

Explore the Historical Context of Chinese Hip-hop/Rap Music: Construction of Chinese Blackness Field, Dialect Rap, and “Keepin’ it Real” of Mainstream Official Upsurge

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This research, borrowing the concepts of Popular Music Studies, Black Studies, and Global Hip hop studies, aims to explore the discursive authenticity of “Keepin’ It Real” in Mainland China Hip Hop/Rap Music. It has been set a Hip hop “wave” and became a popular culture styling after the network program “Rap of China” was on air in AiQiYi. But before the program streamed, Hip Hop culture has been already appearances in China Society by the “black culture”, “street style”, “underground”, and “fashion” which articulated through trans popular music industries. In this essay is mainly discussion the development of China Hip hop/Rap with the authenticity “Keepin’ It Real” before the Rap of China was on air. And use chronicle to contextualization the historical process of its blackness being accepted and transformed in China. In this process, started by the intermediary of foreigners, to the creation of using “dialect” rap music by local teenagers, presents the narrative basis of the “Keepin’ it Real” of China hip-hop culture / rap. Finally, reflect on how the mainstream media industries could continue to create the “real” appearance of China hip-hop culture/rap through the tripartite reconciliation by local cultural practice, commercial media wrapping and government intervention.

Keywords: Rap of China, Subculture, Global Hip hop discourse, Dialect Rap

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I. Preface: Issues Relating to The Rap of China

After the program "The Rap of China" was launched, it soon set off a hip-hop "trend" in the Chinese mainland. It had over 100 million viewers in just four hours, and it topped the ranking lists of mainland online variety show ratings survey agencies, such as Endata, Guduo and Vlinkage, for many times. For Chen Wei, vice president of iQiyi, the show is poised to promote the hip-hop culture/rap. "To promote a new trend, we must put the greatest forces and the greatest resources on the most accurate small incision, so as to produce a blast."¹ However, before the program was produced and broadcast, the hip-hop culture/rap music had already emerged in Chinese society, known in the forms of "black", "street", "underground" and "trendy" cultures, and connected with the local society. Therefore, the show is named "The Rap of China", which in fact discloses that iQiyi avails to its online media advantages to integrate the human, material and economic resources of China's hip-hop culture/rap, as a promising transmission chain in the construction of mainstream production of Chinese hip hop culture/rap.

So what was the Chinese hip-hop culture/rap like before "The Rap of China" was launched? How did it get into China? How did it develop? How did it connect with the local society? This paper starts with the authenticity of "keepin' it real" of the hip-hop culture/rap, and in the form of chronicle, describes the historical process of the localized reception/acceptance and transformation of its blackness in China. It shows how in this process, local youth create rap music with the "dialect", presenting the narrative basis of the "keepin' it real" spirit of the Chinese hip-hop culture/rap. It also reveals how after the launch of "The Rap of China", the mainstream media industry continues to create the "real" look of the Chinese hip-hop culture/rap through the tripartite reconciliation of local cultural practice, commercial media packaging, and government intervened transformation.

II. Localization of Blackness

Before catching on the development process of Chinese hip-hop culture/rap music, we should first understand the process of localized transformation of the blackness of hip-hop culture/rap, and its pattern after the transformation. That is, how the authenticity of "keepin' it real" of the hip-hop culture/rap is understood and interpreted in the local society? What kind of localized hip-hop is constructed. As summarized by Marina Terkourafi, the definitions of "keepin' it real" of the hip-hop culture/rap comprise: keep it street, stick to what you know, do not sell out, do not pander, do not beat around the bush, Keep Black, show no fear, avoid superfluity, do not forget where you came from, keep gangsta, never lose face, be yourself, don't back down, and express you (Terkourafi, 2010:6). Although these definitions are hip-hop products made from the multinational entertainment industry, they are referred to in the discussion of the cultural orthodoxy of "keepin' it real" of the hip-hop culture/rap. Under the operation of the transnational business system, it has been circulated in the world, attracting the attention of more young people. Therefore, the hip-hop culture/rap is no longer just taken as a "black" culture form. More researches have shifted to how the hip-hop culture/rap gets into the local, is transformed and added to the local knowledge and feelings, and becomes a context-specific way of communication and a youth cultural style. Through the process of

¹ Quoted from How about the Ratings of The Rap of China. <https://www.zqnf.com/yulebaobao/5804.html>.

global commodity circulation by the multinational media industry, the hip-hop culture/rap is no longer a cultural form that is exclusively “black”.

From the perspective of the development context of global hip-hop culture/rap music, the rappers criticize the phenomenon/situation of their social life in an outspoken way (Terkourafi, 2010:2). Such sharp critique of the mainstream culture involves the local race and power issues, showing the legitimacy of the appropriation of the black cultural form. In other words, for rappers around the world, diverting the historical context of “race” in American hip-hop culture/rap music is a way to connect oneself to mainstream society. Halifu Osumare believes that the hip-hop culture/rap, in a synchronic, mobile state, is based on the blackness of hip-hop, to re-understand the local discrepancies and explore the marginalized and neglected local social problems (Osumare, 2007:62). The spread of blackness in the world shows, on the one hand, that the local society needs a form of resistance to reflect the injustice/inequity within the local society. At the same time, it also brings its aesthetics and part of the cultural texture, to materialize the look of “keepin’ it real” of the local hip-hop culture/rap. Moreover, it shows that it is always an African-American culture, an international language, and a style that connects and defines the self-image of countless youth (Bozza, 2003: 130). Therefore, English, hip-hop and the local society are intertwined, to modify the exchange and communication rules as language, so that the hip-hop culture/rap music maintains the “keepin’ it real” legitimacy, endow local youth with an object to mimic, to challenge the life mode and norms of the local society.

According to Alastair Pennycook, the localization of hip-hop inevitably involves the complex relationship among the class, race, ethnicity and language use (Pennycook, 2007: 102). This invisibly deepens the local hip-hop culture/rap endeavor, “in the name of blackness”, to construct the “keepin’ it real” landscape geared to the local society. Around 2000, there emerged the Nederhop movement in the Netherlands. The white youth created rap works in Dutch to fight a symbolic struggle with the non-white youth (mainly of Surinam origin) who created rap works in English for the legitimacy of “keepin’ it real” in Dutch hip-hop culture/rap (Pennycook, 2009: 102; Krims, 2000; Wermuth, 2001). For the non-white Dutch youth, rap works created in English can enhance the “marginalized” and racial identity discourse of hip-hop and maintain contact with ethnic minorities in the Black Atlantic countries. However, for the white Dutch youth, the cultural authenticity of the creations in the Dutch language can strengthen the development of the Dutch hip-hop culture/rap music, and increase accessibility, thus no longer just an “exclusive” cultural form of ethnic minorities. Therefore, having pondered the priorities of local hip-hop culture/rap music – how to exert the cultural charm of the hip-hop culture/rap, recognize the orthodoxy with “keepin’ it real”, in the process of absorption and adjustment - and added the specific metropolis-based narrative method, it constantly explores and defines the core text significance.

There are two simultaneous “modes” in the process of localization: First, the “street charm” of the hip-hop culture/rap. As the dark images and sounds shaped by the multinational media and entertainment industry entered everywhere, they sowed a black seed full of rhythm, joy, movement, and physical rhythm in the hearts of local youth. Second, after a period of time, the local media, the entertainment industry, youth and the general public gained some preliminary and superficial understanding of the hip-hop culture/rap culture and the black culture. They use the local language, musical elements, social issues, life experiences, cultural patterns, clothing items, and other local elements in hip-hop culture/rap music. Transforming the original distance from the local, mysterious charm, they transform the black taste of mystic charm,

somewhat alien with the locality, and replace them with the cross-contextual, multi-lingual local hip-hop culture/rap, full of local life, discourse, ideology, identity and care. How do local youth mix local cultural forms and hip-hop blackness into “local hip-hop landscape”? At the same time, they avail to hip-hop costumes, rap music creation, street dance body rhythm to reflect their identity/identification, to construct both local language, song creation themes and global cross-ethnic, costume dresses, sports events, music rhythm, and body rhythm, which are a mixed identity of the new generation local youth.

III. Historical Context of Constructing “Keepin’ it Real” in Chinese Hip-hop Culture/Rap Music

The cultural implications of hip-hop culture/rap music are not confined to racism, but also include the hip-hop cultural rebellion. What the public ignores is the political and social phenomenon depicted in music. In the global hip-hop landscape, hip-hop has become a medium and a method of communication, addressing local social issues and replacing racism to become a way to link to the self-identity of global youth (De Kloet, 2010: 70). The rap music as a pipeline for the local society and culture to understand the black culture, integrates the language, creation themes and music elements of black culture with the black music to produce another “black” variation of the musical work trajectory and the cycle process of reproduction. The dissemination of media and the migration processes of music works through dissemination around the world are the elements of constructing the Chinese hip-hop culture/rap music landscape under the imagination effect of the local society for the transnational culture.

Textual interactions often provide exchanges of ideas, ideologies and other social practices, forming a cognition of social and textual interactions. This process strengthens the black slave discourse and writing power constructed by the Black Atlantic community (Gilroy, 1993: 77). Chinese hip-hop culture aesthetic politics is a continuation of the concept of the black diaspora aesthetics. Having constantly referring to and musing about the black music text content, it creates works connected to the local society, and manages to present the black music rhythm and body performances to the public, to evolve into a mode of creating and performing local music works. So to speak, the Chinese hip-hop culture aesthetic politics is constructed through the mutual influence and practice of the local and foreign music texts and their textuality. The contemporary politics, society, technology, and communication rate and efficiency have further refined the flow and development of the black music. The contemporary black music has been incorporated into the entire multinational media and pop music industry, becoming a style and form of the “pop” music. This incorporating action has strengthened the ability of the hip-hop culture/rap to spread around the world, but weakened the inherent (slave-style) discourse, writing critique and complaint forces of the black music itself.

In 1986, Cui Jian released the single album “It’s not That I Don’t Understand,”² which was included in the compilation album “Selection of China’s Top 100 Singers I”. The song, composed with a funk melody, was recognized by the media at that time as the first Rock ‘n Roll work and also the first rap work in China (Fan Tong, 2021).³ For Cui Jian, the soil of Chinese rap was barren. Therefore, he tried to bring various performance forms and music

² Not That I don’t Understand: https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1bx411E785/?spm_id_from=333.788.videocard.3

³ Quoted from Chinese pop music critic Fan Tong on his Douyin account in May 2021.

styles into the music circles⁴ and tried to sow the seeds for Chinese rock music and hip-hop music through continuous breakthroughs.

In 1987, the movie *Breakin’*, released by MGM, was approved to show by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television of China. In that year, it caused the sensation of break dancing among Chinese youth.⁵ Instantly there merged many hip-hop culture fans carrying tape recorders and wearing pull-up pants in the street. In 1988, the film “*Rock Youth*”⁶, screenplay written by Liu Yiran, directed by Tian Zhuangzhuang, and choreographed and starred by Tao Jin,⁷ was staged. It was modeled after the shooting techniques and dance movements of *Breakin’*, adapted from the novel by Liu Yiran, added with the personal experience of the protagonist Tao Jin, to reproduce and construct the characters to embrace, kiss and dance with close-up shots, and closeness of the camera and the characters. Tao Jin’s interpretation of the hero’s heart and break-dancing body movements reflected the “individual liberalism” tendency of Chinese youth in the 1980s, which rebelled against the traditional dance forms, broke the “mainstream”, and advocated the wild, free, body performances from the street that was not to appeal to the refined taste (Tang Hongting, 2018: 84-85). In the late 1980s, Li Xiaolong from Beijing participated in the “Baiyue Cup Break Dance Competition” held in Tianjin, and got the palm, starting his acting career. However, the hip-hop term had not yet entered China. Such a black music work was rightly taken as a form of foreign culture. At that time, the Chinese society developed a “rejection reaction” from “ideology” and “institutional level”, which soon degraded the black culture to a minority culture in the mainland area and made it hard to enter the public eye. It was until the late 1990s, when the Chinese pop music and culture industry had increasingly frequent cultural exchanges with the pop music industry of Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan that the hip-hop culture re-entered Chinese society in the forms of hip-hop dance and cultural consumer goods⁸.

“In fact, it all started in 1998. In Guangzhou, I happened to meet a friend from Hong Kong who returned from the United States. He was a breaking dancer. From then on, I was exposed

⁴ Since then, rap songs released included “Quack”, “Blue Bones” and “Beyond that Day”

⁵ Quoted from appendix 6 of *70/80 China’s New Mankind, City Pictorial*. *Breakin’* didn’t get a theatre release. But it was aired at “Dubbed Films”, a CCTV-1 program every Sunday afternoon, and was broadcast more than once. In addition, Dai Yuhui voiced the same opinion on page 32 of her article in 2019, “From The Rap of China to China’s New Rap: Symbiosis of Soft Power Policy, Internet Market and the Hip-Hop Subculture”.

⁶ “*Rock Kids*” was produced by Beijing Youth Film Studio, directed by Tian Zhuangzhuang, starring Tao Jin, Ma Ling, Shi Ke, Zhu Xun, Li Hu and Sha Baoliang. The plot was that young dancer Long Xiang dared to innovate in art. But he offended the head of the song and dance troupe by choreographing a self-aware Chinese modern dance. His girlfriend Yuanyuan, who danced as his partner in a pas de deux, did not understand his actions and decided to break up with him. In the face of the boiling and changing modern life, Long Xiang, who was hit, was not discouraged, and continued his pursuit in his career. After a period of hard work, he finally succeeded. His powerful, gorgeous and beautiful modern dance steps won the heart of a wide range of audiences. In this process, Long Xiang received the support and friendship of female entrepreneur Luo Dan, and developed a sincere love with the “self-employed literary individual” Xiaoxiao.

⁷ Because of this movie, Tao Jin became a protagonist of TV shows across China, known as “China’s Michael Jackson.”

⁸ After his debut, it was not until 1993 that Li Xiaolong released his first creation album “*The Layman*”. In 1994, he planned to record the RAP compilation album “*Pirate*”, in which four songs were selected for the Japanese blockbuster film “*Bounce Ko Gals*”. In 2002, he left Kirin Kid Productions Ltd (KKP). In 2004, he founded the rap brand “No. 8 Record”. On December 29, 2006, he released his third album “*I’m Not a Hip-Hop MC DJ*”.

to everything in the hip-hop culture. I appeared in it as a B-boy" (Chen Guanyu⁹, 2007). Like rock music, the American hip-hop/rap entered China still through the influx of Dakou tapes, allowing Chinese hip-hop musicians, street dancers and youth to obtain information about foreign hip-hop music. At the time, tape vendors would pack various types of music tapes in boxes separately for buyers to choose according to their preferences.

"They would keep tape recorders with them while selling tapes, and they were keen on hip-hop in addition to playing things by Nirvana, Guns N'Roses, and other well-known rock bands. At that time, the number of cracked tapes of hip-hop crews was roughly equal to that of rock music" (Music Weekly, 2010). Dakou tapes were not only a medium that influenced the development of Chinese rock music, but also a crucial nutrient for cultivating the Chinese hip-hop culture/rap and street dance. Yan Jun believed that "the music culture that belonged to the youth of the world roared like a flood beyond the sluice gate. With Dakou tapes, it 'sneaked in with the night wind,' to nourish the pale generation struggling in the cultural desert and cultural trash. Yes, from then on, a culture beyond the control of both Hong Kong and Taiwan singers and the Chinese Writers Association began to grow madly. Neither the education system nor the entertainment trends could manipulate the will of the children who had access to the new music, new games, a new sense of belonging, and a new vast world" (Yan Jun, 2001: 175). Yan meant that Chinese rock music was deemed as a fully exotic music style, from "form"¹⁰ to soul.¹¹ He hoped that the "cultural desert and cultural trash" could be "led" and "enlightened" by "advanced" and "modern" Western music forms, so that the contemporary Chinese music and cultural forms are "modernized" in the pop music field.

The same went for Chinese hip-hop culture/rap music. Influenced by pop music of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and the United States, pop music types, artists¹² and groups gained popularity in China through the intermediary of Dakou tapes and pirate/reproduced records. They also won a lot of fans and cultural lovers. These hip-hop enthusiasts were divided into two categories. One was the fans of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korean idol singers and groups, who were influenced by Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea pop music, and passionate for gorgeous dresses and dance movements. Therefore, they started to be concerned about the development and trend of the Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korean pop music circles. The other preferred European and American hip-hop artists and groups. This group of people largely disliked the South Korean fads and Hong Kong and Taiwan idols, but they failed to find

⁹ His real name is Chen Qingcheng, with a stage name Chen Guanyu. He was the first hip-hop dancer in Guangzhou. He danced for artists Show Lo, F4, Joey Yung, and Lee Min-woo of South Korea. He is now the first dancing and rapping artist in Rap MC Guangzhou, with a new stage name Chen Xincheng. He has been engaged in the dance and entertainment industry for ten years. He started his dance career in 1998, specializing in Jazz, Lyrical Hiphop (LA style hiphop), and commercial dance. In 1998, he led Guangzhou's first street dance team, MOVEBOX, to start the first generation of street dance in Guangzhou. He is thus known as the first street dancer in Guangzhou. He won the individual champion of the Guangzhou SOHO Cup Dance King Competition in 1998, and won the team runner-up in the New China Dance Competition in 1999. In 2001, he won the team champion of Guangzhou Popular Front Line Street Dance Competition, and in 2005, he won the national individual champion of Shenzhen Happy Valley Street Dance International Challenge Newstyle battle. In 2007 he won the National Championship of the SPEED CREW. In 2008, he won the OTS National Hip-Hop Team Battle, (SPEED crew) National Championship.

¹⁰ Orchestra arrangement, electronic acoustic instruments, melodies and rhythms, shouts and roars.

¹¹ Youth subculture, vanguard, rebellion

¹² My experience in the mainland is that Hong Kong and Taiwan albums sold in roadside stalls and small shops include: MC HotDog, Jay Chou, Jordam Chan, and Coco Lee.

flag representatives from the European and American artist groups that best represented their hearts. In 1999, China had its first hip-hop culture/rap group, Hi-Bomb under EMI Records, Inc, founded by Chinese-American MC Tang and Shang Siyang from Shanghai, which released the single albums “No.1” and “Hip Hop Constantly” in 2002. The works applied great many lighthearted, witty styles and discarded the offensive words of previous rap songs, to create hip-hop music that was not “sensational”. This was a form of business advocacy to construct a “clean” and “positive energy” hip-hop/rap, which differed from the previous aggressive image of the hip-hop culture/rap, and emphasized the link between music creation content and all kinds of life forms, to bring the hip-hop culture/rap further into vision of the “middle class” stratum.

In 2000, hip-hop appeared for the first time in China via Channel [V]. The hip-hop style, dresses, and music started to influence Chinese youth (De Kloet, 2010:69). In other words, the term hip-hop emerged in the mainstream Chinese pop culture in 2000. However, not all Chinese audiences could watch Channel [V]. Currently, only cable digital TV subscribers¹³ in some areas can view the channel, but operators in some regions have encrypted the channel for further charges. For example, Hubei Chutian Digital TV and Zhejiang Hangzhou Digital TV would open the signal of the channel after the users have paid. But that won’t affect the Chinese youth’ pursuit of the hip-hop culture/rap music.

In 2002, Dana “Showtyme” Burton¹⁴, an underground rapper from Detroit, worked with DJ V-Nutz to found the Iron Mic rap competition (Fei Bao, 2019)¹⁵. Iron Mic is the first MC Free-style Battle in China. It has been continued so far,¹⁶ and fostered numerous Chinese underground rappers, unfolding the “keepin’ it real” attitude of the Chinese hip-hop culture/rap and the “Chinese/black culture” space on the spiritual stage. In 2003, the rap group Hide¹⁷ released its first album, “Serve the People, Singer: Hide”. Among them, “In Beijing” was a song introducing the local customs and lifestyle of Beijing in the form of hip-hop/rap music, attracting a lot of attention. After the release of the album, under the planning of the record company Longmen Array I, they set off on a tour around the country, such as Liaocheng in Shandong Province. In addition to enabling its members to experience different lifestyles across the country, it also brought the hip-hop culture/rap music to the local society, and attracted the attention of the local youth.

If Hide was a representative of the hip-hop culture/rap music in north China in the early 2000s, Bamboo Crew¹⁸ was a pioneer of south China. In 2002, its members Masta Loop,

¹³ In 1984, the Overseas Satellite Agency Department of China International Television Corporation, wholly-owned by China Central Television, received Channel [V] China channel signals, and transmitted band signals through the Asia-Pacific No. 6 satellite. The service was generally only available to hotels above 3 stars and government-designated residential areas.

¹⁴ In 1999, he came to China to explore the market. He went to a nightclub with hip-hop ads to see what hip-hop was like in China. However, the closest thing to hip-hop in the nightclub turned out to be a dancer imitating Michael Jackson on stage. So he started working as a part-time rapper and full-time hip-hop communicator in Shanghai.

¹⁵ Founder of Guangzhou hip-hop brand “Manner”. I met it in November 2019 during a visit to the rap team of my service unit and learned about this information at the dinner table.

¹⁶ <https://m.weibo.cn/status/4549730385006222>

¹⁷ The members, Wang Bo, Zheng Jie, He Zhong and Mark, came from China, the United States and Canada. Among them, Wang Bo was an authentic Chinese, Mark was a Chinese-Canadian, and the other two were Americans.

¹⁸ The mebers included Bamboo Crew, BlaKK Bubble (specialized in Shanghainese rap performances), Masta Loop, Zeero (the first local female MC in Shanghai), Mummy C, Shout Dogg, and Cee (specialized in composing double rhymes).

Mummy C, BlaKK Bubble and Shout Dogg showed up at the first Iron Mic competition. Although the champion was Wang Bo from Hide, it let the audience know the great capacity of Shanghai's rap creation. After that, they deemed that they were like-minded and could work together, so Bamboo Crew was established. Since the members had their own performance characteristics, it thus built up the diversity and inclusiveness of Shanghai rap music creation.

Therefore, Chinese youth did not appeal to the works issued by officially recognized media organizations to receive hip-hop culture/rap records, music videos, and Hollywood films from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Europe and the United States. Instead, it was introduced through the Dakou records, pirate/reproduced videos and video tapes prevailing from the 1990s to the early 2000. Thanks to the promotion of African-American spreaders, Hong Kong and Taiwan hip-hop lovers, and Chinese hip-hop culture lovers, the first and second generations of Chinese rappers were established. By 2005, when the broadband network emerged, Internet access was sped up, allowing Chinese youth to download foreign hip-hop/rap MP3, music videos and hip-hop teaching videos from websites. That is to say, a new Chinese hip-hop group was formed with the convenience of obtaining foreign hip-hop audio texts. Skateboard boys, graffiti painters, street dancers, rap performance groups and DJ playing songs in clubs, dance halls, night entertainment venue, and bars, stirred up hip-hop culture/rap music in China.

In 2012, Hip-hop Fusion, a Chinese independent hip-hop brand founded by Shenzhen Hip-hop Culture Communication Co., LTD, planned, filmed and produced the documentary "Hip-hop in China". Based on the development of hip-hop dance in China, it interviewed 19 street dancers and hip-hop cultural promoters in Chinese cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu and Wuhan). Their interviews described the "re-development" trajectory of hip-hop culture in China from the late 1990s to around 2010. The whole documentary was based on several questions throughout, and it was a preliminary text to explore the development of Chinese hip-hop culture from the perspective of subculture, for example, the start of hip-hop in China, the development status, the development trend, the relationship with business, and the career development of dancers. As shown in these questions, the hip-hop cultural promoters and street dancers from Shanghai, Beijing, Wuhan, Guangzhou, and Chengdu created the style and look of Chinese hip-hop through their own understanding, use and practice of hip-hop. Therefore, the development of Chinese hip-hop culture in this period was not only a driving force of Chinese pop culture, but also an exhibition of self-practice identity confirmation and the construction of group identity by Chinese youth through hip-hop dance performance. In the same year, the Xi'an brand Red Flower Club held the "Eight Miles Underground" rap competition. The event was centered on Xi'an, and held regional competitions in many cities across China.¹⁹ The content was the same as Iron Mic, featuring free-style performance and battles, except that the contestants were relatively young, and focused on the punchlines of rap content in the fights.²⁰

From the perspective of the above "keepin' it real" development, Chinese hip-hop culture/rap music can be roughly divided into three periods (ten years for a period):

Before 2000, hip-hop had not yet entered the Chinese social context. Therefore, as a new form of music creation, it made some exploratory fusions with rock, jazz, funk, and Chinese

¹⁹ Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Chengdu, Chongqing, Kunming, Lanzhou, Urumqi, Xining, Yulin, Yinchuan, Changsha, Xiamen, Quanzhou, Hefei, Xingtai, and Wuhan

²⁰ Many rappers who participated in the filming of *The Rap of China* were baptized by this competition, such as Xiao Qinglong, Beibei, PG One, Ma Siwei, and Sun Baiyi.

national music. In the form of musical performance, it was regarded as a preliminary adaptation of “foreign culture” in Chinese society.

After 2000, the hip-hop culture/rap music was introduced through Dakou tapes, pirate/reproduced discs, European, American, Hong Kong and Taiwan hip-hop cultural intermediaries. It then realized a “leapfrogging” development. Among them, the launch of the Iron Mic competition inspired local youth in rap creation, and endowed more Chinese hip-hop lovers with a performance space for exchanges. The creation of “dialect rap” is a way to connect with the local society and a way that singers intervene in social issues, telling the real-life form in the local society. At the same time, with the flourishing development of broadband network infrastructure, the works are more conveniently circulated, indicating a boom of underground rap development in China.

After 2010, local brands started to hold rap competitions, providing a performance stage for underground rappers in Chinese cities. At the same time, a large number of music talent shows of the same nature were aired, causing audio-visual fatigue of the audience. After its launch, The Rap of China led to a mainstreaming wave of Chinese hip-hop culture/rap music. Rappers entered the mainstream market to explore the way, establish models, brought the audience freshness of entertainment, and dramatic changes to the Chinese pop music culture and politics. Under the banner of local provinces, the brands competed with rappers from other provinces in various performances. They appealed to the creation modes of dialect, rhythm, and brand images to attract more young people to indulge in this type of music creation, injecting more sounds of different generations for the localized development of Chinese hip-hop culture/rap music.

IV. Constructing Acoustic Basis of “Keepin’ it Real” in Chinese Hip-hop Culture/Rap Music with Dialect Rap

With the rise of the Internet, Chinese youth have another way to access more hip-hop/rap works at home and abroad, allowing them across the country to create rap works in their native dialects and find the way of self-identification from the creation of dialect (native dialect) rap works. That is to say, dialect (native dialect) rap is the characteristic of “keepin’ it real” in Chinese hip-hop culture/rap music. By intervening in the local society and power issues, and justifying the legitimacy of the misappropriation of the black form of hip-hop, it presents the Chinese rap music style. It has become a way of self-identification of today’s Chinese youth.²¹

Dialect rap is also an attempt to establish a form challenging the narrative that contemporary China is a “unified national state”. From hip-hop culture/rap music to dialect creation, it expresses an interpretation of the local multiple, diverse, diversified and complex ideology. In 2001, Han Zhao, a musician and film director, posted a flash MV, in the stage name of Snow Village, of his animated music video “People in the Northeast Are all Living Lei Feng”²² on the Internet, and had his moment. The song had a brisk beat. It started by singing in Mandarin, “Old Zhang drove to the northeast and had a crash. The trouble-causing driver acted indecently and ran away. Thanks to a northeast man, who sent him to the hospital for five stitches, he

²¹ For example, regional languages can be divided into: Wu, Xiang, Yue, Shu, Qingdao, Northeastern, Hanzhong, Northwestern, Hakka, Nanjing Mandarin, Yangzhou Mandarin, and Wuhan Mandarin. Further subdivided, they comprise local dialects in provinces, such as the vernacular of western Guangdong and the Cantonese dialect of Guangzhou have a big difference in accent.

²² Living Lei Feng means: People who do good deeds without leaving a name, and treat doing good deeds as “ordinary things”.

recovered. Old Zhang invited him to dinner, and he won't drink less. He said, "Next it was sung in the northeast dialect; we are rich in Korean ginseng... We have braised pork with vermicelli. We are all living Lei Feng... We do not have such people... Who won't save people after a car crash. We have rare mushrooms on the mountain... That man is not from the northeast... Cui Hua, serve pickled cabbage." This song mainly tells of the northeast people who have the character of "people help people, like close cousins."²³ Such mutual help is an instinct for making a living in the northeast region. If you help me, I won't forget you. There rises a primary human relationship.

Following the success of "People in the Northeast Are all Living Lei Feng" on the Internet, many Chinese youth and musicians were inspired to put their own works on the Internet to attract attention. Some works use dialect to perform popular music works originally sung in Mandarin (Liu, 2014: 270). For example, in 2004, a Sichuan farmer presented Nun Chucks, a song from the album *Fantasy of Jay Chou* in Chongqing dialect, titled "Nun Chucks in Sichuan Farmer Edition". The song edged into the 2004 Baidu annual top 10 dialect search list. Such works reinterpreting Hong Kong and Taiwan pop songs in the Chinese dialect, mushroomed like bamboo shoots after a spring rain, including Leslie Cheung's "Wind Continues to Blow" in the Nanning dialect of Guangxi and "Gangnam Style" of Korean artist Psy in Ningbo dialect of Zhejiang. The Internet is a platform that allows many average people to be heard through the sharing of their creations on web links. Chinese dialect rap songs are precisely a main way for the youth in Chinese cities to listen to, watch or download these dialect rap songs online through community website platforms. It started the journey of China's booming underground rap music development.

The rappers downloaded hip-hop rhythms on the web with their home computers and produced sound sampling with music cutting/editing software. When done, they uploaded parts of the demo to the network. Sometimes, they made Flash animations to express their artistic conceptions of the songs and lyrics. Composed in dialect, they usually spread among the local youth community (Liu, 2014: 270). Such works of music and animation created and produced on a personal computer, and promoted on the Internet platform, were influenced by Taiwan's network animation works "Dry Chinese Dragon" and "A GUI" in 2000 and 2001. Among them, "Dry Chinese Dragon" was mainly used to "sing out dissatisfaction for others" and was very popular in Taiwan. In Chinese society, due to the government's regulations in speech and creation, many works cannot pass the review of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television²⁴ and the Chinese Writers' Association²⁵. The Internet, known for

²³ A proverb of the northeast people, meaning a broad mind, grateful, and good-neighborly friendship.

²⁴ The full name is "State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television". It is a ministry-level agency directly under the State Council of China, with the place of National Copyright Administration of China, mainly responsible for supervising and managing the Chinese mainland's journalism, publishing, radio station, television media and film industries.

²⁵ The full name is "China Writers Association". It is a professional people's organization under the leadership of the Communist Party of China that voluntarily unites writers of all ethnic groups. Its predecessor, the All-China Association of Literary Workers, was established in Peking on July 23, 1949, referred to as the All-China Literary Association. It became one of the six major associations under the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles. In October 1953, it was renamed into the China Writers Association, becoming an independent people's organization alongside the China Federation of Literature and Literature. The China Writers Association has subordinate provincial and municipal writers' associations. The publication directly under the organ is "People's Literature". It has four national literary awards: Lu Xun Literature Award, Mao Dun Literature Award, National Excellent Children's Literature Award, and National Minority Literature Creation "Horse Award".

its anonymity, turned into a pipeline for the spread of these critical and ironic works, so that the voices of Chinese urban youth could be heard by more people. These voices were largely rebellion, frustration, doubts and dissatisfaction of the discipline and education methods of the parents, teachers, and society. They were represented by Pen Peng’s rap work in the Shanghai dialect in 2003, *Go Back to Farming*; Geometric Figure’s rap work in Suzhou dialect in 2004, *Student Life*; Hao Yu’s rap work in northeast China dialect in 2003, *University Study Room*; Saliva Corps’ rap work in Hangzhou dialect in 2001, *People’s Light*; Black Stick’s rap work in Shanghai dialect in 2004; *No.87 Xiaafei Road*; an unknown author’s rap work in Cantonese in 2010, *Whatever You Tear Down, Guangzhou Dialect Cannot Be Torn Down*; Yin San’er’s rap work in Beijing dialect in 2008, *Beijing Evening News*; Zhu Xiaolei’s rap work in Nanjing dialect in 2006, *Hello Chen Shui-bian*; and Hei Sa’s rap work in Xi’an dialect in 2003, *Practice Little Japanese to Death*.

These young rappers’ works were quite mean and controversial in comments on Chinese society and local society at that time, but they might want to create “controversy” and “argument” to increase visibility. For example, MC Shazhou’s 2004 work “Qingdao Lao Bazi”, undisguisedly expressed aversion to the migration of peasant workers from Jimo to Qingdao. The lyrics started with “Because I’m a mc, I have to get on some real questions.” It was followed by “Qingdao is not a place whoever may settle. I get mad looking at the motherfuckers. You are a farmer. Why not just go back to farming. You come to Qingdao, what the fuck are you doing here?” It went on to mock and criticize the wear and dress-up of the migrant workers, “You buy cunt rags at the night market, and buy a 1-dollar walkman stuck in your ears. Is it fashionable to wear big sunglasses at night? Dye a few hairs, so you are haughty! Alas, shit, I can’t say you know anything, you bastard.” Next it scolded women from the countryside, “And the whores are also from the countryside. I won’t go into details as they look like that. That night after dinner, I thought I had nothing to do, so I walked outside to play. I saw a miss,²⁶ in pretty look, wore little. I went up and chatted. I said, miss, miss, where did you come from? You are so tall. Glad to meet you. Gosh, I collapsed right away. How a village girl wear so cute? Now the country has opened up, the wild country girls start to follow the fashion. If you want to be in the swim, please go back to your countryside. Is it good for you to cause a stir in the city?” MC Shazhou expressed the chaos and moral degradation brought about by the migrant workers from Jimo, such as young women working in hair salons who were also part-time prostitutes. Such a rap work of discriminatory, belittling and offensive remarks caused heated arguments after it was released online. Some migrant workers felt degraded and insulted, so they contacted local newspapers to find out the rapper and ask him for a public apology.²⁷

Dialect rap songs represent a conscious response to local social disputes (Liu, 2014: 272). When these controversial dialect songs are compared with the mainstream popular songs sung in Mandarin, the dialect songs tell of collective, common social problems and controversies. Although the mainstream pop music is dominated by love songs, these dialect songs will still get the support and attention of the public, even if they involve nationalism, racial discrimination and class inequality.

In June 2009, there was an event in Beijing titled “That Year, We Played Music”, to mock the contemporary pop music industry in the form of a funny, sarcastic Grammy Awards ceremony.

²⁶ Little girl.

²⁷ “Old Bastard” Song Annoys Qingdao People. How Can We Forget Contribution of Migrant Workers in Qingdao Development? 2004. Qingdao Daily.

However, romantic love songs are the only type of music and form of creation recognized by the authorities in China, while the creation of dialect music has not been recognized by the official institutions in terms of subject matter, and it suffers from restrictions. This makes the dialect rap creation open up and construct an alternative sub-cultural space, which comes from the Internet. Although the Chinese government has a monitoring system and mode for the Internet, it is still possible to use some technologies, such as proxy software and servers, to pass on the created works. The Internet allows the youth to actively and decisively express their views on the world, region, nation, and local society, as well as their own lifestyle, rather than passively obeying the parental culture and the hierarchical system of society.

Many Chinese underground rappers were hardly regarded as excellent in school performances. For example, MC Shazhou from Qingdao and Dong Lei, the founder of Hangzhou rap group Saliva Regiment, left school after studying in the first grade of higher vocational school and made a living by creating rap works. Wang Bo, founder of Beijing rap group Hide, gave up his studies at the age of 15. Shanghai rapper Sun Bin did not continue to study after graduating from primary school. Li Sui, a Chengdu rapper, resisted the college entrance exam in 2009, filling out the college entrance exam practice papers with rap words. These rappers grew up as a group of neglected and abandoned people under the Chinese mainland education system. However, in addition to Chinese mainland, the entire East Asia region, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea,²⁸ has seen hip-hop/rap works touch on criticism of the local education system and learning ethos. Such criticism almost always points to the "Eastern education" issue, requiring students to study hard, excellent in character and learning. If they can't learn well, they can attend tutoring classes,²⁹ so as to get the correct "problem-solving" skills. They will get good grades in exams after the training of keeping doing tests.

Dialect rap as a manifestation mode of "keepin' it real" of Chinese hip-hop culture/rap, and rap songs were written in the local dialect serving as the main axis of "keepin' it real", present the local knowledge state and special regional emotions, and express the process of integration of the local space and locality with globalization, locality and global locality. It pairs the American culture-based hip-hop music resources, featuring powerful rhythm of the rap, with rebellious, popular, and clear individualism images of hip-hop dance and dress-up, to gather Chinese youth to compose in dialect rap their understanding and care of the locality, jump off the original African-American look, and transform into construction of another complete localized knowledge. In addition, the creation of dialect rap provides rhetoric of the local social state and external identity, forming a guerrilla method of mainstream and non-mainstream, mass and niche, capital and local cultural symbols. As a result, some dialect rap lyrics are full of local codes, slang, and descriptions of local power³⁰ and violence, sketching a "real world" that is not seen in the "formal society". The background of the singers' and rap works construct the negative stereotypes of the local society. As they are closely related to life, they generate an "emotional energy" to deepen the recognition and resonance of the works and the local society.

²⁸ Xu Taizhi and the children, the Classroom Concept in 1994.

²⁹ Like Taiwan MC Hotdog's work Bu Bu Bu in 2001.

³⁰ Jiao Tou might be a gang leader.

V. Cultural Politics and De-politicization of “Keepin’ it Real” after “The Rap of China”

After the show was aired, the audience watched through the lens the performance of rappers from hip-hop brands in Chinese provinces and cities -- their common experience in life and music creation--and hip-hop culture/rap became a link of their common recognition, discussion and communication. At the same time, it was a process in which the rappers go from the edge to the center, from the underground to the mainstream, and from isolation to acceptance (resistance, style, and collection), experience how the subculture enters the mainstream market, and reposition their role transformation. In other words, through capitalized operation of Chinese video and audio websites (iQiyi and Youku), it “incorporates” and “diverts” the hip hop/rap style elements of the United States, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea,³¹ “forging” a “keepin’ it real” cultural politics, the aesthetic pattern of “Chinese” hip-hop culture/rap, letting it “smoothly” enter the public view. It blurs the group boundaries of hip-hop lovers, throwing them into anxiety about their own identity and group identity.

The first episode was based on the de-politicization of American hip-hop culture/rap. Through “Free Style”, “Battle” and “Diss” links, it showed the cultural style of hip-hop/rap. Through interviews with relevant staff, we knew that the production team’s positioning of the program was “youth, sunshine, positive energy”; secondly, the strict selection of participating singers excluded some inappropriate singers (Xie Mengyao, 2017). Another de-politicization was the emphasis on “musical rhythm creation of hip-hop culture and performance of rap skills”. Such an emphasis was a necessary operation of “popularization” and “marketization” for a hip-hop culture/rap show. But it also weakened the inner power of the show, making the hip-hop culture/rap seem like just a verbal technique, and become a quasi-sports competition show. With an emphasis on skills, the show largely segregated politics, content, and originality.

The program takes “keepin’ it real” as its main axis, emphasizes Chinese rap creation and performance technique and the “Sinicization” of hip-hop cultural ideology, to regulate the look of Chinese hip-hop culture/rap, and stresses to “be oneself” and “show oneself heartily”. It tells the audience that the “reality” of hip-hop is the “reality” of the performance of personal personality and life attitude. However, such a “reality” is an embodiment of the “reality” connected with the real society and life experience. After the show was aired, some commentators thought that hip-hop, in essence, should have the necessary “global hip-hop” conditions and characteristics, and commented on the show from an “expert” perspective: the hip-hop/rap show should launch cultural performance in the context of “keepin’ it real”, and constantly emphasize the legitimacy of “keepin’ it real” of hip-hop culture, a historical product, non-self-contained, permanent sub-cultural politics.

In terms of the program setting, the production team wittingly avoided the performance of original creativity of “global hip-hop” “keepin’ it real” – rap works created under the link of the rappers’ own experience and local social reality. The show was almost entirely to show off the acting ability and rap skills of the rappers through the modes of “improvisation,” “teamwork,” and “remixing.” In this way, it effectively maintained the competitiveness, performance and entertainment nature of hip-hop culture/rap, but also sealed the messaging function of music as a sound of social expression, and castrated the “keepin’ it real” aspect of the hip-

³¹ The Rap of China program borrowed its concept, shooting method, and production method from the South Korean hip-hop/rap program “Show Me the Money”. South Korean rapper Jay Park was originally going to join China’s New Rap 2020 as a judge, but due to the epidemic, he did not appear.

hop culture/ rap, so as to conform to the provisions of the State Administration of Radio Film and Television, to be broadcast on the network platform. As a result, the show impressed the audience with "hip-hop" in the name, and the participating rappers with distinct personalities. Their works successfully set off a new hip-hop star-making campaign, but it lacked rap work that touched the society to hit the audience's body and the beat back of downbeat tempo and frequency sound pressure.

As it stressed only all kinds of expertise and skills, the audience's attention was shifted from the content to the form of language. The show simply focused on rap rhyming, flow arrangement, trap beat control, and narrative violence of chauvinistic attitude, which impaired the narrative power of the theme and content of the rap lyrics. It strengthened rap lyrics as a new "form" of Chinese literary creation, making it a wordsmith specializing in word games. Then, it incorporated it into the current of popular culture, keeping an empty posture of personality for the sake of personality and rebellion for the sake of rebellion. Although this gesture was a part of the hip-hop culture and integrated into it, it excluded the rappers' concern for social issues as exhibited in the theme and content of the songs. Their posture was just a form of performance.

Such a performance caters to the characteristics of the reality show. After restructuring after editing, it becomes a focus of the audience, a guarantee of ratings. For example, PG One's "H.M.E" dissed the designs of many contestants and criticism shows, and the fiery content of the song became a selling point of the show. It not only defined Diss as a kind of confrontation and rivalry, but also emphasized they came from the show, and must be solved in the show. The only thing outside the show was the double champions PG One and Gai, which involved some conflicts between them and their groups. and the competition continues to social platforms such as Weibo. Their battle was extended to social media platforms, such as Weibo. With such a confrontation, it extended the topic from the studio to the public space. With the influx of fans from both sides, the hip-hop circle diss was transformed from that of the two rappers, which further expanded their fans and established their "hip-hop" status in the "star-chasing system".

In this way, "The Rap of China" lowered the political power of "keepin' it real" of the hip-hop culture/rap. Inside the rap music was some sort of sensory order, forming a "world" with theoretical meaning. The Rap of China had confrontation but no revolt, and scolds but no criticism. All the confrontations, scolds, contradictions and beefs between hip-hop singers in the show, true or false, inside or outside the program, were ultimately directed to the entertainment (publicity) effect, which weakened the show's cultural and political impact on Chinese society from "keepin' it real."³²

In December 2017, when The Rap of China Season II was about to start filming, the PG One incident occurred. For a while, the whole Chinese hip-hop circle suffered an unprecedented impact. The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television removed all the works of Xi'an brand Red Flower Club from the shelves. Later, it released a standard document on guests invited by radio and television programs, featuring "Four Resolute Never-Use,"³³ and

³² For example, the lyrics in Jony J's song "Routine" are "In this era, you laugh at the poor, not the prostitutes. It is violent and obscene. You just want a house without windows, and the atheists open the church. You just want to rely on heaven and earth, and friends, run a blind cat into a dead mouse. It's really awesome on its own, and everything else is a paper tiger." Since the content was too sensational, the production unit asked him to adapt the lyrics. He was sifted out due to "forgetting words" when performing.

³³ http://www.360doc.com/content/18/0127/05/16157222_725421476.shtml

a list of rap songs removed for “vulgar negative contents.”³⁴ This series of events and decrees suspended the filming of *The Rap of China* Season II. After rounds of negotiations with the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, the production unit renamed the program to “China’s New Rap”, emphasizing that it would “carry forward the mainstream values with young people’s voice and spread the positive energy of youth cultural characteristics”, so that the show could continue to be aired. That is to say, since 2018, Chinese hip-hop culture/rap music has developed under the regulation and negotiation of the government (control force), commercial interests (economy) and some imagination of “keepin’ it real” (creation theme). Under the control of the government, the rappers’ costumes (tattoos, hairstyles, ear studs, and earrings) and performance clips will be reviewed. As long as the content of the performance is “considered” problematic, it will be (1) disposed of in post-production, (2) re-filmed after changing the content, (3) hidden under the clothing and concealer. For example, when Kung Fu Fat performed “Money Monster”, the original lyric “I just want to turn these into turbines, and drive my dreamy Ferrari” was changed into “I just want to turn these into turbines, and take out my” home play”. Changing Ferrari into a home play was to echo the call of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television for “small cost, great feelings, and positive energy”. Among them, the “great feelings” were clearly elaborated as “not indulging in shallow murmur of individualism and self-entertainment”. So money-worship lyrics should not appear on the show. Kung Fu Fat and Max corrected the lyrics involving crimes in the performance of *My Dream*. The original lines, “truly earn a bag of silver/when my brother walks out of the prison/ if one is born evil/who can be acquitted”, were changed to “truly earn the faith in life/take my brother to make a name for ourselves/if one is born with burden/ who is free to release it”. The original lyrics, “We don’t need recognition of authority”, involved challenging authority, and was changed to “We don’t need their recognition”. They were so afraid of expressing the reality of the society, and only indulged in eulogizing the positive images, that the Chinese hip-hop music creators, brands and singers lingered vaguely between the underground and the mainstream.

VI. The World Sense of Chinese Hip-hop with Ambiguity Among Policy, Capital and Creation

The origin of hip-hop cannot determine its character. Exposing the “implicit” reality in hip-hop in the mode of reflection theory, and accordingly criticizing the so-called consumer society dominated by the utilitarian ideology, is precisely to instrumentalize artistic works and move towards utilitarianism (Wang Yiqun, 2020). Wang saw that in the process of mainstreaming the cultural politics of “keepin’ it real”, the hip-hop culture/rap faces the problems of transformation and use (questioning, resisting, and abandoning). However, he ignored that the negative image of global hip-hop culture/rap is not only an element of pop culture touted by the mainstream media, but also a source of social problems being criticized and reviewed.

In the context of Chinese society, the cultural creed of “keepin’ it real” is manipulated and constructed. There are two reasons. First, government agencies strictly control and check program contents, to avoid social contradictions and conflicts, and maintain the basic framework of the Chinese government’s “safeguarding stability” of the social internal affairs. Second, feedback comes from the public opinion at the moral level. Excessive black image of hip-hop. Traditional American hip-hop culture/rap music videos are filled with elements

³⁴ https://weibo.com/6266788628/G4kDedEIX?type=comment#_rnd1598951281421

of street culture (race, drugs, violence, sexism, misogyny, male chauvinism, and flaunt wealth). Reproducing the "real" form of street culture attracts the attention of Chinese youth and becomes their leader to enter the hip-hop world. The literary transformation of rap lyrics into the sound has become a sensory element of the audience. Therefore, to expose young people to hip-hop culture/rap in a "safe" environment, media organizations must shoulder the "social responsibility" to deliver positive energy. By focusing on musicality (rhythm), creation and performance techniques (rap skills, writing rhyme, and explosive charm on stage), they construct hip-hop images and imagination with "Chinese characteristics".

So, The Rap of China turned into China's New Rap. Under the consultation between the government agencies, the pop music culture industry, and the producer, and by de-politicization, highlighting entertainment, and hip-hop culture charm, the Chinese hip-hop culture circle became a commercial success with the explosive exposure of The Rap of China. It allowed the subsequent The Rap of China to continue to air every year. Other media organizations followed suit to launch music programs with hip-hop culture/rap music, to harvest endless creative energy and exposure opportunities, and increase capital sponsorship of media organizations. As Chinese hip-hop culture/rap moves closer towards the mainstream, the hip-hop lovers who see "keepin' it real"

spiritual attribute greater than the entertainment attribute believed that the commercial success of rappers was a betrayal of their spirit. In my opinion, the Chinese hip-hop singers who entered the mainstream did not show the value tear from the "underground" to the "ground". It seemed that since the Rap of China went viral, it has exploited new consumer groups and new business opportunities for the program sponsors with a variety of costumes. When they enter the mainstream, they get more exposure, such as film performance, performer or judge on other music talent shows, filming variety shows and reality shows, and performing on the Spring Festival Gala stage. They avail to the "rapper" identity to gain both fame and wealth in the mainstream entertainment programs.

This is a paradox. There is always a conflict between commercialization and "keepin' it real". Entertainment should take into account the preferences of most people, and attitude means a consistent position of orthodoxy that cannot be adjusted. If business and attitude can coexist, I believe there is indeed some kind of regulation and negotiation among policy, business and creation. Under the control of the policy, we produce the looks in the entertainment window. However, the public is ultimately dissatisfied with this construction, and seeks new attitudes. In this process, the policy keeps making supervision/regulation to maintain the order of the entire network platform.

Hip-hop did not disappear in China since the cultural policy was announced in 2018. On the contrary, as a "cross-border synchronized" hip-hop culture beat linking global and regional hip-hop, it has become the "real" look of today's Chinese hip-hop culture/rap. After coordination and regulation, it is packaged as a pop music culture type, which can continue to develop in the current state of Chinese society. China's New Rap, China's New Rap 2019 and China's New Rap 2020, produced by iQiyi have been released on the air. The rap competition Listen up, held by the Hip Hop Fusion brand for four years, won the support of Hunan Satellite TV, and was fully upgraded to the variety show "Shout to the Listen Up", and broadcast on Mango TV. Rap for Youth, produced by Bilibili, also premiered on August 22, 2020. The "monopoly" of the "intermediary" of the Chinese hip-hop rap market by iQiyi has been broken. Under the market competition of "national surveillance", it has become the main driving force to promote the sustainable development of Chinese hip-hop culture/rap music.

In addition, government agencies have also invited student rap groups to produce and sing rap works advocated by the decree³⁵. Interestingly, having seen the cultural charm and political and economic benefits brought by the broadcast of *The Rap of China*, the government has realized that it is beneficial to the use hip-hop culture/rap as a decree advocacy tool, as it is in line with the combination of Chinese hip-hop culture/rap and positive energy. By means of “cultural intermediary”, it makes the youth feel that the government decrees are advancing with the times. In terms of the musical form, hip-hop culture/rap will certainly enrich the domestic pop music market and expand the music listening taste of Chinese youth. However, Chinese people are partial to melody in music listening taste. Considering the current landscape of Chinese pop music and the public’s music listening habits, hip-hop will inevitably face competition in rhythm and melody to truly enter the mainstream market. It is still a question of whether to continue to divert the “trap” rhythm or the “Wolf Legend” party rhythm or whether to keep both to continually consult the old rap rhythm form to construct a new Chinese hip-hop culture/rap landscape.

VII. Conclusion: Continuous “Production” of Chinese Hip-hop Generations

In 2000, Chinese hip-hop culture/rap started the localization process, and rap inherited the past and ushered in the future, leaving a trail in the “movement” of Chinese pop music: the black stitching music of “rap” and Mandarin, voicing in local dialect, spiritual enlightenment, local identity, origin and bloodline, and the main position of the local landscape. This othered cultural subject position is a detached juxtaposition of hip-hop culture/rap from the United States, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Therefore, the process of commercialization and localization of Chinese hip-hop culture/rap music is to build a dream for local youth to make a living out of rap. In fact, in the process of cultural practice and adaptation of hip-hop culture/rap, this cultural form and music genre face the situation and confusion of authenticity at the artistic level. The brands developed new consumption and circulation methods from the level of hip-hop culture/rap from the “street” culture, and constructed a new “Keepin’ it Real” authenticity.

Today, the blackness discourse of Chinese hip-hop culture/rap has formed a “pluralistic decision” historical writing through political, cultural, social and economic elements. Based on the “street” culture, it allows Chinese hip-hop culture/rap to construct local landscapes “through blackness”, providing rap singers, music fans, and culture lovers an opportunity to “swing” in the local social space with hip-hop costumes, and circulate knowledge and information through music, costumes and dance. The cultural reality created by “street” culture is simply and easily imagined by music fans as “blackness culture reality”. Therefore, clothing manufacturers, music video directors, and record brands have created imagined them in highly capitalized urban consumption spaces, exposing the transformation of imagined American culture into “local trends”, in an attempt to continue to balance cultural styles and market commercial interests.

Under the unified leadership of the Communist Party of China, the state launches strict controls of the styles and contents of hip-hop culture/rap, so that musicians, brands, singers, and program producers must constantly coordinate and communicate with the government

³⁵ For example, the Maoming Municipal Public Security Bureau invited members of the Guangyou Rap Team in 2019 to create an anti-cult advocacy work “The Gate of Awakening”. MV: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/eavwBN3pQ9V4jSXvSCFRXg>

in the process of promotion, and the originality of the works and performance content they produce is contrary to “keepin’ it real”. However, the logic of “keepin’ it real” will not allow Chinese hip-hop culture/rap to be permanently incorporated by The Rap of China, and new possibilities will still emerge. Today, in the face of the Chinese government’s governance policy of maintaining social stability, the content of rap lyrics and singer costumes in hip-hop/rap talent shows are reviewed to the highest standards. Therefore, in terms of the influence of this part in Chinese society, future researches need to start from the following directions, launch continuous observation and analysis, and deepen relevant discussions:

First, continuous observation and analysis of the music text content. Some rap songs are put on the banned list and have disappeared from online platforms. Therefore, in future researches, we can explore why they are banned from the content of these works, outline a relatively clear cultural policy discourse, explore the “real” state of Chinese hip-hop culture/rap after the government’s control of the entertainment industry and the “regulation” of China’s hip-hop culture/rap, ponder and debate from the policies (on art, culture, and media), and think about the development trend of contemporary China’s cultural and creative industry. This is a hardware for the development of creativity (economy), and a software for shelving ideology (controversy), and closely integrating the two to develop the fullest cultural field. It is also a fact that is most lacking in collation, analysis, reflection and criticism from a social perspective.

Second, how the local youth use the narrative of local lifestyle from rap creation (in Mandarin and local dialect), and maintain the “keepin’ it real” style of Chinese hip-hop. In this part, we need make a case study from the background of rappers, focus on their understanding of hip-hop culture/rap, and “keepin’ it real”, to further think about the momentum behind the creation under “regulation” from the perspective of creators.

Third, the status of hosting other hip-hop rap talent shows and underground rap contests. China’s entertainment industry itself is a part of political reality. The textual content produced by the media industry and the perspective of government censorship influence the construction of cultural and political reality under the deployment of both sides. It continues to hold on to the dominance of “shaping” Chinese hip-hop culture/rap “keepin’ it real”. Some rap works are removed or blocked when they are judged to have “negative energy” influence by the platform monitoring department. Therefore, it is idealistic, wishful thinking to expect dialect rap, as a “keepin’ it real” genre of music, to strongly intervene in contemporary Chinese society. The future development of Chinese hip-hop culture/rap must be dependent on government support, the entertainment industry, and capital operations.

In this way, as we wonder whether the future trajectory of the development of Chinese hip-hop culture/rap music can be as free as that in other East Asian regions, the answer currently may be a denial. It remains to be seen what form of development it will take in the future. Maybe there will be new possibilities.

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