YSYS Online Documentaries:
Performing Authenticity in Chinese Hip Hop

by

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Abstract

Hip Hop has become one of the most popular cultural phenomena in China due to commodification as well as to the broadcast of Hip Hop related variety shows. The unique path of Chinese Hip Hop has raised questions about the contextualization of its authenticity.

This paper collected 9 episodes of documentaries concerning Chinese Hip Hop produced by the niche media "YISHIYISE" from which five themes were generated through deductive thematic analysis. The concept of hybridization provided a perspective that views Chinese Hip Hop as mixed product with both local and global features. Meanwhile, in facing commercial assimilation, the perception of defining underground as a necessity to authentic Hip Hop is becoming fluid and dynamic among Chinese artists. More importantly, as competition among artists is increasing, the core value of Hip Hop, "Peace and Love," has been brought up frequently as a means to reconstruct authenticity within the Chinese Hip Hop community.

Keywords:　　Chinese Hip Hop; authenticity; thematic analysis; assimilation; hybridization; underground

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YSYS   YISHIYISE Cultural Communication Company

Chapter 1.

Introduction

Hip Hop has become one of the most recognizable cultural phenomena in China as a result of the stimulation of commercial forces and decoration from television shows after 2017. For instance, one of the biggest video platforms in China, IQIYI, self-produced a variety show called "The Rap of China", which gained tremendous popularity, hitting the viewership record of 100 million at a record rate after the issue of its first episode on June 24, 2017 (IQIYI, 2017). As of now, "The Rap of China" has been successfully broadcasted for four seasons. Meanwhile, multiple video platforms in China aside from IQIYI, such as Mango TV and Bilibili, scramble to pour investments into producing variety shows featuring Chinese Hip Hop culture. With the popularity of these talent shows, slang such as "freestyle", "battle", "beef," and especially "keep it real", which used to belong to the underground Hip Hop scene, have been dragged into daily language practices of Chinese netizens online.

The year 2017 was when Hip Hop culture exploded in popularity as the result of commercialization, but it was not the year during which Hip Hop culture was nurtured in China. With the trend provoked by these talent shows, more and more underground artists have been introduced to the mainstream market and have gained unprecedented opportunities to perform in front of the public. Simultaneously, with the prosperity of Hip Hop in China comes a number of great controversies. Firstly, underground artists often complain about cultural appropriation by commercial forces ruining the authenticity of Hip Hop. While the show "The Rap of China" was on, numerous artists on the internet had released their self-made diss tracks to criticize the role of capital in assimilating Hip Hop culture. In the Hip Hop genre, diss tracks are mainly songs made by artists to express their feud with others or to exemplify their discontent, emotions, and opinions in response to specific phenomena. Secondly, People's Daily, a newspaper which represents the official mouthpiece of China, also dropped a review with regards to this spread of subculture and its effects on Chinese society (People's Daily, 2018). The article put several subcultures, including Hip Hop, through a conservative lens for observation. While this review partly affirmed the legitimacy of subculture for providing

an emotional outlet for certain groups of people, it also queried some of the side effects that subculture had brought to the younger generation. For instance, the content of drug use and violence embedded in the lyrics of rap songs is usually criticized for not being in accordance to the traditional social values that have been advocated in China for a long time. Apart from that, overexposure is a double-edged sword, whether to some artists or to the Hip Hop genre itself. For example, one of the most famous rappers, PG one, had been criticized because of his inappropriate misogynistic lyrical use as well as for his scandal with another female celebrity. In order to mitigate some negative images of Chinese Hip Hop, during January of 2018, multiple video platforms decided to remove rappers or guests with tattoos from television shows. This act was called the "temporary Hip Hop ban" (South China Morning Post, 2018)."

The debate surrounding the trend of Chinese Hip Hop culture shows that this genre is still a subcultural form compared to dominant culture in China, regardless of its unprecedented popularity. As Hip Hop is a genre born from within the American black community, it is no wonder that the content of deviant behavior often appears in the lyrics of Hip Hop music, representing social injustice from which certain races have suffered. As Rose (1994) states, Hip Hop was a black cultural production revealing the authentic experience of marginalization.

The term authenticity within American Hip Hop often comes from being honest to artists' identities while at the same time revealing their background within race and class struggle. However, the case of Chinese Hip Hop complicates this straightforward analysis of authenticity. When Hip Hop culture expanded its popularity and spread across the ocean to China, where it shares a different context compared to its birth place, America, neither the sensational content targeted by Chinese authorities, nor the American slang used on "The Rap of China" and commercial video platforms like IQIYI were able to capture the authenticity of this sub-genre.

Accepting the subcultural appropriation of Hip Hop by commercial forces and conservative attitudes concerning Hip Hop within Chinese dominant ideology, the main goal of this project is to perceive the dynamics of authenticity within Chinese Hip Hop culture. Meanwhile, in consideration of the background of Hip Hop as being an import to China, it is necessary to view decades of practice by Chinese Hip Hop artists as a production of cultural hybridization (Kraidy, 2006), which means we need to evaluate the

role played by both globalization and localization during the process of building authenticity in Chinese Hip Hop.

This project focuses on analyzing the Hip Hop documentaries produced by a niche corporate media called YISHIYISE (hereafter, YSYS), and uses this data-set as a proxy which neither represents the mainstream media voice in China, nor exemplifies Chinese internet giants such as IQIYI. However, before going into the literature review, it is necessary to introduce some background information about YSYS.

1.1. The Background of YSYS

In 2012, YSYS was established as a media organization based on content production, youth audience communication, and community operation. With the slogan 'The world is sinking and we are partying', YSYS has gained fame for its on-the-spot experience coverage of subculture groups' unique perspectives. Another fact about YSYS is that it used to be sub-division of Vice Media and operated under the name Vice China until September of 2019, when YSYS announced the end of its collaboration with Vice Media (Biede, n.d.).

The documentaries concerning Hip Hop were selected as cases for this study because YSYS still positions itself as an equivalent to Vice. Though it has gone through a transformation period after 2019, the shareholders and core creators of YSYS remain unchanged. Therefore, the local team still plays the roles of participant, creator, and promoter of youth culture and trend in China. Based on this, YSYS represents an alternative to China's official media, and mainstream video platforms, and also offers a transnational perspective on local subcultures.

It is also worthwhile to understand the reasons why specific niche media is relying on subcultures at all. On the one hand, those people who are fascinated with particular subcultural types have become the editors, photographers and producers of the niche media organizations and mostly have their own experience participating in subcultures. As a result, these people still observe the development of subcultures as well as "espouse the underground ideology" (Thornton, 1996, pg.233). On the other hand, the attention on subgenres in niche media is a necessity to maintain subscriptions. The revenue of niche media is related to the popularity of the subcultures it is affiliated

with, and therefore the scrutiny of the underground scene of Chinese Hip Hop is a key for a company like YSYS to keep its main audiences.

Chapter 2.

Literature Review

2.1. Hip Hop as globalized production

In general, Hip Hop is mixture of four basic elements: MC/Rap, DJ, Break dance, and graffiti. As a music genre or culture, the birthplace of Hip Hop is New York City - a melting pot that exhibits diversity in cultural and racial dimensions. Within this circumstance, Hip Hop was born thorough the early fusion of African American and Latino American cultures as well as cultures of immigrants from Caribbean coastal countries (La Verdad, 2016).

The 1970s was the time when block parties were gaining fame among the African American and Latino communities in the Bronx of New York City. DJ Kool Herc, a Jamaican immigrant DJ, is known as a pioneer and influencer of the earliest development of Hip Hop. In 1973, he hosted what is widely regarded as the first Hip Hop party called "Back to school jam". DJ Kool Herc is considered the father of Hip Hop mainly because of his creation of a type of music sampling called 'beat juggling', a technique in which he used two copies of the same record to seamlessly mix the break of a song back and forth to extend it, therefore mobilizing more people who came for the party to dance on the beat (Forman & Neal, 2004).

Another important element incorporated in Hip Hop is emceeing or rapping, which is a language delivery skill that needs performers to speak on the beat with rhyme and wordplay. What makes rap music an indispensable unit of Hip Hop culture as a whole is not only the musicality, but also its social and cultural creativity mostly lead by black and other disfranchised communities. When rap was born in the mid-1970s as a part of African-American and Afro-Caribbean youth culture, it was adopted by artists in contemporary America to articulate the difficulties or pleasures of black urban life (Rose, 1994). Even though rap music mostly dealt with personal experience, its existence as an observer or narrator reveals the attempts of black youth to reshape their own history and to respond to their economic struggle and unguaranteed civil rights. Since rapping shows the lifestyle of an individual to the environment that nurtures cultural resistance and exhibits the image of ghetto that resonates with millions of voiceless, this genre

deserves attention, and more than that, can be viewed as a "cultural projection" or "enabling source" for black youth and community solidarity (Neal & Forman, 2004, p.61). In addition to DJ Kool Herc's innovation as the basis of Hip Hop, there were other artists who had played roles in building the pillars of Hip Hop's foundation. For instance, Afrika Bambaataa founded "The Zulu Nation" not just to promote Hip Hop culture but also to persuade young black people to get rid of the violent activities within gangs (Bennett, 2004), DJs like Grandmaster Flash also take credit for enriching the Hip Hop genre by introducing the "Beat Box" technique to let DJs switch from being beat mixers to beat makers.

It is relatively hard to pinpoint the exact time when Hip Hop permeated into the mainstream and commercial market, since this time was intertwined with the birth of Hip Hop. "Rapper's Delight" by the Sugarhill Gang in 1979 was widely considered as the first Hip Hop record to gain popularity, as the word "Hip Hop" kept repeating in the first verse of this song (Neal & Forman, 2004, p. 62). After the 1980s emerged enormous classic tracks, and meanwhile artists started to adopt the video form to promote Hip Hop. For example, in the video for "Planet Rock" by Afrika Bambaataa, the images of b-boys, graffiti, and neighborhood parties were repeatedly referenced to help set a basis for the public of what Hip Hop looks like. The age of the 1980s was also when movies and documentaries related to Hip Hop such as "Beat Street," "Breakin," "Style war," "Wild Style", and so on came out (Hebdige, 2004). More recently, after the 1990s, music artists like Michael Jackson and Madonna started to hire Hip Hop dancers to appear in their music videos. The visual production paved the way for lifting Hip Hop from underground to mainstream on the one hand, and on the other, it also helped increase the appeal of Hip Hop across the boundaries of the birthplace and promote its transfer worldwide.

2.2. The history of Chinese Hip Hop

2.2.1. The infancy of Chinese Hip Hop

In 2017, China witnessed the trend of Hip Hop changing from a marginalized subculture to a favored element in the entertainment industry (Yang & Feng, 2019). It is worthwhile to articulate the path of Chinese Hip Hop culture, the time when Hip Hop

arrived in China, as well as the process that Chinese Hip Hop culture has gone through before its explosion in 2017.

The infancy of Chinese Hip Hop can be traced to the time between the middle of the 1980s and the early the 1990s (Chen, 2013). When videos helped Hip Hop culture spread across the whole United States, this visual language simultaneously enabled the subcultural wave to stretch across the barrier of time and space to every corner of the world. In the early 1980s the Chinese government started to implement the policy of "Opening and Reform". After ten years of political struggle and ideological conflict within the Chinese Communist Party, the policy of "Opening and Reform" was not only the motivation that China needed to reboot its market economy, but was also representative of the intention of this country to start to embrace entertainment production from overseas. The first incident that brought the wave of Hip Hop in China was the importation of a film in 1987 called "Breakin" which was originally directed in America in 1984. The increasingly rich entertainment life enabled Chinese youth to have a glimpse of break dance (Deng & Yu, 2020). Later, in 1988, with the stimulation of this trend, Youth Film Studio of the Beijing Film Academy produced a movie named "Rock Kids," which mainly depicted a young dancer who was an employee of a dance crew who tried his best to make modern innovation by combining elements of break dance into his work (Vanetta Mcgahan, 2017). Since then, Hip Hop culture had taken root in China from the fame of break dance, influenced by the impact of importation and also as a result of entertainment industry practitioners' early imitation of the western world.

Except for the spread of Hip Hop dance in China, the Chinese music industry went through a reform through the introduction of a rap performance, "AHLAM Diary", created by Hong Kong singer Ah Lam (Wang, 2020). This song was a milestone in the Chinese music industry for breaking the record of being the fastest song in Asia during the 1980s and was the widely recognized as the first Chinese Hip Hop song produced outside Mainland China. Specific areas like Hong Kong or Taiwan experienced the Hip Hop trend prior to Mainland China due to the newly opened cultural environment and the limited dissemination or acceptance in the mainland. Later in mainland China, one of the most famous rock legends, Cui Jian, released a song named "It's not that I don't understand" in 1989. The lyrics, "look at the concrete jungle like wheat in the field, look at the sea of people and traffic jams, look right and left, back and forth, I still do not read it," was performed by Cui Jian through rapping skills, so as to express the confusion that

people felt when they were in the midst of urban expansion and social change in late 1980s (Baidu encyclopedia, n.d.). Aside from Cui Jian's innovation, the first rapper in China was Dai Bing, who started his own rap career after graduating from a foreign affairs college and then founding the first Chinese rap crew called "D.D.jiezou" (meaning rhythm). Chinese Hip Hop culture during its infancy was also affected by the culture flows from neighboring countries like Korea and Japan, whose featured K-pop and J-pop artists had already become subjects mimicked by Chinese youth after the mid 1990s.

2.2.2. The steady rise of Chinese Hip Hop

In 21st century, Chinese Hip Hop has entered a phase of steady rise. In this period, Chinese Hip Hop culture was inseparable from the initial commercial exploration represented by pop singers such as Jay Chou, Leehom Wang, etc.

At the same time, the effort from the grassroots represented by underground artists was also a force to be reckoned with in the growth of Chinese Hip Hop culture. In 2001, one rap crew called "Yin Ts'ang" (meaning hidden) was founded in Beijing. Four members from different nations including China, America, and Canada joined together and started making rap music in a small apartment. These members are frequently referred as the originators for the mandarin Chinese Hip Hop movement in the early 2000s because the first Chinese Hip Hop album they dropped, "Serve The People", gained praise by people from the music industry in 2003 (Anatomy of a Problem, n.d.). As a representative of the Hip Hop force in northern China, Yin Ts'ang came out of the grassroots and gained respect from underground artists while also having done commercial collaborations with many brands like Nike, Philips, and the Chinese Basketball Association. In addition, another group called Bamboo crew was also recognized as the representative of Hip Hop culture in southern China when they was based in Shanghai in 2002.

Rap artists in the early 2000s mostly form groups to release their music works to earn fame. As the saying goes: One generation plants the trees, another gets the shade. In this case, the cooperation of former generations would become trees of experience, in whose cool shade the younger Chinese Hip Hop revolutionaries of tomorrow would prosper.

With the experience of previous pioneers, the prototype of independent Hip Hop music labels came on stage. By music label, Hip Hop music genre means a brand, an intangible asset or a highly abstract symbol of a series of musical works. In addition to that, "label" can also be understood as a company. As a shell of a label alone is not enough, the music content is the most important component of a label (Sun, 2020). The musician under the label is responsible for the creation of the music content of the label, and the label company will sign a written agreement with the musician, stipulating a series of issues such as the creation of music content, deadline and copyright ownership.

In 2004, MC Si was not satisfied with his small success, so he started to recruit members in Beijing to establish the first Chinese Hip Hop music label named "Long Men Zhen" (meaning dragon door phalanx). The formation of "Long Men Zhen" was a gathering of many struggling rappers and reflected their determination to succeed with support from each other. Since then, Hip Hop music labels with local characteristics have sprung up in almost every province in China. For example, Jing Qi Shen in Guangdong, CDC Rap House in Sichuan, Gosh Music in Chongqing, Nous and Hong Hua Hui in Xian, etc. Although Hip Hop labels exist around the country, labels based in other regions are relatively isolated compared to areas like Beijing, Sichuan and Chongqing.

In addition to forming groups or joining in Hip Hop music labels to gain reputation, grassroot rapping battles also provide stages for rappers to gain fame in the underground scene. In 2001, an American living in China named Dana Burton founded Iron Mic, a rap battle in which contestants are asked to improvise sentences within in a given time, with the results being judged by the volume of cheers from the audience (Goldsmith & Fonseca, 2018, p. 118). Iron Mic is the oldest Chinese rap competition and once represented the highest honor in underground scene. While generations of rappers have recognized Iron Mic as the representative rap competition of underground Hip Hop culture, there are some other classic rap competitions with minimal commercial endorsement that are still able to attract numerous Hip Hop insiders to engage in, such as "8 Mile Underground" and "Gan Yi Piao", organized in the Xian province.

With the evolution of the Internet, the ways for youth to accept Hip Hop music has completely changed. The effect of the Internet blurring the boundary between online

and offline has enabled Hip Hop culture to gradually penetrate Chinese youth culture and entertainment life in all aspects. A number of Hip Hop music labels led by "CDC Rap House" and "Gosh," have seen their heyday after their inception by hosting more livehouse performances to build fan bases around their communities (Ma, 2020). Some well-known music festivals in China such as "Midi" and "Strawberry" have also begun to set up Hip Hop arenas and special concerts for Hip Hop singers. Through early rock singers' innovation, participation of grassroots, the establishment of tribes related to Hip Hop, as well as the internet for creating a non-barrier platform for information exchange, Chinese Hip Hop headed to its explosion of popularity in 2017.

2.2.3. The explosion of Chinese Hip Hop

With the release of "Rap of China" by IQIYI in 2017, Chinese Hip Hop officially entered the mainstream to be a product of capital. The show "Rap of China" only had one alcohol brand sponsorship during the first episode of the first season, but it attracted a tremendous amount of sponsorships when the show became viral. Later on, Nongfu Spring became the show's title sponsor at the cost of 120 million yuan, and "Rap of China" successively received other sponsorship partners such as McDonalds, Absolut Vodka and Xiaomi Technology (Wang, 2019).

After its broadcast, Hip Hop musicians featured in the show became new idols for the public. Singers who appeared on the show have experienced a soaring increase of followers on social media causing brands in various industries targeting young people to see Hip Hop as an entry point into youth market, making advertisements featuring rappers commonplace. Even Chinese official media have become more interactive with Hip Hop culture, with raps songs being utilized to promote policy making by media reports during the time of "Two Sessions" (Gao, 2020).

While the development of Chinese Hip Hop was seemingly hitting its prime, the explosion effect had laid its shade over the subgenre at the same time. Firstly, rappers who enjoyed success due to their appearances on variety shows were still fewer compared to others who didn't. More underground artists who were fed up with the cultural appropriation started to degrade reality shows for completely changing Chinese Hip Hop into a pure symbol of entertainment, sanitizing its authenticity. Secondly, the attitude of official media became ambiguous, as some of the over explicit content of Hip

Hop music had been criticized for violating China's traditional moral standards. For example, lyrics related to "white powder" in Chinese alludes to drugs, which is seriously inconsistent with the morals of an anti-drug society. In consideration of the fact that "realness" or "authenticity" has become a variable in what makes or breaks in Chinese Hip Hop, it is then necessary to borrow and review the standards of "authenticity" in the original area of Hip Hop.

2.3. "Authenticity" within Hip Hop

In the field of philosophy, the concept of "authenticity" is usually used to describe the state of being "original" or at least being "faithful to origin" to represent something accurately and reliably (Varga & Guignon, 2020). In this sense, stating something is authentic means it is recognized or reputed to be original. Similarly, in the world of sociology, authenticity plays a crucial role in the process of individuals' establishment and portrayal of their identities, especially in within a particular subculture. With regard to the realm of subculture, this theory relies heavily on articulating the style of certain subcultural groups. For instance, scholars from the Birmingham School have conducted research on some specific subcultural groups like "Mods" and "Rockers," and have stated that the unique dress code of these groups was an imaginary solution to resist cultural hegemony during the post-war period (Hall et al., 2003).

Based on the subculture theory, Hebdige (1979) used the concept of bricolage to demonstrate how punk groups appropriated objects from the commercial world and then readjusted them to create new meanings to represent their distinct thoughts against the dominant ideology. This symbol of guerrilla warfare can also be seen from early Hip Hop culture when participators decorate themselves with large chunky and fake jewelry to mock the fetish value across the western world at the very beginning (Rose, 1994). To explain the style or "hipness" within in the youth subculture, Thornton (1996) coined the term "subcultural capital" - a concept built from Bourdieu's "cultural capital" which represents the correlation between an individual's taste and social-class status. While Thornton did not attempt to include the mode of Marxist class analysis, she tied "subcultural capital" with subcultural insiders who gained respect or reputation, not only by processing enough knowledge within the group but also through their roles of deciding the standard of culture they practiced. Knowledge concerning Hip Hop is vital to this culture and is even regarded as the fifth element of Hip Hop culture in addition to

DJing, Rapping, Dancing and Graffiti (Love, 2016). In the Hip Hop genre, artists construct their authenticity in ways which they accumulate "subcultural capital", such as what dress code they comply with or their familiarity with hip culture including language and behavior.

The conventions of Hip Hop usually emphasize two primary "thematic concerns: identity and location" (Rose, 1994, p. 46). Yet, individual identification is never a simple psychological process, but rather psychosocial development profoundly impacted by politics, economy and culture. Since the inception of Hip Hop culture, Hip Hop artists have played a role of "keeping it real" by expressing crisis of their identity. This type of psychological crisis refers to individual's uncertainty about identity containing individual's worry related to social status (Erikson, 1968, 1993). In the American context, identity crisis and even anger were shown in Hip Hop as a result of "racism, gender and class oppression" (Rose, 1994, p. 61). McLeod (1999) also found that authenticity in Hip Hop was usually claimed when it came to the topics of racial identification. Within his findings, he pointed out that authentic claims like "Keep it real" not only represented artists expressing their candid selves but also centered around black people while distinguishing whiteness out of discussions.

Unlike the Macleod, Harrison (2009) argued that the racial binary cannot be regarded as a standard for judging authenticity of Hip Hop since there exists many white rappers such as Eminem who have already achieved authenticity based on his personal experience. With more exposure of white Hip Hop artists, race is no longer a primary indicator of authenticity in Hip Hop. Rather, class-status has become another prominent signifier of authenticity instead (Hodgman, 2013). In addition to that, non-black artists who strived for respect also claimed to be authentic for adopting the strategy of showing skills related to Hip Hop culture (Fraley, 2009), such behavior can be understood as reflexing subcultural capital.

Thus, the authenticity of Hip Hop culture prominently lies in its resistance to racism and reflection of economic struggle. Similarly, this tradition of Hip Hop criticizing social reality has been inherited in the Chinese context. It is necessary to consider the birthtime of Chinese Hip Hop was overlapped with the period of Chinese Opening up and Reform, when tremendous transformation had taken place in this country's social and economic system. On the one hand, though frequent population mobility had

contributed to economic growth, it used to be a common phenomenon that people migrated from disfranchised areas suffer from prejudice in metropolitans. On the other hand, Young people grew up experiencing great changes around and facing the fierce collision of eastern and Western culture during this period. Mass media constantly present people's lives at the top of the pyramid in front of Chinese people (Dai, 2019), which is the image of "yearning life" equivalent to the myth of "American dream." It was quite common for early artists to complain about their economic struggle in their Hip Hop careers when they strived for fame and failed to realize social expectations.

The concept of "Dramaturgical theory" is also relevant to explain artists' behavior of "Staying true to yourself", usually described as "Keeping it real" within the field of Hip Hop. According to "Dramaturgical theory" (Goffman, 1959), in order to achieve the ideal social interaction effect, individuals divide social life into frontstage and backstage. In the frontstage, individuals meet social expectations through various standardized expressions and play their given roles by following the existing rules, whereas the backstage is the space that belongs to an individual as a place to resolve anxiety and release emotions. Applying this concept into the Hip Hop Culture, mundane life can be regarded as the frontstage for artists, while Hip Hop is regarded as the backstage and empowers artists to express more authentic selves and candid characteristics that they may not present in the frontstage.

Another key to differentiating authentic and inauthentic Hip Hop is to recognize the clear division between underground and mainstream. Hebdige (1979) pointed out that any subcultural types cease to be authentic when they have been commodified. In its birthplace, America, Hip Hop culture, especially the music, has already been brought onto the mainstream stage and switched from being a representation of the struggling experience of marginalized black community to being a mass-produced and prevailing product. In this case, artists' actions of selling out and being commercial also disrupts Hip Hops authenticity or street credibility, as they migrated their own royalty of music distribution to large music label companies (McLeod, 1999).

Through browsing the Chinese thesis database "CNKI," the number of papers related to Chinese Hip Hop has been rising since 2017. This result is highly correlated with the popularity of the show "Rap of China." Nevertheless, most articles paid attention to the prevalence of the variety show itself and neglected the subjectivity of Chinese Hip

Hop culture. The only paper related to "authenticity" put emphasis on the production process of variety shows (Yang & Feng, 2020), and lacked investigation of Hip Hop insiders and the discussions about dynamics of authenticity in a Chinese context.

Derived from the above literature review of Hip Hop culture and its decades of development in China, the train of thought with regards to the construction of authenticity can be divided into the three branches below.

For starters, the authenticity of Hip Hop culture has been widely linked to the degree of artists staying true to their experience and identity which includes their own socio-economic backgrounds. Even though the ethnic factor still plays an important role in the expression of authenticity (Macleod, 1999), today's artists also pay attention to the expression of socio-economic struggle and gathering "subcultural capital" to maintain authenticity when they participate in the Hip Hop genre (Fraley, 2009; Hodgman, 2013; Thornton, 1996). Correspondingly, the field of Hip Hop is regarded as a shelter for these artists to articulate their authentic experience.

Secondly, the construction of Chinese Hip Hop culture is also a process of hybridization that consists of dynamics between globalization and localization (Kraidy, 2006). Thus, it is important not only to consider to what extent Chinese artists are correlated with some representative elements of American Hip Hop that reflects authenticity but also to investigate any localized elements adopted by artists to express their authenticity. For instance, the introduction of dialect use in Chinese Hip Hop is deemed as an innovation for artists to create new forms of authenticity, and such innovation is invokes nostalgia and reflexing pride in constructing their cultural identity (Wang, 2013, p. 363).

On top of the above, Chinese Hip Hop culture has been under pressure mainly from the assimilation of commercial force these days, including controversies as a result of increasing popularity of this culture since the year 2017. It is essential to investigate Chinese artists' attitudes toward Hip Hop's commercialization, whether optimistic or pessimistic. This is necessary not only to investigate how artists preserve the authenticity in this commodification process but also to examine whether the binary standard of considering "mainstream and commercial" as inauthentic has been challenged or not in the Chinese Hip Hop community. In addition, it is also necessary to

examine the ways how these artists resolve the disagreement toward commercialization and comply with the core value of "Peace and Love" in Hip Hop.

The fact there is lack of discussion that tied "authenticity" with the development of Hip Hop culture in Chinese academia has inspired this study to gain an insight on how the claim of "authenticity" from artists functioning within those three different social conditions above, which are related to artists' socio-economic background, the process of glocalization, and commercial assimilation respectively. In the next chapter, this paper is going to explain the reason for choosing videos from YSYS for analysis, the sampling strategy for documentaries, and the analysis approach this paper used.

Chapter 3.

Methodology

The history and the disputes above raise questions about the nature and role of "authenticity" within Chinese Hip Hop. But the case of Chinese Hip Hop complicates the straight-forward analysis by American scholars. To explore the research question, data was mainly collected from documentary series made by Chinese niche media company YSYS, whose main content is localized subculture for Chinese youth audiences. While the documentaries only capture a fraction of what happens in Chinese Hip Hop, it is still important to look at these videos because as Thornton (1996, p.236) stated, media plays an indispensable role in the process of authenticating certain subculture types. Plus, compared to the video platforms like IQIYI and the Chinese authority media organization, YSYS offers a relatively transnational perspective due to its history of cooperation with Vice media, allowing this paper to gain an alternative voice of observation of Chinese Hip Hop. It is also worth noting that this paper only focused on the Hip Hop music element as a narrow example of Chinese Hip Hop culture, as other elements of Hip Hop like dancing and graffiti do not share the same controversies surrounding authenticity as the music genre does in China.

3.1. The data collection process

As YSYS had gone through a brand transformation, the challenge is that some of their videos were deleted. However, they have been reuploading previous videos onto the internet. Therefore, documentaries were collected by browsing several mainstream video platforms in China and as well as YouTube from overseas. In the end, the videos were collected from websites including Bilibili, Tencent, and YouTube. The standard of sampling adopted by this paper is purposive sampling, which is also viewed as a "judgmental sample" or a type of nonprobability sample (Lavrakas, 2008). The primary purpose of this is to generate a data sample that can logically be suitable for this study. In this study, the primary purpose is to select all the documentaries not only produced by YSYS but also related to Chinese Hip Hop culture. After preliminary screening, I found there are 26 episodes of documentaries concerning Chinese Hip Hop culture. However, among those documentaries, 13 of them are related to Hip Hop dance, which is usually

considered as a form of the sport by Chinese academia. In addition, this Hip Hop element has barely raised any controversy in China (Zhang, 2017). Apart from that, those 13 episodes of documentaries related Hip Hop dance only introduce the development of each style of dance in China, such as breaking, popping, locking, urban dance, and none of these bring up the discussion about artists' struggling experience of constructing authenticity when they practice the Hip Hop dance. For the documentaries concerning Hip Hop music, there are also four episodes unrelated to the above discussion of authenticity.

After the preliminary familiarization of the documentaries above, I decided to narrow down the data to 9 episodes as the main data-set for analysis because the other 17 episodes mentioned are not relevant to my research focus. According to the sampling standard, Table 1. below shows the collection of documentaries concerning Chinese Hip Hop music with attributes including the year of production, the title of series, the video platform, and the number of episodes as well as the upload date.

Table 1.   The documentaries related to Chinese Hip Hop produced by YSYS

Year of Production	Title	Episodes	Video platform	Upload date
2014	Born to be	3	Bilibili	May 1, 2017
2016	Young Chinese	1	YouTube	April 14, 2020
2017	Trap in Southwest	2	YouTube	April 8, 2020
2017	Iron Mic	1	Tencent	November 16, 2020
2017	Hongkong area	2	YouTube	April 8, 2020

3.2. Research design

As a genre, Hip Hop culture usually contains content and life experience that audiences can resonate with. Multiple studies have been done to analyze the production within this field in order to generate themes conveyed by Hip Hop (Martinez, 1997; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009). Most of the methodological choices of the above studies comply with the quantitative path as they identified themes from sampling songs and counted the percentage of appearance of each theme, whether it was related to misogyny, oppression or racism, etc. However, themes can also be generated qualitatively (Tyson et al., 2011) since "frequency does not necessarily constitute saliency" McLeod (1999, p. 138). Apart from that, given the fact that investigating cases

requires detailed description of cases and thematic analysis (Yin, 2018), refining themes from data is a common process for Hip Hop scholars to examine cases that meet their research goals (Love, 2016; Tyson et al., 2011). Thus, for the analysis of the episodes, this paper mainly used a thematic analysis approach qualitatively with an intent to develop themes from the transcription data of spoken texts by or centering around the artists appearing in documentaries (Creswell, 2009). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a approach for identifying, analyzing and reporting "patterns" within data. This method places emphasis on how certain "topics are constructed" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.175), which is consistent with the research goal of this paper, which is to investigate how authenticity has been pictured from the verbal claims of Hip Hop artists in documentaries.

The whole process of thematic analysis was carried out in three steps. The first step was familiarization of the data-set and transcription of the audio text. After the transcription of the audio text from documentaries, the second key step was coding. Even though thematic analysis can be conducted deductively and inductively (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this paper codes within data were identified deductively and involved analyzing data with evidence that the researcher is expected to find based on pre-existing literatures, rather than coding data inductively.

Table 2.   Summary of the code sheet

Social condition	Codes
The background of Chinese Hip Hop artists	• Express candid self • Reveal economic struggle • Against stereotypes towards marginal ethnicity • Master performance skills • Familiar with Hip Hop history
The glocalization of Chinese Hip Hop	• Disagree with complete imitation from overseas • Combine local dialect • Express pride in one's own culture
Chinese Hip Hop confronting with the commercial assimilation	• Proud of participating underground competition • Against commercialization of Hip Hop • Embrace commercialization of Hip Hop • Transformation of underground scene • Criticize the use of vulgar language • Advocate unity

The literature review in chapter two referred to three dimensions of social conditions that laid the roots for artists to build their authenticity; these three branches of thought were the inspiration for generating the codes used in this study. A summary of the code sheet is provided to show which social condition or context the codes are associated with (see in Table 2.). The coding step also involves going through the text and collating together all the transcribed data into groups tagged by codes, which allowed for an overview of shared meanings that may be repeated and emphasized throughout the data.

The third step was to review all the codes, find correlation among them, and start generating themes (see in Table 3.). Generally, themes are broader than codes.

Table 3.   Turning codes into themes

Codes	Themes
• Express candid self	Coping with identity crisis
• Stereotypes towards marginal ethnicity	
• Reveal economic struggle	
• Master performance skills	Accumulation of subcultural capital
• Familiar with Hip Hop history	
• Disagree with complete imitation from overseas	Constructing hybridized authenticity
• Combine local dialect	
• Express pride in one's own culture	
• Proud of participating underground competition	Commodifying authenticity
• Against commercialization of Hip Hop	
• Embrace commercialization of Hip Hop	
• Transformation of underground scene	
• Criticize the use of vulgar language	Reaffirming "Peace and Love"
• Advocate unity	

After all these three steps of thematic analysis, this study is attempts to answer the main research question below:

RQ: How do documentaries produced by YSYS construct the dynamics of authenticity in Chinese Hip Hop?

Chapter 4.

Discussion

4.1. Coping with identity crisis

Artists tend to combine personal background and past life experience to perform on the battle stage, where individuals find legitimacy to deliver their own negative emotions. When they could not settle down based on the secular standard, Hip Hop had provided them with a shelter to display their more authentic identification and share their identity crisis among other insiders including audiences of the Hip Hop community.

"I can find my true self in freestyle battle," said Mc Dawei, "why would I be malicious in freestyle battle? Because I was projecting my martial arts training experience to this competition, which was for defeating your opponent" (Biede, 2017,1:56). "words would come out my mouth naturally when I listened to the music. I could sing things with the beat that I wouldn't say so in my real life." said Jia wei, another Beijing-born Hip Hop artist (Miaoshayiqie, 2017, 4:34).

Except for showing candid personalities in Hip Hop music, artist Mc Tangking said, "Back then, I didn't get into the college, I had no job. When I graduated from high school, my parents were disappointed in me" (Biede, 2017, 18:02). This struggle he had in education and work urged him to join into this genre to relieve the pressure from parents' high expectations. In addition, an artist from Hong Kong, Youngqueenz, said, "In the real world, I may be nothing. But in the rap game, I can make something" (Biede, 2020, 1:46).

Not only is economic struggle a factor causing identity crisis, as several rappers articulated in the documentaries, this type of crisis is also related to the social group that artists originally belong to. In China there still exists some remote areas inhabited by numbers of ethnic minorities who suffer from negative stereotypes, even though they have migrated to metropolitan areas for economic reasons. Mc Majun, from the Xinjiang province said, "I spoke out the thoughts and feelings of people who were leaving their hometown for the big cities" (Biede, 2017, 4:32). Given the fact that ethnic minorities suffered from prejudice and felt excluded due to the complicated history around terrorist

violence in China, Hip Hop music had offered artists, especially those from minority communities, an outlet to combat the bad reputation of their own ethnicities nationwide. It is evident that in mobilizing stories about his hometown, MC Majun's authentic rap lyrics are something that audiences can resonate with.

Therefore, for Chinese artists, building authenticity is a process for them to cope with their identity crisis. On the one hand, Hip Hop has always been a "backstage" to show their candid characteristics. On the other hand, we should notice that this identity crisis results from economic struggle and stereotypes towards certain ethnic groups. Such factors could also be seen in the Western context that significantly impacted artists when they construct authenticity.

4.2. Accumulation of subcultural capital

The process by which Chinese artists build authenticity is also a process of accumulation of "subcultural capital", which is a term that can be "objectified" and "embodied" (Thornton, 1996, p.27). Correspondingly, the subcultural capital within the Hip Hop community can be objectified as a wealthy collection of records or a particular dress code that artists comply to. Chinese Hip Hop artists care more about owning the knowledge and abundant experience of participating in Hip Hop events. Individuals can claim to be more authentic if they can recite a lot of historical facts about the development of Hip Hop. Apart from that, mastering performance skills is also a prominent factor in defining authenticity. These elements can be mirrored in the following transcriptions from the YSYS documentaries.

Mc Lil ray delivered the standard that "A good Mc must be good at battling, freestyle" (Biede, 2017, 19:53). He also pointed out that "many people listen to Hip Hop, while they lack the knowledge about pioneers such as Rakim," thus, he emphasized the importance of "showing respect since this a part of the Hip Hop learning process" (Biede, 2017, 1:04:24). Such an effort is a necessity for artists to strive for authenticity, as Jia wei claimed, "Whatever people are into, that's fine with me. What matters are their attitudes toward what they're into, as long as the passion is real" (Miaoshayiqie, 2017,1:55).

Moreover, "To freestyle battle, means that individuals must have the ability to think fast and at the same time perceive the atmosphere of the competition," Said Air, "When you are improvising on the spot, it is a test for your vocabulary and logical thinking" (Biede, 2017, 53:50). Rappers also take performing skills seriously, as artist Bridge said, "freestyle skill is a weapon to beat opponents" (Biede, 2020, 5:38).

Hip Hop artists have turned their love and exploration of Hip Hop culture into a kind of cultural capital. In the process of group identification, the members of the group reflect the glory of authenticity as Hip Hop artists through the accumulation of subcultural capital. Among them, a typical representation is the "showing off" of language ability. Such a sense of superiority provides motivation for the establishment of authenticity and the realization of identity within the group. Moreover, artists enjoy the sense of being "in the know" with regard to the historical facts about the evolution of Hip Hop, which is a necessary "manner" in the process of constructing authenticity.

4.3. Constructing hybridized authenticity

Globalization is crucial to reviewing the process of Hip Hop culture migrating from its original place to China. Within the unique path of Chinese Hip Hop culture, the opening and reform policy and the lowering of restrictions of interculture communication was not only instrumental for China to accept worldwide capital flows but was also the pivot point of embracing freer "cultural flows" (Appadurai, 1996). Nevertheless, the myth of globalization has been gradually substituted by the terms "glocalization" and "hybridization" (Shuker, 2013).This perspective focuses on "understanding of the interface of globalization and localization as a hybrid product of mixed traditions and cultural forms (Kraidy, 2006)." For Chinese Hip Hop participants, the extent of being "faithful to the original authorship" and following the characteristics of U.S. Hip Hop is a challenge when they attempt to represent authenticity within the tribe.

In this regard, rappers like Hendu nanhai thought it would be "silly" to put "n-word" or "homie" into his songs, since this behavior was not only inappropriate, but also did not reflect his Chinese identity (Biede, 2020, 3:18). At the same time, artists like Youngqueenz said, "many people think trap music is only about money and women, but I don't do that" (Biede, 2020, 2:22).

Due to the differences in social environment and cultural context between China and the United States, fully adapting so-called authentic American styles into Chinese Hip Hop for artists may seem like falling into the dilemma of cultural appropriation. Simple imitation by Chinese artists would be interpreted as pure ignorance, which will cause them to lose respect not only from colleagues but also from their audience as well, since such behavior is interpreted as inauthentic. For example, one rapping style called "trap music" which originated from the southern United States has become a well-known form of Hip Hop music (Stacey, 2020). But the term "trap" derives from Atlanta slang for describing a place for illegal drug trade. Artists from Atlanta are proficient in rapping about three elements (money, women and drugs) as a whole symbol set to reflect the social reality around them. While in the Chinese context, not only the does whole society and legal system have zero tolerance towards drug issues, the behavior of flexing is not also regular behavior of Chinese people who have been influenced by Confucianism on a cultural level. This dilemma urges and requires Chinese artists to cite more localized elements into Hip Hop music.

Hip Hop singers attach authenticity to emphasis on their hometown and origin, which is consistent with one of the two major thematic concerns: "location"(Rose, 1994, p. 64). Jia wei, for instance, took pride in his hometown, Beijing, where "people's particular dialect and behaviors" gave him so much inspiration to put the authentic local culture into his music (Miaoshayiqie, 2017, 00:14). Meanwhile, rappers from southwest China like Gai chose to use his "dialect as a characteristic" in his music, rather than putting something "Swag" that refers to the imitation of black people's music styles (Biede, 2020, 15:07). Insisting on singing in a dialect other than mandarin or English is a mode of performance that had become the trick for artist Ty to mitigate the maliciousness of cursing words. For example, while the word "Gua" may sound like the word for "retarded" in Mandarin, "it is not offensive sounding in the Sichuan dialect but rather, sounds like a kind of teasing." Said Ty (Biede, 2020, 8:14). Therefore, instead of imitating language from overseas, picking up inspirations from dialects to create wordplay and juxtaposition is a common way for Chinese artists to make playful rhymes, which reflect where rappers come from in China and gives them a greater sense of authenticity.

Artist Youngqueenz gave an example that "an American Hip Hop crew Wu-tang Clan used to sample elements from Shaw Brothers' Martial Arts movies to gain

popularity" (Biede, 2020, 4:01). In this case, he expressed his understanding of double cultural flows and his ambitions to bring this classical symbol back again into his creation. Similar to Youngqueenz's opinion, Ty stated that "even though every form of culture has its own birthplace, culture should be something shared and owned by the whole human race" (Biede, 2020, 15:53). In the context of glocalization, authenticity is a constructive and relative concept, and any race should get reasonable feedback if they truly represented their locality.

Through decades of practice by Chinese artists, Hip Hop culture from overseas is no longer a homogenous force that is going to completely dominant the artists' construction of authenticity. Nevertheless, this process of hybridization emphasizes intercultural flow where "traces of other cultures exist in every culture" (Kraidy, 2006, p. 148). It is reasonable for Chinese artists to reject some aspects of American Hip Hop culture and to claim their own cultural identity over the music. On this basis, artists firstly utilize some of the symbols from American Hip Hop and then mix it with their own flair to represent their locality in a more efficient way to build authenticity.

4.4. Commodifying authenticity

With the popularization and rapid development of mobile apps, the living space of subcultural groups has been broadened. Hip Hop cultural groups can easily share information and participate in the reproduction of subculture, while mainstream culture's incorporation of Hip Hop is softer in the process of commercialization. The sharp antagonism and independence of Hip Hop culture is externalized into symbols such as clothes and ornaments, thus exerting a subtle influence on the audience. The popularity of Hip Hop has also generated huge profits for the music industry. Hip Hop culture seeks to demonstrate its cultural identity through media tools that demand broader social acceptance.

It is worth noting that in the process of commercialization, Hip Hop culture can easily become a cultural product that can be copied and therefore, can gradually lose its characteristics and connotation, being only an empty shell without soul inside. This form of commercial assimilation has raised challenges to Chinese artists' authenticity construction, especially when numbers of affiliated artists who belong to the

underground community have proactively gone or have been passively dragged onto the mainstream stage.

According to some standards, being "underground" rather than "commercial" used to be the standard for judging whether Hip Hop artists are authentic or fake (Macleod, 1999). This way of thinking was often seen in Chinese Hip Hop artists during their early experience of participation, which means the underground scene was recognized as a key to authenticity and also against mass production and consumerism. As Thornton (1996) stated, the field of underground was espoused by subcultural artists for creating authentic production for insiders. In contrast, for the mainstream stage established by commercial force, the rebellious activity and emotions are no longer necessity. Nevertheless, the opinion proposed by Hebdige (1979) express that the boundary between mainstream and underground is unquestionable. Thornton (1996) argued that distinction between those two fields is fluid and dynamic.

What is obvious is that older generation artists inside the Chinese Hip Hop community treasure their experience of joining underground events as a form of subcultural capital. For example, individuals who have gone through a freestyle battle in the underground scene tend to claim that they present more authenticity compared to those who haven't. Even in the underground field, there exists a hierarchical order displayed between individuals.

Mc Dagou, for instance, explained that "underground freestyle competition "Iron Mic" used to be the top stage that all rappers were looking forward to perform on" (Biede, 2017, 15:35). The experience of joining an underground battle was key to the process of constructing authenticity for every artist.

Although it has become the consensus that having underground experience is crucial for artists to express authenticity and gain respect from insiders, artists are split into two groups nowadays: guardians of tradition who would like to maintain the status of being underground, and mainstream followers.

On the one hand, guardians like Lil Ray took on a pessimistic view on preserving authenticity in Hip Hop and said "now people in this country are restless, and most of them just want to be entertained" (Biede, 2017, 1:03:49). As said by Mc Showtyme, "corporate Hip Hop, K-pop, television are aggressively attacking Hip Hop," such

phenomenon would erode authenticity of Hip Hop culture (Biede, 2017, 1:11:35). Another Hip Hop pioneer called Mc Webber shared his opinion, "It seems that Hip Hop is a fashion trend in China, our life is getting better while the art elements in our music is getting less" (Biede, 2017,1:15:25). Mindful of the compromises required to be mainstream. the guardians warily distance themselves from commercialization and are unwilling to let external factors interfere with their pursuit of authenticity and freedom of self-expression. The works they create and appreciate often dare to speak of social reality. "The substance (of Hip Hop) is poignant with pickles, it has to involve political and social issues, it must have something to do with what you are prohibited to say out loud." said Mc Webber (Biede, 2017, 1:16:02).

On the other hand, some mainstream followers proposed a challenge to the standard that only "underground" is regarded as authentic. One producer, Doughboy from Hong Kong, stated that he was fed up with being called "underground" and being praised by media for having such attitude, since he had been tired of this binary thinking that separates underground and mainstream clearly as opposed to every artist holding "the same goal of making good music" (Biede, 2020, 6:54). Similarly, rapper Mc Tangking also insisted on the vision that all artists should be open minded and he wished "Iron Mic can go mainstream" with the rising fame of Hip Hop nowadays (Biede, 2017, 41:32).

The relationship between commodification and building authenticity is becoming ambiguous. Some artists held the same view about embracing commodification as they all share an unprivileged social-economic background and are eager to achieve financial independence. "These kids, when they look up and they will see Mc Majun, in his thirties, also an iron mic champion, how's he doing in music? Is he doing well? If I am living a shitty life, how could I tell these kids there's hope?" said Mc Majun, who expressed that his motivation for going mainstream was his authentic experience related to economic struggle before (Biede, 2017, 43:48). Similarly, Gai said, "I have no job and do not study in school, tell me what else I could do? All I can do is to try my best, I need money" (Biede, 2020, 13:42). In the era of deepening construction of consumer society, other elements of Hip Hop culture such as dance and graffiti gradually blend into the mainstream and form a prosperous commercial culture scene. They see their fate of incorporation into Hip Hop culture as an opportunity to realize the elevation of their own lower social class before. In this case, the authenticity representing their economic

struggle has gradually transformed into the symbol to bring them more revenue. In addition to that, the authenticity that used to be tied with subcultural capital is becoming the source of economic capital to those group of artists. The distinction between the underground and mainstream has been blurred, and the relationship between the underground battle scene and the mainstream stage is becoming ambiguous.

As an example, an organizer of underground battles named Mc Dagou described the transformation of the underground scene, "This stage (Iron Mic) is always young people even though you have no money, no connections, no contract" (Biede, 2017, 1:00:54). Through participating the underground scene, young artists could build valid authenticity and profound foundation before they go mainstream.

In summary, from the evolution of underground battles and the vision of its organizer, the underground scene is facing the role of change from the place that insiders would like to tag as "authentic" with to the incubation area for younger generations to practice performing skills to embrace more subcultural capital, to the pre-stage before they go onto the mainstream platforms.

4.5. Reaffirming "Peace and Love"

Hip Hop culture, which originated from black neighborhoods in the United States, was born with a tradition of solidarity. The poor and backward conditions of life and the gang-ridden social environments also made the black community more aware of the importance of unity. On the one hand, they join gangs; on the other hand, they advocate for a peaceful living environment and attach great importance to the emotional connection between people. Through this, the core concept of Hip Hop culture was born, and peace and love became the appeal and belief of Hip Hop lovers and artists. It advocates that young people, as individuals who practice Hip Hop culture, should unite and avoid conflict with others (Neal & Forman, 2004, p.61). Enthusiasts also believe that authentic Hip Hop culture is supposed to represent the belief of love and peace.

The most controversial issue is the negative impact of Hip Hop artists' use of vulgar language, which is also the tricky part for Hip Hop artists within their practice. Not only the official media, but Chinese Hip Hop artists as well notice the phenomenon of usage of inappropriate language and have even started to blame this issue. An

organizer of an underground rap competition complained, "Why are we so ugly and nasty, why does it have to be so serious attacking your brother," said Mc showtyme, "I am telling everybody stop using the dirty words, no one is listening to me" (Biede, 2017, 39:09). Such criticism is not rare in the underground scene, "This is not battle, what a great freestyle rapper does is the finesse of of how you combine lines to diss and make fun of your opponent." Said Mc Tangking (Biede, 2017, 56:54).

It has become a consensus that adopting verbal abuse in Hip Hop is unwelcome whether it's in mainstream market or underground scene. With the growing fame of Hip Hop culture as the result of commercial force, there has been more competition among Chinese underground Hip Hop artists. One of the most obvious phenomena is that though the underground scene is still where insiders sharpen their rhyming skills, its role of incubation has become the hotbed for cursing words, as younger generations are desperate to accumulate the fame and fight for voice rights. Such issues not only challenge the traditional Chinese value of humility, but also threaten the core value of Hip Hop's "peace and love." Thus, reciting the basic value of Hip Hop "peace and love", on the one hand, has been a way for artists to ease criticism from the public, while on the other hand has become the way of reconstructing authenticity within the Chinese Hip Hop community.

Chapter 5.

Conclusion

Overall, this paper collected 9 episodes of documentaries produced by a niche media called YSYS, to gain an insight into the meaning of authenticity of Chinese Hip Hop culture. This paper was also inspired by the definition of glocalization and hybridization, which offered a perspective of viewing Chinese Hip Hop as a mixed culture not only with the general characteristics of original Hip Hop, but also with authentic locality embodied within it. The literature review first concludes what was meant to be authentic Hip Hop in an American context. Afterward, this paper used thematic analysis to process the transcription data centering around interviewees in YSYS documentaries. The codes were deductively derived from the description of the literature review in Chapter 2. Finally, five main themes were generated after the analysis (see in Table 3).

Within these documentaries, most Chinese artists tend to express their candid self when practicing Hip Hop culture. As this genre has provided them with a backstage for expression, such function of Hip Hop can be related to the concept of "Dramaturgical theory" (Goffman, 1959). At the same time, Hip Hop artists in China construct their authenticity through revealing their experience of economic struggle and being discriminated against as a result of marginalized identity. For these artists, this strategy of framing authenticity is also a strategy of coping with identity crisis. Within the Hip Hop community, there is also a hierarchy based on the accumulation of subcultural capital, which can be embodied in performance skills and effort devoted by artists.

In terms of the authenticity built around locality, it has become a consensus that Chinese rappers consider the imitation of American Hip Hop as not only superficial ignorance but also an inauthentic manner towards their own group's identifications. More than that, adopting dialect usage might be the most efficient way of presenting authenticity within the Hip Hop community since it has a greater impact on mobilizing audiences. This process of constructing authenticity reveals a bi-directional cultural flow.

Concerning the fact that Hip Hop has been under the pressure of commercial assimilation, there is an intense struggle between building authenticity and

commodification as the latter dominates the construction of authenticity within the Hip Hop space. In this respect, artists have been divided into two groups: "guardians of underground" and "mainstream followers". The guardians claimed to be more authentic by criticizing Hip Hop culture as being entertaining rather than serious. By contrast, mainstream followers are eager to achieve commercial success although they were espousers of the underground before. In this case, their previous struggling experience of representing authenticity is becoming a selling point to mainstream culture.

Through analyzing the transformation of underground scene in documentaries, we can see that the distinction between underground and mainstream is becoming ambiguous. The underground scene already has a feature of incubation for letting young generations of artists finish the accumulation of subcultural capital in order to be more "authentic" in achieving success.

Meanwhile as the space grows bigger and more commercialized, the roots of authentic Hip Hop in China are being challenged. Because there is now a lot more competition in the rap battle scene, artists are becoming more provocative or less authentic in their lyrics. This has led some of the original rappers to question the use of inappropriate language, as it does not reflect "Peace and Love" - the core values of Chinese Hip Hop.

In conclusion, my analysis shows that the dynamics of Chinese Hip Hop culture is moving away from the standard of authenticity defined by American Hip Hop scholars, pointing out the complex relationship between constructing authenticity and hybridization as well as commercialization.

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