both in terms of numbers, geographically across the country, as well as into different hip-hop subgenres and styles such as freestyle rap, hardcore hip-hop, trap, old-school and new school hip-hop, comedy hip hop, *Jianghu* flow, drill hip-hop and urban hip-hop, etc.

Although a detailed and comprehensive account of the stylistic practices associated with these subgenres is beyond scope, this section aims to provide an account of this expansion of Chinese hip-hop and take it as a sign of the increasing translocality of the scene. While this diffusion signals the adoption of local paradigms and regional indigenisation of hip-hop, the expansion also coincided with the growth of supporting infrastructure in China (De Kloet, 2010). As a result, hip-hop fans and producers were presented with increasing opportunities for active participation and interaction with various translocal activites of the scene, such as rap battles and music festivals like Underground 8 miles and Iron Mic (Chang & Watkins, 2007; Fan, 2018). Therefore, this section also describes the spread of rap battles and festivals nationwide, initially in underground non-commercial circles, as an example of the translocality of the scene that allowed geographically separated scenes to come together on these occasions.

In addition, the rapid growth of the Internet between 2000 and 2010 also enabled hip-hop fans to share resources within the hip-hop scene by uploading and exchanging collections of albums, songs and videos through online platforms, albeit still in their infancy. It is in this context that some online video companies began producing music programs entirely dedicated to Chinese hip-hop (Amar, 2018), although producers had to select topics, songs and styles in accordance with government regulations. Finally, this section briefly discusses censorship, how it has

influenced the Chinese hip-hop scene and pushed fans to adapt themes and styles to government directives (Amelia, 2017; Luo 2020; Nie 2021).

2.3.1 The representative dialect of rappers and their crews

In China, regional culture had, and still has, a profound influence on hip-hop artists in their rap creations, where they infuse unique dialect, lyrics and melody. Because of the popularity of hip-hop in China, some regional cultures such as Chongqing, Northeast China, Nanjing, Xi'an and Xinjiang have been included into raps and contributed to represent the regional culture in a good light.

The growing popularity and exposure of hip-hop and Sichuanese 'trap' music

Sichuan is the largest province in western China and its dialect rap is a major feature of Chinese rap. The development of the Sichuan dialect as a variant of the northern dialect gave rise to typical Southwestern Mandarin, whose tonality and accent lent itself to rap (Eduardo, 2018). In contrast, the relatively flat tonality of Mandarin greatly limited the variation of tone. Hence, the integration of the Sichuan dialect brought a unique appeal to rap music.

By some margin, the best-known hip-hop movement is now Sichuanese trap[16], a sub-genre that fits well with the Sichuan's unique pronunciation. Also, Sichuan's hip-hop culture is mirrored in its street decoration. At the gate of the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in Chongqing, graffiti street art depicts the origin of Sichuan hip-hop culture. Its unique street scene encourages people to feel like they are in Brooklyn. Sichuan rappers are particularly keen on 'trap raps' which reflect the character of Chongqing people as well as representing the 'Jianghu', namely the temperament of the city. 'Gosh' is known as the earliest trap raps band in Sichuan, which produces old-school songs and makes constant references to the 'Jianghu' ((Zhao & Lin, 2020).

One well-known Sichuanese trap group is 'Higher Brothers', a renowned hip-hop band from Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province. They are known for their songs in Mandarin and Sichuanese that celebrate Chinese culture. Higher Brothers are notable for being a high-profile rap group formed of four members, Ma Siwei, DZ know, Psy.P, and Melo, who are appealing to Western audiences, making them the first Chinese rap act to garner international success (Lauren, 2018). Higher Brothers' famous rap 'Made in China' set a record viewership for

[16] Trap is a genre that stems from rap and was born in the southern states of America in the early 2000s. It is distinguished by a slower rhythm and lyrics often centred on drug dealing.

Chinese rap on YouTube. In the music video of the song, the four members of Higher Brothers wear the domestic Chinese popular logo, and the scenery has a strong visual impact of red lanterns, fans, mahjong and other Chinese elements. Indeed, the location for this music video is one of the most famous tourist attractions in Chengdu. The rapid cycles of media consumerism allowed the Higher Brothers to enter the international hip-hop scene. As a consequence, the rap band has signed with a famous American record label, 88rising, whose roster of artists includes Asian and Asian-American artists (Zhao and Lin, 2020).

Apart from the MC and rappers mentioned above, there are a lot of other notable underground MCs, such as Wudu Montana, Bridge, Gai, AKA, k11 and Og Rolly. In particular, GAI's music career became more famous after attending iQiyi's hip-hop music show The Rap of China (2017) and winning the contest. Gai is one of the few Chinese rappers actively producing trap and gangsta rap. In his early hip-hop period, he gained notoriety through a series of trap videos. His most famous release was his song 'Gangsta', where he describes his involvement with the local mafia in the MV (Zhao and Lin, 2020). Another representative trap Chengdu rapper is Fat Shady. He became famous after appearing on the mainstream television show 'Sing My Song' in 2004. His best-known song 'I'm Not Working Tomorrow' garnered significant attention because of the rap-style music. His song 'Stupid Foreigner' attacks the arrogance of expatriates in China which resulted in a few foreign news media accusing him of racism (Amelia, 2017). Following on his promotion of hip-hop on mainstream media platforms in China, other hip-hop artists such as AKA, Beibei, Small dragon started to move from the underground scene to the mainstream, while online battle MCs have become popular online, which created another space for MCs to promote their works (Amar, 2018).

Rap in Nanjing and Jony J

When one turns to Nanjing rappers, one of the best-known new generation artists who built a reputation in hip-hop circles is Jony J. In 2014, he attracted attention with his rap 'my city Nanjing' which focuses on the spirit of the city, showing the memories and deep feelings of Jony J's life in that city. Four years after the rap was released in 2016, Jony J stood in the Nanjing Olympic Sport Centre and became the first rapper in mainland China to hold a concert in the stadium. In 2017, Jony J won the most popular rapper award at the 6th China hip hop award ceremony. In the same year, he participated in the iQiyi hip-hop music competition show The Rap of China and was one of the top 4 finalists. In March 2020 he participated in the variety show Youth has You as a rap instructor (Qiang, 2017). With the increased interest in

rap in mainland China, a group of young people in Nanjing founded a famous rap crew, D-Evil, whose team members met in the rap competition Red Light Club. Their first rap depicted the brotherhood of local youth and their love for rap and pride in Nanjing. Following that, 'D-Evil' produced many demos. Although the quality was rough, the sound of the rawest underground band has been unanimously praised by members of the underground hip-hop scene (Tao, 2019). Another active hip-hop band in Nanjing is Free-out whose rap style belongs to the 'new school style' hip-hop. Other famous MCs in Nanjing include MC Light, Trouble Z and DZ snow. The most famous rap created by Nanjing MCs is 'B a rap $tar' performed by Trouble Z, DZ snow together with Higher Brothers. It is an inspirational rap to encourage underground rappers to become famous within underground hip-hop circles (Qiang, 2017).

Xi'an dialect rappers

Xi'an as the largest city and capital of Shaanxi Province in central China, once known as 'Eternal Peace', which marks the Silk Road's eastern end. It is also famous for its underground hip-hop culture due to its vibrant night club culture. There are hundreds of nightclubs and many of them embrace a rap theme. Xi'an rap is unique because of its enthusiasm and the perceived heroism of northwest people. For example, internationally famous rapper Kris Wu created a song based on Xi'an 's food culture[17]. The most famous hip-hop local band in Xi'an is 'Chaos', which was founded by Hyuk (Yenan), Tony (Wu Gang) and Sosso (Li Xiaoxiao). To date, there are nearly 80 team members in 'Chaos' (Tao, 2019). The scale of 'Chaos' as a rap band promoted the development of local hip-hop in Xi'an and successfully cultivated a large number of excellent rappers.

Another famous hip-hop band in Xi'an is 'Triple H' which is one of the most representative hip-hop bands in Northwest China. 'Triple H' was founded by Liu Jiayu in 2011 with many young rappers joining later. In particular, PG One and BT Bai attracted a lot of fans in the The Rap of China. However, 'Triple H' and PG One are the most controversial rapper and band respectively in Chinese hip-hop history. Since PG One's appearance on the show significantly raised the profile of 'Triple H', his past scandals also made him a divisive figure and his bad reputation tarnished the label's public image (Sun, 2019). With the negative reaction from the public, 'Trial H' confirmed their break up in a personal statement by the founder Jia Yuliu (Tao, 2019). 'Trial H' still have active band members in other music shows. Although some

[17] A large bowl of noodles is a hip-hop song written by the Chinese-Canadian idol Kris Wu. The song is centred around the Xi'an's big bowl of noodles, which became famous for its self-deprecating and catchy style.

scandals were hidden, songs were unavailable, and the team members quit. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that ‘Trial H’ was representative of the independent rap music brand in Xi'an.

Xinjiang rappers and their unique raps

In 1988, under the influence of the domestic break-dancing craze, the Xinjiang Tianshan film studio filmed China's first street dance movie 'Crazy Dancing' in the West of China (Zhong & Kimura, 2018). This wave promoted the original Xinjiang crew ‘Grey Wolf’. Although rock and rap belong to different genres of music, the combination of the powerful expression of rock and Xinjiang's local rap sparked local hip-hop in Xinjiang. In 1996 the crew released their first solo album Grey Wolf (Sun, 2019). The lead singer Esqer Memet was unanimously recognized by the domestic music industry and was invited to participate in recording by MTV, Channel 3, CCTV 3 and other programs, becoming a model of creative integration of Uyghur folk music and modern music (Anonymous, 2015). His music videos were filmed in Hotan, Urumqi and other places and include typical Xinjiang elements, such as Xinjiang tambour (Sun, 2019).

In 2003, the southern Xinjiang rap crew Six City was formally established and was undoubtedly an important step forward in the history of Xinjiang rap. The name evokes the six main cities of southern Xinjiang: Korla, Aksu, Atush, Kashgar, Hotan and Keju (Fan, 2019). Six City's most popular work was a diss rap against the rap crew 'DSP '. The conflict between the two hip-hop gangsters 'Master P' and 'Six City' created two factions in Xinjiang, dissing through the uploading of raps on xjrap.com. Until now, these diss tracks are regarded as classical Uyghur rap in Xinjiang (Fan, 2019).

Later on, 2008 can be considered as the peak of hip-hop in Xinjiang, since the region’s hip-hop became known at the national level (Northern Park, 2018). In 2008, Six City performed the Uyghur rap ‘Urra’ on the variety show ‘NAWA’ on the national TV station 2, which made this rap crew famous over China. In 2010, more exciting news came: Xinjiang MC Ma Jun was the overall winner of the Iron Mic competition in Beijing (Zhong & Kimura, 2018). After 4 years, the Iron Mic moved to Xinjiang, marking the first time this top hip-hop event was held in the region, which inspired many local rappers. Five years later, in 2015, the title of the Iron Mic went to a Xinjiang artist again, Ai Re, who won the competition by a landslide (Fan, 2019). As more and more rappers from Xinjiang started to appear, another talented rapper, NaWu, quit his job as a preschool teacher in his hometown and moved to Beijing to pursue his dream of hip-hop. In 2015 and 2017, he took part in the second season of China's good songs on

CCTV and the second season of the sound of dreams on Zhejiang TV. The quality of his raps and the rapping speed shocked the audience. In 2019, he came second in the second season of the The Rap of China Since 2019, a new wave of rap music has emerged in Xinjiang, with artists such as Ma Jun, Ai Re, Fox, Huang Xu and Ai Fu Jie Ni continuing to gain space in the Chinese hip-hop scene and proving the power of Xinjiang rappers. According to the NetEase cloud music 'rap TOP' list (Fan, 2019), four of the top five most-listened songs are from Xinjiang rappers.

2.3.2 The 2010s: Hip-hop battle competitions

In 2010, rap battles started to gain significant popularity in the underground hip-hop scenes. The most popular underground battle competitions are 8 Miles Underground, Iron Mic and Listen Up. In these underground competitions, a new generation of rappers such as Beijing's MC Dawei, Urumqi's MC Majun, In3 and Nasty Ray stood out between the participants and got the attention of the hip-hop fans. These new generation rappers were stepping away from the usual clichés propounded by hip-hop and rapped about their frustration with authority, be it official, parental, or educational which contributed to triggering the 2015 blacklist raps censorship (Tao, 2019).

Iron Mic

Iron Mic was started by an American entrepreneur, Dana Burton, who came to China in 1999. He first made connections with hip-hop artists at clubs in Shanghai and eventually a new club was created to play only hip-hop. Since then more and more hip-hop was in time allowed to play in the club and more clubs playing exclusively hip-hop music emerged. The battle rules established that a predetermined beat must be followed, then the assigned two rappers were given an allotted time to 'freestyle' while the audience decided which rapper is the winner (Chang & Watkins, 2007).

In 2002, Burton organized the first 'Iron Mic' rap competition in Shanghai, crowning MC Webber as champion. As Burton said in an interview, 'hip hop will be popular in China because there are so many incredibly talented kids in such a big country' (Fan, 2018). After almost 20 years, Iron Mic is now China's longest-running rap battle. Now Iron Mic takes place in almost thirty cities in China, from Xinjiang to Shenzhen and in cities where one would never expect a

hip-hop scene. At the same time, Iron Mic helped a whole host of rappers gain reputation, such as Wang Bo, who became the first new champion to succeed (Fan, 2018).

8 Miles Underground

'8 miles underground rap battle game' is another rap competition prototype which was inspired by the Eminem movie '8 miles'. Participants rap freestyle 'off the cuff' and attack each other in the form of the game (Fan, 2018). The first 8 miles Underground took place in 2012, and after 10 years, 8 miles Underground is now one of China's most professional and renowned rap competitions, which attracts audiences of several thousands of people every year. 8 miles underground is known for its efforts to promote hip-hop culture throughout China, and many young rappers have emerged from this competition (Amelia, 2017). From 2010 to 2017, 8 Mile Underground continued to bring rappers to the broad scene. For example, Kafe Hu, a Chengdu jazz rapper was famous for the winner of '8 Mile Underground', released his first album, 'The Guy' in 2013. One year later, freestyle MC in '8 Mile Underground' Fat Shady from Chengdu became famous for his dialect rap 'Not Going to Work Tomorrow' on the stage of 'Sing My Song', a music show produced by national network CCTV with a large viewership (Chang & Watkins, 2007).

Listen up

Listen Up is a more recent rap competition which had garnered extensive attention from young hip-hop music fans and is currently recorded into episodes after Tencent bought the producing copyright for the show. Initially, Listen Up was a real-time hip-hop competition and did not air on any mainstream platform. In every round of the battle half of the twenty initial contestants in each section are eliminated. The top 20 overall are invited to a five-day 'Creative Training Camp' before a final contest is held. The first three editions of Listen Up competition enrolled candidates from Chengdu, Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, and Shenzhen. Due to its increasing scale and attention from the audience, the show has started airing on Tencent Video and Ku Ran Video. Although Listen Up came to the forefront of mainstream popular culture as an online show, it still retains underground style with the judges and contestants pushing for the 'keep it real' mantra of hip-hop (Tao, 2020).

In 2020, Listen Up was upgraded and launched as a comprehensive and professional rap competition jointly with Hunan TV station Mango TV. This is the first time that an underground competition has been shaped into a pop-culture product which attracted the

interest of a regional TV station. Industry insiders predict that Listen Up will completely elevate hip-hop from underground events to Internet platforms. Also, Listen Up will realise the dream of hip-hop industry insiders and professionals who have said that they ‘don’t want to over-commercialize and be limited by the sponsors’ and wish to ‘let music be No.1’ (Tao, 2020). This is because this program aims at standing for the real music expression of rappers and not for their commercial value, so that it will try to maintain the purest spirit of hip-hop.

2.3.3 The censorship of cultural products

In the 1980s, Chinese rock music became extremely popular while it started being marginalised by censorship after 1989. The 2015 and 2019 blacklists produced the same effect. In 2019, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT) announced that Chinese media were forbidden to invite guests such as tattooed artists or ‘dispirited culture’ Fan, 2019). In addition to this, guests invited to appear on Chinese entertainment program should follow strict rules on their outlook. To trace the origins of why Chinese authorities decided to ban hip-hop culture from all type of media in a short time, the year of '2015 rap blacklist event' is of particular relevance.

120 ‘harmful’ songs blacklist in 2015

Chinese hip-hop faced a significant large-scale censorship crackdown for the first time in 2015, when China’s Ministry of Culture banned 120 songs deemed immoral for ‘containing content that promotes sex, violence or crime, or harms public morality’. This meant that streaming music sites and karaoke parlours had to remove these songs within 15 days or else face a fine. Most of the songs were created by underground artists but some are said to be mainstream and karaoke favourites. Many of these songs had titles that were obviously sexual or violent in nature, such as 'One-night stand', 'Everybody dies' and 'Suicide diary'. However, there were also less controversial titles such as 'Good morning teacher', 'Beijing Evening Newspaper', and 'I don't want to go to school' (Yue, 2018). A number of rap crews were also explicitly mentioned in the blacklist. For example, In3, one of the most influential rappers in the underground, ranked first in the list, with 17 censored songs. His rap ‘Good Morning, Teacher’ criticised the academic institution by epitomising the new generation born after the 1990s. The list also included some well-known hip-hop crews and rappers such as Taiwanese rapper Hot Dog.

According to the New York Times (Zhang, 2017), the censorship of certain Chinese cultural sphere was relatively lax up until 2012. Indeed, after 2015, the government propagandised a

type of culture which spread ‘positive energy’ of socialist values. The reason why the raps on the blacklist were suspended was that these raps appeared to contradict this ‘positive energy values’, and part of the reason why the government's censorship was more focussed on hip-hop rather than punk, for example, is most likely due to its growing popularity among Chinese youth (Ap, 2014).

The scandal of PG One in 2017

On January 25th, 2017, the Youth League of China posted a message on the Weibo social network accusing PG One, the co-winner of The Rap of China of spreading immoral content in his rap ‘Christmas Eve’. This post mainly stated that ‘Christmas Eve’ encouraged young people to take drugs and humiliate women, and also stated that ‘public figures on the internet should act as positive role models and set a good example to the youth’. The posts were quickly shared among the people with more than 55,000 comments (Anonymous, 2010). PG One responded to the public crisis quickly and stated that he regretted his actions. As a result, PG One songs were immediately removed from every platform by the media companies and the scandals even had a chain effect. A week later, GAI, another winner of The Rap of China, was removed from the music show ‘I Am a Singer’, and even the footage of his appearance was removed from all online video sites (Anonymous, 2018). On 18 January 2018, Global Times confirmed that another female rapper VaVa had been hastily cut from the edit of a show called ‘Happy Camp’, broadcast on Hunan TV (Tao, 2019).

After the removal of popular rappers from Chinese public sight, the authority has also used other forms of censorship targeting live-streaming sites. In order to comply with SAPPRFT’s regulation, many sites of online streaming video were prohibited to stream rap-related content. This has also affected another form of live stream show, ‘Shoumai’, (which translates as ‘screaming into the microphone’) which was also banned from online streaming. Seventy-seven related ‘Shoumai’ songs were removed from the site result in some MC were forced to change their names to comply with the regulations (Zhou, 2018).

According to the above discussion, China's rapid economic growth at the dawn of the new millennium was mirrored by a fresh and rapid development of the hip-hop music industry and scene. Hip-hop artists and crews in different regions of China grew and, as a result, hip-hop expanded to various places and contributed to the creation of diverse indigenous local scenes and a broader translocal Chinese scene connected by nationwide events such as rap battles and

music festivals. The expansion of hip-hop subgenres in China arguably represents a direct maturation of the underground Chinese hip-hop scene and its transition from being localised to becoming translocal within the country. Thus, after around a decade since the hip-hop scene began to be established in China, Chinese hip-hop developed into numerous subgenres. The rap subgenres in China have expanded in terms of number and style thanks to the diversified regional cultures but through a common trajectory that took into account Chinese characteristics (see chapter 5 and 6 for a detailed analysis of these characteristics). Meanwhile, the development of the overall market economy and increase in urbanisation provided solid infrastructures for the hip-hop music industry. Large-scale live performances, rap battles, and a wide variety of parties and nightclubs fostered an active fanbase. Even though the whole fanbase contributed to the scene, their statuses and contribution are different, as it will be covered in chapter 7, where three pairs of memberships positions 'insider' and 'outsider', 'peripheral' and 'centralist', 'hardcore' and 'softcore' will be analysed.

In conclusion, the trajectory of hip-hop's expansion in China shows both the local and translocal nature of the scene initially theorised by Straw (1991) and then empirically demonstrated in various case studies in Peterson and Bennett (2004). The localised nature is expressed by practises of local appropriation and regionalisation in the use of dialect language, styles and symbols in different provinces across China, as discussed in this section. At the same time, the creation of nationwide networks, exemplified by large music festivals and rap competitions, highlights the translocal nature of the mature scene. In this phase, the scene was supported by agents that include both scene's insiders and different external stakeholders such as music records and local labels, who jointly work together to negotiate a space for the development of hip-hop in China. This point will be further explored in the next section with an analysis of the process of virtualisation of the scene in online venues, and how the Chinese hip-hop virtual scene is mainly led by reality shows.

2.4 Chinese hip-hop takes on the bigger stage

Thanks to the growth of the market economy, increasing large-scale popularity of hip-hop music in China and trends of digitalisation, the hip-hop underground scene and early translocal instances discussed in the previous section, began to see the rise of an online scene. This section takes the birth and development of online music shows, in particular The rap of China, as the prime example of such process that significantly contributed to the flourishing of the Chinese hip-hop online scene. Prior to the show's airing in 2017, nobody could have predicted what a

success it would be, as the show later secured billions of views and started pervading online spaces. A significant growth of online communities on social media ensued and more fans began to identify with the rap culture by wearing streetwear and idolizing their favourite contestant on the shows (Zou 2019; Zhao & Lin, 2020). The changes in producing, distributing, and promoting hip-hop music both inside and outside the original scene, brought hip-hop in China into a more flexible and diverse status, mainly characterised by reaching mainstream audiences for the first time since its infancy, almost three decades earlier (Flew, Ryan & Su, 2019).

In this stage, the distribution of hip-hop music to the mainstream audience in China is highly dependent on reality shows, as the key pillar of the virtual scene. The reformation of the way of distribution from the word of mouth and cassettes to the Internet enriched available resources on Chinese hip-hop and contributed to an enlargement of the fanbase in China, who can now rely on a strongly developed online infrastructure consisting of social media, music streaming apps and subscription services (such as NetEase), online news blogs and online fans groups, which, not coincidentally, represented the main source of interviewees for the following analysis chapters five, six and seven of this research. Following the pioneering production of The Rap of China, many other music shows thrived and began to either invite rappers or host competitions between rappers (Adan, 2019). A growing number of music companies began promoting Chinese rap, and more record labels even started competing for secure contracts with hip-hop artists, as it will be further discussed in this section.

2.4.1 2017: The Rap of China changes the game

By 2017, hip-hop had been popular in the underground scene for over two decades. Yet in the summer of 2017, the music show The Rap of China, produced by Baidu-owned streaming platform iQIYI's, changed the Chinese hip-hop game, making it mainstream almost overnight. The first season of the show first aired in 2017, and was followed by four seasons, which demonstrated the influence it had, and the positive and continued reception from the public. Previously underground rappers such as GAI, VAVA and Jonny J suddenly became major stars, rap battles went viral online, and terms such as 'freestyle' entered the mainstream lexicon. The Rap of China became a major cultural sensation in China quite suddenly and it was broadcast on the iQIYI website and brought substantial benefits for the then young media company. The show garnered a record of 3.5 billion views and achieved profits of £15 million (Flew, Ryan & Su, 2019).

However, the first season of The Rap of China was not exempt from critics from the China's pop-cultural mainstream scene and government censorship alike, as it was deemed incompatible both with the underground rap culture in many aspects and the positive energy culture propagandised by the government. Many have identified it as 'the most controversial reality show' in Chinese history (Fan, 2019). For instance, the first season's co-champions GAI and PG One were hit by a series of scandals, as the case of PG One discussed in the previous section. The same season was also the worst hit by the government's swift response because of the sudden popularity gained among young people in China. As a response, iQIYI announced that the second season of The Rap of China was momentarily suspended, while some of the standout rappers in the first season such as PG One, Gai and VAVA have been banned from appearing on many music platforms and music shows. Some commentators argued that The Rap of China would not return to TV (Bureau, 2018).

However, following negotiations between the government and media companies, the second season of The Rap of China returned with a new name: The new Rap of China. The production team for the new seasons spent more time and effort into examining candidates' history and potential 'unhealthy habits' to prevent the entry of another PG One (Zhao & Lin, 2020). Moreover, the directors eliminated sensitive themes from the first season and introduced new ones such as 'success and money', 'dreams and hard-work', and 'frustration and courage' to demonstrate positive energy and lofty emotions through rapping. Lastly, there were more Chinese elements in this rap show to attract a broader audience (Zhao & Lin, 2020). Therefore, the new version of The Rap of China was more Chinese-style, diverse, positive, 'trendier' and more rational by portraying hip-hop culture as the latest 'trendy thing'.

While the first two seasons of the show saw an essential conflict between the underground mindset and a push towards mainstream recognition, the third season of the show started airing in June 2019, with high expectation from the audience to promote the 'keep it real' attitude of the underground rappers. The producers were the Chinese-Canadian rapper-singer Kris Wu, Taiwanese-American singer Will Pan, Hong Kong singer G.E.M., Taiwanese rapper MC Hot Dog and Taiwanese rock musician Chang Chen-Yue. Even though far fewer established rappers showed up for the auditions of the third season, the winners were young generation rappers KeyNG and Boom Huang, which stood out and garnered national attention thanks to the competition (Fan, 2019).

2.4.2 2018-current: Latest hip-hop themed shows

After various bans and controversies, Chinese rap is now seeing more rappers getting back on the mainstream stage. According to the author's search, in 2019, hip-hop related shows exploded, as 17 new music shows featuring hip-hop elements at the different levels were aired. 7 new music shows in 2020 involved the participation of rappers as either mentors or candidates. Interestingly, some of these new shows are bringing on the screen other forms of hip-hop such as street dance which was not featured before the production of the 'The Rap of China'. Indeed, the capital power behind these programs is pushing the hip-hop culture into another peak, and the three biggest media companies iQIYI, Tencent and Youku are catching up with this new trend and even competing with each other (Fan, 2019).

From 2018 to 2020, after successfully promoting The Rap of China, iQIYI also produced other important shows, such as 'Idol Producer' and 'Young with You'. These programs are idol-training shows that seek for excellent rap artists, similar to South Korean K-pop idols, in order to create pop idols, and they have attracted their fair share of rappers (Fan, 2019).

For example, the first season of Idol Producer featured Lay Zhang (K-pop singer and breakdancer), Jackson Wang (rapper), MC Jin (OG rapper, see the 'Chinese-American artist section') as coaches, who are all K-pop rappers or underground rappers who achieved success in the mainstream. In the second season of Young with You, the popular rapper Jony J (see the section 'Nanjing hip-hop') was chosen as rap mentor. As a result, some rappers are growing into idols. For instance, MC Imp (one of the contestant from The Rap of China) and other 8 members founded the idol crew Nine Percent following participation in Idol Producer; former Rap of China contestant He Meiyan was set to be picked as part of the new K-pop-like idol group that emerged from the series. It worth mentioning that Idol Producer gained He tens of millions of fans and likely resulted in a far more lucrative business than making the finals of Rap of China (Fan, 2019).

Tencent, another large media company, does not lag behind this emerging entertainment trend. The new company's popular show 101 producers feature Stanley Huang as a mentor, a member of 1992-formed Taiwanese rap crew L.A. BOYZ and a real OG (see the 'Hong Kong and Taiwan hip-hop' section in this chapter). The premise of the show is simple: select nine out of a 100 trainees to form a new all-female pop group, with the show's vast audience casting votes on who moves forward and who doesn't. It is an inviting setup meant to create buzzy topics online and incubate fan groups. The success of the show also showcased its potential to create

fashion star. Some of the idol constants who finished the competition such as Yang Chaoyue, Meng meiqi, Xuanyi have become national sensations and have been invited to attend some fashion brand promotion activities (Fan, 2019).

Youku seems to lag behind iQIYI and Tencent on producing hip-hop music shows, as Youku seems to be focusing on another category of programs based on the hip-hop street dance culture. Indeed, since 2018, Youku started producing 'This is street dance' as a response to the heated trend of hip-hop in China, which can be considered as a smart strategy to tactfully avoid competition from other media companies. Meanwhile, Youku also produced the idol competition program This! Is Original, which began airing in March 2019 and attracted some rappers to its ranks. Youku's tactic was to invite some previous rappers who have attended The Rap of China and 101 producers. For example, Swaggie, a female rapper and former street dancer who also participated in the Rap of China Season 1, attended This! Is Original (Adan, 2019).

Therefore, one could argue that the wave of pop idol-producing TV shows that has swept across the globe in the past two decades, has also invested China in its own time and pace, that is only in the last few years. No matter how many Chinese rap-centric shows we eventually see rising, they definitely represent an important platform for fans and rappers who would like to stand on the mainstream stages. However, it is still uncertain whether these pioneering shows will remain uncompromised by the allure of commercial gain and if they can continue to speak their minds in the face of new industry challenges.

2.4.3 The virtual scene and the future of Chinese hip-hop

As Paolo Magaudda (2020) argues, the rising of online platforms and media are shaping our relationship with music, how music is experienced and how the local and translocal nature of music scenes has changed. Since the first season of The Rap of China was broadcast, it became clear how variety shows produced by major Chinese video streaming platforms have brought localised underground music and independent musicians to translocal mainstream audiences and contributed to creating a fervid online scene (Zhao & Lin, 2010). Though music-themed variety shows have existed since the pre-internet era, an entirely new ecosystem has been created by online programs such as The Rap of China, 101 Producers, Young with you, Idol Producer and This! is original, as summarised below (Adan, 2019; Fan 2019).

Firstly, video streaming platforms and reality shows are rapidly changing China's production and consumption practices by popularising 'watching' music over 'listening' to it, as such shows reshape the music industry in their image in the eyes of the mainstream. Online fan clubs dedicated to specific artists, groups, and subgenres who are most popular in the mainstream scene now abound on Chinese social media, which have represented the most important resource to recruit interviewee for this research. These new shows are also producing pop idols who try to become rappers, while some rappers turn into pop idols. Phenomena like this stir controversy about whether these idol producing programs represent a new era for Chinese hip-hop on mainstream media (Fan, 2019).

Secondly, the trend of virtualisation of the hip-hop scene leads to forms of polarisation. On the one hand, underground rappers would prefer to maintain their original hip-hop style and are reluctant to compromise on commercial packaging. While underground music festivals may still have enough support and a stable audience not to be completely swamped by mainstream idol rappers (Fan, 2019; Adan, 2019), the growing ranks of idol rappers are gradually shadowing the original, localised scene.

Hence, the particular case of the Chinese hip-hop virtual scene supports Hebdige's analysis of the subculture framework, because of the way that mass media like press, television, and film provide such a strong basis for image-making and class-construction, 'much of what finds itself encoded in the subculture has already been subject to a certain amount of prior handling by the media' (Hebdige, 2020: 22). Indeed, this has been the case for Chinese hip-hop, where shows like The Rap of China have been deemed to 'bring hip-hip culture alive, presenting the full package of this subculture personified by live performances, sounds, styles, and attitudes of rappers' (Luo & Ming, 2020: 7). The mainstream success has also created economic and marketing opportunities for media companies, which capitalise on growing audiences to increase sales and commercial appeal. In this regard, the second part of chapter six explores how the concept of 'cool' is commercialised. In the context of this chapter, the implication is that the virtual hip-hop scene in China is partly in control of mediators, or media companies, rather than only true hip-hop followers, contrary to Bennett and Peterson's hope that virtual scenes would be more in control of fans (Bennett and Peterson 2004:11).

Although on one hand online media have propelled the Chinese hip-hop virtual scene, they have also raised issues of authenticity versus commercialisation and debates on localisation. Conventional local scenes are still kept in motion by a series of gigs, club nights, and more

hardcore performances, where fans converge, communicate and reinforce their sense of belonging to a particular hip-hop scene. However, the main frontier of Chinese hip-hop has shifted to the virtual scene since 2017 and it is in a swift-changing development phase. This is going on supported by the power of the fan economy. Music talent shows like Young with You and Idol Producer cultivate and shape idols such as IMP, Kun, NINE PERCENT (Fan, 2019). Once these idol rappers garner enough attention, they earn large profits for their company with endorsement fees and performance money. These themes will be widely echoed throughout the analysis chapters and analysed through the lens of concepts like 'insiders' vs 'outsiders' in chapter seven, which highlights the level of commitment to hip-hop as a discriminant in defining membership to the scene. Similarly, the discourse on authenticity in chapter five focusses on the debate on how to 'keep it real' in hip-hop as another important criterion that defines the characteristic of the scene. The related concept of 'subcultural capital' is also applied in chapter seven to discuss how different roles in the scene interact with both internal and external agents in contemporary Chinese society.

2.5 The Chinese hip-hop scene: from local to virtual

Based on the above discussion, when being applied in this research, scene is understood as a spatial concept geographically, socio-culturally and virtually. Section 2.2 discussed how Chinese hip-hop started as underground and localised, in terms of space and time, in a specific period in China (the early 90s) and locations (mostly live houses in Beijing and Shanghai). As a non-native musical genre and cultural phenomenon, hip-hop was initially transplanted into China. The early roots of hip-hop in China cannot be categorised as 'traditional' of 'westernised' hip-hop genre, instead, they can be characterised more by an experimental hip-hop style.

In a second phase, the gradual development and expansion of the Chinese hip hop scene originated from different regions and featured local label agents that promoted local styles such as Sichuan's trap rap, Nanjing's 'city' rap, Xi'an's heroism rap and Xinjiang dialect rap. The indigenous scene of Chinese hip-hop proves the relations between music and place described by Grazian (2004), whereby local music scenes become associated with the culture and traditions of local communities to create authenticity (Bennett, 2004: 228). However, as Straw (1991) further argued, scenes may be both local and trans-local phenomena. This possibility also played out in China, where the translocal nature of the scene is demonstrated by hip-hop artists from different regions who gather at a venue for certain events. Major festivals such as

8 Mile Underground and Listen Up attract thousands of fans, DJs, rappers and promoters each year, and have spawned the growth of hip-hop crews, records and shows nationwide. The success of rap battles in China demonstrates the vitality of local scenes and creates the conditions for the establishment of solid translocal scenes and networks of hip-hop, supported by groups of professional hip-hop artists, a stable fan base, suitable infrastructures to host events, and a certain scale of market demand.

Finally, since the The Rap of China was broadcast, the translocal nature of the Chinese hip-hop scene was reinforced, as it became clear how virtual scenes have brought underground music genres and independent musicians to mainstream audiences nationwide. Virtual scenes in China rely on video streaming platforms, online fans group, music streaming apps, reality shows and are rapidly changing China's music industry. 'Watching' music might become more popular than 'listening' to it, so that shows are reshaping the music industry and contributed to splitting the hip-hop scene into the mainstream and the underground. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify these two concepts here, as they will be invoked many times over in the thesis. Based on the above discussion, the 'mainstream scene' in the Chinese context includes artists and musical works that are concerned with being embraced by the public, relatively high album sales, social influence, and significant media exposure. In contrast, 'underground scene' refers to those artists or works which have yet to be accepted and which are marginalised by the hegemonic cultural and commercial system. These two terms do not signify any specific genre/style or a clear artistic standard, but an industrial status and aesthetic attitude. Thus, they are both relative concepts because that the acceptance criteria of the public are always changing over time. More detailed discussion on the characteristics, practises and affiliations with the mainstream and the underground will be presented as an integral part of chapter five, especially in the context of the perceived authenticity of Chinese hip-hop, and seven, in relation to ways in which the hip-hop community is stratified.

3.0 Literature review

This chapter surveys academic literature on the three key themes of this thesis, namely resistance, taste, and subcultural hierarchies. The chapter starts by discussing the concept of subcultural resistance and some elements of the academic debate around it. Particular focus is devoted to James Scott's definition of everyday resistance and the relation between the ideas of resistance, harmony and power. Secondly, this chapter discusses theories that are central to understand chapter six, namely musical taste and the concept of cool. In this case, key theories revolve around the omnivorous thesis of cultural consumption and the consumption of cool in subcultural settings. Finally, the last section relates to the themes of chapter seven, and it reviews relevant scholarly definitions of subcultural capital and how this concept contributes to the creation of subcultural hierarchies.

3.1 The conceptualisation of resistance

This section aims to review and define the concept of resistance in a subcultural context and to provide a basis for the analysis of resistance in chapter five. The concept of resistance has been invoked and systematically used in many different sociocultural settings, including social movements, music, gender, sport, technology, among others (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). Owing to the fluidity and evolution of both societal context and cultural scenes, the traditional notion and context applicability of resistance is in need of a systematic typification and adaptation to various settings, including in the context of the Chinese hip-hop scene. Hence, this section first reviews the typification of resistance based on Hollander & Einwohner (2004), whereby types of resistance are defined based on two central dimensions: the question of whether resistance must be recognised by others and whether it must be intentional, that is recognised by the resisting actors. Particular attention is then devoted to everyday resistance, a type of resistance which goes inherently unrecognised and may also be unintentional. Secondly, this section draws from Michel Foucault's discourse analysis to examine relevant debates on the Chinese harmonious core value system. This discourse is crucial to analyse the unique characteristics of resistance in the Chinese cultural scene and to better understand the inextricable relationship between resistance and power in a Chinese context and how resistance may be expressed through subcultural practices and hip-hop language. Finally, this section reviews research around the notion of authenticity, given that in the hip-hop context, authenticity becomes a way to both express and practice resistance in hip-hop subculture.

3.1.1 Traditional types of resistance and 'everyday resistance'

In the broadest sense, resistance is an antagonistic action (Lilja & Vinthagen 2009). In particular, cultural resistance has been described as the practice of contesting and combating a dominating authority through meanings and symbols (Paddison, Philo, Routledge & Sharp, 2002). Classical theoretical frameworks for understanding resistance are often rooted in the fields of collective politics, whereby motives for resisting are found in the defence of political ideology. Another classical view on subcultural resistance was offered by traditional schools, such as the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, which widely focussed on the study of youngsters with a working-class background and the ways they resist middle-class lifestyles (Hall, Ed., 1993; Jefferson, Ed., 2002; Hebdige, 2012). More recent examples are related to the relationship between the Black Lives Matter movement and hip-hop listening (Allen & Randolph, 2020), which have described this type of movement as active resistance in relation to racial conflict. In opposition to overt and strong forms of resistance, the concept of everyday resistance was introduced by James Scott in 1985 to cover a type of resistance different from insurrection, demonstration, revolution, and street protests that have the common characteristics of organised, collective, or confrontational resistance activities. In other instances, researchers have also studied themes related to gender identity, where Antunes (2021) focused on resisting expectations and implicit rules of standardised gender identification.

In light of such extensive and diversified research landscape, there is a need to identify common key characteristics of resistance to create a framework to classify and describe resistant activities. To this end, I will draw from Hollander and Einwohner's (2004) typology of resistance. In their work, Hollander and Einwohner, motivated by the varied used of the term resistance, identify two elements common to most settings where the concept of resistance is invoked, namely action and opposition. All acts of resistance include an action, in its broadest sense, be it a verbal, physical or cognitive act, and opposition to someone or something, be it a cultural code, a social structure, a stereotype or a physical entity. The identification of these two key characteristics naturally leads to the adoption of two key criteria to classify a resistant action, namely intention and recognition, which are directly linked to the action and the opposition. Should resisters be aware that their actions are resisting any exercise of power? And does the oppositional action need to be recognised as such by either a third party or the object of resistance? To answer these questions, Hollander and Einwohner (2004)'s typology of resistance identifies actors, targets and observers of resistance. Depending on the different combinations of intentionality by the actors and recognition by the targets and the observers,

Hollander and Einwohner (2004) conceptualised seven types of resistance, namely overt, implicit, uninformed, goal-defined, externally defined, attempted, and non-resistance. These categories contribute to articulating lines of disagreement in the conceptual development of resistance, and practically help decide if an act can be recognised as resistance, although, as Hollander & Einwohner (2004) conceded, not all scholars may agree that all the behaviours should be referred to as resistance. For example, it is hard to imagine that alternative dressing choices (such as goths of cross-gender dressing) could be considered in the same category as overt political protest on the streets, although in both cases the acts of resisting may be intentional and recognised by the wider society.

The questions posed by Hollander and Einwohner (2004) and their typification points to a crucial issue in characterising hip-hop resistance in the Chinese context. In fact, later in the debate, it will be analysed how subcultural resistance in the context of Chinese hip-hop may not be openly recognised by the actors and may go unnoticed in many circumstances, meaning that resistance has gone beyond the scope of strong repression and control, or overt resistance to the class structure as traditionally suggested by the Birmingham School. Hence, studying the 'recognition' and 'intention' of the resister is an effective approach to identifying resistance, especially considering that the Chinese subculture is implemented based on a different set of values and norms compared to Western subcultures. In fact, in continuing analysis of the issues of resistance intention and visibility, Hollander & Einwohner's draw from political scientist James Scott, who challenged the idea that resistance must involve large-scale movements and overt opposition. This idea was conceptualised by Scott in the definition of 'everyday resistance' (Scott, 1985), which covers a broad variety of actions that would not normally be considered in the resistance discourse. Everyday resistance is an informal and non-organised set of oppositional actions that Scott defined as 'infrapolitics' (or invisible politics). Everyday resistance is when individuals engage in ways that undermine authority in their everyday lives or implicitly express disapproval. These actions are not easily regarded as open and collective resistance because they are usually hidden, disguised, personal and often not expressed openly because they are not as visible and dramatic as insurrections, riots, political protests, or revolutions that are organised, collective and antagonistic (Scott 1985,1987 & 1989). Scott's definition of everyday resistance emphasises indeed the 'everyday' nature of the set of behaviours that are necessary to understand their contrast with the unusual or, as Bhabha (1985: 162) puts it, the 'spectacular'. In this sense, everyday resistance is configured to silence, ordinariness, and ordinary behaviour, becoming normalised. In public discourse, for example, everyday acts of defiance are not seen as political, such as when a person adopts a lifestyle that

refuses to support the ‘meat culture’ owing to personal food taste, rather than political purpose. Thus, actors themselves may not necessarily view their own actions as resistance, but as an inherent part of lives and customs.

In the context of Chinese hip-hop study, some of traits identified both by Hollander & Einwohner and James Scott are essential to detect everyday resistance expressed by Chinese hip-hop followers. As it will be analysed in chapter five, Chinese hip-hop music producers or consumers may find their daily jobs meaningless, feel angry over certain personal businesses, find themselves in an unjust position in their workplace, they may just feel tired or emotional when they produce and consume hip-hop music, or they may simply attach to hip-hop in the desire of pure entertainment. All these motivations and intentions that lead to everyday resistant behaviours may be possible. In other words, the Chinese rap scene becomes part of ordinary life. The everyday resistance concept contributes to the proposal that in the contemporary Chinese rap scene, resistance through hip-hop is expressed as a type of everyday resistance that is practised on a regular basis but is not officially or politically expressed. It is a form of activity that may not be recognised as resistance by observers because it is rendered invisible to and by society by the resistant actor (Hollander & Einwohner, 2014). Hence, in this context, James Scott's greatest contribution is to invite us to look beyond the academic circle of the Birmingham School (Hall & Jefferson,1976; Hebdige, 1979; William, 2007), which has long dominated the scene of subcultural and resistance studies. Scott’s perspective distinguishes between everyday resistance and ‘a more direct, open confrontation’ (Scott, 1989: 34). That is, in everyday resistance acts, the resister aims to achieve ‘tacit, de facto gains’, whereas in the overt resistance, resisters seek for ‘formal, de jure — recognition of those gains’ (Scott, 1989: 34). In Scott’s (1989) classic commentary on these two types of resistant acts, the goal to achieve gain are similar, but the actions and means are different.

3.1.2 Power, harmony and resistance: Foucault’s discourse and the harmonious value system

The previous literature illustrated how resistance can take the form of everyday resistance, whereby the simple, mundane nature of resistance explains how individuals conduct their everyday lives in ways that might be seen as undermining power. Such pervasive filtration of resistance down to the daily and individual level speaks volumes to Foucault’s belief that ‘where there is power, there is resistance’ (Foucault, 1995: 95). On one hand, in a Foucauldian sense, power is something that exists in any relationships and requires individual discipline to be maintained. De Certeau, on the other hand, presents an anti-Foucault approach to analysing

resistance that does not over privilege the strength and importance of discipline (Bleiker, 2000). This section will discuss theories both from Foucault's and De Certeau's viewpoints as central perspectives to understand how resistance and power are exercised in everyday contexts.

Disciplinary power has been widely debated in the theoretical works of Michel Foucault. Foucault's concepts were primarily developed in his book Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison in 1975, which includes his most renowned and comprehensive expositions of disciplinary power (Turkel, 1990). According to his argument, disciplinary power is the power that subjects exercise over people, such as applying rules of conduct and appropriate behaviour to help them follow the norms and maintain social order (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). In this sense, disciplinary power shapes and regulates subjects who ultimately become, talk, think, and act in a similar manner (Foucault, 1995:177-184). As a result, Foucault (1995) argues that people develop a set of 'self-skills' to help them cope with the everyday life and the existence of norms. The self-censorship of rappers (which will be briefly discussed in chapter five) is a practical example that reflects Foucault's idea of self-discipline power. Especially in a post-subcultural era, where the emphasis is placed on individuality and hip-hop production and marketing, these techniques of oneself indeed appear as techniques of exercising power over oneself. More generally, Foucault (1995) articulated three main crucial viewpoints on the relationship between power and resistance. The first argument states that power is unavoidable, and that any form of resistance is always engaged in a struggle with such dominant form(s) of power. Secondly, power is decentralised and intersectional, which, given the first point, logically implies that resistance is also decentralised and intersectional. Lastly, Foucault deemed that the relationship between resistance and power takes the form of either accommodation or continued resistance, namely, that the relationship is dichotomous in nature. Although there has been a significant debate on these key interpretations of Foucault and their applicability to various contexts (McNamee, 2000; Ffrench, 2004; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013; Johansson, & Vinthagen 2019), the overall implications of these ideas in the context of Chinese hip-hop is that discipline is internalised by subjects, it is related to power, and can take many forms depending on how it is internalised and therefore expressed as resistance.

If Foucault's understanding of power and resistance is about discipline instilled by power, De Certeau's opinion is about a 'network of anti-discipline' (De Certeau, 1984: xv). In De Certeau's argument, resistance to various forms of power can be understood as a creative use of the network of social discipline. It is the cultural creativity practiced in the everyday that may subvert dominant discourse and historical social practices. In this approach, contrary to

Foucault, De Certeau's analysis focuses mostly on historic social practises that did not transform into overt power methods but still exist and succeed in resisting prevailing authority in society. A clear illustration of De Certeau's argument was presented by bell hooks (1989) in the classic example of 'back talk' practiced by black women. As she puts it in her book:

> 'I grew up in the realm of 'talking back', which implies posing as an equal to an authoritative person in the southern black society. It might entail daring to differ, or it can simply mean having an opinion.'
>
> (hooks, 1989: 5)

'Talking back' has been defined as an act of defiance in Hook's argument, because black women refuse to remain silent when they are silenced by authority figures. This can be seen as an example of useful and meaningful resistance. According to hooks (1989), 'Talking back' illustrated that no matter how unprivileged people initiate small acts of resistance, they might potentially undermine the dominant power by talking back. This point seems important when it was analysed through De Certeau's (1984) interpretation of cultural creativity in the everyday, because the consistent and durable talking back might eventually result in decisive victories for feminist movements and alleviate racial tension. As De Certeau (1984) argued, everyday resistance can be as subversive as large-scale social change depending on the durability and scope of the resisters. Persistent and undramatic everyday resistance can spread beyond minority races in the long run and change societal relationships and cultural patterns. Unlike Scott, who set everyday resistance in a rural society among peasants, where relationships are repressed, De Certeau contextualised resistance in urban settings, where poor and exploited minorities resist their socioeconomical and living conditions. Thus, Scott and De Certeau point to the same nature of resistance, although extending its existence to different living and social contexts.

Indeed, De Certeau (1984)'s research focuses on urban economic and cultural consumption, such as buying, using cultural symbols, eating, dressing, and talking, as well as how individuals use and bend the dominant societal norms to accomplish pragmatic goals and perhaps construct new identities. When the dominant norms do not work for them, people rebel in a creative manner, and their desires drive them to employ their own style of resistance creatively. Another common example cited in relation to De Certeau's understanding of creative resistance is the idea of 'Time Theft' (1984: 25), where an employer writes love letters on company time. The employee spends their time for their own pleasures, wants, and interests. These activities are

basically free, creative, and not profit-driven (De Certeau,1984), and represent angry employees resisting the company and the dominant rules. This means that, in opposition to Foucault's subject, who consciously disciplines itself, De Certeau describes a form of resistance that wishes to undermine the system whose purpose is to discipline the workers. Everyday life, according to De Certeau (1984), is full of such strategies, cunning methods, and information about how to resist control and discipline, even if this is just partial and transitory in certain cases. Similarly, there are numerous examples from the areas of subcultural resistance that show similarity with this concept of resistance. When Hebdige (1979) conducted research on subculturalists and their stylistic meanings, he gave the example of the punk practice of using pins and piercings as a way of challenging the standard material meaning of pins (namely, holding things together), just to create shock and disgust in the minds of the authority. Punk resisters creatively deconstruct dominant cultural interpretations of items at the semiotic level by removing common objects from their typical cultural meaning.

Talkback, employees' strategic appropriation of time and resources given by the capitalists, subculturalists' subversion of meanings of normal goods, are all resistant behaviours that are creative and uncontemplated, sometimes covert and subtle, but powerful, nonetheless. If such resistance is sustained on a large scale for a long time (e.g., work less daily, continued deviant behaviour), it may achieve the same effect as overt, large scale social change. Sustained, non-dramatic everyday resistance might gradually grow beyond a few people, changing relationships and societal norms. De Certeau's illustration of everyday resistance practice is precisely embodied as a strategy that involves manipulating power rather than confronting it head-on, utilising it in ways that are not intended or anticipated, while aligning it to the resister's interests or desires.

In the context of this thesis, I side with Scott's and De Certeau's interpretation, although I hold that resistance might take even more subtle forms in certain contexts, depending on the social and power environments, such as the Chinese context. This is where it becomes necessary to discuss the complementary relationship between the masses as resisters and the power within the value system of a harmonious society. One important aspect of literature around resistance and power works in China concerns the tension between mobilisation (nationalism discourse) (Chen & Wang, 2009) and repression (limiting public expression) (Duara, 1991). Chen & Wang (2020) have examined the recent years' dominant public discourse in China and used Foucault's methods to analyse the relationship between power and resistance in China. They argue that Chinese ideological power is exerted in a dispersive pattern, rather than referring to

a strong centralised power structure. This dispersity entails that the power discourse permeates popular culture and private life. Specifically, the power system and 'positive energy' message of a harmonious society produces self-disciplined subjects who internalise national interests as their own interests and quietly dissolve the tension between resistance and power. Therefore, the following paragraphs will focus on explaining the harmonious society as the context in which power, and thereby resistance, operate by drawing on Foucault's and Chen & Wang (2020)'s research on how the relationship between power and resistance plays out in the context of a harmonious society, hence making these themes central to my own study on hip-hop resistance in China.

Harmonious power is an important concept in Chinese society, which dominates the whole cultural and political system, filtering down from central government to the population at the individual level. The Harmonious Society is recognised as the most effective response to the increasing social injustice and inequality emerging in mainland Chinese society (Wielander, 2011). At the same time, establishing a harmonious society is also perceived as the national goal of the ruling vanguard party (Ma, 2009). As it has been critically suggested by scholars such as Bremmer (2008), the ideological goal of this concept is to achieve a delicate balance between a controlled social environment and complete openness on the other, while ensuring social and economic development. Although the notion of harmony has evolved tremendously in contemporary Chinese culture, its profound roots remain in Confucianism (Wielander, 2011). The purpose of Confucian harmony philosophy is the common welfare that individual good must be realised in the process of obtaining comprehensive good for the whole family, community, and nation (Rarick, 2007). According to the ideology of harmony, individuals should balance their own interests with the interests of society as a whole. Traditional Confucian philosophy maintains that a community must have a fundamental order, man and nature are linked by natural harmony and that the natural order of the society should be represented in human connections. The family is seen as the core social unit, including the relationships of husband-wife, parent-child, older brother-younger brother, and friend-friend (Wielander, 2011). Each pair of relationships in this social system has clearly defined responsibilities. The Confucian notion of human interactions emphasises reciprocity or shared accountability between subordinates and superiors. It cultivates the ultimate virtue, humaneness, or a feeling of connectedness to other people, when it is extended to all human beings. As a result, confidence in mankind's inherent goodness and perfectibility has had significant ramifications for the harmonious society system as a source of empowerment. With regards to power, in a Confucian state, the ruler's primary role is to teach and reform people

(Marsh, 2000). This is best done by moral models and conflict resolution by the emperor and his officials, rather than through legislative control and pression. To promote social harmony, Confucianism places a premium on conflict resolution through mediation over the application of abstract rules defining what is right and wrong.

In modern China, the prominent view of harmonious society as rooted in Confucian philosophy, has been popularised as aiming at reducing inequity and restoring social stability, while also influencing and manipulating people's understanding of the power system and societal values such as resistance and obedience (Li, 2013). In an effort to resolve issues, the harmonious values system also signals the state's readiness to acknowledge the unhappiness created by 'severe conflicts and difficulties' (CCP Central Committee, 2006). For instance, when people experience tangible hardships, harmonious neoliberal values provide an outlet for venting but also encourage people to endure difficulties and overcome them together, along with the entire country. This is a demonstration of how power can play the role of a compassionate paternal state, while requiring the public to possess the highest virtues illustrated by the Confucian ideology. In this contemporary interpretation of Confucianism, today's China power system has identified the utilitarian value of Confucianism to directly target resistance with discipline, as Chen & Wang (2020) describe. Although not formally banned, certain forms of overt and violent resistance may be disregarded as society is content to accept life's positives after everyday struggles and demonstrate gratitude to their parents, community, and, most significantly, the authority of the state. Hence, although the harmonious values and Confucianist beliefs may support a floating and dispersive power structure in China, their subtle combination results in a homogeneous social order that serves the ruling class's interests. Just as the Foucauldian discipline contributes to capitalist society by compelling passive bodies to labour unsteadily for capitalist production, the harmonious values and Confucius's thoughts shape the subjectivities of citizens by instilling patronising virtues to implement the power system based on national interests.

However, it would be naïve to believe that social conflicts can be mediated and resolved solely by Confucian ethics, so to achieve an ideal harmonious society power structures simply dominate the masses. As Foucault holds: 'Where there is power, there is resistance' (Foucault, 1990: 95). Power indeed invites resistance, although power and resistance do not have to confront each other in a dichotomous war of position but may feed each other in a spiral relationship (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019). As also Chen & Wang (2020) noted, although the centre of power in China may be shifting from focusing only on large scale political issues, it

still needs to consider everyday nuisances too. This is because of the creative aspect of resistance, 'the actual art of resistance', in De Certeau's words, becomes an increasingly important part of everyday entertaining life, seemingly apolitical in content, yet carrying subtle resistant messages. Many scholars (Wallis, 2015) have studied this new form of resistance in China and the corresponding shift of power centres. For instance, online culture serves as a depoliticising disguise, infiltrating society, mobilising participation, and partly altering public discourse. Instead of being necessarily regarded as open resistant acts that get widespread attention, this resistant discourse, within the limits imposed by censorship, becomes intertwined with popular culture and enters fandom communities, establishes direct contact with netizens, and vent out resentful feelings.

So far, it is clear that resistance and power are not necessarily dichotomous, but they can co-exist in an entangled, dynamic relationship where society-wide Confucian values blur with individual interests and creative expressions of resistance. It seems that neither Foucault's theory of disciplinary power nor De Certeau's 'anti-disciplinary network' can fully capture the dynamic and re-negotiating nature of the relationship between power and resistance in the Chinese context. As Johansson & Vinthagen (2019) point out, resistance inevitably needs to operate within a specific social context with its own historical heritage, as well as a specific location and/or social space shaped by power. Especially when resistance is innovative, experimental and creative, it needs to be identified in direct conjunction with the power context it operates within. This is something that will become increasingly clear and further analysed in the discussion in chapter five about the conceptualisation of resistance.

3.1.3 Authenticity, race and resistance

This section discusses the notion of authenticity and how it relates to resistance. Authenticity occupies a central role in cultural studies in a broad variety of settings, including music and hip-hop (Speers, 2017; McLeod 1999; Firth 1998). Scholarly research on the conceptualisation of authenticity has taken two main approaches. Some scholars conceive authenticity as an intrinsic property of cultural products, something that assumes the existence of an 'essential(ised), real, actual essence' (Taylor, 1997: 21). On the other hand, another line of thought holds that authenticity is not an inherent property but is a socially agreed upon construct that privileges subjective experiences, identities and interpretation of producers and consumers of cultural products (Moore, 2002; Rubidge, 1996). It is therefore crucial to explore how music produces authenticity and how it is received by audiences.

Rubdige (1996) argued that describing a cultural product as authentic necessarily involves a judgment and, as such, 'authenticity is not a property of, but something we ascribe to a performance' (1996: 219). A natural consequence is that the perception of authenticity needs to be historicised and is a matter of subjective interpretation. The role of subjectivity and identity in defining authenticity is well highlighted by Frith's work. In his essay *Music and identity* (Frith, 1996), Frith denies that social groups first agree on values (including what's authentic and what isn't) and then express those values through cultural production and consumption. Rather, it is the opposite. Social groups identify themselves as social groups through cultural activities and aesthetic judgments. Indeed, Frith also believes that authenticity is not an inherent characteristic of musical creations, instead it has to do with 'the story it is heard to tell' (Frith, 1998:275) and how such stories enable listeners to transcend everyday routines and place themselves in imaginative cultural narratives. In other words, authenticity needs to be drawn from material experiences and analyses of how songs are produced and consumed. Otherwise, the risk is to incur in circular arguments whereby aesthetic *a priori* judgments are used to evaluate the same set of values that underpin the definition of authenticity in the first place. In his study of American folk and pop, this is how Frith put it:

> '[…] without a material analysis of how specific songs have actually been made and used, [the argument] is circular: an aesthetic judgment that folk songs are more 'authentic' than pop songs are the basis for the contrast between means of production (community creation v. commercial exploitation) which is used to explain why folk songs are more authentic than pop songs (Frith, 1981: 161).'

In other words, authenticity is 'ascribed, not inscribed' (Moore, 2002:210) and, using Frith's words, 'making music isn't a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them' (Frith, 1996:111). This conceptualisation is also embraced by Speers in her study of the London hip-hop scene (Speers, 2017), where she emphasises the importance of 'living out' authenticity as a continuous discussion, understanding, negotiation and managing of the tension and struggles faced by hip-hop artists living in London, rather than relying on fixed essentialised categories.

In a similar fashion, Negus (1995) criticised the existence of an implicit idealism that defines abstract concepts of what is commercial and what is creative and authentic. When Negus analyses issues of authenticity through the lens of the commercial versus creative, he emphasises that it is mundane practices and lived experiences that produce the categories of

commercial and creative. He keeps drawing from Frith when he criticises binary conceptualisations of commercial versus authentic and highlights that, from the perspective of participants, these ideas are continuously produced and negotiated in an attempt to make sense of their musical experiences. In fact, Negus offers an evolving concept of authenticity in response to the continuous emergence of new trends, genres and motifs that lead to changes in aesthetic criteria. As he puts it (1995:334):

> '[...] there are completely distinct notions of what is good and terrible, manufactured and authentic, true and false, in rap, rock, soul, disco, world beat, and so on. Struggles are ongoing, both inside genres and between genre hierarchies. Existing artists and producers are always trying to legitimise their creativity in reaction to new creative methods.'

In the context of this research, I side with non-essentialists views of authenticity that privilege the individual experiences of participants in music scenes and how authenticity is produced and 'lived out', whereby the perception and production of music are influenced by listeners' identities and experiences and represent how participants make sense of what is happening to them. Indeed, much of the empirical data and related analysis on authenticity in chapter five shows that fans and performers of Chinese hip-hop draw authenticity from local, mundane experiences, rather than pre-conceived idealised criteria.

The above discussion explains that essentialist and non-essentialist interpretations of music authenticity specifically revolve around the debate of what is real and what is not real in musical creations. In effect, in the context of hip-hop, the discourse around authenticity has also been vigorously debated, which has resulted in abundant scholarly research. Studies of hip-hop authenticity have often been discussed along racial, class, and commercial lines (McLeod, 1999; Armstrong, 2004; Hess, 2005; Harrison, 2008; Hodgman, 2013; Rose, 1994; Sullivan, 2001; Grealy, 2008), whereby the debate on racial authenticity in hip-hop music has been deemed to show tensions in the framework of racial essentialism (Dyson, 2007; Kitwana, 2005). Furthermore, socioeconomic status seems to be as essential in determining authenticity. For instance, working-class rappers who have faced some types of socioeconomic hardship are seen as more credible in hip-hop (Hess, 2005). Besides, the commercialisation of hip-hop music has always been considered a contentious topic between whether artists 'sell-out' or 'keep it real' to their hip-hop albums, which requires consideration of the music industry's broader influence (Bennett, 1999; Arthur, 2006; Huq, 2007). The rest of this section combs

through these arguments and discussions on authenticity in hip-hop and how they relate to resistance.

The archetypical feature defining authenticity in hip-hop is arguably best represented by race. The importance of race and its inextricable link with hip-hop is powerfully articulated by Tricia Rose in one of her most prominent works '*Black noise: rap music and black culture in contemporary America*' (Rose, 1994), which is often endorsed as the book that first legitimised academic studies of hip-hop and considered a strong declaration of hip-hop's essential blackness (Harrison, 2008).

In her book, Rose offers a critical analysis of the relationship between the musical, cultural and societal dimensions of hip-hop in America. Through a historical analysis of the development of hip-hop, she highlights how hip-hop draws themes, messages and emotional power from the oppression that African American communities had to endure in the 70s and 80s. Particular emphasis is placed on issues of oppression perpetuated by racism, class inequality and segregation. As a result of very conservative and overtly racist government policies in America, entire African American communities fell below the poverty line, unemployment increased, and violence thrived. Rap was supposed to be a powerful reflection of these challenging circumstances, 'from this unforgiving social environment, replete with police brutality and high homicide rates, rap was born', as Sullivan (2001:35-36) described it. Hip-hop was born as a means of resistance to institutionalised racism, to give young black people voices to articulate their sufferings and ambitions, to have their territories in the cities, the ghetto, recognised and to criticise the lack of institutional interest in, and overt mistreatment of, African American communities. Through hip-hop, black communities sought to bring racial and social equality into reality. Grealy (2007) identifies Afrocentrism as the conceptual root employed by black Americans to reclaim their realities in a climate that privileged everything white. In Grealy's argument, hip-hop is informed by and grounded in discourses of Afrocentrism that indeed criticise institutionalised racism and oppression and has historically represented a space to protest such realities.

These statements match the original meaning of hip-hop authenticity, which according to Nyawalo (2012: 465), arose during the era of slavery as a means for Africans to fight the physical and ideological models that were forced on them. As Nyawalo (2012) put it, it is the black musicians who blended the standard version of hip-hop music as a means for black people to resist the suffocating sufferings in their lives. In particular, black hip-hop music originated

from a societal background characterised by extreme poverty, violence, heavy drug use, and other forms of criminal activity in urban environments (Ryan, Calhoun, & Wentworth: 121). Hence, the phrase 'keep it real' becomes commonly used in the context of 'talking openly about unwanted or difficult truths about black urban street life' that are 'hard to hear' (Nyawalo, 2013: 461).

It is through these lived experiences of suffering that, traditionally, hip-hop draws authenticity from blackness. However, although Rose positions American hip-hop as a "critical force [that] grows out of the cultural potency that racially segregated conditions foster' (Rose,1994: xiii), she also acknowledges that 'suggest[ing] that rap is a black idiom that prioritizes black culture and that articulates the problems of black urban life does not deny the pleasure and participation of others' (Rose, 1994: 4) and highlights hip-hop's ability to 'resonate with people from vast and diverse backgrounds' (1994: 19). The relative openness of Rose's viewpoints to acknowledge non-black instances of hip-hop has been contrasted by more resolute views that exclude any non-black music expression. For instance, Henderson (1996) describes hip-hop as exclusively and essentially black, denying any possibility for 'White folks' (1996: 323) to produce legitimate hip-hop. Similarly, Allinson (1994) affirms the black nature of hip-hop, which does not leave space for white people to experience the culture. The title of Allinson's essay is quite telling in this sense, '*It's a Black thing: hearing how Whites can't*'. Both Henderson (1996) and Allinson (1994) concur in describing the involvement of whites with hip-hop as a process of corporate consolidation that destroys the spirit of hip-hop and attempts to marketise experiences of Black hardship.

The struggles of black people as a source of legitimacy in hip-hop have also been discussed by McLeod (1999), whose work is often considered foundational due to his attempt to provide a comprehensive typification of authenticity in hip-hop. McLeod moves beyond the sole issue of race and frames the discourse around authenticity into six semantic categories: social-psychological, racial, political-economic, gender-sexual, social locational and cultural, which correspond to categories of staying true to oneself vs following the mainstream, black vs white, underground vs commercial, hard vs soft, the street vs the suburbs and the 'old school' vs the mainstream. These categories reflect his understanding of authenticity as an attempt of hip-hop to preserve its identity from the threat of assimilation with mainstream society. The role of the six categories in defining authenticity in hip-hop is understoof by McLeod as privileging identification with being hard and Black, representing the underground and keeping close to

hip-hop's origins. Opposite qualities of being white and soft, consuming commercial raps in the suburbs are signs of inauthenticity.

In this sense, McLeod work's first emphasised the importance of authenticity in maintaining cultural identity, an aspect that was arguably neglected by previous works on subcultural expression and continues to support an almost exclusive black stance as a key characteristic to build authenticity. This aspect was also articulated in the works of Painter (2006) and Grealy (2007), who discuss the role of the 'black macho' as the source of authenticity, thus highlighting both the racial and gendered roots of authenticity in hip-hop. However, McLeod typification arguably suffers from being strongly US-centric as well as rather rigid in its dichotomous definition of semantic categories. In addition, his interpretation is only invoked discursively, thereby missing out on how authenticity is enacted in practice. Although McLeod acknowledged the 'floating signifier' (1999: 139) nature of authenticity, his semantic dimensions remain fixed and are arguably limited by his interviewees being all black male hip-hop musicians. In response to these shortcomings, Harkness (2012)' research on the Chicago underground scene widened the scope and definition of authenticity. In his ethnographic account of the Chicago underground hip-hop scene, Harkness concurred in articulating the importance of blackness in constructing hip-hop authenticity, given that participants often remarked on the link between hip-hop and blackness, racial discrimination and the history of slavery. However, his works also widens and contextualises authenticity to a much broader level than McLeod.

In fact, Harkness recognised the global spread that hip-hop has experienced, and how this spread has necessarily meant that ideas of authenticity have had to evolve and re-adapt. Some of the ways has adapted to various countries outside the USA are discussed in section 1.2. In the context of authenticity in this section, while Harkness' work recognised the racial roots of hip-hop, his main contribution shows that, when it comes to the contemporary hip-hop scene, the concept of authenticity has steadily evolved from a racial descriptor into a more complex and malleable template that includes elements such as being underground, being true to oneself, unique, coming from the street and being skilful (Harkness, 2012). To this end, Harkness proposed the concept of 'situational authenticity' (Harkness, 2012: 284), whereby the rhetoric of authenticity serves to emphasise and de-emphasise elements of the artist's identity, rather than fixed categories like black and male. The concept of situational authenticity helps make sense of how hip-hop outsiders, such as whites, females, and people from the suburbs, create authenticity in the male- and black-dominated Chicago hip-hop scene. Based on participants'

observation and in-depth interviews with 135 musicians from different racial pools, Harkness concluded that authenticity is indeed situational. Situational authenticity suggests that interpretative categories, such as skills, are relied upon when outsiders try to build authenticity, rather than the fixed categories of race or gender. As Harkness elaborated, 'situational authenticity occurs when a person makes a claim to 'realness' that emphasizes certain categories within the normative cluster of conditions that govern authenticity, while downplaying others' (Harkness, 2012: 288). For instance, a white suburb male emphasises skills and being true to oneself and downplay the roles of race and location, thus shifting emphasis among the normative conditions that define authenticity. Harkness' concept builds on Grazian's differential levels of authenticity in the blues scene (Grazian, 2004) and is also similar in nature to Maxwell's study of Australian rappers, who also downplayed the role of the race when defining authenticity, in favour of truthfulness to oneself (Maxwell, 2003).

Based on this argument, in light of the reduced emphasis on the standard of black hip-hop authenticity, scholars have also been focusing on non-black hip-hop artists by attempting to uncover how they can be acknowledged as true hip hoppers and claim authenticity (Rodriquez, 2006). For instance, Laidlaw (2011)'s research concerns the acceptability of white rappers and how they attempt to construct authenticity by relying on lyrical content and delivery, the consistency of their rappers' persona, as well as their job and everyday life outside of the scene. White hip-hop musicians have embraced a new concept of authenticity in which being genuine to oneself, and your lived experiences may substitute ideas of black hip-hop authenticity. As Armstrong (2004) contends, successful white hip-hop artist Eminem, establishes his authenticity by demonstrating irreverence and crudeness, while also legitimising himself as white rapper by rejecting gangsta rap. However, to make white rappers succeed in being recognised as authentic, Armstrong (2004) continued that rappers may still use their white bottom class upbringing and define themselves as underdogs. Many viewpoints of Armstrong (2004) also highlight the debates over white involvement in hip-hop, as well as the manufactured and deliberate nature of racial authenticity in modern culture. Similarly, Grealy (2008) studied how Eminem claims authenticity as a white rapper in a black-dominated and rooted culture. Grealy argued that, though it is undeniable that hip-hop was born black in spirit, it has always existed within a white-dominated society. It is this broader context that has provided white artists like Eminem the possibility of hybridising their creation by drawing from both sides of the colonial relation. Eminem has access to his privileged position as a white male, though this implies a lower position in the scale of authenticity. To reclaim authenticity, Eminem successfully utilises class discourse to find a common ground between Black

Americans and White Americans who have also grown disenchanted with the promises of capitalism. It could be argued that this strategy represents a solid use of Harkness' situational authenticity, whereby Eminem emphasises class and socioeconomic background as a source of authenticity, while de-emphasising race.

Based on Armstrong's (2004) research, other scholars (Archer, Hollingworth & Halsall, 2007; Hollingworth & Williams, 2009; Collins, 2014) have also stressed that non-black hip-hop musicians who have experienced some form of social struggle, are more credible than those who make 'conscious' or political hip-hop that represented black rappers' identity. Hence, during the 2000s in the US, hip-hop was led by white artists such as Eminem who built their hip-hop legitimacy and authenticity via their experiences of social confrontation, hardship and marginalisation. Specifically, legitimacy and authenticity may arise from 'genre components that arose from a particular background of inner-city life marked by great poverty, violence, excessive drug use, and other forms of criminality' (Ryan, Calhoun, and Wentworth: 1996). Also, the usage of the underclass to exhibit authenticity uncovers the debate concerning rap's racial essentialism versus its class-based heterogeneity. That is, middle-class blacks decry rap as a mistaken depiction of black life, one that is premised on notions of blackness as intensely deviant (Neal, 1997). Therefore, there is much debate about rappers' ethnicity and how this impacts hip-hop authenticity, particularly when it comes to whether rappers are creating authentic identities for commercial gain.

Similar de-emphasis on the fixed categories of race and socio-cultural background was also observed in Solomon's (2005) study of the Turkish underground hip-hop scene in Istanbul. In his case study, authenticity does not rely on race due to the ethnic homogeneity and the absence of black people in the Turkish scene. More interestingly, authenticity is not built upon socio-economic background. Instead, authenticity is derived by the process of localisation of hip-hop and drawing spatial boundaries between different parts of Istanbul, as well as by highlighting the authenticity of non-commercial production compared to the mainstream success of certain hip-hop artists. Indeed, when it comes to the debate on hip-hop authenticity, commercialisation is another important factor perceived as impacting the authenticity of hip-hop. Kitwana (2005:13) defined commercialised hip-hop as mainstream hip-hop that is packaged, often distorted, and then sold by American companies, which implies the degradation of previously pure culture or music. In contrast, underground hip-hop is typically associated with independent artists who may or may not sign with labels, but are outside the general commercial canon, and often characterised by socially conscious, positive, or anti-commercial

lyrics (Keyes, 2004). On the one hand, a commercialised popular rap may attract numerous fans so that artist sell themselves to the music industry in order to ‘make it’. On the other hand, overexposure of a rap album might destroy the artists' reputation in the hip-hop scene. Kitwana (2005: XIII) attributes the blame to mass media and telecommunications industries for the commercialisation of hip-hop and its potential threat to authenticity, so that hip hop becomes ‘for sale to all buyers’. However, scholars such as Dyson (2007) consider that the commercialisation of hip-hop may actually start a new phase of growth rather than destroying originality, as hip-hop may reform itself in the face of mainstream assimilation. Therefore, there's a clear debate here about whether the commercialization of hip-hop undermines its authenticity.

In response to this debate, Templeton (2006) considered that this conflict between underground and mainstream is characterised by an unwillingness to acknowledge the complete commodification of cultural practices. Though, as Krims (2000) explained, this unwillingness depends on what one means by resistance and authenticity, as the rap mainstream music industry can also open a space for freedom and pleasure beyond the definition of authenticity. Based on this, Huq (2007) makes an important point that it is unhelpful to see commercialisation as bad and ‘pure’ in a subculture as automatically good, because this is a false dichotomy. As Huq (2007: 48) explained, ‘authentic hip-hop music pieces are the ones that do not often tout by their fans’. Hence, here the significance of a rappers’ persona is deemed as more important when constructing authenticity, beyond the underground or mainstream reach of their music creations. Hess’ (2005) research also investigated the identities and resistance of hip-hop persona artists. As he argued, hip-hop authenticity is a commercial value that grew in importance as the music gained a substantial market share of commercial radio. This is how rapper and actor Ice Cube claimed that rappers are from the street but selling the rap albums to non-street audience (Hess, 2005: 298). Such debates seem to stress the divergence over the credibility of underground and commercial hip-hop. Here, a consistent performance identity seems to be crucial to credibility, that is, whether rappers' commercial image and underground hip-hop attitudes are aligned. Hess (2005: 306) describes such credibility and conflict as ‘rap masks’, that hip-hop artists blur, obfuscate or split their identities in order to subvert often conflicting standards of authenticity and marketability.

Overall, the works above emphasise the key role of race, perhaps above other attributes, in defining the authenticity of hip-hop and how the debate on racial authenticity has been further fuelled by the global spread of hip-hop. In light of the diversified forms of hip-hop, many

scholars have called for more malleable and broader definitions of authenticity that consider different socio-cultural contexts. Most of these works concur is defining authenticity as actions, instead of a static prescribed set of conditions to be satisfied. Kruse (2018) called for such a definition to embrace a variety of practices that challenge archetypical definitions by prioritising a glocalised interpretation of hip-hop authenticity that 'reveals the complicated give-and-take between global and local, and further illustrates the notion that there is no singular version of authenticity in hip-hop' (Kruse, 2018: 156). As such, Kruse advocates for the use of creative categories instead of interpretive elements, thus highlighting how universal and static conceptualisation of hip-hop authenticity are not 'adopted' but 'adapted' (Kruse, 2018:155). See section 1.2 for a more detailed discussion of key debates around globalisation and hip-hop.

Therefore, the spread and reach of hip-hop around the globe suggest that the link between ethnicity and hip-hop is not as evident as it was in the early days of hip-hop in the New York ghetto. This view is supported by several studies that examined how hip-hop is adapted to a variety of cultural contexts (Mitchell, 2001; Charry, 2012; Condry, 2006; Saunders, 2015; Solomon, 2005; Zhao, 2020). For instance, Condry's study of hip-hop in Japan sets out to understand how Japanese hip-hop can legitimise itself given the lack of cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic roots with African American culture. He concluded that 'Japanese hip-hop cannot be explained in terms of racial dynamics' (2006: 49) and calls for a widening view of hip-hop as a culture, a way of life or a lifestyle that speaks more about youth issues and hierarchies of class and gender, rather than focussing exclusively on the sufferings of Black Americans. Similarly, the case of Eminem has also weakened the connection between hip-hop and black rebelliousness as discussed above based on Armstrong's (2004) and Grealy's (2007) analysis. Hip-hop in China, as an imported cultural form, is no exception. The racial discourse in Chinese hip-hop is necessarily downplayed, and the emphasis on blackness in defining authenticity is not directly applicable, given the racial uniformity end the lack of common sufferings and hardship of Black American musicians, along the lines of Condry's study of Japanese hip-hop.

Certainly, post 80s Chinese youth have had their own personal and social struggles and there exist elements of cultural unitedness in Afro-Asian cultures that aim 'to bring truth, justice, and light to their ancient history of cooperation, sacrifice, and work' against the 'imperialist powers' (Ho & Mullen, 2008: 2). However, the challenges are vastly different from the issues of racial segregation, discriminatory policies and systematic racism endured by Black

Americans that led to the birth of hip-hop. Indeed, the case of Chinese hip-hop further contributes to weaking the link with the archetypical features of hip-hop. As De Kloet argued, Chinese hip-hop undermines the US-centrism of hip-hop and 'challenges the assumed link between hip-hop culture and the lower classes, just as the link between ethnicity and hip-hop is disrupted in a Chinese context' (De Kloet, 2010: 71).

As such, hip-hop in China has had to find its own ways to claim legitimacy and express authenticity. Cheuk (2021) argues that one of the ways Chinese hip-hop can draw authenticity relies on the distinction from the mainstream by acquiring and displaying subcultural capital, in the form of rapping skills, look and knowledge of the origins of hip-hop. This argument is reminiscent of what De Kloet (2010) refers to as the mythology of authenticity derived from early Chinese rock and shares the same traits of authenticity claimed by other subcultures such as club culture and goth subculture in the UK (Thornton, 1996; Hodkinson, 2002). This form of capital is inherited based on one's skills, activities and is based on merit, rather than deriving from cultural or ethnic roots. Cheuk believed that Chinese hip-hop artists rely on 'variations of authenticity through the practice of competitive collaborations between local and non-local artists' (2021: 98), thus highlighting the role of skills and competitiveness in earning authenticity, over racial discourses.

As a result, in the Chinese hip-hop scene, the interpretation of the concept of authenticity is closer to the 'apolitical' and 'underground' rap characteristics of white hip-hop artists (Armstrong, 2004), in that the notion of authenticity is often associated with its nature of resistance to commercialisation, the artists' skills and adherence to one's experiences, as well as varying according to regional culture. For instance, Zhang (2019) critically analysed the sudden popularity of hip-hop in China and how it caused a significant contradiction when trying to promote the commercialization and competition principle of hip-hop in an online entertainment setting. In particular, Zhang (2019) contributed to the debate by discussing the role of online media in providing Chinese hip-hop with a way to construct authenticity outside the mainstream media. In fact, commercially packaged shows are deemed as inauthentic cultural reproduction. Hip-hop reality shows seem to sell authenticity as a unique cultural product, which has greatly sacrificed originality for mainstream attraction. Zou (2019) points out another interesting interpretation of authenticity in hip-hop by analysing the complex interplay between the artist's creativity and the limits imposed by governmental censorship. By analysing nationalistic-themed raps, Zou concludes that the intervention of government cultural control and artists' self-censorship may be perceived as inauthentic by audiences.

Instead, some songs try to ably navigate the boundaries imposed by censorship by injecting elements of critique of social or environmental issues, signalling attempts to confer authenticity by grounding musical creations into real and current socio-economic issues. Based on these debates about the authenticity of Chinese hip-hop that emerged in 2019, Zhao & Lin (2020) further reviewed how the online music show The Rap of China is heavily based on the popular Korean rap competition 'Show Me the Money', which takes advantage of the huge fame of famous Chinese artists and micro-celebrities who participate in these reality shows, hence, again, sacrificing authenticity for fame and acceptance in the mainstream. In this process, media companies have prioritised commercial and State interests over an authentic representation of hip-hop's origins and authentic signifiers. However, Zhang (2019) continues to argue how fervid online activities also aim at creating oppositional readings of the mainstream version of hip-hop culture by openly calling out on social media instances of 'fake' authenticity in the mainstream media, thus allowing to drive authentic hip-hop culture despite the ongoing attempt at commodification and appropriation by the mainstream media. Zou (2019) points out another interesting interpretation of authenticity in hip-hop by analysing the complex interplay between the artist's creativity and the limits imposed by governmental censorship. By analysing nationalistic-themed raps, Zou (2019) concludes that the intervention of government cultural control and artists' self-censorship may be perceived as inauthentic by audiences. Instead, some songs try to ably navigate the boundaries imposed by censorship by injecting elements of critique of social or environmental issues, signalling attempts to confer authenticity by grounding musical creations into real and current socio-economic issues. Based on these debates about the authenticity of Chinese hip-hop that emerged in 2019, Zhao and Lin (2020) argue that Chinese rappers such as Gai and PG One built the authentic identity by engaging with the adoption or rejection of global and local cultural codes in their performance. Their strategies rely on combining allusions to Chinese traditional literature sang in local dialects with modern, imported trap musical styles and tempos and themes of loyalty, struggle and compromise. Such insertion of Chinese traditional elements earns the rapper's credibility, elicits sentiments of pride and belonging in the audience, and legitimises the Chineseness of the performance.

Another viewpoint on authenticity in Chinese hip-hop is offered by Chen, Tong, & Zhang (2021: 5), who believe that authenticity in Chinese hip-hop is built around unorthodox styles and it "often hovers between disturbing expressions and social norms". Another important feature of being authentic in Chinese hip-hop is brotherhood in hip-hop community. By constantly reiterating the close relationship between brotherhood and expressing how follower

are united as a marginalised subcultural group, Chinese rappers provide an outlet for angry people to vent their violent impulses, provides an opportunity for the grass-roots class to listen to their voices, and triggering a sense of belonging (Chen, Tong, & Zhang, 2021: 5). Hence, Chinese hip-hop singers regard brotherhood as the most real emotion and regard it as a way to resist the outside world. Interestingly, Chen, Tong & Zhang's study of Triple H, one of the most famous hip-hop clubs in China founded in 2011, also highlights how the concept of brotherhood and the instances of authenticity that derive from it, transcend the underground and mainstream divide. Although Triple H was divided by internal quarrels following PG One's scandal, brotherhood eventually prevailed, and the group came back together. Thus, according to Chen, Tong and Zhang's argument, rappers can still support each other in the pursuit of their dreams, be it in the mainstream or the underground. In their words, the expansion of Chinese hip-hop in the mainstream represent a 'multidimensional cultural flow into other spaces, supporting diverse types of authenticity in the music business, which helps to the restoration of brotherhood inside and beyond the underground' (2021:7). Finally, the notion of authenticity in the Chinese context is also related to the practice of local rappers resisting language practices and rules to make them look authentic to local audiences. In this regard, Wang (2012) explored the concept of 'unqualified rappers', which refers to rappers who uses language inappropriately and are therefore perceived as inauthentic. As Wang (2012) indicated, the insertion of English in Chinese raps gives local audiences unrealistic and unfamiliar feeling, since it may stress the global nature of English as a language and the fact that hip-hop music is believed to have originated in English. Instead, in order to build local authenticity, hip-hop artists should employ strategies based on local dialects so to involve local audiences and, in turn, claiming authenticity.

Overall, the problematic, racialised, denouncing archetypical features of hip-hop are, if not erased, significantly deemphasised in Chinese hip-hop and replaced by the debate over mainstream versus underground performance, the mundanity of the performance and, as this research will show, the search for pleasure or for pressure release valves. An important consequence of this adaptation is, as Fung (2008) believed, that hip-hop loses its rebellious and subversive potential, since "apolitical hip-hop music actually functions to soothe social upheaval and maintain the status quo' (2008: 97). This is quite a stark contrast with the invigorating strength that hip-hop had at its birth, as it will be further dissected in chapter five.

3.2 Sociological taste and its consumption

The sociological study of taste has long been recognised as a significant aspect in the realms of culture, music, film, and daily consumption (Holbrook & Addis, 2007). Music taste is also an important aspect of sociological research, which is thoroughly analysed in chapter six, while the purpose of this section is to provide theoretical guidance to present key concepts of taste distinction, music and cool consumption. Firstly, this section reviews two key scholarly lines in the study of the taste. On the one hand, traditional Bourdieusian theories of cultural distinctions and Peterson's concept of the cultural omnivore focus on unravelling the connections between musical taste and sociocultural standing. On the other hand, a complementary perspective on taste and music consumption is taken by DeNora, whose research emphasises how music is used as a resource in daily life and how it contributes to shaping the self. Following this, the chapter explores how the everyday term 'cool' has been defined historically in subcultural settings as a way of qualifying certain cultural objects and practices, as well as how the concept of 'cool' has evolved to permeate the modern era of consumerism and fashion choice that are inextricably linked in the contemporary hip-hop scene.

3.2.1 Two argumentation lines on sociological taste and music consumption

Sociological research on music and taste has a long historical tradition and it continues to flourish with both theoretical and empirical accounts. Scholarly research typically focusses on lively discussion on the connections between music taste and social structures (Bourdieu,1984; Peterson & Kern, 1996) and the music's social effects and 'power' in everyday life (DeNora, 1999; 2000). Hence, this section reviews these two argumentation lines for the study of sociological taste in the field of music. It begins by reviewing the traditional Bourdieusian school of taste (Bourdieu,1984) in opposition to contemporary accounts of taste distributions that point out the weakening of cultural boundaries (Peterson & Kern, 1996), thus presenting two perspectives on the relationship between music taste and social structures. The section then moves on to discussing the challenges associated with applying these theoretical frameworks to the study of Chinese hip-hop, owing to its historical trajectory and the problematic history of the highbrow-lowbrow divide in Chinese culture. A further challenge is presented by the focus of this thesis on one music genre and the lack of collected empirical data on respondents' social belonging and overall repertoire of preferences. In this sense, the first section articulates the limitation of this thesis in providing insight into the link between musical taste and social structure in the case of Chinese hip-hop.

The second section reviews Ollivier's (2008) notion of openness to cultural diversity, which is useful to frame the diverse and broad taste patterns displayed by respondents in this study, albeit within the same musical genre of hip-hop. This debate revolves around the discursive connections between the extent to which people's taste is open or closed and how openness can be conceptualised as a form of cultural capital. This section also discusses a complementary viewpoint on music consumption that, instead of social belonging and hierarchies, emphasises the power of music in daily life based on DeNora's concepts of 'music in action' and technology of the self (DeNora, 1999; 2000). These concepts are useful to investigate the power of music in shaping the self as mediated by emotional engagement with the music and the values and meanings that people attach to music consumption.

One of the most historically influential research on the study of taste is Bourdieu's (1984) *Distinction*. The key idea is that strong distinguish in taste, labelled as highbrow and lowbrow, are tightly linked with differences in social classes, the elite and the masses, the privileged and the underprivileged. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 14–15) argued, the discrepancies between taste preferences repeat the structure of entitlement and the reproduction of social inequality. In other words, individuals are stratified not just by their economic capital, but also by their social and cultural capital. The highbrow taste of the elites, according to Bourdieu, is a sort of symbolic violence that is employed to differentiate and perpetuate the socially powerful in society. As a consequence, one's sense of taste is inextricably linked to one's social status (Bourdieu, 1984).

However, due to the growth of popular culture in Europe, notions of the cultural omnivore and cosmopolitanism (Peterson, 1992; Peterson & Kern, 1996) began questioning Bourdieu's views about cultural elitism of the privileged, and, as such, that cultural consumption is necessarily strongly connected to social stratification and inequality. Although these theses still assume a sense of structural homology between social stratification and taste distribution, empirical findings began to show that cultural elites are more open to forms of popular culture and more willing to cross traditional highbrow-lowbrow cultural boundaries (Peterson & Kern, 1996). The degradation of high art and the rising of popular culture indeed offer a challenge to Bourdieu's historical account of the time, which is getting more out-of-date as popular culture gains prominence. Traditional high culture is no longer exclusive, and cultural eclecticism is growing in recent decades. Following this research, a series of works ensued and reinforced the validity of the cultural omnivore hypothesis in Europe, boosting it to the rank of being a generally accepted explanation of taste distribution in contemporary society (Sintas & Alvarez,

2002; Van Eijck & Knulst, 2005; Coulangeon & Lemel, 2007). As Ollivier (2008) argued, the elites' willingness to consume both highbrow and lowbrow culture is due to the disintegration of cultural borders, which may be explained by the elites' increased tolerance and openness to different cultures.

However, the omnivore thesis has not escaped criticism. One of the key critiques often revolves around the challenges associated with defining the highbrow-lowbrow culture divide (Brisson, 2019; Nault, Baumann, Childress & Rawlings, 2021). Many works take for granted traditional categorisations of cultural products in highbrow and lowbrow tiers. However, a 'traditional' classification based on common knowledge risks to be outdated and is necessarily tied to the cultural context and time of the research. In addition, most classifications rely on endogenous measures of cultural hierarchies, whereby highbrow culture is defined as the culture consumed by high-status people. The circularity of the argument is evident here, given that an *a priori* assumption is made to establish the legitimacy of cultural products, which may also make the omnivore hypothesis non-falsifiable (Robette and Roueff, 2014; Nault, Baumann, Childress & Rawlings, 2021). These issues are even more relevant to the Chinese case for at least two reasons. Firstly, the vast majority of literature and debate on music taste is based on West-centric assumptions about the nature of social structures, definitions of legitimate culture as well as social and educational backgrounds. Secondly, the definition of legitimate, or highbrow culture, has had a challenging history in China, as discussed below.

In an eastern cultural context such as China, there are significant subtle differences that make it difficult to determine the extent to which theories of cultural distinctiveness developed in Western contexts, such as the cultural omnivores account and Bourdieu theses, are applicable (Li, 2021). Legitimate culture, according to Bourdieu (Lamont & Lareau, 1988: 157), was defined as the traditional canon of Western classical and opera music. However, legitimate culture in China has had a far more problematic history, since the canon has changed multiple times over the country's history (Li, 2020). Initially, high culture played an important role in the Qing dynasty, when high art flourished in the form of painting, sculpture, poetry, opera, and porcelain making (Mackerras, 1973). The Western classical cultural standards initially entered China in the early nineteenth century, and it returned during the Reform and Opening in the 70s, carrying its significant prestige as the influential Western globally acceptable culture (Hayhoe, 2004). Nonetheless, under Mao's communism, the West's cultural patterns were criticised as bourgeois taste and even traditional high culture was particularly impacted by the Cultural Revolution during Mao era, which has blurred the concept of highbrow culture in

China (Jameson, Kang & Zaifu,1993). Therefore, the definition of legitimate culture in China and the position of cultural distinction appears to be unstable and changeable. When discussing hip-hop subculture as an imported trend from the West, the same consideration should be applied, so that its traditional sharp distinction left over from history must be considered, as well as the cultural omnivore thesis typical of contemporary, modern and globalised society. The subcultural scene in China is also unlike that in the West (Li, 2020; Li, 2021). After the Reform and Opening, subcultures from outside Mainland China gained massive popularity (see chapter two about the history of Chinese hip-hop). Another significant distinction between China and many Western countries is the speed at which the average Chinese's music and cultural taste has evolved, while social inequality behind taste still exists (Li, 2020).

Another critique to the study of sociological taste through the omnivore lens is that most accounts of the omnivore rely on measures of genre preferences, but do not account for differences within a certain genre. Many scholars have raised concerns about the conclusions that can be drawn from analysing preferences across genres and advocated for more fine-grained analyses that shift the focus on specific works and practices (Holt, 1998; Nault, Baumann, Childress & Rawlings 2021; Warde and Gayo-Cal, 2009; Johnston and Baumann, 2007). This was also Bennett's preferred approach in his comprehensive *Class, Culture, Distinction* (Bennett et al., 2009), where drawing from Holt (1998)'s critique of taste research he argues that 'it is necessary not just to ask about genres of music, but about specific works and practices of consumption, since we need to know exactly which ones, or which combinations, serve as markers of taste' (Bennett et al., 2009: 77-78). The important issue here is that, although there exist hierarchies of consecration across genres, taste studies must also consider within-genre variations. As Brisson (2019: 4) puts it, 'mobilising a limited range of musical genres prevents one from analysing the spectrum of tastes and distastes within a particular genre family'. In fact, as much as there exists cultural hierarchies across genres, it should not be excluded that different levels of cultural legitimacy may exist within each genre. As Nault, Baumann, Childress & Rawlings (2021: 721) echo, 'measures of genres consumed or preferred may be imprecise, or masking status distinctions in musical tastes that occur within genres rather than only across genres'.

In this thesis, rather than adjudicating between the applicability of Bourdieu's theories and that of the omnivorous consumer, I focus on the definition of within-genre subtle taste distinctions. These subtleties were also pointed out in some relevant literature (Hoyer & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012; Prinz, 2007), where differences in taste can also create different levels of aesthetic

standards among omnivores. Peterson himself, in some of his latest works, advocated for a shift of perspective, whereby emphasis should be placed also on 'horizontal' measures of taste that may be detected in an individual's cultural repertoire on either highbrow or lowbrow elements (Peterson and Rossman, 2008), rather than necessarily requiring crossing the highbrow-lowbrow divide. This phenomenon was framed by Schmutz, Van Venrooij, Janssen & Verboord (2010: 410) within a 'set of aesthetic criteria' that guide music choices. In this respect, I side with the argument that sets of aesthetic standards are useful to make sense of a relatively 'open' and variegated aesthetic system in China, when omnivore consumers are confronted with different types of hip-hop culture, but may have subtle preferences, nevertheless. For instance, omnivore consumers might set aesthetic criteria that emphasises functional, emotional and experiential ways of evaluating popular music (Bielby & Bielby, 2004). Alternatively, omnivores can judge a type of music more as a serious form, which demands the appreciators to develop deep knowledge and distance themselves from daily life (Regelski, 2006).

Thus, given this thesis' explicit focus on one genre and on studying taste exclusively within hip-hop, it is important to emphasise that, although some of the works above suggest the importance of withing-genre studies, the validity of the findings is limited to the specific domain of Chinese hip-hop. As such the findings and discussion in this thesis do not allow to make wider inferences on society-wide taste patterns and stratification models. For this reason, the analysis in chapter six employs the term 'Chinese hip-hop omnivore' to describe characteristics of omnivorousness, when they are detected, while simultaneously alluding to the existence of omnivorousness within one genre, Chinese hip-hop.

Another way to respond to the increasing polarisation in the debate about omnivorousness, and to better frame the findings in chapter 6, is to invoke research such as Ollivier's (2008), who debated on how to accommodate and account for diversity in leisure and cultural consumption. Ollivier's narrative focused on the idea of openness to cultural diversity and is based on positive connotations of terms such as diverse, open, mixed, fluid, eclectic, global and cosmopolitan as opposed to single, homogeneous, local, static, and closed. Ollivier's merit is to focus the discussion on the omnivore to the intrinsic cultural value of omnivorousness and to emphasise the purported tolerance of individuals (Alexander and Smith, 1993) in classifying and evaluate people, products and practices. The capacity to be open, fluid, eclectic or cosmopolitan is increasingly presented by its scholarly proponents as a standard for all aspects of cultural and

social life that eventually may filter down to personal musical taste practices and preferences (Fridman and Ollivier, 2004).

In the current wave of cultural globalisation, as a new standard of distinction and evaluation, openness to diversity has given rise to various processes of cultural acceptance and hybridisation, as individuals and groups seek to legitimise their attributes and practices according to the criteria of openness to cultural diversity within the global flow of culture. Indeed, the case of Chinese hip-hop as an imported cultural form is exemplary in demonstrating how a global cultural product has permeated China (see section 1.2 on globalisation for a more detailed discussion). Thus, in the context of taste, Ollivier and Fridman (2002) offered a few interesting points to frame the phenomenon of the cultural omnivore following the work of Peterson (1992) and others (Bryson, 1996; Erickson, 1996, Coulangeon, 2003). Ollivier and Fridman (2002) argued that the praise of diverse and eclectic preferences is indicative of the formation of a new type of legitimate culture, which imposes new standards for identifying what is good and undesirable in cultural acquisition. Instead of being based on preferences for a small number of high-status cultural items, the new legitimate culture places a premium on knowledge of, and interests for, a diverse range of multicultural objects and behaviours (Bryson, 1996), which include high 'traditional' culture but is not necessarily restricted to it. Hence, this logic partly detaches the taste discussion from social structures, as it privileges multiculturality and increased tolerance displayed by individuals over the rigidity of social stratifications.

The cultural omnivore as advocated by Ollivier and Fridman (2002) is part of a larger discursive configuration that includes terms such as diverse, open, eclectic, global, cosmopolitan, enlightened, and desirable; so that terms such as unitary, local, closed upon itself, regressive, and undesirable assume negative meanings and are symptomatic of illegitimate discourses. Instead of classifying cultural consumers' taste into highbrow and lowbrow, Ollivier and Fridman (2002) considered that openness to diversity constitutes a new type of cultural capital in the form of a set of cultural attitudes widely considered as desirable. In the current debates about globalisation and cultural flows, groups occupying a privileged position in a given cultural field, such as music, may often find themselves in a better position to define their own cultural production and consumption practises as open, eclectic, and global, while the culture of disadvantaged groups may be defined as regressive, closed, and local. Put differently by Bryson (1996), in the setting of increasing fluidity of cultural borders and hierarchies, individuals with extensive cultural resources are more likely to exhibit visible tolerance to variety. In a world where social relations are increasingly described in terms of

fluid identities and loose social networks, the distinctions between open and closed, as well as diverse and unitary, offer new ways of classifying and evaluating people and things that avoid the old hierarchies of class cultures, of highbrow vs lowbrow.

This section also reviews a more micro-approach to evaluate the relationship between music, individuals and society by discussing DeNora's works (1999;2000). Tia DeNora (1999;2000) takes an approach that focuses on the power of music in shaping the self and personal music experiences. In her book *Music in Everyday Life*, instead of addressing issues of music stratification in relation to societal hierarchies, she conceptualises the interactions and meanings attached to and deriving from music within aspects of everyday life. She starts by departing from the 'production of culture' approach (Peterson, 1976; Coser, 1978), which detaches styles of art from styles of social beings and patterns of perceptions. At its earliest, this conception of socio-musical analysis was what Bennett Berger (1995) described as 'culturology', usually devoted to studying the 'the work itself'. According to this framework, the semiotic force of music can be decoded and used to predict how a certain musical product will work in real life, for instance which emotions it will arise and which social circumstances it may be used in. However, DeNora argues that this approach has resulted in music's social effects being underestimated because it fails to 'specify how the social comes to be inscribed in the musical' (2000: 3). In addition, she is concerned that '[the] analyst's task may be confined to the consideration of aesthetic forms; music users' hardly need to be considered" (DeNora, 2000: 22), thus signalling a neglect of music listeners, who are, however, the main social actors that use and interact with music on a daily basis.

In response to these shortcomings, DeNora draws from extensive ethnographic research in the US and the UK to explore a wide range of topics relevant to sociological inquiries, including the construction of the self, the embodiment of music practises and the power of music in shaping daily activities (DeNora, 1999; 2000). In her work, significant attention is devoted to music 'in action' in order to highlight how music functions in social processes and how people put music into action in given social spaces and temporal contexts. The subsequent history of this perspective arguably represents a great contribution from music sociology to the understanding of music culture, which has also later influenced music psychology (Sloboda & O'neill, 2001; Clarke, Dibben & Pitts, 2010), as it provides concepts and descriptions of how aesthetic materials acquire social value in and through their contexts of daily experience. In *Music in Everyday Life*, DeNora called on the semiotic power of music to examine the listening and social activities of music agents and relocate the aesthetic bases of social life at the heart

of sociology's paradigm. In this process, music becomes a powerful referent to investigate and make sense of non-musical phenomena, such as social context, identity, mood, and energy levels, that may otherwise get neglected. In this sense, music is 'taking the lead in the world-clarification, world-building process of meaning-making' (DeNora, 2000:44). This is the purpose of DeNora's (2000) writing: to understand how music provides various resources for the constitution of the human subject, the existence of social life, sensations, movements and behaviours. The influence of Frith is clear here, given that *Music and Identity* (Frith, 1996) also promoted the importance of (popular) music in shaping social group and identities. As he put it: 'the issue is not how a particular piece of music or a performance reflects the people, but how it produces them' (Frith, 1996: 109)

Another important insight provided by DeNora's work is the conception of music as a technology of the self, in that it becomes implicated in the self-generation of social agency and how this generation may be viewed as it happens, namely 'in action' (2000:47). Music consumption is conceptualised as a highly reflexive activity that bridges the cultural material and the constitution/construction of the self and identity. By focusing on intimate musical practices, music audiences play a role as aesthetic agents. According to DeNora, music has two functions in terms of self-technology: firstly, it reconfigures the self to participate in various types of social activity by changing sentiments. Second, it establishes self-identity. People develop the self through everyday musical practise by selecting music that meets their interests, as well as daily and emotional needs. In this respect, music reflects personal preferences and tastes. DeNora drew her arguments from statements from her fieldwork like 'music helps me', 'music can inspire you, bring understanding', 'If I need to really settle down and just like relax or something I'll put on slow music', and in general, from a 'vocabulary of using music to achieve what you 'need' [which] is a common discourse of the self' (DeNora, 2000: 50). These statements suggest that music becomes a form of self-care, and that music is consumed as a representation of where listeners may wish to be, either emotionally or physically. In this sense, music possesses transformative powers to shape the self and provides listeners with opportunities to engage in self-conscious articulation work. Such an approach orbits around action-as-practice, which highlights the music's effect and power in shaping not only the self, but also the ways in which the self-interacts with society. This is widely discussed in her works about the role of music in maintaining social relationships, the use of music in the public space, the political power of music, the importance of music in creating ambience and its use in commercial and organisational settings, among other examples (DeNora, 2000).

Overall, DeNora's merit is to emphasise the importance of music in everyday life and the role in shaping the self, instead of necessarily seeking connections between musical tastes and social standing. Not that the latter connection does not matter, given how extensively it has been a subject of sociological enquiry. However, exploring the meanings that listeners attach to music, how identities are shaped, and how music is actually used as a resource in daily life is equally worth of investigation, as DeNora's work compellingly supports. The theories reviewed here will be useful in chapter six, where I mainly discuss the Chinese hip-hop audience's aesthetic preferences, how their musical choices show breadth of taste and how their choices are linked to their daily life experiences, moods and circumstances.

3.2.2 Consuming cool in subcultural scenes

It should be noted that taste, in its broader sense, does not only signal taste preference, but also taste exclusion (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu's work has also indeed been placed in the context of subcultural research, such as in Sarah Thornton's (1996) work on young men and women from working-class backgrounds' fashion choices and taste. Their fashion choices were mocked in the mainstream media, and even chastised for their lack of taste. However, this style later evolved into a stylish trend. By 2003, 'Where have all the cool folks gone?' inquired the media and claimed that 'overexposure has damaged Hoxton's coolness' (Carter-Morley, 2003).

Hip and cool are both phrases that originated from black jazz artists' 'jive' language. Both are characterised by a feeling of detachment and unlawful 'knowledge'. Thornton (1996) also used Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in this sense, when talking about coolness, as coolness is more easily recognised by those individuals who have a similar concept of cool, so that cool might be considered purported capital or knowledge (Nancarrow, Nancarrow, & Page, 2012). Soon, this alternative culture's cool principles started to pervade mainstream consciousness. The mainstream began to consume cool as an anti-establishment, hedonistic, unusual set of ideals in the 1940s and 1950s in Western culture (Majors & Billson, 1992). For the first time, it seemed as though an entire generation of white middle-class students were adopting 'cool' and seeing themselves as a hippie tribe so that the tribal look became significant (Deloria, 2007). Dark clothing and dark spectacles had become a recognisable appearance and the mark of cool for black jazz artists, and certain elements of their outfits had been taken up by the margins of the mainstream (Gabbard, 1996). Rap and hip hop pushed cool taste and hip ideals in the urban black music scene in the late 1990s and interpreted its meaning to the extreme (Cheyne & Binder, 2010). Hip-principles and cool performances enraged the mainstream by

being disproportionately macho and sexist and sparked a massive worldwide fashion chain for sportswear and oversized clothing. In the 1990s, the stimulation of hip-hop's value of cool developed into ghetto bling (Cheyne & Binder, 2010). Although rappers are seen as ultimately or entirely concerned with accumulating money or other goods, materialism/bling[18] has also been described as cool. This was obvious during the East Coast–West Coast dispute between New York and Los Angeles rappers in the mid-1990s (George, 1998). Thus, cool taste has long been associated with consumer culture, interpreted as a market meaning, subcultural possession and perceived as a status symbol shaped by class, race and gender (Belk, Tian & Paavola, 2010). Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, an approach to cool emerged in research that cast African Americans as a unique representation of Black aesthetic in music, entertainment, literature, dance, art, poetry, theatre, film, language, and sports, which were all recognised as contributions to areas of black aesthetic and its consumption (Osumare, 2005). Furthermore, as Stearns (1994) emphasised, cool is an American style that involves calm control of strong emotions and projecting an image of disengagement and indifference, aimed at creating an irrepressible sense of superiority. This emotion evolved into a sign of masculinity as a way of maintaining masculine ideals of pride, dignity, and tenacity (Holt & Thompson, 2004). Thanks to movies, television and music videos, this cool masculinity has also been creeping into consumer brands such as cigarettes, alcohol and guns.

In the contemporary music context in the 21st century, the concept of cool is still important as it inspired important debates on the social life of music. For instance, in Haynes & Nowak (2021), the authors investigate the production and discourses of cool in the sociology of music. In their research, they revisit the idea of cool and discuss what is considered cool and uncool. According to their theoretical examination, music sociologists seldom discuss their personal connections to the field, apart from Beer (2009), who clarified the relationship between 'cool' and the aging researcher. This contribution to cool in music taste methodologically inspired the study of cool in Chinese hip-hop taste in this thesis. In fact, cool is also a term in music taste that can be understood as a dichotomy between an insider status and an outsider status, so researchers should look for answers beyond the immediate lived experiences and witness cool from inside the scene, without restricting its significance to social factors. As both Beer (2009) and Haynes & Nowak (2021) argue, not recognising 'cool' may mislead discourses on the roles that cool plays in popular music's social life, hence encouraging a thorough examination and appreciation of the concept.

[18] The idea of bling, also referred to as 'materialism', portrays rappers as being primarily or exclusively obsessed in accumulating money or material items.

Therefore, whether in some British subcultural scenes around the 2000s as described by Sarah Thornton, or following Haynes & Nowak (2021)'s method to examine cool music taste in a contemporary music scene, the idea of cool has repeatedly been proved significant in the study of music sociology, although it has not been thoroughly explored in the Chinese context, whereby the impact of consumerism is significant, as the phenomenon of cool continues to occur and manifest itself in the fields of fashion, public performances, luxury consumption and marketing. For instance, Chinese rappers adopt specific words and phrases to define what is considered cool, and the show 'The Rap of China' often tries to select the 'coolest' hip-hop stars and contest to promote the development of hip-hop fashion in China, as it will be explored further in Chapter six.

3.3 Cultural and subcultural capital and hierarchical differentiations

The idea of subcultural capital serves as the starting point and basis for the discussion in this section. Pierre Bourdieu initially proposed the concept of cultural capital in his article 'Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction' (Bourdieu,1984), which emphasises the relationship between taste and social structures. According to his definition, cultural capital, or knowledge, is gathered via upbringing and education, and it affects an individual's social rank. In other words, the foundations of social hierarchies are cultural capital and its associated hierarchies. Following Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, scholars in the study of subcultures often contend that cultural participants tend to categorise and appraise others in a cultural scene using a conscious and mutually accepted set of norms, that may form the basis for the creation or (sub)cultural hierarchies, as this section discusses.

3.3.1 cultural and subcultural capital from an insider point of view

According to Sarah Thornton (1996), the idea of subcultural capital is all about having insider underground knowledge, privileging the obscure and despising mass culture, thus making it difficult for outsiders to take part. The idea of subcultural capital put forward by Thornton is based on the traditional research on cultural capital, which has mainly focussed on studying the existence of cultural hierarchies in relation to social ones (Bourdieu, 1984). According to Thornton (1996), subcultural capital is similar to cultural capital in that it may be objectified or embodied. Subcultural capital is manifested in the form of trendy hairstyles, dressing choices or well-curated record collections, just as cultural capital is manifested in the form of books and paintings. In this respect, Thornton updated Bourdieu's theory by extending it to recognise

members of a subcultural community with a capital of shared knowledge and activities inherent to their subcultural practices. Also, the members of a subculture attempt to elevate their position and set themselves apart from mainstream society. As West (2001) further argued, subcultural capital elucidates how youth subcultures are hierarchically organised within themselves, as well as the products, experiences, and ways by which young people negotiate and gain status within their own social worlds.

The implications of Thornton's work for this thesis lie in her research on subcultural hierarchies in club cultures in the UK in the 90s. Thornton (1996: 181) explored how these cultures are rich in hierarchies and identified three principal categories that create stratifications: the authentic against the fake, the hip against the mainstream, and the underground against the media. This idea also applies to hip-hop music scenes in that, for instance, one of the standards to examine hip-hop authenticity is whether it comes from mainstream or underground. In particular, underground hip-hop has been considered authentic while mainstream hip-hop has been deemed unauthentic (Harrison, 2008), as also discussed in the relevant literature review section on authenticity. Furthermore, the distinctions revealed by Thornton also help to identify the status of subcultural members within the scene. High-status insiders are the hippest, as opposed to low-status imposters, the poseurs, who may only pretend to possess subcultural capital (Thornton, 1996). The absence of insider knowledge may successfully keep the mainstream out of the subculture, much as the literary or artistic canon can be used to keep non-classical educated individuals out of bourgeois society. Many academics based on Thornton (1996), have later extended the scope of subcultural capital to various other fields and contexts. For example, Dupont (2014) explored how skateboarders separate themselves from the mainstream based on authenticity and how skaters preserve these borders. In another work, Moore (2005) utilised the term 'subcultural capital' to characterise the economic impact of adolescent rebellion as well as the co-optation process that happens when it is incorporated into consumer culture in music market. As Moore (2005) points out, when subcultural capital is commercialised, it loses the mark of authenticity imparted by its founders, and many people think it loses its cool, unique, or rebellious qualities. Hollingworth (2015) utilised Thornton's (1996) theory of subcultural capital to demonstrate how varied subcultural communities acquire distinctive capitals or resources that are validated in an urban school context. He refers to the smokers' exhibitions of white middle-class masculinity as legitimated capital between them. Therefore, the introduction of subcultural capital and its application to the situations above brings attention to the existence of hierarchies within subcultures, specifically on how youth groups are organised hierarchically. While traditional research on cultural capital has

mainly focussed on studying the existence of cultural hierarchies in relation to social positions, cultural capital may be legitimately referred to as subcultural capital or hipness knowledge when identified by people who are part of a subcultural group and share a sense of belonging to the group.

3.3.2 Subcultural capital reintegrates socio-structural variables

Another significant contribution to the study of subcultural scenes and related hierarchies was provided by Sune Qvotrup Jensen (2004), who thoroughly analysed and expanded Sarah Thornton's work on subcultural capital. As Jensen (2004) argued, although Thornton's starting point is Bourdieu, during her study, she abandoned Bourdieu's emphasis on the social position of cultural participants, as well as their gender, ethnicity, and race. Instead, Jensen (2004) emphasised the need to consider power and social hierarchies to understand and explain subcultures, which led him to further develop the notion of subcultural capital. Jensen's study demonstrates that the concept of subcultural capital is graded depending on the social background, as exemplified by his study of minority youth of non-Danish origin living in Denmark. In his research, subcultures arose as a response to the circumstances of existence of impoverished non-Danish youth, and subcultural capital is an intrinsic component of their solution to their marginalised identity. Subcultural capital, from this perspective, is about genuine creativity in various cultural collectivises, and owners of such capital can use it in disadvantaged social circumstances to develop subculture via their efforts to resolve, manage, work through, or address common daily challenges. Jensen's research and opinions were certainly influenced by the Chicago School's prominent beliefs on bottom-class adolescents in the United States in the 1990s, when subculture was notoriously theorised as a 'problem-solving approach' (Muggleton, 2005) and a means of alleviating 'status discontent' (Cloward,1959: 175). In fact, subcultures, according to Muggleton (2005), gave kids who had failed in school a way to live a different existence.

Hence, Jensen (2004) holds that subcultural autonomy exists at the intersections of the participants' social position, gender, ethnicity, and race. Within this sociological tradition, the terms 'subculture' and 'relative capital' imply that society is hierarchical in nature and that subcultures are subservient to the larger social category, often repressed or dominated as well (Bjurström, 1997). In other words, Jensen shifted his perspective from a single, intra-group view of subcultural participants to a perspective that emphasises the importance of race, gender, and social class in defining subcultural hierarchies. Thus, to some extent, Jensen dismissed

Sarah Thornton while integrating the notion of subcultural capital into an overall sociological framework inspired by Bourdieu (1987). Jensen (2004) even examines how subcultural capital can be transformed into other types of capital. For instance, he described the subcultural capital owned by socially and economically deprived young men as a distinct masculine bodily practice. Body rhythms such as hip-hop, nightclubs and DJ swing were conceptualised as physical capital, gradually transformed into professional assets in an environment of extreme poverty. Thus, when Jensen (2004) analysed subcultural hierarchies, he emphasised not only their subordination in the social hierarchy, but also the autonomy of the subculturalist, in that they can convert their subcultural capital into different forms to promote their hierarchical positions.

Following on Jensen's extension of subcultural capital based on a racial-specific structure, many researchers explored the concept in other subcultural contexts. Inspired by Jensen's definition of masculinity subcultural capital, Huppatz & Goodwin (2013) examined masculinised and feminised occupational segregation in Australia and proposed the term 'gender capital'. Haines, Poland & Johnson (2009) drew on the concept of 'symbolic trade value' (Jensen 2006: 268) to position tobacco use as a form of field-specific capital that young women built as they navigate the social environments of adolescence. Sandberg (2008) investigated how the Black drug dealers deem Cannabis dealing as street capital in Norway, referencing Jensen (2006: 269)'s 'capitalising on one's street credibility' as a form of legitimate power that has capacity to generate profit. Sandberg (2008) further defined street capital as knowledge, competence, skills, acquisitions, and objects that are given value in street culture. In addition to building on Jensen's original idea that brings racial specific-structure back to and subcultural capital study, all the above researches (Jensen, 2004; Sandberg, 2008; Haines, Poland & Johnson, 2009; Huppatz & Goodwin, 2013) emphasised the significance of economic capital. In Jensen's argument, he highlighted the importance of economic capital and financial commitment to subcultural production and notes that these commitments are important factors in judging participants' position in the subcultural hierarchy. Most importantly, it is a practical approach to reveal how the resources or capitals of different levels of subcultural members get attributed with value, consolidate their membership, and may provide advantages in the subculture.

The research on Chinese hip-hop subcultural capital in chapter seven, draws from both Thornton's original concept in shaping internal subcultural hierarchies, and from Jensen's research on transforming subcultural capital into economic capital in the Chinese hip-hop

subcultural scene. As Jensen (2004) noted, in certain circumstances, subcultural actors can transform their subcultural capital into conventional occupations. This is the case of rap artists, who are often recruited from poor subcultural milieus (Quinn, 2004). In the case of Chinese rappers, as far as rap can be a source of economic income and recognition in the wider society, DJs and rappers can convert their creative subcultural capital into sources of income, or even reach fame through media companies and become nationwide celebrities. This is a good example that advocates for Jensen's point of considering the broader social context through which participants can transform their subcultural capital into economic and social capital, in turn improving their social status.

3.3.3 Subcultural structures in a non-subcultural scene

The issue of differentiation within subcultures is further emphasised by Paul Hodkinson's research on the goth subculture in the UK. In his book 'Goth: Identity, style and subculture' (2002), Hodkinson places the goth subculture within a modern subcultural scene. Specifically, due to the erosion of media and commercial forces, Hodkinson prefers to consider subculturalists as consumers and producers of subcultural products, so that he can set the subculture free from coherent and distinctive cultural ties. As a result, traditional factors affecting subcultural hierarchy and subcultural social structuring, such as class, gender, and race (Jensen, 2004), are gradually replaced by elective 'build-your-own' subcultural producer and consumer identities (Hodkinson, 2002: 17). As Hodgkinson noted, subcultures may offer a career through the magical change of commodities. Indeed, most of the events attended by goths were initiated and organised by enthusiasts targeting newcomers and new clients, subcultural promoters who possess first-hand knowledge of goths, who run and promote a night out or are paid to hire out space and its staff. Paul Hodkinson (2002) findings on the Goth subculture scene share a key characteristic with the contemporary Chinese hip-hop scene, namely the existence of a subcultural structure within a broader non-subcultural scene. In fact, chapter seven, places hierarchies in the Chinese hip-hop scene in the larger context of cultural production and consumption in the wider society. For this reason, when discussing its subcultural hierarchies, the theoretical framework offered by Hodkinson (2002) must be invoked and employed.

Another important aspect of Paul Hodkinson's research that is relevant to this research, is the idea of interconnected subcultural infrastructures that exist between producers and consumers of the subcultural scene (Hodkinson, 2002). In order to explain and compartmentalise these

interconnections, Hodkinson (2002:28-32) introduces four indicators of (sub)cultural substance, namely the four criteria of consistent distinctiveness, identity, commitment and autonomy. These criteria are the characteristics that divide and categorise subcultural members. The first indicator is the consistent distinctiveness of the goth dressing style and appearance, which is employed as the main feature to identify one another in the scene. The second indicator creates hierarchical levels by examining the degree to which participants perceive themselves to be members of a distinct cultural group and share sentiments of identification with one another. The third indicator is the commitment to the subculture in terms of events attendance and running of the network, which also determine the status within the subcultural hierarchy. The final indicator is autonomy. As Hodkinson points out, although the contemporary subculture operation is inevitably connected to the society and the politico-economic system, (for example, selling albums may become an activity outside the subcultural group), the subculture members also retains a relatively high level of autonomy in their own internal organisation and workings, which are also used to define tiers within the subculture.

A further implication of Paul Hodkinson's work on the field of subcultural research is a methodological nature. Hodkinson investigated the goth subculture himself as an insider, by attending events and spending time with other subculturalists, which made this methodology appealing to later scholars (Hesmondhalgh, 2005). These research details are of high relevance to the study of Chinese hip-hop. First, Hodkinson's approach to defining himself as an insider offers an angle for investigating hierarchies in Chinese hip-hop too, as I prefer to define myself both as a researcher and, to some extent, also a subculture insider when observing other participants. Secondly, the Chinese hip-hop scene references Hodkinson's idea of considering 'the identities of subculturalists as fluid collectivities in the modern subculture atmosphere'. This helps to look beyond the somewhat rigid hierarchical differentiation framework built by Sarah Thornton (insider and outsider dichotomy) or Sune Qvotrup Jensen (racially structured hierarchy). This allows to explore the modernity of subcultural hierarchies by considering the Chinese hip-hop community as a 'a non-subcultural environment with substantive subcultural structure' (2002: 28). One of the main merits of Hodkinson is that, despite that works of literature around hierarchical divisions based on values, tastes and belonging are generally broad and complex, he managed to abstract them into four key criteria for division, hence moving beyond the usual dichotomy of dominant ideology versus subversive subcultural practices.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This section details the methodology employed in this research to investigate the Chinese hip-hop scene. As discussed in the introduction, hip-hop in China has been mostly confined to the subcultural realm until it has experienced a sudden popularisation starting in 2017, when the hip-hop reality show 'The Rap of China' was first aired (Wang, 2020). As such, the main goal of this research has been to utilise preliminary interview methodology to investigate how hip-hop is understood, produced and promoted by Chinese producers and consumers. Subsequently, this section presents the procedures that were applied to sample participants, data collection through individual semi-structured interviews and subsequent analysis of the generated interview data. Finally, this chapter lays out ethical considerations related to the research.

In order to capture relevant viewpoints and experiences from Chinese hip-hop, the research design should enable the researchers to observe and speak with fans and artists in the Chinese music scene in order to examine their 'social processes, identities, and collective practices' (Cohen, 1993: 127). By being immersed in the Chinese hip-hop music scene, chatting to participants, and witnessing subcultural activities, the researcher should be in a position to explain the multi-layered social and cultural realities of hip-hop fans in China and the subcultural practices that surround them. For this purpose, a methodology based on qualitative interviews appeared to be the most appropriate choice. Given these characteristics as the main investigation method, it was chosen to conduct individual semi-structured interviews with Chinese hip-hop consumers and producers, which produced the collection of interview data. This process was also preceded and supported by online observation of participants and relevant online performances and reality shows, as this section describes in detail.

4.2 Sampling and recruitment process

According to their classical definition (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009), qualitative interviews allow the researcher to 'obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009: 6). Bryman ([2004] 2016) also maintained that qualitative semi-structured interviews represent one of the most effective research methods for reflecting an interviewees' subjectivity, and in his 'Handbook of qualitative research', Brinkmann (2015) pointed out the two-fold ability of semi-

structured interviews to probe whichever angles of viewpoints are considered important by both the interviewee and the interviewer. Given these characteristics, as the main investigation method, I chose to conduct individual semi-structured interviews with Chinese hip-hop consumers as the main means to produce the collection of most of the interview data that will be analysed. In terms of sampling for the qualitative interviews, it was decided that the most appropriate way to proceed was via three steps: voluntary sampling, snowball sampling and purposive sampling, as detailed later in this section. Mainly due to geographical distance and potential geographical sparsity, the best choice for recruitment was deemed to be online recruitment, which was mainly conducted on active online hip-hop fan groups on social media.

WeChat was selected as the social media to identify and recruit participants. Considering that WeChat is the most common social media in China, it was deemed to be the most convenient and useful platform to get in touch with large samples of hip-hop followers compared to other social media platforms that are not available in China. WeChat (Wei Xin in Chinese) is a multi-purpose mobile app, which provides a broad variety of functions such as instant text messaging, video calls, in-app games, sharing multimedia files and locations, as well as functioning as a mobile payment app. Since its launch in 2011, WeChat has expanded to become the largest smartphone application in the world, with over 1 billion monthly active users. Hence, WeChat appeared to be the best option to find, observe and recruit participants for my case study. Indeed, many studies on Chinese popular culture, media and cross-cultural studies (see Sun, Son & Chi, 2016; Ma, Hardy & Ooi, 2020) have relied on WeChat for observation and recruitment purposes.

For the purpose of this research, one of the most exploited features of WeChat was public accounts (公众号), which enable owners to push feeds to subscribers. I have subscribed to 10 accounts (Shuōchàng HIPHOP, the Park, Rap poet, Super hip-hop, Nánqī hip-hop, hip-hop empire, Beijing hip-hop club, Tstar hip-hop, SKR hip-hop, CBD hip-hop club). These accounts typically have several thousands of followers, among which I could find potential interviewees by observing and replying to some of the most popular comment threads. On a few occasions, I attempted to follow some alleged 'high profile' artists to attempt to interview them. However, their public page accounts were unlikely managed by themselves and they never replied to my requests, so some of the more well-known artists were deemed out of reach.

The other useful function of WeChat are groups, namely dedicated spaces on the app, either public or private, where up to several hundred users can join. Much like Facebook groups,

groups on WeChat allow users to exchange messages and multimedia content as well as create events and send invitations to other members. Upon searching, it became clear that the amount of fan groups on WeChat vastly exceeds what can be feasibly exploited and analysed. A simple search for groups with keywords such as 'hip-hop fans', 'rap gigs' or 'rap competitions', would return thousands of groups that could be potentially useful for this research, which begs the question of how to find a representative sample. To be protective of the accuracy of the sampling and the originality of the data, it was decided to use a simple random sampling method (Goodman, 2011). That is, the scope of sampling should be determined according to randomly picking fans' group discovered on WeChat. Although this method may be time consuming, given that some of these fans' groups might not be quite active, it represents the most feasible choice as it avoids any potential biases in the enrolment process, especially when presented with such a large number of potential participants (see Fanzana & Srunv, 2001; Broeck, Sandøy & Brestoff, 2013).

I started recruiting participants in October 2019 and immediately realised that joining fans groups was not as simple as I first imagined. Before joining, group administrator(s) often asked me specific questions about rappers' albums, musical preferences, and level of acquaintance with the culture, which are testimony to the high level of knowledge and cultural capital that members are expected to possess to be able to join. Once I disclosed my interest to join the group for research purposes, I received mixed responses. In some cases, the admin would stop responding, likely because of reticence and suspicions about my real intentions. However, somewhat surprisingly at first, many admins were rather eager to let me enter the groups. After several searches, posts, observation, and waiting for responses, at the end of December 2019, I managed to join 7 hip-hop fans groups (Xiāngqīn xiāng'ài yījiā diāo， Xīhā luàn bào, CHC trend raps, Pal Music Club, Hēi pà, HIPHOP KING, HIPHOP Party) out of the 11 that I had sent an initial request for. In these hip-hop fans groups, I discovered that the administrator(s) signposted events such as upcoming rap battles and competitions as well as links to hip-hop related blog posts and news articles. Fans were usually rather active in re-posting content, sharing live broadcasting performances and actively commenting on other members' posts. To convey an idea of the scale of activities, in one of the most active groups, live broadcastings were watched by several thousands of fans at once, and highlighted posts and news would receive hundreds of comments in a few hours from publication, with lively discussions and arguments developing in the comment section for days, and being shared hundreds of times within hours. Once I joined the groups, further sampling of participants and subsequent

interviews took place in three steps: voluntary enrolment, snowball sampling and purposive sampling.

The first step involved voluntary enrolment. Once I had access to the groups, I advertised my research activity by sharing a post visible to all members. In this post, I introduced myself as a university student and fan of Chinese hip-hop and invited group members to contact me in private to express their interest in being interviewed about their passion for hip-hop and their understanding of resistance to begin with. Through this first round of recruitment, I enrolled 18 interviewees.

The second phase of recruitment consisted of snowball sampling. During this round, further potential interviewees were 'subjects who are nominated by further subjects known to them' (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997). This method can effectively and rapidly increase sample size, while also ensuring targeted recruitment, given that hip-hop fans within certain communities were found to know each other very well, often even in person, as some interviewees stated. Through snowball sampling, between February 2020 and March 2020, I recruited 9 more interviewees from two hip-hop groups by recommendation. Among these 9 new interviewees, an influential Chinese hip-hop blogger Uncle Qiang, publicly posted parts of our interview on his blog and on his WeChat profile followed by more than 4000 users. This re-post contributed to give visibility to my research in the hip-hop community in China.

Hence, in the third step, as a result of the increased visibility provided by Uncle Qiang's post, more volunteers contacted me initiatively and I received about 50 interviewees' requests. In response, I eventually reduced the number to 15 respondents based on their comments below Uncle Qiang's post, and how their positions were close to the themes of this research. Thereby, at this stage, the purposive sampling method was applied to identify individuals on the basis of how close the interviewees matched to the research purpose of this thesis (Tansey, 2009). Overall, 42 interviewees were recruited, whose pseudonyms, declared ages, years of attachment to hip-hop fandom, and geographical regions (according to their WeChat profiles) are summarised in Table 1 below. Some interviewees were contacted more than once for follow-up interviews when certain answers were deemed of interest and needs to further probe some specific themes, as the analysis chapters will detail.

Table 1: List of Interviewees

	Name	Age	Gender	Occupation	Years of HF	Region
1	Abby Zhang	24	male	Gym Tutor	5	Guangzhou
2	Bennet Wong	20	male	Taxi driver	4	Beijing
3	James Li	19	male	Skilled worker	n/a	Guangzhou
4	Zoe Zhao	21	male	Labor contractor	5	Xinjiang
5	Wendy Liu	22	female	Primary school teacher	n/a	Chongqing
6	Fabio Wu	31	male	Insurance canvasser	7	Changsha
7	Giam Zheng	22	male	n/a. Rapper as a hobby	n/a	Guangzhou
8	Hannah Chen	22	female	Full time blogger and rapper	3	Shenzhen
9	MC Huang	n/a	male	Singer	6	Shanghai
10	MC Guang	22	male	Full time rapper	9	Beijing
11	MC King	23	male	Music shop owner	8	Beijing
12	MC Jin	25	male	Tengfei Music workshop owner	n/a	Beijing
13	Ivan Lin	21	male	Hardware store staff	5	Fuzhou
14	MC Xing	23	male	Freelance hip-hop blogger	1	n/a
15	Jess Feng	22	male	n/a – Rapper as a hobby	5	Fujian
16	Andy Zhou	n/a	male	Architect	4	Guangzhou
17	Nelson Deng	n/a	male	BA student in music engineering	n/a	Shanxi
18	Owen Gu	22	male	Freelance hip-hop blogger	1	Guangzhou
19	Pete Yang	22	male	MA student in politics	6	Shanghai
20	Robert Su	19	male	BA student in music	n/a	Langfang
21	Simon Pan	n/a	male	Delivery man	n/a	Guangxi
22	MC Qiang	21	male	Rapper/BA student in music production	3	Inner Mongolia
23	Tim Yang	21	male	Student in music engineering in Toronto	6	Toronto, Canada
24	Jee Sun	26	male	rapper	n/a	Beijing
25	William Xie	24	male	Student in economy of entrainment industry	6	Qingdao

26	Scott Wei	24	male	Full time MC	n/a	Tianjin
27	Ivan Wen	23	male	Full time MC	n/a	Sichuan
28	Justin G	n/a	male	Full time Rapper	7	Jilin
29	Andy Ye	n/a	male	Blogger	n/a	Sichuan
30	Ben Jiang	21	male	BA student - Rapper as a hobby	3	Heilongjiang
31	Carl Zhang	22	male	Blogger	2	Heilongjiang
32	Dale Wong	24	male	Gym Tutor	n/a	Guangzhou
33	Fisher Li	25	male	Rapper as a hobby	4	Shanghai
34	Tony Wong	n/a	male	Salesman	2	Xi'an
35	Harley Zhou	27	male	Taobao shop owner (selling streetwear)	6	Jilin
36	Ian Wu	24	male	Singer	n/a	Qinghai
37	Liam Zheng	24	male	n/a. Rapper as a hobby	6	Xinjiang
38	Martin Chen	22	male	Blogger/seller	5	Chongqing
39	Daniel Lin	22	male	Rapper as hobby	4	Sichuan
40	Omar Sun	24	male	Full time rapper	3	Beijing
41	MC Qiang	n/a	male	rapper	5	Beijing
42	Julian Chang	21	male	Fashion blogger who like rap	3	Guangzhou

Most of the interviews were conducted over a six-month period between October 2019 and March 2020. The length of the interviews ranged from 10 minutes to over one hour, resulting in around 35 hours of recorded interview footage. While most interviews proceeded quite smoothly, some interviewees proved more challenging, particularly in terms of scheduling interview times, given the eight-hour time difference between the UK and China, keeping promises, unreasonable requests of purchasing their albums at a higher price than advertised as a form of compensation. Indeed, most of the failed attempts at interviews were due to direct rejections, no response or breaking an appointment. There were five interviewees that requested to email the interview outlines to them first so that they can provide the answers in written form, instead of speaking to me. However, these interviews ended up being rather flexible back and forth of emails or messages. As Fritz & Vandermause (2018) note, this

‘flexibility’ in the method of in-depth email interview has its pros and cons, for example, on the one hand, it enables interviewees to answer research questions more directly and eliminate redundant data; however, on the other hand, it has some potential technical problems, eg. if these exchanged examples are lost or intercepted, it would become a case of breach of confidentiality. Overall, the five written interviews proceeded efficiently and I safely obtained interview material from all of them.

4.3 Online interviews

4.3.1 Interview questions

An initial list of open-ended questions to ask during interviews was compiled based on preliminary academic literature search and the formulated research questions. In an initial phase of this research, which corresponded to the first round of voluntary recruitment, the questions mainly revolved around the theme of subcultural resistance. However, in a second phase of the investigation, when the focus was re-directed towards hip-hop only, further questions were added to enable a deeper analysis of this case study and extend the scope of the research to themes of resistance, hip-hop authenticity, music taste, subculture, and music scenes (see section 3.3.3 about refocussing the scope of this research). Indeed, some of the interview questions also arose from follow-up interviews. In detail, the interview consent forms were sent along with interview outlines. The questions were intended to serve as a guide and semi-structured, and not an exhaustive list to be worked through (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) because this method ensures flexibility and fluency in the conversation. I always started off with general questions such as ‘Why does hip-hop music appeal to you?’, ‘How long have you listened to hip-hop?’, or ‘Could you share any personal experience related to be a fan of hip-hop?’. In addition to the flexible opening questions, the rest of the interview frame was built upon the broad questions below:

- Do you think Chinese hip-hop is a type of resistant subculture?
- Who are your favourite rappers and what are your favourite styles of music?
- Do you watch The Rap of China?
- How do you see underground hip-hop and mainstream hip-hop?

These are the key questions that have allowed me to uncover the vivid hip-hop experiences of fans, while also exploring the complexities of the scene dynamics, such as the underground-

mainstream dichotomy, preferences and interpersonal interactions between members of the community. Prior to designing the interview outline and conducting the fieldwork, the interview questions only revolved around the key theme of resistance. However, during the interviewees and subsequent data analysis, the other two key analytical themes of taste and hierarchy started to emerge as powerful themes to deepen the analysis of the scene. This is detailed in section 3.3.3 below as well as reflected in the overall structuring of the thesis. This expansion of scope may have partly arisen thanks to the framework of the interviews being deliberately designed openly to help interviewees self-expose views beyond rigid interview questions.

4.3.2 Conducting online interviews

As discussed above, I recruited participants on WeChat, but later interviewed them through WhatsApp. This strategy is aimed at protecting the interviewees' privacy and mitigating the risks associated with communicating via WeChat, as further detailed in the section about ethical considerations. Crang & Cook (2007) stated that interviews are the main method through which researchers strive to get a better understanding of their subjects' day-to-day social, cultural, political, and economic life. Online interviews allow the researchers to repeatedly listen to the recording and take notes to analyse the data theoretically and observationally, as well as allow the researchers to add secondary commentary and in-process memos (Luo & Wildemuth, 2009).

While online interviewing allowed some of the issues related to gender and physical spaces concerns (discussed later in section 4.5.2) to play a lesser role, it is also important to discuss ways in which research dynamics may have been influenced by conducting internet-mediated interviews instead of face-to-face interviews. Although, traditionally, face-to-face interviews have been considered the ‘gold standard’ for qualitative sociological research in terms of quality of the data and rigour (Lofland, 1995), internet-mediated interviews are increasing in popularity as a methodological choice in a progressively technological world (Deakin, 2014; Zadkowska, 2020). There are clear practical advantages in interviewing participants online, such as lower time and financial investment for interviewer and interviewee, therefore favouring increases in sample size. Online interviewing also offers flexibility in terms of duration, scheduling of the interviews and control over personal space. In the case of this research, recruiting participants on WeChat and interviewing on WhatsApp has been instrumental in securing sample size. Although the 7-hour difference between the UK and

China needed to be taken into account when scheduling interviews, the advantage and flexibility have outweighed the need for myself to adapt to the Chinese time zone. Online recruitment and interviewing also allowed this research to transcend geographical limitations and collect data from different cities and regions over China, thus avoiding potential region-specific biases or local culture influences.

However, it is worth mentioning that some important cues may be inaccessible during an online interview. Face-to-face communication may carry important non-verbal cues from both the interviewer and the interviewee that may help decode the individual's reactions and emotions during the conversation. In-person interaction may also help to create a more relaxed and positive interview ambience, as well as build a strong personal rapport with participants that may make it easier for interviewees to feel comfortable in sharing their perspectives ('O Connor, 2008). In this respect, the lack of face-to-face interaction may represent a limitation of the current study, although it is also important to mention that I, as a researcher, share many traits with most of my interviewees, such as age, ethnicity, cultural background and shared knowledge (of hip-hop in this case), which are recognised to be conducive to creating a good level of rapport as well as an open and safe interview environment ('O Connor, 2008).

It's also important to mention that in-person fieldwork may have enabled me to attend live events, visit the physical spaces where hip-hop takes place and experience them first-hand. This is indeed the approach taken by many ethnographic studies of subcultures (Thornton 1996; Hodkinson 2002; Hodkinson 2005). However, COVID-19 pandemic-related travel and social restrictions would have prevented in-person encounters and live events from taking place, given that most of the fieldwork was conducted during the very first wave of the pandemic. In addition, in-person fieldwork would have limited the study only to a specific city or province of China. While this limitation may not have been necessarily harmful, it is worth noting that regional differences may be quite pronounced in China, as the history chapter 2 discusses, so that the scope of the research would have been different. The current research does not seek to unveil or study in detail regional differences, which although present and certainly of scholarly interest, are beyond the scope of this research.

As such, while physical interaction with interviewees did not happen, I had the chance to immerse myself in the fervid online activities. Indeed, the pervasiveness of online technologies and electronic communication have resulted in the birth of virtual music scenes, as first conceptualised by Bennett and Peterson (2004). As discussed at length in section 2.4, the case

of Chinese hip-hop has not escaped trends of digitalisation and expansion to the online domain. Testimony to this development, is the crucial role played by online music shows, such as The Rap of China, in bringing hip-hop to popularity, shaping people's taste and understanding of the culture and, more broadly, mediating fans' interaction and consumption with hip-hop in China.

To guarantee the participant's privacy, I coded their names with British-Chinese pseudonyms reported in Table 1. All interviews were recorded on a university laptop protected by password. During the interviews, I would often take notes in handwriting to emphasise specific points or to guide further questions (Adams, 2015). These individual, semi-structured open-ended interviews have allowed for in-depth conversations on hip hop as well as giving fans and artists to share their own experiences and ideas, hence allowing me, as a researcher, to obtain information directly from people in the social realm under investigation (Sherman-Heyl, 2001). Although interviews are not strictly about extracting information, as Negus (2013: 11) points out, they are an 'active social encounter' in which knowledge is generated through a process of exchange that involves 'communication [with the interviewer], interpretation [with the interviewer], comprehension [with the interviewer], and, occasionally, misunderstanding' (Negus, 2013: 8). It is critical for the interviewer to pay close attention to the speaker, respect any thoughts expressed and take notes during the interview, where needed (Sherman Heyl, 2001). I also learned another crucial lesson during the interviews, that is to prepare interview questions and pose them in a way that does not appear to be unprofessional or showing lack of knowledge or interest. I experienced this reticence myself. During one of the interviews, a rapper repeatedly mentioned his rap creations on Netease, and when it clearly appeared that I had not listened to them prior to the interview, he swiftly changed tone and he started addressing me as 'not respecting hip-hop'.

As a result, I spent a significant amount of time preparing for each interview, learning as much as I possibly could about each candidate before proceeding. I carefully observed their social media posts and behaviour, listened to their songs (when interviewees were rappers), read their lyrics, and took notes of features of interest that might arise during the interview. It was clear that most interviewees were appreciative of the time I had spent and the knowledge that I had amassed about each of them, so they often appeared willing to take the time by answering questions about their work or lyrics and amply discuss their viewpoints in most cases. Moreover, to dive into the Chinese hip-hop scene, I watched every season of The Rap of China, given its role in propelling Chinese hip-hop to fame. This reality show was also an important

resource to gather information on the contemporary mainstream hip-hop scene, as often emphasised during many interviews. I was also closely following related posts, news and comment threads about the reality show, latest rap releases and live event alerts for followers to watch. This strategy allowed me to keep updated on the internal workings of online hip-hop communities, as well as upcoming live performances and gigs, since most of them are available online, either as live broadcasts or pre-recorded. While conducting this online observation of both participants and online shows, I was taking notes of my own thoughts as fieldwork notes, which helped me prepare for the further interview process. All the processes, activities and platforms described here represent an integral part of the contemporary online Chinese hip-hop scene initially introduced in section 2.4, and in which I immersed myself for this research.

This investigation method partially corresponds to Hodkinson's (2005: 131) description of insider researchers as 'investigators having some degree of initial cultural proximity to the individuals or cultures under the microscope.' In fact, this proximity gives the researchers and participants a conversation-like exchange (Mann, 2016). Occasionally, the subjects of the interviews would veer off on unconnected arguments, but I always attempted to keep the conversation as unstructured as possible, to allow the information and ideas to emerge naturally. Often, what they said might have sounded irrelevant at the time of the interview, but it often proved extremely useful after transcribing and analysing the material. For instance, the key analytical themes of taste and subcultural hierarchy emerged upon data analysis. Similarly, some topics kept reoccurring during the interviews, but I did not see the significance of them at the time. A clear example is the recurring theme of ‘cool’, which many interviewees often used when starting to answer questions. At first, I thought it was simply related to a rappers' way of speaking, and I did not see the potential importance of the term. It was only after conducting multiple interviews and hearing it from every single respondent, that I realised that ‘cool’ was a key concept to understanding hip-hop taste and provided an interesting starting point for further reflection. Hence why I organised some follow-up interviews to further explore this concept. The significance of this procedure will be also discussed in the data analysis chapters.

4.3.3 Refocusing the research on hip-hop

Originally, this project aimed to answer the broader research question about how Chinese popular culture in the context of online entertainment media may move beyond State control. The original case studies included three contemporary popular culture trends in China, namely

hip-hop, eSport games and Xuanhuan novels (a broad genre of fictional stories mixing Chinese mythology with foreign elements and settings). Initially, the key interview questions aimed at covering the experiences of fans in all the three areas, why they found them appealing, how fans perceived themselves within the communities and, more importantly, whether interviewees considered their cultural activities to be a form of resistance to state control.

However, from the very onset of fieldwork, it became clear that the hip-hop case study looked much more promising in terms of quality and quantity of interviewees' data and available online resources. Hence, the following work entailed changes to the methodology, including redesigning interview questions and adapting interview and observation strategies. Compared to the Xuanhuan drama and eSports case studies, the interviewees from the hip-hop group showed better willingness to be enrolled in the study and talk to me about their experiences and perceptions. Many more hip-hop fans group and public profiles on WeChat were discovered, a substantially higher number of potential participants accepted to be interviewed and were much more enthusiastic about their activities. After the initial three weeks of online recruitment, I had already managed to sign up 37 out of the 42 hip-hop interviewees, as compared to 4 and 8 for the Xuanhuan and eSports case studies, respectively. I also noticed that some of the respondents in the hip-hop case were eager to refer me to highly popular WeChat groups and communities with tens of thousands of followers, hence maximising my chances of finding suitable interviewees. All of these signs made me realise that the most promising case study for this research was hip-hop. The positive responses and referrals from interviewees in the recruitment process were already testimony to the vitality of the Chinese hip-hop music scene.

Hence, transferring the research focus to the hip-hop case study helped to collect data in a more effective way and, perhaps more importantly, created new opportunities for a deeper analysis of the hip-hop scene. To do this, I have also collected literature on the history and development of Chinese hip-hop. The aim was to analyse how hip-hop in China developed by presenting a chronological history of Chinese hip-hop from the earlier 2000s to the present. This data was primarily collected from published book chapters, biographies, online blog pieces and music news magazines and online articles. Some of this material was recommended by some of the interviewees, who are hip-hop blog editors and writers and who provided useful resources for a deeper understanding of the history of Chinese hip-hop, as well as for the entire research. Studying the history of Chinese hip-hop has allowed me to discover interesting introductory

points to initiate dialogues with many interviewees during the semi-structured interviews, which was conducive to gaining the interviewees' trust.

4.4 Data analysis

4.4.1 Coding

The data collection process for this thesis included a series of observations, note-taking and interviews in multiple forms, including watching hip-hop reality shows, searching for artists, examining Chinese hip-hop history, reading news and talking to fans, artists and rappers. However, most of the data analysed in this thesis come from the 42 interviewees listed in Table 1.

After recording the interviews, I manually transcribed them for further analysis, which started with the construction of analytic categories. Although different researchers prefer to adopt different procedures, interview data analysis generally involves a process of classifying, summarising, and inducting (Bryman ([2004] 2016). To begin with, I indexed all the material, which necessitated making physical copies of all the interview transcripts and numbering pages. In doing so, my reasons were practical, since during the interviews, I handwrote an abundance of field notes, and the 35 hours of interview resulted in a copious number of transcripts. I was also afraid that I would lose some of the 'rawness' of the material because some of the infrequent remarks are critical but may appear insignificant during the interview. Rather than using a computer, I chose to analyse the material by hand, which, although time-consuming, ensures close readings and familiarity with the interviews and field notes (Basit, 2003).

The manual process of coding was gradual but intricate. In general, in accordance with Braun and Clarke's guidelines (2006) on coding, before I began, I read through the data completely and became comfortable with it. This is a basic method known as open coding, which refers to the practice of writing down the meaning of statements or words that explain occurrences in the margin of a document, as described by Strauss (1987). I then wrote more in-depth annotations, which I coded again to embed new meanings to the descriptive data and label recurring themes to complete the compilation process (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2011). Initially, the codes that I identified were somewhat chaotic and without a clear logic: 'resistance', 'peace love and respect', 'emotions', 'dissing', 'The Rap of China', 'keep it real', 'cool', 'vulgar', 'inclusiveness', 'I don't care', 'freestyle' etc. I started reflected on whether I had missed

something in the coding process. I went over details that I might have missed and went through the coding again with insights, intuitions, and ideas on important but potentially overlooked notes that I had written down on various occasions, as well as explanations for them. These can be considered my ‘theoretical notes’ (Strauss, 1987: 100) that would help me find out, for instance, the tensions within the scene, the link between rappers and hip-hop followers and the broader society, the perception of resistance, as well as the broader categories of entertainment and music scene. These categories eventually morphed into the three key areas of conceptualising resistance, music taste and hierarchies within the hip-hop community. However, this repeated decoding process was not successful at first. There were times when I needed to organise follow-up interviews since I realised that I had overlooked some key concepts on the themes of taste, fashion and 'cool', for example. In these instances, the initial datasets were not sufficient to be supportive of the association of 'related instances and characteristics of events into broader groups' (Seidel & Kelle, 1995: 56). After returning to some of the rappers, it became clear to me that 'I don't care' and 'cool' were indeed two terms categorised into hip-hop taste and fashion.

4.5 Reflexivity in fieldwork

4.5.1 Researcher’s positionality in hip-hop studies

Researcher reflexivity is a critical issue related to the position taken by a researcher and relates to a critical perspective on how the researcher constantly impacts impacting on various aspects of the research and their findings. This is vital in the research field of hip-hop and subcultures (see Finlay, 2002; Hodkinson, 2005; Berger, 2015).

In this respect, I adopted Paul Hodkinson's insider/outsider approach. Insider researchers, according to Hodkinson (2005: 131), are ‘investigators who have some degree of initial cultural closeness to the persons or civilizations under the microscope’. Indeed, I began by putting myself in such a position, as I consider myself very passionate about Chinese hip-hop and eager to gain more insider knowledge, including through this research, following public account and watching online shows. However, although I was initially enjoying cultural intimacy with the group under study, I rapidly realised that I was not an insider fan for several reasons. After all, I have never written raps, performed on stage or been part of a hip-hop crew. Despite having extensive knowledge of hip hop and the opportunity to talk to many artists, I am only a hip-hop consumer and not a producer. This distinction began to gain importance during the data

collection, as best exemplified in chapter seven, where the distinction between consumers and producers appears to be significant in terms of status within the hierarchy and the level of perceived (sub)cultural capital. Once this distinction became clear, along with others that are further detailed in chapter 7, as a researcher, I started doubting which exact position in the hip-hop hierarchy I held when conducting interviews.

Methodologically, a certain degree of trust and cooperation is also granted by interviewees in a semi-structured interview (Agar, 1996: 105). This makes it easier to use, instead of a rigid question and answer model, a two-way interchange and conversational flow model, which is beneficial to explore different aspects and broaden the scope of the conversation (Armstrong, 1993). On the one hand, such interviewing strategy, according to Hodkinson (2005: 140), must be adopted especially when researchers are (at least partly) outsiders to the hip-hop scene. As he pointed out, being an 'insider' might place pressure on responders to provide consistent responses on a constant basis. This is the outcome that I wish to avoid as a researcher. On the other hand, research on subcultural scenes requires researchers to be immersed in the scene from the perspective of methodology, which specifically demands more cooperation from interviewees and researchers to grasp the degree of data collection. Hence, this blurred position as both insider and outsider, arguably helped my research by enabling me to adjust tone, behaviour and questioning style depending on whom I was interviewing and the degree of trust that was being granted by the interviewees. As Milligan (2016) suggests, this position corresponds to be an 'inbetweener', namely neither an insider nor an outsider, which may also help develop relationships built on trust when researchers apply participative methods, as illustrated by a few examples below.

This considerations are particularly important for the data analysis process. Some of the interviewees did seem to give honest answers and cooperate throughout the interview. Some of the interviewees did seem to give honest answers and cooperate throughout the interview. Although it is always challenging to unambiguously ascertain whether participants' responses are entirely honest, as noted in 4.2 most group admins were eager to let me into the groups, many interviewees were enthusiastically discussing their passion for hip-hop and their musical creations and sounded genuinely interested in my research aims. I consider these behaviours as signs of sincerity and willingness to open up about authentic feelings, preferences and viewpoints. However, during subsequent data analysis, I realised that some of their views were not helpful for the research. In the process of reflexivity, I realised that it may have been due to an eagerness of being 'one of them' and trying to 'bribe' the people I was interviewing,

while neglecting to critically evaluate certain people and practices. For example, when I asked interviewees about the resistant nature of Chinese hip-hop, I collected answers that, at first, seemed paradoxical to me, since respondents did not think of hip-hop as a subculture of resistance. I had doubts, but I did not clarify them with the respondents at the time of the interview. This delayed reaction made me think about what could be behind the data for several months. During the second round of data collection (and further analysis), I was more perceptive, paid attention to the respondents' words, and returned to some of the interviewees on why they did not want a sufficiently deep discussion. I figured out interviewees' words were contradicting themselves and seemed to point to the concept of resisting resistance, as analysed in chapter five. Hence, this process of research reflexivity was effective in identifying potentially hidden meanings and implications behind the data. In addition to my role as an insider/outsider, potentially limiting access to truer data, my position as a researcher may have prevented respondents from telling the entire truth. Some respondents wondered about my intentions as a research student in a British university and doubted my genuine research interest in the issue of hip-hop resistance. Other interviewees were instead more interested in my experiences abroad and the European hip-hop scene, rather than focussing on the interview questions. Both attitudes resulted in incoherent and vague interview data.

These vagueness in the fieldwork may have also been due to the principle of cultural translation. Cultural translation is a subject of study of cultural anthropology, and is about questioning the validity of language translation through cultural and contextual differences (Italiano & Rössner, 2014). Chinese hip hop studies are not only based on language translations, but also on the local cultural context that may influence on people's understanding of the words and questions being asked. In the research on Chinese hip-hop, some important cultural terms do not represent the literal translation in the meaning of hip hop. For example, 'keep it real' in Chinese is 保持真实 (Bǎ ochi zhē nshi), which is a cultural translation, understood differently by the Chinese rappers in a Chinese music scene (as it will be detailed in chapter five). These considerations required me, as a researcher, to have a sense of the cultural translation and to reflect on the interview closely, utilise reflexivity skills as well as to use to my advantage of being a native Mandarin Chinese speaker when interpreting and translating interview material.

4.5.2 Gender dimension positionality

Another important dimension related to the issue of reflexivity in fieldwork concerns gender. As a female researcher researching the Chinese hip-hop scene, I recognise that I should take reflexivity steps to evaluate how my gender impacts on the research processes and findings.

This consideration originates from the obvious observation that the pool of interviewees shows an overwhelming majority of male participants (40 out of 42). The gendered nature of the sample, in conjunction with the random sampling employed in the research, strongly suggest that the hip-hop scene under study is indeed strongly male-dominated. This is a fairly common trait of hip-hop scenes worldwide and it has to do with men usually showing preferences for more aggressive, exciting and non-conformal music (Palma-Martos, 2021), which are characteristics often associated with hip-hop. McLeod (1999) also highlighted the gender dimension in his seminal work about hip-hop authenticity, arguing that attributes of being 'soft' represent femininity and are associated with the idea of 'selling out' authenticity, thus emphasising the importance of acting in a masculine manner to claim authenticity. The male preference for hip-hop has also been linked with the archetypal rapper being a black male (Morris, 2015; Harkness 2012, also discussed at length in section 3.1.3), thus also generating a discourse of gendered racial legitimacy.

The case of Chinese hip-hop is no exception, although the reasons for gendered participation needs to be re-evaluated. As the analysis sections will show, interviewees, mostly male, reject aggressive, misogynistic, and violent content. Also, issues of racial legitimacy do not apply to the Chinese context given the ethnic uniformity of the population. In fact, the gendered politics of Chinese hip-hop may have more to do with issues of cultural inequality instead of race or violence. Although scholarly research on gender and hip-hop has mainly focussed on Western contexts, the few available studies in Eastern societies point indeed to a prioritisation of culture over race (Chew, 2019; Dixon, 2016). In particular, the study of Chew (2019) on Chinese female break dancers identifies thin-body ideals, the masculinity of the performance and the exclusion from relevant industrial networks as the main issues preventing equal representation of females. I argue that the same discourse applies to my sample inasmuch the previous points have to do with underlying Chinese cultural traits and archetypical features of hip-hop culture.

In addition to reflecting on its own reasons of existence, the gendered nature of the sample signals the need for me to reflect on my positionality as a female researcher in such a male-dominated setting. In the case of research of male-dominated music scenes, female researchers have reported mixed experiences depending on the context and scope of the research. In her

study of the hip-hop scene in Dakar, Appert (2012) recognises the constraints associated with her being a white woman immersed in the almost entirely black male scene. For instance, her mobility and participation in events was severely hampered by certain areas of Dakar deemed too rough and dangerous for her. Similarly, Speers (2017) noticed how her position as a female received mixed responses in her ethnographic study of the London underground hip-hop scene. Although she was often one of the few females attending gigs, some members were welcoming towards her, while others appeared sceptical to recognise her right to be present. Overall, however, Speers (2017) deems her gender to be advantageous because male rappers were more responsive, honest and eager to talk to her.

As Easterday (1977) holds, gender may lead to "lack of participation, or non-serious participation [by the interviewees], which may, or may not, be a problem in research terms". Female researchers may not be taken seriously enough by male informants and perceived as submissive and incompetent (Gurney, 1985). However, female researchers may also have advantages in situations where they may gain access to settings and information more easily (Easterday, 1977). Thus, in social research in general, and musical scenes specifically, gender roles can be capitalised, and their peculiarities can be renegotiated for the purpose of the fieldwork.

In the case of this research, some of the implications and the experiences above are valid and need to be taken into account. The importance of such consideration is suggested by the gendered nature of the pool of interviewees being strongly gendered, as discussed above. When approaching Chinese hip-hop followers for online interviews in this research, I initially needed to gain trust from group admins in order to be admitted into many of the fan groups by answering hip-hop related questions and stating my motivations. This demonstration of knowledge prior to admission into the groups addresses some of the shortcomings related to females being perceived as incompetent or non-serious as highlighted by many of the studies above (Easterday, 1997; Appert, 2012; Speers, 2017). To a certain extent, the closeness in age with many of the interviewees and common ethnicity helped overcome some of the potential complications arising from the difference in gender, as these ensured some level of shared affinity. On a personable level, I often felt that I could relate to the interviewees, and they could relate to me thanks to the common age, shared knowledge of hip-hop and common cultural background. It is also worth noting that interviews were conducted online, which impeded physical closeness and interaction with the interviewees. As such, some of the barriers typically encountered in ethnography by female researcher in male-dominate contexts, such as the need

to access physical spaces surrounded by men (Appert, 2012), the importance of body language (Chandler, 1990) and physical appearance (Hammersley, 1995) did not play a role. Instead, passing the 'access test' before joining hip-hop groups on WeChat, granted me the right from the group leader(s) to be part of the group and to be accepted regardless of my gender. In fact, the interest shown by group members in participating in my research, manifested by the enthusiastic responses to my recruitment posts, suggests that my status as a female did not generate excessive suspicion from male fans. This may be because I was judged to be harmless and not be a direct competitor or rival, or judgmental. As such, males did not need to demonstrate masculine superiority, boldness, or diffidence.

4.5.3 Ethical considerations

Before starting data collection, ethical clearance from an ethics commission of the University of York was needed. I submitted a thorough ethics form outlining the research methodology, the sampling process for participants, an information sheet, consent form, risk assessment, and interview questions. In addition, according to the ethical regulation of the university, the interviews were digitally recorded with the Windows 10 Recorder application on a university laptop, which remained stored for the duration of the interview until the research was concluded. In the initial round of ethics approval procedure, the ethics committee had pointed out concerns about the use of WeChat for conducting interviews. These concerns were motivated mainly by fears of online surveillance monitoring and censorship, given the sensitive nature of my research topic on popular culture and resistance. Because of the relatively strict control and censorship operated by the Chinese Government on social media and popular culture, potential risks may have arisen for social media users who discuss topics that may be deemed sensitive, such as discussing or circulating illegal content, politically sensitive information, or spreading rumours. These can represent a risk for account holders, and consequences may involve having a WeChat account deleted or censored for a certain amount of time. To mitigate such risks, I limited myself to select interviewees from WeChat groups, as described in the previous section, but later communicated with them via WhatsApp. In addition, if the interviewees used words that were deemed at 'risk' by accident while typing on WeChat, the communication was halted. It was also necessary to evaluate how such risks could impact myself, considering that I was posting interview recruitment adverts on many WeChat groups. In this regard, I have acted in the interest of the research purpose by creating an alternative WeChat account on a different device, to be used in the unlikely event that my principal account would be censored or deleted. However, overall, this risk was deemed to be

minor, given that the content of my interviews and my enrolment posts may be sensitive, but not risky. Nevertheless, as a researcher, I always reminded the participants of the potential risks, however minor that risk may be, as also detailed in the consent form and information sheet provided to each interviewee.

As a final consideration of the ethical implications of this research, I noted that during the recruiting process, most interviewees did not show significant concerns about their interview data and research purpose. However, a few respondents sounded suspicious about some of the questions I asked, mainly related to the themes of resistance, censorship, nationwide scandals, and they requested to read this doctoral thesis if possible. As a response, I told them that it would depend on how the thesis develops and, as a researcher, I would only provide the final thesis if the participants' privacy and identity are protected, as well as noting that the thesis' reading is purely for academic research purposes.

As a researcher, I realise that respondents may have been asked to remark on something that they may normally prefer to take for granted, and that they may have succumbed to social desirability as a result of the request. Perhaps, suspicious interviewees perceived questions about topics of resistance to be somewhat sensitive and presuming, so they may have not been fully sincere in their replies or dodged the real question. In fact, the discussion on resistance in chapter five and its conceptualisation as ‘resisting resistance’ signal the existence of self-contradictory protective mechanisms arising from cultural sensitivity around issues of resistance. Indeed, follow-up interviews, further in-depth discussion and listening to interviewees’ creations, were needed to conceptualise resistance, as discussed at length in chapter five. Overall, however, (online) encounters where I perceived suspicion and reticence were very few in number, as the majority of interviews proceeded rather openly and smoothly.

4.6 Conclusion

The methodology discussed in this chapter guided me in conducting data collection and analysis in a pragmatic and rigorous fashion. Firstly, through prior research and work, the interview questions were defined and sources for the recruitment of participants were identified in WeChat groups and public posts. The construction and dissemination of the interview outline and invitations played a crucial role, as they served as a bridge for initial communication with potential interviewees. Secondly, during the interview process, the combination of online individual, semi-structured, open-ended interviews and note-taking were conducive to a

smooth progress of the interview and subsequent transcription. During a first round of interviews, note taking and open conversations have provided validity and reliability, as well as opportunities for identifications of themes that were initially overlooked. These further themes were deemed worthy of further investigation, so that follow-up interviews were conducted in many cases. Thirdly, during the data analysis procedure, manual coding proved to be the most suitable choice for this study. Due to the complexity and breadth of research questions, mechanised understanding of data may have missed important but hidden details in the interview data. In addition, some interviewees did not express their opinions articulately and clearly, which highlights the necessity of manual coding. Fourthly, reflexivity in fieldwork and ethical considerations contributed to presenting fairly and ethically sourced and managed data. Having detailed the methodology used in this research, the next chapter focus on presenting a history of Chinese hip-hop in the form of a chronological account from the early 1990s to the present, with the aim of providing a historical perspective that is instrumental to appreciate the content of the subsequent analysis chapters.

5.0 The conceptualisation of resistance

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the conceptualisation of resistance in Chinese hip-hop. In sociology, as well as in other disciplines, resistance has been recognised by scholars (Althusser, 2006; Scott 1985, 1989, 1990; Hollander & Einwohner, 2014) in a large variety of behaviours ranging from the individual to the collective level and in various settings, such as political systems, entertainment, literature, and the workplace. Despite this variety of definitions of resistance, perhaps the concept of resistance has been particularly prominent in works on social movements (Findji, 1992; Creasap, 2012). This chapter explores how resistance occurs in the Chinese hip-hop scene by articulating its profound differences with the more traditional understanding of the concept. In fact, hip-hop in China does not rely on overt and powerful forms of resistance, but mild, compromising, often contradictory, contingent and non-confrontational practices that are the subjects of the different sections of the chapter.

The contradictory nature of the conceptualisation of resistance in Chinese hip-hop is exemplified and discussed in section 5.2. This section analyses one of the dominant viewpoints amongst interviewees, namely the direct rejection of the idea that hip-hop is a type of resistance. As a result, I hold that interviewees are resisting the notion of resistance itself. By drawing from James Scott's (1985) theory of everyday resistance and Hollander & Einwohne's (2014) review on the typification of resistance, I frame the discourse of 'resisting resistance' within the concepts of externally defined resistance and everyday resistance. This is motivated by the identification and analysis of fragments of resistance both in the interviewees' answers and in some of their raps, despite their lack of awareness or open intent to resist.

Further examples of resistance are discussed in section 5.3, which moves onto analysing another significant theme mentioned by hip-hop artists and fans in the interviewees, namely the notion of 'peace, love and respect'. The section explores how this theme is conceptualised by interviewees as a form of resistance that places Chinese hip-hop in opposition to violence and inequalities and instead emphasises its connotations of unity and reciprocal respect. This is consistent with the ideology of Afrika Bambaata and the Zulu Nation of hip-hop that relied on the 'peace, love, respect and having fun' motto. This section also articulates how this interpretation is aligned with both an educational and non-violent vision of hip-hop and with

traditional values of Chinese culture as rooted in Confucianism and the concept of harmonious society.

Finally, section 5.4 provides an account of the interpretation of the concept of 保持真实 (Bǎo chí zhēn shí), 'keep it real', as a means for artists to claim authenticity. It discusses how this is also conceptualised as a form of resistance to the 'mundane' and massification trends and a way for rappers and fans to stay true to themselves and follow their dreams. Of particular relevance, the distinction between mainstream hip-hop and underground hip-hop is also discussed mainly in relation to what rappers consider to be authentic and therefore resistant to the commercial forces that are bringing Chinese hip-hop at the forefront of Chinese popular culture.

Overall, this chapter shows how resistance in Chinese hip-hop is conceptualised and expressed in more unique ways than the somewhat tame characteristics on the surface would appear to suggest. These characteristics generate resistance is different ways compared to the traditional understanding of hip-hop that are inextricably linked to specific aspects of traditional Chinese culture, thereby making Chinese hip-hop a distinctive case study to broaden the understanding of resistance with regarding to Chinese hip-hop as well as potentially broadening the understanding of resistance in cultural scenes and social movements.

5.2 'Hip-hop is not about resistance': resisting resistance

Section 5.2 attempts to answer the core question about whether hip-hop culture in China is considered to be a form of resistance by hip-hop enthusiasts. Although many researchers have deemed 'resistance' to be a term that is easily identified in a societal movement (Earl, Maher & Elliott, 2017; Findji, 2018; Hintz, 2021), in a cultural context, the definition of 'resistance' is difficult to define precisely and there is considerable disagreement and ambiguity in this respect (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). This makes it particularly difficult to formulate characteristics of the notion of 'resistance' also in the Chinese context and to explore questions such as under what circumstances, and by whom, can Chinese hip hop be defined as resistant.

To explore these issues more clearly, interviewees were directly asked whether they see hip-hop as a type of resistance, namely whether rappers and hip-hop followers consider hip-hop

culture in China to be resistant. The initial answers have been collected reveal either a rejection of the idea of resistance or ambiguity in its definition. Typical responses include:

> Abby Zhang: 'hip-hop is not about resistance. Hip-hop is to speak what ordinary men fear to say, sometimes it is an angry voice.'

> Bennet Wang: 'Resistance is only part of rap, and the word resistance does not fully represent Rap. Rap is not a challenge to the harmonious culture, as someone describes it, But a challenge to the disharmonious culture. Hip-hop resists the dark side and advocates for the bright side'.

Abby Zhang, who has been a rapper for several years, suggests very directly that hip-hop is not perceived to represent any resistance, but, at most, to convey everyday anger about their daily lives, personal problems, relationships and aspirations, so that hip-hop provides a space to speak, vent and grow. Meanwhile, another interviewee, Bennet Wang, suggested that resistance is present, but it is only one aspect of hip-hop; specifically, rap opposes the disharmonious society by promoting the bright side, which is consistent with harmonious values. These responses illustrate the difficulty of defining Chinese hip-hop as a certain type of resistance. It appears that acts and ideas of resistance in hip-hop culture are not necessarily recognised by the Chinese rappers as the core acts of hip-hop and that the definition of resistance is ambiguous for them.

According to the literature review in Chapter two and the most influential theories of resistance (Antonio Gramsci, Karl Polanyi), the expressions of difference, opposition, deviation or individuality are typically labelled as 'resistance'. These types of resistance are usually overt and visible and are recognised by both targets and external observers (Holland & Einwohner, 2004). However, when discussing hip-hop in the Chinese context it is not possible to simply define it as an active and open movement against a dominant cultural practice. In contrast, the practices of resistance in Chinese hip-hop are produced as an ongoing process of resistor's self-contradiction, and multiple interpretations and possibilities depending on the executors' understanding. These contradictions continue to be highlighted by Bennett Wong, who initially noted how hip-hop opposes the disharmonious aspects of society, but later recognised that limitations imposed by censorship might hinder a rapper's creativity:

> Bennet Wong: ‘Some lyrics in hip-hop music are really ‘dirty’ and are not suitable for minors. But sometimes the governmental censorship is too strict, and the process is rigid, which is not conducive to rappers' artistic creativity’.

From Bennett Wong’s discussion, some fragments of ‘resistance’ in hip-hop can be identified as typical subcultural values as resistant interviewees believe that certain lyrics in hip-hop music are detrimental to the formation of childhood values. At the same time, Bennett criticised the strictness of the censorship since it might limit creativity. Based on these viewpoints, it appears that resistance is not always purely intended and there is significant ambiguity and contradiction on the understanding of resistance among rappers’ and followers. In fact, Bennett’s response suggests that individuals or groups who resist power may simultaneously support the dominant class. Different researchers referred to this complexity as ‘accommodation’ (Sotirin & Gottfried, 1999), ‘ambiguity’ (Trethewey, 1997), ‘complicity’ (Healey, 1999), ‘conformity’ (Martin & Gavey, 1996), or ‘assimilation’ (Faith, 1994), depending on the situations and context. Indeed, these observations are reflected by similar answers among many other interviewees, who believe that hip-hop culture is to challenge societal injustice, inequality, demoralisation, and even crime, rather than further intended action. For instance, the self-created hip hop song ‘a pipe dream’ that Abby Zhang strongly recommended me to listen to, raps:

> ‘Draw a peaceful world where poor babies are no longer used as toys. Girls walking in the night are no longer afraid, all the bad guys pay the price. Draw an equal God who wants all children to receive equal education.’

‘A pipe dream’ is both a classic reflection on ‘societal adaptation’ and a spontaneous production of resistance vision as an individual. The song simultaneously resists those unjust social realities such as women's rights, educational inequality and the phenomenon of abandoned babies. When the discussion continued to point to the implications behind resistance, Abby said: ‘it's all in rap, nothing else behind, it's rap that expresses resistance, not me’, and ‘it's the responsibility of the government and the police to sustain a harmonious society’. These responses show that rap lyrics may indeed convey an idea of resistance, but producers do not openly recognise it and instead uses rap to vent, express anger, a desire or a social vision. This discussion also reminded me of Leblanc (1999: 17), who wrote that ‘resisters, after all, remain

within the social system they live'. Abby Zhang does express attitudes of resistance as a rapper both with her words and her lyrics. However, she refuses to admit that she is resisting; it's the rap that resists, not Abby. She instinctively rejects the idea of resistance because she is embedded in the societal system that promotes a harmonious culture. In other words, she is resisting the concept of resistance itself.

In addition, the analysis above suggests that rebels in Chinese hip-hop, may regard resistance as a 'small scale, indifferent and relatively safe' (Scott,1989:35) phenomenon. That is, Chinese hip-hop does not seem able to evolve into mass, conscious protests and 'street politics', as the history of American hip-hop has showed. So far, the resistors in the Chinese context do not seem to have the means to, or the interest in, openly resisting a hegemonic power, so their resistance reduces to simple, everyday acts that 'do not make the headlines' (Scott, 1985: 36). Therefore, Chinese hip-hop ambiguously adapts to the power environment around it and does not express resistance through dramatic or visible means such as rebellions, riots and revolutions. Instead, Chinese hip-hop artists express their idea of resistance creatively, which can be in the form of a mood, a moment of inspiration to rap or by just whining. Several interviewees, such as Nelson Deng, Robert Su and Vito Mao, provided responses that align with this interpretation, as they expressed similar ideas: 'we are not doing anything actually resistant', 'I am only expressing my inner emotions', 'why does hip-hop have to be resistant?' According to Hollander & Einwohner (2014), these features match the criteria for externally-defined resistance, whereby resistance may not be intended by the actors and may not be recognised by the cultural environment where subjects operate - but actions can still be labelled as resistant.

Based on these observations, two unique features emerge. Firstly, Chinese hip-hop rappers and fans are resisting the notion of traditional overt resistance by rejecting to define themselves as openly resisting anything. Secondly, the resistance may be externally defined and found in mundane practices that take the form of everyday resistance. The everyday nature of resistance in Chinese hip-hop is highlighted in the following sections by continuing to analyse respondents' understanding of it.

The above observations point to the mundane nature of resistance expressed by Chinese rappers. This aspect was also theoretically introduced in chapter 2, where the idea of everyday resistance by James Scott (1984) was discussed. Scott (1984) suggests that resistance can be integrated into social life and become a part of normality, instead of being as dramatic or exceptional as

traditionally assumed, even if this mundane aspect may make it still unclear to grasp how common it is. As Scott (1984) defines it, 'everyday' resistance is not politically articulated, clearly expressed or formally organised by the resister, which often makes it invisible to society. In the Chinese hip-hop cultural context, this would mean that the rappers might not be aware that they are resisting some exercise of power or are intending to do so for an action to qualify as an act of resistance, although they put forward some creative ideas of resistance. The passage below, extracted from an interview with Jee Sun, highlights the 'everyday' nature of resistance and the different interpretations of resistance that may arise in different daily contexts. Jee Sun is an amateur rapper from Beijing who writes his own songs and uploads them on Netease, where he has above five thousand monthly listeners. When asked about his interpretation of resistance in hip-hop, he stated:

> Jee Sun: 'I don't think there is a unique definition of resistance in hip-hop. Sometimes I write or listen to raps to release my frustration from work and swear against co-workers, sometimes just to chill. Hip-hop has different meanings depending on the rappers' and listeners' different understandings and daily emotions'.

According to Jee's viewpoint, the types of resistance in hip-hop music are diverse and intimately related to the listeners' and creators' emotions. Jee believes that the meaning of 'resistance' is personal, intimate and individual, and can be understood differently depending on the context of daily life. One day, Jee writes hip-hop songs to resist work pressure and vent out. On other occasions, he composes to simply relax. During the interview, he invited me to listen to some of his compositions on his Netease account, which provided further interesting insight. A look at his profile revealed song titles and lyrics that reflect his daily frustrations and small acts of defiance. The first song on his profile is titled 'you shut up'. In this rap, he takes on to people who 'show off sweet times with their partners', while he is '35 years old, earns minimum wage and doesn't have a girlfriend' and 'everyone laughs at me when I try to be funny'. In another song, he raps: 'I complained about super annoying supervisors who don't want to work overtime today, super annoying bosses who only control us'.

Again, the interviews and lyrics point out the microscopic nature of everyday resistance, based on resistant fragments of individual listeners who rely on temporality, individual choices, personal tactics and context opportunities which are all shifting, intangible and transient. Nevertheless, from this type of mundane or non-dramatic resistance, we can understand the

origin and modes of action of resistance. Everyday resistance of hip-hop followers is concretised in various subtle and individual acts of resistance in daily life that need to be detected and interpreted in their specific daily context. Perhaps such small resistant acts recur in a similar way in everyday life, however, the resister might react in an automatic and non-reflective way. This 'coincidence' reflects the hip-hop resisters' creativity and sensitivity to the feelings expressed by hip-hop, rather than an intentional and explicit resistance. This interpretation is also reflected by another interviewee MC Guang, who said:

> MC Guang: 'The rebellious part of hip-hop is that people have various and colourful stories of the past and they have been transformed into different emotions. There are depressed, angry and relieved versions of raps. These hard-nosed life attitudes are all included in hip-hop music'.

MC Guang's response reveals that resistance in his hip-hop music pieces consists of a variety of emotions. From his response, we see the potential for other dimensions of resistance focusing on the symbols, language, interaction, emotions and effects of everyday resistance. As MC Guang explained, the feelings of anger, frustration, relief are considered to be a more integral part of rap. These sentiments become the silent, mundane and entertainment patterns of acts that are normalised within a certain subordinated culture or community. This is better illustrated by MC Guang's story, who kept telling me about working several part-time jobs, while using his leisure time to write songs, which made hip-hop music part of his life. During the interview, he invited me to scroll through his NetEase profile, which had about five thousand followers. He showed me his new daily followers and achievements that he accumulated during his five years of rapping. MC Guang's story clearly shows how hip-hop music and culture are gradually becoming hip-hop enthusiasts' part and way of life, personality and habit as well as a way of expressing everyday resistance.

In one of his most popular raps, MC Guang sings: 'his persuasive power comes from arrogance, a greedy, unwise, and selfish little bastard. This type of person is the worst and the most hateful'. MC Guang later explained to me that the dissing is aimed at one of his line managers at work, who often tries to sow discord in the workplace by taking advantage of his high status. As MC Guang admitted later in the interview, in response to the manager's behaviour, he fakes compliance in the workplace and uses work time to create hip-hop to diss his manager. MC Guang's exemplifies how resistance in a modern society in China can be stylish and creative. Dissing manager in a workspace clearly illustrates how the creative tactics of resistance can go

beyond 'difference' from dominant designs and manipulates it to one's advantage (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019). As mentioned in chapter two, unlike James Scott (1989: 33), who describes everyday resistance as 'hidden, small-scale survival techniques', De Certeau (1984) deems that through cultural consumption, resisters are creative, utilising and bending the norms and rules, to form styles and forge new identities. This interpretation really seems to explain MC Guang's behaviours, whereby the resisters' desires to evade norms pushes them towards a creative use of their own time, style and daily circumstances.

In fact, the example of dissing a manager in a workspace reminds us of De Certeau's 'time theft', which exemplifies how employees resist employers. Indeed, one of the types of everyday resistance identified by De Certeau (1984: 25) is 'foot-dragging': intentionally dragging feet along and lowering the working tempo. He uses the term 'everyday resistance' in the situation when the workers engaging in leisure activities during working time. This is the case of MC Guang, who writes hip-hop songs on 'company time' and denigrates the manager. Instead of producing profit for the employer and shopping mall, rappers use the time and space for their own needs, leisure and interests, specifically for activities that are creative and non-profit. This also reminded me of interviewees' quotes such as: 'as a rapper, I should take advantage of the money I earn from my full-time job to maintain my rap career'. This might be also the case of semi-professional rappers in China who are subverting the rules of dominance in a working environment to turn them to their advantage, which shows how resistance is practiced in everyday contexts. These variegated understandings of the concept of 'everyday resistance' from James Scott and De Certeau shows again that resistance in Chinese hip-hop and everyday of hip-hop followers' practice is not a traditional and dichotomous concept (either overt or covert resistance), rather it encompasses small acts, fragments of emotions and normalisation of lifestyle. These mundane, small acts of resistance might be creative, effective and smart survival tactics in a modern power centre, a point that will be further discussed in the following sections.

Aside from the interviewees reported above, which show that resistance can be linked to an individual's everyday emotions and serve as everyday survival strategies, other concepts of resistance are connected to the debate about whether hip-hop as a subculture can even resist dominant culture. With regards to this idea, interviewees provided further viewpoints about the position of hip-hop within the mainstream cultural scene. When asked about resistance to contemporary mainstream and commercial hip-hop, Giam Zheng said: 'the so-called 'mainstream hip hop' and 'underground hip hop' distinction is just a label. It doesn't matter if

either scene is rebellious, I just hope that my voice can be heard more and more in the mainstream so more people can know about my rap'.

Giam Zheng has been a semi-professional rapper for two years and his profile on NetEase counts several thousand monthly listeners. He believes that using the distinction between 'mainstream hip hop' and 'underground hip hop' is not important in China's contemporary hip hop scene, as these two concepts are just labels. This point suggests that Giam Zheng does not see hip-hop as resisting any dominant power, or, at least, it is not important to him. Instead, his desire to be heard in the mainstream reveals a personal search for fame more than an intrinsic interest or intent to be rebellious. This attitude was also shared by other interviewees such as Hannah Chen, who declared: 'I just want to have as many listeners as possible on Netease. Whether my raps are rebellious or not, I only hope that one day I can be selected for a music show'. All of the remarks above reveal that the symbolic boundary between underground and mainstream hip-hop in Chinese hip-hop may not be as important as it was in the subcultural scene in New York around 1970s, when subculturalist regarded it as a way to demarcate their subcultural realm compared to the mainstream. Another viewpoint on the underground and mainstream (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003) is that hip-hop is dead with regards to its function to resist mainstream culture because any action to challenge, or position against or disrupt the dominant power will not have an intrinsically subversive relationship with the dominant culture and that it will only 'expose as an illusion'. Perry (2004: 6) makes this same point slightly differently: most of the hip-hop music in the mainstream market has been commercialised and hence lost its power to contrast massification.

For example, Zoe Zhao believes that for commercialised artists, the attitude they express is the result of a compromise with the market requirements, hence leading to the loss of the hip-hop uniqueness, as she stated: 'to me, it is not really important if rappers are resisting something, either in the mainstream or in the underground. However, hip-hop singers who have performed on mainstream platforms have been commercialised, they are all the same, they do not show anything unique'.

Zoe Zhao is a frequent listener of hip-hop this music genre. She is a long-standing member of one of the hip-hop groups on WeChat and her feed is full of blog posts, new rap releases as well as occasional posts about niche artists. Her answer reiterates that resistance is not a key aspect in her perception of hip-hop; however, she criticised mainstream artists because they do not differentiate. Such desire for distinctiveness is also common to other interviewees who

stated that: ‘I don’t like most artists on mainstream apps’, ‘I always search for new rappers that nobody knows about’. In fact, the same rapid development of the music market that allowed hip-hop to be commercialised, has also led hip-hop culture to change the relationship between artists, producers and consumers. The demand for niche music has also spawned independent, freelance hip-hop artists and work in line with niche tastes, which does not need to compromise with mass commercialisation standards. This is where many Chinese hip-hop musicians are moving towards in the music market. Independent labels such as Chongqing GOSH, Xi'an Red Flower, from Chongqing, Xinjiang, Nanjing and Changsha are independent hip-hop labels that are active in different urban cities in China. These autonomous labels have created hip-hop communities that are free to form bands, based on the idea that ‘hip-hop originated in the streets’. This tendency is confirmed by another interviewee, Ivan Wen, who believes that:

> Ivan Wen: ‘Hip-hop culture doesn't need to resist or blend with the mainstream culture because it's an innovative culture. Many independent labels still pursue their own style choices without becoming mainstream.’

The point offered by Ivan Wen highlights again how resistance does not seem to matter, even in the context of mainstream versus underground. There is no need to neither resist nor blend with the dominant culture because hip-hop is believed to be innovative, and therefore distinct in its own right. As After Journey, an indie hip-hop artist who was runner up at the 2017 edition of The Rap of China, once said, ‘no one can say I am from underground, we are all from the street’. This thought again highlights that what matters to hip-hop artists is not belonging to the mainstream or underground hip-hop scene, being rebellious or not, because all rappers are ‘from the street’. This suggests that some Chinese hip-hop artists are likely to understand their practice as the ‘autonomous realm’ of the street and play a mediating role of the resistance art they create in society. Thus, resistance, as an activity determined by the subject, allows people to listen to the voice from the ‘hood’ and street. This implies that people could arguably move around as they please, doing things they like and relating freely to each other, meaning that these voices ‘from the street’ do not map to a serious political position or opposition, they are merely a display or communication of a ‘significant difference’ of the group’s identity. Overall, it could be argued that the hip-hop scene in China may be in a period in which artists are committed to producing marketable music which is commercially conscious of mainstream audiences while maintaining the necessary authenticity of the origins of hip-hop culture. This duality for rap has positioned hip-hop as an important symbol of ‘coming out of the street’ and enabled MCs to promote their place in mainstream commercial culture through their raps. The

discourse about authenticity and its perception as resistance will be analysed in greater detail in section 5.4.

Based on this contrast between underground and mainstream, many interviewees also pointed out how resistance can take the form of a performance act in modern hip-hop culture. This is also believed to partly explain why, from the outset, most of my interviewees rejected the idea that hip-hop is resistant, because most interviewees may realise that rebelliousness and discord are often faked in rapping. Such interpretation is best exemplified by MC Huang, who defined his interpretation of resistance in hip-hop as the practice of dissing. In his words: 'my understanding of resistance is to diss in hip-hop culture'. Dissing in African-American hip-hop culture is mainly encouraged as a non-violent way to resolve disputes. But current hip-hop followers like the diss culture because they like to watch the rappers swearing at each other and affirming their own identity on stage. Whether the dissing is real or not doesn't matter'.

Based on MC Huang's point of view, resistance in hip-hop takes the form of dissing and can be conducive to the artists' identity. According to his understanding, dissing was initially born to resolve disputes peacefully. However, in the contemporary Chinese scene, dissing serves a different purpose, namely for rappers to show their 'attitude' and to prove that they able to defend their own identity on stage. Whether this process is real or not, doesn't matter to MC Huang. This interpretation suggests that rappers construct a 'resistant' hip-hop artistic identity and package it with a playful nature. Chinese rappers are not rebellious nor hostile to each other, rather they perform resistance and aggressiveness through dissing with a pure entertainment aim. The entertaining nature of dissing is also highlighted by Owen Gu, an independent rapper who stated:

> Owen Gu: 'We fight on the stage, we pretend to diss each other, but in the backstage, we respect each other. Fundamentally, I don't think there is a real resistance between rappers, we see this form of hip-hop as a performance to entertain the public'.

Owen Gu's response shows how anger, dissing and resistance can indeed be faked and packaged as on-stage performances. As he believes, there is no 'real' tension between the rappers. He continued: 'it's like the early spread of hip-hop in New York where a group of black rappers gathered together on the street to find musical inspiration, some white street rappers wanted to battle with them'. Conflicts over the cultural background and ethnic

differences began like this. In a contemporary music scene in the 21st century, such battle scenes are not real, and they transform the conflict based on cultural background and ethnic differences into a 'war of words', or 'beef' that is directed against individuals and their own hip-hop music style.

This analogy with cultural background and music style reminded me of how Chinese rappers use dialects when dissing to affirm cultural identity and ownership. For instance, Siwei Ma (a member of the Higher Brothers crew from Chengdu) wrote a song in his own Chengdu dialect against Gai to imply his satirical attitude towards Gai's music; in response, Gai wrote another song to fight back in his own Chongqing dialect. Such conflicts may also extend to a larger level and involve entire music labels. One of the most publicised conflicts between rap labels happened between Xi'an Red Flower and Chong Qing Gosh during the 2016 and 2017 'Iron Mic Night'[19]. It was initiated by a rumor that Xi'an Red Flower accused Chong Qing Gai of not being authentic (Weibo Red flower account, 2012 Jan 8). Though the claim was never verified, it led to a quarrel between the two labels, and many unknown rappers have since become famous for taking sides by 'dissing Gai' or 'supporting Gai' (Weibo, 2013 Oct 8). Indeed, rap beefs between rappers become feuds that start with someone dissing, insulting, or calling out the other party in a rap song. Though rap beef entertains fans, they are often staged for publicity, to bitter differences, or to artificially create a competition to see who's better lyrically. Indeed, it was never confirmed whether Xi'an Red Flower members accusing against Gai was real or it was simply made-up.

The format of rap beefs was only present in the underground scene on a small scale before the reality show The Rap of China[20] became heated. On such a larger scale, the battles continued and were amplified to a different level. In fact, the show provided a much bigger stage for rap beefs by dividing the participating teams in 'Underground OG' and 'Idol Rappers'. This arrangement basically magnified the feuds between labels and individual rappers from the underground scene on the mainstream stage. For instance, underground OGs strongly dissed Idol rapper Zhou Mi 'for those fakers who flakily left after the first round, we as the underground rapper will eliminate you all, whether you are idol or whatever'. On top of this,

[19] Also introduced in chapter two, Iron Mic is a battle between two rappers or camps, where participants are given an allotted time to "freestyle" while the audience decides the winner. In 2012, Chong Qing Gosh won the championship. In 2013, Xi'an Red Flower was awarded the title.

[20] Also introduced in chapter 4. The Rap of China is a music reality show, produced by streaming platform iQIYI. The first season of the show aired in 2017 and was followed by four seasons, which demonstrates the influence it had and the positive reception from the public. In the first season, the two winners were PG One and Gai.

participant rappers often pick fights outside the ring, such as the fight between Gai and PG One, which was then commercialised successfully. Gai and PG One started a beef online, using rap lyrics to diss each other, although they then ended up jointly winning the championship, so that the fight dissipated. This was confirmed in PG One's 2019 overseas tour, where he publicly stated that he and GAI had long since reconciled and publicly stated, during an interview: 'Hey bro, which rapper's song are you listening to right now, is it GAI? Just kidding! Gai and I are already at peace. Gai is freaking awesome'.

In conclusion, the format of rap beefs became a tool for reality shows to earn more hits from the audience rather than expressing a true idea of 'underground vs mainstream' or for rappers to show real resistance, rebelliousness or defiance. 'It's more like a ridiculous TV series than a competition', says the interviewee MC Huang. This process shows the commercialisation of hip-hop in China and the embodiment of the concept of 'authenticity', which will be further analysed in section 5.4. In a commercialised era, one of the ways authenticity is defined is through the media. As Hebdige (1979) argues, the media is a cultural disseminator that helps organise the subcultural experience and explain 'authenticity' in the subculture. In this, it is integral in defining the 'underground' scene's authenticity for subcultural members. This is why both GAI and PG One, as underground rappers, are willing to participate in staged conflicts on reality shows and perform resistance.

5.3 'Peace, love and respect' is a type of resistance

The previous section discussed the idea of overt resistance in Chinese hip-hop being rejected by interviewees. Here, an extended perspective on resistance provided by the interviewees will be discussed. When interviewees were asked about resistance, their reluctance to identify hip-hop as resistant was often followed by identifying the core spirit of Chinese hip-hop as 'peace, love and respect'. As reviewed in chapter two, where there is power, there is resistance, so it is necessary to consider discussing resistance under the Chinese power system, so that it becomes interesting to discuss how resistance under the Chinese power network may evolve into an ambitious social vision in regard to 'peace, love and respect', which appears to be far beyond the resistance and control dichotomy and has practical societal significance. Tim Yang, a long-term listener of hip-hop, stated:

> Tim Yang: 'Why does hip-hop have to be resistant? I think hip-hop stands for peace and love. My understanding of American hip-hop

> culture is that African American black people pursue a better life and fight out of their poor lives and dark reality. I feel that Chinese hip-hop also fights that darkness of reality'.

Tim's response identifies the concept of hip-hop resistance with the struggling life experienced by African Americans, who regard hip-hop as a means of escape dark realities. Specifically, Tim characterised hip-hop with the terms 'peace and love'. These concepts are reminiscent of the societal wish and vision of 'peace, love, unity, and having fun' proposed by Afrika Bambaataa, who founded the Universal Zulu Nation in 1982 (Katz, 2012), which was created by a group of socially and politically aware rappers, B-boys, graffiti artists and followers involved in hip hop culture. The aim of the Zulu Nation was to support diversified and different races and cultures around the world. Specifically, Bambaataa was inspired by the 1964 film Zulu, and more DJs, rappers, b-boys, graffiti artists followed this community. Bambaataa's plan for the Universal Zulu Nation was to live by the motto of 'peace, love, unity, and having fun', to unleash the creativity of youths with an authentic and liberating worldview (Katz, 2012). The universal perspective of the Zulu Nation's mantra is useful to analyse some interviewees' viewpoints. According to Tim's understanding, the 'peace and love' motto of hip-hop is reflected in the courage of African Americans in 1970s fighting the dark side and pursuing a brighter life. Indeed, some scholars have highlighted the positive impact of rap music in modern society, as it provides marginalised youth with alternatives to violence and gang activities and offers resources to understand the world justice and inequality (Katz, 2012). This call for justice and equality gives voice to worldwide generations who try to resist their economic poor circumstances and prejudice so that they could create and sustain a better life. Hence, the motto 'to exist is to resist' was coined and originally served to express the everyday difficulties of the black man in the economic paralysis of New York City in the mid to late 1970s (Katz, 2012). This is how hip-hop provided both a politics of recognition and rage and an aspirational focus youth up against marginalisation, isolation and exclusion. This aspirational focus indeed is to offer an alternative sense of place to speak, a means of interpreting the world and, I would add, also a different way of expressing resistance, just as the interviewees below expressed:

> Wendy Liu: 'Rap resists the dark side of society and advocates the bright side of society, which is consistent with the idea of harmonious society based on reciprocal peace, love and respect'.

Jess Feng: 'The spirit of rap is peace and love, which is consistent with the values of the harmonious society. Norms of a harmonious society are benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom and faithfulness. This is consistent with the original idea of hip-hop founders to eliminate inequality and injustice with the bright side of hip-hop culture'.

The connection between the concept of harmonious society and the spirit of hip-hop put forward by the respondents above is reminiscent of Confucianist values (Bell, 2010), and coincide with the Zulu Nation principles of benevolence, justice and wisdom. Correspondingly, in the 'Hip-hop declaration of Peace'[21] (Katz, 2012) declared by Zulu Nation, 'Peace' indicates that hip-hop culture is united as one multi-skilled, multi-cultural, multi-faith, multi-racial community committed to the establishment and the development of peace. 'Hiphoppas' are encouraged to speak out against injustice and shape a more caring society and a more peaceful world. This is quite similar to the harmonious value of 'benevolence'. 'Respect' refers to the desire to respect the dignity and sanctity of life without discrimination or prejudice. In a similar fashion, this is described in the Chinese harmony society values as 'propriety'.

According to Han (2008) and his research about the harmonious society, harmony is the sensation realised via the interactions of individuals with society and its institutions. The interactions between societal institutions and an individual's chosen values at a given time provide a sense of harmony. This is how Wendy Liu and Jess Feng, as hip-hop enthusiasts living in the Chinese society, interact with both individual choices and social core values. That is, what they learned about hip-hop in Chinese society is about harmonious values which are about advocating social justice and fighting crimes, seeking for brightness and avoiding darkness, upholding equality and revealing injustice. As Jess later said in the interview: 'I really don't think that hip-hop should be only an expression of resistance and I don't like violent and vulgar raps. Hip-hop should represent the positives of life and be against exclusion and violence'. This fits into our previous discussion on how resistance intent is affected by the society resisters live in, which pushes resisters to the self-contradictory and protective mechanism to instinctively resist resistance, since they themselves live in that society.

[21] The Hip Hop Declaration of Peace was presented to the United Nations Organization on May 16th, 2001. The document puts forward 18 principles, which aim to establish hip-hop as an international culture of peace and prosperity and should guide hip-hop culture towards freedom from violence.

In continuation of the previous discussion, the following section mainly analyses how the power system in China constraints resistant docile subjects. According to Gramsci (1971: 445–462), Foucault (1995), and Althusser (2006), successful ideological works usually disguise their genuine intentions, orchestrate methodically generated common sense, and silently domesticate people's brains in order to govern the formation of new concepts. Harmonious ideology in hip-hop values demonstrates how through subtle disciplinary techniques, the generation of thoughts is softly controlled. In this light, the intention of hip-hop resistance is explicit: Chinese rappers rationally utilise the power system within the framework of discipline as a personal resistance tool but ultimately transform it into pragmatic venting out or self-encouragement. We can see that as times evolve, hip hop is shedding its old shadow (such as hip-hop in New York that was in favour of the aggressive and hard-hitting beats to emphasise the rap themes of police and gangsta) and is starting to reveal a pragmatic and energetic side (Such as the ‘progressive theme’ in the American hip-hop scene around the 1980s and late 1990s). Unlike the genre's more commercially successful, 'gangsta rap', progressive-rap artists often reject intracultural violence in favour of constructive and educational answers such as consciousness, uplift, comedy, and activism (Nyawalo, 2013). In this case, the everyday experience of hip-hop is displayed as a ceremonial event, a spectacle distanced from everyday life. When Jess Feng and Wendy Liu explained their view on resistance and intention behind it, as a researcher, I instinctively sensed that their signifier meant: ‘look, I'm resisting’, but also that, when I actually asked the question, their response was ‘no, I'm not resisting’. In a way, it is even more speculative that they think hip-hop music brings them some so-called ‘positive energy’. This is how another interviewee MC King understands hip-hop ‘positive energy’ as a semi-professional rapper, who stated:

> MC King: ‘Hip-hop brings me a lot of energy. It teaches me to seek the truth, critically think about the world and be optimistic. When I write hip-hop, I feel energised, my raps push me to fight my fears and reject the dark side’.

MC King insisted on showing off some of his raps during the interview, which he sang to me: ‘We will always be as alive and fearless as new-born babies, may the world be young and bright, the whole world is bright and young’. In another rap, he sings: ‘you are always full of hope and strong and warm every day. How many times the endless night, the endless darkness failed to consume you. You always light up my day’. He then explained to me that this song is dedicated to hip-hop, and he is pretending to talk directly to the art of rapping, which saved

him from the darkness and always comforts him. It appears that both his reply and raps exude optimism, and that rapping is a valuable means for MC King to express his optimism and positivity. From this perspective, Chinese hip hop artists are heirs to the African American rappers and, more broadly, the Chinese hip-hop might realise the ambition of Zulu Nation, whereby the ultimate meaning and inspiration of hip-hop stem from notions of strength, resilience, and hope. Thus, while the concept of resistance in hip hop culture is ostensibly at odds with the concept of 'peace, love and respect', the ideal objective with practices such as 'dissing' and resistant lyrics through rap, is that both the artists and their fans achieve deep bonds over life struggles but rise above such hard feelings through a mutually cathartic cultural experience.

‘Looking for the light in pain’ is what MC Huang once again emphasised to me as he reiterated that he looks for ‘positive energy’ in hip-hop music. Actually, as discussed in chapter 2, the term ‘positive energy’ was not introduced by Chinese hip-hop artists but is appropriated from public discourse on the propaganda discourse on harmonious society. Historically, the phrase 'positive energy' was originally used in the West to refer to spiritual healing (Hird, 2018; McGuire & Kantor, 1988: 241). It reflects an Orientalist and syncretic interpretation of cosmology and Eastern philosophy of health, suggesting that via yoga and other spiritual activities, a type of 'positive energy' from the cosmos may be absorbed into the human biofield (Hird, 2018). The core of positive energy in Chinese sociocultural discourse is that individuals should behave and think positively (Chen & Wang, 2019).

In modern China, when people experience hardships, positive energy's self-help solutions imply resisting resistance rather than starting a cultural revolution, or using the narrative of suffering in musical creations, rather than overtly venting out dissatisfaction.

Therefore, the interpretation of peace, love and respect as a type of resistance in this section, can be simplified into a dichotomy of positive and negative energy. Chinese rappers use ‘positive energy’ as a strategy to deal with their life dilemmas of not reinterpreting negative emotions. The positive energy narrative targets directly the generation of emotions, which shares a common root with the idea of ‘harmonious society’. However, the internalisation of positive energy by the rappers pushes the emotional dichotomy one step further. The reflection on the hip-hop pieces created by the interviewees and their attitude towards it, shows that even lyrics that seem depressed, pessimistic, desperate, and resistant may hide the original intention behind of always looking for the bright side and staying positive. I argue that this is how

resistance should be reinterpreted in the context of the Chinese harmonious society. Within the boundaries imposed by the positive energy narrative, resistance is to be understood as a strategic resistance to survival. It also can be interpreted as the product of harmonious power instilling, where individuals are demanded to stay positive and to vent out negative feelings. This is the core discussion that how power and everyday resistance are entangled in intricate ways. The next section will explore this musical practice of resistance in more detail focussing on how Chinese hip-hop artists practice the common hip-hop mantra of 'keep it real' with resistant emotions.

5.4 'Keep it real': authenticity as a type of resistance

So far, this chapter has revealed that resistance in Chinese hip-hop is conceptualised and expressed in more subtle ways than the somewhat tame characteristics on the surface would appear to suggest. Such expressions refer to 'resisting resistance' and 'peace, love and respect as a type of resistance'. This section will reveal a further understanding of resistance in Chinese hip-hop, which is more closely related to the practice of hip-hop, as it includes the concept of authenticity and the interpretation of the mantra 'keep it real' as a marker of resistance itself. This interpretation further reveals the subtlety, secularity and inextricable connection of resistance to everyday life.

The interest in the concept of 'keep it real' arose because many fans and rappers mentioned this specific sentence during the interviews in connection with their interpretation of resistance and relation with hip-hop. Literally, 'keep it real' is expressed as 保持真实 (Bǎochí zhēnshí). Bǎochí means 'to maintain, to keep', and is employed to express temporal extension and persistence of a concept, while zhēnshí is translated as 'real, authentic, truthful' and conveys a strong idea of authenticity and honesty about the subject being discussed. In fact, many interviewees even used the expression in English as 'keep it real' to imply 'stay true' and 'be yourself'. These concepts seem to be at odds with the increasing commercialisation that the current hip-hop music scene in China is experiencing. As hip-hop artists pride themselves on the 'street cred' they receive among their fans which is to remain faithful to the 'keep it real' mantra. In other words, hip-hop artists and fans find themselves in a contradictory situation of being 'inside' a mainstream culture that they had, in part, defined themselves as being against. This is where the starting point of this section comes from hip-hop authenticity can be a type of strength that encourages artists and creators to express resistance to a multitude of ordinary

concepts, such as ‘mundane’, the ‘superficial’ and the ‘massification’. When I asked Andy about his understanding of resistance he said:

> Andy Zhou: ‘hip-hop is not really resistant, instead it’s all about keeping it real. Hip-hop is to say what you want to say, do what you want to do and stay true to yourself. We should not use our own ‘real’ to define others’ ‘real’.’

Andy Zhou seems to initially reject the idea of hip-hop being resistant, he provides a definition that is the result of understanding ‘keep it real’ from different resistant dimensions. From a social-psychological perspective, Andy suggests that ‘keep it real’ means ‘staying true to yourself’ which is opposite to ‘following mass trends’, thereby highlighting the valorisation of individualism and the resistance to conformity in the discourse of hip-hop community members. On a more personal dimension, Andy believes that hip-hop music encourages him to keep his heart and not worry too much about the insights of others, because his ‘real’ cannot be defined by others’ idea of ‘real’. In fact, a look at Andy Zhou’s most popular rap on Netease confirms his interpretation. In his song ‘Go straight’, the refrain sings: ‘Go straight, keep it your own way, I don't care about other people's business or other people's words, forget what other people said’. Similarly, in his other rap ‘In Da street’ (title in English), Andy reaffirms his independence: ‘Stay true to your hood, you don't need someone to lead the way you want to go’. Overall, although Andy seemed to initially reject the concept of resistance, his definition of ‘keep it real’ actually show his adversity to homogeneity in society.

Another interviewee, Daniel Lin, supported this interpretation by instinctively rejecting conformity. As a self-defined underground rapper, he criticised the hypocrisy of the Chinese hip-hop music scene in the form of vanity and rappers who only seek online fame:

> Daniel Lin: ‘You need to keep it real when you rap. The only way to do it is to really love it. You can’t just do it for fun, or only because you think it’s cool. Hip-hop is serious stuff. You can’t just do it to be famous on the internet or to copy others. You must dedicate yourself fully to hip-hop to keep it real.’

In this argument, Daniel Lin positions himself against the inauthentic by stressing the necessity of passion in order to ‘keep it real’. He doesn’t rap only because it’s cool to do so, or to blindly

follow other rappers. His passion for rapping is profound and wholehearted. According to him, this is the only way to achieve authenticity in his creations and not to compromise with rapping only to achieve internet fame. We could therefore see how Daniel defines resistance through building up his authenticity and individualism against compromised mass ideology and day to day lifestyles. In Daniel's opinion, what Chinese hip hop artists need to resist is the contradictions brought about by the 'mundane', whereby Chinese hip-hop artists need to face potentially divergent professional and personal roles as well as societal responsibilities in modern scenes. In fact, Daniel believes that authenticity can be achieved by fully committing himself to hip-hop.

The theme of commitment to making and listening to hip-hop also led to another interpretation of 'keep it real', which emerged from the interview with Owen Gu, a professional rapper. John believes that the struggles of his daily life and mundanity represent an important source of inspiration in his raps:

> Owen Gu: 'My written songs are all about struggling to be a rapper while keeping my job. I sometimes realise that I will probably not make it big, so I still try to have fun jumping between a day job and being a rapper. But this is the real life, many amateur artists struggle with this balance, but they still rap about it to show their real experiences'.

This viewpoint provides a further opportunity for reflection on the understanding of authenticity and its relation to resistance. According to Owen Gu, reflecting on his daily struggles in the songs is a means to achieve authenticity and stay true to oneself. Balancing a job with rapping is difficult for him, but also a source of authenticity because it provides inspiration for his raps that talk about real life. In fact, he continued: 'my raps are powerful because they tell real-life stories without any embellishment', and later articulated:

> Owen Gu: I am always myself when I write and sing raps, either when recording or in a live rapping competition. I don't build up my identity as an artist. I rap about things I care in real life, and I don't care if people think I am lame or whatever. This is who I am'.

With this viewpoint, Owen Gu typifies Krims' (2000: 95) description of hip-hop artists' daily identity and hip-hop persona as 'collapsed identities'. According to Krims, for a rapper to

achieve a real self, the 'performer' must collapse onto the mundane self to allow for a new collapsed self to 'speak from authentic experience' (Hess, 2005: 298). This is how Owen keeps it real when he raps, and how he understands his art in mediating 'individual creativity with social dynamics' (Hess, 2005: 298). At the same time, the collapsed identity exemplified by Owen is a way of resisting stereotypes and prejudice, as he doesn't care about what people think of his persona: 'This is who I am', he concluded.

The importance of staying true to oneself was also voiced by another interviewee, Fabio Wu, who told me his story about being married with two children, working a skilled job and rapping at the same time. During the interview, he sounded very proud of his creations because they 'draw from my daily difficulties'. He used to rap only within his friends' circle, until he was encouraged to create a Netease[22] account to upload his creations. Initially, he did not achieve much visibility, but recently he reached about one million fans on the app and was invited by a small music label to record his own album. During the interview, he was considering whether it was necessary to keep his job because:

> Fabio Wu: 'If I give up my job, I am afraid I will lose flexibility and inspiration to create real music from my everyday life. I am not sure if I can keep my raps real if I don't live the real life out there'

Fabio Wu's words confirm that 'speaking from authentic experience' (Hess, 2005: 298) is key to achieving authenticity by getting inspiration from the mundane. His works demonstrate his extreme commitment and passion for his raps, as he is even considering keeping his blue-collar job to get more struggling stories while facing the fact that he might actually be able to only keep a better-paid hip-hop artist's role to support his family lives. Fabio Wu's experience also shows that the tension between a daytime job and attempting to make it as a rapper leads to a significant divergence between work life and rapper life. This tension, on the other hand, provides enough material for lyric expression. It feels like it becomes a necessity for rappers to endow their songs with hardships, and only through this struggle can rap be authentic and resist the same hardships that become sources of creativity. In other words, there are rappers with day jobs that have a deep merger of their rapper persona and their professional identity, whereby the resulting tension is a source of authenticity that creates resistance. Many other rappers I have interviewed told me about similar struggles between work life and rapping. Even

[22] NetEase Cloud Music is a premium music streaming service developed and owned by NetEase, Inc. The streaming service was launched to the public in April 2013.

hip-hop artists who can make a living from their talent are not financially secure. Day jobs are supportive for Chinese hip-hop artists who are unable to make a livelihood off their music.

However, this duality is also used as a tactic for rappers to speak from their real-life experience, rapping about their own stories and keeping it real in this way. This is especially true when it comes to the contemporary Chinese hip hop scene, where a rapper may have a daily job, while also being a musician, professional, entrepreneur, performer, scene member, promoter, which can result in contradictory and conflicting roles. The multiple stratified levels rappers operate result in everyday paradoxes and problems that they must handle. This section of the analysis is also reminiscent of the practices of everyday anger and resistance in the workplace, such as MC Guang's example discussed in the previous section, where Guang uses his work time to write raps against his line manager. As a result, the inspiration of Chinese rappers is often found in subtle aspects of the work environment, which shows how rappers' artistic activity, and their professional lives may be closely intertwined. This is how Chinese rappers learned to speak from their life lessons. Citing Chinese famous rapper Gai: 'that's why people work jobs during the day and rap at night.' Here, can be seen a link between hip-hop practice and the everyday work of Chinese rappers.

Another understanding of the 'keep it real' mantra that arose from the interviewees, leads to a different interpretation of resistance in the form of tension between underground and commercial hip-hop. In the Chinese hip-hop scene, this discourse is intimately linked with authenticity, as it often revolves around discussions of what is pure and polluted culture or, respectively, authentic and fake expression. For example, it has been emphasized since the first season of The Rap of China that 'underground rappers are real and idol rappers are fake' (Souhu news, 2017 July 20). This definition exacerbated existing quarrels between rappers and music labels, such as the never-ending infamous dispute between Gai and PG One or the clashes between the Gosh label in Sichuan and the Red Flower Party in Xi'an (Zhihu, 2012), which began after they accused each other of not being authentic. These quarrels have consistently been understood by hip-hop fans and rappers as aimed at highlighting the discourse of authenticity of hip-hop (Zhihu, 2017). MC Jin, an underground rapper, commented on the discord between Gai and PG One:

> MC Jin: 'those contestants are all fakers. Do you think that they really want to keep it real? Do you think they rap about their life struggles? They are not from the street, so they don't care. All they have and want is money'.

Even though these specific artistic behaviors may be aimed at maintaining the hip-hop credibility and authenticity, rappers like John do not buy it. In his view, the search for authenticity sold by commercial quarrels on the mainstream stage are faked. This suggests that Chinese rappers such as MC Jin seeks for maintaining a suitable ownership and control of their 'from the street' subcultural identity, such as the 'real life struggles' John mentioned, which is the reason why artists are eager to show its unique hip-hop cultural features against unauthentic hip-hop culture. What is inauthentic hip-hop music? The answer to this question is somewhat problematic and bears significant complexity. Considering the collected opinions of Chinese rappers, a key aspect to unveiling the understanding of (in)authenticity is based on the rappers' attitudes towards commercialisation trends of hip-hop culture in China.

One of the rappers, MC Xing, defined inauthentic underground hip-hop artists who sell themselves to the mainstream and become commercial, as this compromises their 'keep it real' attitude. According to MC Xing: 'If you get signed by label, you are not real anymore. Real hip hop is from the street, it's from the hood, if you rap about commercially appealing stuff, you are not true to yourself. You sell your soul to the music labels; you can't keep it real anymore once you work for them. Many rappers are eager to become mainstream, and that is fine, but they should be aware that they can't keep it real anymore, and fans won't buy it'. MC Xing's points partly exemplify the perception of authenticity as resistance to commercialisation and the mainstream. His ideas about making it to the commercial stage emphasise the tensions and contradictions between staying authentic and being a commercial artist who potentially earns a lot of money. In fact, his ideas are rather strong: he is not willing to compromise his spirit with the mainstream requirements and is not willing to 'sell his soul' to music labels. When further asked about the meaning behind his works, he explicitly said that it is meant to express resistance to popular rap and conveys feelings of confrontation with the mainstream hip-hop market. His most famous song is titled 'all want to be popular' and goes: 'Change yourself just to become popular, preferences and tastes have become popular, but that's the popular that sucks you in. If the criterion for success is only being popular, then Bob Dylan wouldn't be blowing in the wind'. This reflects an important feature of the contemporary Chinese underground hip hop scene, namely that hip-hop creative inspiration must be aligned with authenticity while resisting massification and mass trends by relying on the 'keep it real' mantra. Interestingly, MC Xing also subverts the concept of 'success' in hip-hop by detaching it from the idea of popularity and bringing Bob Dylan as an example. Therefore, the multiple

invocations of authenticity made by rappers such as MC Jin and MC Xing above are the reactions to the threat of underground hip-hop being assimilated into commercial hip-hop.

In fact, some interviewees such as Nelson Deng, Pete Yang and Robert Su all used the notion of authenticity to completely distinguish themselves against what they consider the 'mainstream'. Typical expressions from the interviewees included: 'what I like about hip-hop is that it makes me different from others', 'I am keeping myself real' or 'hip-hop reality shows are fake'. In this mainstream hip-hop scene, they usually defined themselves against inauthentic ideology, anti-commercial and separated themselves from mainstream hip-hop. As another interviewee, MC Qiang puts it, fakers have appeared in the scene.

> MC Qiang: 'Since 2017, more fakers have appeared. I don't have much hope for the future of hip-hop. After many hip hop artists in China became popular, they did not release a single album, but did shoot a lot of commercials. There are even rappers who buy other people's lyrics to sing, which makes them really fake.'

MC Qiang later confirmed that because of this loss of authenticity he stopped following and listening to many of his favorite Chinese rappers. With the sudden popularity of hip-hop in China, it grew from a relatively unprofitable subculture that was mainly dismissed and derided by the mainstream to become a massively profitable enterprise. In the purists' followers of hip-hop's eyes, such as MC Qiang, this change might bring complete antagonism between those who had previously been inside and the insiders who always consider the outsiders who came into the musical genre once it became popular and profitable, which is considered 'not real'.

The case of MC Qiang also proves that any behaviour considered to be unreal within the established values of this music scene may be considered by the insider audience as fake, thereby cutting off the emotional connections between the insider's audience and the hip-hop artist. In the case of MC Qiang, as an audience member, his notion of authenticity is continuously redefined and constructed as a close connection to his favorite hip-hop artists' creations, a genuine expression of his inner feelings and the attachment to the hip-hop subculture identity. Hence, if hip-hop fans doubt the authenticity claims of their favorite songs subsequently, they act to resist the trend of hip-hop by stopping following the artists.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has critically discussed the concept of resistance in Chinese hip-hop culture and how it is understood and practiced by Chinese hip-hop fans and artists. From the discussion, it emerged that although resistance may come in different forms, it exhibits the common characteristics of being covert, contradictory and subtle. It covers collective and/or individual protests to daily life conditions while advocating for peace love and respect. In addressing 'everyday resistance', hip-hop resistance in a Chinese context helps us fill a gap in our current understanding of resistance practices and, by extension, its societal significance. Close dialogue with hip-hop artists and enthusiasts in China is revealing and resulted in the three key findings of this chapter.

Firstly, the concept of resistance must be re-interpreted and redefined in the Chinese context. Unlike liberal western contexts where hip-hop is rooted in violence and discrimination, Chinese hip-hop must find an alternative way of expressing ideas. According to the analysis, the interviewees resist the 'traditional' notion of resistance in Chinese hip-hop. This is evidenced by their opposition to seeing themselves, as well as hip-hop as resisting actors. Interviewees rarely used concepts of subversions or rebelliousness to describe themselves, including the music they listen to or produce. By contrast, fragments of resistance in Chinese hip-hop could be identified in the contingent, the everyday life; whereby raps provide a way for listeners and producers to express their emotions of either joy of frustration, to vent out anger or to simply relax. Hip-hop artists and followers in China do not organise rebellions or collective action, but powerful forms of subtle 'everyday resistance' through hip-hop lyrics and ideology.

Secondly, the mantra of 'peace, love and respect' is considered an expression of resistance to the darkness of society. Most interviewees, upon rejecting the ideas of overt and strong resistance, highlighted instead how hip-hop is all about 'peace, love and respect'. This shows how resistance can take very different forms and can even be integrated in an unrecognised way into daily life. Through the analysis of Zulu Nations and harmony culture's mantra and cultural value, this finding relates to the power context in China, and how hip-hop as resisters can strategically and purposefully resist. I would go as far as to say that this type of resistance is more adventurous, since such patterned, covert practices tend to stay out of the gaze of power, mainstream and society, while still challenging them.

Thirdly, being authentic is also a form of resistance. In this case, the mantra is ‘keep it real’. By keeping it real, hip-hop enthusiasts resist the superficiality of society and the falsity of intrapersonal relations. Keeping it real means to be authentic about one’s feelings and emotions, by drawing inspiration from rappers' everyday struggles and difficulties. This process leads to a collapse of identities (Krims, 2000) between the hip-hop performer and the mundane self, so that the new collapsed self can really speak from authentic experience. Moreover, the ‘keep it real’ motto is used against the inauthenticity of commercialised artists. Many underground hip-hop fans resist the sudden popularity of shows such as The Rap of China, claiming that mainstream hip-hop culture has become fake in China, and that the fame of commercialised music scene violates the ‘keep it real’ attitude, as the mainstream is driven only by commercial interests.

Overall, the seemingly irrelevant and even paradoxical concepts of resisting resistance, peace, love and respect and being authentic as a type of resistance, all reflect the interpretation, expansion and evolution of subcultural resistance in the context of Chinese power. These forms of resistance provide Chinese hip-hop followers and artist a path for resistors to negotiate, struggle for existence with the various power entities. Although these forms of resistance may appear distant from each other, they all reveal a set of shared characteristics of being contradictory and even paradoxical, on the surface. Within the realm of harmonious culture and positive energy, resistors must resort to self-help solutions that imply processes of resisting resistance, instead of starting an open revolution. Indeed, what they also have in common, is that they are all covert, subtle and far from being openly recognized, hence signaling the necessity for the resistor to find relief in everyday form of resistance.

More broadly, this analysis chapter demonstrates that today's Chinese hip-hop scene cannot be narrowly described as belonging to a well-defined or established resistant subculture, as it may be commonplace for hip-hop in western cultural contexts. The Chinese hip-hop motifs of peace, love and respect are well aligned with mainstream Chinese values. Resistance and ‘peace, love and respect’ are two different expressions of the same idealized hip-hop world. As the interviewees hinted at repeatedly, this is exactly the significant perspective they expect scholars to excavate for its philosophical worldview and universal sociological significance (Wright, 2004; Asante, 2008; Pardue, 2008; Johnson, 2014). It is also revelatory to think that sometimes resisters might have to, at least initially, adjust to the given circumstances and practice everyday forms of resistance. Hence, in its fundamental meaning, resistance in the Chinese

context is not a reaction to domination based on the traditional understanding on the concept. Rather, it emerges from social practices and desires, joy and hope that creatively seeks its own meaning beyond given daily situations.

6.0 The hip-hop taste in China

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the taste criteria that guide Chinese hip-hop fans and rappers' choices and preferences of raps, with particular emphasis on their judgement on what is considered to be of good and bad taste and how music is used in relation to daily and life events. To frame this differentiation between good and bad taste, it is useful to recall the variety of hip-hop styles and subgenres in today's Chinese scene, as discussed in chapter two on the history of hip-hop and the Chinese hip-hop scene. This breadth presents hip-hop fans with a diverse choice of music styles, beats, topics, and performances, especially fuelled by the recent popularity of music reality shows such as The Rap of China. As a result, the taste of Chinese hip-hop enthusiasts in China has evolved rapidly in terms of styles, fashion, and consumption practices.

The first part of this chapter explores how fans navigate the music scene and whether they create any distinctions in taste. Interviewees are generally open to a variety of styles and content, which point to their openness to diversity (Ollivier, 2008), while also providing insight into how they use music as a resource in everyday life (DeNora. 2000). The openness is also symptomatic of 'Chinese hip-hop omnivorousness', namely an openness to appreciating everything, albeit within one single genre, Chinese hip-hop. However, further interviews reveal the existence of subtle but powerful taste distinctions that are not readily captured by the 'hip-hop omnivore' label, which therefore requires a more fine-grained analysis. Consumers rely on an aesthetic judgment based on mainstream societal values, traditions and habits that create a distinction between a 'vulgar' and a 'serious' taste of hip-hop music.

The second part of the chapter argues that hip-hop taste and consumption is not only about music, but also about traits and accompanying consumption practices that are encompassed by the concept of 'cool'. 'Cool' emerged as a keyword used by many interviewees when they described their own music and dressing choices, attitudes and reception of hip-hop performances. Thus, the concept of cool is configured as a way to explain how hip-hop, as a subcultural phenomenon is consumed by followers and how it contributes to its adoption in the mainstream. In particular, 'cool' is understood by hip-hop followers and producers to have a two-fold function. On the one hand, cool is unique, new, and a means for differentiation from the masses. On the other hand, cool is a way to express emotional control in the form of nonchalance and indifference.

Overall, this chapter demonstrates how hip-hop listeners in China demonstrate open attitudes to anything about raps and hip-hop culture, however, there are well defined aesthetic criteria that guide music choices and create subtle yet strong taste distinctions. The concept of cool aids to further expand the scope of hip-hop consumption from the musical realm to a more personal way to express an attitude, to show uniqueness and to control emotions.

6.2 Taste preferences: between the openness to diversity and rejection of the vulgar

In this section, I draw on Ollivier's (2008) notions of openness to cultural diversity to frame the consumption practices and taste choices displayed by participants in this research. The analysis also points to the importance of the power of music in shaping the self in everyday life, as discussed by DeNora (2000). As DeNora wrote, rather than utilising the semiotic of music to decode how music is used in the social, it is important to 'try to specify how the social comes to be inscribed in the musical' (2000: 3), and that this can only be done by gathering listeners' perspectives on their personal and daily interactions with music. Hence, instead of exploring the relationship between the distribution of taste and social structures typical of Bourdieusian-omnivore debates, this chapter aims to emphasise how Chinese hip-hop listeners and producers display traits of cultural openness and willingness to appreciate a broad variety of hip-hop cultural products, while using music 'functionally' and as a resource in their daily lives.

When interviewees were questioned about what hip-hop music they like to listen to, and who is their favourite hip-hop artists, several keywords were consistently mentioned, such as 'techno flow', 'melodic sense', 'lyrics with depth', 'old school', 'new waves', and 'hit song'. A typical response along these lines is exemplified by Ben Jiang, a university student who has recently approached hip-hop:

> Ben Jiang: 'It's hard to define what my actual taste in hip hop is. There is techno flow, rap melodies, old school songs, and now a bunch of new waves are constantly coming out. Taste depends on how well you know hip-hop. You can follow and listen to whoever you like'.

The response above shows that Ben Jiang consumes a broad variety of music styles, hence emphasising the freedom to choose whichever artist or styles fans may like. In the Chinese

context, Ben Jiang's response points to a perception of freedom to consume hip-hop as people please and to an apparent lack of a rigid structure of taste. In Ben's experience, hip-hop is largely means of reflecting and expressing self-conscious internalised feelings, while the question of musical taste becomes secondary. Ben doesn't seem to be able to define his own taste, and it doesn't even seem to matter to him. Similar interpretations were also expressed by Emily Zhou, for instance, who stated that: 'this downtempo really helps lovers who have just suffered a heartbreak'; while Hannah Chen pointed out the functional use of her favourite hip-hop album, which she described as 'a perfect energising background for vigorous exercise or morning jogging'. These viewpoints reflect Venrooij and Schmutz's (2010) arguments about popular aesthetics emphasising daily emotions, amusement value and how music is used functionally. As Lamont (1992) suggests, in a loose, non-hierarchical cultural system, where there is no strong distinction between art/culture and everyday life, ways of aesthetic evaluation are available that do not require long-term intellectual training or educational capital.

Based on the above, on the one hand, the argument here is that Chinese music consumers' taste is facile, simple, superficial, privileging immediate sensation and direct and easy enjoyment. Hip-hop music consumers in China are concerned more about the participatory experience rather than providing a fixed, restrictive definition of their own taste. On the other hand, privileging the immediate sensation and enjoyment offered by music points to the relevance of the discourse of the self-invoked by DeNora (DeNora, 2000). What Emily and Hannah are spelling out with their listening activities suggests that music is an 'accomplice' (2000: 53) in attaining and/or maintaining and/or overcoming certain moods (sadness following a heartbreak) of body energy levels (energising during a morning jogging). DeNora conceptualised such activities as music acting to shape the self, whereby music 'is an active ingredient in the organization of self, the shifting of mood, energy level, conduct style, mode of attention and engagement with the world' (2000: 61).

Regarding the breadth of taste displayed above, researchers have attempted to update Bourdieu's theory to explain how cultural tastes continue to form through both new popular and subcultural forms, which are considered 'emerging forms of cultural capital' (Prieur & Savage, 2013). Of particular relevance in this context, is the idea of 'openness to diversity' put forward by Michèle Ollivier (2008). As Ollivier (2008) argued, openness to cultural diversity is becoming a new discourse based on underscoring the positive perception of attributes such as diverse, open, hybrid, fluid, eclectic, global, and cosmopolitan, when talking about cultural consumption choices. These values represent the basis for a new form of cultural

capital which does not only stem from 'traditional' cultural resources such as knowledge and competencies *a là* Bourdieu, but also from the ability to understand differences and deal with change. In fact, these values are characteristic of individuals who are ready to embrace new viewpoints, experiences and activities. In this sense, openness to diversity refers to those who are open to appreciating the unknown, eager to learn new things, and open to gain new knowledge. This characteristic represents well Chinese hip-hop listeners like Ben Jiang, who declare themselves as unselective listeners and open to consume pretty much any stile of hip-hop.

The characteristics of openness to diversity and readiness to 'accept new ideas' (Ollivier, 2008: 121) are perhaps even better embodied by seasoned fans who have listened to Chinese hip-hop for many years, like Justin G:

> Justin G: 'You just made me realise how much my taste and preferences in hip-hop have evolved over the last few years. I'm 30 years old and have been listening to hip-hop since I was a very young teenager. When I first got into it, I was only underground. The only time I listened to mainstream rap was in the backseat of cabs. As I got older, my old pretensions have pretty much disappeared and I'm more open to the culture as a whole'.

The excerpt above shows that also seasoned fans may listen to multiple sub-genres and styles of hip-hop. We can see that Justin G, even as a long-term hip-hop follower, is open to all styles of hip-hop, from hardcore hip-hop from his teenage years to more contemporary mainstream and even commercialised raps. As Ollivier (2008) debates, modes of openness to cultural diversity and the personal qualities associated with openness are related to increased adaptability, flexibility, mobility, and a search for self-improvement. Justin G has these qualities, which enable him to appreciate hip-hop music in its entirety. As Justin implied in the interview, these qualities are reflected in a change of attitude: 'as I got older, my old pretensions have pretty much disappeared'. Justin G's openness to diversity of consumption is also the result of a self-reflection and intimately linked with a specific 'conception of the self' (DeNora 1999: 41): 'you just made me realise how much my taste and preferences in hip-hop have evolved over the last few years'. Hence, music operates as a technology and a resource for building materials of 'subjectivity' (DeNora, 1999; 2000). Here, through a reflexive projection of the self, Justin G expresses 'a sense of mastery and autonomy' (Ollivier, 2008: 125) shown

by his ability and willingness to gradually open to more aspects of the hip-hop culture and to be open minded when it comes to embracing new styles, attitudes and cultural forms.

The story of MC Zhang is also quite exemplary in that it embodies both the ideas of the construction of the self and the values of openness. MC Zhang grew up in the 90s in the outskirts of Shenzhen and then moved into the city in his mid-20s. Encouraged by an increasingly vibrant musical atmosphere, he decided to make a living out of hip-hop by producing his own raps, uploading them online and even forming a crew, more recently. Regarding his musical choices and life experience, this is what he had to say:

> MC Zhang: 'You know, hip-hop is huge in China. When I first moved to Shenzhen almost 10 years ago, I didn't realise how brilliant the city was and how broad the choices (of raps) were. In my small village, I could only listen to Dan Bao and In3. These days, I follow and listen to so many artists and crews. They don't only rap like in the 90s, but they mix new styles. Many artists also take inspiration from their own humble origins, sometimes even from Western rappers'.

The reflective project of the self, understood as 'practices that regulate, elaborate, and substantiate themselves [the social actors] as social agents' (DeNora,2000:47), is well represented by the story of MC Zhang, whose attachment to hip-hop music led him to make music his own job. As he implied, immigrating into Shenzhen was beneficial to him, as it broadened his hip-hop music repertoire and even gave him a job. In this sense, hip-hop music represented a resource in his life. Music has acted as the mediator for MC Zhang to negotiate his place between Shenzhen and the village he is from, enabling him to carve his space in the megacity with his new crew.

MC Zhang's account also emphasises that hip-hop aesthetic is constantly shaped by changes in the geographical location of audiences. Hip-hop audience's geographical migration, the transformation of the community he belongs to, and even the change of the ways and habits to listen to music, give audiences a sense of place and belonging (De Kloet, 2008). When MC Zhang lived in a relatively small village, his access to rap music was limited and his choices were only restricted to certain artists and styles. However, the migration to Shenzhen provided him with more options and led him to openness. He has now embraced mixes of new styles and a more cosmopolitan image of rappers. In fact, he later mentioned Higher Brothers as an

example of a Chinese hip-hop group from Chengdu that was later signed by the international record label 88rising, and Chinese Canadian rapper Kris Wu, originally from Guangzhou, who recently reached the iTunes Top 10 with his raps. Thus, Chinese rappers like MC Zhang tend to emphasise the innovation of their consumption and production practises of hip-hop, aesthetic sensibilities of hybridisation and openness to new taste.

These aspects continue to be reflected by some MCs[23] I interviewed and how make their own music. Guang is an MC based in Xi'an who has been producing his own music for many years. His ideas on hip-hop taste also show traits of openness to diversity of music styles, not only in his consumption but only in his production practices. During the interview, MC Guang reflected on the music style transformation during his production journey:

> MC Guang: 'I used to write songs following old school style that uses clear and powerful rap pronunciation and heavy rhythm; however, because of new trends in the creation of hip-hop, I changed my flow and I started to use auto-tune and remix which increases my followers on NetEase and promotes our label. This is the new wave hip-hop that is popular right now'.

MC Guang highlights a variety of styles that fuse into other musical genres. While he used to follow the Old School hip-hop style, he now follows current trends and changes in taste, and has gradually started to employ more modern musical techniques and online creation tools, thus gaining more fans. Again, this behaviour shows openness and willingness to embrace new trends and techniques and how such openness becomes a new form of capital, as Ollivier believes (Ollivier, 2008). MC Guang indeed capitalises on the 'changes of flow' and new production techniques to increase appealing, broaden audiences and promote his label. This 'new wave' method of making hip-hop is a sign of the experimentalism in defining and creating a new taste of hip-hop. As a more demanding subject of 'advanced modernity' (DeNora, 1999:36), MC Guang conducted a profound self-aesthetic reflection and incorporated the result of the reflection into hip hop production. While it is conceivable that this process was ultimately dictated by the desire to be more popular among young audiences, the point here is that music for MC Guang is, again, a resource that shapes his self as an aesthetic agent operating in society (DeNora, 2000). As a result, Chinese music producers and consumers are

[23] An MC (short for Master of Ceremonies or Microphone Controller) is a rapper who is the host of a live music event, who also generally writes and delivers his/her original performance.

presented with a broad choice of hip-hop styles and sub-genres, which they produce and consume extensively. It appears that the contemporary hip-hop scene in China is not characterised by a quest for exclusive, relatively isolated spaces of cultural content and aesthetic forms but an admitted openness to music forms. In other words, Chinese hip-hop producers and consumers are aesthetically liberal from any rigid form of hip-hop taste musical structure, and display fluidity of creation that is constantly and consciously willing to implement stylistic innovations in hip-hop.

Overall, the interviewees above are testimony to Ollivier's openness to diversity and show different modes of openness such as tolerance, adaptability, regional mobility and self-promotion of Chinese hip hop followers (Ollivier, 2008). This openness results in unselectively when it comes to musical choices within hip-hop, which is symptomatic of 'an openness to appreciating everything' (Peterson and Kern, 1996: 904). The consumption choices of listeners are also guided by the quest for self-help, mood regulation, reaction to everyday life. In doing so, Chinese hip-hop listeners privilege the 'self-help' power of music over a specific style within the hip-hop genre, thus substantiating themselves as social agents, according to what DeNora (2000: 46) views as the 'technology of self'. However, following interviews in this chapter show that this openness of taste may only limited to hip-hop styles, rather than themes and topics and, as such, may not always be as broad as interviewees above suggest on the surface. In fact, a rigid distinction does exist in terms of musical themes, as vulgar, dirt music appears to be universally rejected.

However, in the context of Chinese hip-hop, this openness of taste may not always be as broad as interviewees above suggest on the surface. After a deep and long discussion with MC Guang, he offered a somewhat deeper insight into what he considers to be of good and bad taste in hip-hop:

> MC Guang: 'Take our hip-hop label, for example, hip-hop taste is what we, as a crew, want to show our followers and the public. Every hip-hop crew bills itself as coming from the street, but street cred is just being misogynist and gangsta? I think rappers should always promote better taste and style than that. I think that certain raps are of really bad taste to be promoted at any level'.

Even though MC Guang is quite open to many styles and incorporating different elements into his creations, this interview excerpt shows that there exists a bottom line. To him, it is important that hip-hop is not about misogyny, gangsta violence and drug abuse, as these themes are considered bad taste. On the one hand, MC Guang, as a hip-hop crew member, encourages a more open-minded pursuit of taste in terms of different genres, the cosmopolitanism aspect discussed earlier; on the other hand, he criticized low taste artists, who, later in the interview, he called 低端嘻哈 (dī duān xīhā), which can be literally translated as 'basic' or 'vulgar' hip-hop artists. These are rappers who, in MC Guang's opinion 'spread moral degeneracy and simply ruin the culture in the eyes of the audience'. In Guang's mind, these raps may attract more audiences in the short term, however, in the long run it will destroy Chinese hip-hop culture because it encourages rappers to use vulgar words and plots to express violent content. A similar perception on the distinction of good and bad taste was also offered by Zhang, an MC from Beijing, who believes that:

> MC Zhang: 'There is still a distinction between Chinese and Western hip-hop. Chinese hip-hop is not that violent and dirty these days, but more inspiring. Even if some low-level crews or artists still promote dirty and misogynist content, I feel like the audience does not like it. They might attract a small number of fans, but if you want to be heard and appreciated, you should rap about things that will meet people's taste, not just violence and drugs'.

If one wants to take a closer look at the distinction of hip-hop taste, one should look at how hip-hop as a subculture first developed in the underground and link it to the wider cultural atmosphere in China. Once hip-hop started to appear in the mainstream, and after experiencing major censorship events in 2015 and 2017[24], coverage of the status of vulgar content of hip-hop music is frequently mocked in mainstream media and everyday conversations in the mainstream scene. Similarly, hip-hop music, marked by the gangsta style rapping and violent language deemed as 低端 (dī duān), indeed vulgar, as MC Zhang hinted at above. The wider societal taste and value preferences of hip-hop have largely developed against the rise of lowbrow tastes, issuing bans on 'actors who are tasteless, vulgar, obscene and dispirited culture' (Li, 2020). Instead, 'wiser' rappers express anger, criticism and pressure in relation to daily

[24] In 2015, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPRFT) released a blacklist of the raps that 120 'harmful' songs; in 2019, SAPRFT announced that Chinese tattooed artists or "dispirited culture" should not be invited on the public performance.

difficulties, emotions and negative feelings through their daily practice of resistance in a much more narrative and peaceful language, as discussed in chapter five. At this point, Chinese hip-hop artists seem to have agreed to a tacit understanding of the creative vibe in China, whereby vulgar content is both suppressed by the censorship, but also not appreciated by most consumers. This is evidenced both by the major censorship events of 2015 and 2017 as well as the rejection of vulgar themes expressed by MC Guang and MC Zhang reported above.

The rejection of vulgarity themes was also vividly expressed by MC Huang's attitude towards PG One, co-winner of one edition of The Rap of China. PG One, after winning the competition, sang about attacking women and using drugs in his rap 'Christmas Eve'[25], which was heavily criticised both on social media and official news propaganda. This is what Mc Huang had to say about the scandal:

> MC Huang: 'I would say boo to PG One after what he has done to hip-hop in China. I find some of his lyrics quite uncomfortable. It is wrong for rappers to belittle women and talk openly about drugs and sex, such as in 'Christmas Eve'. That song created a huge scandal on social media and so many people got angry about it. Famous people like PG One should not give bad examples and should act wholesome in front of a such big audiences. We live in a society with harmony as one of its core values. On an open platform, you can't insult women, mention drug use, or insult deceased singers.'

MC Zhang and MC Huang above are both listeners and long-term producers and, although they initially recognised themselves as cosmopolitan omnivores, they later showed 'extremes' in their taste choices and a certain level of preference for rap. These 'extremes' are realised as the creation of a clear boundary between vulgar and acceptable hip-hop taste, which immediately distances them, both as consumers and producers, from vulgar taste artists such as PG One and hip-hop crews that claim to be from the street just by relying on misogyny and gangsta themes. These subtle but powerful taste distinctions are not readily captured by the 'omnivore' label in the Chinese hip-hop scene, which therefore requires a more fine-grained analysis.

[25] On January 25, 2017, the Youth League of China posted a message on the Weibo social network accusing PG One, the co-winner of The Rap of China, of his early songs "Christmas Eve". This post mainly stated that his song Christmas Eve encouraged young people to take drugs and humiliate women; the post also stated that public figures on the internet should act as positive role models and set a good example to the youth.

Arguably, such distinction in today's Chinese hip-hop scene is rooted in deeper differences in habits, values, and mentality of Chinese hip-hop listeners in the past (Li, 2020). However, this is not the focus of this study. Here, the point is that the taste distinction occurs at the individual follower level, who can be at the same time be an omnivore, while having bottom lines that create distinction. In other words, when discussing hip-hop taste, the followers claimed to like many kinds and styles of hip-hop music, but they also impose boundaries on themes, and their attitudes demonstrate a deep resistance towards vulgar hip-hop music. Here, these taboo themes have to do with anything that is viewed by the interviewees to be 低端 (dī duān), namely vulgar, basic and uncultured, with reference to content that is misogynistic, sexual, referencing to drug use or being disrespectful of the dead. According to the interviewee Hannah Chen, who, although initially expressed openness to various styles, later admitted: 'vulgar taste does not suit China and cannot thrive here'. MC Huang also added later in the interview that lyrics about white powder, money, girls, sex and violence represent: 'what hip-hop is, but they are banned in China, and most Chinese rappers have always known it. But that's ok with me. I don't like that kind of content in hip-hop music'. These responses all point to how hip-hop followers in China create taste distinction in a way that excludes vulgar themes of rap creations, which are not appreciated by fans and producers alike, and by drawing on societal criteria, as discussed in chapter five about harmonious societal values. This is a distinction that the label of 'hip-hop omnivore' cannot not fully cover.

At the same time, within these thematic boundaries, hip hop followers in China consume many types of hip-hop music, and listen to hip-hop driven by enjoyment and entertainment, hence somewhat shadowing the importance of taste. However, interviews also suggested the existence of a further aesthetic criterion, which will be discussed below, that puts emphasis on an intellectual form of reception of hip-hop music and considers some forms of hip-hop music as 'serious' (Regev, 1994). James Li, a long-term hip-hop listener who admitted to attending many subcultural venues in his teenage years, offered his reflection on what he considers 'serious':

> James Li: 'I used to listen to many artists and style, but I then realised that it's hard to find rappers who have an attitude as serious as PACT. He has never rapped about boring and attention-grabbing topics such as sex, violence and drugs. I like that he doesn't rap about frivolous stuff. Listen to some of his albums, you will know how serious and real he is'.

As a subcultural follower for more than 10 years, James Li has amassed a wealth of hip-hop knowledge and aesthetic standard. The interviewee James Li seems to be particularly fond of authentic hip-hop artists and high-quality hip-hop albums such as PACT's productions, which he repeatedly labelled as 高级 (gāojí), which can be translated as 'high-raking', or 'authentic'. In fact, James Li was a fan of PACT before he came onto the mainstream following his participation in The Rap of China. This can mostly be attributed to a gut feeling that authentic and serious artists are considered to be high standard in terms of hip-hop attitude and essential rapping skills such as lyricism, cadence and consistency. Certain themes are considered more serious by James, such as rapping about true hardworking stories, rather than shallow content. While in chapter 5.4 ('authenticity is a type of resistance') authenticity is mainly related to a singer remaining true to their roots, here, authenticity refers to the originality of raps from the perspective of music aesthetics. From the conversation with James, it appears that authenticity is related to a hip-hop artist's sincerity in their music creations. James pays significant attention to how hard an artist has worked, establishing it as a way of appreciable rap piece, not just as a profession. This makes the artist easily identifiable and understood by the audience, which creates a tight bond between the singer and the audience. Artists should be 'hardworking, disciplined, and inspiring', and these are the criteria for understanding a 高级 (gāojí) hip-hop artist, namely, serious and authentic rappers, which is a sentiment echoed by James Li in his interview. Everything that is not directly music-related - silly jokes, shallow content, drug usage, disrespect to women - is not appreciated from a taste point of view. James further described his feelings when listening to PACT's albums by arguing: 'I always feel inspired and empowered when listening to PACT. There are no preteens, no unnecessary stuff, no limousines or Rolexes. PACT's songs earn the listeners' respect. Another interviewee, Daniel Lin, provided a similar viewpoint on the concept of authenticity and taste from the perspective of commercial production of hip-hop in China.

> Daniel Lin: 'there is very little good hip-hop music produced by record companies. Popular rappers are mostly just commercially packaged. Listening to them doesn't improve your taste. My collection of raps includes raps from Hot dog and in3. These classic raps are never out of date, you never get tired of listening. Current raps produced commercially are short-lived. You listen to them for a few weeks and then get bored of them.'

Here, Daniel sees iconic rappers in Chinese hip-hop history as legendary and sacred, and he later referred to them as 经典 (Jīng diǎn) artist, which is best translated as 'classical' artist. According to these attributes, Daniel is using a criterion that distinguishes iconic hip-hop from profane commercial hip-hop. Artists like Ghost, Hot Dog and In3 are considered 经典 (Jīng di ǎn), or classic hip-hop icons in China, generally active around the 2000s, when hip-hop started to develop and when they were referred to as old school (see history in chapter four). These hip-hop musicians could be considered equivalent to western hip-hop classic idols such as Eminem and 2Pac, although, once again, with notable differences in the thematic appreciation of hip-hop, considering that these Western idols often recur to vulgar and expletives in their songs. However, the commonality can be found in the 'sacred' and 'legendary' attribute, which explains why these classic rap albums are collected, remembered and listened to, so to enhance the hip-hop aesthetic. This type of consumption distances the listener from the practical and functional concerns of everyday hip-hop music's life. In fact, Daniel applies a rational and intellectual criterion for the appreciation of hip-hop. As Van Venrooij & Schmutz (2010) explained, 'sacred' high taste culture and 'profane' commercial culture have autonomy and legitimate distinction, and the idea that 'autonomous art' is and needs to be distanced from the practical and functional concerns of everyday life. This distinction can be described, in line with Adorno's (2001: 73) works, as true artistic freedom and true free art appreciation.

Overall, although the contemporary Chinese hip-hop music scene allows for the existence of selective taste, it also includes taste that is in line with the mass aesthetics and cosmopolitan tendencies, as well as taste that seeks high-standard, classical and 'serious' productions. These elements suggest freedom of taste and the cultural omnivorousness of Chinese hip-hop consumers. However, this does not mean that consumers believe hip-hop music should be misogynistic, vulgar and violent. As it has been analysed, although interviewees claimed to like many styles of hip-hop music, they also impose boundaries, and their attitudes demonstrate a deeper resistance toward vulgar-themed hip-hop music. Another non-negligible fact is that taste distinctions of hip-hop music is becoming hidden by the popular song ranking lists and hip-hop reality shows that are constantly producing commercialised hip-hop music. This distinction persists in subtle ways, from a simple choice of hip-hop artists to a complex denigration of mass hip-hop taste, although this classification and choices also depend on the interviewees' level of interest in selective items, the depth of knowledge and their critical

aesthetics appreciation. Some of these aspects will be further detailed in chapter seven, when discussing the hierarchy of hip-hop members based on some of the elements above.

6.3 Beyond music: the consumption of cool and fashion

In addition to expressing choices, preferences, and distinctions in Chinese hip hop from the perspective of music genres, when asked about music taste, many interviewees pointed out a further characteristic of hip-hop, repeatedly described as 酷 (Kù) in Chinese, and literally translated in English as cool. In response to this tendency, during many interviews and follow-up interviews, I echoed the interviewees and often asked to elaborate on the concept of 'cool' and how they relate it to the theme of hip-hop taste. What emerged is that the perception of cool goes well beyond a simple act of choosing a specific artist or style when listening to music. Instead, 'cool' embodies an attitude, a lifestyle, the perception of an artist, and even filters into clothing and fashion. Indeed, as hip-hop suddenly popularised in China in 2017, it generated its own distinct fashion style and aesthetic, unlike anything in the mainstream fashion world, which developed and evolved over time. Therefore, the association with the concept of 'cool' immediately suggests that hip-hop in China is not only about music, but also about some hip-hop traits and accompanying consumption and fashion practices. This section focuses explicitly on these 'cool' traits and practices around hip-hop.

Although a variety of definitions of coolness has been discussed by scholars (Kerner & Pressman 2007; Dar-Nimrod et al. 2012), interviews reveal some basic characteristics of 'hip-hop coolness' and how it relates to taste and consumption. The relevance of such perception of 'cool' is clear from Fabio Wu's words, who, when asked about his opinion on certain rappers, stated:

> Fabio Wu: 'I think rappers are cool.'
>
> Interviewer: 'do you mean that rappers look cool?'
>
> Fabio Wu: 'Yeah, they do, but I also mean that rappers look cool to me. Many fans like me perceive rappers as being super cool, because they show their own attitude on stage, they wear whatever they want, they say whatever they want, and they use a lot of cool gestures and behaviour on stage. I look up to cool rappers.'

Fabio Wu's response reveals hip-hop to be perceived both as a verbalised and embodied performance. As such, like any performance, it requires validation by an audience that appreciates the rappers and perceives them as cool. Fabio first states that rappers are cool, but when asked to elaborate, his words suggest that 'cool' is not an inherent feature of rappers, but a perception or an attribution bestowed by others. In Fabio's example, hip-hop coolness signifies that rappers are supposed to be cool since others look at them like this. This idea is echoed in another interview with MC Huang, who offered his interpretation of being cool from a rapper's perspective:

> MC Huang: Showing coolness and being cool in hip-hop is all about control. You need to know what's cool and what's not, not only musically, but also on the stage. Hip-hop is not only about rapping, making music or dissing opponents. You need to have dressing codes and specific behaviours on stage, because controlling and choosing them is part of the performance. And the dressing codes must show something unique. If all the other rappers wear Versace belts, then I'll try to avoid the same brand. I also personally hate earrings.

Both interviews above show that hip-hop, as a verbalised and embodied performance, shows some degree of artists' taste and the performers' ability to control through distinctive ways of rapping, gesturing and dressing. MC Huang believes that a rapper's taste is reflected in their ability to carefully control their appearance and performance, with the aim of appearing cool. MC Huang and his crew are in control of what they consider to be cool and uncool. It is thanks to their years-long presence in the scene and their amassed experience and cultural capital, that MCs like Huang can choose what to wear, what to say, what gestures to do on stage, and by doing so, they know how to be perceived as cool by fans like Fabio Wu. All these features point to a carefully crafted control of taste by the hip-hop artist, what interviewees eventually perceive and call 'cool taste'.

Both responses also suggest that being cool involves delivering a performance in a manner that appears nonchalant and under a mask of indifference. In the words of MC Huang later in the interview, 'what is cool' includes 'smirky faces to show that you are confident, that you are in control, and that you are very calm on the stage, even though you might be very nervous or excited when performing [but] you shouldn't make a cheerful smile or a painful face'. This

practice is a clear representation of the original definitions of cool by Stearns (1994), who emphasised that cool involves dispassionate control of intense emotions together with an air of disengagement and nonchalance aimed at creating an impression of firm superiority. In fact, pursuing cool in hip-hop performance and appearance is the ability to show the most tasteful parts of hip-hop, while avoiding exhibiting tension, nervousness as well as uncool gestures and outfits that may discredit the artist on the stage. This distinction also extends to outfits, as MC Huang declared his selectivity in picking clothes, belts, and accessories, and his reluctance to wear earrings because he personally considers wearing them as uncool and of very bad taste, as he suggested during the interview. Pursuing cool appears to be also related to creating a distinction of good and bad taste, which in Bourdieu's original interpretation of cultural capital was also about what should be considered tasteful and what should not be considered legitimate culture (Bourdieu 1984, Holt 1998). In this sense, showing hip-hop cool traits is similar to what be considered as the right tastes, preferences, and knowledge in others' perspectives. In the case of hip-hop, according to Kitwana (2005), rap music and stage performances are generally accepted as the latest instantiations of cool taste, as indeed suggested by the interviews above.

Hence, cool in hip-hop fashion is all about an attitude of self-confidence, calmness and nonchalance, embodied by appearance and outfit choices, which define, shape and distinguish what is cool and uncool taste, good and bad taste in the audience. This interpretation was further elaborated by MC Huang, who continued: 'your outfit must reflect your state of mind of being a rapper, it shows that you are unique'. This shows that being cool is part of the show and aids in constructing a rapper's identity. Whether expressed by choices of small details in clothing, hairstyle or accessories, rappers are delivering messages of their own thoughts. If a rapper has a typical style of dressing on the stage, MC Huang will try to avoid dressing the same so that he can demonstrate uniqueness. In this way, he shows coolness and differentiation from other performers. As Huang continued to argue: 'people who are really cool break norms and are independent'. So, the concept of cool taste continues to be built around to pursuit of style and distinctive consumption practices and always searching for new knowledge.

These traits, as many Chinese rappers and fans pointed out in the interviews, converge in the key idea that hip-hop cultural practices in the contemporary music scene are all about being alternative and showing emotional control and differentiation. Carl Zhang is an undergraduate student from Harbin, in Heilongjiang, who has been listening to hip-hop since his teenage years. From the way he talked, I immediately realised that he is really attached to hip-hop as he

showed real excitement. As he repeatedly mentioned ‘cool’ in relation to his musical preferences and dressing styles during the interview, I asked him to elaborate on this concept:

Interviewer: Why do you keep mentioning ‘cool’?

Carl Zhang: hip-hop is cool. the music, the performance, the attitude, the clothes, the accessories are cool. For example, I always buy colourful and oversized clothes with big prints on them. This is what hip-hop fashion is all about, to be different and unique. I can choose what to wear, I mix clashing colours and styles that many people wouldn’t like, but I do, and I don’t care about what people think of my outfits and if they criticise me.

Here, Carl Zhang is defining his idea of being cool by emphasising the strong connection between the concepts of hip-hop, coolness, and fashion. He believes that every aspect of the culture is cool, especially fashion, and he believes that wearing cool clothes means finding niche items that nobody is wearing, to find the latest trend in which he feels comfortable. His words also reiterate the same characteristic of indifference and nonchalance discussed earlier. According to him, despite unconventional dressing styles, he does not pay attention to what people might think of his choices. ‘I don’t care, I am cool’, he later stated. As it has been discussed by previous scholars, cool is dispassionate, free-willed and self-confident (Smith, 2003), which relates to Yinger (1984)’s description of ‘counter-cultural values’: self-expression, anti-establishment attitudes. So, the concept of cool taste continues to be built around the pursuit of style and distinctive consumption practices and always searching out new knowledge. These attitudes are clearly evidenced by Carl Zhang’s aesthetic choices of adventurous items.

However, the continuous pursuit for the hip[26], the new, the latest trend implies that hip consumerism is also creating a new ideology of consumption which, in the current scene, must also involve a considerable degree of market consciousness. This apparent dichotomy between the niche and the commercialised, exemplifies the characteristic of hip-hop in China, which is not only about critical musical attitudes and hard beat rhythms, but, to some extent, also about the hip-hop fashion as shaped by artists and the mainstream media. In fact, this argument

[26] Hip and cool are both phrases originated from black jazz artists' 'jive' language. Both are characterised by a feeling of detachment and unlawful 'knowledge’.

emerged during the interview with Giam Zheng, a long-term hip-hop fan. His words strongly suggest that the concept of 'cool' experiences commodification and is continuously changing:

> Giam Zheng: 'I have watched every single episode of The Rap of China. What I like the most about the show are the contestants' and judges' outfits. I pay a lot of attention to what they wear. It is very different from what young people of my age would wear a few years ago, but I like it because it reflects new trends in fashion that I always follow. You have no idea how fast those streetwear items get sold out in a minute after they go viral on reality shows. Rappers nowadays are icons of fashion.'

Giam Zheng is admittedly a die-hard fan of The Rap of China, and he is particularly interested in the fashion elements of the reality show. His words acknowledge the influence of hip-hop shows on his own fashion taste as well as the impact of the show judges' endorsement on what brands he buys. According to his point, it appears that cool is described as an advanced form of knowledge about commodities and mainstream consumption practices. In fact, there has been considerable debate about whether the idea of 'coolness' has been fully incorporated into the consumer ideology or being cool can still be considered a distinctive subcultural trait (Frank 1997). Within the context of Chinese hip-hop, there is a clear engagement of counter-cultural values with the dominant ideology, individualism and self-expression. In fact, the consumerism of cool is experiencing increasing attention, certainly aided by hip-hop reality shows, advertising and marketing. Many media companies such as iQIYI, Youku and Tencent expend large resources trying to capture cool identity and see 'coolness' as a selling point to effectively sell the concept of fashion to the audience via reality shows such as The Rap of China (2017), Rap for Youth (2019) and New Generation of Rap (2020). Undisputedly, these shows, given their significant reach that they achieve online, inspire Chinese consumers to talk about streetwear. The importance of fashion items as endorsed by music shows is evident from the content posted in many of the fans' group on WeChat that I joined. Admins and fans not only exchange content about upcoming performances and music, but many posts are about streetwear fashion, oversized hoodies, caps, necklaces, belts and the latest online offers on websites where they often sell out in a matter of hours.

These observations reflect the fact that hip-hop in China was never about music only. The idea of 'bling', that is the ostentatious consumption first popularised by rap musician Brian Birdman' Williams in 1999, is anything but low profile in the Chinese context (Kameir, Tarling, Kochhar

& Barshad, 2017). High-end brands such as Cristal Champagne, Gucci, and Mercedes are often mentioned in rap lyrics, and Chinese advertisers have long taken advantage of the bling and cool come with hip-hop. For example, in 2017, the Chinese internet superstar Angela Baby (Chinese name Ying Yang) shot a whole page photo in dreadlocks, court clothes and bling styling in the 10th issue of Fashion (China). The Rap of China‘s founder and Canadian Chinese hip-hop superstar Kris Wu was featured in the 2017 November issue of Harper’s Bazaar China with gold rings, chains and earrings in a variety of over-the-top looks. Interestingly, as one of the world's top fashion magazines, Harper‘s Bazaar Nov 2017’s themes were splashed across the pages of the magazines, with Kris Wu stating: ‘Redefining cool’, ‘Hip-hop is my attitude’, and ‘Power from oversize clothes’. These are a few examples of how marketers readily present hip-hop fashion to the mainstream market in China, even more rapidly and efficiently than in the Western context. For example, only in 1996 black rapper 2Pac was the first rapper invited to a catwalk of a luxury brand, Versace. Similarly, it took several years for brands such as Gucci to become associated with the wider hip-hop culture and to feature in adverts and magazines. On the contrary, the rise of Chinese hip-hop and fashion have occurred in a much shorter timeframe. In the first episode of the show's first season, the hip-hop mentor Kris Wu wore Supremes’ Oversize coat, which quickly sold out on Chinese shopping websites (Zheng, 2018). Fashionable trends continued to appear in the second season of the show, as hip-hop mentor William Pan wore an Off-white brand suit with its signature black and white striped pattern and text decoration, leaving an immediate impression on Chinese audiences and sparking active commentaries around the web and on Chinese social media (Grogam, 2020). Similarly, in the third and fourth seasons of The Rap of China, hoodies, oversized trousers and bucket hats were proposed as hip hop's classic stage look, so that most of the advertised brands sold out all their stock within days of appearance on the show.

Therefore, in the context of contemporary Chinese hip-hop, ‘cool’ is the whole and key language of this subculture's consumption as presented to mainstream audiences by media companies and advertisers. This cool taste seeking phenomenon was expressed by Julian Chang, who believes that:

> Julian Chang: No matter what Kris Wu and Hot Dog wear, people will wear it too. They have a lot of influence on people’s choices of clothes and styles. I myself often buy the latest items that rappers wear on these shows.

Julian Chang is clearly recognising that music shows aim at creating idol figures that act as tastemakers and opinion leaders. He imitates the style he is offered by the idol rappers because it brings a sense of leading-edge fashion taste to him. Undoubtedly, marketers are interested in this process of creation, diffusion and innovation of new products and trends. Large media companies appear to be keen on leveraging early adopters and opinion shapers, which Nancarrow & Nancarrow (2012: 136) define as 'messenger of cools' who act as style leaders, or tastemakers. These messengers of cool may be considered the successors of Bourdieu's (1984: 359) 'cultural intermediaries' in the contemporary hip-hop scene. The 'cultural intermediaries' are the individuals who may be known as 'style leaders', 'taste-makers' or 'cool elite' who propose and sell an idea of cool and let consumers consume it. They are a vital part of the cool tribe, constructing a cool world consisting of those few who initiate and those larger numbers who imitate. They are lead edge consumers, but they are not creators, designers or inventors; rather they act as intermediaries that shape people's opinion by endorsing or publicising certain brands or styles. In the Chinese context the messengers of cool are known as key opinion leaders, equivalent to the western role of 'influencers' on social media platforms. This imitation of celebrities reflects a wider phenomenon that sees hip-hop culture and coolness in China no longer as a culture of the few; in fact, it is becoming driven by consumption. Some influential fashion brands often appear in the media to provide instances of 'cool' taste. However, those 'in the know' who may be considered cool taste manipulators may subtly change the criteria of taste, moving on from something being 'hip' to mocking late adherents. As Julian Chang later continued in the interview:

> Julian Chang: 'What is considered cool changes every year. Clothes that people used to wear last year are already considered old the year after. There is always a new brand, colour, pattern, shape and size of the clothes. If you want to be cool, you always need to follow hip-hop celebrities and bloggers because they will tell you what is cool this year.'

From the discussion above, it appears that the hip-hop cool culture that Cheng follows is no longer independent, rebellious, or different, but driven by the dominant forces of the market. While the definition of hip-hop as a cool culture never changed, cool content and fashion trends are determined by fashion manipulators. Hence, the starter of the cool taste would be those opportunist marketers who are neither hip-hop artists nor subculturalists. The case of the streetwear brand Supreme is exemplary. As Cheng acknowledged: 'Supreme is surely the most popular cool brand among contemporary Chinese young generation'. However, Supremes'

fashion message is no longer based on the grassroots and street-skating culture. Since its birth, Supreme has only represented people who promoted the development of street skateboarding culture at that time under the obstacles of conservatives, and their behaviour was regarded as 'cool' by outsiders. Instead, in contemporary China, Supreme has become a fast-consuming luxury brand. After consuming traditional luxury fashion brands for a long time, the new generation of cool consumers does not want to be unique and niche, but is interested in popular, showy and conformity symbols such as Prada, other fast consuming items. As Cheng reiterated, she buys the same brands as the stars of The Rap of China because she considers the hip-hop celebrities' leading brands are cool.

These mechanisms bring to mind one of the most influential scholars in marketing, Russell W. Belk, who proposed research on important consumer behaviour concepts such as 'gift-giving behavior', 'sharing behavior' and materialism. He and his collaborators wrote *Consuming Cool: Behind the unemotional mask* (Belk, 2010), where, based on qualitative research on young people in the United States and Finland, they described American coolness as 'an irritating sense of superiority, an air of relaxation, and an atmosphere of indifference that young people create by being cool' (Belk, 2010: 186). Since then, however, American cool culture has deteriorated. Belk (2010) blamed the mediocrity of American cool culture on marketers since they seized the meaning of cool and, by commercialising it, killed American real coolness. This process is similar to the hip-hop status in China at present, in that, after experiencing presence in reality shows and promotion by behind-the-scenes marketers, the subcultural nature of coolness has been assimilated into the mainstream of fashion and cool brands. Hip-hop practice, fashion and the idea of coolness have been popularised among the non-subculturalists. Take the interviewees, Chang, following Supreme as an example. The deep reason for her to wear Supreme branded items is that she wants to stand out in the mainstream, but without separating herself from mainstream society. Following the mainstream culture and being unique is not fully about breaking some sort of rule or autonomous behaviour as defined by subculturalist.

In summary, when I attempt to investigate hip-hop taste from the interviewees' data, it emerged that hip-hop culture is more than just music taste, as it also encompasses hip-hop fashion taste and attitudes. The concept of 'cool' emerged as an important characteristic to define what is considered of good and bad taste in the Chinese hip-hop scene, which also include attitudes expressed by performers on stage and by fans in musical and fashion choices. Being cool means being different, dressing unconventionally and not caring about other people's judgment. A

cool attitude is dispassionate, self-confident and emanating an air of disengagement and nonchalance, aimed at creating an impression of firm superiority.

Indeed, research on music taste (Miller, 2011; Webster, 2019) is usually not only about rhythm and melody, but also about cutting-edge consumption, audience preferences and other subcultural practices, including clothing. In particular, this chapter frames the issue of hip-hop taste as a subcultural phenomenon yet influenced by the popularity of hip-hop reality shows in China. In addition, Chinese rappers and fans regard hip-hop fashion as an indispensable part of stage performances and as a mean to express subcultural identity and hip-hop attitude. This demonstrates the importance attached to hip-hop fashion. According to Pierre Bourdieu, taste differences reflect social and economic differences between the upper classes and members of other social classes. Instead, in this study of hip-hop taste in China, the taste difference contributes to maintaining the uniqueness and superiority of a particular subcultural group and its internal cultural capital. However, hip hop fans stated that hip-hop reality shows and hip-hop celebrities are the sources of their cool taste. Hence, in a consumerism era, the cool taste is largely shaped by the advertisers and the marketing manipulator. This means that although cool is considered hip, different and cutting-edge from its inception, cool items and what is cool are determined by the non-subculturalists.

6.4 Conclusion

Based on the data collected and analysed, chapter 6 examined the issue of taste in hip-hop music and culture in China, along with the aesthetic characteristics of hip-hop preferences and cool identity in regard to fashion and consumption. First, even though the hip-hop music scene is currently diversified in China in terms of hip-hop subgenres, and different styles are consumed omnivorously by listeners, Chinese hip-hop fans create subtle yet powerful distinctions of taste. Interviewees clearly classified artists and musical themes into 低端 (Dī duān, vulgar), 高级 (Gāojí, authentic), and 经典 (Jīng diǎn, classical). These listeners consume music seriously and rationally, subtly rejecting vulgar content, over-commercialized short-lived raps and their associated popular rankings. Vulgar hip-hop tastes were repeatedly referred to as misogynistic, referencing drug use, and being disrespectful of the dead by many of the interviewees reported in this chapter. These productions are considered of bad taste and are deemed inappropriate to feature on public platforms. In addition, most of the raps in the Chinese music market are consumed for entertaining and, when they become heavily

commercialised, they are described by interviewees as short-lived musical pieces, or ‘easy to be forgotten’.

Secondly, in addition to expressing their preference for hip-hop music taste, respondents pointed out that hip-hop consumption and culture is not only about music, but also about the attitude of cool and fashion. Fashion emerged as an integral part of hip-hop culture, in that it contributes to defining the identity of rappers and reflects a sense of belonging to the community. In the interviewees’ words, hip-hop clothing is ‘cool’. This is how the new hip-hop generation in China seeks a cool identity, attaches meaning to dressing and follows the ever-changing concept of cool style. However, in the pursuit of the latest cool items, a strong marketisation of the concept of ‘cool’ is observed, as it becomes tied up with fast consumption mechanisms of fashion dicated by media companies and key opinion leaders.

The marketisation also points to an interesting aspect of the relation between the ideas of ‘cool’ and the cultural omnivore. Although it might appear that cool and hip-hop music consumers enact opposite choices, both concepts appear to be converging upon the action of marketisation. As Thomas Frank (1997) argued, the advertising industry’s ‘conquest of cool’ began already in the 1960s, when the industry started to identify and co-opt anything that is deemed to be cool and trendy by fans for the purposes of selling. Therefore, if consumers become increasingly omnivorous, and ‘cool’ becomes increasingly commercialised, then cultural capital must increasingly be associated with knowledge of the cool and trendy. Thus, under the contemporary logic of capitalism and marketisation, the omnivorous consumer is ‘forcibly’ faced with consuming commercialised instances of ‘cool’ (Taylor, 2009). The importance of these remarks is highlighted by Chinese hip-hop reality shows, in that more mainstream audiences follow the commercialised versions of cool as packaged by media companies, while other rappers avoid popularised brand by building their own cool taste, as illustrated by some of the interviewees in this chapter.

Sociological investigations of taste, fashion and subcultural consumption have rarely escaped from studies and inherent hierarchies within the studies (Fox, 1987; Moore, 2005; Harrison, 2006). Indeed, scholars have detailed the lives and social worlds of the members within subcultures, but often viewed their identities from the outside and reduced subcultural identities to a list of social characteristics (Williams, 2011). When discussing vulgar and serious taste in hip-hop music, competence of the connoisseur (Bourdieu, 1984:66) allows the omnivorous listener to subtly distinguish rappers like PG One from PACT; rappers who create scandal from

rappers who are considered serious and wholesome. The analysis presented in this chapter sheds light on the preferences of hip-hop listeners in music and fashion, while also highlighting concepts of taste inclusion and exclusion. That is, Chinese hip-hop listeners claim to be cultural omnivores, yet they show a deep exclusion of low-end hip hop. Overall, these remarks offer the idea that hip-hop listeners, artists and fashionistas do create distinctions, and that these distinctions may impact their status within the community. Chapter seven will be devoted to analysing such hierarchies within the community and their characteristics.

7.0 The hierarchy of the hip-hop community in China

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an account of the hierarchy within the Chinese hip-hop community. The interviews with fans and artists demonstrated that highly successful shows such as The Rap of China are only the tip of the iceberg of hip-hop culture, as a variety of individual responses beyond the collective hype around such popular shows was uncovered by the interviews. Based on such a varied spectrum of experiences, passions and beliefs that underpin people's attachment to, and perception of, hip-hop, fans and rappers tended to position themselves at different levels within the hip-hop community.

In this respect, the aim of this chapter is twofold. On the one hand, the chapter details how subcultural capital is embodied in the Chinese hip-hop scene and what are the relevant variables that define subcultural knowledge and practices. On the other hand, the chapter explores how different levels of subcultural capital create hierarchies by investigating the relationship between a member's subcultural capital and their position within the hierarchy. Specifically, the chapter analyses how subcultural capital, in the form of knowledge, style, practices and social connections within the hip-hop scene are rewarded with recognition, status and prestige within the subculture. Thus, these elements contribute to establishing a person's position within the subculture and their perception of and by other members. The chapter mainly draws from the notion of subcultural capital originally developed by Sarah Thornton (1996) in her work on British club cultures, but in the different scene of Chinese hip-hop. Throughout the chapter, the investigation demonstrates that there is explanatory potential to be gained by integrating the notion of subcultural capital into the Chinese context and that the concept helps to understand hierarchical forms of differentiation and intersections between different subcultural-structural variables.

This chapter is organised in three key sections that reflect the detected hierarchical levels, which are identified as three pairs of tiers: 'insiders and outsiders', 'peripherals and centralists' and 'softcore' and 'hardcore' members. The relations between these categories and their place within the hierarchy are schematically illustrated in figure 7. Generally, the higher the status of the member's position, the more subcultural capital they possess. Additionally, the more labour, time and learning they invest in hip-hop, either by just listening to it or by producing it too, the higher they are positioned in the hierarchy.

The first distinction, which is the subject of section 7.2, is based on the very concept of belonging to the hip-hop community and articulates the differences between outsiders and insiders. The key characteristic that defines these two categories is the level of commitment invested by members of the community. In particular, outsiders do not show a continuous interest and commitment to hip-hop music. This category includes 'three-minute crushes' fans, who are only temporarily interested in the culture. In contrast, insiders show a more consistent interest and their understanding of hip-hop often goes beyond commercially packaged online shows such as The Rap of China.

A further level of differentiation is then identified within the insiders' category. Insiders can be simple consumers, or they can also be engaged in producing hip-hop. These two categories are named 'peripherals' and 'centralists', respectively, to reflect the heightened status of the latter. This tier is the subject of section 7.3. With both being insiders, individuals in these categories go beyond consuming hip-hop solely from online shows, as members of these categories show a deeper understanding of the culture. However, peripheral members only limit themselves to listening to hip-hop and broadly following the subculture. In contrast, centralists show a stronger level of engagement, and therefore subcultural capital, by producing music themselves.

Finally, the last hierarchical level is presented in section 7.4 and consists of 'softcore' and 'hardcore' members. For these categories, the main discriminant is the level of compliance and understanding of the subcultural norms. Softcore members abide by subcultural norms, while hardcore membership refers to rappers who have become famous or even national celebrities. Hence, due to their high status, hardcore members are free to choose whether to deviate from subcultural norms or to conform with them. Such individuals may have a significant impact on the evolution of hip hop as they include opinion leaders.

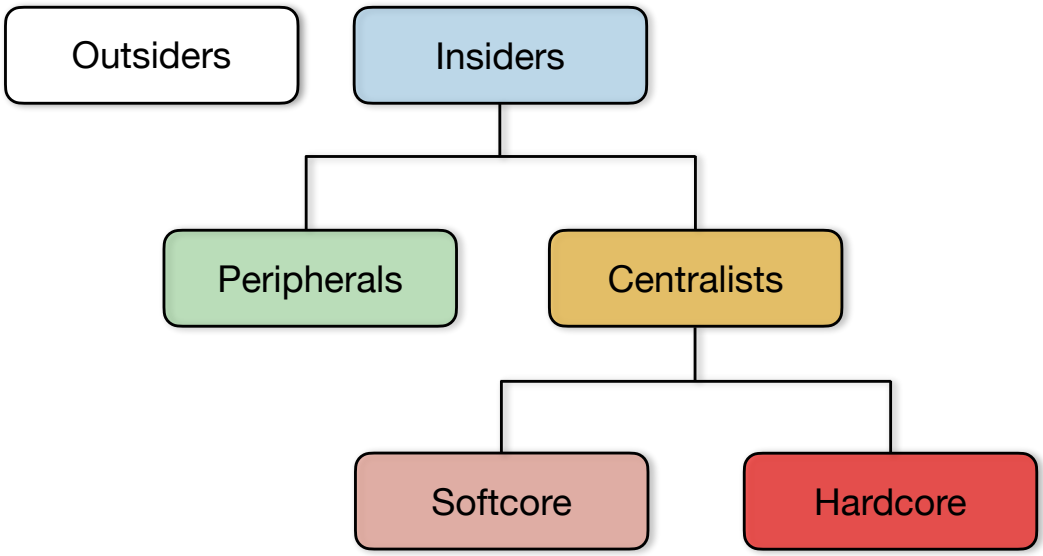

Figure 7. Scheme of the hierarchy of Chinese hip-hop scene

7.2 Insiders vs outsiders: the level of commitment to hip-hop

This section analyses the first and broadest level of stratification of the Chinese hip-hop community, namely insiders versus outsiders, by discussing the main characteristics that define these groups based on the conducted interviews. This distinction partly draws from Hodkinson's (2002) interpretation of Thornton, who invoked the concept of subcultural capital to analyse the Goth subculture in the UK in the mid 90s. This perspective is based on the use of subcultural social spaces and knowledge and how members of the community can exercise classificatory power within the subculture. In Hodkinson's (2002) perspective, the term subcultural capital refers to characteristics, styles, knowledge and forms of practice that are rewarded with recognition, admiration, status or prestige within a subculture. In the case of the insider/outsider distinction in Chinese hip-hop, it is necessary to also invoke such concept as it allows to highlight the distinctive traits of hip-hop and analyse the standards of recognition and belonging to the hip-hop community, along with the characteristics that insiders possess, while outsiders do not. The research in this section is also reminiscent of Andes (1998: 220)'s study of punk culture, whereby those who lacked authentic commitment were regarded as 'poseurs'.

Many of the characteristics of non-belonging are well embodied by Andy Ye, who can be considered a typical representative of the outsider category. When I asked him about the time he started to listen to hip-hop and whether he considers himself part of a community, he simply denied being an insider:

Andy Ye: Honestly, I don't consider myself part of any community; I joined this fan group mainly because I watch The Rap of China and to learn more about the culture and gain some basic knowledge about it. I'm still trying to learn some hip-hop, but I don't know how long I'll like it for.

Andy Ye's words offer an evident sense of distinction and strong rejection of the idea of organically belonging to a community. I consider this as a way of defining himself as an outsider. The outsiders' level of superficiality regarding hip-hop culture and their lack of belongingness to the subculture community indicates a consistent distance from the genre, or transient closeness, at best. Interviewees like Andy, who only follow hip-hop casually, denied being part of the hip-hop community and are not regularly involved in hip-hop activities. In addition, Andy's words suggest that the outsiders' perception of hip-hop is entirely dependent on reality shows created by Chinese media companies, as it also emerged in many other interviews. For instance, Simon Pan and Tim Yang also expressed some level of interest in hip-hop, admitted to listening to it and wanted to learn more about it. However, their main sources of hip-hop knowledge are online shows like The Rap of China and, more importantly, they still refused to recognise themselves as members of a community or a hierarchical system. As Simon Pan stated: 'Yeah, I watch a lot of these online rap shows, but only casually. I am interested in the music and I want to learn some lyrics, but I don't want to fully commit myself to it. There are so many other genres out there'. Even more directly, Tim Yang stated: 'I don't consider myself part of any hip-hop group. I know I will follow hip-hop only until it's trendy'. This is indeed a clear distinction expressed by hip-hop outsiders, who distance themselves from any form of belonging, nor they seem interested to fully embrace the culture.

Andy, Simon and Tim speak for many of the 'three-minute crush' fans that I often encountered in WeChat groups. This term is not infrequent among the Chinese hip-hop community as it is commonly found on WeChat groups and posts, as sān fēnzhōng fěnsī (三分钟粉丝), literally translated 'three-minute fans'. This expression is often used by those who consider themselves to be committed members of the community to describe hip-hop fans that are not enduring and who are perceived to be disloyal to hip-hop. In fact, many years after *The Rap of China*, many of the 'three-minute crushes' still remain in such a 'follower' phase, as Andy, Simon and Tim best exemplify. In addition, 'three-minute crushes' fans may lose their enthusiasm for hip-hop

over time, as hinted at by Tim. After all, these fans are only attracted to hip-hop because of reality shows, as Andy Ye continued to explain:

> Andy Ye: 'After 2017, hip-hop reality shows started getting boring. Until a few years ago casual fans' attachment to hip-hop was very strong. As the initial fever subsided, many of the initial fans shifted to different entertainment, such as rock or idol-producing shows.'

Andy Ye's ideas here emphasise again the lack of continued commitment to the hip-hop scene as another characteristic of outsiders. Since the strong sense and passion of hip-hop outsiders that result in hip-hop music shows such as The Rap of China achieved great success, however, this reality show is mainly relying on the participation of famous celebrities and candidates' scandals involving contestants. It is clear that fans such as Andy Ye are a product of media cultivation, which can easily attract a broad fandom, which is, however, a 'casual fandom' without deep involvement. Kahn-Harris (2004b; 2007) argues that subculture fans' activities can be linked to their everyday pursuits, displays and performance of subcultural capital. This can be related to the time and effort that the fans contribute to the culture they are attached to. However, when most of the outsider Chinese consumers get attached to hip-hop culture from the reality show, they are more concerned with a desire to focus upon individual and fluid attachments to lifestyle, music, fashion and consumption without deep involvement. This is how Andy, Simon and Tim openly refused to be considered members of the hip-hop community: outsiders of hip-hop in the contemporary music scene are a fluid, loose group centred on pleasure and the possibility of choice between different genres. Hence, outsiders find no reason for an ideological commitment to the hip-hop community, and merely treat it as 'a stylistic game to be played' (Muggleton, 1997: 180). All these characteristics place insiders at the bottom levels in the hierarchy within the hip-hop community.

In contrast, insiders hold quite different views. Insiders have followed hip-hop culture for a longer time, and their passion goes beyond watching The Rap of China or other similar shows. Here, to elaborate on this distinction, invoking subcultural capital is useful since it allows to describe different levels of reward and recognition between insiders and outsiders with regard to long-time commitment. Following and participating in hip-hop culture for a long time encourages insiders to become members of the hip-hop community by amassing subcultural

capital in the form of practices, knowledge and improved status within the community, as it will be discussed below.

Pete Yang is an MA student in Shanghai, who has been interested in hip-hop since high school. As a fan, he never misses a single competition battle of his favourite rappers and has collected old CDs of the most iconic local rap crews, even those that are out of print. He embraces hip-hop culture very actively and with a lot of enthusiasm, as I noticed from his very fervent posting and commenting activity in the WeChat group where I recruited him. As such, he can be considered a seasoned member of the hip-hop community, with a significant amassed subcultural capital that immediately suggests the existence of a strong distinction between him and outsiders like Wendy or Simon. He can therefore be considered an 'insider' in the structure of the hip-hop community when compared to the outsiders, who only consume hip-hop music and culture from mainstream platforms. In contrast, insiders such as Pete can be really obsessed with niche hip-hop, as they seek the pure hip-hop spirit embodied in the film 8 miles[27](2002), as Pete mentioned. According to Pete, these individuals have a different sense of hip-hop music and culture:

> Pete Yang: In hip-hop, what you listen to and how much you indulge in it are very important. I usually listen to hard-core, niche hip-hop crews. If you are obsessed with a crew that is not famous, you find yourself desperately trying to find all of their albums. Do you know what I mean? Instead of being fed by music apps and online shows, it is a journey for and by yourself.

Based on his long-time devotion to hip-hop culture, Pete's words reveal a sense of commitment to gain and maintain subcultural capital through the rejection of online shows and the embracement of niche music. Obviously, Pete is fairly concerned about how hip-hop members enter the community and whether they search for authentic hip-hop music or are otherwise 'brainwashed' by mainstream and commercial hip-hop. Even though he did not mention explicitly anything about mainstream hip-hop fans in this conversation, he repeatedly used the term 'three-minute crushes' to refer to outsiders during our interview. He highlighted how reality shows and mainstream hip-hop are used as business machines to create three-minute crushes fans. These fans do not properly approach the subculture as they just passively watch

[27] 8 Miles is an autobiographical film about famous white rapper Eminem's life and his attempt to launch a career in hip hop, a genre typically dominated by black people.

and listen to hip-hop music reality shows. In Pete's opinion, commercialised hip-hop reality shows represent threats to hip-hop because they reduce longer-standing fans' subcultural contributions. Hence, the mainstream hip-hop fans with the characteristics discussed above are positioned as outsiders. This interpretation is also echoed by other insiders' point of view, who feel that only through deep knowledge and commitment, can an individual be considered a member of the hip-hop community. This point was best articulated by Fisher Li, who has been practising rapping as a hobby for several years:

> Fisher Li: 'The hip-hop music scene is overrun by fake scenesters right now. Those poseurs and people who don't have the same passion as us, are destroying this culture. Media companies have cultivated too many followers for their own interest in hip-hop development. Do these people really understand what the spirit of hip-hop is? Some of my friends often tell me how strong a rapper was and how fast he could rap. In my opinion, these criteria are so unprofessional.'

Here, Fisher Li emphasises again how the outsiders are far from the hip-hop subculture due to their lack of passion and professionalism, such as by evaluating a rapper's performance only based on his rapping speed. In Fisher Li's opinion, the hip-hop cultural environment has changed significantly since 2017 and it is no longer the type of environment he used to love. It is also interesting to note that he considered that seasoned fans and followers of hip-hop who have been on the scene for a longer time believe that newcomers are destroying the hip-hop culture in China. From Fisher's words above, we get a sense that 'insiders' fear that the hip-hop scene has become corrupted by people who do not appreciate the culture. Over the course of the interview, Fisher kept complaining about how 'poseurs' and people who don't have the same passion as insiders are weakening the standard of the hip-hop music scene. With these words, he speaks for the insiders who believe that, due to their lack of subcultural knowledge, outsiders who follow only the hip-hop culture that is portrayed in mainstream media and advertising are polluting the real spirit of hip-hop.

The insider versus outsider classification highlighted here can be further framed within Georg Simmel (1950)'s idea of the 'The Stranger', an individual who is simultaneously close and distant from the group and therefore experiences both sociocultural closeness and distance from other members of a group. Outsiders in the Chinese hip-hop community are somewhat part of hip-hop, yet they are distant from a true appreciation of the culture and from a real sense of

belonging. As a result, the stranger experiences the culture but is not organically connected to the complex structure of the community. In fact, the key characteristic of outsiders, as aptly described by the term 'three-minute fans', reflects Simmel's interpretation of the stranger as being mobile, constantly renegotiating their synthesis of closeness and distancing from the group. The thoughts of Andy Ye are extremely fitting: 'I am not part of any community, I'm trying to learn some hip-hop, but I don't know how long I'll like it for'. His words show that Andy is somewhat within the bounds of the hip-hop cultural sphere, but there is no guarantee that he will continue to do so. To put it another way using Georg Simmel's (1950: 402-403) word: 'the stranger is perceived as being in the group but not of the group'.

Based on the conversations with insiders it can therefore be concluded that to be an insider or an outsider not only depends on subcultural capital, but also on a sense of identity within the subcultural group. Hip-hop artists and fans are not just young people wearing fashion clothes, dreadlocks and nose-piercings. Insiders in the Chinese hip-hop community have distinct attachments and reasons to be embedded in a subcultural identity. They are a group of young people who have a distinctive sense of self-connection with the subculture. Most importantly, the group identities of insiders are well-defined and more permanent compared to those of outsiders. Here, Hodkinson's (2007) formulation of subculture identity still fits in a contemporary Chinese hip-hop music context, since Hodkinson defined subculture identity as 'hav[ing] a clear and sustained subjective sense of group identity and a sense of like-mindedness with other subcultural members regardless of other factors'. Even in a modern consumerist society, insiders in the Chinese hip-hop community still act as loyal 'subculturalists' trying to maintain a 'symbolic' boundary with the outside and by which they can maintain the purity of the hip-hop tribe, such as by rejecting the poseurs and the three-minute fans. At the same time, the persistence of hip-hop insiders emerges from the stability of the relationship between self-identity and subcultural identity.

Overall, the distinction between outsiders and insiders appears to be quite clear within the Chinese hip-hop community. Outsiders have a short-term interest in hip-hop, as they are mainly attracted to the commercialized nature of online shows. In contrast, insiders are much more active and have a long-term loyalty. An insider hip-hop fan sees loyalty to hip-hop as an obligation to remain faithful to their commitment regardless of the status of the hip-hop subculture. It is also clear that insiders desire to define their membership as stable, committed, and authentic, while also protecting the ideal collective hip-hop identity. Hence, outsiders are perceived as invaders. This was a common focus of many interviewees where insiders believe

that outsiders threaten the development of hip-hop because outsiders do not display any real commitment to the subculture and only appreciate the commercialized aspects of it. Interestingly, this is how insiders and outsiders position themselves based on the judgement of their attachment and proximity to hip-hop. This comparison further reveals the essential difference between insiders and outsiders: insiders follow hip-hop culture because of its distinct and shared values, practices and identity, while outsiders follow it because of their music taste and consumer tastes. However, in the eyes of insiders, the infiltration of outsiders stepping into the arena would result in a weakening of the hip-hop community. By contrast, because insiders shared subculture identity and cognition, insiders instinctively want to protect the purity of hip-hop culture.

7.3 Peripherals vs Centralists: The scope of engagement in hip-hop

The research interviews uncovered a further level of distinction within the group of insiders. Not all insiders show the same level of commitment, subcultural capital and understanding of hip-hop. In fact, the insiders' tier can be further subdivided into what I term ‘peripheral’ and ‘centralist’ members. This classification is mainly based on the degree of involvement and whether the followers are mere consumers of hip-hop or are also producers. Hence, while insiders and outsiders discussed above differ based on the level of commitment to hip-hop, the distinction between peripheral and centralist is mainly based on the degree and scope of the involvement with hip-hop. Specifically, a higher degree of involvement implies engagement in music production activities, as opposed to music consumption only. Peripherals are consumers who have been long-standing fans, before online shows brought hip-hop to the forefront of popular culture. Centralists are often engaged in production activities, either as solo artists uploading their creations online or performing in live rap battles, or as members of hip-hop ‘crews’ and bands. Hence, both the consumers and producers of hip-hop culture, peripheral and central members, are insiders that make important contributions to Chinese hip-hop, even though those contributions are quite different in nature.

As discussed above, peripheral membership refers to hip-hop fans who gained access to the hip-hop community through long-term commitment and attachment to hip-hop. Tony Wang can be considered one such member. I first encountered him on WeChat through a fans group during recruitment. His WeChat Profile avatar shows a dreadlocked, defiant face looking at the camera. He later confirmed that it was himself in the picture. When I asked him why he chose this for his WeChat profile, he said, ‘dirty dreadlocks are one of the symbols of hip-hop. It’s

something that sets me apart from everyone else'. When further asked about his relationship with hip-hop he said:

> Tony Wang: 'I started listening to hip-hop when I was in junior high. It is when rap music started to become popular in Shanghai pubs and live houses. I and my elder brother always went there. I was always surrounded by this music; it was part of everyday life. During my birthday celebrations, I remember being in my brother's car, and it was certainly the weekend soundtrack. When I listened to the CD I had borrowed, I was stunned by the bass tones and frantic tempo of rap music, I was shocked and attracted by the content of the music which is full of dirty and defiant words. I can feel the dark side in my body has been brought up by it.
>
> Interviewer: 'Do you watch The Rap of China?'
>
> Tony Wang: 'I never watched *The Rap of China*. It does not show too much real performances because it is commercially packaged. But I attend hip-hop gigs, as many as I can afford. To understand the authentic hip-hop scene, you need to be exposed to underground hip-hop. I don't usually listen to the mainstream raps, but only listen to some underground hip-hop. Hot Dog and Fat Shady are cool. Have you ever heard any dirty words in the lyrics of any of those mainstream raps in reality shows? (laugh) In underground rap, swearing is a weapon being, which is the embodiment of 'keep it real'.

Through Tony Wang's account, we learn that, as a peripheral hip-hop member, he usually consumes the rap music in live houses[28] and underground music scene and he believes that it helps subcultures feel the 'atmosphere'. This is exemplified by the use of profanities in the underground scene that contribute to the 'keep it real' attitude that is impossible for mainstream hip-hop music to attain as, in contrast, it never contains any lyrics with expletives. From the way Tony Wang consumes hip-hop and participates in the hip-hop scene, it appears that the peripherals have a great wealth of hip-hop knowledge to rely on. As a result, their consumption

[28] A live house is a live music club, a music venue featuring live music. It most frequently refers to small to mid-sized venues, which feature few seats, open bar and feature rock, jazz, hip-hop, and folk music.

can be considered to be more in line with the values of the subculture itself compared to that of non-members. In Tony Wang's words, being authentic is an integral part of rapping and consuming hip-hop culture and is a strong sign of loyalty to the subculture. Tony Wang, therefore, reveals that consumption by peripheral members is relatively reflective of diametrically opposed to mainstream cultural codes. In other words, he believes hip-hop members should have more subcultural attributes such as niche musical tastes, an authentic hip-hop spirit and engage in traditional street form performance, which are all considered to be desirable features.

When hip-hop appeared in China in the early 21st century, Tony Wang was one of the young people who were in pursuit of new trends and were active in the bubbling musical atmosphere of the club and live house scenes in major cities (see history chapter four). Hence, here, I tend to describe the identity of peripherals as those who pay more attention to the emotional and physical experiences that hip-hop music brings to individuals. Brennan (2003: 129) argues that 'structures of feeling' are central to understanding the character and experiences of community: the experience of hip-hop with fan practices, notions of authenticity, kinship, membership, and participation. Structures of feeling are reflections of the position of hip-hop peripheral members to the community. This demonstrates that, although hip-hop listeners' feeling appears private and personal, peripherals have some common feelings in relation to the hip-hop community. When Tony Wang thinks about the disjointed nature of his life, hip-hop surrounded him at every moment: it was inseparable from his memories of his relationship with his brother, his friends, and people in the pub. Tony Wang's pursuit of extreme feelings in high school contributed to him building his social relationships and societal connections. He even believes that 'hip-hop is a part of [his] life' and that it provides him with an emotional connection between hip-hop and daily life and memories. Such a strong connection with hip-hop music means that peripheral members are closely associated with hip-hop, forming a long-term, stable and intimate relationship with the music genre. The inherent nature of peripheral members advances their standing within the subculture compared to outsiders, so that they may also have the potential to access higher levels in the hierarchy.

However, when I asked Tony if he is potentially preparing to enter rapping competitions or thinking of becoming a professional rapper, he rejected the idea, by stating: 'I'm honestly not thinking about being a rapper at the moment. I wholeheartedly like hip-hop music and deeply appreciate and listen to it. I will do some beats for some freelance rappers, maybe. That's it!' From this last account, it appears that, although Tony, as a follower who has contributed to the

hip-hop community for a long time, can create his own beats, he does not have the ambition to become a professional rapper. Peripheral members in the Chinese hip-hop community are limited to being consumers of hip-hop culture, without further participation in any production-based hip-hop activities such as battle competitions, DJing or becoming freelance rappers. As Tony Wang further stated: 'hip-hop does not require further commitment for fans who are familiar with rap, you can just enjoy it and be ok with it'. So, whether peripherals decide to further devote themselves to hip-hop depends on whether they are willing to put their hip-hop knowledge into business practice in a broader sense that goes beyond personal enjoyment of the music.

The case study of Tony Wang can be framed within Hodkinson's concept of 'autonomy' (2016). Hodkinson deemed that subcultures have their own operational 'autonomy'. In his research, insiders to the goth subculture created their own autonomous media and networks, as subculture producers need to be socially active and in constant dialogue with each other and with the rest of the subcultural network. Tony Wang seems to lack such characteristics, since he does not seem interested in developing or safeguarding subcultural autonomy, space and terrain. He appears to care more about the personal experience that the subculture brings to him.

In contrast, fans like Omar Sun do show a sense of subcultural autonomy and a desire to maintain the structure and workings of the hip-hop networks. Omar Sun is a rapper that I recruited on one of the most active fan groups on *WeChat*. The interview with him was very animated and lively, as he appeared very keen on telling me his story and experiences as a semi-professional rapper. He told me that he leads his own hip-hop crew, and that he has even auditioned for The Rap of China. He also intends to continue to devote himself to hip-hop music:

> Omar Sun: 'I have a band now and I am in charge of the beats. I recently auditioned for the third season of *The Rap of China* 2020. However, keep in mind that there are too many high-quality rappers, and I am only one among many of them.'
>
> Interviewer: 'What do you mean by high-quality rappers?'
>
> Omar Sun: 'In China, there are so many rappers that are able to rap and have

> different styles of rapping, both in the underground and the mainstream. Popular rappers are making a lot of money in the mainstream music market, but underground rappers like us may starve to death if we are not invited to perform somewhere. But I am determined. I love making music with my crew and performing at local events, even if I only have small audiences for now.'

Omar is part of a relatively unknown band; however, he is very keen on 'making it', as he adamantly engages in hip-hop production and tours regularly, and therefore represents many of the centralist members. Centralists are mainly local Chinese MCs and rappers who regularly produce music. They also occasionally take part in competitions to promote hip-hop culture and music. For the centralist members in this study, hip hop has become more than a casual interest and is instead a near full-time commitment and contribution which definiens their identities. Such high levels of commitment provide members of this category with the opportunity to continue to improve their hip-hop skills, gain wider hip-hop knowledge, develop social relationships with other members, and ultimately obtain greater esteem. However, as Omar Sun puts it, it is difficult for amateur rappers to achieve fame because of the breadth of the market and the sheer number of rappers and bands competing for business. Even though most centralists may not be particularly successful, they represent an inextricable component within the hierarchy since centralist members are individuals who have moved to proficiency in the production of hip-hop culture, consumer experiences and the demonstration of subculture-specific social capital. Thus, the further hierarchical membership level of centralists includes individuals occupying a more central position within the community, based on their musical production activities and broader engagement with local events and networks. As opposed to peripherals, centralists are not only avid hip-hop consumers, but they are also professional producers of hip-hop who often participate in different performances, such as freelance battles, gigs and rap competitions of different sorts. Based on this classification, we can identify the main difference between the centralists and the peripherals in the degree of engagement and activity in maintaining the overall hip-hop culture.

Furthermore, centralists organize events and create their own music in line with the subcultural notion of autonomy identified by (Hodkinson, 2007). This is demonstrated by Omar Sun's behaviours the WeChat group where I found him in, where he acts almost as a group leader. His posting activity made it clear that he oversees and cherishes his local hip-hop fan community. He was responsible for organising events, signposting important competitions,

posting videos of some mainstream reality shows, accepting perspective members to the group, sending out invited to his own shows and engaging in long discussions in many comments' threads. Therefore, more broadly, through producing hip-hop music autonomously, centralists show a strong perception of being part of the hip-hop community and show a clear awareness of occupying a higher status compared to other members thanks to their proficiency, knowledge and involvement. These characteristics are the key traits that differentiate centralists from peripherals. Producing hip-hop music, either as independent rappers or in a crew and practicing subcultural autonomy within local communities represent means to attain proficiency in music production, deeper knowledge of hip-hop and stronger involvement with the hip-hop community.

In addition to these centralists that are active in the underground or local scenes, another type of centralist is instead seeking a greater influence, often in the mainstream scene. The interview with Omar Sun above hinted at this desire, especially when he told me that he auditioned for The Rap of China and admitted that 'Popular rappers are making a lot of money in the mainstream music market'. This perception shows that centralists may amass proficiency, knowledge and involvement with hip-hop to transition to the mainstream and become famous. In fact, The Rap of China is the best example to showcase rappers belonging to this tier. As the first hip-hop music reality show on mainstream media, The Rap of China was the very first example to demonstrate that hip-hop could bring money and fame to Chinese rappers. Since rappers like Gai and After Journey gained success thanks to the program, they were no longer trying to simply make a basic living from hip-hop, but they began to gain materialistic success and accumulate significant wealth, such that money became the ultimate objective and a symbol of the success of a rapper's songs. At the same time, these success stories made hip-hop more of a commercial phenomenon and contributed in leading to hip-hop commodification among the new generations of fans. Many of the rappers that I interviewed could be considered to belong to this tier, as their responses strongly show their willingness to participate in one of the many mainstream music reality shows with the sole aim of becoming rich and famous. At this stage, hip-hop is not only a means of support to the rappers, but it represents a strong desire for fame and a means of social climbing by wealth.

7.4 Hardcore vs softcore: compliance with subcultural norms

A continued analysis of the data revealed that centralists feature a further level of internal division: softcore and hardcore members. While both softcore and hardcore members are

centralist, meaning that they both engage in hip-hop music production, an additional distinction within the group emerged based on their level of adherence to subcultural norms, as the following section details.

As individuals who advanced beyond the status of outsiders and peripherals, softcore members are centralists who achieve their status in the hip-hop hierarchy through labour and commitment in the production of rap music. They achieve this status mainly by demonstrating both subcultural capital (in the form of technical knowledge of music production and adherence to subcultural norms related to the use of specific terminology, gestures and practices) and subculture-specific social capital (mainly in the form of organization of social events, local rap battles and creation of local networks of rappers). Perhaps most importantly, their perception of self is also found to be more embedded in the collective perception and exemplary values of the hip-hop community group. For the soft-core members in this study, hip hop has become more than a casual interest, as it is a near full-time commitment and a framework that guides their lives and identities. Such high levels of commitment provide soft-core members with the opportunity to continue to improve their hip hop skills, advance their hip hop knowledge, and develop social relationships with other members, thus obtaining greater esteem. According to MC Xing who has been an independent MC from a local label, friendship, investment in hip-hop and the autonomous operation of music business are the three essential characteristics and conditions for softcore members to establish their hierarchy position in the second tier of the hip-hop community.

Interviewer: ‘How do you connect to hip-hop music?’

MC Xing: ‘I am an independent hip-hop artist. Hip-hop costs me too much money. Buying the recording equipment, operating my NetEase cloud account, maintaining hip-hop brand membership require big amount of money to spend. Those basic listeners have no idea how much money and commitment it takes to produce good music. I'm going bankrupt.’

Interviewer: ‘but why are you still holding on?’

MC Xing: ‘Trying your best to do what you like, isn't it a good thing? Making music with a bunch of hip-hop bros is cool.’

Interviewer: ‘How do you feel about your current situation?’

MC Xing: ‘Mixed feelings. I'm an unknown rapper who needs to make some extra money to support my favourite hip-hop. At present, I am affiliated with a label in Chongqing, and I often take part in club activities and performances out of my main job. They are very useful because I get to know and network with other local names in hip-hop. But right now, there are too many rappers in China who are not famous but want to be famous like me. I think to go from ‘no one’ to ‘someone’ in this hip-hop community, I need much more time to write my rap, more money to invest in the music business and the hype of the agency behind me.’

The interview excerpts with MC Xing reveals at least three characteristics of the softcore members of the hip-hop community. Firstly, the subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital of the softcore members is incomparable to outsiders, insiders and peripherals. As described by MC Xing, the basic elements for a professional rapper are recording equipment, a network that connects rappers in order to maintain its own music channel. These constitute elements of subcultural capital that a simple listener does not possess, hence revealing that, through proficiency, commitment and production/consumption experiences, the softcore members have moved much further beyond the other tiers in terms of amassed subculture capital, expertise in hip-hop and network with other professionals. The process of becoming an independent rapper usually begins with a lot of writing and performance practice. Then, once an artist has decided on a stage name and created original songs, they're ready to begin marketing in order to create a ‘buzz’ and inform people of their music. They must then develop further, often aided by the growing use of digital media, which sometimes allows them to get their music to the public without a record label behind them. However, decent recording equipment ranges from a few hundred pounds to thousands of pounds. As an independent creator, it is undeniable that having your own recording equipment is the most convenient way to make quality music. In addition, other essential inputs, such as the use of the Internet to expand popularity, is already a direct channel for relatively unknown rappers to gain popularity. In China, artists who wish to upload their creations of music apps, such as NetEase Music[29]

[29] NetEase Music is a Chinese Internet technology company providing on-demand music-streaming services.

and KuGou Music[30] , have to pay personal membership fees before they can gain subscriptions from more fans.

The second characteristic revealed by MC Xing is the opportunity to develop social relationships with other hip-hop members, thus maintaining the identity of softcore members as subcultural participants with a full-time commitment to hip-hop. As Xing indicated, he is signed by a hip-hop music label. Under his Chongqing local label, he even encounters famous rap crews such as *Yin San* and *Gentian Purple*. Such strong connections with Chinese pioneer rappers allow MCs like Xing to access the subcultural heritage of top underground rappers and to be rooted in the subcultural community. It is especially important for independent artists to have a strong network under a local label since they do not have the resources of major record labels behind pushing them and will likely severely lack awareness of the industry. From Xing description, his hip hop label is far from a music company, instead it is more of an intangible asset that independent rappers rely on, a highly abstract symbol for a series of rap songs. Simply put, when a rapper manages to have a record produced by *Gosh* (a relatively famous hip-hop label in Chongqing), fans appreciate the high quality of the hip-hop produced because of the fame of *Gosh*. This is because a label such as *Gosh* would naturally associate signed hip-hop artists with rap masters such as *Gai*, *Bridge* and *Pheasant*. This is why independent rappers in China seek for building close ties with local labels to gain more subculture capital, a greater knowledge of rap creation and to network with other hip-hop artists of different calibre.

The third point mentioned by MC Xing is that softcore members are still positioned at a lower level compared to hardcore members of hip-hop. Softcore members are often freelance MCs within the music market, because hip-hop is not their only career and they use their own money to support their hip-hop development. Becoming successful as a rapper can be difficult, as there are more people who want to become musicians than there are success stories. The field is very competitive. Participation in the hip-hop music scene certainly involves hard work for respondents, especially in their attempts to break through the tier of the softcore member which many of the rappers become trapped in. In order to progress to the higher levels and achieve greater success in their hip-hop career, softcore members place high value on pure subculture norms which, in turn, frequently influence their values, opinions, attitudes and behaviour. On this point, subcultural evolution, the motivation for respecting hard-core members, is more likely to be based on a desire to assert softcore membership through learning and by

[30] KuGou Music is a Chinese music streaming and download service established in 2004 and owned by Tencent Music.

conforming to the group norms of the subculturalists rather than of a literal admiration of the hardcore members, as it will be better articulated in the following discussion.

From the viewpoints discussed above, softcore hip-hop members in the community generally possess a high level of subcultural capital. Softcore members gain subcultural capital through collaborating with local hip-hop labels, networking with other artists ad investing money both in musical production equipment and membership fees for online apps to upload their creations. In particular, the willingness to continue growing on all these aspects seems a common feature between softcore members. In fact, getting signed by a local hip-hop label is beneficial for independent rappers to accumulate fame and establish their hip-hop business and spread their style, as MC Qiang, another local rapper, articulated:

> MC Qiang: 'We are signed by a hip-hop label based in Chongqing. Chongqing's urban cultural atmosphere is suitable for trap rap, so most of our members do rap trap. In order for the audience to remember us, after every performance, our crew members will make a gesture unique to our team which means victory among us. Although few people care about these distinctive gestures at present, we still keep this habit. It's almost a rule: you've got to do some of these gestures or something unique to show that you truly belong to hip hop and you care about it'.

In MC Qiang's words, a group hand gesture, a distinctive logo on a garment, or a common musical style are ways to show belonging to the hip-hop community. On the one hand, these are unique 'logos' for each label and band, referring to the musical philosophy behind those labels and the band's legacy. On the other hand, the use of such distinctive features highlights the personal subcultural identity of these local rappers. Such sets of brands, symbols and styles of hip-hop create a group ritual executed every time the members perform on stage. Following on our close-to-one-hour conversation, I realized that MC Qiang continued to mention several norms, rituals and terminology he adheres to, in order to show his subcultural and musical identity in the hip-hop scene Among the concepts mentioned by Qiang, 'swag', 'money' and 'brotherhood' emerged as being regarded highly by the hip-hop crew he belongs to.

Firstly, MC Qiang highlighted 'swag'. Even though this term was not first introduced by Chinese softcore members, it suddenly became the most desired trait among Chinese

underground hip hop artists. In the American hip-hop 'vibe', it was first used by American rapper Jay-Z in 2003 to signify 'bold self-assurance, stylish and cool attitude. The interview with another MC, Jin, reveals a similar understanding of 'having the swag' or 'being swag':

> MC Jin: 'You've got to have swag as a rapper, you know? You can't let anyone say your hip-hop is worse than theirs or criticize your songs with no reason. You've got to believe in what you rap about and be sure of yourself, especially when you perform on stage. You need to keep it real. It's not like those amateur rappers or, even worse, those mainstream rappers on online shows who pretend to be cool and have the swag. They immediately come across as fake to me, and I am sure that people who really understand hip-hop will not follow them for long.'

The passage above suggests that, when used by the current Chinese hip-hop community by rappers such as MC Jin, 'swag' symbolizes a type of style and presence that displays confidence in one's ability, being reminiscent of the idea and characteristic of 'cool' analysed in chapter six. MC Jin's viewpoint further reveals that to 'have to swag' has a twofold function: on the one hand, it confers credibility to rappers, which is crucial to keep appeal real fans; on the other hand, being swag also functions as subcultural capital to elevate the status of rappers within the community. In accordance with the rest of this chapter, MC Jin is presumably referring to insider fans who show serious commitment to hip-hop and are not simply attracted by mainstream online shows. MC Jin's ideas also suggest that softcore members often have individual ideas, mostly against the mainstream consciousnes. When I listened to some of his raps on his NetEase profile, I realised how the melodies and lyrics tend to have a darker style. He often screams while singing, and his songs sounded somewhat influenced by rock and metal genres, while exhibiting a darker look compared to Chinese commercial rappers.

Secondly, 'money' as a subcultural feature appears in rap lyrics as a reference to either having a lot of money or not having enough money. In terms of the lifestyle and career status of softcore members, it is interesting how and why softcore members involve 'money' in their rap creations. Some of my interviewees mentioned that their music career started on the street and that, at that stage, all they were seeking from hip-hop was simply enough money and fame to get by, as well as an opportunity to stand on a stage. As MC G mentioned in his interview:

MC G: 'I have started rapping with almost nothing 10 years ago. I used to join small rap battles in a park near my house, where the winner would get a small amount of money. That was almost all I had to support myself. Now I make decent money with rapping, but I also work a part-time job as a delivery man. I know many other rappers around me have also struggled financially, and that's why they feel like rapping about money and becoming rich is part of who they are as artists'.

Though hip-hop is subject to a lot of criticism for the 'bling' and wealth it refers to, most genres of music have go-to subjects that establish one thing in particular: status. From Simon's words, wealth is important to softcore members because many of its listeners and producers come from backgrounds or are in situations where money is an issue. It seems like the type of hip-hop practiced by softcore members is not middle-class music. Hence, artists and listeners of hip hop recognize the value and influence that money brings with it, which also makes it is clear why some rappers intend to show off their wealth and why audiences have never grown tired of hearing about it - because it is a representation of status. Money and all that comes with it is at the center of softcore members' ambitions, and therefore constitutes another important subcultural feature displayed by softcore members.

Thirdly, softcore members care about brotherhood, since Chinese rappers who have been in the hip-hop music scene for several years need a sense of belonging to their community. The sense of belonging and love for the hip-hop community has led rappers at this stage of development to focus on teamwork and the spirit of hip-hop:

MC Zhang: 'I know most of the rappers in my local area. We have many WeChat groups where we post about events, we hang out in the same places and we often talk about our latest creations, beats and competition we participated in. It's a nice group to be part of. We call each other brother because we are good friends, and we always stand by each other. However, a lot of fake rappers out there still use the term brother, but they only pretend to be authentic and keep it real. I don't think they really mean at all as all they care about is money and fame'.

From the excerpt above, it appears that 'brotherhood' refers to solidarity to the community of rappers that is often asserted as the need to stick together as a minority group. Because of the

nature of the solidarity embraced by these rappers, they feel emboldened and empowered. My interviewees typically used the vernacular terms *gemen'r* (哥们儿) and *Xiongdi* (兄弟) to refer to each other, which are literally translated as 'brother', but often used to refer to close friends, fellow crew members, or a 'band of brothers'. Once again, Zhang also appeared to be very critical of mainstream rappers who compromise authenticity for fame and betray the very concept of subcultural brotherhood. Hence, brotherhood emerges as another important subcultural norm that softcore members adhere to.

So far it is has become clear from my respondents' understanding of 'swag', 'money' and 'brotherhood', that these are the subcultural norms advocated by softcore members like MC Jin, G and Zhang. These norms have permeated through their personal ideology, social relationships, life stories and they inform the raps they make and influence the recognition of the entire label and crew. These hip-hop elements are also applied to different labels and independent rappers, who should follow them. This often happens as individuals move from being on the outside or fringes of a group to becoming the fully-fledged members.

The next membership category includes hardcore members, namely individuals who have accumulated an abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital. As a result of this accumulation, they occupy the top position of the status hierarchy. As very few members of the Chinese hip hop culture have such extensive knowledge, accomplished skills and valuable social networks, hard-core members are the fewest in number. As it emerged from my fieldwork investigations, the greatest difference between softcore members and hardcore members is their need to comply with subcultural norms. This means that while softcore members attempt to follow the subculture norms, hardcore members are free to deviate from the subculture norms or conform to the subculture norms.

As an example, the rapper Fox has achieved widespread success following his participation in the third season of The Rap of China. He is referred to by his fans as a 'rap poet' and is often labelled with various titles such as the 'descendant of Peking Opera masters', the 'Xinjiang rapper' and a 'Chinese style singer'. However, Fox does not acknowledge any of these identities because he believes hip-hop is a free music genre without norms to follow and he believes that is why people love it. Below is an excerpt from an interview with Fox in Music Business Magazine (China):

Fox: 'I love it when people say: 'You don't look like you're into Hip Hop';

> I'm like ‘What does that look like? Who told you that? Who told you that there are rules and that you have to play by them? I don't want to be labelled because I'm trying to make my (musical) personality richer. My style is just Fox’s style’.
>
> Music Business interviewer: ‘What do you think [about] the atmosphere of the hip-hop industry in China?’
>
> Fox: ‘I've always looked at rap as a distinct minority culture, a musical expression that emphasizes inclusiveness. However, the Chinese hip-hop industry is growing so fast that some insiders want some ‘rules’ to shape this culture. In my opinion, this is baffling.’

From Fox’s statements, it is clear that, as a mature rapper he refuses to follow the typical hip-hop member norms, and even wants his fans to see him as ‘unique’. In other words, he is dismissive of subcultural rules, which he finds ‘baffling’. He does not like being labelled as the kind of hip-hop artist he is, instead he prefers to be himself and abandon any ties to norms and rules. Rappers such as Fox stand in the most dazzling position in the hip-hop community. The original motivation for Fox to join the hip-hop community shows the same characteristics as other subculture members, however, once he achieved fame within the community, he showed behaviours that seemingly contradict the subculture. This is because hardcore members do not feel under pressure to inform the group's established cultural norms and do not have to worry about being questioned about professionalism. A limited number of hardcore members have abandoned the use of objectified subcultural capital and hence have presented a variety of incongruous styles from the core of the subculture. In Fox's words, that’s ‘Fox’s style’. Hence, the behaviour and performance of hardcore members is constructed as a genuine representation of their self-identities and leads to a unique genre in the music scene free from subcultural norms to follow.

In the contemporary hip-hop market in China, hardcore members are liberating themselves from the conformity of the group to form into unorthodox styles of hip-hop. This not only applies to Fox, but to other successful Chinese hip-hop artists who are also looking to expand to a diversity of styles. A good example is *Gai*, the winner of the first season of *The Rap of China*, and one of the most prominent rappers in the contemporary music scene. Before becoming popular*, Gai* had always tried to build an image as a subcultural ‘gangsta’ rapper, a

violent youngster using a mixture of gangsta and trap style lyrics. As discussed before, gangsta and trap hip-hop styles are classic rap music styles and the rappers themselves are considered subculture followers. Comparing Gai's style in recent years to his initial phase, one can see that he is much smarter and trendier now. After becoming famous, Gai was no longer constrained by subcultural norms, according to which his hip-hop needed to focus on niche lyrics and urban violence or distinct from the 'mainstream others'. It seemed like the music style of *Gai* was updated; he began popularizing a type of nationalist Chinese rap music that has taken him to the mainstream. The 'Gai' style is still visible in contemporary rap: full of doubts about the world and angry with injustice.

The interview with Fox and the transformation of Gai's hip-hop style epitomize an entire hip-hop community's transformation. Hip-hop reality shows in China gave rise to a unique membership category of the Chinese hip-hop community: the independent rapper and songwriter, which usually refers to hip-hop celebrities and famous rappers who tend to create their own raps rather than being assigned content by music labels concerned with defined music genres. The hardcore member act as arbiters of meaning and opinion leader who is able to reshape and influence the subculture's direction. Most importantly, these hardcore members are aware of their highly esteemed positions in the hierarchy and of their ability to influence other members of the hip-hop community. As such, they feel it is their responsibility to ensure that their actions promote hip-hop values and provide softcore and insider members with hip-hop knowledge. In doing so, hardcore members reinforce the subcultural ideology in a contemporary hip-hop scene and provide members with the embodied subcultural capital necessary to safeguard the subculture's future. As an example of this awareness, the following extract is an excerpt of an interview from iQIYI with Kris Wu, judge of The Rap of China and one of the most famous hip-hop celebrities in contemporary Chinese hip-hop.

> Kris Wu: 'In the summer of 2017, I was a judge in The Rap of China, which made me realize that I'm actually seen as a representative of Hip Hop culture, especially on Auto-Tune rapping and my own fashion brand ACE. Whether I like it or not, I am playing this role, you know what I mean? So, I might as well just do it properly, because that's exactly what role I'm in.'

It therefore appears that these nationwide celebrities can be considered representative figures. These members are well respected because of their experience and have a significant impact

on the evolution of hip hop. Other examples of artists in this tier include Hot dog and Wilber Pan, because their current career aims are impact, prestige and accomplishment. They achieve these aims through participation in numerous music shows, reality shows and by establishing massive presence on social media. Sometimes, in order to achieve these three aims of maintaining impact, prestige and accomplishments, the hardcore member has to act as a representative of a hip-hop genre as a whole. As mentioned above, Kris Wu is a representative figure of Chinese hip-hop culture. His promotion of electro-rap pushed Chinese hip-hop music to the global forefront. Indeed, artists in this category of the hierarchy do not differ much from their western counterparts; for instance, many such Chinese hip-hop stars achieve national and international recognition, are signed up by international music record companies, become ambassadors of luxury brands or launch a personal streetwear brand. This is because these hardcore members have accumulated an abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital and, as such, have been able to occupy a position at the top of the status hierarchy.

As Kris Wu put it: 'I have to play the role of hip-hop leader'. This suggests that Chinese rappers at this level cement their legacy not just through their music records and live concerts but via the impact of their music ideology, their prestige as musicians and the accomplishments embodied in their careers. Therefore, instead of following subcultural norms, hardcore members lead the subculture development. This is a result of the recognized duty of hardcore members to promote hip-hop as a niche culture that is flourishing in China, and which has encouraged hip-hop's followers to keep up with the trends. As Hot Dog, another current leader of hip-hop, puts it, their aim is to 'make some sound out of the various genres'. To some extent, hardcore members even refuse homology with one single type of hip-hop music and instead promote individualism and diversified hip-hop musical styles.

7.5 Conclusion

Discussing the layering of the Chinese hip-hop community is key for this thesis as a whole because it shows how hip-hop fans and artists are active in the hip-hop music scene, what networks they establish, and how they are positioned within their communities. Wei Chen, the director of *The Rap of China* commented on the dynamics of hip-hop music scene:

> ‘The success of the The Rap of China is a landmark in the inexorable rise of Chinese rap music, but it also indicates clearly who is active in this scene and who holds the power in the nascent scene’

The director’s words deeply reflect the focus of this chapter, given the deep analysis of the tiers in the Chinese hip-hop community and how power within the scene creates hierarchies based on levels of commitment, activity and adherence to norms. In this respect, this chapter contributes to the identification of the most active categories of fans and producers within the hip-hop community and to the establishment of the main subcultural characteristics that demarcate the boundaries between different tiers of the hierarchy. Notably, the hierarchy is not rigid and is characterized by fluidity and dynamism; while tiers may be considered dichotomous, insider members of the community do share identity and values, form common bonds, and can move between different categories depending on their levels of attachment or willingness to increase their subcultural capital.

In particular, the distinction of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ is based on the level of commitment invested by members of the community. Outsiders do not show a continuous interest and commitment to hip-hop music. This category includes ‘three-minute crushes’ fans, who admit to being only temporarily interested in the culture. In contrast, insiders show a more consistent interest and their understanding of hip-hop often goes beyond commercially packaged online shows. Notably, these two tiers are often at odds regarding the preservation and perception of hip-hop culture, which creates tension. Insiders believe that newcomers are destroying the culture by blindly consuming reality music shows that only promote commercialized and shallow raps. However, at the same time, the insider/outsider boundary is not fixed: engaging in hip-hop culture over time allows fans to become members of the hip-hop community as well as to develop an awareness of the nature of the specific subculture and of collective identification itself.

Insiders are further differentiated between consumers and producers of hip-hop, which I term ‘peripherals’ and ‘centralists’, respectively. While insiders and outsiders are differentiated based on commitment and involvement, the distinction between peripherals and centralists is about the degree and scope of involvement. With both being insiders, these categories go beyond consuming hip-hop from online shows, as members of show a deeper understanding of the culture. However, peripheral members only limit themselves to consuming hip-hop and to broadly following the subculture. In contrast, centralists show an even broader level of

engagement by producing music themselves. This production may take the form of solo compositions that are uploaded online, being a member of a band, or producing beats for more famous rappers. Centralists show a stronger sense of belonging compared to peripherals as well as awareness of their higher status within the community, mainly thanks to their proficiency, knowledge and involvement with hip-hop.

Finally, the last hierarchical level is represented by the difference between 'softcore' and 'hardcore' members. For these categories, the main discriminant is the level of compliance and understanding of the subcultural norms of the hip-hop community. In particular, the concept of hardcore membership to refer to rappers who have become famous or even national celebrities. Due to their high status, hardcore members are free to choose whether to deviate from subcultural norms or to conform with them. Such individuals may have a significant impact on the evolution of hip hop as they include renowned rappers and opinion leaders. Instead, softcore members largely limit themselves to adhering to the broad norms of the subculture, which are organised around the concepts of swag, money, and brotherhood.

Ultimately, the development of hip-hop in China is inseparable from the emergence of hip-hop stratification and is instrumental to analyse the prosperity and workings of the hip-hop community. Such continuous evolution of Chinese hip-hop implies that the hierarchy and its norms are fluid and in constant transformation. Even over the duration of this research project, some aspects of the Chinese hip-hop hierarchy and memberships have been upgrading. For instance, when I first interviewed MC Zhang, he was a softcore member producing music on his own. However, by looking at his NetEase profile more recently, he has been signed by a commercial record company. Therefore, how to assess his current status in the hip-hop hierarchy need to be discussed, as Zhang has now accumulated a high degree of subcultural capital, as it emerged from the interviews, which may now be at odds with his new commercial contract. Similarly, one of the 'three-minute fans', Andy Ye, has progressively moved towards becoming an insider music fan, as revealed by her continuous posting of hip-hop content on *WeChat* and her ever-increasing niche hip-hop playlists she listens to on NetEase. At the same time, a new generation of hip-hop members are drawn to hip-hop by reality music shows and therefore may join the community as newcomers; hence how their identity will be shaped by new trends, artists and practices is certainly a topic worth discussing in future research. Fluidity, mobility between tiers and a constantly developing's music scene appears to be the key reasons why hip-hop stratification in China is worth discussing in the future studies.

8.0 Conclusion

8.1 Exploring China's hip-hop resistance, taste, and hierarchy

In 2017, a reality show, The Rap of China, took the hip-hop subculture in China from an unknown and niche underground status onto the mainstream stage. Although the driving force behind this hip-hop trend may have started out as a mere commercial operation, the popularity that Chinese hip-hop is enjoying points to the much more significant phenomenon of a rising subcultural movement in China. By delving into the Chinese hip-hop scene, this thesis provided a perspective on how Chinese rappers and fans understand and live hip-hop in such an evolving scenario, as well as how many aspects of the hip-hop culture differ from their western counterpart. As it emerged from the collected data and its analysis, this thesis suggests that resistance, taste and hierarchy are three of the key areas that help capture the complexity of the scene and the sociological significance of hip-hop in China.

The findings show that Chinese hip-hop enthusiasts subvert the traditional concept of subcultural resistance by resisting resistance and redefining it in a way that fits in the Chinese context. Secondly, although Chinese consumers may appear to be cultural omnivores when consuming hip-hop, a fine-grained analysis reveals the existence of taste distinctions, as vulgar hip-hop music is strongly rejected and considered of bad taste. Classical (经典, Jīng diǎn) hip-hop and authentic (高端, Gāoduān) hip-hop music albums released by skilled and wholesome Chinese rappers are instead considered highly. Finally, the concept of subcultural capital has been reaffirmed as the key element through which hip-hop followers establish their position, status and prestige within the community. The rest of the section will outline and discuss these three points in greater detail.

The debate about resistance suggests that the traditional concept of subcultural resistance needs to be re-examined in the context of Chinese hip-hop. This has been the central theme of Chapter 5 and led to the conclusion that Chinese hip-hop fans and artists resist resistance. Hip-hop in China does not express overt, politically active or openly subversive forms of resistance. Instead, hip-hop fans and artists find emotional resonance in the process of creating and listening to hip-hop music, often to express a variety of emotions: anger, frustration, joy, relaxation. Drawing from James Scott, this type of resistance is identified as 'everyday resistance' that takes the form of small acts of defiance, often invisible to the wider society.

Although the resisting actors do not recognise the resistant act, forms of everyday resistance were clearly identified in both interviewees' responses and rap lyrics produced by many interviewees. Statements such as: 'I am just expressing my anger', 'I rap to diss my boss', 'I rap against people around me', demonstrate a functional use of hip-hop as an emotional outlet to express daily emotions and resist everyday circumstances, rather than as a means to ignite social movements, large-scale protests or overt subversion.

Following from the discussion above, it is not hard to understand why in section 5.3 interviewees suggested that the core value of Chinese hip-hop is not resistance, but 'peace, love and respect'. This is not a just utopian notion conceived by Chinese rappers, rather it is an embracement of the mantra of the world biggest hip-hop community, the Universal Zulu Nation. This movement is indeed founded on the concepts of 'peace, love, unity, and having fun' and aims at building a wholesome, peaceful and prosperous hip-hop community. As the interviewees explained, 'peace, love and respect' can be perceived as a type of resistance in its own right. This is another possibility provided by Chinese hip-hop fans and artists, that is, to obtain positive energy through hip-hop music and make resistance a strategic and pragmatic measure to endure and survive the difficulties of the everyday.

This strategy represents a remoulding of the very concept of resistance within the boundaries imposed by the power system in China and its messages of harmony and positive energy. Through reflection on the hip-hop songs suggested by the respondents and their attitudes toward the music, it appears that, even when the lyrics express depression, pessimism and despair, they hide energetic feelings that encourage and keep positive thoughts. In addition to the above, the idea of 'keep it real' as important as 'peace, love and respect' when finding ways to resist. To 'keep it real' means to stay true to oneself, to ignore people's judgment, and, in turn, to be authentic about one's feelings and emotions. By keeping it real, hip-hop artists aim to resist the superficiality of society and the fake side of intrapersonal relations. To sum up, chapter five proved that the power of Chinese hip-hop music is manifested as everyday resistance, whereby self-help solutions such as listening to rap to get positive energy and keeping real to oneself, are the resistance paths for Chinese hip-hop followers. Or in other words, fans internalise the resistant power of hip-hop music, rather than directly venting out dissatisfaction or taking their anger to the streets.

Secondly, the taste of Chinese hip-hop followers shows an open attitude towards many styles of raps, which supports the thesis of the 'cultural omnivore' by Peterson (1996). Despite this

perceived openness, in reality fans create subtle yet powerful distinctions in taste between vulgar (低端 dī duān), authentic and inspiring (高端 gāo duān) and classic (经典 jīng diǎn) hip-hop. Thus, deep distinctions in taste exist, as manifested by the firm rejection of vulgar hip-hop containing violent and misogynistic messaged and featuring scandalous rappers, who are perceived as polluting the integrity of the entire culture. The category of bad taste also includes commercial and mass-produced raps that are only aimed at achieving fame but have no substance and musical quality. Furthermore, interviewees suggested that hip-hop taste in China is not only about musical performance but is also inextricably linked to fashion and to looking cool. Being cool means to behave calmly and emanating an area of superiority, disinterest and uniqueness. However, at the same time, the concept of cool is being commodified and shaped by market forces, media companies and key opinion leaders, who act as the contemporary equivalents of Bourdieu's cultural intermediaries by injecting evolving instances of cool in music shows and the market, hence shaping the taste of the masses.

Finally, chapter seven illustrated how members of the Chinese hip-hop community are organised in a hierarchy and are differentiated based on the level of subcultural capital they own or develop within the scene. In this respect, Chinese hip-hop followers can be stratified in pairs of categories: 'insiders and outsiders', 'peripherals and centralists' and 'hardcore and softcore'. Each tier is defined by a different level of embodied subcultural capital that takes the form of commitment, engagement, activity and adherence to subcultural norms. These characteristics directly determine the status, reputation and perception of members within the hierarchy.

In particular, the distinction between outsiders and insiders is based on their level of commitment to hip-hop. The outsiders are often described as *san fenzhong fens*i (三分钟粉丝), or three-minute fans, who are simply attracted by commercial reality shows and do not show any sense of organic belonging, or willingness to belong, to the hip-hop community. Instead, insiders are fans who are constantly involved in the hip-hop culture, beyond commercialised shows. Insiders feel part of the hip-hop community as manifested by their continuous participation in local events and high level of engagement in online activities in fans groups. Peripherals and centralists are both insiders. While peripherals are loyal fans, they are not involved in music production. Instead, centralists are engaged in a deeper way, as they are producers of hip-hop music such as DJs, band members or independent freelance rappers. In this case, centralist actively attempt at converting their embodied subcultural capital into

economic capital, as they often try to make a living out of their musical production by uploading songs online or taking part in live performances and competitions. Hardcore and softcore members are both rappers and producers who are in the centre of the community. The key difference is that softcore members follow subcultural norms and often only operate in the underground scene. In contrast, hardcore members are nationwide celebrities who do not have special norms to follow, as they are hip-hop genre leaders and opinion shapers. Their status in the community is so high because they have amassed sufficient subcultural capital to be free to deviate from the norms and follow their own style.

8.2 Theoretical contributions of this research

Based on the empirical results of each chapter, this thesis outlined a theoretical framework to illustrate how the concepts of resistance, taste and hierarchy should be reinterpreted in the Chinese context and provide different perspectives and possibilities for these sociological terms. Although there exists systematic studies of hip-hop subcultures and music around the concepts of resistance, taste and hierarchy in America and Europe, the empirical research in this thesis demonstrated that these concepts promise potential for further exploration in different cultural contexts.

The discussion about resistance in Chinese hip-hop offers an opportunity for reflection on the debate about power and resistance between Foucault's disciplinary power and De Certeau's creative resistance. In fact, the adoption of the ‘peace, love and respect’ mantra represents a prime example of Foucault’s theory of power in action, which maintains that the more effective forms of power are not centralised but dispersive and systemic (Foucault, 1995). The positivity message in contemporary hip-hop can be considered a tangible manifestation of the broader discourse on positive energy (Chen, 2020) in action, as dispersedly ad pervasively adopted by the government propaganda outlets. This messaging provides effective means for positive emotions to be conveyed and internalised by rappers in their performance and hip-hop fans in their listening practice. However, this mechanism suggests that the ‘peace, love and respect’ message is not based on a mere ideological discourse, since ideology may be typically understood as a top-down method to forcefully instil ideas. Instead, the positivity-imbued hip-hop in contemporary China is clearly not concerned only with persuasion imposed from above, or by the broader society, but it is also configured as a systematic demonstration of discipline focusing on and using speech and actions, namely lyrics and performance. However, Foucault also concedes that ‘where there is power, there is resistance’, implying that power, be it

institutional or arising from societal norms, cannot exist independently from resistance. Due to the dispersive and immersive nature of power, acts of resistance can only exist within it, potentially supporting the very mechanism it set out to oppose.

This tension and contradiction are resolved under De Certeau's perspective. In fact, De Certeau's theory provides method to analyse the relationship between power and resistance alternative to Foucault's. According to De Certeau (1984), people resist creatively when mainstream norms do not work for them, and their desires drive them to creatively adapt their own forms of resistance. This is how Chinese hip-hop deals with power and the ideological messaging of positive energy. The messaging is internalised but then used to one's own advantage rather than to serve the power. It could be that Chinese rappers are creatively taking up work time to write raps as a way of resisting their superiors, expressing anger in response to life events or creatively venting out dissatisfaction about a personal injustice. These acts of resistance through a cultural and musical practice are small and mundane, sometimes creative and subtle, but powerful and effective. If this type of resistance acts persists over a long period of time, it may achieve the same effect as overt, large-scale social changes. Thus, the subcultural practices by Chinese hip-hop fans and artists is configured as a survival strategy for resisters who do not seek 'legal recognition', but 'tacit, de facto interests' (Scott 1989:34). This represents a key contribution of this research: Chinese hip-hop subverts the traditional conceptualisation of resistance associated with hip-hop and offers an example of a (sub)culture that doesn't confront power head-on, but by using resistance in creative, pragmatic and unexpected ways, apparently serving the power, but also aligning with the resisters' interests and desires.

Secondly, the taste of hip-hop fans in China can be understood through the idea of openness to diversity (Ollivier, 2008) and the definition of 'cool' in subcultural scenes. Chinese hip-hop consumers claim to consume all styles of raps and consume whatever meets their needs, without any rigid taste rules. In using music for their needs and personal circumstances, music consumption also reflect DeNora's (2000) conceptualisation of music as a technology of the self. According to Ollivier (2008), cultural openness entails attributes of openness, flexibility and eclecticism. However, although such definitions describe well the attitudes of interviewees, it actually covers up deeper and subtler distinctions. That is, there exists a 'moral' bottom line that leads Chinese hip-hop consumers to strongly reject scandalous rappers and vulgar distasteful products. This rejection points to the the existence of taste distinctions broadly advocated by the traditional Bourdieu school. However, the taste distinction of Chinese hip-

hop consumers unveiled in this research, show more similarities to the characteristics of eclecticism with a moral bottom line, rather than having to do with social class and upbringing. This is not to say that these distinctions are not linked to social status; however, this question is beyond the scope of this work. Here, I summarise the taste of Chinese hip-hop consumers as 'openness to the diversity' and conducive to the 'the perception and shaping of the self', yet characterised by subtle distinctions of taste. These distinctions are dictated by a set of aesthetic standards. In particular, one might evaluate music by emphasising functionality, emotion and experience (Bielby and Bielby, 2004), which includes 高端嘻哈 (Gāoduān xīhā), namely classical ad serious productions. Vulgar hip-hop (低端嘻哈 Dī duān xīhā) is instead below moral acceptance. Here lies another key contribution of this thesis. When discussing hip-hop subculture as a western imported concept, one should not assume that all cultural characteristics are passively accepted and embedded in the new social fabric. Instead, one should also consider the complex legitimate music forms in Chinese history as also inextricably linked with the different cultural context and appreciation standards.

In addition to expressing choices many respondents pointed out that another 'buzzword' of Chinese hip-hop is 'cool'. 'cool' is an attitude, a way of life, and even penetrates choices of clothing and fashion. Hence, the second part of chapter six, explained how hip-hop enthusiasts understand the concept of 'cool'. On the one hand, cool refers to dress novel and fashionable and is a means to distinguish from the masses. On the other hand, cool is a way of calmly controlling emotions and appearing dispassionate on stage for Chinese rappers. Although the subcultural in essence, the modern concept of 'cool' must face consumerism. This is not dissimilar to Sarah Thornton's (1996) research on the fashion of young men and women from working-class backgrounds in England. This youth's fashion choices have gradually evolved into fashion trends in the mainstream society, which even led to media exclaim: 'where have all the cool people gone?' Indeed, the last part of chapter six has identified Chinese key opinion leader as the successors of Bourdieu's cultural intermediaries, who continually present the masses with the latest instances of cool as determined by market demands and needs.

Finally, the Chinese hip-hop community is stratified based on the concept of subculture capital. According to chapter 7's analysis, Chinese hip hop fans and artists are categorised into three categories: 'insiders and outsiders', 'outsiders and centralists' and 'softcore and hardcore' members. Generally speaking, the higher the status of members, the more subcultural capital they have. Moreover, the more labor, time and learning hip-hop followers invest in hip-hop,

their position can be promoted by that. More importantly, Chinese hip-hop members use their subculture capital to maintain and utilise their status, labor, time invested, connections with the hip-hop community and convert them into recognition, status, and prestige. These factors also help to establish a person's position in the subculture and their views on other members. Therefore, the Chinese hip-hop community reaffirms the power of the concept of subcultural capital to explain the existence of hierarchical forms of differentiation and intersection between different subcultural structural variables.

Overall, the argument offered here is that the hip-hop music and culture is malleable in the Chinese cultural context. Chinese hip-hop re-negotiates the concepts of resistance, taste and belonging to the community in order for all these characteristics to fit within the broader mainstream cultural system. The ideas and representations of hip-hop in China can morph into a hierarchical system of inclusion and exclusion to the community, while also allowing hip-hoppers to convey resistance in subtle and quiet ways that allow the existence of a flourishing hip-hop culture within the mainstream setting. In fact, hip-hop does coexists within the larger harmonious societal value system while expressing its own cultural preferences, fashion choices and internal stratification system. This thesis also argues for the extensibility of some traditional cultural concepts. Traditionally, scholars like Foucault, Bourdieu and Thornton studied culture and society on the basis of relative inequality and class structure. Today, however, as Scott and De Certeau jointly express, some small acts, fragments of emotions and normalisation of lifestyle are sometimes creative and subtle, but powerful and effective. These observations advocate for sociologists to explore cultural phenomena in society with particular attention to their close links with everyday life.

8.3 The significance of this research

8.3.1 Rethinking the concept of resistance in hip-hop subcultures

Hollander and Einwohner (2004) reviewed numerous articles about cultural resistance and, given the multitude of ways in which scholars define resistance, two basic, essential elements that define resistance were proposed: recognition and intent. In the traditional definition of resistance, resistance always involves some active behaviour, be it verbal, cognitive, or physical, with the aim of expressing a sense of opposition. However, many scholars have argued over the idea of intent, in some cases, to the extent that resistant individuals do not need to see themselves as resisting (Hollander and Einwohner 2004), for their actions to qualify as

resistance. In other words, whether or not resistant acts go unnoticed, and whether or not there is intent, certain acts count as resistance.

Chinese hip-hop provides an alternative perspective to examine the concept of resistance. The way in which Chinese hip-hop artists resist the traditional concept of resistance is related to a dual characteristic of resistance. On the one hand, while resisting power, individuals or groups may simultaneously support the structures of domination that necessitate resistance in the first place. On the other hand, sharing the roots with the dominant culture may render individuals not fully aware of their resistance. In such cases, drawing from Hollander and Einwohner (2004), resistance can be externally defined as everyday resistance. In this thesis, I do not merely explain how hip-hop resistance in China can be to be externally defined, I also demonstrate how Chinese hip-hop enthusiasts deem resistance in the lyrics as everyday resistance. Most importantly, this externally defined everyday resistance is strongly influenced by the mechanisms of the harmonious social view and then internalised as a more harmonised hip-hop ideal to maintain a broad 'peace, love and respect' societal order.

8.3.2 Researching subcultural taste in China from an insider subcultural group

Discussion of hip-hop tastes and tastes preferences of subcultural groups in China has always presented a gap in the existing literature (Wu, 2019). The literature on hip-hop music and subcultural taste in China currently focuses on the following three angles. The first perspective is represented by the researchers such as Zou (2019) who examined how censorship as a dominant power shapes the taste of the subculture taste of Chinese audience. Zou (2019) unravels the coalescence between bottom-up youth culture and state-led ideological work in China by examining the patriotic hip-hop music videos of Chinese youth bands. The second angle is based on subcultural taste in China being able to negotiate with the dominant culture so that subcultures in China have the freedom to develop freely. Regarding this point, Luo & Ming (2020) consider hip-hop reality shows as the best example for exploring more possibilities of alternative cultural policy from the government side with the aim of increasing pervasiveness. Thirdly, Chinese subcultural producers actively embrace the masses and adapt to their tastes. By examining hip-hop authenticity in the Chinese music scene, Cheuk (2021) argues that in the post-2017 era of Chinese hip-hop, Chinese rappers continuously adapts their creations to meet the masses hip-hop taste, even though they still strive to 'keep it real' and maintain authenticity.

However, none of the key contributions above have explored the broader audience's point of view about current taste trend and preferences. Noticing this research gap, this thesis investigates the current hip-hop taste in China and contributes to the debate on taste by identifying a 'superficial' omnivore trend, while also describing distinctions between classical and vulgar hip-hop. While the former is perceived as sacred, the latter is firmly rejected by listeners and artists. This thesis also demonstrates the significance of cool taste. Based on the studies of the concept of cool in Western contexts, a cool image is often associated with being aloof, upper-class, hiding emotions, possessing talent and knowledge as ways to look unique and different from others. Hence, the study of taste is concerned with inclusion and exclusion, in that Chinese subculturalists prefer an authentic and cool taste in terms of hip-hop music and fashion consumption, while they are firmly against vulgar and over commercialised products. In other words, studying taste in Chinese hip-hop is synonymous with how artists and fans show their differences and uniqueness.

8.3.4 Re-layering the hierarchy of Chinese music subcultures

Much of the sociological literature on music subcultures published in the UK and the US tends to focus on grime music, hip-hop, rock and metal music as forms of socially stratified subcultures as well as alternative spaces for marginalised classes of people to interact, form common ties and identities, and celebrate their differences. However, due to the different influential factors, such as censorship and the rapid commercialisation, the research on hierarchies in the hip-hop community in China cannot be simply based on identity differences. In fact, this study of the Chinese hip-hop hierarchy shows that the layering of Chinese hip-hop hierarchy is based on the degree of subcultural capital possessed by fans and rappers, rather than the existence of a strongly shared identity. The thesis provides a detailed account of how the hip-hop followers' actively cultivated and maintained their status by their possession of subcultural capital. Hip-hop followers in China were initially a small group of subculturalists who wanted to express their unique identity around the 2000s. However, for the most part, hip-hop culture has become a highly commercialised and developed form of popularised music genre that includes different levels of outsiders, insiders, peripherals, centralists, softcore members and hardcore members. In this process, the division of the hip-hop hierarchy in China has not been strongly based on identity, but on the possession of subcultural capital. In Western hip-hop research, members at the top of the hierarchy, hardcore members, are usually underground rappers who are considered closer to the subculture. However, in the Chinese hip-hop scene, some hip-hop celebrities are considered to have amassed significant subcultural

capital and accumulated fame and knowledge of hip-hop music genres in their entirety. Hence, hip-hop celebrities are considered hardcore members instead of underground rappers with less visibility and genre knowledge. In the same way, when Todd Dedman (2011) analyses the hierarchy of British grime music followers, he divides them into purists and peripherals based on autonomy and sense of belonging; in contrast, the demarcation of Chinese hip-hop centralists and peripherals are based on the scope of participation in hip-hop music divided as producers and consumers.

Overall, this research reveals that as hip-hop become popular in Eastern countries, including China, some of the traditional concepts of subculture are calling for renewal. Originally, rap in the United States and Europe was a value carrier for symbolic resistance to racial inequality and injustice, and a source of misogyny, rampant materialism, and violent criminality (Keyes 2002; Quinn, 2005). In contrast, these themes are firmly rejected by Chinese hip-hop. Although this research does not deny that rap has a growing influence among Chinese youth, it argues that rap music doesn't necessarily have universal significance for all who listen to it. While some fans in China may listen or produce to raps as protest music, others may come across the genre and listen to raps with open attitudes and willingness to appreciate the culture as a whole. Therefore, research on hip-hop's musical taste and subculture become more eclectic and individualised, and hip-hop followers may no longer be symbols of collective identity, so that the traditional theory of traditional subcultural resistance (Bennett 2000; Muggleton, 2000) are challenging to apply.

8.3.5 The localisation of Chinese hip-hop

Debates about the universal applicability of archetypical ideas associated with hip-hop are central themes in the discourse about the globalisation of hip-hop and its adoption in many nations around the world. When hip-hop has filtered into diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, many examples in the literature show how hip-hop has been 'adapted' and not simply 'adopted' (Kruse, 2018:155). In this respect, this thesis contributes to the debate around globalisation and hybridisation by showing that hip-hop in China has also been shaped by locality and Chinese traditions and values, following similar trajectories to those outlined in other studies in the area (Mitchell, 2001; Condry 2006; Charry, 2012). This thesis shows that some of the archetypical hip-hop attributes, such as overt resistance, violence and racial authenticity, are ostensibly absent, or strongly de-emphasised, in Chinese hip-hop and are substituted by the notions of

resisting resistance, 'peace, love and respect' and ideas of authenticity drawn from daily struggles and difficulties.

Many forms of indigenisation were discussed throughout the thesis, especially in section 1.2 and chapters two, five and six. Examples of these strategies include the use of Chinese local dialects or *Jianghu* flow to confer authenticity, the battles between local labels, the nationalistic discourses adopted by mainstream artists in online music shows, the shaping of rap themes and lyrics to conform to government propaganda, the use of Chinese traditional musical instruments, the use of rap to convey anger about daily frustration and the open rejection of vulgar, violent and misogynistic content. Based on these peculiar characteristics, it is this thesis' argument that hip-hop in China has been, and continues to be, shaped by economic, cultural and political factors that are specific to China and its historical cultural traditions and development. Influenced by these factors, Chinese hip-hop has mirrored processes of cultural hybridisation and localisation observed elsewhere around the world (Condry 2006; Mitchell 2011; Pritchard 2016) and supports the validity of theories of globalisation as hybridisation (Pieterse, 1995; 1996) as opposed to theses of Americanisation/McDonaldisation or cultural homogenisation (Ritzer, 1993), or the cultural clash of civilisations envisaged by Huntington (1996).

Despite the scepticism voiced by preeminent figures in the study of Chinese hip-hop and music (such as De Kloet, 2010), this thesis sides with another important body of studies on global hip-hop (Mitchell, 2001; Condry 2006; Solomon 2006; Charry 2012) and more recent works on Chinese hip-hop (Zhang, 2019; Zou 2019; Zhao & Lin, 2020; Chen, Tong, & Zhang, 2021) that support the existence of processes of localisation, or Sinification, of Chinese hip-hop, through some of the practices listed above and throughout this thesis. Indeed, a key contribution here is to add to the existing literature on global culture by showing the potential of hip-hop to travel around the world and to be re-territorialised even in the Chinese context. In this respect, this research supports Lipsitz's idea that the nature of hip-hop comes "less from its origin than from its uses" (Lipsitz, 1994:34), so that hip-hop can, and does, find its way in disparate socio-cultural contexts and circumstances well beyond the New York ghettos of the 70s.

8.4 Research limitations and future research opportunities

8.4.1 Participant observation

When I interviewed hip-hop enthusiasts, I felt that I had an outsider role rather than an insider. This is partly due to the professionalism of the hip-hop producers and consumers that I interviewed. Most importantly, during the interview, as a researcher, I suppressed my own opinions not to influence respondents, hence letting the informants express their views. However, this reticence may have also restricted me from exploring further potential topics or details. This is because many of the interviewees may view researchers as outsiders who do not belong to their group so that when they give their opinions, they deviate from the subject. This was at times a difficult task.

Noticing the limitations of this research, I would recommend future researchers to conduct participant observation in an attempt to grow closer to the community under study. As Kawulich (2005) explains, participant observation brings rich and detailed descriptions as it allows becoming a member of a subculture, hence entering the hierarchy and initiating processes of socialisation with members of the community. This process would allow the researcher to experience and interact with different elements of the hip-hop culture as an insider. As experienced by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) and Belk and Costa (1998), this socialisation process brought about a transformation in the researcher, from an outsider to the group to an accepted member, which entailed a deepening commitment to the values and attitudes of the culture, including adopting cultural jargon, rituals and styles. This strategy should provide researchers with the ability to gather richer data and conduct a deeper analysis when examining the data.

8.4.2 Opportunities in studying DJing, breakdancing and graffiti drawing

According of my interviewees' responses, this research focus has been on hip-hop music and, in part, fashion. However, these are only some of the aspects of hip-hop. As some interviewees briefly hinted at, other practises of hip-hop have also thrived and gradually gained importance in the hip-hop industry in China. These include the practices of rapping, DJing, breakdancing and graffiti writing, which become integral parts of the hip-hop culture. Although people I have interviewed participate in hip-hop in a variety of ways, such as listening to hip-hop, producing raps, participating in rapping battle competitions, or wearing streetwear, members of the community in different areas may have more knowledge about each field and provide further interesting perspectives. Resistance, taste and hierarchy are important aspects of the study of culture. In particular, as noted in Chapter five and literature review, resistant actions and intentions can be of very different nature (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004). However, the

expression of resistance in daily life in different cultural contexts may be subtler and take unexpected forms. It may be worth arguing that extending the notion of resistance provides different perspectives and opportunities for resisters to make their voices heard through a series of cultural activities and safeguard their legitimate rights under different social backgrounds. Similarly, taste and hierarchy show different trends in different contexts. Thus, when future researchers plan to examine Chinese hip-hop, the practices of breakdancing and graffiti writing would be interesting research targets to explore to fill the gaps in current research around the conceptualisation of resistance, taste and hierarchy in those contexts.

In addition, more detailed quantitative studies design may increase the significance of the findings of this thesis. In fact, recent research on young people, music, and youth cultures using qualitative methods tends to focus on self-identified fans of a particular music style, who may not be representative of all young listeners. Small data samples size may prevent answering broader questions about the evolving nature of resistance, taste and hierarchy as well as their significance over a larger pool of participants. Thus, it is suggested for future studies to use large number of statistical surveys, providing insight into the development of hip-hop youth culture in China while also potentially unveiling new patterns of interest.

Reference list

Adams, W. C. (2015). Conducting semi-structured interviews. *Handbook of practical program evaluation*, 4, 492-505.

Adan, K. (2019). *Video Streaming Platforms and Reality Shows are Rapidly Changing China's Music Industry.* [Online], ORADII, US Last updated: 13 August 2019. Available at: https://radiichina.com/video-streaming-chinas-music-industry/ [Accessed 23 September 2019].

Agar, M. (1996). *The Professional Stranger. (2nd edition).* United States: Academic Press.

Alim, H. S. (2009). Translocal style communities: Hip hop youth as cultural theorists of style, language, and globalization. *Pragmatics*, *19*(1), 103-127.

Allen, T. N., & Randolph, A. (2020). Listening for the Interior in Hip-hop and R&B Music. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, *6*(1), 46-60.

Allinson, E. (1994). It's a black thing: Hearing how whites can't. Cultural Studies, 8(3), pp.438-456.

Althusser, L. (2006). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (notes towards an investigation). In Sharma, A., Gupta, A. *The Anthropology of the state: A Reader*, 9(1), 86-98.

Amar, N. (2018). "Do you Freestyle?". The Roots of Censorship in Chinese Hip-hop. *China Perspectives*, 1-2, 107-113.

Andes, L. (1998). Growing up punk: Meaning and commitment careers in a contemporary youth subculture. In Epstein, J., *Youth culture: Identity in a postmodern world*. United States: Wiley, pp. 212-231.

Anonymous. (2010). *The Introduction of Shulaibao.* [Online]. Made in China, China. Last updated: 14 December 2012. Available at: https://resources.made-in-china.com/article/culture-life/yxQmjtUcuJHW/Shulaibao/ [Accessed 23 May 2020].

Anonymous. (2018). Criticism towards PG One. [Online]. Sohu, China. Last updated: 08 January 2018. Available at: https://www.sohu.com/a/215351197_793254 [Accessed 08 January 2018].

Antunes, A.C. (2021). Youth Resisting the Popular Curriculum of Gender and Sexuality. In Mayo, C. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality in Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Appert, C. M. (2012) *Modernity, Remixed: Music as Memory in Rap Galsen*. Unpublished University of California, Los Angeles. PhD.

Ap. T (2014). *China's online ban against 'Fart' and 119 other 'immoral' songs*. [Online]. CNN, US. Last updated: 12 August 2015. Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/12/asia/china-song-ban/index.html [Accessed 12 August 2020].

Archer, L., Hollingworth, S., & Halsall, A. (2007). University's not for Me—I'm a Nike Person': Urban, Working-Class Young People's Negotiations of Style', Identity and Educational Engagement. *Sociology*, 41(2), 219-237.

Armstrong, E. G. (2004). Eminem's construction of authenticity. *Popular Music and Society*, 27(3), 335-355.

Armstrong, G. (1993). 'Like that Desmond Morris'. In D. Hobbs & T. May (Eds) The Field: Accounts of Ethnography. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Arthur, D. (2006). Authenticity and consumption in the Australian Hip Hop culture. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 9(2), 140-156.

Asante Jr, M. K. (2008). *It's bigger than hip hop: The rise of the post-hip-hop generation*. London: Macmillan.

Atwal, G. (2022). 'Is Hip-Hop the New K-Pop for Luxury Brands in China?'[Online]. Last updated: 24 March 2022. Available at: https://jingdaily.com/k-pop-new-hip-hop-luxury-china/ [Accessed 17 April 2022].

Alexander, J. C.,& Smith, P. (1993). The discourse of American civil society: A new proposal for cultural studies. *Theory and society*, 151-207.

Bauman, Z. (1998). On glocalization: Or globalization for some, localization for some others. *Thesis Eleven*, 54(1), 37-49.

Beck, U. (1992). From industrial society to the risk society: Questions of survival, social structure and ecological enlightenment. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 9(1), 97-123.

Beer, D. (2009). Can you dig it? Some reflections on the sociological problems associated with being uncool. *Sociology*, 43(6), 1151-1162.

Belk, R. W., & Costa, J. A. (1998). The mountain man myth: A contemporary consuming fantasy. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 25(3), 218-240.

Belk, R. W., Tian, K., & Paavola, H. (2010). Consuming cool: Behind the unemotional mask. In *Research in consumer behavior*. volume 12. 183-208.

Bennett, A. (1999). Hip-hop am main: the localization of rap music and hip-hop culture. *Media, Culture and Society*, (41) 21, 77–91.

Bennett, A. (2004). Consolidating the music scenes perspective. *Poetics*, *32*(3-4), 223-234.

Bennett, A., & Peterson, R. A. (Eds.). (2004). *Music scenes: local, translocal and virtual*. Vanderbilt University Press.

Berger, B. M. (1995). *An essay on culture: Symbolic structure and social structure*. California: University of California Press.

Bhabha, H. K. (1985). Signs taken for wonders: Questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817. *Critical inquiry*, 12(1), 144-165.

Bielby, D.D., & Bielby, W.T. (2004) 'Audience Aesthetics and Popular Culture', In R. Friedland R. and J. Mohr (eds) *Matters of Culture: Cultural Sociology in Practice,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Pp. 295-317.

Bjurström, E. (1997). The struggle for ethnicity-Swedish youth styles and the construction of ethnic identities. *Young*, 5(3), 44-58.

Bleiker, R. (2000). *Popular dissent, human agency and global politics (Vol. 70).* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boli, J., & Lechner, F. (2005), *World Culture: Origins and Consequences.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). A social critique of the judgement of taste. ('*Traducido del francés por R. Nice').* London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1987). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1992). *Réponses* (Vol. 4). Paris: Seuil.

Bozza, A. (2003), *Whatever You Say I Am. The Life and Times of Eminem*. London: Bantam.

Bremmer, I. (2008). The return of state capitalism. *Survival*, *50*(3), 55-64.

Brinkmann, S. & Kvale, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. New York: sage.

Broeck, J. V. D., Sandøy, I. F., & Brestoff, J. R. (2013). The recruitment, sampling, and enrollment plan. In Van den Broeck, J., Brestoff, J. R. *Epidemiology: principles and practical guidelines*, New York: Springer, pp. 171-196.

Brisson, R. (2019). Back to the original omnivore: On the artefactual nature of Peterson's thesis of omnivorousness. *Poetics*, (11)*76*, pp101-124.

Bryman, A. (2004). Qualitative research on leadership: A critical but appreciative review. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15(6), 729-769.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bryson, B. (1996). "Anything but heavy metal": Symbolic exclusion and musical dislikes. *American sociological review*, 884-899.

Bureau. (2018). *China's fledgling hip-hop culture faces official crackdown*. [Online]. *BBC News Chinese Website*, China. Last updated:24 January 2018. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-china-blog-42800032 [Accessed 27 January 2019].

Carter-Morley, J. (2003). *Where have all the cool people gone?* [Online]. The Guardian, G2. Last updated: 21 November 2003. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2003/nov/21/fashion1 [Accessed 21 November 2020].

CCP Central Committee, (2006). *中共中央关于构建社会主义和谐社会若干重大问题的决定* .[CCP Central Committee's decisions on several important questions concerning constructing a socialist harmonious society. The state council of the people's republic of China, approved on 11 October. [Online]. Last updated: 2006 Available at: http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2006/content_453176.htm [Accessed 2 May 2019].

Chandler, J. (1990) 'Researching and the relevance of gender', in R.G. Burgess (ed.) *Studies in Qualitative Methodology,2(11), Reflections on Field Experience*, Greenwich: JAI Press.

Chang, J., & Watkins, S. C. (2007). It's a hip-hop world. *Foreign Policy*, (163) 127, pp.58-78.

Charry, E. (Ed.) (2012). *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World*. Indiana University Press.

Chen, X., Tong, Y., & Zhang, J. (2021). Brotherhood and Hip-Hop: The Case of Chinese Hip-Hop Club Triple H. *SAGE Open*, 11(4).

Chen, Z., & Wang, C. Y. (2019). The discipline of happiness: The Foucauldian use of the "positive energy" discourse in China's ideological works. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 48(2), 201-225.

Cheuk, M.K.C. (2018). The Lazy Element: LMF and the Localisation of Hip Hop Authenticity. In Polley, Poon & Wee. *Cultural Conflict in Hong Kong* (pp. 149-166). Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chew, M.M.T. & Mo, S.P.S. (2019). Towards a Chinese Hip-hop feminism and a feminist reassessment of Hip-hop with breakdance: B-girling in Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. *Asian Studies Review*, 43(3), pp.455-474.

Cheyne, A., & Binder, A. (2010). Cosmopolitan preferences: The constitutive role of place in American elite taste for hip-hop music 1991–2005. *Poetics*, 38(3), 336-364.

China Daily. (2005). *China's rock father Cui Jian tunes colour music*. [Online] China Daily, China. Last updated: 06 April 2005. Available at: https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-04/06/content_431816.htm [Accessed 5 May 2020].

Clarke, E., Dibben, N., & Pitts, S. (2010). *Music and mind in everyday life*. Oxford University Press.

Cohen, S. (1993). Ethnography and popular music studies. *Popular music*, 12(2), 123-138.

Collins, M. (2014). *The likes of us: A biography of the white working class*. London: Granta Books

Cohen, S. (1993). Ethnography and popular music studies. *Popular music*, 12(2), 123-138.

Condry, I. (2006). *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization*, New York: Duke University Press.

Coser, Louis, ed.1978. Special issue on the production of culture. *Social Research*, (45) 2. pp.178-212.

Coulangeon, P., & Lemel, Y. (2007). Is 'distinction' really outdated? Questioning the meaning of the omnivorization of musical taste in contemporary France. *Poetics*, 35(2-3), 93-111.

Coulangeon, P., & Roharik, I. (2005). Testing the 'Omnivore/Univore'hypothesis in a cross-national perspective. On the social meaning of eclecticism in musical tastes in eight European countries. In *summer meeting of the ISA RC28, UCLA,* 11(19).pp.1-27.

Crang, M., & Cook, I. (2007). *Doing ethnographies*. London: Sage.

Creasap, K. (2012). Social movement scenes: Place-based politics and everyday resistance. *Sociology Compass*, 6(2), 182-191.

Crossley, N. (2009). The man whose web expanded: Network dynamics in Manchester's post/punk music scene 1976–1980. *Poetics*, *37*(1), 24-49.

Dar-Nimrod, I., Hansen, I. G., Proulx, T., Lehman, D. R., Chapman, B. P., & Duberstein, P. R. (2012). Coolness: An empirical investigation. *Journal of Individual Differences*. 33(3), 175–185.

Deakin, H., & Wakefield, K. (2014) "Skype interviewing: Reflections of two PhD researchers." *Qualitative research* (14)5. 603-616.

De Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life* (S. F. Rendall, Trans.; 3rd ed.). University of California Press: Berkeley.

De Kloet, J. (2005). Cultural synchronization: hip hop with Chinese characteristics? *International Association for the Study of Popular Music*, 8(3), 36-40.

De Kloet, J. (2005). Popular music and youth in urban China: The dakou generation. *The China Quarterly*, (183), 609.

De Kloet, J. (2010). *China with a cut: Globalisation, urban youth and popular* music (Vol. 3). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Dedman, T. (2011). Agency in UK hip-hop and grime youth subcultures–peripherals and purists. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 14(5), 507-522.

Deloria, V. (2007). *We talk, you listen: New tribes, new turf.* Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press

DeNora, T. (1999). Music as a technology of the self. *Poetics*, *27*(1), 31-56.

DeNora, T. (2000). *Music in everyday life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

DiMaggio, P. (1987). Classification in art. *American sociological review*, (52) 4, 440-455.

DiMaggio, P., & Mukhtar, T. (2004). Arts participation as cultural capital in the United States, 1982–2002: Signs of decline? *Poetics*, 32(2), 169-194.

Dixon, T. (2016). *Foreignority: Japanese female agency through engagement with hip-hop*. Unpublished: Indiana University. MA thesis.

Domer, B. N. (2013). *798: Protest Subculture and Creative Industry*. Unpublished: Texas State University-San Marcos. BA Honors thesis.

Driver, C., & Bennett, A. (2015). Music scenes, space and the body. *Cultural Sociology*, *9*(1), pp.99-115.

Duara, P. (1991). *Culture, power, and the state: rural North China, 1900-1942*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Dupont, T. (2014). From core to consumer: The informal hierarchy of the skateboard scene. *Journal of contemporary ethnography*, 43(5), 556-581.

Dyson, M. E. (2007). *Know what I mean?: Reflections on hip-hop*. London: Civitas Books.

Earl, J., Maher, T. V., & Elliott, T. (2017). Youth, activism, and social movements. *Sociology Compass*, 11(4), pp125-178.

Eduardo, B. (2018). *Fangyan Friday #3: The Rap of Sichuanese.* [Online]. The world of China, China. Last updated: 2 November 2018. Available at: https://www.theworldofchinese.com/2018/11/fangyan-friday-3-the-rap-of-sichuanese/ [Accessed 25 May 2020].

Erickson, B. H. (1996). Culture, class, and connections. *American Journal of Sociology*, 102(1), 217-251.

Faith, K. (1994). Resistance: Lessons from Foucault and feminism. *Power/gender: Social relations in theory and practice*, 11 (4), pp 36-66.

Fan, S. (2019). *"Rap of China" Gears Up for Season 3 Despite Waning Interest.* ORADII. [Online] Last updated: 27 March 2019. Available at: https://radiichina.com/rap-of-china-season-3 [Accessed 3 October 2019].

Fan, S. (2019). *Idol Hands: How China's Super Fan Groups Make and Break Stars Via the Multi-Million Dollar "Fan Economy".* [Online]. ORADII, US. Last updated: 7 January 2019. Available at: https://radiichina.com/idol-hands-how-chinas-super-fan-groups-make-and-break-stars-in-the-multi-million-dollar-fan-economy/ [Accessed 9 October 2019].

Fan, S. (2019). *The History of Rap in China, Part 1: Early Roots and Iron Mics (1993-2009)*. [Online]. ORADII, US. Last updated: 14 February 2019. Available at: https://radiichina.com/the-history-of-rap-in-china-part-1-early-roots-and-iron-mics-1993-2009/ [Accessed 9 October 2019].

Fan, S. (2019). *The History of Rap in China, Part 2: Hip Hop Goes Mainstream (2010-2019).* [Online], ORADII, US. Last updated: 14 February 2019. Available at: https://radiichina.com/the-history-of-rap-in-china-part-1-early-roots-and-iron-mics-1993-2009/ [Accessed 9 October 2019].

Fan, S. (2020). *Dongbei rapper GEM makes history at the CCTV Spring Festival Gala, but did he steal the "Ye Lang Disco" beat?* [Online]. ORADII, US. Last updated: 04 February 2020.

Available at: https://radiichina.com/chinese-rap-coronavirus-wild-wolf-disco/ [Accessed 04 February 2020].

Fanzana, B. M., & Srunv, E. A. (2001). A venue-based method for sampling hard-to-reach populations. *Public Health Rep*, 116, 216-22.

Faugier, J., & Sargeant, M. (1997). Sampling hard to reach populations. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 26(4), 790-797.

Feng, Y., & Karan, K. (2011). The global and local influences in the portrayal of women's roles: Content analysis of women's magazines in China. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 3(2), 33–44

Ffrench, P. (2004). A different life?: Barthes, Foucault and everyday life. *Cultural studies*, 18(2-3), 290-305.

Findji, M. T. (1992). From resistance to social movement: the indigenous authorities' movement in Colombia. In Escobar, A., *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America*, London: Routledge, 112-133.

Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research*, 2(2), 209-230.

Flew, T., Ryan, M., & Su, C. (2019). Culture, communication and hybridity: The case of The Rap of China. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 14(2), 93-106.

Forman, M. (2002). The hood comes first: Race, space, and place in rap and hip-hop. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* (Translated by A. Sheridan). New York: Vintage.

Fox, J. (2005). Paradigm lost: Huntington's unfulfilled clash of civilizations prediction into the 21st century. *International Politics*, 42(4), pp.428-457.

Fox, K. J. (1987). Real punks and pretenders: The social organization of a counterculture. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 16(3), 344-370.

Firth, R. W. (1998). The Tikopia. *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, (11)*9*, 853-873.

Fridman, V., & Ollivier, M. (2004). Ouverture ostentatoire à la diversité et cosmopolitisme: Vers une nouvelle configuration discursive?. *Sociologie et sociétés*, *36*(1), 105-126.

Frith, S. (1981). 'The magic that can set you free': The ideology of folk and the myth of the rock community. *Popular music*, 1, pp.159-168.

Frith, S. (1996). Music and identity. *Questions of cultural identity*, 1(1), pp.108-128.

Frith, S. (1998). *Performing rites: On the value of popular music*. Cambridge (US): Harvard University Press

Fritz, R. L., & Vandermause, R. (2018). Data collection via in-depth email interviewing: Lessons from the field. *Qualitative health research*, 28(10), 1640-1649.

Fung, A. (2008). *Global Capital, Local Culture: Transnational Media Corporations in China*. New York: Peter Lang.

Gabbard, K. (1996). *Jammin' at the margins: Jazz and the American cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

George, N. (1998). *Hip Hop America*. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc.

Gill, F., & Maclean, C. (2002). Knowing your place: Gender and reflexivity in two ethnographies. *Sociological research online*, *7*(2), pp.118-128.

Goodman, L. A. (2011). Comment: On respondent-driven sampling and snowball sampling in hard-to-reach populations and snowball sampling not in hard-to-reach populations. *Sociological methodology*, 41(1), 347-353.

Grazian, D. (2004). The symbolic economy of authenticity in the Chicago blues scene. Music scenes: Local, translocal, and virtual, In Bennett, A., & Peterson, R. A. (Eds.). (2004). *Music scenes: local, translocal and virtual*. Vanderbilt University Press. pp.*31-47.*

Grazian, D. (2005) *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Grealy, L. (2008). Negotiating cultural authenticity in hip-hop: Mimicry, whiteness and Eminem. *Continuum*, *22*(6), 851-865.

Grogam, B. (2020). *Kris Wu, GAI, Jane Zhang, Will Pan and Jay Park Team Up for "The Rap of China" 2020 Cypher*. [Online]. ORADII, China. Last updated: 18 September 2017. Available at: https://radiichina.com/rap-of-china-2020/ [Accessed 18 September 2019].

Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2011). *Applied thematic analysis*. London: Sage Publications.

Gurney, J. N. (1985). Not one of the guys: The female researcher in a male-dominated setting. *Qualitative sociology*, *8*(1), 42-62.

Haines, R. J., Poland, B. D., & Johnson, J. L. (2009). Becoming a 'real'smoker: cultural capital in young women's accounts of smoking and other substance use. *Sociology of health & illness, 31(1),* 66-80.

Hall, S. (Ed.). (1993). *Resistance through rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain* (Vol. 7). London: Psychology Press. pp. 192-230.

Hall, S. & Tony J. (Ed.). (1976). *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. London: Hutchinson.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: principles in practice. 2nd ed.* New York: Routledge.

Han, A. G. (2008). Building a harmonious society and achieving individual harmony. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 13(2), 143-164.

Hannerz, U. (1999). Reflections on varieties of culturespeak. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2(3), 393-407.

Harkness, G. (2012). True school: Situational authenticity in Chicago's hip-hop underground. *Cultural Sociology*, 6(3), 283-298.

Harrison, A. K. (2008). Racial authenticity in rap music and hip hop. *Sociology Compass*, 2(6), 1783-1800.

Harvey, D. (2001). Cosmopolitanism and the banality of geographical evils. *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*. In Comaroff, J. L., Comaroff, J. & Weller., R. P. (Eds.) Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism. Amsterdam: Duke University Press. pp. 271-309.

Hayhoe, R. (2004). Ten lives in mine: Creating portraits of influential Chinese educators. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 41(4-5), 324-338.

Haynes, J., & Nowak, R. (2021). We were never cool: Investigating knowledge production and discourses of cool in the sociology of music. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 72(2), 448-462.

Healey, L. (1999). Gender, power and the ambiguities of resistance in a Malay community of Peninsular Malaysia. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 22(1), 49-61.

Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: the meaning of style*. New York: Routledge.

Henderson, E.A. (1996). Black nationalism and rap music. *Journal of Black Studies*, 26(3), pp.308-339.

Henderson, E.A. (2005). Not letting evidence get in the way of assumptions: Testing the clash of civilizations thesis with more recent data. *International Politics*, 42(4), pp.458-469.

Hesmondhalgh, D. (2005). Subcultures, scenes or tribes? None of the above. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8(1), 21-40.

Hess, M. (2005). Hip-hop realness and the white performer. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 22(5), 372-389.

Heyl, B. S. (2001). Ethnographic interviewing. *Handbook of Ethnography*, 1, 369-383.

Hintz, L. (2021). The empire's opposition strikes back: popular culture as creative resistance tool under Turkey's AKP. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 48(1), 24-43.

Ho, F., & Mullen, B.V. (Eds.) (2008). *Afro Asia: revolutionary political and cultural connections between African Americans and Asian Americans*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press

Hodgman, M. (2013). Class, race, credibility, and authenticity within the hip-hop music genre. *Journal of Sociological Research*, 4(2), 402-413.

Hodkinson, P. (2002). *Goth. Identity, style and subculture*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.

Hodkinson, P. (2005). 'Insider research' in the study of youth cultures. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8(2), 131-149.

Hodkinson, P., & Deicke, W. (Eds.). (2007). *Youth cultures: scenes, subcultures and tribes*. London: Routledge.

Holbrook, M. B., & Addis, M. (2007). Taste versus the market: An extension of research on the consumption of popular culture. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(3), 415-424.

Hollander, J. A., & Einwohner, R. L. (2004). Conceptualizing resistance. *Sociological Forum* 19(4), 533-554.

Hollingworth, S. (2015). Performances of social class, race and gender through youth subculture: Putting structure back in to youth subcultural studies. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18(10), 1237-1256.

Hollingworth, S., & Williams, K. (2009). Constructions of the working-class 'Other' among urban, white, middle-class youth: 'chavs', subculture and the valuing of education. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 12(5), 467-482.

Holt, D. B. (1998). Does cultural capital structure American consumption?. *Journal of consumer research*, *25*(1), 1-25.

Holt, D. B., & Thompson, C. J. (2004). Man-of-action heroes: The pursuit of heroic masculinity in everyday consumption. *Journal of Consumer research*, 31(2), 425-440.

Hooks, B. (1989). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black (Vol. 10).* Massachusetts: South End Press.

Hoyer, W. D., & Stokburger-Sauer, N. E. (2012). The role of aesthetic taste in consumer behavior. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 40(1), 167-180.

Huppatz, K., & Goodwin, S. (2013). Masculinised jobs, feminised jobs and men's 'gender capital' experiences: Understanding occupational segregation in Australia. *Journal of Sociology*, 49(2-3), 291-308.

Huq, R. (2007). *Beyond subculture: Pop, youth and identity in a postcolonial world*. London: Routledge.

Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Issitt, M. (2009). *Hippies: A Guide to an American Subculture: A Guide to an American Subculture*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.

Italiano, F., & Rössner, M. (Eds.). (2014). *Translation: Narration, Media and the Staging of Differences* (Vol. 20). Columbia:Transcript Verlag.

Jackson, T., Jiang, C., & Chen, H. (2016). Associations between Chinese/Asian versus Western mass media influences and body image disturbances of young Chinese women. Body Image, (11)17, 175–183.

Jameson, F., Kang, L., & Zaifu, L. (1993). *Politics, Ideology, and Literary Discourse in Modern China: Theoretical Interventions and Cultural Critique*. Amsterdam: Duke University Press.

Jefferson, T. (Ed.). (2002). *Resistance through rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain.* London: Routledge.

Jensen, S. Q. (2006). Rethinking subcultural capital. *Young*, 14(3), 257-276.

Jian, M. (2018). The survival struggle and resistant politics of a DIY music career in East Asia: Case studies of China and Taiwan. *Cultural Sociology*, *12*(2), 224-240.

Johnson, E. M. (2014). *My culture, my voice: The impact of youth hip-hop and spoken word on adolescent participants in positive youth development settings*. Unpublished: University of St. Thomas. MA thesis.

Kahn-Harris, K. (2004). The 'failure' of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7(1), 95-111.

Kameir, R., Starling, L., Kochhar, N., & Barshad, A. (2017). The Complete History Of Bling Bling. [Online]. FADER, US. Last updated: 2017. Available at: https://www.thefader.com/2017/01/11/bling-bling-oral-history-lil-wayne-bg-turk-juvenile-birdman-mannie-fresh [Accessed: April 22 2018].

Katz, M. (2012). *Groove music: The art and culture of the hip-hop DJ*. Oxford: Oxford University Press on Demand.

Kawulich, B. B. (2005). Participant observation as a data collection method. *Qualitative Social Research*, 6(2). Pp 121-171.

Kerner, N., & Pressman, G. (2007). *Chasing cool: Standing out in today's cluttered marketplace*. Manhattan: Simon and Schuster.

Keyes, C. L. (2004). *Rap music and street consciousness*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

Kitwana, B. (2005). *Why white kids love hip-hop: Wankstas, wiggers, wannabes, and the new reality of race in America*. New York: Civitas Books.

Kohnhorst, A. (2017). *Yin: '90s Throwback with Yin Ts'ang, China's Original Rap Group.* [Online]. ORADII, US-China. Last updated: 28 October 2017. Available at: https://radiichina.com/yin-90s-throwback-with-yin-tsang-chinas-original-rap-group/ [Accessed 25 May 2020].

Kobayashi, S., Baobo, J., & Sano, J. (1999). The "Three Reforms" in China: Progress and Outlook. *Pacific Business and Industries*, *45*(3), 2-41.

Krims, A. (2000). *Rap music and the poetics of identity (Vol. 5).* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kruse, A.J. (2018). Hip-Hop authenticity and music education: Confronting the concept of keeping it real. *Journal of Popular Music Education*, 2(1-2), 149-164.

Lagerkvist, J. (2008). Internet ideotainment in the PRC: National responses to cultural globalization. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 17(54), pp.121-140.

Laidlaw, A. (2011). *Blackness in the absence of blackness: white appropriations of Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture in Newcastle upon Tyne-explaining a cultural shift*. Unpublished: Loughborough University. PhD.

Lamont, M. (1992). *Money, morals, and manners: The culture of the French and the American upper-middle class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lamont, M., & Lareau, A. (1988). Cultural capital: Allusions, gaps and glissandos in recent theoretical developments. 11 (3). *Sociological Theory*, 153-168.

Lauren, T. (2018). *Higher Brothers Are Chinese Hip-Hop's Greatest Hope*. [Online]. Music by VICE, Australia. Last updated: 28 January 2018. Available at: https://www.vice.com/en_au [Accessed 21 January 2020].

Leblanc, L. (1999). *Pretty in punk: Girls' gender resistance in a boys' subculture*. London: Rutgers University Press.

Lee (2018). The history of Chinese rap in the 1990s. [Online]. Hip-hop in China, 2018. Available at: https://www.xihachina.com/7390.html [Accessed 11 May 2020].

Lee, R. L. (2005). Bauman, liquid modernity and dilemmas of development. *Thesis Eleven*, 83(1), 61-77.

Lee, S. S., & Peterson, R. A. (2004). Internet-based Virtual Music. In Bennett, A., & Peterson, R. A. (Eds.). (2004). *Music scenes: local, translocal and virtual*. Vanderbilt University Press. *Music scenes: Local, translocal and virtual*, 187-209.

Li, C. (2013). *The Confucian philosophy of harmony*. London: Routledge.

Li, G. C. (2020). *Distinction in China-the rise of taste in cultural consumption* Unpublished: The London School of Economic and Political Science (LSE). PhD.

Li, G. C. (2021). From parvenu to “highbrow” tastes: The rise of cultural capital in China’s intergenerational elites. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 72(3), 514-530.

Lieberson, S. (2000). *A matter of taste: How names, fashions, and culture change*. Yale: Yale University Press.

Lilja, M., & Vinthagen, S. (2014). Sovereign power, disciplinary power and biopower: resisting what power with what resistance? *Journal of Political Power*, 7(1), 107-126.

Lipsitz, G., 1994. *Dangerous crossroads: Popular music, postmodernism and the poetics of place.* Champaign: University of Illinois.

Lizardo, O. (2005). Can cultural capital theory be reconsidered in the light of world polity institutionalism? Evidence from Spain. *Poetics*, 33(2), 81-110.

Lofland, J. and Lofland, L. H. (1995). *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis* (2nd ed) Belmont: Wadsworth.

Luo, L. (2009). Semistructured interviews. In Wildemuth. B. M. *Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science*. Exeter: libraries unlimited. pp 208-258.

Luo, M. & Ming, W. (2020). From underground to mainstream and then what? Empowerment and censorship in China's hip-hop music. *Critical Arts*, 34(6), pp.1-12.

Macartney, J.（2008). *Chinese rappers Dragon Tongue Squad put the bling into Beijing*. [Online]. The Times. Last update: 8 February 2008. Available at: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/chinese-rappers-dragon-tongue-squad-put-the-bling-into-beijing-bq8hgnzrhtl [Accessed 8 July 2018].

Ma, L. (2009). The Study of Harmonious Together-Development Model for Large Project with the Community during the Construction Stage of Shanghai 2010 Expo China. *2009 International Conference on Management and Service Science*, IEEE pp. 1-5.

Ma, Y., Hardy, A., & Ooi, C. S. (2020). Researching Chinese tourists on the move. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 16(2), 214-229.

Mackerras, C. (1973). Chinese opera after the cultural revolution (1970–72). *The China Quarterly*, 55, 478-510.

Magaudda, P. (2020). Music Scenes as Infrastructures: From Live Venues to Algorithmic Data. In Tofalvy, T., Barna, E. *Popular Music, Technology, and the Changing Media Ecosystem* (pp. 23-41). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Majors, R., & Billson, J. M. (1992). *Cool pose: The dilemmas of black manhood in America.* New York: Lexington.

Mann, S. (2016). The research interview. *Reflective Practice and Reflexivity In Research Processes*. (11) 4. pp 125-168.

Maxwell, I. (2003). *Phat Beats, Dope Rhymes: Hip Hop Down Under Comin' Upper*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Marsh, R. M. (2000). Weber's misunderstanding of traditional Chinese law. *American Journal of Sociology*, 106(2), 281-302.

Martin, L. S., & Gavey, N. (1996). Women's bodybuilding: feminist resistance and/or femininity's recuperation? *Body & Society*, 2(4), 45-57.

Mascarenhas-Keyes S. (1987) 'The native anthropologist: Constraints and strategies in research'. In Jackson A. (Ed.) *Anthropology at Home*. London: Tavistock.

McDonald, M. G., & Toglia, J. (2010). Dressed for success? The NBA's dress code, the workings of whiteness and corporate culture. *Sport in Society*, *13*(6), 970-983.

McGrew, A. (1992). A global society. In S. Hall, D. Held, & T. McGrew (Eds.), *Modernity and its futures* (pp. 1–102). Cambridge: Polity Press

McGuire, M. B., & Kantor, D. (1988). *Ritual healing in suburban America*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

McLeod, K. (1999). Authenticity within hip-hop and other cultures threatened with assimilation. *Journal of Communication*, 49(4), 134-150.

McNamee, S. (2000). Foucault's heterotopia and children's everyday lives. *Childhood*, 7(4), 479-492.

Miller, G. (2011). Sweet here, salty there: evidence for a taste map in the mammalian brain. *Science*. (333) 6047. pp.1213-1782.

Miller, J. (2011). *Fashion and music*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Milligan, L. (2016). Insider-outsider-inbetweener? Researcher positioning, participative methods and cross-cultural educational research. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 46(2), 235-250.

Mitchell, T. (Ed.). (2001) *Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop Outside the USA*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Moore, A. (2002). Authenticity as authentication. *Popular music*, 21(2), pp.209-223.

Moore, R. (2005). Alternative to what? Subcultural capital and the commercialization of a music scene. *Deviant behavior*, *26*(3), 229-252.

Morrison, J. (2017). A Brief History of Taiwan's Vibrant, Diverse Underground Hip-Hop Scene. [Online]. BandCamp, University of Southern California. Last updated: 21 February 2019. Available at: https://daily.bandcamp.com/scene-report/taiwanese-hip-hop-feature [Accessed 25 May 2020].

Morris, M. (2015). Authentic Ideals of Masculinity in Hip-Hop Culture: A Contemporary Extension of the Masculine Rhetoric of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. *Sydney Undergraduate Journal of Musicology*, (11)*4*, pp 125-156.

Muggleton, D. (1997). *The post-subculturalist. The Club Culture Reader.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Muggleton, D. (2000). *Inside subculture*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.

Muggleton, D. (2005). From classlessness to clubculture: A genealogy of post-war British youth cultural analysis. *Young*, 13(2), 205-219.

Muggleton, D., & Weinzierl, R. (2003). What is 'Post-subcultural Studies Anyway? In Muggleton, D. and Rupert Weinzierl, R. (Eds), *The Post-Subcultures Reader. Oxford and New York: Berg*.

Nancarrow, C., & Nancarrow, P. (2012). Hunting for cool tribes. In Cova, B., Kozinets, R, Shankar, A. (Eds.) *Consumer tribes*. London: Routledge, pp. 142-156.

Nault, J. F., Baumann, S., Childress, C., & Rawlings, C. M. (2021). The social positions of taste between and within music genres: From omnivore to snob. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *24*(3), 717-740.

Neal, M. A. (1997). Sold out on soul: The corporate annexation of black popular music. *Popular Music & Society*, 21(3), 117-135.

Negus, K. (1995). Where the mystical meets the market: creativity and commerce in the production of popular music. *The Sociological Review*, 43(2), pp.316-341.

Negus, K. (2013). *Music genres and corporate cultures*. London: Routledge.

Nie, K. (2021). Disperse and preserve the perverse: computing how hip-hop censorship changed popular music genres in China. *Poetics*, *88*, 101590.

Northern Park. (2018). *Xi Jiang hip-hop history*. [Online]. Douban Music, Chin. Last updated: 22 August 2018. Available at: https://www.36kr.com/p/5149521 [Accessed 20 May 2020].

Nyawalo, M. (2012). *From trickster to badman to 'gangsta': Globalizing the badman mythoform in hip-hop music*. State College:The Pennsylvania State University..

Nyawalo, M. (2013). From "badman" to "gangsta": Double consciousness and authenticity, from African-American folklore to hip hop. *Popular Music and Society*, 36(4), 460-475.

Ollivier, M. (2008). Modes of openness to cultural diversity: Humanist, populist, practical, and indifferent. *Poetics*, 36(2-3), 120-147.

Osumare, H. (2001). Beat streets in the global hood: Connective marginalities of the hip hop globe. *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures*, 24(1-2), 171-181.

Osumare, H. (2005). Global hip-hop and the African diaspora. In Elam, H. J., Jackson, K. A., & Jackson, K. (Eds.). *Black cultural traffic: Crossroads in global performance and popular culture*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press. 266-288.

Paddison, R., Philo, C., Routledge, P., & Sharp, J. (2002). *Entanglements of power: geographies of domination/resistance*. Routledge.

Painter, N. I. (2006). *Creating black Americans: African-American history and its meanings. 1619 to the present*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Palma-Martos, M. L., Cuadrado-García, M., & Montoro-Pons, J. D. (2021). Breaking the Gender Gap in Rap/Hip-Hop Consumption. In Howard, K, *Music as Intangible Cultural Heritage* (pp. 51-65). London: Springer.

Pardue, D. (2008). *Ideologies of marginality in Brazilian hip hop*. London: Springer.

Pennycook, A. (2003). Global noise and global Englishes [Review of Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA]. *Cultural Studies Review*, 9(2), pp.192-200.

Perkins, L. (2011). *Exploring the history and culture of Chinese hip hop.* [Online]. The Michigan Daily. Last updated: 13 March 2011. Available at: https://www.michigandaily.com/uncategorized/chinese-hip-hop/ [Accessed 13 March 2021]

Perry, I. (2004). *Prophets of the hood: Politics and poetics in hip hop*. Amsterdam: Duke University Press.

Peterson, R. A. (1992). Understanding audience segmentation: From elite and mass to omnivore and univore. *Poetics*, 21(4), 243-258.

Peterson, R. A., & Kern, R. M. (1996). Changing highbrow taste: From snob to omnivore. *American Sociological Review*, (11) 45, 900-907.

Pillai, S. (2020). *Idol Hands: How China's Super Fan Groups Make and Break Stars Via the Multi-Million Dollar "Fan Economy".* [Online]. ORADII, US. Last updated: 31 July 2019. Available at: https://radiichina.com/chinas-beyonce-is-the-new-face-of-rihannas-fenty-beauty/ [Accessed 4 February 2020].

Pieterse, J.N. (1995). Globalisation as hybridization. In Mike, F., Robertson, R., & Lash, S. (Eds.) *Global modernities*, London: Sage, pp.45-68.

Pieterse, J.N (1996). Globalisation and culture: Three paradigms. *Economic and political weekly*, 31(23), 1389-1393.

Pratt, A. C. (2009). Urban regeneration: From the arts feel good 'factor to the cultural economy: A case study of Hoxton, London. *Urban studies*, 46(5-6), 1041-1061.

Prieur, A., & Savage, M. (2013). Emerging forms of cultural capital. *European Societies*, 15(2), 246-267.

Prieur, A., & Savage, M. (2014). On 'knowingness', cosmopolitanism and busyness as emerging forms of cultural capital. In Coulangeon, P., & Duval, J (Eds.) . *The Routledge Companion to Bourdieu's' Distinction,* Oxford: Routledge, pp. 325-336.

Prinz, J. (2007). *The emotional construction of morals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Prior, N. (2008). Putting a glitch in the field: Bourdieu, actor network theory and contemporary music. *Cultural Sociology*, 2(3), 301-319.

Pritchard, G., 2009. Cultural imperialism, Americanisation and Cape Town hip-hop culture: a discussion piece. *Social Dynamics*, 35(1), pp.51-55.

Qiang, X. (2017). An interview with Jony J. [Online]. Zhihu, China. Last updated: 18 September 2017. Available at: https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/30871260 [Accessed 25 August 2021].

Qin, A. (2017). *With Dreadlocks, Rhythm and Flow, China Embraces Hip-Hop*. [Online]. *New York Times*, US. Last updated: 26 October 2017. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/26/world/asia/china-hip-hop.html [Accessed 25 May 2020].

Quinn, E. (2004). *Nuthin' but a "G" thang: the culture and commerce of gangsta rap*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Rarick, C. A. (2007). Confucius on management: Understanding Chinese cultural values and managerial practices. *Journal of International Management Studies*, 2(2). 177-205

Regelski, T. A. (2006). Reconnecting music education with society. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, 5(2), 1-20.

Regev, M. (1994). Producing artistic value: The case of rock music. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 35(1), 85-102.

Regev, M. (2007). Cultural uniqueness and aesthetic cosmopolitanism. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 10(1), 123-138.

Rheingold, H. (1994). Virtual Community. In Minerva, L., Sahlins, M. *Stone Age Economics.* Atherton: Aldine-Atherton.

Ritzer, G (1993). *The McDonaldisation of Society.* London: Sage.

Ritzer, G. (2011). *Sociological Theory* (Eight Edition). New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies.

Robertson, R. (1994). Globalisation or glocalisation?. *Journal of international communication*, *1*(1), 33-52.

Robette, N., & Roueff, O. (2014). An eclectic eclecticism: Methodological and theoretical issues about the quantification of cultural omnivorism. *Poetics*, *47*, 23-40.

Rodriquez, J. (2006). Color-blind ideology and the cultural appropriation of hip-hop. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(6), 645-668.

Rose, T. (1994). Black noise: rap music and black culture in contemporary America. Hanover, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Rubidge, S. 1996. 'Does authenticity matter? The case for and against authenticity in the performing arts', in *Analysing Performance*, ed. P. Campbell (Manchester), pp. 219–233

Ryan, J., Calhoun III, L. H., & Wentworth, W. M. (1996). Gender or genre? Emotion models in commercial rap and country music. *Popular Music & Society*, 20(2), 121-154.

Sandberg, S. (2008). Black drug dealers in a white welfare state: Cannabis dealing and street capital in Norway. *The British journal of criminology*, 48(5), 604-619.

Saunders, T. L. (2015). *Cuban underground hip hop: Black thoughts, Black revolution, Black modernity*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Schmutz, V., Van Venrooij, A., Janssen, S., & Verboord, M. (2010). Change and continuity in newspaper coverage of popular music since 1955: Evidence from the United States, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. *Popular Music and Society*, 33(4), 501-515.

Schouten, J. W., & McAlexander, J. H. (1995). Subcultures of consumption: An ethnography of the new bikers. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(1), 43-61.

Scott, J. C. (1985). *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. Yale: Yale University Press.

Scott, J. C. (1987). Resistance without protest and without organization: Peasant opposition to the Islamic Zakat and the Christian Tithe. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 29(3), 417-452.

Scott, J. C. (1989). Everyday forms of resistance. *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, 4, 33-33.

Second Brother Diary (2019). *What's the difference between hip-hop and Ranting and Rapping Online, Allegro and Shulaibao? (Zhihu status update).* [Online] Available at: https://www.zhihu.com/question/61998432 [Accessed 09 January 2019].

Seidel, J., & Kelle, U. (1995). Different functions of coding in the analysis of textual data. *Computer-aided qualitative data analysis: Theory, methods and practice*, (11) 34. pp52-61.
Sloboda, J. A., O'Neill, S. A., & Ivaldi, A. (2001). Functions of music in everyday life: An exploratory study using the Experience Sampling Method. *Musicae scientiae*, 5(1), 9-32.

Solomon, T. (2005). 'Living underground is tough': authenticity and locality in the hip-hop community in Istanbul, Turkey. *Popular Music*, *24*(1), 1-20.

Simmel, G. (1950). *The sociology of Georg Simmel* (Vol. 92892). London: Simon and Schuste.

Sina Music. (2009). *A profile of 大喜门.* [Online]. Souhu Website, China. Last updated: 12 November 2009. Available at: http://ent.sina.com.cn/s/h/p/2009-11-12/12012767152.shtml [Accessed 21 December 2020].

Song, E. (1996). *Shanghai: transformation and modernization under China's open policy*. Beijing: Chinese University Press.

Sotirin, P., & Gottfried, H. (1999). The ambivalent dynamics of secretarial bitching': Control, resistance, and the construction of identity. *Organization*, 6(1), 57-80.

Souhu Music. (2005). *A profile of Kong Fu Band.* [Online]. Souhu Website, China. Last updated: 03 March 2005. Available at: http://music.yule.sohu.com/20050303/n224517996.shtml [Accessed 2 June 2019].

Souhu Music. (2020). *"Idol Rapper is fake!" Hip hop artist as mentor on Young You 2.* [Online]. Souhu Website, China. Last updated: 26 April 2020. Available at: https://3g.k.sohu.com/t/n445994783?goLiteapp=1 [Accessed: 14 April 2021]

Speers, L. (2014). *Keepin'it real: negotiating authenticity in the London hip hop scene.* Unpublished: King's College London. PhD.

Stacey, R. (2018). A guide to the many styles of hip-hop, from hyphy to horrorcore. [Online]., Red Bull, US. Last updated: 17 July 2019. Available at: https://www.redbull.com/gb-en/different-types-of-hip-hop-guide [Accessed 29 July 2019].

Stearns, P. N. (1994). *American cool: Constructing a twentieth-century emotional style*. Manhattan: NYU Press.

Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Straw, W. (1991). Systems of articulation, logics of change: communities and scenes in popular music. *Cultural studies*, *5*(3), 368-388.

Sullivan, M. (2001). African-American music as rebellion: From slavesong to hip-hop. London: *Discoveries*, (11)3, pp21-39.

Sun, J., Son, J., & Chi, T. (2016). Adoption of Transaction-focused Social Commerce by Fashion Product Merchants: A Study of WeChat Commerce in China. *International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings,* 73(1). pp123-156.

Sun, W. (2019). 'Chinese rapper under fire for lyrics glorifying sex, drugs' [Online]. People's Daily China, Last updated: 09 January 2018. Available at: http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0109/c90000-9313381.html [Accessed 3 June 2020].

Tansey, O. (2009). Process tracing and elite interviewing: a case for non-probability sampling. In Pickel, S., Pickel, G., Joachim. H.L. *Methoden der vergleichenden Politik-und Sozialwissenschaft*. Leiden: Brill. Leiden-Boston. pp. 481-496.

Tao, H. (2019). *A profile of Free-out.* [Online]. Hip-hop China, China, 2019. Available at: https://www.xihachina.com/tag/free-out [Accessed 15 September 2019].

Tao, H. (2019). *The profile of Triple H.* [Online]. Hip-hop China, China, 2019. Available at: https://www.xihachina.com/tag/honghuahui [Accessed 15 September 2019].

Tao, H. (2019). *Xi'an local hip-hop crew-chaos.* [Online]. Hip-hop China, China, 2019. Available at: https://www.xihachina.com/30241.html [Accessed 15 September 2019].

Tao, H. (2020). *Listen Up's fourth season finale is coming!* [Online]. Hip-hop China, China, 2018. Available at: https://www.xihachina.com/17326.html [Accessed 19 October 2020].

Taylor, J. B. (2009). *The financial crisis and the policy responses: An empirical analysis of what went wrong*. Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Taylor, T. (1997). *Global Pop: World Musics, World Markets.* Routledge.

Taylor, T.D. (2014). Global pop: World music, world markets. London: Routledge.

Templeton, I. H. (2006). *What's so German about it? Cultural Identity in the Berlin Hip Hop Scene*. Unpublished: University of Sterling. MA thesis.

Thornton, S. (1996). *Club cultures: Music, media, and subcultural capital*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Thornton, S. (2012). *Seven days in the art world*. London: Granta Books.

Tomlinson, J. (2001). *Cultural imperialism: A critical introduction*. London: A&C Black.

Trethewey, A. (1997). Resistance, identity, and empowerment: A postmodern feminist analysis of clients in a human service organization. *Communications Monographs*, 64(4), 281-301.

Turkel, G. (1990). Michel Foucault: Law, power, and knowledge. *Journal of Law and Society*, 17(2), 170-193.

Van Eijck, K., & Knulst, W. (2005). No more need for snobbism: Highbrow cultural participation in a taste democracy. *European Sociological Review*, 21(5), 513-528.

Van Venrooij, A., & Schmutz, V. (2010). The evaluation of popular music in the United States, Germany and the Netherlands: A comparison of the use of high art and popular aesthetic criteria. *Cultural Sociology*, 4(3), 395-421.

Varis, P. and Wang, X. (2015). Superdiversity on the Internet: A case from China. In Blommaert,J.,Rampton,B.*Language and superdiversity* (pp. 228-246). London: Routledge.

Vinthagen, S., & Johansson, A. (2013). Everyday resistance: Exploration of a concept and its theories. *Resistance Studies Magazine*, 1(1), 1-46.

Wallis, C. (2015). Gender and China's online censorship protest culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 15(2), 223-238.

Wang, J. (2009). *Now Hip-Hop, Too, Is Made in China.* [Online], New York Times, US. Last updated: 23 January 2009. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/24/arts/music/24hiphop.html [Accessed 1 Sep 2019].

Wang, X. (2012). 'I am not a qualified dialect rapper': constructing hip-hop authenticity in China. *Sociolinguistic Studies*, 6(2), 333.

Wang, Y. (2020). The New Hip-Hop Generation of China. In Dunn, R. A. (Ed.). *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Media Fandom*. Hershey: IGI Global. pp. 150-171

Wang, Y-L. (2015). *Holler if you hear me: Taiwan hip-hop under the transnational culture flow in East Asia*. Unpublished: *National Taiwan Normal University*. MA thesis.

Warde, A., Wright, D., & Gayo-Cal, M. (2008). The omnivorous orientation in the UK. *Poetics*, 36(2-3), 148-165.

Webster, J. (2019). Music on-demand: A commentary on the changing relationship between music taste, consumption and class in the streaming age. *Big Data & Society*, 6(2).

Webster, J. (2019). *Taste in the digital age: Music streaming services and the performance of class distinction*. Unpublished: University of Southampton. PhD.

West, L. A. (2001). Negotiating masculinities in American drinking subcultures. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 9(3), 371-392.

White III, G. O. (2003). Navigating the Cultural Malaise: Foreign Direct Investment Dispute Resolution in the People's Republic of China. *Transactions: Legal Abbreviations and Acronyms*, 5(55).

Wielander, G. (2011). Beyond repression and resistance—Christian love and China's harmonious society. *The China Journal*, (11) 65, 119-139.

Williams, J. P. (2007). Youth-subcultural studies: Sociological traditions and core concepts. *Sociology Compass*, 1(2), 572-593.

Wright, K. (2004). Rise up hip hop nation: From deconstructing racial politics to building positive solutions. *Socialism and Democracy*, 18(2), 9-20.

Xinhua News. (2017). Dialect of Sichuan: Dragon Tongue. [Online]. Xinhua Newspaper Website, China. Last updated: 18 February 2018. Available at: http://www.sc.xinhuanet.com/content/2018-02/18/c_1120711478.htm [Accessed 18 February 2018].

Yinger, J. M. (1984). *Countercultures*. London: Simon and Schuster.

Żadkowska, M., Dowgiałło, B., Gajewska, M., Herzberg-Kurasz, M. and Kostecka, M. (2022). The Sociological Confessional: A Reflexive Process in the Transformation From Face-To-Face to Online Interview. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21 (4), pp.160-187.

Zhang, A. (2019). Keep It “Skr:" The Incorporation of Hip-Hop Subculture through Chinese Talent Shows and the Online Battle for Authenticity. *Georgetown Journal of Asian Affairs*. [Online] Available at: https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/1055372 [Accessed: 10 April 2021]

Zhang, S. (2017). *You think hip-hop is only hip-hop?* [Online]. Xinhua Newpaper Website, China. Last updated: 21 October 2017. Available at: http://m.xinhuanet.com/sn/2017-10/21/c_1121821181.htm [Accessed 25 October 2017].

Zhao, J. J. (2020). Queerness within Chineseness: nationalism and sexual morality on and off the competition show The Rap of China. *Continuum*, *34*(4), 484-499.

Zhao, Y., & Lin, Z. (2020). ‘Jianghu flow’: examining cultural resonance in The Rap of China. *Continuum*, 11(45). pp.1-14.

Zhou, W. (2018). *Will there be hip-hop in China after the "main melody" crackdown.* [Online]. BBC News Chinese Version, UK. Last updated: 29 January 2018. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/chinese-news-42855743 [Accessed 29 May 2020].

Zou, S. (2019). When nationalism meets hip-hop: Aestheticized politics of ideotainment in China. *Communication and critical/cultural studies*, 16(3), 178-195.

Appendix 1

Information Sheet and the Outline of Interview

Hello, my name is Yehan Wang. I am a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the University of York (UK). I am currently conducting research into the topic of Chinese pop culture and its links to state control. My advisors are Prof. David Beer and Dr. Ruth Penfold-Mounce. The main research question we would like to address is how Chinese popular culture is moving beyond state control in the context of online entertainment media.

The reason why you have been chosen is because you are either a fan of "The Rap of China", an online gamer, a TV fan or a person with similar interests. We would highly appreciate it if you could take part in this research project by agreeing to an interview. If you do decide to take part, you will be able to keep a copy of this information sheet and you should indicate your agreement via the online consent form. You can still withdraw at any time and you don't need to give a reason.

You will be interviewed through Wechat, which we estimate will take around 15 minutes. All interviews will only be used for academic research and will not be used for other purposes. In order to facilitate the follow-up research, all interviews will be recorded. If you change your mind about being interviewed either during or after the interview, I will delete all the data related to this interview and all backups and copies. You can withdraw from the research within three months of the interview if you wish.

Participation in this research could potentially be seen as risky because of the sensitive nature of some of the questions related to the resistance to government policies. However, the government tolerates individuals expressing such thoughts and the nature of the conversation is not considered to be such that requires monitoring. If you use sensitive words by accident the interviews will be halted.

The interview can be conducted anywhere you wish. The interview is expected to take place from September 2019 onward. If you are happy to participate, I will send you a further email to discuss the exact time and interview arrangements. Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any negative consequences or discomfort.

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. This anonymised data will not allow you or your institution to be identifiable. Only your input from the interview will be recorded.

Appendix 2

Information Sheet and the Outline of Interview (Chinese version)

你好，我的名字叫王页涵。我是约克大学社会学的博士生。我目前正在研究的课题是流行文化与国家控制。我的导师是 David Beer 教授和 Ruth Penfold-Mounce 博士。研究的主要问题是，在网络娱乐媒体的背景下，流行文化是如何超越国家控制的。

之所以选择您参与采访，是因为您是《中国说唱》的粉丝、游戏迷或电视迷，或者与您有类似角色的人，所以如果您能够参加这个研究项目，这对我们来说是非常重要的。如果您决定参加，您将能够保留一份本信息表的副本，您应该在在线同意书上注明您的协议。您仍然可以随时取消。你不需要给出理由。如果你愿意，你可以在面试后三个月内退出研究。

参与这项研究可能被认为是有风险的，因为一些问题的敏感性与对政府政策的抵制有关。然而，政府可以容忍个人表达这样的想法，而对话的性质并不需要监控。如果你不小心使用了敏感词汇，面试将会暂停。

您将被要求完成一个基于网络的采访，我们估计这将花费您 15 分钟。所有访谈将完全用于学术研究，不用于其他目的。为了便于后续的研究，所有的访谈都将被记录下来。如果面试者在面试过程中或面试后后悔被面试，我，王页涵将删除所有与本次面试相关的数据，不保留任何副本。

我会通过 Skype 或者微信来采访你。你可以在任何你想去的地方接受面试，在家或者任何休闲的地方。预计采访将于 2019 年 8 月或 9 月左右开始。我将进一步发邮件给你讨论具体的时间和面试问题。参与研究不会给您带来任何不便或不适。我们在研究过程中收集到的关于您的所有信息都将严格保密。这些匿名数据将不允许任何个人或他们的机构被识别或识别。在没有得到您的单独许可的情况下，除了您对基础信息的输入外，您不会以任何其他方式被记录。

Appendix 3

Consent form (English version)

Supervisor: Prof. David Beer
& Dr. Ruth Penfold-Mounce
PhD student: Miss Yehan Wang

This form is for you to state whether or not you agree to take part in the study. Please read and answer every question. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

Have you read and understood the information leaflet about the study?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions about the study?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you understand that the information you provide will be held in confidence by the researcher?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you understand that the information you provide may be used in future research?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you agree to take part in "beyond state control: Chinese popular culture in the context of online entertainment media"?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you agree to excerpts from your audio/video recordings to be used in presentations or in teaching by the researcher, without disclosing your real name? *(You may take part in the study without agreeing to this).*	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you agree to the researcher's keeping your contact details after the end of the current project, in order that s/he may contact you in the future about possible participation in other studies? *(You may take part in the study without agreeing to this).*	Yes ❒ No ❒

Do you agree with the interview being audio recorded? Yes ☐ No ☐

Do you understand that you can withdraw from the research within three months? Yes ☐ No ☐

Signatures:

I _____, consent to participate in the research"Beyond state control: Chinese popular culture in the context of online

entertainment media" conducted by Yehan Wang. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. My signature below indicates my consent.

If you have any problems, please contact the emails below.

Researcher:
Miss Yehan Wang Email: yw2785@york.ac.uk

Research supervisor:
Professor David Beer Email: david.beer@york.ac.uk
Dr Ruth Penfold-Mounce Email: ruth.penfold-mounce@york.ac.uk

Ethics committee: Email: elmps-ethics-group@york.ac.uk

Appendix 4

Consent Form (Chinese Version)

知情同意书

《超越国家控制:网络娱乐媒体语境下的中国流行文化》研究计划

指导教授：Prof. David Beer & Dr. Ruth Penfold-Mounce
博士生:王叶涵

这张表格是让你陈述你是否同意参加这项研究。请阅读并回答每一个问题。如果您有什么不明白的地方，或者您想了解更多的信息，请询问研究人员。

您是否已经阅读并理解了有关该研究的说明? 是❒ 否❒

你是否有机会对这项研究提出问题？ 是❒ 否❒

你是否了解研究者会对你所提出的所有讯息完全保密？ 是❒ 否❒

你是否了解你有权利可以拒绝回答任何问题？ 是❒ 否❒

你是否了解你提供的信息可能会被用于研究者以后的相关学术发表但你的相关信息将完全保密？ 是❒ 否❒

你是否同意参加这项研究 是❒ 否❒

如果同意，你是否同意你的采访将被录音?
(你可以选择不被录音但参加这项研究) 是❒ 否❒

如果是，你同意你的采访被录在视频里吗？ 是❒ 否❒

您是否同意在不透露您的真实姓名的情况下，从您的音频/视频记录中摘录用于演示或研究人员的教学？（你可以不同意参加这项研究）。 是❒ 否❒

您是否同意研究人员在当前项目结束后保留您的联系方式，以便他/她将来可能会就可能参与其他研究与您联系？（你可以不同意参加这项研究）。 是❒ 否❒

签名：

我_____,同意参加王页涵主持的“超越国家控制：网络娱乐媒体语境下的中国流行文化”研究。我了解这个项目的性质并希望参与。我在下面的签名表示同意。

如果您有任何问题，请联系下面的电子邮件。

研究员:
王叶涵小姐电子邮件:yw2785@york.ac.uk

研究主管:
David Beer 教授　　电子邮件:David .beer@york.ac.uk
Ruth Penfold-Mounce 博士　　电子邮件:ruth.penfold-mounce@york.ac.uk

Appendix 5

Invitation and interview survey of the Rap of China

Dear Sir/Madam

This is an interview-based survey about hip-pop music. If you are interested in the topic of my research, please add my WeChat ID. I might also contact you out of my own initiative.

Please make sure to leave your WeChat ID, since there may be follow-up interviews or group discussions.

Please try your best to complete the interview and answer honestly according to your own experience. There is no right or wrong answer to the questions. Thank you for your support!

Part I

1 What is your gender?

2. What is your age?

□18—25 □26—35 □36—45 □46—55 □56 above

3. What is your education background? (middle school, high school, BA, MA or above)

4. What is your job?

Professional Rapper Student freelancer Office worker other

5 How long have you been a fan of hip hop? (Please write down the number of years)

Part II

1What do you think of the presentation of hip-hop culture in "the rap of China"?

2. Which singer do you like/which rapper's performance or video would you like to watch?

3. Have you seen any advertisements for the "the rap of China"?

4. What do you think of the addition of hip-hop elements to the advertisement of "The Rap of China"?

5. Have you ever bought hip-hop culture-related products? (Yes/no) If so, what is the average annual consumption of hip-hop cultural products (such as clothing, shoes, jewelry, etc.)?

On December 18, 2017, the popular phrase "Do you have free style?" It was selected as the top ten network terms published by the National Language Resources Monitoring and Research Center in 2017.

2. What do you think of "free style" as one of the top ten buzzwords of the year?

Part III

On January 19, Gao Changli, director of the Propaganda Department of the State Administration of Radio and Television, put forward that inviting guests to Radio and Television should adhere to the "four absolute no-use" criteria: resolutely not to use actors who are not faithful to the Party and whose morality is low; resolutely not to use actors who are vulgar and obscene; resolutely not to use actors who are not of high ideological level and style; and resolutely not to use actors with misbehaviour, scandals and moral problems...

1. As a hip hop fan, what do you think of the "Four Not-to-Use Principles" of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television?

The singer PG One who became popular because of "The Rap of China " has been exposed to the public by netizens. After being criticized by the state-level media and institutions, PG One announced that he would take the initiative to remove and rectify

the songs, but it was too late, and his reputation continued to deteriorate. Eventually, the PG ONE commercial show was cancelled and the songs were banned.

2. Do you support a comeback for PG ONE and his reinstatement as a commercial performer?

3. What do you think of hip-hop singers who have transformed from "underground singers" to "commercial stars" under the operation of commercial capital and media platforms?

4. What do you think of the changes that took place from “The Rap of China” to "The New Rap of China"?

5. What do you think that some “haters” of "The Rap of China " and Kris Wu became into "fans"?

6. Will you continue to watch the third season of "The New Rap of China"

7. What do you think of hip-hop culture?
   _It’s an active cultural genre, which is conducive to cultural prosperity and diversification
   _Obvious traces of capital manipulation
   _Young, fashionable and rebellious culture, representing the inner voice of teenagers.
   _A real cultural genre, which can reveal the darkness of society.
   _A very special culture, in line with the current pursuit of personality
   _Cultural dross, which is not conducive to the development of Chinese popular culture

8. Do you think hip-hop concerts will gradually move from a minority interest to the general public in China after the Rap of China?

Part IV

1. Do you have any complaints or criticisms about hip-hop? Tell me about your experience? (If you are interested, you can also send me messages on Wechat.)
2. How would you say hip-hop culture affects you? Briefly talk about your opinions. (If you are interested, you can also send me messages on Wechat.)
3. Do you have a favourite fashion brand? (Yes/No) What do you think of the cooperation between hip hop and business?

Appendix 6

导 读

2017 年，中国第一档以嘻哈为主题的综艺节目燃爆整个夏天。《中國有嘻哈》节目在 24 小時內播放量破亿，总决赛直播当日平台观看总人次 1.33 亿。微博主话题中国有嘻哈阅读量高达 73.5 亿，讨论量 2756.7 亿，相关话题占微博热搜榜超过 300 次。一时间，GAI，PG ONE, VAVA 等一批嘻哈选手终于从“地下”走到了“地上”。

自《中国有嘻哈》发布以来，关于它的争议也是不断的。有许多说唱歌手对节目组和导师发布 diss。尤其是，在广电总局发布了“四不用”政策之后, 有人认为“中国有嘻哈”彻底“凉凉了”。据悉，《中国新说唱》第三季在 2019 年 3 月 11 日正式在爱奇艺微博账号上做了宣传和招募。这一切来得“惊喜”和“不易”，这就是我对这档节目感兴趣的原因，并希望将此作为一项课题进行研究。

关于课题

具体来说，我正在为我的博研究进行一项实地调查。看看“中国有嘻哈”（后改名中国新说唱）是怎样在广电总局不断“限制娱乐”的背景下探索一条既趋向社会潮流又符合大众口味的新模式的？并试图分析这种尝试是否能成为一种新的流行文化趋势？

关于问答 About Q&A

之所以选择您参与问答，是因为您是《中国新说唱》的粉丝或者专业 rapper，能够对本研究提出的问题进行批判性的思考。千万不要担心您的答案会被泄露！因为本研究所有的问卷或者采访数据都是匿名的。您将被要求完成一个思辩性的问答或者选择，请务必写下您的真切感受，这将对我十分重要。如果您对我研究的课题感兴趣，请加我的微信，不过我也会主动联系各位小主的。

请务必留下您的微信号，因为后续会有访谈或者焦点小组讨论。

第一部分 真假粉丝 Part I True and False Fans

填写人姓名 Completed by：

微信号 WeChat ID：

1. 您有没有加入嘻哈的群组，如果有请写明（❗十分重要）

2. 您的性别是
   □男/Male　　□女/Female
3. 您的年龄在以下哪个阶段
   □18—25　□26—35　□36—45　□46—55　□56 岁以上/above
4. 您受教育的程度
   □高中及以下/ Senior High School and below　□专科/ Junior College
   □本科/ Undergraduate　　□研究生及以/Post-graduate and above
5. 您的工作是
   What is your job?
   □专业 rap 选手/Professional Rapper　□学生/Student　□自由工作者/ Freelancer　□上班族/ Office worker　□其它/ others

6. 您喜欢嘻哈多长时间了？（请填写年限）

7. 您是通过什么途径知道“中国有嘻哈”（中国新说唱）的？
   □手机视频 app 推荐的/ Mobile Video App Recommendation　□身边的人告知/Told by people around me　□网上自己搜/Search on the Internet　□微信朋友圈/Wechat circle of friends　□不知道什么原因，突然就火了/Don’t know why, but it gets popular suddenly　□大家都喜欢看，自然就接触到了/Everyone likes to watch it, so I just know it　□其它/Others
8. 您是专业 rap 选手吗？
   □是/Yes　　□否/No
9. 您的 rap 昵称是

10. 对于脏辫的流行，您如何看待？
   □很好，大家开始喜欢并接受它/Great, and everyone begins to like and accept it　□一般般，一个阶段的潮流而已/Just so so, a passing trend of a certain phase　□很丑，希望不要兴起/Ugly, don’t want it to be popular　□其它（请说明）/Others (Please specify)

第二部分 您与“中国有嘻哈”如何结缘的
Part II: How do you connect yourself with "The Rap of China "

1. 您觉得《中国有嘻哈》中对于嘻哈文化的展现怎么样
   □不了解/Don’t know about it　□很全面的展现了正宗的嘻哈文化/ A very comprehensive display of the authentic hip-hop culture　□只是展示嘻哈文化的一小部分/ Just a small part of hip-hop culture.　□其它（请说明）/Others (Please specify)

2. 您是哪位选手的粉丝/最喜欢观看哪位 rapper 的演出或者视频？

3. 您看这档节目的时候看到节目中的植入广告吗？您还记得哪些广告

4. 您如何看待在“中国有嘻哈”广告中加入嘻哈元素的
   □很无聊，不想看到这些广告/Boring, don’t want to see these advertisement　□没有商业广告就没有这档节目/No commercial AD, no this show　□很有创新性，喜欢/Very creative, I like it　□其它

（请写明）/Others (Please specify)

5. 您是否购买过嘻哈文化相关的产品？（是，否）如果是，您购买过的嘻哈文化产品（如服饰、鞋、首饰等）平均每年消费多少？

□2000 元以上/2,000 RMB and above □1000 元至 2000 元/1,000 to 2,000 RMB
□ 500 元至 1000 元 500 to 1,000 RMB □500 元以下 / Less than 500RMB

2017 年 12 月 18 日，节目中的流行用语“你有 freestyle 吗？”入选国家语言资源监测与研究中心发布的 2017 年度十大网络用语”。

6. 您如何看待“freestyle”选入年度十大流行语？
What do you think of "free style" as one of the top ten buzzwords of the year?
□很好/Very good □无聊/Boring □不关注/Not my concern
□其它（请说明）/Others (Please specify)

第三部分 中国有嘻哈：暂停？复出？
Part III: The Rap of China: Suspension? Comeback?

1 月 19 日，广电总局宣传司司长高长力在宣传例会上提出，广播电视邀请嘉宾应坚持“四个绝对不用”标准，即：对党离心离德、品德不高尚的演员坚决不用；低俗，恶俗、媚俗的演员坚决不用；思想境界、格调不高的演员坚决不用；有污点有绯闻、有道德问题的演员坚决不用……

1. 作为嘻哈粉丝，您如何看待广电总局“四不用原则”？（请务必做答，对课题很重要）

从“中国有嘻哈”走出来的歌手 PG One 被网友扒出各种黑历史。在被国家级媒体和机构点名之后，虽然 PG One 发文说，准备主动下架歌曲整改，但为时已晚，事件持续发酵。最终，PGONE 商演被取消，歌曲被下架……

有人认为，rapper 明星本本身就是一个特殊的群体，在大众看来，他们衣着光鲜，收入不菲，一首歌可能就抵得上普通人一年乃至数年的收入。明星的行为也受到大众的关注。如果明星所作所为有损社会主体价值观的话，就会对社会造成极大恶劣影响……

2. 您支持 PG ONE 复出并参加商业性演出吗？
Do you support the comeback of PG ONE and its commercial performance?
□支持/Yes □反对/No
为什么？Why?

据粉丝爆料，VAVA，GAI 等从“中国有嘻哈”走出来的明星，虽然在电视台播放的时候遭到“挡脸”或者“因不可抗力”退赛等结果，但这些歌手仍然没有被“点名”，在社交媒体的活跃指数和粉丝量没有减少反而增长了。这些歌手活跃在不同的音乐节和商业中，甚至被邀请拍摄时尚大片。有人认为，在商业资本和爱奇艺这样的媒体平台的的打造下，嘻哈选手能“推陈出新”也是一种不错的选择。

读了上面的文字，您如何看待嘻哈歌手在商业资本和媒体平台的运作下从“地下歌手”转型为“商业化明星”

After reading the above text, what do you think of hip hop singers who have transformed from "underground singers" to "commercial stars" under the operation of commercial capital and media platform?
□支持/Support □反对/Oppose □其它（请说明）/Others (Please specify)

2018 年 7 月，中国有嘻哈改名为“中国新说唱”之后在爱奇艺平台上正式复播。据一些自媒体报道，这档节目在选择参赛选手时有着严格的审查，避免“有黑历史”的选手出现。

“中国新说唱”将选手分为 underground rapper 和 idol rapper，使得整个节目“火药味”十足。据笔者在知乎上的观察，一些“中国有嘻哈”和吴亦凡的“黑粉”转成“红粉”。他们表示，“节目呈现很到位，选手的表现都很真实，他们当中有相当一部分人体现了 HIPHOP 的精神和文化。”

粉丝评论截图：

对此我向吴亦凡道歉，并表示不再使用不良称呼

在第二期里，他的表现也再次让我折服，为避免被说蹭热度，后续我大概不会再拿吴亦凡说事，因为之前的质疑已经可以消散了，而选手的表现和节目本身就已经足以喜人眼球了。

3. 您如何看待到中国有嘻哈改成“中国新说唱”？

4. 您如何看待“中国新说唱”和吴亦凡的“黑粉”转“红粉”？

5. 您觉得偶像嘻哈歌手是专业歌手吗
□是/Yes □不是/No □其它（请说明）/Others (Please specify)

据悉，《中国新说唱》第三季于 2019 年 3 月在爱奇艺微博账号上做了正式宣传。

7. 您还会继续看“中国新说唱”第三季吗（如果选否，直接跳到第 9 题）
□是/Yes □否/No

8. 您对嘻哈文化的看法是（多选）
What do you think of hip-hop culture?(Multiple choices)
□活跃的文化类型，有利于文化的繁荣和多样化□□
□商业色彩浓重的文化类型，资本操纵痕迹明显□□
□年轻时尚并且叛逆的文化，代表了青少年内心的声音□□
□真实的文化类型，能够揭露社会黑暗□□
□很特别的文化，符合当下对于个性的追求□□
□文化糟粕，不利于我国文化的发展

9. 您认为中国流行文化发展的趋势是
You think the trend of the development of Chinese popular culture is:
□比较开放/Relatively open □与发达国家还有差距/ There is still a gap with developed countries □过于中庸/Over moderate □还不够多元化/Not diversified enough
□大众文化水平还有待提高/ The level of popular culture needs to be improved
□对外来文化比较排斥/ Relative exclusion of foreign cultures

10．您对于嘻哈文化借助爱奇艺平台在中国的迅猛发展表示
□极其赞同/Extremely agree □并不反对/Not oppose □不同意/Disagree
□其它（请写明）/Others (Please specify)

13. 您觉得在中国有嘻哈之后，嘻哈音乐会从小众逐渐走向大众吗
□会/Yes □不会/No □其它（请写明）/Others (Please specify)

第四部分 你和嘻哈的故事

1. 是否有人对您喜欢嘻哈的兴趣表示不满或批评？简单讲讲您的经历？（如果您感兴趣，也可以微信告诉我）

2. 您认为嘻哈文化对自己有哪些方面的影响？简要谈谈您的想法.（如果您感兴趣，也可以微信告诉我）

嘻哈音乐起源于 1970 的美国纽约贫民区，主要由非裔、加勒比海裔和拉丁裔青年孕育的街头文化，嘻哈本身有着更为真实的面向，这一面向直接指向政治。它成了嘻哈歌手们用来反映现实或批判社会的最佳武器，广泛涉及贫民区中的毒品泛滥、暴力执法、社会不公以及种族歧视等问题。

但嘻哈的兴起和当今追崇它的国人有着一定的差距。中国嘻哈歌手的出身与他们美国前辈已十分不同，前者更多来自于中产阶层甚至知识分子和富裕家庭。有人说，现代说唱音乐更关注的是节奏型音乐本身的魅力。

3. 读了上面的文字，您怎么看待嘻哈在中国的流行？

4. 请问您更关注嘻哈的音乐性还是对抗性？
□音乐性/Musicality □对抗性/Antagonism □都关注/Both □其它（请写明）/Others (Please specify)

嘻哈史上最负盛名的组合 Run–D.M.C.，1986 年在麦迪逊花园广场演唱新歌《MyAdidas》，此时的 Adidas，是纽约嘻哈乐手们最爱穿的运动鞋，看到全场举起两万双运动鞋的盛大场面，一位 Adidas 经理飞快跑回总部报告——他带回一份价值 150 万美元的广告合同，开启了嘻哈文化与主流商业的合谋之路。

5. 您有自己钟爱的潮流品牌吗？（有，没有）您如何看待嘻哈和商业的合作？

Rapper Jony J 曾在歌曲《套路》里讽刺拜金的社会风气。其实，Hip-hop 在中国，仍然具有草根文化天然的现实批判性。因为这些特点，嘻哈成为连通地下文化和主流商业的桥梁。——《文艺研究》

6. 您如何看待嘻哈音乐中的草根文化？

您对调查问卷有什么建议？

关于嘻哈音乐有什么想说的？

谢谢您的配合！