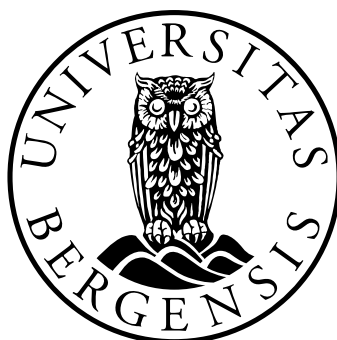


**“Keeping it Real” In Beijing;  
Exploring Identity, Authenticity and Music as a ‘Technology of the Self’ among  
Urban Middle-class Youth**



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## Contents

Introduction.....	1
Defining key-concepts.....	2
Field and Methodology.....	4
Anthropologist and Hip-hop Artist.....	5
Cultural Translation.....	7
Empirical Material.....	8
Analytical framework.....	9
<u>Chapter 1.</u>	
Music in China.....	13
Pre-revolutionary China; the Intellectual and “Bourgeois” Shanghai.....	13
Revolutionary China; the Voice of the State.....	14
Post-Mao Era; 1980s and the Sounds of Technology.....	14
Individualization.....	15
1990s; Commercialization.....	20
<i>Suzhi</i> ; Embodied ‘Quality’.....	20
State Television and Censorship.....	22
21st Century; Mass-media and Communication.....	24
<u>Chapter 2.</u>	
Youth and Music Cultures.....	28
Ambivalent Fun-Seekers.....	30
<i>Sanlitun</i> and <i>Gulou</i> ; a Modern Landscape of Urban Leisure Activities.....	31
Social Media.....	33
Hip-Hop Radio “The Park”.....	35
Censorship and Government Control.....	36
Beijing Hip-Hop.....	37
Tracing the Origins of Hip-Hop in Beijing.....	37
Hip-Hop vs. Mass-Media and Mainstream Culture.....	40
Hip-Hop vs. Parents.....	40
Indication of a Middle-class.....	41
Defining ‘Youth’.....	42
Defining ‘Middle-class’.....	44
The 80s Generation; Private and Public spheres.....	45

Modernity with Chinese Characteristics .....	47
Censorship as a Productive Force.....	48
Hip-Hop as Cosmopolitan Formation.....	51
Identity .....	53
Social Boundaries .....	53
Similarity and Difference.....	55
Summary .....	58
<u>Chapter 3.</u>	
“Keeping it Real” in Beijing.....	60
Authentic Imitation .....	72
Subcultural Capital .....	74
Being “Real”; Defined by what you are Not.....	75
“Keeping it Real”; Contextually Constructed .....	76
Pollution .....	83
Summary.....	84
<u>Chapter 4.</u>	
Music, Embodiment and Communication of Self .....	88
Tuning-In-Relationship.....	98
Preknowledge .....	99
Familiar Structures of Hip-Hop .....	100
Body Language and ‘Tacit Knowledge’ .....	102
Creating Memory .....	104
Intersubjectivity .....	106
Resonance.....	107
Summary .....	108
Concluding Remarks.....	111
Bibliography .....	116
Internet.....	121

## Introduction

With this anthropological master-thesis I am exploring urban middle-class youth in Beijing, born during the 1980s, and how they navigate and express themselves as individuals and as part of collectives. China has been going through a rapid social, political and economic development since its opening-up-reforms during the 1980s and this has a significant effect on how contemporary youth behave and understand themselves in relation to others. By focusing on music, leisure activities and cultural production in China I am exploring the relationship between creative youth cultures and the larger social and political developments in which it is connected. China's modernization project is fertilizing the urban population with a flux of cultural consumption possibilities playing an important role in subject formation. Capitalism and modernization have led urban youth into a complex society where state-interference affecting individual and collective life coincides with individual efforts, desires and choices to choose paths of their own. It is within the boundaries of modernization in China that certain music-cultures finds its ways through both official and non-official channels and it is within this cultural complexity that hip-hop emerge. I am exploring the hip-hop environment in Beijing, in depth, and analyze how social boundaries affect processes of identification, and how desires and dissatisfactions are expressed through their cultural practice. There is an ongoing individualization process in China where the state is placing higher autonomy on the individual's freedom to choose, inspiring people to take responsibility for their own actions on the one hand. At the same time, the state is attempting to control the individual's choice and responsibility towards idealized goals on the other. This creates frictions in which individual choices does not always cohere with the expectations of the public discourse. As narratives in Beijing unfold we will get to know how youth embrace the freedom to choose their own path, and how contradictions and challenges in subject formation become realized and expressed through hope, joy, anger, indifference and despair among the population of youth. The individualization- and modernization process in China have brought about a dual approach of two seemingly contradictory ideologies, merging economic liberalism and political authoritarianism, forming what Liu Fengshu (2011) coins as 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. Contradictions within this dual approach are exemplified by Yan Yunxiang (2006), portraying Chinese youth as young and hopeful fun-seekers on the one side, and socially pressured, success driven pragmatics on the other, shaping a clear distinction between a fun-seeking private sphere and a more pressured public sphere, entrenched with political authority. I argue that the boundaries of these spheres are overlapping and becomes contested as Chinese hip-hop artists and fans publicly resist overarching ideals in society and are continuously pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable behavior and

not. State efforts to control mass-media and public speech through an ambiguous censorship system are effectively employed. However, censorship serves to be a counter-productive force as it effectively creates unspeakable topics by censoring it. The hip-hop environment is not shaped solely by their resistance towards external forces, even though these forces are continuously addressed in ways to distinguish themselves as a distinct group formation. The hip-hop environment in Beijing is constructed by identification of its surroundings as much as by means of personal goals and interests. All forces which shape the cultural complexity in which urban youth navigates, is mutually inclusive. I am discussing how hip-hop, as an American invention, becomes adopted, incorporated and expressed as an authentic cultural practice in China. Chinese artists and fans are inspired by American hip-hop, assuming and incorporating key-values into their cultural practice and define the practice of hip-hop within a distinct system of ‘subcultural capital’. Standards and measurements of validation seems to adjust itself swiftly according to the context in which an urge to express hip-hop as a meaningful cultural practice occurs. Ambiguous implications of ‘authenticity’ within the hip-hop environment serve nonetheless as a tool binding the participants of the environment together. I argue that hip-hop as cultural practice becomes authentic and *real* to the artists and fans because music is closely intertwined with processes of identification and self-expression. Music as a ‘technology of the self’ and social interaction with music serves as a gateway for individuals to communicate and interpret each other, in a flux of communicative variations. As people are socially engaging with each other in music, knowledge and past experiences becomes communicated in the present moment, and subsequently becomes interpreted and understood by others. In this way, people are able to express self-identity and subjectivity in music, and creatively shape relationships based on ‘similarity’ and ‘difference’, ‘familiarity’ and ‘strangeness’ as social interaction unfolds.

### **Defining key-concepts**

I am focusing on the 80s generation in Beijing, inhabited by boys and girls ranging from 22 - 33 years old during the time of my research. I am drawing on Durham’s understanding of youth as historically contingent ideas and experiences (2000:591). I am defining ‘youth’ in a wide sense, as embedding the local and global time and place they are in, culturally and contextually. The age-range of the 80s generation is also viewed and addressed as ‘youth’ or ‘young’ in China as well, and is therefore represented as such in this thesis. For a closer look at my discussion- and definition of ‘youth’, see *Defining ‘Youth’* in chapter 2.

The representation of youth in this thesis seems to be a part of an ‘emerging middle-class’. ‘Middle-class’ is a rather difficult concept for me to define clearly, and I am basing my definition on mere arguments, observations and empirical material rather than measurements of income and clear-cut boundaries of class. I am focusing on a segment of youth, in “downtown” Beijing, spending a substantial amount of money and time on products and leisure activities. I am drawing on Liu Fengshu’s argument addressing the families of these urban consumers as forming the major component of China’s emerging middle-class (2011:7), and ‘emerging’ are pointing to a growing wealth among urban Chinese. It is relevant to note that the majority of youth represented in this thesis viewed themselves as economically privileged and often used the term “rich, but not very rich” as a description. However vague, for a closer look at the indication- and definition of ‘middle-class’ see *Indication of a Middle-class* and *Defining Middle-class* in chapter 2.

I am focusing on hip-hop as a distinct music-culture and as a cosmopolitan formation. Hip-hop is commonly traced back to the late 1970s in urban New York, the Bronx, as a cultural expression emerging among the Latin-American and Afro-American youth, and hip-hop incorporates various styles of aesthetical expression such as Rap (oral), DJ’ing (aural), Break-dancing (physical) and Graffiti (visual) (Maxwell 2003:41; en.wikipedia.org 1). These various forms of expressions are all commonly referred to as elements of hip-hop and these elements are all present within the hip-hop environment in Beijing, however, my fieldwork are mainly focusing on Rap-artists and the production of hip-hop as musical form. I have chosen to narrow the definition of hip-hop according to this, reminding you that both break-dancing and graffiti is all the while present and important elements within the environment I have explored. I am defining ‘Rap’ as a vocal performance of rhythmical lyrics, chanted or spoken, delivered either over music or without accompaniment. “Stylistically, rap occupies a gray area between speech, prose, poetry, and singing”, and is the main ingredient in which speech becomes articulated in hip-hop (en.wikipedia.org 2). A ‘DJ’ or ‘DJ’ing’ is referring to a person “(...) who mixes recorded music for an audience” (en.wikipedia.org 3), using technological equipment. In my thesis, many of the DJs I encountered are also producing hip-hop music, the back-tracks of which Rappers perform their lyrics upon.

Hip-hop developed from being a subcultural phenomenon in States and became integrated into the mainstream of mass culture during the 1980s and 1990s (Blair 1993:22), and have since then “(...) moved far beyond any perceived “local” U.S origins in the South Bronx” (Mitchell 2001:32).

“According to the U.S. Department of State, hip hop is "now the center of a mega music and fashion industry around the world," that crosses social barriers and cuts across racial lines. Natural Geographics recognizes hip-hop as "the world's favorite youth culture" in which "just about every country on the planet seems to have developed its own local rap scene. Through its international travels, hip hop is now considered a “global musical epidemic” (en.wikipedia.org 1).

As we will understand, the seemingly “openness” and “free flow” of hip-hop music spreading into different localities across the globe, alluded by the statement above, does not fully match with the reality in which hip-hop exist in China. It might be a part of the fashion industry to some extent, and a local Rap scene does certainly exist, but it does so within a cultural complexity leaving hip-hop deeply intertwined with a state trying to control its effect on young people, and young people’s own efforts to choose by their own means. In this thesis I am mainly focusing on hip-hop as a subcultural construct and as a cosmopolitan formation. For a closer look at definition of cosmopolitan formation see *Hip-hop as Cosmopolitan Formation* in chapter 2. Other key-concepts and key-terms will be defined and made an account for as we go along.

A few grammatical remarks; to rap (verb) will be written will small case ‘r’, a Rapper (noun) and Rap as designation of genre will be written with capitol ‘R’. To DJ (verb), a DJ (noun) and DJ’ing as designation of genre will all be written in capital letters.

## **Field and Methodology**

I travelled to China October 5<sup>th</sup> 2012 to research hip-hop in Beijing for six months. I stayed through the winter and found myself very much fascinated by the city and interested in staying there longer. I chose to stay for another six months and was granted permission by the University of Bergen to write my thesis while living in Beijing. This was more difficult than I anticipated as it was difficult for me to stop researching and almost impossible to separate myself from the field. However, I gained a lot of experience from staying in Beijing, in which I am grateful, as I eventually returned Norway April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014. I was studying mandarin for six months in Beijing at BLCU (Beijing Language and Culture University) in 2008, and I was hoping to improve my language proficiency to the extent that I would be able to engage and converse in day-to-day activities in Beijing during my fieldwork. This turned out to be more difficult than I anticipated as my scarce language abilities left me rather useless in most of the conversations I encountered. I was able to express myself to some extent, and the people I met where able to communicate with me to some extent, at times leaving conversations in broken English and broken Chinese to mere will, at times involving the whole body as fields of expression, and sometimes leaving communication solely in the hands of an



interpreter. This, I have to admit, made it difficult for me to fully explore Chinese hip-hop culture through speech and text, but at the same time, it consequently enhanced other ways of communication as we creatively found ways to understand each other upon interaction. Limited language proficiency actually turned out to grant me significant insight in ways of which communication often precedes speech, as I will explore in chapter 4.

I have been interested and fascinated by Chinese culture ever since I studied Chinese history at Norwegian Teacher Academy in 2007, which is why I wanted to travel to China. The reason why I wanted to research hip-hop is because I have been part of the hip-hop environment in Norway as a music-producer since 2003, and have been interested in hip-hop since my early teens. With personal affection to- and significant insight in hip-hop as musical form and way of expression I am somewhat personally affected towards the hip-hop environment I am looking to research in Beijing. I quickly became part of the local hip-hop environment as a DJ, as a music-producer and as a subject with significant subcultural capital to take part in the cultural production of hip-hop, leaving the boundaries of being ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ somewhat fluid and overlapping. This certainly had an effect towards my role in the field, leaving questions like “what is hip-hop and where does it come from?” somewhat strange and inappropriate because I was expected to already know this, and it made it difficult for me to have them teaching me about basic principles of hip-hop music, which would have been interesting, I’m sure. From another perspective, being considered someone who “knows” and “understands” what hip-hop is I was entrusted to take part in discussions and conversations regarding what hip-hop means, on a higher level, among the artists and fans I spent time with. Already knowing about hip-hop and the stylistic differences between for example “oldschool”- and “newschool” hip-hop, I was able to learn about their relation to hip-hop on another level, building on an already set of basic knowledge. I was very aware of this as my fieldwork unfolded and as such, it is important for me to give an account of my role in the field, to clarify how my role both come to limit- and perhaps enhance my study of hip-hop in Beijing.

### **Anthropologist and Hip-hop Artist**

There were never any doubts about my anthropological role as I was consistently introducing myself as someone who wanted to study and write about Chinese hip-hop. The local hip-hop radio (which most hip-hop enthusiasts in Beijing are listening to) were even broadcasting that I was there to conduct research about Chinese hip-hop, and that they were proud that someone would travel from the other side of the planet to do such a thing. An understanding of anthropology and its academic implications did not seem to be widespread among Chinese youth, so if I was considered

to be a journalist or simply someone with personal ambition to investigate Chinese hip-hop culture I do not know, but it did not feel like my questions and presence posed any threat to the people I met, most of the time. As a way for me to access and enter the hip-hop environment I did not try to hide myself as a hip-hop producer, rather contrary, I chose to actively use my experience with hip-hop as a gateway to “fit in” with the environment. There are not too many local producers creating the music in which Chinese Rappers record lyrics upon, and as such I handed out some of my own CDs to various artists and key-figures within the environment to try to establish contact and a relation. This had an immediate effect in establishing contact and quickly gave me access to the hip-hop environment as an ‘insider’, soon to take actively part in local hip-hop production, having me somewhat ‘snowballing’ through the environment. Another relationship which both enhanced my anthropological mobility and at the same time made my role in the field even more complex was my encounter with a Norwegian hip-hop artist called *Xiao Ou*, whom had been living in Beijing for about six year when I met him. When I arrived he had been recording several Rap-songs in mandarin over the years, and had already gained recognition within the hip-hop environment for his music. During my stay he finished the highest level of language proficiency (level six) in mandarin at Peking University. He played an important role during my research both in terms of exploring the hip-hop environment and in terms of translation. We moved in together, built a home-recording studio in our apartment and produced a hip-hop album in Chinese together (an album which also features three local artists). Almost anything related to hip-hop during my stay, *Xiao Ou* and I did it together, and he became in many ways my interpreter, assistant and partner as we explored the hip-hop environment. I was invited to be a DJ at numerous hip-hop events, we were holding a handful of concerts within the local hip-hop environment, I spent time producing hip-hop music together with local hip-hop artists and we even travelled China as an official tour for a month performing *Xiao Ou*’s hip-hop album in different cities and provinces. In our home-recording studio we recorded songs with local artists and we were invited into different artist’s apartments to take part in hip-hop production. Having an interpreter whom which also has significant knowledge about hip-hop as cultural practice also poses limitations and advantages in relation to my anthropological study, and the fact that he is a native Norwegian rather than a native Chinese might have both lost and altered some interpretations.

I have gained my empirical material through intricate participant-observation balancing my role as an anthropologist and as a hip-hop artist exploring the hip-hop environment through informal conversations, recorded interviews, from case studies of hip-hop shows (both from the perspective of the audience and from the stage as an artist) and through sharing ideas, knowledge,

motives and aspirations while producing hip-hop and simply hanging out at informal occasions with a wide variety of urban youngsters in Beijing.

### Cultural Translation

Talal Asad is discussing the limitations and possibilities in anthropological methodology, attesting the very ways in which the anthropologist is translating culture and language into specific text. Not only is my role in the field and my affiliation with the specific subject of study shaping my cultural translation of China and hip-hop in Beijing, but cultural translation is also depending on the genre concerned, which in my case is scientific analysis. In addition to a scientific analysis in which my cultural translation is related, reproduction of culture and language is also depending on “(...) the resources of the translator’s language, as well as on the interests of the translator and/or his readership” (Asad 1986:156). Asad argues that cultural translations are “(...) addressed to a very specific audience, which is waiting to read *about* another mode of life and to manipulate the text it reads about according to established rules, and not to learn *to live* a new mode of life” (1986:159). To Asad, established rules address the disciplinary conventions of anthropology, its institutional life, and the wider society in which it exists (ibid., 1986). This position implies a power relation according to Asad, and points to the direction in which these processes need to be addressed (1986:164).

In discussing the ‘inequalities of languages’ upon cultural translation in anthropological ethnography, Asad argues that “all successful translation is premised on the fact that it is addressed within a specific language, and therefore also to a specific set of practices, a specific form of life” (1986:154). He refers to Walter Benjamin’s argument addressing the anthropologist’s responsibilities upon translation;

“The language of a translation can – in fact must – let itself go, so that it gives voice to the *intentio* of the original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intentio*” (Benjamin 1969:79 in Asad 1986:156).

With Benjamin’s argument, Asad imply that it is for the reader for to evaluate that *intentio*, and not for the translator to preempt the evaluation (Asad 1986:156). There are asymmetrical tendencies in cultural and lingual translations, and as such; “(...) anthropologists need to explore these processes in order to determine how far they will go in defining the possibilities and the limits of effective translation” (Asad 1986:164). I want to follow Asad’s advice by making an account for my role in the field and factors of limitations and possibilities of my cultural translations, enabling the reader to evaluate its validity, and to place my humbleness towards the Chinese people whom I come to represent and reproduce in my own language, within this thesis.

## Empirical Material

Most of the empirical material presented in this thesis derives from numerous events I attended during my fieldwork, for the most part, at ‘Section 6’ and ‘Natural Flavor’, two frequently held and popular hip-hop events which is organized, hosted and embraced by participants within the hip-hop environment itself. The formation of hip-hop in Beijing constantly define themselves by their marginalization from mainstream culture and by their distinct ‘look’ and ‘taste’ regarding music, and as such, I am referring to this environment as a distinct group-formation. This is both physically apparent as these events took place within ‘underground’ clubs and venues in Beijing, by the distinct sound of music and style of clothing, and also apparent by the ways in which behavior, social codes and a distinct system of value were constantly addressed, separating this environment from other spaces where leisure activities took place. During my fieldwork I spent a significant amount of time together with a few artists and fans becoming key-persons of reference throughout my thesis. *Nasty Ray* is a merited and respected Rapper from Beijing, in his mid-twenties, organizing and hosting ‘Natural Flavor’. He bears significant influence on the local hip-hop environment having a significant fan base in Beijing. As we frequently met and spent time together I got the opportunity to gain insight in his views and sentiments towards society, and motivations and aspirations towards hip-hop. I will present his distinct position in the field, in depth, in chapter 3. *D-Yosef* is another artist I came to spend significant amount of time with, a widely recognized artist within the hip-hop environment, respected for his skills and style in hip-hop as he both produce, rap and record hip-hop in his own home-recording studio. He is in his mid-twenties as well, originally from *Xinjiang* province located on the far western borders of China. He was initially living in Beijing as a student, but has recently dropped out of his studies, leaving his temporarily residence in Beijing as a hip-hop producer and Rapper in an ambivalent space. The studies are supposed to come to an end, and he soon has to move back to *Xinjiang* province somewhat “empty-handed”. His views upon hip-hop and society will continuously be referred to throughout this thesis as he came to be a great source of information and inspiration during my fieldwork. We will get to know *D-Yosef* in depth in chapter 3 and 4. *Wes* is in his early thirties, a half American half Chinese DJ and host at the state-run hip-hop radio-show. His significant experience and knowledge about Chinese hip-hop has granted me a deeper understanding of both the history- and contemporary state of Chinese hip-hop. By running the hip-hop show on official state-run radio he has first-hand experience with the public discourse of censorship and government control in China and is at the same time intimately connected with the ‘underground’ hip-hop

environment. As we will see, day-to-day music activity and state-control are closely related in China and this will continuously be subjected to analytical inquiry throughout this thesis.

### **Analytical framework**

Before I start exploring my ethnographic material of music and youth in China I believe it is necessary to outline key-concepts and present the main analytical tools framing the body of this thesis. The first chapter will serve as historical and contemporary backdrop guiding you through the history of music in China and its relation to the larger social and political developments in which it is connected, with an emphasize on the 1980s, 1990s and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Musical variations such as *gangtai*, *xibeifeng*, “prison songs”, rock and hip-hop are all expressions which both highlight the ongoing frictions between state and population, and which also reflect China’s modernization project and opening-up-to-the-world policies since the beginning of the 1980s. Nimrod Barnovitch’s (2003) thorough depiction of music and its social implications in China since 1978 – 1997 serves as a fruitful starting point in exploring this era. It is by no coincidence that my approach, as Baranovitch’s and other authors I am referring to throughout this thesis are depicting a resisting and counter-cultural/political force among segments of the population. Notions of resistance are pervasive and continuously addressed throughout this thesis. Music, like any other social expression in China are intricately connected to sociopolitical and sociocultural shifts and developments such as the ‘Chinese individualization process’ - placing higher autonomy on the individual’s choice and responsibility for its own actions while at the same time asserting state-control on the individual’s choice and responsibility towards individual and collective goals by governing from a ‘distance’ (Ong & Zhang 2008; Yunxiang 2006). The one-child policy of the 1980s have resulted in a higher level of social expectations from individuals, evident by the incorporation and the redefinition of the Chinese term *suzhi*, symbolizing ‘embodied qualities of human worth’, legitimizing social hierarchies and fueling the ‘status-game’ between individuals in China. Ann Anagnost’s (2004) and Andrew Kipnis’s (2006) comprehensive works on *suzhi* will aid us in exploring its significance. The commercialization and capitalization of the 1990s and its continuation into the 21<sup>st</sup> century have turned the urban society and its notions of *suzhi* into a highly materialistic and capitalistic space, whereas the state continuously promotes and regulates patterns of social behavior through market liberalism and strict state-media control. This, however, does not at all limit segments of the population, especially the urban youth to involve in cultural practices involving music and leisure activities which in many ways contest and resist overarching ideologies of the public discourse. As we will see, commercialism and modernization have led urban youth into a complex society where state-interference affecting individual and collective life coincides

with individual efforts, desires and choices to choose paths of their own. It is within the boundaries of modernization in China that certain music-cultures finds its ways through both official and non-official channels and it is within this cultural complexity that hip-hop emerge. The first chapter will hopefully create a fruitful backdrop in which hip-hop in Beijing must be viewed in relation to the larger historical context in which it exist.

In the second chapter I want to guide you through my empirical endeavor exploring leisure activities among urban youth in Beijing, with emphasize on the hip-hop environment. I will compare my empirical material to Yan Yunxing's (2006) and Liu Fengshu's (2011) exhaustive works on the 80s generation in China, suggesting that urban youth are pulled between two grand forces, shaping what Yunxiang propose as private and public spheres (2006). The forces shaping these spheres are recognized by Liu as a 'double subjectification regime' affecting identity construction in often conflicting ways (2011). I will merge Yunxiang- and Liu's arguments as reflections of the same matter, attesting how China's 'modernization project' have resulted in a 'dual approach' leaving Chinese youth torn between freedom to choose individually on the one hand, and the authoritarian control towards the individual's choices on the other (Liu 2011:29). I suggest that the boundaries between the private and public spheres are contested through the practice of hip-hop leaving these spheres somewhat fluid and overlapping. In the light of Foucault's theories of power and domination (2007) I will explore how the state is immanent in all social formations and point to how these power-relations both have a limiting- and a productive force in relation to hip-hop production and towards its influence upon identity construction. I am seeking to better understand how the cultural context of urban youth are affecting their understanding of self and others, and I will try to do so by employing Richard Jenkins' theories about identity as knowing 'who's who' and 'what's what' through processes of identification (2008). Urban youth identify themselves and others by identification of 'similarities' and 'difference' in their social worlds, and as 'difference' are constantly being addressed as a distinction between the hip-hop environment and 'others' I find it relevant to draw on Fredrik Barth's theory of 'social boundaries' (1969) as an analytical approach to understand these dynamics. By analyzing these matters I will try to highlight and understand the forces shaping the individual in China by identification, and understand how the complexity in which 'modernization with Chinese characteristics' are manifested by urban youth in ways of which they incorporate hip-hop into their life-worlds as means to express individual- and collective identification.

Chapter three will continue to explore processes of identification, with emphasize on the ways in which hip-hop, as an adopted musical form originating from America, are expressed by hip-hop artists and fans as an authentic cultural practice in a Chinese context. Expressions like “Keeping it Real” and “Real hip-hop” were frequently chanted within the hip-hop environment in Beijing and seems to be referring to standards and measurements of validation and authenticity of hip-hop as distinct musical form. Ian Condry poses an interesting question in his book about hip-hop in Japan in which I am inspired to follow up myself;

“What would it mean to ‘know’ Hip-hop, and what would be required to participate in the production of Hip-hop, in a language other than English and for the people with little (if any) historical connection to the largely African American communities that gave birth to the style? How can a Japanese artist ‘keep it real?’” (Condry 2006:26).

How can a Chinese artist “Keep it Real” is the question I am seeking to answer. I will present detailed empirical material of hip-hop events- and interviews diving deep into their reflections of authenticity within hip-hop and analyze how “Keeping it Real” might be viewed through Sarah Thornton’s theory of ‘subcultural capital’ (1996), in trying to explain how local artists and fans legitimize their cultural practice. I will trace the notion of “Keeping it Real”, as a widespread expression within hip-hop, back to its origins and look at six semantic dimensions in which Kembrew McLeod (1999) trace its implications in America. With McLeod’s semantic dimension I want to see if I comparatively can gain some understanding of how “Keeping it Real” is articulated by local artists and fans to authenticate hip-hop in China. Discussion will show how these negotiable and dynamic dimensions are useful in processes of authentication. To explain the mechanisms in which American hip-hop becomes adopted, translated and incorporated into Chinese day-to-day life I am referring to Jeroen de Kloet’s analytical approach to ‘translation’ as *pollution*, arguing that “Keeping it Real” is originally an imagined construct, leaving both the presumed “original” and the alleged “copy” inevitably obscured. “Keeping it Real” is deemed equivocal, but efforts to authenticate hip-hop as cultural practice are nonetheless important feature in which hip-hop becomes meaningful to Chinese artists and fans. This leads me to think of music as an element in the production- and reproduction of the self.

In chapter four I am looking at music as a ‘technology of the self’, posed by Tia DeNora, as a way to understand the relationship between music and subjectification (1999). To her, music constitutes subjectivity and contributes in the production of self-identity over time (DeNora 1999:32). As I spent time together with *D-Yosef* producing music we were able to negotiate and

communicate notions of self-identity through the music we were making. In order to analytically approach such a concept I will present a thorough empirical depiction of how *D-Yosef* and I made music together, and I will try to make account for my own thoughts and reactions as we go along and provide a detailed description of the context in which our interaction took place. I will analytically discuss the empirical material of our interaction, drawing on Alfred Schutz's (1951) idea of communication as something expressing the "communicator and the addressee's inner life" (Schutz 1951:96). To him, this involves 'preknowledge' about the certain musical activity at hand, connecting a relation to familiar musical form (Feld and Kiel 2005), and becomes expressed through various forms of "languages" (verbal, bodily, audible, technological and instrumental) to communicate both explicit and implicit 'tacit knowledge' (Müller 1996; Polanyi 1967) about ourselves and our experiences to one another. By approaching music as a 'technology of the self', as something actively used to define and redefine your self-identity, music might serve as a sound way to understand how urban youth navigate as individuals and part of collectives in contemporary China.



# Chapter 1

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## **Music in China**

In this chapter I want to map the modern history of China by depicting its social and political developments through the perspective of music and popular music cultures. This might seem like a creative way of looking at social and political history, but there exist extensive work connecting the field of music and popular cultures with its sociopolitical context in China. As such, I want to connect my empirical experience within the urban environment of hip-hop in Beijing with the historical, political and social context in which it exists. I will use Baranovitch's (2003) thorough depiction of music and politics in China ("China's New Voices") from 1978-1997 serving as a comprehensive foundation in which music and its relationship to its context in China might be understood.

I have divided this introduction into four parts; the first part is a short introduction to the musical aspect of the pre-revolutionary- and revolutionary Mao Era. The second part is a more elaborate introduction to the Post-Mao Era regarding developments in popular cultures during the 1980s. The third part is looking at some of the economic- and political shifts and developments during the 1990s. The fourth part presents a short introduction to the developments of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in terms internet access and consumption. With this chapter I mean to provide a general presentation of the intertwined relationship between politics and social life in China, by looking at the developments within cultural production influencing the construction of life; from the Red "revolutionary" songs of Mao and until the vast access to global popular music in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The tale will be simplified and short, but will hopefully serve as a foundation in which contemporary hip-hop culture in Beijing might be understood and discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

## **Pre-revolutionary China; the Intellectual and "Bourgeois" Shanghai**

During the 1920s, young intellectuals could enjoy a wide variety of Western products in the cosmopolitan urban atmosphere of Shanghai. They spent their leisure time in cafés listening to American- and Japanese jazz music while discussing Darwinism, women-liberation and national independence. The Japanese invasion from 1937-1945 and the Cold War during the 1950s made an end to the open-minded climate of the intellectual elite (Hansen and Thøgersen 2013:22-23).

Western influenced songs, and Western cultural influence as such, came to be considered decadent

and escapist by the leftist circles in China, especially after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931. They labelled the music ‘pornographic’, accusing it of distracting the urban population’s attention from the nationalistic cause. It represented Western and Japanese imperialism, corrupting the Chinese bourgeois to exploit China’s workers and peasants, and to be careless about the national crisis they were facing (Baranovitch 2003:14). These views followed the history to come, as Chairman Mao and the Communist Party founded the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949.

### **Revolutionary China; the Voice of the State**

During the Mao ‘revolution’, in the realm of music, only militant revolutionary songs, a handful of revolutionary operas and ballets that praised the leadership were allowed to be performed in public. During this era, any shape or form of music or performing arts were to represent and signify the doctrine of the Communist Party, all containing optimistic and positive political content, negating the past, present and future as bright and promising. In this period, the Party was also striving for equality between the sexes, an unisexual ideal if you will, essentially being a masculine ideal for both sexes by eliminating ‘feudal’ and ‘decadent’ qualities and practices which traditionally was considered feminine (Baranovitch 2003:1-23). Baranovitch argues that during this period of militant music, people were denied a whole range of basic human emotions and modes of expression (2003:12). With music as a tool to promote the ideals of the Party, Mao stated that all music must be of high quality and correct ideology in ways that it must appeal to the masses and must state an official message (Perris 1983:2). As we will see, Mao’s ideas about the purposes of arts and music are not that different from how the Party in China views music and arts today, however, the reality in which music and arts exist in 21<sup>st</sup> Century China is of quite different proportions than of the Revolutionary era. Let me guide you through the following years of reform and change in China.

### **Post-Mao Era; 1980s and the Sounds of Technology**

Deng Xiaoping became China’s new leader by the end of 1978, initiating the era commonly referred to in China as the era of “open door policy” (Baranovitch 2003:10). His reforms led China into a free-market economy enabling foreign investments and influence, enabling private businesses to grow, having former monopolies and state-owned institutions shut down and gave people more freedom to choose where they wanted to live and work (Baranovitch 2003:1-2; Hansen and Thøgersen 2013:17). Since then, culture has not been dictated or imposed unilaterally from above, to the same extent as during the Revolution. The social, cultural and political diversity which came from these reforms does not, however, imply that the government in China were not trying to dictate or impose power and control, but the “opening-up” reforms since the 1980s have made it significantly more complicated and difficult for the Party to do so (Baranovitch 2003:1).

## Individualization

To understand the effect of popular music during the 1980s it is important to understand the sociopolitical shifts during this era. Yunxiang Yan (2010) recognizes the institutional changes in China throughout the 1980s, commonly referred to as *songbang* (松绑), literally meaning ‘to untie’. The decollectivizing reforms ‘untying’ peasants in the rural areas, allowing them to work as individual laborers, quickly spread to the urban areas as well, giving rise to a more individualistic oriented subject in China (Yan 2010:496). According to Yan, mobility plays an important role in this transformation because “(...) it enables disembedding, making it possible for the individual to break out of the shadow of the various sorts of collectives” (Yan 2010:498). During the 1980s, “...the state still maintained centralized control of the economy and claimed moral responsibility for the well-being of the citizens.” (Ong & Zhang 2008:14) and “only some groups were expected to take the first steps toward individual initiative, as expressed in the call “let some people get rich first” (*rang yibufen ren xian fuqilai*, 让一部分人先富起来)” (ibid., 2008).

Guangdong province, located close to Hong Kong, played an important role in the development and revival of modern urban leisure activities during this period. Not only is Guangdong located far from the political capital Beijing, but the province was also labelled a “special economic zone”, granting them a higher degree of liberation and autonomy than other provinces at the time. A “special economic zone” means in its most simple form that some areas are subjected to different economic- and political regulations than other areas in order to develop and thrive (Baranovitch 2003:16). Guangdong enjoyed a free-market system, supporting the growth of private entrepreneurship, and foreign investments were encouraged in order to develop the economy (Sit 1985:69). The economic reforms in Guangdong and its geographical distance from the political capital of Beijing were boosting the pace of modernization, and caused, in terms of modern urban leisure activities a reappearance of nightclubs and dance halls (Baranovitch 2003:16). “The increasing importance of emotionality and desire in private life is one of the most important changes that has occurred in the individualization process” (Yan 2010:504). This is not to say that desires and emotions somehow became a “new” feature in Chinese individual life, rather, desires and emotions which initially were subdued, controlled and stigmatized by the socialist state as improper, now entered the public sphere (504-505) in ways in which it became celebrated publicly, like *gangtai* music.

## *Gangtai Music*

The earliest form of foreign popular music to be introduced to mainland China in the post-Mao era was pop songs from Hong Kong and Taiwan, known as *gangtai* (港台) music. The soft and slow sounds and emotional lyrical content of these songs stands out in direct contrast to the ‘revolutionary’ music that Chinese people on the mainland had been exposed to since 1949 (Baranovitch 2003:10-11). “The lyrics were about love, not for the homeland, the Party, or Chairman Mao, but rather romantic love between a man and a woman (...)” (Baranovitch 2003:11). What formerly was banned and viewed as “decadent” and “bourgeois individualism” during the revolution was now penetrating the borders of mainland China, from Hong Kong and Taiwan as a result of new reform policies. Music scholars commonly agree that the *gangtai* music of the late 1970s descended from the pre-revolutionary period in China, as mentioned briefly in the beginning of this chapter. Western-influenced popular music that emerged in Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s were now entering China once again (Baranovitch 2003:11).

Foreign music entered China together with modern technology such as tape recorders and cassettes which means that people were no longer depended exclusively on state-controlled media to explore music and arts. This had a “(...) decentralizing and democratizing effect empowering people through the ability to choose and listen to the music they liked” (Baranovitch 2003:13), challenging and weakening the Party’s tight control over Chinese society and culture (ibid., 2003). Due to the increased opportunities of mobility in physical terms, the individual is able break away from the constraints of social groups and find her or his own ways of self-development in a new social setting.

“The invisible hand obviously plays a decisive role in promoting mobility because the market needs free and mobile laborers. The visible hand of the party-state, however, is equally important because it has a high stake in stimulating economic growth and maintaining the social structure on its own terms” (Yan 2009:276).

The official classified *gangtai* songs into three categories; “low-class and filthy, pure love songs, and songs about ordinary life and homesickness for the mainland”, and regarded only the last category as completely acceptable (Honig and Hershatter 1988:59-60 in Baranovitch 2003:15). Thomas B. Gold argues that the state could only accept *gangtai* music in terms of reunification between Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China. Practically, this means that whenever this kind of music would get exposed in Chinese media it would be with political aim; “(...) (as) a way for the regime to show its own people the veracity of its propaganda about the people of Hong Kong and Taiwan yearning for reunification (homesickness for the mainland)” (Gold 1993:921). In this

way, the government creatively incorporates *gangtai* culture from Hong Kong and Taiwan as a way to support the Party's political goals (ibid., 1993), and at the same time stimulate the popularity of *gangtai* music. Efforts to limit the spreading of *gangtai* music by forbidding romantic sentiments addressing any other kind of love than "love for the homeland", did not manage to hinder its wide production, consumption and growing popularity. Songs regarded controversial by the government quickly became hits and the singers from Hong Kong and Taiwan were the first "stars" to arise in post-revolutionary China (Baranovitch 2003:16). This fact does not only emphasize the influence of the outside world as China "opened up", but more interestingly, it indicates that large portions of the Chinese society were now taking the liberty to resist official regulations (ibid., 2003).

Romantic songs by singers from Hong Kong and Taiwan conquered mainland China despite governmental efforts to ban it, and "(...) millions of individuals were inspired by their emotion-ridden, individualistic, and apolitical messages to rethink the meaning of life" (Yan 2010:503). Wearing blue jeans, sunglasses, listening to pop music and attending dance parties grew as the pursuit of one's own had become a forceful trend by the mid-1980s, as "(...) the politics of lifestyle began to play a role in Chinese social life" (ibid., 2010). Baranovitch argues that the state had no choice but to accept and incorporate the growing popularity of *gangtai* music, in order to communicate with China's youngsters, who were the main patrons of this music (2003:18).

### *Xibeifeng*

While the soft, sweet and slow restrained *gangtai* music represented a longing for femininity on mainland China, the emergence of *xibeifeng* (西北风) with its rough, loud and forceful style constructed a desired powerful, earthy and primordial masculine image (Baranovitch 2003:20). *Xibeifeng* rose as a musical reaction against the soft *gangtai* music, and it symbolized the reassertion of mainland cultural independence as it combined characteristics of northwest folk music with modern rock and disco style and tempo. It was the first indigenous, popular music style to emerge on the mainland since the beginning of the reform era, and marks the public emergence mainland pop- and rock in China (Baranovitch 2003:19). Baranovitch explains how this musical style came to represent a longing for cultural identity and collectivity, and resistance against the government. "*Xibeifeng* both reflected and shaped the intense public cultural and political negotiation that was taking place on the mainland during the 1980s" (2003:24).

Baranovitch explains the emerging critical attitude among youngsters in China and their aspirations for independence (2003:25) by referring to Jin Zhaojun (1988), China's most prominent popular music critic, writing for the most politicized official newspapers and magazines in China

such as *People's Daily (Renmin ribao)* and *People's Music (Renmin yinyue)* (8). In Baranovitch's book, Zhaojun argues that;

“(…) Chinese youngsters experienced enormous pressure, mental conflict, and confusion due to rapid change in values and the transition from the old to the new, and (...) *xibeifeng* emerged because it satisfied the youngsters' need to release ‘their feelings of oppression’” (Jin Zhaojun 1988 in Baranovitch 2003:25).

Zhaojun recognized in 1988 the growing distrust and rejection towards the government and their aspirations to change things. These sentiments signaled a growing aspiration for social change among the new generation of Chinese youth (Baranovitch 2003:25-30).

### **“Prison Songs”**

While *xibeifeng* communicated a collective and idealistic sense of mission, a second musical trend called “prison songs” arose simultaneously and made a similarly controversial- yet significantly different imprint among young people and private entrepreneurs called *getihu* (个体户) (Baranovitch 2003:26).

“(…) most private entrepreneurs in the early 1980s were individuals who, for various reasons, could not find a position in a state-owned enterprise or collective unit, the label “*geti hu*” carried certain negative connotations (...) as if these individuals were not completely accepted by society” (Yan 2009:281).

“Prison songs” appealed to those who identified themselves with the despair, dark realism and antagonism embedded in the slow- and “blues-like” “prison songs”. The songs celebrated and reflected the dark realities of the complex urban life in post-revolutionary China, which resonated with many people's own experience. In opposition to the official representations of life as “healthy” and “positive”, “prison songs” symbolized resistance against the mainstream culture. To the private entrepreneurs whom which many were ex-convicts, dropouts or petty criminals, “prison songs” came to represent their experiences, worldviews and emotions providing them a sense of identity and a voice. The popularity of “prison songs” among China's urban youth reflected a post-revolutionary fascination with alternative, nonconformist, and less idealized ways of life, which undoubtedly was strong among this social segment (Baranovitch 2003:26-29). “(...) dissatisfaction, disillusionment, despair, bitterness, idealism, self-empowerment, and the desire to change things expressed in *xibeifeng* songs, ‘prison songs’” (Baranovitch 2003:29) and rock music were all indications of what came to develop into a protesting movement against the government in 1989. A movement of dissatisfied youth which could have been foreseen if scholars in China would have treated pop culture more seriously in the 1980s (Baranovitch 2003:30). As such, the clear self-

empowerment and resistance towards the Party through music consumption may serve as an example highlighting important dimensions of the individualization process.

### **Rock**

Already during mid-1980s, Rock music and students in protest occurred together, in Shanghai, where unrest among students at a rock concert performed by an American surf-rock band resulted in an incident between students and the police. A student that resisted arrest and was beaten up by the security guards lead to a public dialogue between students in Shanghai and the mayor Jiang Zemin, and the failure of this dialogue marked the beginning of active student demonstrations in Shanghai by the end of 1986 (Schell 1988, 223-224).

The story of rock in China bears similarities with *gangtai* music, *xibeifeng* and “prison songs” as the practice of musicians singing their own songs, expressing personal feelings was completely strange to most Chinese at that time. When Cui Jian became popular during the 1980s he invoked ideas of individualism, non-conformism, personal freedom, direct and bold expression, protest and rebellion into his music, very much like in Western rock culture. He trivialized the voice of the state by emphasizing his own, empowering the individual self and by asserting it independent value (Baranovitch 2003:32). Baranovitch recognize that Cui Jian’s music came to symbolize the frustration among young intellectuals, who by the sudden exposure to Western culture grew cynical about communism and increasingly critical of China’s traditional and contemporary culture. Since Cui Jian’s first large-scale public appearance in 1986, Chinese rock has been banned officially from state-run television and live concerts have been subjected to restrictions. Next time Cui Jian was to perform officially was in 1989 (Baranovitch 2003:33).

### **The sounds of Tiananmen Square in 1989**

Weeks before the outbreak of the 1989 demonstrations, Cui Jian held a large-scale performance in Beijing Exhibition Hall in front of an audience of mainly students. The evident link between Cui Jian’s rock music and the demonstrations became clear when his songs were sung by the students as anthems during the demonstrations (Jones 1992b:83 in Baranovitch 2003:34). I am not arguing that the democracy movement itself stem from rock, “prison songs” or any of the musical developments of the 1980s described above, however, the connection in which popular music during the 1980s reflects the growing distress- and emerging desire for social change that, in turn, was embedded in the movement of 1989 is obvious.

Demonstrating against inequality and corruption, the movement of 1989 was concerned with a system that deprived them of the right to vote or speak freely. Historically, China has been

governed by state socialism were the party-state seeks to control all aspects of individual lives, particularly ideological domains (Zuo and Benford 1995:135). The structure of the political system during the 1980s did not change much, but the government loosened its grip in the ideological field providing the means of critical views to emerge and become shared beyond the boundaries of state control. “The exposure to Western ideas due to the ‘open-door’ policy in the 1980s created a new awareness of political and cultural alternatives” (Zuo and Benford 1995:136).

The government on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1989 cracked down on the demonstrations with military force and violently put an end to its public negotiations. As such, this marks an important shift whereas the critical voices of the 1980s became silenced, and the state regained its control and was able to continue forming the social, political and economic life in China. This did not end or set back an individualization process; the individualization process in China is not about the individual power to change politics as much as it implies that the individual is supposed to take responsibility for one’s own actions. This is important in understanding ‘governmentality’ in China; “the problem of the state and population” (Foucault 2007:115) which I will discuss in chapter 2. As Ong & Zhang argues; “powers of the self, (...) are regulated and framed within the sovereign power of the nation” (2008:1).

As we now have discovered the backdrop in which popular music grew hand-in-hand with processes of individualization and sentiments of social change during the post-revolution era of the 1980s it is interesting to explore how the relationship between social life and popular music continued after 1989 and through the following 1990s.

### 1990s; Commercialization

In contrast to the 1980s when private entrepreneurs were socially marginalized, they emerged as a new label for successful individuals in the beginning of 1990s. The former term *getihu* was replaced with by other more specific and individualistic terms, such as *xiaoshangfan* (小商贩, pretty vendor). This were increasing the private entrepreneurs’ mobility in the society, becoming more and more praised by the state, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some were even recruited into the Chinese Communist Party. Just as the usage of “I” gradually replaced the usage of “we” during the 1980s and 1990s, empowering the individual, “social labelling is important because it defines the individual’s rights, status, and identity in society” (Yan 2009:280-281).

### Suzhi; Embodied ‘Quality’

According to Liu Fengshu, *suzhi* (素质) is an important Chinese term in understanding the ideal subject in China, and the term is commonly translated into English terms as ‘quality’ (2011:30). In



simple forms, *suzhi* is referring to “embodied human quality, and the embodied qualities it refers to include those that result from both nature and nurture” (Kipnis 2006:388) and is closely related to measurements of social status (Anagnost 2004). According to Kipnis, the English term ‘quality’ fails to fully catch the nuances of *suzhi* (Kipnis 2006:296), and as such, the term calls for elaboration. During the 1980s, the term *suzhi* was used by the state, associated with the one-child policy “to foster a whole generation of high quality people” (Liu 2011:30), in an effort to raise the quality of the population by limiting its quantity (Kipnis 2007:388). The “reference to *suzhi* justifies social and political hierarchies of all sorts, with those of ‘high’ *suzhi* being seen as deserving more income, power and status than those of ‘low’ *suzhi* (Kipnis 2006:295). During the 1990s, the ideals of “*suzhi* spread from official and academic publications into more popular genres” (Kipnis 2006:302). This led to advertising campaigns for numerous products, promising to raise the *suzhi* of those who consume them and popular magazines gave parents suggestions on how to cultivate the *suzhi* of their children (ibid., 2006). In this way *suzhi* has come to represent “(...) a form of common sense adhering to bodies as a measure of their worth as human capital” (Anagnost 2004:193). “*Suzhi* may be glossed as human quality and *suzhi* discourse refers to the ways in which this notion of human quality is used in processes of governing contemporary China” (Kipnis 2007:384).

### **Disempowerment**

According to Baranovitch, rock music rose to the surface and achieved popularity in the euphoric and carnivalistic spring of 1989, and rock continued to intensify after the crackdown, however, rock came to represent more an “...expression of anger, defiance, and perhaps a kind of compensation for the failure of the movement” (Baranovitch 2003:36). During the early 1990s, rock bands were found everywhere in Beijing and the music revealed a reflection of helplessness and disempowerment. The admiration for rock music and Western culture went almost to the point of fetishizations among the Chinese youth adopting a whole set of Western values, expressing desires of personal freedom and resistance towards traditional values and morals (Baranovitch 2003:40-44). However, banning rock from television and placing more restrictions on rock performances, especially in Beijing, during the early 1990s, the government successfully marginalized rock music to the extent that young people lost much of their past idealism and will to change things (Baranovitch 2003:44).

Rock did not cease to exist, but rather lost its mass appeal and descended into the underground as China sailed towards the mid-1990s. Baranovitch explains how musical attention

during this period reveals the dialectical relationship between state-dominance and shifts in public negotiation.

“It was obvious in the mid-1990s that the success of the regime in suppressing the movement and maintaining stability, order, and economic progress had caused many to reevaluate the movement, and many saw it now in a different light. (...)The decline of rock reflected the general lack of interest in China of the 1990s in stimulating politicized cultural products, thoughts, and behavior, let alone political activity. People seemed to be interested mainly in material comfort: in making money and improving their living standard. As for music, there is no doubt that listening to nonpolitical, sweet, romantic music was the dominant practice in the mid-1990s, even among intellectuals. If past revolutionary songs, like some of the more recent rock songs, aimed to stir people up and mobilize them to struggle and action, then, in contrast, the dominant practice and both official and unofficial discourse about music in the mid-1990s placed music in the context of ‘relaxation’” (Baranovitch 2003:44-45).

The progress of state power and the government’s attempt to direct public attention from counter-cultural idealism resulted in a more materialistic oriented subject. Materialism became increasingly valued and led many rockers and former critical voices to temper their past antagonism against mainstream culture in an attempt to make profit in a highly commercialized market. At the same time, *gangtai* music was dominating the musical landscape in China and it kept intensifying, a musical form much more fit with the notions of music as “relaxation” promoted in the popular discourse of the 1990s. Karaoke machines spread in China during this decade and its popularity caused a transformation in music production emphasizing predictable melodic patterns, a moderate regular tempo, clearly articulated words that could easily be sung, learned and reproduced (Baranovitch 2003:46). If the characteristics of the emerging music during the 1980s were challenging the traditional structures of melody, tempo, voice and lyrical content by obscuring it, then the emerging form popular music during the 1990s were the very antithesis of the 1980s. Wang, in his article about “Culture as Leisure and Culture as Capital” argues that; “...the state has undertaken the building of the material base of a consumer society as steadily as it inculcates the ideology of mass consumption” (Wang 2001:75). The technology and popularity of karaoke machines and the ‘simplicity’ of this music seems to celebrate the implications of Wang’s statement above as music in its most uncontroversial form could become massively distributed and serve the capitalistic intentions of the state.

### State Television and Censorship

The state controls the commercial broadcasting mediums such as television and radio (CCTV), so maintaining a good relationship with officialdom was important for anyone who wanted to pursue a career in the entertainment industry (Baranovitch 2003:45). Through CCTV, the state aims to

satisfy the people's musical needs and limit their access to unofficial channels of communication and music, through which they could be exposed to alternative ideologies and practices (Baranovitch 2003:196).

“CCTV, and by extension the state, propagates a variety of themes, the most important of which include nationalism and patriotism, good citizenship, collectivism, productivity, education, the centrality of Beijing, (...) and in a more subtle way, the Communist Party” (Baranovitch 2003:196).

By allowing for a limited range of expressions CCTV allows for only patriotic and nationalistic expressions, addressing (what they consider) positive and idealized forms of life (Baranovitch 2003:194). Beijing and the official language (Mandarin) are praised as the center of worship through CCTV, serving as the national unifier. By excluding songs from the south sung in Cantonese, the state effectively resists regionalism and asserts the dominance of the north (Baranovitch 2003:201-202). Asserting pride in a specifically Chinese cultural identity has been an important factor in shaping nationalism among the Chinese population, and youth are no exception (cf. Jack, Kipnis and Sargeson 2013:193).

CCTV may be fully in control of what is broadcasted through TV and radio, however, live concerts are one of the few arrangements in China where a large amount of people spend several hours together, and as such, they present a potential threat to the state. Lyrics have to pass official inspections upon album releases and before a song can be performed in an officially approved large-scale concert. However, there does not seem to be clear standards for censorship, at a subtle level, the relationship between a particular musician and officialdom, the general political atmosphere and other local and temporal conditions might just be the determining factor (Jack, Kipnis and Sargeson 2013:216). Obviously, the state will most likely censor your music if you are “...directly opposing the government, its policies, or are too critical of reality and thus challenge the party's legitimacy” (ibid., 2013). Jeroen de Kloet has done significant research in understanding the ambivalences regarding censorship in China. According to Article 102 of Chinese criminal law, it is an offence for any person “(...) to confuse right and wrong, to poison people's minds, to incite the masses and create chaos, to undermine socialist revolution and construction, and to achieve the final goal of overthrowing the people's democratic dictatorship and socialist system” (Fu & Cullen 1996:145 in de Kloet 2010:183). This provides the state with the legal means to censor anyone at any time for just about anything, and their motives for doing so does not at all seem to ease.

“China's elaborate regime of party-state power in public communication has few parallels in the contemporary world. What is apparent is the party's determination to sustain this regime at all costs and by all means, its

ability to constantly revamp and perfect this regime, and its progressive amplification and modernization since the early 1990s” (Zhao 2008:61).

Although the state are attesting popular culture with monopolized power to regulate it, in the official sphere, there still exist nonofficial channels in which popular- and alternative cultures become widely distributed and reproduced. Apart from the prevalent distribution of just about anything that can be pirate-copied by modern technology accessible to ordinary people, de Kloet recognized another interesting phenomenon penetrating the strict system of censorship in China.

*Dakou* stands for CDs and tapes bearing a cut on the side, in order to prevent them from being sold. These CDs and tapes are dumped by the West and are supposed to be recycled, but instead, they are smuggled into China and distributed extensively on the black markets. According to de Kloet, this opened up a musical space during the 1990s, especially for rock fans, a space that did not officially exist, and it came to signify a whole urban generation. It is easy to look at this generation as rebellious and counter-political, experimenting with alternative lifestyles, however, de Kloet argues that *dakou* culture is more diverse and ambiguous than being put in a simple political binary opposition of resistance between state and youth cultures. The reality in which China are developing and being governed are complex and multisided, and may not, by any means, be fully understood by reading a fragmented and simplified introduction such as this chapter. However, this introduction provides a significant insight to the historical and contemporary context in which urban music in Beijing belongs, and I am convinced that by addressing this complexity and multiplicity our understanding of today’s youth cultures in Beijing will enhance. *Daokou* CDs and tapes diminished as the digitization of music fully flowered in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, giving birth to a whole new generation in China, the *balinghou* (80s generation - 80 后) with access to the most obscure and exotic sounds just one click away on the internet (de Kloet 2010:20-23).

## **21st Century; Mass-media and Communication**

In 2012 there were over 560 million internet users in China, 60 percent of these people were men between 20-30 years and spent more than 20 hours every week on internet. The regional differences are big, as 70 percent of the population in Beijing is internet users compared to only 29 percent in the Jiangxi province (Hansen and Thøgersen 2013:232).

In order to control the flow of information the government are doing everything they can to control and regulate the internet. While popular social media such as *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Youtube* is blocked in China, the government has established almost identical Chinese alternatives such as *Weibo* (Twitter), *Youku* (Youtube) and *Renren* (Facebook). To ensure control, the Chinese

internet is divided into hundreds of local units where about one thousand censors are attached to each unit. There also exist an official internet-police with about 20.000-25.000 employees in addition to about 250.000-300.000 party members working continuously, reading and reporting internet use and abuse (Hansen and Thøgersen 2013:232-233). The advanced censorship system controlling the internet in China is popularly referred to as “The Great Firewall” by foreign media, but in reality, Chinese internet users enjoys much more freedom to write what they want than what such a nickname might imply. Where the censorship draws the line between right and wrong seems to rest on what is considered individual expression and what is considered to mobilize the masses (Hansen and Thøgersen 2013:233). “The growth of television and internet has been particularly important in influencing youth identities and culture.” (Jack, Kipnis and Sargeson 2013:184)

“Together with consumerism, one of the most outstanding features distinguishing Chinese sociocultural life of the last few decades has been an unprecedented increase in the flow of ideas, images and values, as well as goods, both around the country and between China and the rest of the world” (Jack, Kipnis and Sargeson 2013:184).

Technological developments and efforts to both control- and stimulate television viewers and internet users are enabled by state motives of growth in consumption and innovation (Jack, Kipnis and Sargeson 2013:184).

“Like developments in consumerism, the media boom in contemporary China points to a characteristically modern, global liberation and proliferation of the identities, values and forms of self-expression available to young people. At the same time, it is associated with particular changes in values and identities specific to China” (Jack, Kipnis and Sargeson 2013:192).

Jack, Kipnis and Sargeson recognize different directions of change in youth identities and values. The spread of communication technologies and the increase of people’s physical mobility have made young people across China more worldly-wise and cosmopolitan in their values and tastes. The impact of modern Western values, ideas and tastes, and similarly, influences from other parts of East Asia such as South Korea and Japan have led an emergence of globalized youth identities and cultures in China. *Gangtai* pop from Hong Kong and Taiwan is by far the most popular genre among young people in China, influencing their tastes and fashions. This suggests that East Asian youth identity has been more culturally and socially significant in China in recent decades than any other kind of global identity. A growing desire to identify- and assert pride with a specifically Chinese identity is also important trends among youth. This is apparent by the vast popularity of pre-revolutionary TV dramas and by the increase of nationalist protests against critics from the outside world (Jack, Kipnis and Sargeson 2013:192-193).

The state encourage youth through consumer capitalism and moral education to think of themselves as individuals, responsible for their own development, that social success and a good life can be achieved through individual effort and by consuming material goods (Jack, Kipnis and Sargeson 2013:194). However, in China, individualization does not necessarily lead to individualist identities, as I will discuss in the forthcoming chapters. Trends in consumption in China, as elsewhere, are heavily shaped by desires of status, to “fit in” and to “stand out” and the strive for success among Chinese youth contribute to high level of spending on publicly visible markers of identity and status such as cosmetics, clothes, accessories and so on. The Chinese market competes for young customers by fueling the “status game” with advertisements and new trendy products creating demand for culturally valued knowledge, skills, style, looks and other qualifications and attributions that will enable young people to get “ahead” in their social worlds. “The status game, and the consumerism that accompanies it, have contributed, and been shaped by, the development of new youth subcultures.” (Jack, Kipnis and Sargeson 2013:182-183). It is in the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century hip-hop has emerged as a youth culture in Beijing, and in this thesis hip-hop may be coined as part of mainstream fashion and commercial capitalism on the one hand, and as part of a subcultural segment of urban youth perceiving themselves as the antithesis of mainstream fashion and commercial capitalism on the other. Kipnis (2012) argues that “in the context of music and variety shows broadcast on Chinese television, guitars, break dancing, hip-hop, and rock music are presented in a manner that associates their Westernness with upper-class, urban Chinese youth rather than anti-aspirational, working-class egalitarian culture” (Kipnis 2012:192). This might be true as hip-hop is consumed, in large, by privileged urban youth, but this statement only reflects the agenda of the government, and not the agenda of the youth who embrace it. According to Fung (2008), Chinese television incorporate global trends such as hip-hop and break-dancing to fit with the prevailing government agenda on youth (Fung 2008:97), and argues that “Rapping in China does not include a growing discontent, defiant animosity, and explosive expostulations about the social evils of Chinese society” (ibid., 2008), but are rather “occupied with consumptive hedonism, individualistic narcissism and materialistic pursuits (...)” (ibid., 2008). To Fung, “apolitical hip-hop music actually functions to soothe social upheaval and maintain the status quo” (ibid., 2008). Hip-hop in China might function to soothe social upheaval and maintain the status quo, in terms of government agenda on youth, however, Fung fails to tell the narratives of how hip-hop becomes incorporated by urban youth to, in part to resist overarching ideals of personhood, to express discontent, if not growing, and to challenge and negotiate value and moral within their social boundaries. The ways in which a consumer oriented Chinese market, an emerging urban middle-

class and a cross cultural flow of products, ideas and values through both official and nonofficial channels have led to developments of subcultures in Beijing, and a subculture of hip-hop as such, which in part resist the ideals of mainstream media is what I intend to discuss in the following chapters. Since the introduction of modern technology during the 1980s enabling people to consume music and arts independent from state-owned media, and by the increase of privatized music venues, clubs, cafes etc. where popular songs have been consumed and embraced ever since, *dakou* CDs, black-markets of pirated CDs, films, games and the constantly increase of internet-access have all led music to be in abundance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and this access to popular trends and cultures does not at all seem to decline.

In this chapter I have been presenting a fragmented history of music in China and its relations to the changing political and social landscape in which it develops. The ongoing individualization process, with Chinese characteristics, keep forming the variety of ways Chinese youth navigate through life. Ideas of *suzhi* and how to create and maintain social status and ‘quality of life’ is closely linked to processes of individuation, individual responsibilities in representations of the individual self, the family and the state. It is important to underscore the specificity of Chinese individualization.

“(…) individuation in the Chinese situation does not necessarily mean the growth of liberal individualism, or Western values of individual rights which are influential only among certain sectors of the educated elite. Rather, we identify this individuation as an ongoing process of private responsibility, requiring ordinary Chinese to take their life into their own hands and to face the consequences of their decisions on their own. Individuation goes beyond making choices in consumer markets; it also extends to choices that shape one’s tastes, habits, lifestyle, health, occupation, friends and networks in relation to a surfeit of forms of knowledge and practices. Thus the reinvention of selfhood and personal privacy are embroiled with new kinds of knowledge and information that participate in shaping “the new social”” (Ong & Zhang 2008:16).

The mix of self-governing and socialist governing at a distance is forming a space where state authorities interplay with a multitude of self-interested actions, and this shape the “new social” (Ong & Zhang 2008:4). To contribute to the understanding of Ong & Zhang’s “space” I have been researching how trends in music are shaping, constructing and recreating identity in urban Beijing. How global cultural flows of music, consumption and leisure activity are shaping subcultures with Chinese characteristics, and how music might be viewed as a “technology of the self”, as a vehicle for one’s identity, respectively within the hip-hop environment in Beijing.

# Chapter 2

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I want to guide you through my discovery of hip-hop in Beijing, both how I came to experience urban Chinese music cultures and how I came to learn about Chinese hip-hop. There are two ways to approach hip-hop in China, the way I see it; the way hip-hop has emerged and been incorporated into the mainstream and commercial market, and the way hip-hop has created a subculture of hip-hop which in part, is resisting mainstream culture. As I discuss in the next chapter, these two different dimensions do not exist in isolation, but are rather constructing each other, leaving both perspectives as reflections of the other. However, the environment in which I have conducted most of my fieldwork are situated in the subcultural segment of hip-hop enthusiasts in Beijing and beholds in large the empirical representation of my thesis. This chapter is seeking to analyze and discuss the cultural context in which urban youth navigate as individuals and as part of collectives, in terms of domination, power and modernity that are affecting identity constructions in Beijing. This chapter will merely touch upon the complexity and flexibility in identity construction, but will hopefully create a fruitful backdrop in which ‘hip-hop and authenticity’ and music as a ‘technology of the self’ will be discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

## Youth and Music Cultures

During my first weeks in Beijing, getting to know the surroundings of my new residence, I realize how huge this city really is, with a population extending 20 million. You spend hours walking only fragments of the city, crossing huge intersections, passing enormous building constellations, plunging your way through massive crowds of people, discovering the endless maze of small concrete buildings and narrow alleyways called *hutong*, at least what is left of them, only to find yourself exploring a small circle of the supersized Beijing-map folded in your back pocket. You simply have to get a bicycle to get familiar with the geography of the city and to enhance your mobility exploring it, and still, it would take years to get to know the details of this city.

Within the first three weeks of my fieldwork I manage to buy myself a used bicycle. Shaky and scared I entered the chaotic traffic in Beijing, a chaos in which the amount of cars in Beijing alone exceeds the amount of people living in Norway all together, not to mention the amount of motorcycles, electric mopeds, bicycles in addition to the millions of people walking. While rolling around in Beijing looking for hip-hop, I discover all sorts of urban culture and music. I pass huge shopping malls filled with young people going up and down the escalators and I find small CD and



Vinyl shops selling local productions of urban music within random narrow streets. I see “hip” young people everywhere dressed up in trendy clothes fondling with their smartphones, “hanging out”, drinking tea, coke and beers, flirting and conversing in café’s, parks and at MC Donald’s. I meet skateboarders as they fill the empty spaces behind the huge shopping malls and I pass young and old people as they gather outside in parks to play with kites, dance and exercise. The constant food smell from street vendors making breakfast in the morning, lunch at noon, dinner in the evening and snack at night fills the exhaustively polluted air at every single metro station in every single district where there is a constant river of people passing by, leaving me with an impression of a city that never sleep.

Using internet to locate café’s, bars and clubs in Beijing I quickly find myself inside sweaty, dim and crowded club- and bar environments listening to a wide variety of music, everything from jazz, blues, rock, folk, techno, electronic, pop (both Western and Chinese) and American hip-hop music. It takes a while before I hear a hip-hop song in Chinese, it does not seem to be played in public much. There are certainly clubs playing foreign hip-hop music, such as *Mix* or *Vics*, which constantly features foreign DJs playing the latest hip-hop hits from the East Asian- and American music charts. These two clubs are commonly referred to as fashionable and commercial youth clubs, wearing an image of representing hip-hop culture, but do not appeal much to the local hip-hop environment I came to encounter. I spent time observing these clubs watching how they organize the most exclusive cars to be parked right outside of the club-entrance, leading young people dressed in the latest fashion into an entrance of neon lights. The doorman tell me that there are about seven hundred Chinese and foreign guests during a usual weekend night. I did not hear a single Chinese Rap song in *Mix* or *Vics*, and I learned that this is not the place to look for local hip-hop.

I am looking for a local environment where people rap in Chinese, produce their own hip-hop music, dress and consume hip-hop on the daily, in an environment where people share the ideas and takes part in both the production and consumption of local hip-hop. I tried to use common public internet sources like [thebeijinger.com](http://thebeijinger.com), [cityweekend/beijing.com](http://cityweekend/beijing.com) or other well-known internet magazines to locate popular urban culture, but it did not provide me any solid information about hip-hop’s existence in Beijing. The environment, if it exist, seem to be quite underground.

Hip-hop certainly exists within the fashion industry, as clubs like *Mix* and *Vics* attract hundreds of young people every weekend into their atmosphere of hip-hop music. A “local Rap scene”, however, seems hard to find within the maze of leisure activities in Beijing. I can do

nothing but to continue exploring how young Chinese people indulge with cultures of popular music, navigate the urban landscape in order to say something about the context popular music exists (or not exist) in.

### **Ambivalent Fun-Seekers**

I discover that there are young Chinese boys and girls, in their teens, twenties and thirties everywhere in “downtown” Beijing, shopping, eating in nice restaurants or drinking coffee at Starbucks or Mc Donald’s, dancing and drinking in pubs and clubs during nighttime. It seems to me that young urban Chinese have both money and leisure time to involve themselves in a wide variety of consumption possibilities, which is to state the obvious, however, the observation fails to tell the narratives of young urban individuals and how they live in a more complex reality. I met a 23 year old singer and host working at a Blues bar and she put me on the trails of several hip-hop DJs and Rappers that might benefit my fieldwork. She explained to me that most of the youth indulging with urban music in Beijing have rich parents and spend most of their time on hobbies and leisure activities.

“Young Chinese with rich parents have problems finding what they want they want to do with their lives, they are spoiled and lazy. They rather want to do their hobbies, be trendy and consume expensive and modern things like clothing, music, electronics and social activities, rather than being “responsible”, saving their money and working hard at school” (*Lory*).

The way she is dichotomizing hobbies and trendy consumption on the one hand, with working hard at school, being responsible on the other implies that there exist contradictory ideas towards what one “should” do in contrast to what they are “actually doing”. She continues to say that there are high expectations in school and in the society at large creating fierce competition and tough races among youth to be the “best”, in the pursuit of steady work, high income and being able to take care of the family. To *Lory*, these expectations come from parents, teachers, peers, government propaganda and generally from older people in society. She did not finish her degree at the university she was studying music, and according to her there is a growing distrust among youth that high education and hard work at school is going to “pay off” at all. Being “best in class” does not necessarily provide youth steady work according to *Lory*. This is why a lot of privileged youth spend more time on themselves and their hobbies hoping that life is going to find its own way eventually. She is portraying Beijing as a city where everybody is looking for money, where being “rich” seems to be the common idea of happiness, and the only path to a successful life. She shakes her head in disappointment towards what she is saying.

I was taught by young people, frequently, about the hardships and strife to succeed and become rich in China. “There are too many people here”, “too much pollution”, “too much corruption”, “too many pressures”, “too little time”, “they don’t want us to think for ourselves”, “only rich people have a good life in China” and the list goes on and on. Some told me that they wanted to leave China as soon as they finished their education, to live in country with less people, less pollution, less hardships and more freedom. Others told me that China is going to be better, implying that they all need to work hard for it now, in order to enjoy life in the future. The common impression I got about the government, among urban youth in Beijing, was that you cannot argue with them and the best thing to do is to stay away from the authorities, to stay away from trouble. Young people seemed to talk about their dissatisfactions with ease, however, I never experienced these issues to be discussed in depth, dissatisfactions were simply stated as a mere line-up of facts before moving on to the next topic.

### ***Sanlitun and Gulou; a Modern Landscape of Urban Leisure Activities***

I spent most of my time in two areas, namely in *Sanlitun* and *Gulou*. By mere appearance, *Sanlitun* (see figure 1.) presents a more modern architecture of tall buildings, nice restaurants, rooftop bars, shopping malls of international and lucrative brands, and is located close to *Gongti* (Workers Stadium) where most of the fashionable and high class nightclubs reside. *Gulou* is another well-known area, built in more traditional *hutong* architecture; a maze of low concrete buildings and narrow streets. In *Gulou* (see figure 2.) you will find small café’s, pubs, restaurants, second-hand shops, tattoo studios and smaller music venues. The general explanation by young people in Beijing is that *Sanlitun* represent more a mainstream and high class fashion, and *Gulou* represents more ‘alternative’ and ‘underground’ lifestyles. Popular culture in Beijing stretches farther and wider than these two areas, but for the benefit of my thesis, and the fact that most of the events and happenings during my time in Beijing took place within the boundaries of these two areas, the majority of my fieldwork were naturally conducted there. You can easily travel between *Gulou* and *Sanlitun* either by metro, taxi or by bicycle (about 5km).



(1). Sanlitun Village; Shopping malls  
(en.wikipedia.org 4)



(2). Nanluoguxiang; a popular street in Gulou  
(geolocation.ws 5)

Biking within the narrow streets of *Gulou* I stumbled across a small shop selling second-hand LP's. Being an enthusiastic LP collector I spent some time in the shop exploring music and getting to know *Wang Kai*, a guy in his late twenties running the shop together with a friend. I assume that *Wang Kai* knows about music cultures in Beijing given his appearance wearing fashionable clothes, comfortably reading a music magazine in his own shop filled to the roof with foreign LPs featuring a wide variety of music having never being played on Chinese radio or TV. His LP collection stretches from American pop-rock, soul, funk and hip-hop to German and Japanese techno and electronic music. I asked *Wang Kai* where to look for hip-hop and “cool” music in Beijing and he bluntly replied that it is hard to find “good” music in China, because the government does not want young people to listen to “good” music. I was baffled by his response and wanted to know what he meant. According to *Wang Kai*, there is no room for anything but poor pop and patriotic songs in China. It seems to me that it takes effort for young Chinese to dive deeper into different music genres. *Nasty Ray*, a Chinese Rapper I came to meet later during my fieldwork told me that if you want to learn about- and enjoy “quality”- hip-hop, rock, techno or any alternative or subcultural form of music, you have to work hard looking for it and work even harder to understand it; “you have to dig for it” (*Nasty Ray*). It is hard to learn about music-cultures without exposure he tells me; “Chinese media does not play Chinese hip-hop” and “most young people only look at hip-hop to adopt the fashion, only a few are looking to understand the music” (*Nasty Ray* interview).

*Wang Kai* spends time with me pointing out different venues and shops on my map to where a more alternative variation of music gets played, consumed, promoted and enjoyed by young Chinese looking for other kinds of music than the most commercial foreign chart music or pop music played on radio or TV. The venues he pointed out are where most of the hip-hop, rock and

electronic music events took place during my fieldwork; *Mao Live house*, *Yugong Yishan*, *2 Kollegas*, *Lantern* and *Dada*. What these places have in common, as I came to notice is that they are not decorated with neon-lights and mirror-balls serving fancy cocktails with umbrellas like many of the other clubs playing popular music in Beijing. There are no red carpets leading into the venues or expensive cars parked outside, which is common outside many clubs in *Sanlitun*. There is not even much light inside these venues at all, and young people often dress aesthetically distinct according to which kind of music is being played there, in ways which contrast the appearance of the people attending commercialized clubs like *Mix* and *Vics*. As most clubs in Beijing are trying to attract young urban consumers, there are obviously different segments of young consumers with different motivations and needs to appeal to. The venues listed above by *Wang Kai* are commonly viewed as more ‘underground’, providing a more alternative selection of music, venues which are diving deeper into different music genres like hip-hop, reggae, rock or electronic music. I came to get familiar with the owners of some of these venues, and as many of them are DJs themselves or simply music-enthusiasts they are driven, in part, by idealism to promote certain forms of music of their own interest, in order to nourish and develop an environment for alternative lifestyles. This is my general impression from various conversations I had with some of them at different events during my stay. These ‘alternative’ environments of electronic-, rock- and hip-hop music were described as relatively small in size, compared to the population at large.

*Wang Kai* is not particularly into hip-hop, but he knows about and a group called *Yin San*. *Wang Kai* likes *Yin San*’s lyrics as they rap in a quite direct and vulgar way against authorities and social life in China. I came to learn that *Yin San* is one of China’s most renowned hip-hop groups, and his description of their controversial lyrics is a widespread characterization of this group. He gives me a tip about an upcoming hip-hop event hosted by *Nasty Ray* called ‘Natural Flavor’ (which I will return to later), and he tells me that I should download *weixin* (*wechat*) on my smartphone, a social networking media, to establish contact with people and get updates about upcoming events.

## Social Media

Young people are constantly using their smartphones in public and I came to learn that it is through applications on my smartphone that I can effectively connect with people and keep in touch with people I meet in Beijing.

### *Weixin*

I downloaded *weixin* onto my smartphone and found this application to be the most common way to exchange contacts, instead of exchanging phone-numbers you exchange *weixin*. Upon establishing contact through *weixin* you immediately have access to your contact's profiles of public pictures and posts available, and you are able to send both private and public messages, in addition to a list of other features enhancing social mobility. As soon as I got hip-hop artists on my *weixin* I got updates about when and where the next event was taking place.

### *Douban and Distribution of Music*

Wondering how Chinese hip-hop artists distribute their music (since most hip-hop artists in Beijing are not signed on official record labels) I was told that there are several nonofficial ways to get your music printed onto CDs and that it is normal to distribute them in small music stores around *Gulou*. However, I learned that neither record-deals nor CD production are channels in which they generally spread their music. The internet is much more commonly used as you can upload your songs directly onto the internet, with a simple click on your home computer. I was told that this is the most common and most efficient way to spread your music in China. *Douban* is such a site ([douban.com](http://douban.com)) where you can create your own public band profile and upload songs, videos, gain followers and promote your music, and there are literally loads of similar internet-sites created with the means of hosting aspiring musicians to create profiles and upload songs. Producing CDs (I bought quite a lot of local hip-hop CDs in Beijing) and have them sold in local music stores around *Gulou* are also common, but it serves more like a gimmick than an efficient or lucrative way to spread your music. A band-promoter from an indie-label called "Modern Skye" I met at a café in *Gulou* told me that he advice Chinese rock bands to sing in English because there is no way to make money as a rock band in China. People do not buy CDs and concerts are rarely lucrative; "you need to gain popularity abroad". *5050* (a hip-hop group) had more than two hundred screaming fans at their concert when they were performing their first album, but as *D-Yosef* told me, they only sold a handful of CDs because people already had access to their songs through the internet. "They don't buy CDs when they can listen to music for free on the internet" (*D-Yosef*) leaving CD production somewhat counterproductive within the subculture of hip-hop in Beijing.

### *Youku*

When *Nasty Ray* were visiting our apartment to record a hip-hop track with Xiao Ou and me he showed us videos of himself and his group performing on stage. As mentioned in chapter 1, *Youku* is a Chinese webpage equivalent to *Youtube*, where you create profiles and upload videos. Clicking on 'related' or 'suggested' videos on *Youku* I found endless of Chinese hip-hop videos uploaded by

various profiles presenting hip-hop parties, concerts, interviews, local and foreign music videos. As mentioned earlier, 70 percent of the population in Beijing have access to the internet, with more than 560 million internet users nationwide by 2012, by which 60 percent of the users being between 20 and 30 years old (Hansen and Thøgersen 2013:232). This leaves internet as a powerful and widespread social networking medium among Chinese youth.

### **Hip-Hop Radio “The Park”**

While social media is commonly used in Beijing to connect with each other, informally, or to promote your music as hip-hop artists publicly, there also exists a weekly hip-hop radio-show, which spread foreign and Chinese hip-hop music through official state-run radio. The hip-hop radio-show (“The Park”) is hosted by *Jeff Kong*, a former pop-star from Taiwan and *Wes*, a half Chinese half American DJ. Since 2006 they have been broadcasting local and foreign hip-hop once every week, a show which is very much embraced by the local hip-hop environment. In the beginning they were only broadcasting in Beijing, but when the station was synchronized with Shanghai and Guangzhou “The Park” came to be broadcasted in these three cities, and still are. As a well-respected DJ and contributor within the local hip-hop environment, *Wes* wants to promote what he consider ‘quality hip-hop’, both Chinese and foreign. He plays whatever song he likes, he tells me, as long as it does not compromise with the policies of the radio-station.

“We try to play more local tracks, but the Rappers have to improve. I would like it to be fifty-fifty (half foreign and half Chinese hip-hop), but you can’t get that many good local tracks here. We get sent more and more tracks and by now our show plays about thirty percent (Chinese hip-hop), but it’s gonna be a while before its fifty percent, its gonna be a long while” (*Wes* interview).

Beijing is commonly viewed as the capital of hip-hop in China, where the environment is bigger and where hip-hop events and concerts are performed regularly, but Shanghai and Guangzhou are recognized as cities with a substantial hip-hop environment as well. Hip-hop is still “young” in China, *Wes* tell me, even though the interest has been growing, hip-hop is still quite new to the urban Chinese. In his view, there are too many local Rappers and fans in China and Beijing which simply do not understand basic principles of hip-hop production yet. Young people are looking for something ‘cool’, they are looking for themselves, but they do not seem to dive deep into it, they are merely looking to consume a ‘hip’ and ‘cool’ identity (*Wes*). “They don’t know what they are doing (sigh)” (*Wes* shaking his head disappointingly).

*Wes* was born in China, but grew up in America becoming exposed to hip-hop while living in Los Angeles. He returned to China in 2001 and has since then witnessed the Chinese hip-hop

environment develop, an environment which started to emerge around 2003. He does not earn much money by hosting the radio-show so his personal reasons for running the hip-hop radio are mainly idealistic, a hobby in which he wants to promote foreign and Chinese hip-hop to a Chinese audience and stimulate the hip-hop environment to grow. “I believe it’s gonna get there (Chinese hip-hop), eventually, I think so. That’s why I have been doing the show you know (laugh)” (*Wes* interview). By “getting there” he is referring to the quality- and amount of local hip-hop on his radio-show, and he believes that the quality of Chinese hip-hop is going to develop, and that is, in part, his inspiration and motivation for running the hip-hop radio.

### Censorship and Government Control

Through trying and failing, *Wes* and *Jeff* have learned how to deal with the policies of the state-run radio-station. “We don’t get guidelines for what we have to say from the main-station, and I don’t think there are no guidelines at all. There is just stuff that you cannot say, and we learn slowly what’s ok and what’s not” (*Wes* interview). They usually record and turn in the show two days before it is broadcasted for the main-station to go through it, mainly for censoring purposes. *Wes* and *Jeff*’s aesthetical aspirations of ‘sound’ and ‘style’ are not subjected to inquiry. The main-station might edit the show before its broadcasted, “they edit it, cut the parts that they don’t want or maybe they just keep the show as it is and just warn us or something like that” (*Wes*). Asking *Wes* about these processes he states that is not necessarily depend on *what* they (Rappers) say, but “it depends *how* they say it and which words they use. It’s a judgment call you know”. This echoes the rather ambiguous definitions of law and censorship presented in chapter 1, providing the state with the legal means to censor as they choose. *Wes* naturally cut curse-words and avoid playing local Rap-songs with too critical content towards politics and social life; “We try to be extra safe, but when it comes to the content of American hip-hop I don’t worry too much because nobody understands it anyways, with local music we are much more strict” (*Wes* interview). He explains to me that there are more local Rappers cursing and being critical towards society today than ten years ago; “Now people say whatever, say everything, anything just to get attention. They are not scared because nothing has really happened you know, nobody has been busted for being a rebel”. He implies that many Rappers curse and articulate themselves controversially because it gives them attention, at the same time he states that they (Rappers) are not scared of “saying what they want” because nobody have experienced repercussions by doing it. Different Rappers are pushing the boundaries for what is acceptable speech in different ways, and there seems to be lot of hip-hop songs that is not suited for official radio-play. However, I did experience hip-hop artists being



subjected to repercussions by authorities in Beijing during my fieldwork, and I will return to that later.

In relation to censorship, *Wes* states that this surely shapes in various ways how hip-hop artists articulate themselves in their lyrics, such as avoiding sensitive topics or hiding their motives in intricate phrases, and it might fuel other Rappers to curse even more. However, Chinese hip-hop production does not rest solely on its relationship to authorities and censorship. *Wes* explains that there are artists placing themselves all over the sociopolitical spectrum in Beijing, implying that criticism towards social and political life are by no means the only motivation in which hip-hop becomes expressed. I was taught that hip-hop, however, tended to be more political in Beijing than in (for example) Guangzhou, because Beijing is more sensitive being the political capital of China, while Guangzhou are is located far south, in the political periphery. *Xiao Ou* has listened to a wide variety of Chinese hip-hop for several years and he tells me that “you hear Chinese Rappers talk about girls, about school, about their social life, about their future, past, about how ‘cool’ they are, about anything.” (*Xiao Ou*) “Rapping about my own experiences” is the most common answer I got asking artists about their lyrics.

### Beijing Hip-Hop

The first hip-hop album to be released on the Chinese mainland, in mandarin language, was in 2003, by a group called *Yin Ts'ang* (隐藏). It is common among artists and fans in Beijing to view the early years of 2000, and the release of the *Yin Ts'ang* album as the beginning of Chinese hip-hop. Although *Yin Ts'ang* rap in Chinese and claim to represent Chinese hip-hop, three of the four members in are actually foreigners; *Sbazzo* grew up in Canada, *Dirty Heff* and *XIV* are both from the U.S and *MC Webber* are from Beijing. This means that most of the members in *Yin Ts'ang* learned about hip-hop on the North-American continent before they introduced it to a Chinese audience. Many of the leading figures within the hip-hop environment in Beijing are foreigners, but since 2003, many local artist and fans have emerged. As I was exploring the hip-hop environment, both foreigners and locals where actively taking part in the production and consumption of hip-hop in Beijing.

### Tracing the Origins of Hip-Hop in Beijing

When I finally found the local hip-hop environment I learned that there exist, and have been for almost 10 years, a regular hip-hop event located in the various ‘underground’ venues and clubs in Beijing. ‘Section 6’ is known as the “original” and “real” hip-hop event, according to the local hip-hop fans, and has been arranging events and concerts regularly (usually once a month) since about

2005. According to various artists and fans in Beijing, “original” is referring to the fact that ‘Section 6’ was the first event in Beijing regularly arranging hip-hop concerts featuring local artists, arranging freestyle battles (Rap competitions), DJ-shows and overall creating a space gathering local and foreign Rappers, Producers, Fans, Graffiti artists, Break-dancers, Skateboarders and anyone with affiliation with- or interest in hip-hop culture. They use the word “original” and “real” in opposition to other hip-hop clubs in Beijing such as *Mix* and *Vics* which to them are considered “fake” and commercialized music clubs. ‘Section 6’ is characterized as the grass-root movement of hip-hop by artists and fans, and still holds that reputation, however, the event were not arranged more than a handful of times during my stay (from late 2012 – early 2014) and I was told that the amount of participants were less now than what it used to be.

The first time I attended ‘Section 6’ was during November in late 2012, at *Mao Live house*, located in *Gulou*. As I entered the large and dark concert-room the party had already started, two people were hosting from stage screaming at the crowd as they were forming a ring (called ‘cypher’) for Break-dancers to compete (called ‘battle’) against each other, one by one. During the event, local- and foreign Rappers were performing on stage, the hosts were entertaining the crowd in between the performances and the music was constantly thumping out of the speakers as the DJ were merging different songs together between two record-players (‘turntables’) and a mixer (a device enabling two record-players to be played at the same time). A crowd of two hundred people or so, in ‘baggy’ pants and ‘oversized’ t-shirts were indulging with the music as the hip-hop party unfolded. At these events, I met many of whom I came to know as respected and merited Rappers and DJs within the local hip-hop environment. Apart from being a late night leisure activity, an informal atmosphere of drinking and consuming hip-hop culture, these events serves as a space of sharing ideas and network possibilities for people within this particular environment. It also gave me access to learn a great deal about Chinese hip-hop and its history.

### ***Yin San; Local Hip-hop and Controversy***

It is hard to say much about the members of *Yin San* (阴三儿) as they appeared to me more as a myth than real figures. Truth is that three times I came to see them perform a concert realizing that their show had been cancelled. Reliable sources within the hip-hop environment told me that the club owners got pressured by officials to cancel the shows. I met one of the *Yin San* members (*Jia Wei*) at one of the ‘Section 6’ events, but I did not get to talk with him or get to know him because the club was making too loud noise to be able to converse much. That night, however, *Yin San* was performing several songs and the audience were roaring vigorously citing their lyrics as they were performing. Since this event was created by- and promoted as ‘Section 6’, *Yin San* were able to

perform without any troubles. During my fieldwork, *Yin San* was frequently mentioned as one of the most popular and most influential hip-hop artists in China and Beijing, creating an atmosphere of unison excitement at ‘Section 6’ to such an extent that it preceded all other hip-hop shows I encountered. My information about *Yin San* is based on what I was told by other artists and fans, and as such, it is important not to view my information about *Yin San* as how they choose to represent themselves, but rather as how they come to be represented by other people. As mentioned before, *Yin San* is often referred to as quite controversial artists. Different people I talked to had different stories about them, stories portraying them as “rough”, “rebels” having been to jail for possession of drugs and so on. All these stories were presented as to enhance their credibility and authenticity as hip-hop artists. *D-Yosef* told me that they are “real Beijing hip-hop” and that their explicit and controversial lyrics are “exiting” (**hanzi**) and “satisfying” (**hanzi**) to listen to. At the same time *D-Yosef* was conspicuously reluctant in speaking much more about them. He seemed utterly discontent with the topic as I was recording the interview with him. He suddenly said to me that “the government is great and you should not talk shit about the government, you don’t know who you are barking to” (*D-Yosef* interview), and then we moved on to the next topic. I do not want to reveal what *D-Yosef* have said about the government when speaking more informally about it, but I can say that it does not resonate with his statement above.

*Yin San* were established around 2006, and since then they have become symbols of Beijing hip-hop with their distinct Beijing dialect. In addition to being regarded as skillful and merited Rappers in Beijing, they are undoubtedly famous for controversy. I was told that they have had multiple shows in Beijing during the years and that cancelled concerts have only recently started to happen. I was also told that Beijing are politically more strict and socially more sensitive than other cities in China, which might explain how they were able to perform in Shanghai only a short while after their show got cancelled in Beijing. Chinaculture.org has written an article about *Yin San* after one of their songs ignited heated debate among Chinese students in 2007 (chinaculture.org 6), rapping fiercely against the morals of a Chinese teacher. The webpage publishing this article are maintained by *China Daily*, one of the biggest newspapers in China, being under the guidance of the Ministry of Culture (chinaculture.org 7). The article is citing *Jia Wei*, one of the members of *Yin San*.

“Hip hop is the kind of music that inspires passion among the youth. It originated from New York City and mainly among African Americans. But we live in Beijing and we are native Beijingers. What we currently make is the Beijing-styled hip-hop, which serves as a medium to tell the world what is now happening in

Beijing and what we ordinary people feel about Beijing. Through hip hop, we raise questions. Those questions are not only reflected by our society but also chosen by ourselves” (chinaculture.org 6).

*Wes* tells me that the “good” Rappers, pointing to *Yin San* and others; “don’t really care if their songs will be played on radio or not”. He explain that those Rappers who are politically- and socially critical in their lyrics are conscious about the risk they are taking, that having a critical voice might limit opportunities for them and might get them into trouble. *Wes* often ask them to make “clean” radio-versions of their songs, but as he states, “they say they want to, but they are just too lazy to do it”. The critical voices of *Yin San* have limited opportunities for them and have evidently gotten them into trouble, however, it have also gained them a significant amount of recognition and fans as a result of it.

### **Hip-Hop vs. Mass-Media and Mainstream Culture**

“Living on the edge” of what is socially acceptable and what is not are consequently creating frictions and heated conversations among hip-hop artists and fans, with both negative and positive connotations. It is obviously exciting when people dear to speak the unspeakable, but it also creates dissatisfaction. In their view, the government is not interested in artists expressing themselves, and the music-industry seems to be the source in which they direct this dissatisfaction. *Nasty Ray* explains that break-dancing have developed in China much more than rapping, because break-dancing does not curse and does not pose political threat. “Break-dancing can be exposed on TV and take part on large-scale arrangements, but Chinese hip-hop cannot, because they (government) are not able to control if somebody is cursing or suddenly say something sensitive.” (*Nasty Ray* interview) Creating patriotic and nationalistic Rap songs to “fit in” with the commercial industry is simply not an option, they would lose their credibility among peers. To *Nasty Ray* and *D-Yosef*, hip-hop is not about rapping about sensitive topics, about being ‘cool’ or about material success; “it is something more than that” (without saying exactly what that *more* is), and that ‘more’ is what makes hip-hop meaningful to them.

### **Hip-Hop vs. Parents**

Asking artists about their parents and their support, I learned that it might not be common to view their children’s pursuit of hobbies as responsible unless it proves to be a fruitful way to make a living. The only reason why *Nasty Ray*’s parents approve of his hobby is because he earns money by doing it. He is able to support himself through his monthly hip-hop event (‘Natural Flavor’) and by being invited to perform at occasional arrangements. “They (parents) think its ok, for now” (*Nasty Ray* interview), implying that pressure might increase in time. “What keeps people from fully involving themselves with hip-hop is that you cannot make it big with hip-hop in China, so

many involve with hip-hop only for fun, and for a short while.” (*Nasty Ray* interview) To make it “big”, in this context, *Nasty Ray* is implying that it is difficult making a substantial living of hip-hop in China. He further implies that most young people pursue their hobbies, such as hip-hop, only for a short while, while pressure is somewhat low. *Nasty Ray*’s ambitions is to make a career within the entertainment industry, hosting and organizing hip-hop events or managing related projects such as websites or even TV shows. He is the most determined hip-hop artist I met in Beijing in relation to future plans, resolute to make a living out of his hobby. *D-Yosef* does not earn a substantial amount of money in producing or performing hip-hop shows, similar to most of the hip-hop artists I encountered in Beijing. He is depending on economic support from his parents, and as he dropped out of university to pursue his hobby, he soon has to face his family as his studies as are supposed to come to an end. His wish is to have a career in music as well, but he does not believe that it is going to happen. From conversations with *D-Yosef* he told me that unless a miracle happens, he reluctantly have move back to *Xinjiang* (a province located by the far West borders of north China) and work for his family’s company in order to support himself.

#### Indication of a Middle-class

It seems like most of the artists and fans I have encountered in Beijing come from families with substantial money to support their children’s hobbies, and most of the people I met during my fieldwork supported this idea. I was unable to gather solid numbers of income among those whom I spoke to about this, but they all agreed that being able to indulge with leisure activities such as going to clubs or buying music equipment to become a DJ or Producer forges a substantial economy. *Lory* told me in the beginning of this chapter how most of the urban youth either producing music or regularly attending nightclubs in Beijing have rich parents. What “rich” means in this context is hard to say, but it points to a certain differentiation of class in the Chinese society, which implicates that “other” people cannot afford such activities. *D-Yosef* is sure that most of the urban youth going to clubs, wearing the latest fashion of clothing and involving themselves with hip-hop culture in Beijing has parents with significant economy to support them. He is himself supported economically by his family and beholds a significant amount of expensive music equipment in his apartment. *Wes* view on this subject is that most of the young people indulging with hip-hop in Beijing live with their parents, and because they do not have their own house or other high expenses they spend their money on leisure activities. “You don’t have to be rich to afford 50 *yuan* (Chinese currency) entrance-fee at ‘Section 6’ or ‘Natural Flavor’ once a month”. He continued to explain how there exist all kinds of people in Beijing, and that pressures of income-

and to succeed might be common among the average Chinese family, but “there is so many people in China, and these guys (hip-hop artists) are often not from the average family” (*Wes* interview).

“The people who end up trying to be a Rapper, buying DJ equipment, spending money on their hobby, trying to become an artist - they are not from the average family. People that spend money on a CD or a ticket to a concert there are from the average family - that get the pressure where you have to earn money and go to class and shit” (*Wes* interview).

*Wes* is referring to an experience of difference between average and not-average families in China. He argues that “there are a lot of people in China so the average is a lot, but even the not-average is a lot of people too”, pointing to the dangers of generalizing a Chinese society into definite categories, which in his view, fails to explain the diverse and complex reality in which family life and music cultures in China and urban Beijing exist.

My empirical material serves as examples of how urban youth navigate music cultures in Beijing within boundaries of state, family, social networks and layers of motivations and expectations. The way I spent significant amount of time with these people may enable me to analyze their leisure activities and statements in relation to notions of identity, worldview and desires in social life. That is what I mean to do with this chapter, as my fragmented empirical material will be subjected to anthropological theory during the following discussion.

## **Defining ‘Youth’**

In order to say anything about ‘youth’ we need to explore the term and what it means both in academic discourse and define its use in this thesis. The term ‘youth’ or ‘adolescence’ has been understood primarily as “preparation for adulthood” by Western psychologists (Bucholtz 2002:528). Many of the young people I met during my fieldwork were studying in University, living with their parents or recently graduated, in a transition-phase, looking for work opportunities and planning their futures. They may be viewed as ‘youth’ in a transition, preparing for adulthood. However, some of my informants were married, renting or owning their own residence, had a steady income and perceived themselves as economically independent, and as such, viewed themselves as young adults. As my research are focusing on the 80s generation in China, the age subjected to inquiry in this thesis are between 22 and 33 years old, respectively, during the time of research (2012-2014) and are per definition the age-range of my empirical material. In this sense, the 80s generation cannot, all be placed in the definition of ‘youth’ as in a transition, preparing for adulthood. You might view ‘youth’ as a cultural stage, a “beginning of a long-term, even lifelong,

engagement in particular cultural practices, whether its practitioners continue to be included in the youth category or not.” (Bucholtz 2002:528) According to this view, the 80s generation are theoretically ‘young’ in a ways of which they are in a *‘beginning of a long-term, even lifelong, engagement in particular cultural practices’*. As such, *cultural practices* must be pointed to the cultural context in which young people in China exist. Durham in his article about “youth as a social shifter in Botswana” (2000) explores how youth and adolescence are historically contingent ideas and experiences (Durham 2000:591), and points to earlier anthropological works defining youth and adolescence as culturally constructed and variable across cultures and times, and that “such constructions take place in the context of complex processes of globalization” (ibid., 2000). In this view, youth-cultures inhabited by the 80s generation in Beijing represents the local and global time and place they are in, culturally and contextually. In Durham’s words, the term ‘youth’ must be understood by its relation to the context in which the term gets invoked, which helps us to recognize “(...) the nature of discourses as relational, pragmatic, and part of a shifting and contested historical social arena” (Durham 2000:593). If ‘youth’ in China represents its cultural context, then it seems fruitful to explore the local implications of ‘youth’. Liu Fengshu explores the cultural implications of ‘youth’ in China, commonly referred to as *‘qing nian’* (青年), literally translated as the ‘green years’, and coins its differences towards how ‘youth’ commonly have been understood in the West (Liu 2011:5). Liu refers to Wulff’s ‘introduction of youth cultures in its own right’ (1995) arguing that the word ‘youth’ often “refers to a relative indeterminate state between childhood and adulthood, associated with inexperience, impulsiveness, resistance, deviance and rebelliousness, and is often viewed as dangerous and disturbing” (Wulff 1995 in Liu 2011:5). “In contrast, the Chinese term (*‘qing nian’*) carries much more positive connotations (...) associated with hope, courage and dynamism” (Liu 2011:5). To add another layer of complexity in determining ‘youth’ as a concept in China, young people are at the same time “(...) described as unfinished persons not yet belonging to society and not yet having established correct world-views and knowledge about life” (Bakken 1994:263 in de Kloet 2010:39). This reveals the complications in generalizing ‘youth’ as a concept and it points to the dangers of generalizing ‘youth’ and ‘youth cultures’ with fixed and static interpretations.

My intention is not to generalize ‘youth’ as a theoretical concept, but rather define its use within this particular thesis. Following Liu, the Chinese concept of ‘youth’ (*‘qingnian’*) includes people ranging from “those in their early teens to those in their late twenties. Sometimes people below 35 (or even 38) years old (...)” (Liu 2011:5) This simply means that the age-range of the 80s generation subjected to inquiry in this thesis is viewed as ‘youth’ in China, and are presented as

such in this thesis, analyzed by the ways they are involving in certain cultural practices in certain time and place. Bucholtz argues that;

“The most productive view of youth cultures and youth identities, (then), must admit both the ideological reality of categories and the flexibility of identities; recent work, especially in anthropology, draws from theories of practice, activity, and performance to demonstrate how youth negotiate cultural identities in a variety of contexts, both material and semiotic, both leisure-based and at home, school, work, and in the political sphere” (Bucholtz 2002:544).

I want to look at the relationship between the Chinese state, the 80s generation in Beijing, global cultural flows of music and the flexibility of identities such a context entails. I will try to follow Bucholtz’s argument by reflecting my empirical material presented in the first half of this chapter with anthropological theory and discuss how urban youth in Beijing negotiate and express cultural identities through leisure activities. I intend to use my empirical material as a foundation of inquiry because I believe “(...) youth are cultural actors whose experiences are best understood from their own point of view (Bucholtz 2002:533).

### **Defining ‘Middle-class’**

Navigating through the wide variety of urban leisure activities in Beijing it is quite apparent that the shopping malls during day-time and the music-clubs during night-time are mainly inhabited by young people. Liu finds the urban youth in China as the most attractive part of the Chinese consumer market, “they are members of the only-child generation and their families form the major component of China’s emerging middle-class” (Anagnost 2004 in Liu 2011:7). It is difficult to classify the young people I met by standards of family-income as I did not gain access to such data, however, young urban consumers are often associated with the emerging middle-class in China and I believe that the people whom I frequently met consuming leisure activities in “downtown” Beijing may be understood as such. Being involved in cultural practices, such as music, is closely related to a Chinese ideology of *suzhi*, which as mentioned earlier is referring to a measure of worth in human capital (Anagnost 2004:193). Anagnost argues that the idea of *suzhi* is “what defines the middle-class family as a theater of neoliberal subject production through the project of building quality into the child,” (Anagnost 2004:192) where “consumption both constructs the body of value and establishes its distance from its other” (Anagnost 2004:200). Anagnost argues that the emerging middle-class publicly distinguishes itself from “others” (lower-classes or rural people) through consumption, and the way I see it, taking part in urban music production and going to night clubs in “downtown” Beijing can be viewed as implications of such activity. Whether music consumption is



a 'quality' built into the child by parents or simply a feature "built" into leisure time by the child itself, "high levels of spending among young people on forms of consumption (...) serve as publicly visible markers of identity and status (...)" (Jack, Kipnis and Sargeson 2013:183), and "(...) trends in consumption are heavily shaped by a 'status game' in which young people buy goods in order to improve or maintain social status" (ibid., 2013). The idea of hip-hop as a cultural practice evolving from middle-class youth is by no means specific to China. Ian Condry recognized how hip-hop was a trend appropriated by middle-class youngsters in Japan (Condry 2000:169 in de Kloet 2010:72) and Tom Solomon reveals how hip-hop came to be produced, in large, by middle-class youth in Turkey (Solomon 2005:4). Differences, however, in which hip-hop becomes invoked as cultural practice in different localities becomes more clear as we explore its cultural context.

## **The 80s Generation; Private and Public spheres**

"A generation having to live through an anything but ideal educational system, criticized for its sole insistence on memorizing rather than thinking, and for whom politics is merely an unfashionable word, belonging to a complicated past. A generation, also, which often turns to music to navigate these circumstances in their everyday lives" (de Kloet 2010:148).

Acknowledging privileged and pressured Chinese youth in urban Beijing are not significant ethnographic material, quite contrary, the forces which characterize the 80s generation has been explored and discussed by many (see de Kloet 2010; Liu Fengshu 2011; Yan 2006) and complexities surrounding 'privileges' and 'pressures' seems to be the common umbrella under which these concepts gets invoked. Yan's extensive works on the 80s generation provides an explanation of these concepts.

The '80ers represent the first generation of Chinese youth who have no life experience of Maoist socialism, who in childhood have heard adults saying that "to be rich is glorious" and talking about "jumping into the sea (of business)," who were showered by increasing supplies of commodities as they grew up, who witnessed the ups and downs of their parents' pursuit of wealth, and, since their first day of schooling, who also experienced unprecedented pressure to score high on various exams. (Yan 2006:256)

This is how Yan (2006) are describing the 80s generation in China which reflects the opening-up reforms of 1980s, the ongoing individualization process, the economic boom and commercialization of commodities during the 1990s and during the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century presented in chapter 1. Yan portrays a complex picture of young and hopeful fun-seekers on the one side, and socially pressured, success driven pragmatics on the other. A combination which creates, as he argues, a

sense of loneliness, distrust towards strangers and an early-maturing distaste for idealism (Yan 2006:255). I do not know much about their loneliness, but I did experience distrust towards people whom are not affiliated as friends, friends-of-friends or family. I was told by many that you have to be careful about strangers because they might be corrupt and will not hesitate to take your money. This fear is not about robbery or physical violence (even though there popular reality TV shows depicting such criminality) as much as awareness of clever money-scams, lawsuits and corruption which they conceive to be common and which leaves them skeptical towards people they do not know. If the generation of young people during the 1980s were characterized by their will to attest corruption and social inequality loud and publicly, the young Chinese today seems to be more silent and private about these matters, focusing most of their attention on themselves and how to navigate as individuals (cf. Yan 2006).

Jeroen de Kloet explains how “this new generation of ‘little emperors’, as they are often cynically referred to (...)” (de Kloet 2010:22) are the first generation born after the one-child policy of 1978, and for them, “China has always been a country which is opening up, a place of rapid economic progress and modernization, a place of prosperity and increased abundance, in particular in the urban areas” (de Kloet 2010:22). Yan (2006) argues that this is visible through their consumption in a “restless pursuit of being cool”, and they go beyond old social norms to get it. However, compared to their counterparts in the United States, Chinese youth only pursue “coolness” in their private sphere, mainly through personal consumption. In the public sphere, where they face serious social issues of inequality, injustice, corruption, and entrenched political authority, they become rational pragmatists who carefully plan their moves toward well-defined goals, skillfully handle complex interpersonal relations, and as mentioned, demonstrate an early-maturing distaste for idealism (Yan 2006:255-256). It is the impact of their public pragmatism on the one hand, and their private aspirations of fun which drives the idealism out of the current 80s generation (Yan 2006:262).

I find it difficult to fully resonate with Yan’s statements above because the people whom I interviewed and the environment I took part in seemed, in part, to be driven by idealism. They were motivated to break with overarching expectations, pressures and propagated ideals, and their goals did not seem to be well-defined at all. Maybe the hip-hop environment and leisure time are part of their private sphere? Maybe this environment bears similarities with Sarah Thornton’s study of “Club Cultures” in Britain (1996) where she found that questions about work might be taboo in such leisure environments, and that it might be “(...) rude to puncture the bubble of an institution

where fantasies of identity are a key pleasure” (Thornton 1996:91). However, their “alternative” lifestyle as DJs, Rappers or hip-hop enthusiasts within an environment characterizing themselves, in part, by their difference towards mainstream music culture, at times criticizing authorities in their Rap lyrics and even dropping out of university to pursue their hobbies seems to portray a more fluid relationship between the seemingly clear-cut boundaries of the private and public sphere posed by Yan. To understand the frictions revealed by the ways Chinese youth navigate the private and public spheres I find it necessary to try to explore the forces shaping these spheres.

### **Modernity with Chinese Characteristics**

Foucault argues that “politics is defined by the whole sphere of state intervention (...)” which implies “(...) directly or indirectly, (that) the state is everywhere.” (Foucault 2007:390). Following Foucault, state powers are immanent in all social formations such as in child-parent relationship or in individual-public power, and such power-relations are “(...) inseparable from analysis of corresponding forms of resistance (...)” (Foucault 2007:389-390). He “(...) encourages pursuing local resistance by strategizing any power expression” (Tovar-Restrepo 2012:131). This means that analyzing any form of resistance posed in my empirical material entails state-power. Liu Fengshu, pose “the making of the new Chinese subject” in her book about “Urban youth in China” (2011) and argues that the significant difference between Chinese youth and their American counterparts are as a result of China’s modernization project. The introduction of a market economy and opening up to the world did not bring about democratic political reforms, rather, the social-political control brought about a notion of socialism with Chinese characteristics (Liu 2011:28). Characteristics in which “(...) regimes of living are shaped by the intersection of powers of the self with socialism from afar” (Ong & Zhang 2008:2). Ong & Zhang identify how a “(...) multitude of self-interest and self-animation associated with neoliberal logic” are expressed in a state which “(...) continue to regulate the fullest expression of self-interest from a distance” (2008:3-4). Liu suggests that “(...) China has reinvented itself through the Party leaders’ hybridization of two seemingly contradictory ideologies; economic liberalism and political authoritarianism” (Liu 2011:20), and that “(...) such a dual approach has been a result of China’s response, not at least resistance, to a constantly changing world – and a changing China – brought about by two grand forces, modernization at home and globalization in the world” (ibid., 2011). The way I understand Liu is that, at some level, the government both resist and embrace modernization at the same time. China’s urge to develop and take part in the global economy forges modernization, but at the same time Chinese leaders are asserting social control “(...) in the face of the danger of modernity” (2011:32). She argues that

“such a dualistic approach to modernity presupposes a double subjectification regime, with two sets of subjectification technologies, often with conflicting values” (2011:29). One technology aim towards the individual’s freedom to choose, rationally and autonomous, placing authority in the hand of the individual in processes of identity construction. The other is asserting authority over peoples choices, calling people to “(...) ‘deny’ one’s self and embrace the communist-collectivist values such as selflessness, collectivism, hard and plain life devoted to the Party (...)” (2011:29), presupposing the authority of the Party to guide the individual’s choices and identity construction (ibid., 2011). The contradictions between the private and public sphere, as it is coined by Yan seems to be related to the conflicting values between these two subjectification regmies.

It is within these frictions that “governmentality”, “the problem of state and population” (Foucault 2007:115) is forming what Yan identifies as private and public spheres, as a way for Chinese youth to rationalize these frictions, the way I see it. As such, the younger generation especially embrace and internalize the self-choosing and self-enterprising ethos (Liu 2011:30), and “(...) youth seem eager to carve out a social space (...) to satisfy their subcultural needs and cope with the pressures in daily life” (2011:52). Following Liu’s argument, Chinese youth are filling their leisure time with hobbies, such as hip-hop, as a way to embrace their own ideas and aspirations, and at the same time contesting the pressures and expectations from authoritarian forces. The way Chinese hip-hop artists and fans spend time rapping, cursing and screaming at hip-hop events reveals the space in which they both *satisfy their subcultural needs and cope with the pressures in daily life*. It is interesting to view the formation of hip-hop in Beijing as constructed by its limitations, but that would dismiss the fact that this environment also expresses themselves through joy and creativity, which reminds us not to understand these cultural dynamics solely on its opposition to pressures and authority.

### **Censorship as a Productive Force**

The ways the state both embrace and rejects modernization indicates the flexible context in which hip-hop artists neither are “(...) completely suppressed by, or in complete compliance with, the communist state” (de Kloet 2010:181). de Kloet recognizes how censorship is both a limiting and a productive force, and argues that censorship is more a playground than a political battlefield” (2010:169). He finds rock artists and labels creatively looking for ways to avoid censorship such as changing certain words with similar, less sensitive words in pronunciation, or simply by handing in another set of lyrics than what is actually going to be performed before a public concert. de Kloet depicts multiple ways in which rock artists and labels play “hide and seek” with censorship (de

Kloet 2010; Chapter 5). Hip-hop music is not part of the public sphere as much as rock music in China, however, to a similar extent, hip-hop artists effectively distribute their songs both publicly and privately through the internet and they hold ‘underground’ parties where the participants sing vigorously to songs by *Yin San* and other local Rappers. They creatively make ways for themselves to perform lyrics which would be censored on radio or in other public settings, and these spaces seems to satisfy a need to contest what is acceptable behavior and not. If censorship is a representation of the public sphere, invoked by the Party to limit what is acceptable speech and not, it shapes at the same time distinct topics and speech-acts for hip-hop artists to and fans to fit into their agenda.

According to de Kloet, censorship creates fertile zones of ‘unspeakability’ (192). He refers to Butler (1997) in describing the dialectical relationship between speech and censorship; “Censorship precedes the text (including ‘speech’ and other cultural expressions) and is in some sense responsible for its production” (Butler 1997:129), because “(...) it first has to define what is and what is not acceptable speech, which itself is a speech act (de Kloet 2010:189). Following Butler and de Kloet’s argument; “(...) regulations introduce the censored speech into public discourse, thereby establishing it as a site of contestation, that is, as the scene of public utterance that it sought to preempt” (Butler 1997:130). In this sense, regulations effectively create speech by censoring it, serving as a productive force for those who want to contest authority, or for those who simply want to get attention. Butler claims that “to move outside of the domain of speakability is to risk one’s status as a subject” (1997:134), and as such, censorship “(...) produce an unspeakability as the condition of subject formation” (1997:135). On the one hand, *D-Yosef* was openly criticizing authorities in informal settings, and on the other hand, he was openly supporting the government and seemed discontent in talking about *Yin San*’s controversial lyrics when recording an interview. This might exemplify how unspeakability poses a risk to one’s status as a subject, subsequently forging *D-Yosef* to censor himself, formally, in relation to the government. Censorship may be understood as a condition in which young urban Chinese navigate and negotiate themselves as subjects, and the ‘underground’ parties serves as *fertile zones* where young people perform what publicly is recognized as ‘unspeakable’. de Kloet argues that;

“By censoring rock, the Party is at the same time intricately involved in the production of rock as a distinct music world, because it not only focuses attention on a specific music genre, but it also corresponds well with the marketable image of rock as a suppressed and therefore rebellious sound” (de Kloet 2010:189).

Similarly, a journalist (Jimmy Wang) from The New York Times interviewed hip-hop artists and enthusiasts in 2009 about Chinese hip-hop, finding that participants of the hip-hop environment relate to the suppressed and rebellious sound of rock music; “Hip-hop is free like rock’n’roll, we can talk about our lives and what we are thinking about” (citing *DJ Wordy* in nytimes.com 8). By cancelling *Yin San*’s concerts for instance, the government focuses attention on hip-hop music as a distinct musical form, and reifies the hip-hop environment’s image of being suppressed and rebellious.

Despite the political authoritarianism evidently shaping sociality in China, the current generation of youth, urban and rural alike, grow up without much influence from communist ideology, according to Yan (2006:256). By the very way the state governs society from a ‘distance’ (Ong & Zhang 2008), today’s youth are “open to new ideas, uninterested in party politics, and yearns for freedom and individuality” (Yan 2006:256). Being open to new ideas and yearning for individuality sounds like a familiar melody within China’s urbanities since its very opening reforms of the early 1980s, however, pointing to the characteristics of the 80s generation; “(...) their identity construction is being played out in a dramatically different socio-cultural context compared with the previous generations of Chinese youth” (Liu 2011:57). By mere glance across chapter 1, China has increasingly been addressing the individual’s responsibility to achieve their goals, inspiring capitalism as means to attain a successful life, infusing *suzhi* to ensure potential among its population, leaving the only-child of the 80s generation with a nothing but an urge to get rich in order to meet these expectations. In contrast to this generalized view, I also experienced how urban youth were contesting these notions by indulging with alternative forms of music, by focusing on their hobbies rather than performing their responsibilities, self-expressions are openly conflicting presumed values of the public, reminding us that contemporary Chinese youth must be viewed from multiple angles. There are as many ways understanding the 80s generation as there are individuals belonging to this category of youth, and with my thesis I can only highlight a few, however, implications might point in directions of where notions of individuality and definition of self and others are played out in a contemporary Chinese society. There are many ways to satisfy a yearning for freedom and individuality, and many of these ideas have been floating across the mainland borders in forms of music, by modern technology, as trash from the U.S (*Dakou* CDs) or through the internet.

## Hip-Hop as Cosmopolitan Formation

Ever since the reform era of the 1980s, foreign music has been emerging and influencing the mainland population. From *gangtai* music and rock during the 1980s and 1990s to commercial and ‘underground’ hip-hop today, Chinese people have been adopting and recreating music with both foreign and Chinese characteristics for decades. In academic discourse, tracing the global and the local in constantly evolving localities has created numerous debates and efforts to understand what is global and what is local, and how to coin and define these dynamics (see Turino 2003). Instead of talking about ‘globalization’ I find it more suitable in this thesis to talk about ‘cosmopolitanism’. As Turino forcefully argues, ‘globalization’ are simply too vague and all-encompassing in discussing cultural dynamics (2003). Particular forms of music and its respective environments do not encompass everyone everywhere in China and that is why I find ‘cosmopolitanism’ serving as a better design in understanding music-cultures in Beijing.

“(…) cosmopolitan formations exist across multiple sites in a number of states, and a cosmopolitan group may represent a small minority within a given country. Cosmopolitan formations may have far-flung diffusion, but often do not have deep penetration within whole populations in many locations” (Turino 2003:61-62).

I find this term appealing in describing the hip-hop environment I encountered, as they represent a small minority within the population at large, but are at the same time spread widely in China. During my fieldwork I encountered hip-hop artists and enthusiasts all the way from Shanghai in the east, to Guangzhou in the south and to Urumqi in the West. Hip-hop is widely spread geographically, but do not have deep penetration or significant influence within the whole population.

“(…) cosmopolitan formations are defined by constellations of conceptions, ethics, aesthetics, practices, technologies, objects and social style – habits and resources for living. Like all cultural formations, specific cosmopolitan formations come into being through basic processes of socialization: (...) in particular social networks” (Turino 2003:61).

As I will discuss in the next chapter, the formation of hip-hop in Beijing are defined, amongst other things, by their practices, technologies and social style in which they become socialized within a distinct system of ‘subcultural capital’ (see Chapter.3). “Membership is a subjective condition formed through on-going relations to particular environments and external conditions.” (Turino 2003:61) The hip-hop environment is basically shaped by a social network of young people sharing certain interests and ideas about their cultural practice. Their membership are constituted, in large, by their distinction from “others” (for example pop-music or patriotic songs), and are significantly

influenced by the sound and style of American hip-hop. Szerszynski and Urry define cosmopolitanism as “(...) a cultural disposition involving an intellectual and aesthetic stance of ‘openness’ towards peoples, places and experiences from different cultures, especially those from different ‘nations’.” (2002:468) Now, it is important to realize the influence of American hip-hop among Chinese hip-hop artists and fans, but to simply mirror American hip-hop culture with the hip-hop environment in Beijing would simply be dismissive and fail to explain how American hip-hop becomes incorporated into daily life amongst youth in China. Regev argues that “(...) cultural uniqueness of nations and ethnic groups is no longer characterized by such a quest for exclusive, relatively isolated spaces of cultural content and aesthetic form” (2007:125), implying that neither American hip-hop nor Chinese hip-hop are isolated spaces, and cannot be subjected to such analysis. Regev understands the “(...) incorporation of contemporary cultural forms for expressing ethno-national cultural uniqueness (...)” as a “(...) condition of aesthetic cosmopolitanism (...)” (124). Aesthetic cosmopolitanism, as Regev define it, may shed light on the relationship between Chinese hip-hop and its perceived American ‘origins’.

“If aesthetic cosmopolitanism begins with a taste for cultures of countries, nations and ethnicities different from one’s own, then at the level of production local cultural producers who have taste for goods from cultures other than their own, become inspired and influenced in their own work by elements from these other cultures. Cultural elements from alien cultures are thus inserted, integrated and absorbed into the producer’s own ethno-national culture” (Regev 2007:126).

In its most simple form, Regev’s argument highlights both the influence coming from other cultures, inspiring the sound, style and looks in Chinese hip-hop, and how it becomes incorporated into Chinese culture (see Chapter 3.), inadvertently, as an individual and collective expression of “ethno-national uniqueness” (Regev 2007). An ethno-national uniqueness might be understood as rapping in mandarin, about their own life, aspirations, troubles, hopes, and so on. Most hip-hop artists and fans in Beijing today are Chinese, however, the very first hip-hop album to be released on the mainland were made by foreigners, and the hip-hop environment in Beijing swear to the sound and style of American hip-hop. This serves as an example of the global aspect of external conditions in which the formation of hip-hop in Beijing are partly shaped by. In terms of being Chinese growing up abroad, eventually bringing foreign music back to the mainland like in the case of *Yin Ts’ang*, *Wes* and other key-figures with the environment tempts one to talk about a hybrid form of cultures, where Chinese hip-hop and American hip-hop merge into a hybrid form, but as Kraidy argues, “locality is inevitable a hybrid space,” (1999) leaving Beijing essentially hybrid in itself. The fact that some Chinese families have economic power to educate their children abroad



enables Chinese youth to become socialized in foreign cultures and they might bring these influences back to the mainland, infusing an already hybrid space with, say, American inspired hip-hop music. In this way, discussing Chinese hip-hop and its cultural practice becomes multidirectional as it unfolds in both global and local directions. As such, following Kraidy, it narrows down to the unavoidable issue of identity construction because locality already contains the global and the local within its cultural complexity (1999:457). With this argument it seems fruitful to try to look at identity construction among urban Chinese youth in order to understand the local and global affiliations in which they embed.

## **Identity**

From my empirical material I find two dimensions which correlates in relation to how hip-hop becomes meaningful to those whom embrace it. The first dimension, which I want to discuss in this chapter, is how hip-hop as a leisure activity becomes meaningful in relation to the social, political and cultural complexity in which my discussions so far have been concerned. It is in relation to the individualization process in China and the ‘modernity with Chinese characteristics’ I want to make use of theories of identification. A second dimension is how hip-hop as a distinct music culture, adopted from the U.S becomes expressed in Beijing by standards and values which serves to authenticate hip-hop as a cultural practice in China. This will be discussed and analyzed in Chapter 3, addressing the mechanisms in which hip-hop is an expression of cultural capital within their respective environment. It is a tremendous task to unravel identity construction among urban Chinese youth, and in this thesis, I can only point to directions in which forces shape the Chinese individual and their collective characteristics. As I have already defined and conceptualized the geographical and demographical field of study, my discussion will explore the ways in which social relations affect the individuals I have presented, and the processes in which an understanding of these relations emerge.

## **Social Boundaries**

Barth’s extensive works on the constitution of ethnic groups and how they persist by the nature of the boundaries between them have not only been an important contribution to the literature of ethnic studies, but have parallels and implications which stretch wider and further than the boundaries of his regional field of inquiry (Schuth 1974:50). Implications of how group-formations identify themselves by their differences towards other groups make his theory relevant in understanding hip-hop and identification in Beijing, the way I see it. I intend to use the term ‘boundary’ as a limit of something abstract, especially a subject or sphere of activity (oxforddictionaries.com 9), which I

believe resonate with the implications of Barth's theory. Barth's reference to 'ethnic-group' will in the context of this thesis simply be understood as a group-formation defined by its "mutual recognition on the part of its members" (Jenkins 2008:104).

Urban youth are categorized within boundaries of age and contextually within expectations of accomplishments, and their territorial boundaries are situated by the ways of which their leisure activities are located in the "downtown" areas in Beijing, of whom the majority of the young consumers are demographically located within a fluid category of an 'emerging middle-class'. The hip-hop environment is distinctively located within the 'underground' and 'alternative' venues and clubs where musical forms takes place in the city, and they place themselves within distinct boundaries of hip-hop as an exclusive aesthetic form in relation to other forms of music and cultures. There are layers of groups and boundaries everywhere, and to Barth, these are 'social boundaries' where a group maintains its identity when members interact with 'others' (Barth 1969:15).

Figures within the hip-hop environment are frequently evaluating and judging others, both within and outside the environment, as identifications of criteria within their group-formation. Barth suggests that "the identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgment" (Barth 1969:15) and "it thus entails the assumption that the two are fundamentally 'playing the same game'" (ibid., 1969). By the same rule, an identification of "others as strangers, as members of another ethnic group, implies a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgment of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest" (Barth 1969:15). This is how boundaries entail criteria for determining membership and ways of signaling membership and exclusion (ibid., 1969). The way *Lory* express in the beginning of this chapter how youth rather want to pursue hobbies than responsibilities, as a way of resisting pressures from parents, teachers, the government and others reveals the way a group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgment. Even so, how the hip-hop environment oppose ideals of the mass-media points to a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgment of value and performance reveals criteria for determining membership and exclusion. How *Yin San* gained significant amount of support and recognition by their controversial lyrics, swiftly becoming dismissed by the system of censorship exemplifies how hip-hop as a group-formation becomes shaped by boundaries of speakability. Jenkins are referring to Barth's theory, formulating the concept of identity as "(...) somewhat fluid, situationally contingent, and the perpetually subject and object of negotiation" (Jenkins 2008:44). Processes of identification are

to be found and negotiated in the encounter between internal group-identification and external categorization by others which “allows a wider distinction to be made between *nominal identity* and *virtual identity*” (ibid., 2008). The nominal identity of being a Rapper is shared among many within the hip-hop environment, but the experience of being a Rapper may not signify a shared experience between Rappers (virtual identity). They are “doing” and “being” Rappers differently, consequently leaving their shared nominal identity as Rappers to be experienced dramatically different by each Rapper (Jenkins 2008:44). To Jenkins, nominal- and virtual identity is in a coterminous relationship leaving the processes of name and the experience of such a name in an array of possible identifications (2008:44-45).

If boundaries are ways in which people identify themselves and others, by which evaluation and judgment are subjected to processes of identification, these mechanisms seems to address a complex cultural context in which similarities and differences are forming group formations. Complexity has a significant effect on how individuals define their interests (and vice versa) and how processes of identification are shaping understanding of ‘self’ and others, either as part of music environments, peers groups, friendship circles, family, small- or large-scale organizations, work units or as a Chinese citizen. The human capacity to know ‘who’s who’ and ‘what’s what’ involves a multi-dimensional classification or mapping of the human world and our places in it (Jenkins 2008:5).

### **Similarity and Difference**

To Jenkins, ‘similarity’ and ‘difference’ cannot be separated in understanding processes of identity (Jenkins 2008:21) as “(...) invocations of similarity are intimately entangled with the conjuring up of difference. One of the things that people have in common in any group is precisely the recognition of other groups or categories from whom they differ” (Jenkins 2008:24). How they (hip-hop artists and fans) define the ideals of mass-media as appalling, are by the same measure why they find an alternative ideals as appealing, and so the circle of identification continues.

People within the formation of hip-hop in Beijing have similar interest in the sound and style of music, they dress, behave and articulate themselves similarly. They are similar to each other by identification of interest. At the same time, they express their differences toward mainstream hip-hop music, towards the ideals of mass media and authority, from “other” people whom differ in music and taste, even differences towards people within the environment itself, people which presumably exploit hip-hop for the wrong reasons. They are different by definition of interest. As processes of identification are founded on a relationship between ‘similarity’ and ‘difference’, the

hip-hop environment creates a fruitful space for these mechanisms to be expressed. To Jenkins, the way hip-hop becomes meaningful to young people in Beijing is inevitable related to its social context, suggesting that identity is socially constructed and have to be understood in relation to its social surroundings (2008:41).

In other words, hip-hop artists and fans pursue their own goals and interests in relation to others, in order to “(...) to ‘be’ – and to be ‘seen to be’ – ‘something’ or ‘somebody’, to successfully assume particular identities” (Jenkins 2008:42). To *successfully assume particular identities* in relation to others imply that what you are seeking to ‘be’ or seeking to be ‘seen to be’ is socially negotiable, a matter of meaning, which always involves interaction; “agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation” (Jenkins 2008:17). Jenkins exemplifies these processes;

“How I identify myself has a bearing on how I define my interests. How I define my interests may encourage me to identify myself in particular ways. How other people identify me has a bearing on how they define my interests, and indeed, their own interests. My pursuit of particular interests might cause me to be identified in this way or that by others. How I identify others may have a bearing on which interest I pursue” (Jenkins 2008:7).

Jenkins reveals the dialectical relationship between you and others in processes of defining yourself and your interests. How *Nasty Ray* identifies himself has a bearing on how he defines his interest in hip-hop. The way he defines his interest in hip-hop encourage him to identify himself in particular ways, for example as a skillful artist, as a rebel or as a responsible musician. How other people identify *Nasty Ray* and define his interests has a bearing on how they define and identify themselves and their interests. Inevitably, how *Nasty Ray* identifies others may then, the way I understand Jenkins, have a bearing on why he is interested in hip-hop. Jenkins argues that ‘identity’ is not a ‘thing’ or an object, it “(...) does not, and cannot, make people do anything; it is, rather, people who make and do identity, for their own reasons and purposes” (2008:9). Therefore, rather than a static entity, ‘identity’ must be viewed as ongoing processes of ‘identification’ (ibid., 2008), leaving *Nasty Ray*’s interest in hip-hop continuously entangled with its contextual implications. The way hip-hop artists are cursing more and writing more controversial lyrics than ten years ago, as *Wes* states in my empirical section, either to gain attention for it or because they are not afraid to do it, are implicating how artists are continuously negotiating with their cultural context. The way *D-Yosef* choose to censor himself in discussing the government, as I have discussed earlier, when I were formally recording an interview with him also suggests how *D-Yosef* negotiate his interests, leaving identifications of interests dynamic and contextual, as all processes of identification and all

social relations are intricately intertwined with the cultural complexity, in which they both resist and embrace, as Chinese citizen. More subtly, how *Nasty Ray* recognizes that his family is supporting him as a Rapper, for now, implying that their support might change as time goes, points to the ongoing processes of identification as negotiation. If leisure activities are viewed as part of a private sphere, as posed by Yan (2006) earlier, then hip-hop as a representation of such activity may point to a negotiation of identification with the public. As *Nasty Ray* is determined to make a career of his interest in hip-hop, then processes of identification are contesting the boundaries of the private and public sphere, the way I see it. How these processes come to shape Chinese youth are pinpointed in Liu's book about urban youth in China; "(...) Chinese urban youth's identity construction seems to revolve around an interrelated set of apparent paradoxes, or double-facetedness, which together constitute a complex and multi-faceted collective character" (Liu 2011:183). This argument points to the very reality of these processes of identification, as interaction does not necessarily comprise agreement.

My presentation of the urban 80s generation as modern consumers, fun-seekers, as privileged and pressured individuals, pursuing and negotiating their interests continuously through hip-hop and other leisure activities are reflecting desires to "fit in" and to "stand out", as stated before by Jack, Kipnis and Sargeson (2013:182). A 'desire' to produce and consume hip-hop music, to be recognized among people by what you do and to attain desired states of pleasure through leisure activities seems to be a driving force within the hip-hop environment. The leisure activities I have explored, and its relation to identification resonates with Foucault's theory of 'technologies of the self' (1988). He calls for analysis of "(...) specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves" (1988:18). Techniques which;

"(...) permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault 1988:18).

With 'technologies of the self' Foucault are pointing to the way individuals form their own identity and subjectivity (Tovar-Restrepo 2012:104), the 'self' as a constituted subject of desire (2012:105). He is focusing on the individual's capacity for self-reflection, their articulations of experience (2012:106) and their self-interested projects of personal investment also formulated as 'entrepreneurs of the self' (Dilts 2011:8). The way urban youth in Beijing articulate their experiences in spaces where opposing notions of authority is accepted and where hip-hop music is promoted as key pleasure seems to be a fitting example with Foucault's description. To echo Liu's

discussion of 'Chinese modernity' as presupposing two sets of (often conflicting) subjectification regimes affecting identity construction - whereas one (technology) aims towards the individuals freedom to choose in processes of identity construction, and the other is forging identity construction to develop through ideals of collective responsibility - urban youth in Beijing embrace hip-hop as means (desire) to form their own identity and subjectivity, using music as a 'technology of the self', the way I see it. By embracing the freedom to choose in processes of identity construction, using hip-hop as a 'technology of the (desirable) self', youth are openly attesting the cultural complexity in which their understanding of self and others derives.

## Summary

In this chapter we have been exploring Beijing, a thriving modern landscape filled with young consumers involving in a wide variety of leisure activities. We have gotten to know the 80s generation in China, both empirically and theoretically, a presumable middle-class in Beijing indulging with hip-hop as distinct musical form, navigating as a cosmopolitan formation in a complex and dynamic social, political and cultural context.

We have explored how the individualization process in China has developed into a dual approach towards identity construction, whereas the individual are more and more responsible for its own development and actions while at the same time being subjected to authoritarian control and guidance towards their actions and ways of individual and collective development. I have pointed out how these two approaches often contradict- and dialectically construct each other, leaving the very reality of young people's understanding of 'self' as complex and sometimes contradictory within these dynamics. So far, I have been depicting overarching ideologies infusing youth with domination through *suzhi*, education, ideals of subjectification through mass-media control, censorship and by ambiguously governing modernity from a 'distance'. I have been reflecting these issues through the spectacles of music production- and consumption in China, mainly by addressing the relationship between music, state and public discourse, all in which points to subject formations. My empirical material reveals fragments of how these mechanisms are understood and become represented by subjects and individuals. Youth's leisure activities forms a space where cultural complexity takes form and becomes negotiated upon interaction with others, as social boundaries embody both similarities and differences in processes of identification.

With Barth's and Jenkins' arguments, the formation of hip-hop in Beijing are both constructed by identification of its surroundings as much as it is constructed by means of personal

goals and interests, because all forces which shape the cultural complexity in which urban youth navigates, is mutually inclusive. Following Liu's argument that youth are embracing the self-enterprising ethos (discussed earlier), evident by my empirical representation, I find how leisure activities might be viewed as 'technologies of the self', whereas individuals effect certain operations on their own bodies, thoughts and way of being, as way to form their own identity and subjectivity. I will further explore how music is connected to identity and subjectivity in chapter four.

As I have explored how hip-hop as a leisure activity becomes meaningful in relation to its social, political and cultural context, by processes of identification, I have yet to approach how hip-hop, as an American invention, becomes adopted, incorporated and expressed in Beijing as an authentic cultural practice within the hip-hop environment.

# Chapter 3

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Jeroen de Kloet sites the editor Himm Wong of Urban Magazine in Beijing about hip-hop, and how it has become so trendy; “Most Chinese youth are just seeking a superficial kind of culture, and real people, those who study the spirit of hip-hop, are very few” (de Kloet 2010:69). I spent most of my fieldwork in the inner circles of those very ‘few’ described above by Himm Wong; the ‘real people’, who study the spirit of hip-hop.

Following dedicated hip-hop artists and fans in their local music sphere I want to dive deeper into their expressions of taste and values within their respective hip-hop system. Jeroen de Kloet (2010) has written extensively about ‘hard cultures’ within the Chinese rock-music environment and in his book “China with a Cut” he argues that the notion of “Keeping it Real” within Chinese hip-hop bears similarities with the way Chinese rock authenticates their taste and music through a distinct rock mythology (de Kloet 2010:74). “The rock mythology binds producers, musicians, and audiences together and is the basis of the production of rock culture; it is the ideology of ‘authentic rock’ (de Kloet 2010:26)”. In this way, “Keeping it Real” might be understood as an expression of authenticity within the hip-hop environment in Beijing - binding producers, musicians and audiences of this particular form of music together.

## **“Keeping it Real” in Beijing**

Scholarly, hip-hop and authenticity has in large focused on ethnicity and race as a source of authentication, but as research outside of the Afro-American realm has shown, there are ways in which hip-hop and authenticity can be invoked without tracing the particular form of hip-hop and subcultural values through the spectacles of ethnicity and race (see Condry 2006; Mitchell 2001; Maxwell 2003; de Kloet 2010). However, the ambiguity of authenticity and imitation within hip-hop arise when place and locality actually shows to be an important feature of hip-hop in China, as in hip-hop culture worldwide; local dialects and features of locality are frequently being used as ‘weapons’ in Rap battles (competitions) to ensure autonomy and authenticity (de Kloet 2010:71). Now, if rootedness is important within hip-hop, but ‘race and ethnicity’ are not the main forces in which authenticity is invoked, then how does the Chinese hip-hop community balance the double sidedness of claiming their own locality and place, while at the very same time borrowing a form of



music based on American street culture emerging within the Latin and Afro-American sphere in suburban New York forty years ago to prove it?

“What would it mean to ‘know’ Hip-hop, and what would be required to participate in the production of Hip-hop, in a language other than English and for the people with little (if any) historical connection to the largely African American communities that gave birth to the style? How can a Japanese artist ‘Keep it real’?” (Condry 2006:26).

In Ian Condry’s book about hip-hop in Japan (2006) he wonders how hip-hop can be authentic outside of its original birthplace, where it seems to be disconnected with its African American origin. With this chapter I want to raise the very same question about hip-hop in China. How can a Chinese artist “Keep it Real”?

The phrases “Keeping it Real” and “Real hip-hop” gets frequently chanted within the hip-hop environment in Beijing; in concerts, in freestyle battles, in recorded songs and when just informally talking about music in a bar, there is apparently a very clear difference between what is “Real” hip-hop and what is not. These phrases get mentioned interchangeably and seem to be referring to what is considered authentic hip-hop and what is not. I want to find out what these phrases might refer to and how these references may express a sense of authenticity within hip-hop in Beijing. First, I want to present empirical material where I discover the trails of “Keeping it Real”, based on my observations and conversations, following some of the leading local Chinese hip-hop artists in Beijing.

### ***Gaining Respect, Gaining Authenticity?***

To *Nasty Ray*, achieving respect in the hip-hop community was hard, he explains that you not only need to have skills to be accepted and to get respected as a Rapper, but you need to understand and have significant knowledge about hip-hop as well. He explains this with his arms shaping a form like these three criteria's or standards, if you will, are all part of the same package. *Nasty Ray* started collecting hip-hop CDs in Beijing when he was about ten years old, collecting, analyzing and listening to all hip-hop music he could get his hands on (mostly American hip-hop). When he became sixteen he entered his first freestyle-battle competition, a type of event where you can perform your skills and talent in front of a crowd, where you compete against an opponent in improvised rhymes on top of background music and try to win the battle (competition) by simply being more skillful than the other, and by exciting the crowd the most.

Today *Nasty Ray* is twenty-five years old and hosts his own hip-hop events in Beijing, organizing freestyle battles, concerts and parties. He has a significant fan-base within the hip-hop

environment, and he has earned his respect by winning multiple freestyle battles, recording and performing multiple shows over the years, and he wears the image of being “Real” and “True” hip-hop. He is regarded as an authentic Rapper by his peers and plays one of the leading roles within the hip-hop environment. Paying allegiance to what is “Real” and “True” hip-hop is exactly what *Nasty Ray* spends most of his time doing, hosting his events from stage. He makes his audience roar in unison reciting renowned American hip-hop phrases. They follow what he says and answers back when he tells them to; “say Real hip-hop!” - and the crowd roars back, “say 2 Pac!” - and the crowd obediently recites his words. This is all happening while famous instrumental hip-hop tracks, so called “classics”, are played in the background by a DJ on two turntables (record players) setting the right rhythm and style for the show. These “classics” are originally Rap songs from the 1990s, produced by merited American artists such as Nas, Mobb Deep, Notorious B.I.G and so on. At the same time there is a DVD projected to the wall behind the DJ showing American hip-hop documentaries from the 1980s and 1990s featuring famous African American Rappers. This is how *Nasty Ray* presents hip-hop in Beijing, the way he organizes the aesthetics around his events, the context to compliment the rapping which gets performed by different participants on stage and the conditions in which he presents hip-hop to an audience. *Nasty Ray* explains to me;

“I try to promote ‘Real’ hip-hop culture, I want to tell people what they should listen to and teach them about hip-hop culture and hip-hop history. I have a responsibility to guide those who likes me and show them what ‘Real’ hip-hop is, to show them the way, and how to do the right thing” (*Nasty Ray* interview).

The way *Nasty Ray* teaches his audience about hip-hop is not going through the “abc” of Hip-hop, like a textbook in a classroom reciting its objective history of events and breaking down the content of its culture and variety of possible aesthetic interpretations. When he tells his audience what they should listen to and teaches them about hip-hop culture and history it is obviously in a highly selective, fragmented and subjective manner. *Nasty Ray* mainly promotes ‘classic’ and ‘oldschool’ American hip-hop from the American 1990s era, and also local Chinese hip-hop from his particular ‘crew’ (group). ‘Oldschool’ hip-hop, during my fieldwork, was referring to the 1990s era of American hip-hop, which according to the people I met has a distinct and distinguishable sound and style to it.

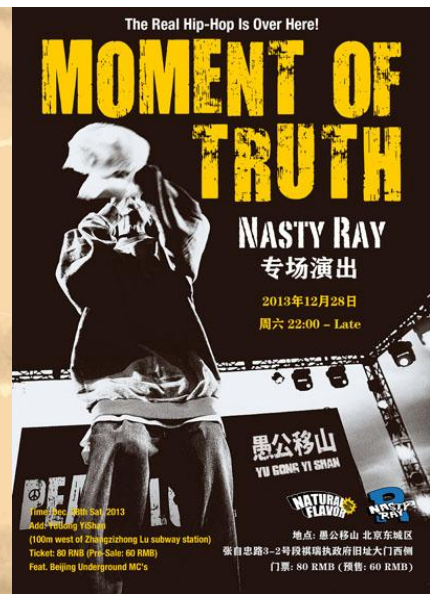
What *Nasty Ray* promotes must surely resonate with what the majority of his audience already thinks about hip-hop, but given his significant amount of fans he is already in the position as somebody who “knows” what “Real” hip-hop is. This is not only positioning *Nasty Ray* as a representative of “Real” hip-hop, but he becomes himself the very source to authenticity. He teaches his audience about taste in music, what he values as important elements in “Real” hip-hop

culture, history and music. His reasons for doing so, putting himself in the position as a teacher may have several incentives and this position may be useful for several purposes. The fact that *Nasty Ray* earns a fair amount of money every month by doing these events suggests that his dedication to the local hip-hop community is based on material gains as well (which also results in jealousy and distrust among other groups of Rappers and DJs in Beijing). However, the very reality that *Nasty Ray* is in title to teach an audience about what is “Real” hip-hop (thus alluding what is not), then at least there is a reason to believe that authentic hip-hop is something that is perceived as possible to obtain in Beijing, no matter how much money he earns by doing so. *Nasty Ray*’s story shows that becoming a representative of hip-hop in Beijing is something that needs to be entrusted him by his peers, followers and fans. In order for him to keep being regarded as authentic and influential he needs to maintain his image and reputation by continuously mediating his knowledge of hip-hop and talent in front of a “core” hip-hop audience.

### **Underground Hip-hop**

The first time I saw *Nasty Ray* perform a *freestyle* was at his own monthly event called “Natural Flavor”, the poster for this event had big letters that said; “Beijing Underground Hiphop” and “Liquid Swords Freestyle Battle” (see figure 3.). According to McLeod ‘Underground’ seems to emphasize a political-economic detachment to its perceived “fake” oppositional counterpart ‘Commercial’ (McLeod 1999:139), and “Liquid Swords” is a reference to the second solo album with the same name made by GZA, the founding father of “Wu Tang Clan”; a famous and influential hip-hop group from America (mtv.com 10). Both of these factors obviously strengthen the idea that this is an authentic hip-hop event; ‘Underground’ simply because that’s “Real”, and “Liquid Swords” draws a line connecting this Chinese hip-hop event to American hip-hop, its origins. *Nasty Ray* frequently uses features of American hip-hop as headlines for his shows such as; “Moment of Truth” (Album title by the famous group called ‘Gangstarr’ from New York, used as the poster-title of *Nasty Ray*’s own concert in Beijing in 2013, featuring a large picture of himself beneath the title. See figure 4.) and “Flava in New Year” which is a world-play referring to a ‘classic’ hip-hop track from the 1990s by Craig Mack called “Flava in Ya Ear”, used as title for one of *Nasty Ray*’s monthly hip-hop events, winter 2013. See figure 5.).

de Kloet (2008) finds that “(...) audience (and artists) uses music to negotiate place, that is, mainland China and Beijing” (de Kloet 2008:156). In this sense, *Nasty Ray* is using elements from American hip-hop culture to serve and support the idea of authentic hip-hop in Beijing. He says that you need to stay true to the origins of hip-hop culture, by representing it, not by imitating it (*Nasty Ray* interview).



(3). 'Natural Flavor' poster

(4). 'Natural Flavor' poster

(5). Nasty Ray concert poster

### Perception of Time and Place

To *Nasty Ray*, the core difference between American and Chinese hip-hop are merely a question of physical space and size of hip-hop community. The environment might be smaller than in America, and its influence within the whole population might be less, but hip-hop in Beijing is based on the same principles as in America, ensuring the quality of “Real” hip-hop music (*Nasty Ray* interview). He believes that he is following and representing the same principles of hip-hop as he believes American hip-hop is about although he has never actually been in America physically (but rather studied hip-hop through careful consumption; listening, watching, reading and eventually crafting his own production). By adopting the style and form of music and culture through careful consumption and experience, *Nasty Ray* convinces his audience that he is a local representative of hip-hop culture. He is using his position to mediate what he perceives as important principles and values within hip-hop culture at large, namely vinyl collecting (‘digging in the crates’), DJ’ing (using two turntables and a mixer), producing beats (by using drums and melody samples from old soul and funk records) and by Rapping (Rapping and ‘freestyling’ using his voice to mediate lyrical content, rhythmically on top of loops/beats often created by a DJ or hip-hop producer). The way he is implementing elements of American hip-hop in his events, he is determined to place Chinese hip-hop into a larger context. He is constantly drawing cross-references between himself, his events and American hip-hop. He explains that his craft is building on top of a foundation that is already there, coming from America. He is doing so by producing hip-hop music with explicit Chinese lyrical

content distributed within the urban music environment in Beijing. *Nasty Ray* has been `warming up` for American hip-hop artists touring China many times, and he has carefully been documenting these moments by taking pictures together with them, presented side by side or in the middle of these famous American hip-hop artists. When he posts these pictures on the internet to promote himself as an artist, he creates an image of authenticity, him being part of a global hip-hop network, having famous American hip-hop artists by his side acknowledging him as hip-hop artist, in turn becoming acknowledged as credible by his peers. Now, is *Nasty Ray* presenting “Real” hip-hop music with explicit cultural content or is *Nasty Ray*’s attempt to create hip-hop in Beijing just a fraud, a mere imitation of American hip-hop, cynically using the attributions he needs to gain power and status within his local environment?

### **Skill**

When I entered the club, located two floors below ground level (literally underground), I saw *Nasty Ray* performing on stage having everyone’s attention. He was doing a *freestyle*, he was improvising rhymes by continuously trying to find things he could rap about in the room. The reason why I noticed that is because he was pulling the hats off people’s heads and performed rhymes about the brand, the color and the style of that particular hat before he moved along to the next. This was a type of event where anyone who wanted to sign up for battle could do so, to *freestyle* in Chinese against opponents in a competition for respect, recognition and the first prize; shoes, clothes (provided by sponsors), respect and one thousand RMB (Chinese currency). Being one of the most merited *freestyle-battlers* in Beijing, *Nasty Ray* naturally manifested his position by performing his skills as the host and leader of the evening. Talking to another Rapper in Beijing called *D-Yosef* about ‘skill’ he answers; “you have to create your own style, you have to `live it` and understand how to build up a cool beat, a cool verse, a cool flow”. So if anything, *Nasty Ray* is showing the audience his style, his flow and his skills as a Rapper, on a cool beat. These conditions are obviously reassuring his authenticity.

Spending time in *D-Yosef* and *Odd Pluton*’s apartment, which they rebuild into a home-recording studio (5050 Studios), I was able to take part in their music production and get to know their views about music, life and hip-hop. They are about the same age as *Nasty Ray*, in their mid-twenties, *Odd Pluton* is originally from Russia, but speaks fluently Chinese and *D-Yosef* is originally from *Xinjiang* located by the far north-west borders of China. Since they are not from Beijing, and Beijing are widely considered in China as the capitol of Chinese hip-hop, they felt like they had to prove themselves by standards higher than other local Beijing Rappers, pointing to specific locality as key to authentic hip-hop in China. However, they did overcome these standards

by earning their respect through skillfulness, musicality and by performing vigorously on stage. 5050 received massive response from the local hip-hop community when they released their first album in early 2012. Years of interest in hip-hop, gaining knowledge, understanding, learning how to produce the music and Rap led them to record an album. Years of crafting your work is a significantly important element for *D-Yosef* as he puts it, in order to ensure good quality of hip-hop music. *D-Yosef* is less occupied with the “oldschool” sound of American 90s hip-hop compared to *Nasty Ray* and believes that you can make good hip-hop music in multiple ways. The most important part, to him, is to be “original” and to “stand out” with something “new”, but he is concerned that most people within the hip-hop environment fails to acknowledge this important fact (*D-Yosef*). This highlights the ways in which different Rappers experience their nominal identity virtually different, as I have discussed earlier.

### **Commitment and Technology**

“There are far too many people that just buy equipment and call themselves Rappers or Producers the next day. They just ‘play’ hip-hop, we ‘play’ we too, but we are serious about what we do” (*D-Yosef*). To produce, to record and to DJ, you basically need electronic equipment. *Odd Pluton* and *D-Yosef* have the basic equipment they need; computer, midi keyboard, speakers, turntables, mixer and microphone. However, for them, having the right equipment is not enough, you need to know what you’re doing, “you cannot just buy the right equipment and call yourself a Rapper or Producer” (*D-Yosef*). It takes time to learn about hip-hop and to craft your skill, just as *Nasty Ray*’s story, *D-Yosef* and *Odd Pluton* had to go the grades. “You need to have you own style, if you are just imitating it’s not hip-hop. In the beginning its mostly imitation, but if you’re patient you can learn how to express your own style”. Of course having the ‘right’ equipment is important at some level, just by the ‘dribbling’ look on *D-Yosef*’s face when we are in *DJ Wordy*’s studio proves that, but it is not what is considered ‘most’ important in order to create hip-hop. *D-Yosef* is saying that more important than having the ‘right’ equipment you need to spend time learning how to use it. Making hip-hop is supposed to be fun, but it takes effort, time and significant commitment in order to master it. You will be acknowledged as a Rapper or Producer through your skills, and you only get skills by yearning for the music.

### **Social Codes**

After spending time at local hip-hop events I start to recognize repetitive patterns of social behavior which in part seems to structure and reinforce a social hierarchy within this particular environment, and it seems to reinforce the participants experience of “Real” and authentic hip-hop. My experience at such events bears similarities to Sarah Thornton’s research on Club Cultures in

Britain (1996), finding subcultural capital as key to understand these social patterns. I will return to 'subcultural capital' as theory later in this chapter.

At these events both artists and enthusiasts navigate within the local hierarchy through appearance, attitudes, gestures, and so on. It matters who you know, who knows you, how you behave and the particular ways in which you communicate yourself. Participants of these events are organizing themselves through a set of social codes and it seems like you create and maintain your authenticity through the way you communicate these codes. It is important to note that the sociality played out at these events is perceived as very real by the participants themselves. Famous sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) has contributed with extensive theory on human interactions as a performance or 'acting';

“At one extreme, one finds that the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality. When his audience is also convinced in this way about the show he puts on - and this seems to be the typical case - then for the moment at least, only the sociologist or the socially disgruntled will have any doubts about the “realness” of what is presented” (Goffman 1959:47).

With the idea of social performance as 'play' within any given social context, in this case, even if all the participants are respectfully 'acting out' their social role, this does not make it any less part of the perception of reality by the participants themselves at the present moment. At the other 'extreme', the performer fails to seduce his audience with his play and thus fails to become a trustworthy participant of the social situation (Goffman 1959:47), deeming a hopeful Rapper to be considered “fake” or a failure. I regard Goffman's theory as very applicable to my experience of the hip-hop community in Beijing, the way some hip-hop artists or fans gains success- or fails, to become regarded as authentic representatives of hip-hop culture might just be measured by their ability to perform their “Realness” and truthfulness within their social 'theater'.

### *Elements of Hip-Hop*

I am followed by *D-Yosef* as we enter the club, and we walk straight to the entrance passing a long line of people. Followed by an approving nod and a friendly handshake by the 'doorman' I enter the club for free together with *D-Yosef*. Walking down the dim corridors of 'Section 6' we are passing boys and girls with serious and indifferent looks on their faces leaning 'laid-back' towards the walls, in baggy jeans and large t-shirts, affirmatively nodding their heads to the beat from the dance floor. I am struck by their “coolness” as I am passing by headed towards the main area of the club where the DJ and the hosts are entertaining the audience. I'm watching intricate handshakes and

gestures being performed around me as people meet each other, groups in circles are gathered Rapping or Breakdancing in friendly competition proving their skill and distinct technique, while others are paying detailed attention to everything that happens within those circles. Some guys are given “starstruck” looks and attention from all around, while others are passing silently without recognition. By the far side of the stage and behind the DJ you can spot where the ‘important’ people of tonight’s event reside, the “inner circle” if you will; DJ’s, Rappers, friends and organizers. They are making confident gestures supporting the host as he is screaming to the crowd; “This is the Real underground hip-hop party” - “Everybody say hiiiip-hooop..”. *D-Yosef* and I are joining the “inner circle” as we are faced towards the crowd with an overview from stage. There are about two hundred people at this event, and I am told that most of these participants are attending regularly.

They wear the ‘right gear’, they are making the ‘right’ gestures and perform the verbal response at the ‘right’ time when the host calls them to, and they all seem to have the ‘right’ attitude to support their roles within this context. It is by no accident that these people choose to come to this particular event instead of going to the bigger- and more commercial hip-hop clubs in Beijing which is located not too far away. Asking the participants of this event about the difference between the two places, the common conception is that this particular event offers something that the commercial hip-hop clubs are missing, namely authenticity.

### **Commercial vs. Underground**

Compared to *Mix* and *Vics* (the two biggest and most commercial hip-hop clubs in Beijing) people tell me that ‘Section 6’ and ‘Natural Flavor’ are the only hip-hop parties playing “Real” hip-hop and where “Real” hip-hop artists and fans participate. They are categorizing ‘Section 6’ and ‘Natural Flavor’ as events where you’ll hear a more authentic selection of music, where there’s a focus on DJ’ing, Rapping, Break-dancing and overall the important elements within hip-hop culture. On the contrary, “nobody at *Mix* or *Vics* knows anything about hip-hop, they just go there to ‘show off’ and to get drunk. They are not into the music, they just want to be ‘cool’ and show off in front of girls” (one informant stating what I came to hear from a wide variety of hip-hop fans and artists in Beijing). *Nasty Ray* divides hip-hop in Beijing into two different categories; Those who is learning about fashion through mainstream hip-hop, but does not care too much about the culture (not ‘real’), and those who are dedicated to the style of the music and collects it, who’s digging for the culture (‘real’). *Mix* and *Vics* are widely considered within the hip-hop environment as mainstream and commercial clubs for profit, as a place having nothing to do with “Real” hip-hop culture. I have been to *Mix* and *Vics* at several occasions and just by observing the high level of



expensive cars stopping by the red carpet leading into these nightclubs I immediately experience a difference between this environment and the more underground hip-hop environment. There are obviously a mismatch between which values is considered important within the two different spaces. *Mix* and *Vics* does promote themselves as authentic hip-hop clubs in Beijing, to make themselves attractive to everyone they combine mainstream chart-music with huge graffiti inside to create a hip-hop environment, but the club in itself are widely considered by the subculture as commercial and “fake”, representing mass-culture, mainstream popular hip-hop music from the American and Asian charts and most important, the hierarchy and reality in which organize the local hip-hop scene of artists and fans in Beijing simply does not apply in *Mix* or *Vics*. “Being someone” in the local hip-hop environment does not make you significantly important in the mainstream hip-hop clubs, which in turn undermines the perception of authenticity within the subculture of dedicated hip-hop artists and fans. Now, it can seem like the commercial clubs are in a conflict with the more underground community of hip-hop, but as studies of subcultures prove; “(...) the social logic of subcultural capital reveals itself most clearly by what it dislikes and by what it empathetically isn’t” (Thornton 1996:105). This suggests that the commercial clubs are actually, in part, shaping clear boundaries within the underground hip-hop community. To follow Thornton’s reasoning we need to know more about what hip-hop in Beijing empathetically isn’t, in order to understand what it is.

### *Being ‘in the know’*

Having the ‘right look’ is important and you need to have the ‘right sound’, but without the ‘right knowledge’ the former two credentials might just be dismissed as mere imitation. Any merited and respected artist within the hip-hop environment in Beijing that I have encountered utters concern about the lack of knowledge about hip-hop within the hip-hop community itself.

“People don’t even know about Biggie and 2pac when you ask them. They say that they know about Rap music, but they don’t even know about Mos Def, Talib Kweli or Tribe Called Quest. They don’t know about hip-hop” (*Nasty Ray* interview).

To know who Biggie and 2Pac is does not ultimately make you an authentic Rapper or hip-hop fan, but *not* knowing ultimately makes you inauthentic. To *Nasty Ray* there is a certain level of basic knowledge to obtain about hip-hop in order to be ‘in the know’, like being able to hear the difference between Mozart and Beethoven is you’re a classical musician. *D-Yosef* further explains that; “they (certain Rappers and fans) think hip-hop is “Real” just because it sounds like hip-hop, they don’t understand hip-hop, they don’t like it enough to understand it”. As pointed out earlier, to *D-Yosef* there is a level of commitment needed in order to obtain a sufficient level of understanding

and skill, which in turn enables you to take part in the production of “Real” hip-hop. “Real” hip-hop reveals itself for those who ‘really’ likes it enough. This implies that some of the leading figures within the hip-hop community sense a collective responsibility to nurture the perception of difference between imitation and authentic hip-hop. Those active in the hip-hop scene often blame the culture for its inauthenticity (de Kloet 2007:139), which in turn reinforces the authenticity of those who ‘knows’. This resonates with Bourdieu’s concept of ‘symbolic domination’ which “(...) attempt to constitute or reproduce social hierarchies through the definition of symbolic “legitimacy” and thus “symbolic capital”” (Johnson, Fulcher and Ertman 2003:313). Bourdieu’s works on ‘symbolic capital’ has inspired Thornton to formulate ‘subcultural capital’ (1996), which is a relevant analytical approach in relation to my empirical material above, the way I see it. ‘Subcultural capital’ will be presented as an analytical approach later in this chapter.

When I am talking about “Real” vs “Unreal” with *Wes*, the host of the National hip-hop Radio show “The Park”, he explains that there’s a lot of Rappers that just download the most classic instrumentals from the internet and then just imitate the voice of other Chinese Rappers like *MC Webber* or *Sbazzo* on top of it. Two factors make this an inauthentic action according to *Wes*, firstly they do not produce their own music or even try to find their own style of music, they simply download the most commonly used hip-hop song from America and rap over it. Secondly, they do not rap with their own voice, they simply imitate the flow and pitch of the most influential Chinese Rappers, which is considered stealing. However, *Wes* can calmly reassure me that this music will not get airtime on his radio and does not pose any threat to the hip-hop environment, it only creates frustration and distress among those who know how to produce “Real” hip-hop music. There are many Rappers and hip-hop groups from all over China sending their new tracks to *Wes*, hopefully getting airtime on his weekly hip-hop show, but as I have mentioned earlier, most of these productions are simply not regarded as good enough.

By asserting certain standards of authenticity to Chinese hip-hop, the merited and respected people within ‘hip-hop Beijing’ regulate the environment by evaluating the quality of its production. If the hip-hop is not good enough it will not get airtime on the hip-hop Radio, it will not be played at *Nasty Ray*’s hip-hop events, nor at ‘Section 6’, it will not get support from *D-Yosef* and it will not be mediated through the channels it needs to be mediated through in order to become widely accepted as authentic Chinese hip-hop. It is important to add that most of the leading figures of hip-hop artists and organizers in Beijing are constantly stating their concern about their listener’s ability to distinguish between what is “Real” hip-hop and what is not. They refer to the listeners of

hip-hop as “amateurs” that constantly has to be guided, reminded and told what hip-hop is. In Condry’s study of hip-hop in Japan, the level of authenticity are often a negotiation between artists and audience (cf. Condry 2006), whereas in Beijing the artists and influential people producing hip-hop are themselves very much in charge of maintaining the direction of Chinese hip-hop by actively trying to teach and guide the relatively small audience of dedicated hip-hop fans (they are themselves referring to the hip-hop audience as relatively small). To compare with the study of Dutch hip-hop, an “authentic” fan is only recognizable if he or she wears the right brands of clothes, buys the right records and listens to the right hip-hop radio shows. However, all these products and medias are available to everyone in Holland suggesting that it is hard to differ between the “real” fan and the “phony” (Wermuth 2001:159). Still, even if the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion are almost invisible, artists and fans within Dutch hip-hop constantly draws distinctions between those who are “Real” and those who are not (ibid., 2001). In Beijing, these distinctions are as blurry as in Holland, and similarly, the local hip-hop artists and fans in Beijing are forcefully and continuously claiming who is “Real” and who is not.

### ***Standards of Authentication***

Respected profiles within the hip-hop environment seems not to care too much about hip-hop potentially being exploited by forces from the “outside”, like commercial clubs or commercial industry presumably profiting of the image of their culture. They are far more concerned about the level of commitment and understanding of hip-hop within the hip-hop environment itself. Merely looking at clothing, appearance and consumption of hip-hop related products might be misleading researching hip-hop in Beijing because the distinction between who represents the “Real” hip-hop culture and those who are just imitating it might not all be visual. Wearing hip-hop clothing does not by itself give you access to the hip-hop environment, as I have already suggested, authentic hip-hop seems to be regulated by embodied elements such as skill and knowledge more than factors of appearance.

The way I understand this environment is that the notion of “Real” hip-hop are solely resting on a few local artists and organizers inhabiting the knowledge and abilities to demand it and they are continuously doing so by mediating these values through recorded songs, radio-shows and events. The notion of “Real” and authenticity seems to be the very basis on which the subculture rests its credibility to exists and grow, if there is no credibility and nothing that separates this environment from the rest of the society it will not be able to bind producers, musicians and audiences together as a distinct hip-hop formation. By applying certain standards and rules to hip-hop music the local environment keeps the culture exclusive and ensures the participants

commitment. On the one hand hip-hop artists feel confident about their production of music, but on the other they feel less confident about the listener's ability to understand, and this seems to be very important within the environment in Beijing, as they continuously reflect on the listeners' ability to understand on what the artists do.

Standards and measurements which constantly serve to validate hip-hop in Beijing are so far based on loose categories such as 'understanding', 'knowledge', 'commitment', 'style' and 'skills', and they all seem to be considered as embodied and symbolic values. In Bourdieu's description, 'cultural capital' is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment, and it becomes transmitted and visible by the marks they leave in social interaction (Bourdieu 2008:283).

*Nasty Ray* and *D-Yosef* are explaining these standards and values to me as if the words give accurate and obvious description of what the environment in Beijing expects from you. They are reassuringly nodding their heads to their words when they are explaining it as if it couldn't be clearer. I get the feeling that I understand, given the body language and the perceived obviousness of the explanation, but these standards are still not explained. Academically, all those terms needs to be elaborated in order to identify what these 'obvious' standards really are about.

## **Authentic Imitation**

I want to present the larger academic context in which hip-hop and authenticity occurs in order to highlight the complexity of my empirical material described above. Being originally from America, hip-hop no matter where you find it are somewhat related to its African American origins, and this is where the academic discussion about hip-hop and authenticity 'outside' America begins.

"First, it is important to recognize that in one sense Japanese Hip-hop is, in fact, imitation. All of it is. (...) Second, the idea that a certain background is necessary to make an authentic rapper obscures the fact that assertions of authenticity almost always come after musicians have proven their musical skill by standards other than ethnic or racial background" (Condry 2006:34).

Condry is addressing the debate about hip-hop and authenticity, which in large has been focusing on its African American roots, thus making hip-hop and authenticity something that primarily has to do with racial heritage and geographical affiliation. The fact that hip-hop comes from America is not a discussion in this thesis, because it obviously does, however, Condry finds that this is not necessarily the way in which hip-hop participants themselves primarily evaluate what is authentic and not in their respective localities. Imitation might not obscure the possibility that perceptions of authentic hip-hop can be obtained outside the African American context. It might be academically

fruitful to trace the origins of hip-hop and discuss whether hip-hop 'outside' of its birthplace can be considered as imitation or not, but this would dismiss the fact that the actual people producing and consuming hip-hop in a given location *do* experience authenticity within their own locality. More important than measuring the 'validity' of their experience, I believe it is more fruitful to look at the various ways in which hip-hop as a global popular trend becomes interpreted, embedded and given meaning, locally.

In China, *Nasty Ray* detects skill, understanding and knowledge as significantly important elements for him to become accepted and respected as a Rapper. He was pursuing these standards by studying hip-hop for years crafting his knowledge and skills, imitating the sound and style of the origins of hip-hop in order to understand its nature. The way *Nasty Ray* came to prove his skills was by showing his abilities to rap in front of others, and he was doing so by participating in freestyle battles. Condry suggests that you can witness the process of authentication by "looking at the performative character of activities in the present" (Condry 206;26). In that sense, the standards in which hip-hop becomes authenticated seems to be contextually created, or reproduced. Both the fans and the respected artists at the time where having the power to judge *Nasty Ray's* credibility and they were openly doing so, by evaluating the skills of his performances. Now, it is important to identify what these standards might be from context to context, to understand its significance, that is in part what I am set to do with this chapter, but first I wonder how *Nasty Ray* can prove his skill and knowledge about hip-hop created in America, and claim authenticity in China. What enables Chinese youth to authenticate hip-hop at the same time as they are imitating it? Tony Mitchell, the writer of '*Global Noise; Rap and Hip-hop Outside the USA*' (2010), points to the issue of imitation and argues that;

"Hip-hop and Rap cannot be viewed simply as an expression of African American culture; it has become a vehicle for global youth affiliations and a tool for reworking local identity all over the world" (Mitchell 2001:1-2).

Following Mitchell's argument there seems to be more to the expression of hip-hop in Beijing than simply copying African American culture. *D-Yosef* may shed light on Mitchell's argument when he told me that a lot of young people involve with hip-hop because they want to find their own way, and they want to stand out from the masses to "realize" themselves. Discussion in chapter 2 reveals the mechanisms in which hip-hop is related to processes of identification, To *D-Yosef*, hip-hop has been a huge source of inspiration- and has made a big impact on his life. For both *Nasty Ray* and *D-Yosef*, hip-hop is more than a hobby, to them it's a *lifestyle*.

Posed with the question of what life-style is, *D-Yosef* attempts to explain it; "... 'living hip-hop' is finding yourself in it, by expressing yourself and by creating your own style". What starts of as mere curiosity and perhaps an urge to find your own way might just lead you into the expression of hip-hop. Is this what Mitchell is referring to? Are *Nasty Ray* and *D-Yosef* embedding hip-hop as means to communicate their own perception of selves? There is definitely a sense of self reflection and passion when *Nasty Ray* and *D-Yosef* are talking about hip-hop, their body language and their facial expressions are communicating something important to them, something located within them, using the same bodily gestures in the interview as if they were on stage performing their lyrics. It is very clear to me that both *Nasty Ray* and *D-Yosef* recognize themselves as representatives of authentic hip-hop in China, while at the same time placing humbleness and respect towards the origins of hip-hop, namely, the history of American hip-hop. They are describing Chinese hip-hop and American hip-hop as mirroring each other and not contradicting each other. They are not trying to be African American, they are inspired by a musical form invented by African American`s to express themselves. Now, there are a lot more to this cultural adoption than simply stating the obvious and I need to dig deeper into the way Chinese hip-hop artists and fans are `making sense` of this American musical invention. Either it`s by knowing, understanding, being skillful or simply `living` the nature of hip-hop, both *Nasty Ray* and *D-Yosef* are undoubtedly being regarded by the local hip-hop environment surrounding them, as authentic. What is so profound about the attributions of hip-hop that enables one to be authentic and others to be `fake`, how do you measure `understanding` and `living` hip-hop?

### **Subcultural Capital**

Sarah Thornton`s comprehensive works on subcultures and their values of credibility suggests `subcultural capital` as a plausible way to dissect these measures. She builds her theory as an extension of Bourdieu`s works on `cultural capital`; which in short describes the link between taste and social structures at play regarding how *culturally* `rich` (or poor) you are (cf. Thornton 1996). Your `cultural capital` are "(...) knowledge that is accumulated through upbringing and education which confers social status" (Thornton 1996:10). In other words, your status are defined in part by your cultural knowledge, say, the way you dress, how you articulate yourself, your particular taste in arts and music (cf. Thornton 1996). Inspired by Bourdieu, Thornton finds `hipness` as a form of subcultural capital in youth culture.

"Subcultural capital can be objectified or embodied. Just as books and paintings display cultural capital in the family home, so subcultural capital is objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record

collections (...) Just as cultural capital is embodied in 'good' manners and urbane conversation, so subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being 'in the know' (...)" (Thornton 1996:11).

*Nasty Ray* are holding the microphone, rapping skillfully enchanting the audience with his rhymes while moving his arms like he's throwing important messages at the crowd. He is wearing a brand new Yankees cap, a huge black t-shirt saying "Fuck you, fuck me, fuck everyone" in capital letters, with tan brown leather Timberland boots and a gold chain around his neck. He is being in the spotlight, being the knowledgeable, the headmaster on the stage surrounded by DJs, Turntables, hip-hop music, posters saying "Beijing Underground" and "Liquid Swords" all over the place, in a room filled with hip-hop fans moving simultaneously to the beat with their hands up, all paying attention to *Nasty Ray* and the music - and all dressed up in similar gear; baggy jeans, cap (or beanie), large t-shirts (or basketball jerseys) and boots (or sneakers). If subcultural capital is knowing how to look and behave in a certain way then this room is filled with it.

If you did not know what to wear that night and came with you normal punk-rock outfit; tight shredded pants and a shrunken black t-shirt you would look very different from the rest, you would not blend into this picture and you would be perceived as someone not 'knowing' what is going on, the way I understand it. 'Living' and 'understanding' hip-hop seems to refer to the subcultural capital Thornton is talking about, being the logic in which the hip-hop community distinguish themselves from 'others' and creates the grounds in which they authenticate their culture. This resonates with the discussion of social boundaries in chapter 2, where an understanding of 'who's who' and 'what's what' arise in processes of identifying similarities and differences.

### **Being "Real"; Defined by what you are Not**

To *Nasty Ray* and *D-Yosef*, hip-hop initially got their attention because of its 'hip'- and 'coolness', and to them it evolved into becoming an all-encompassing lifestyle involving their body, their mind and their social life. Hip-hop and its community becomes an important element in their social world, and by the explanations of my informants it seems harder to accurately explain what defines hip-hop than defining what is not. To the level of understanding and 'living' hip-hop there does not seem to be any specific way to do it other than 'digging in the crates', having 'your own style' and having knowledge about the important elements in hip-hop culture, which can be done in manifold variations. On the contrary, being inauthentic have very clear measures; not knowing who Biggie and 2pac is, (being caught) imitating someone else's rhythmical flow and style of voice, calling yourself a Rapper before you have earned that reputation by certain others or simply by consuming

hip-hop at the wrong clubs. This resonates with the social logic of subcultural capital mentioned earlier, whereas subcultural capital reveals itself mostly by what it is not. How much you need to understand and know about hip-hop to become an ‘insider’ is hard to measure, but not knowing anything about hip-hop at all is easy to spot, and thus reveals the important subcultural capital which is missing. If you don’t know who “Biggie” and “2Pac” is, then knowing is your subcultural capital. While material things such as expensive cars, clothes and alcohol are considered valuable capital in the commercial clubs, - knowledge, attitude and skill are more valuable capital within the hip-hop community. This is not to dismiss material things as unimportant to the people of the subculture, because as I have talked about earlier, money is a very important value in the Chinese society, but is not a primary importance within the subculture itself. People within the hip-hop environment suggests that commercial clubs are placing profit over authenticity and (in Thornton’s view) simply does not value key elements of the subcultural capital within the hip-hop environment. This, at the very least, strengthens the suggestion that this environment in large rests its identity on differences from its counterparts, which shows how both the commercial industries and the ‘underground’ environments are dialectically shaping each other.

Acknowledging subcultural capital within hip-hop in Beijing shows that certain attributions are needed in order to be a part of it, however, it does not necessarily bring us any closer identifying exactly what the contents of these standards really are about, it simply identifies that it’s there. Subcultural capital might work as a meaningful tool to locate attributions of significance within an subculture, like hip-hop in Beijing, but acknowledging that you need to look a certain way, talk a certain way or have certain skills and knowledge is not enough to fully understand the nature of “Keeping it Real” and its processes of authentication alone. Standards seems not be based on a set of fixed values. Reviewing my empirical data, the existence of “Real” hip-hop in Beijing are based on indefinite measures of *knowledge* and *skills*, which in turn needs constantly to be mediated, reproduced from context to context and seems to rest on a few peoples subjective powers to judge upon it.

### **“Keeping it Real”; Contextually Constructed**

What if the context was different; a Chinese hip-hop event was in fact taking place in America. Would the same notion of authenticity apply to the performance of *Nasty Ray* and other Chinese Rappers, being regarded as “Real” and “True” hip-hop artists in Beijing, or would they now be dismissed as merely imitators? Maybe they would have to prove themselves all over again, with another set of local standards and values towards knowledge, understanding and skill. Maybe



another place regards ethnicity and racial background as key, as in Quebec where hip-hop is a vehicle for fights between ethnic groups, making it almost impossible for some people to be recognized as authentic no matter how skillful you are? What does it mean when *Nasty Ray* tells the audience to “Keep it Real”? To understand “Keeping it Real” I want to trace it’s content back to where the term comes from. McLeod have been researching the various meanings of “Keeping it Real” in America and highlights the multiple ways in which hip-hop artists use this term.

“Keepin`it real and various other claims of authenticity do not appear to have a fixed or rigid meaning throughout the hip-hop community. Keepin`it real is a floating signifier in that its meaning changes depending on the context in which it is invoked” (McLeod 1999:139).

McLeod implies that claims of authenticity changes from one context to another by swiftly shifting its content, but not its appearance. “Keeping it Real” is a concept in which underlines a whole range of subjective preferences, but still has become one of the main claims of authenticity within this particular form of music. With his article, McLeod present a framework to understand the various ways in which this widespread term gets used within hip-hop. His article is about hip-hop in America, and how the concept of “Keeping it Real” came to be used more and more frequently by hip-hop artists and their fans during the 1990s. During this decade hip-hop seriously grew into the American mainstream culture as the biggest and most selling genre of popular music. This resulted in a major identity crisis within hip-hop because artists and fans that used to define themselves as against the ‘mainstream’ was now a huge part of it. By struggling to maintain a “pure” identity hip-hop artists and their fans where invoking concepts of authenticity in order to protect the hip-hop culture from assimilating into mainstream culture, by creating boundaries and distinguishing the difference between what is authentic and what is inauthentic (McLeod 1999:136). McLeod’s article about “Keeping it Real” and its relationship to authentication has lead him to formulate six semantic dimensions which recognize key symbols within American hip-hop culture’s identity (McLeod 1999:137-138).

Semantic Dimensions	Real	Fake
Social-psychological	staying true to yourself	following mass trends
Racial	black	white
Political-economic	the underground	commercial
Gender-sexual	hard	soft
Social locational	the street	the suburbs
Cultural	the old school	the mainstream

(McLeod 1999:139 - Table 1. Support Claims of Authenticity)

All of these dimensions might be fruitfully compared with the Chinese hip-hop environment, however, I have only explored a few of these dimensions empirically, and therefore I choose to focus my attention on some of these dimensions. By using some of McLeod’s semantic dimensions I want to see if I comparatively can gain some understanding of how “Keeping it Real” is used by local artists and fans in processes of authentication within hip-hop in China, and discuss how “Keeping it Real” might refer to different dimensions in different contexts.

### **True to Yourself vs. Mass Trends**

*D-Yosef* and *Nasty Ray* are very clear about the importance of expressing yourself and creating your own style. They are explicitly exemplifying this by comparing their own dedication and commitment to hip-hop versus “others” lack of it. In fact, by the very existence of these supposedly “fake” imitators of hip-hop, they themselves gain more autonomy and confidence about their own subjective perception of “Realness” and sense of being “true” to hip-hop. *Nasty Ray* and *D-Yosef* may not categorize these “fake” Rappers and fans as explicitly ‘following mass-trends’ as McLeod suggests, because in China, hip-hop is not a mass-trend compared to the U.S, but the idea of “fakers” are certainly being regarded just as ignorant about hip-hop as those attending the commercial hip-hop clubs, which validates McLeod’s dimension. Understanding my informants correctly, ‘staying true to yourself’ are considered more as the contradiction of imitation than the opposite of commercialism, although the idea of imitators and those who are just following mass trends are often put into the same category, the ‘others’, the ‘unreal’. Those who are perceived as ‘mass trend followers’ and ‘imitators’ in Beijing are most obviously those who indulge with clubs

like *Mix* and *Vics*, however, there are Rappers and fans within the underground environment itself being regarded just as inauthentic and “fake”, which leaves this dimension incomplete.

### ***Underground vs. Commercial***

Commercial hip-hop in China is a tricky category because hip-hop is not a big part of the national commercial industry. However, with internet, global trends and global popular music travels far and wide. American *Billboard* music are regularly played in a wide array of clubs, bars and restaurants in Beijing, so even if this music is not channeled through the official national TV channels of CCTV, some international hip-hop songs still manages to pass the Chinese censorship-filter and becomes available on various urban radio channels in big cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. Songs that fails to pass the radio-filter are still widely accessible throughout the internet. As long as hip-hop and Rap music are part of global popular music charts, urban Chinese people are bound to be exposed to it in some way or another. The kind of hip-hop music that comes from popular charts is the musical form of hip-hop which local Chinese hip-hop artists and fans are referring to as “fake”, the kind of hip-hop music that is pumping through the monstrous speakers at *Mix* and *Vics*.

“Keeping it Real” are often used in China to attest the dichotomy between underground and commercial, as my empirical evidence suggests earlier in this chapter, but putting this dichotomy to test reveals a more complex reality. While ‘staying true to yourself’ are more widely accepted attribution to “Keeping it Real”, underground vs. commercial poses a more complex matter within the Chinese hip-hop sphere. Some DJ’s within the ‘core’ hip-hop environment in Beijing are traveling China and Hong Kong playing regularly at commercial venues. For example *DJ Wordy*, which is one of the most respected artists and DJ’s within hip-hop China. He makes a living commercially being a successful coveted DJ, and he does so by indulging both in the commercial and in the underground world. He seems to be resting above all inquiries of authenticity, indulging with commerciality he is left with no less respect in the underground community. He is considered one of the best producers and DJ’s of hip-hop music in China and continues to be regarded as such even if going on accord with ‘core’ and strict overarching subcultural values such as resisting the commercial industry.

I remember when *Nasty Ray* asked me to DJ at his hip-hop party, he explicitly asked me to play “Real” hip-hop, and he carefully texted me at least once a day for two weeks before the event making sure that I would not play any other form of music than “Real” hip-hop. This is when I came to know *Nasty Ray*’s preferences of “Real” hip-hop, to him, being “oldschool” and “original”

American hip-hop from the 1990s era. Posing *DJ Wordy* with *Nasty Ray*'s definition of "Real" hip-hop reveals a somewhat different, he argues that many people (hip-hop artists and fans) are too much occupied with the sound and style of '90s hip-hop'; "hip-hop is developing like everything else, you cannot just stop time and stop music from evolving, 90s hip-hop is 90s hip-hop, and now we are in 2012." (*DJ Wordy* interview) *Nasty Ray* and *DJ Wordy* are defining their particular 'style' and taste within hip-hop differently.

Say if *Nasty Ray* were to DJ at the most commercial clubs in Beijing, he would be considered a "sellout" by many, leaving people skeptical of his means and values, but *DJ Wordy* successfully lives in both worlds, which shows that even the most important principles in which the hip-hop environment rests its identity of authenticity is not statically interpreted in isolation, but are rather carefully contested and weighed with other attributions and standards like 'staying true to yourself', merits, reputation, knowledge, skills and so on. *DJ Wordy* does not define "Real" hip-hop as counter-commercial and he is not considered inauthentic. Despite his commercial profile he is rather considered as a proud example of the hip-hop community's capabilities, talent and influence, being a role-model for people in the underground. The dichotomy between underground and commercial are so flux and fluid in real life that it hardly can be elaborated as a tool for gaining clear understanding of "Keeping it Real" and processes of authenticity. Despite this fact, the term frequently addresses the underground as authentic and the commercial as "fake". In this way I am bound to accept this semantic dimension as contradictory and look at it as contextually constructed, a term which is adjusting its content selectively to fit the given situation in which it occurs. My experience in Beijing suggests that the dichotomy in itself does not bear much specific content, until somebody is claiming it in time and space, which suggests that "Keeping it Real" is more of a negotiation tool between contradicting values and subjective opinions than bearing fixed and clear meaning.

### ***Oldschool vs. Mainstream***

The same story goes for the old school vs. the mainstream, even though the hip-hop environment in Beijing embrace 'oldschool' hip-hop, it does not undermine new styles such as 'new school' or even 'mainstream' hip-hop. The different contexts in which I have experienced "Keeping it Real" attesting the dichotomy between 'old school' and 'mainstream' in Beijing is when the 'old school' clearly represents a "true" form of hip-hop and the 'mainstream' represents the forces in which exploit hip-hop culture for monetary gains, alluding that categories such as 'mainstream' is just another bucket to throw people considered with 'lack of knowledge' of hip-hop culture into. *DJ Wordy* can produce songs that 'sounds' like mainstream hip-hop and at the same time be regarded

as “Real” because he is evaluated by other values such as skill, knowledge and merits. You might say that *DJ Wordy* has subcultural capital enough to contest and alter the conception of values and authenticity within hip-hop in China, or maybe I am just placing too much value to the notion of “Keeping it Real” all together. It might just be another ‘hip’ word adopted by privileged Chinese youth to fill their leisure time with being “cool”, an urge to take part in music trends?

Now, instead of perceiving these contradictions as questioning the validity of authentication within the Chinese hip-hop scene I want to argue that this rather shows how creating adaptive and fluid forms of ‘making sense’ of hip-hop in China contributes to maintaining the cultural production of this particular style of music. Following up with examples directed towards some of the other semantic dimensions posed by McLeod I intend to show exactly how flux “Keeping it Real” gets mediated in hip-hop China.

### ***Black vs. White and Street vs. Suburbs***

I started my theoretical journey in this chapter by referring to the debate about race and ethnicity, and even if there exist a notion in American hip-hop, and global hip-hop as such, whereas race and ethnicity is of importance, various studies of hip-hop outside the Afro-American context have shown that authentication processes are often forged by other measures than racial background. In McLeod’s article, Black vs. White is a racial dimension referring to authenticity as related to racial distinction. In Beijing, race and ethnicity were rarely addressed at all. A black person at a hip-hop event in Beijing might embody the subcultural capital of resembling the physical look of the ‘imagined’ homeland of hip-hop, but that does not by itself make him “true” hip-hop, or any more “true” than the other Chinese hip-hop enthusiasts in the same room. Ian Maxwell has written a book which explores the Australian hip-hop environment in depth, he recites one of his informants telling him that it does not matter if a Rapper is black or white, if you got the skills you will get respect (cf. Maxwell 2003:65). Posing leading figures within the hip-hop in Beijing with the same question I experienced the same reasoning, pointing to knowledge and skills as sources to respect and authenticity, rather than race and ethnicity. Since *Han*-Chinese (汉) form more than 90% of the population (Hansen and Thøgersen 2013:14), there is no reason to Rap about discrimination, ethnicity or race. Chinese artists are rather performing their *locality* by using local dialects, talking about their own trivial everyday life experiences (de Kloet 2007:139). de Kloet points out that what they are *not* rapping about also have a localizing factor, like not talking about discrimination, ghettos or violence, which is more common in the U.S (de Kloet 2007:139). The point is that *locality* an important factor in processes of authentication within Chinese hip-hop. Tom Solomon

argue, in his article about hip-hop in Turkey (2005) that people may want to ground themselves solidly in specific places even if in the process of imagining those places they are using cultural products and styles that ultimately have their origin in other places (Solomon 2005: 17).

With this argument, Solomon is addressing the processes in which hip-hop, as a cultural practice adopted from American street culture, may serve as a tool for local expression elsewhere, becoming a vehicle for locally grounded identities. Drawing on Solomon's argument, by involving with hip-hop in China, and by engaging in local debates about it, the Chinese hip-hop environment use hip-hop to tell their own stories, to produce their own identities as 'hip-hoppers' and as 'Beijingers' (Solomon 2005: 17). *Nasty Ray's* reflection about this matter is that "hip-hop everywhere resembles the sound of American hip-hop. In Taiwan, France or Japan, they all sound like hip-hop from New York, but that doesn't mean that they are imitators" (*Nasty Ray* interview). His statement shed light on the multidimensionality in processes of authentication, reminding us that authentication may be found both in the intersection of 'similarity' and 'difference' between American- and Chinese hip-hop as much as in the intersection of 'similarity' and 'difference' between the hip-hop environment and its surrounding boundaries.

Instead of focusing on ethnicity or race, Chinese Rappers are more concerned with their own locality, their own city and their own experiences in validating their hip-hop music. The same can be said about street versus suburbs, you do not have to be poor or from the streets to be a Rapper in Beijing. Even though hip-hop originally is a construct invented by lower-class youth in the Bronx, hip-hop has in large been adopted by middle-class youth in many countries, and China is no exception. Being "black" or "poor" might help your reputation of being "true" hip-hop, but as far as producing and indulging with "Real" hip-hop goes in Beijing, it merely is considered as a part of the "package". This is an interesting part of the discussion, because the Chinese youth adopts the 'tough' and 'ghetto' look of American hip-hop, but they are not aggressive, nor poor in reality. Coming from the streets and being poor might be an attribution of authenticity in America, or elsewhere, but it simply does not apply itself in the same way in China. Somewhere along the line, as American hip-hop culture becomes translated by Chinese youth, the content gets distorted.

The flux of conflicting interpretations attributed to "Keeping it Real" are deeply embedded in most of McLeod's semantic dimensions, if I am to compare them to the Chinese hip-hop environment. In de Kloet's depiction of Chinese hip-hop, he elaborates how the music got introduced to mainland China by a group called *Yin Ts'ang*, consisting of three Rappers from the North-American continent and one Rapper from Beijing, with a mission to teach the Chinese about "true" hip-hop in order to resist McDonaldization (de Kloet 2007:140). He points to the very irony

of this hip-hop mission of three Americans, rapping in Chinese to avoid McDonalidization, a contradiction which is just too obvious to ignore. de Kloet in his work points to several ways in which Chinese hip-hop are decoupled from the notion of “Keeping it Real” and understands their ambivalent relationship to hip-hop ideology as an art of “Keeping it Unreal” (de Kloet 2007:141). To understand how de Kloet explains “Keeping it Real” and “Keeping it Unreal” as two sides of the same matter we need to dive into his *pollution* theory.

## Pollution

de Kloet suggests that there is a moment and place of departure and arrival, of cultural globalization, and in this moment of translation both the assumed “original” and its alleged “copy” are being *polluted*. These moments are built on imaginary constructs, because the idea of an “origin” of hip-hop (being the streets of the Bronx) only signify one moment of a much longer and profoundly bifurcated history of hip-hop (de Kloet 2007:135). de Kloet is drawing on Ray Chow’s theory of ‘translation’ as referring to tradition and yet, betrayal, to argue that the moment in which hip-hop tradition becomes translated, its content gets obscured, hence polluted (ibid., 2007). Not only does the translation pollute the imagined construct of a tradition, but to de Kloet and Chow, the imagined “origin” is itself an infected construct, which alludes that Chinese hip-hop are polluting an “origin” which never has been pure in itself (de Kloet 2007:135). If we are to believe McLeod’s theory that “Keeping it Real” is an construct within American hip-hop to protect and prevail a notion of “origin” and authenticity during the 1990s when hip-hop became a huge part of the commercial music industry, then “Keeping it Real” are from the very beginning build on an imagined construction, based on a static ‘moment’ of a constantly evolving hip-hop history.

The idea of *pollution* posed by de Kloet opens an academic pathway to understand how globalizing cultural forms travels the world and becomes embedded into different localities. This is a tool to reveal both the dihcotomic- and interchangeable relationship between Chinese- and American hip-hop. With this suggestion, understanding “Keeping it Real” and Chinese hip-hop cannot be found in a ‘moment of clarity’, but rather in realizing a ‘moment of distortion’. Dissecting the way Chinese hip-hop artists authenticates their hip-hop does not seem to reveal an objective history of events, and it does not even seem to exist an objective series of events tracing “Keeping it Real” back to it’s perceived “origins”. On the other hand, “Keeping it Real” seems to be a tool legitimizing an adopted form of music enabling Chinese hip-hop artists to express their own perception of selves. Instead of demanding an objective relationship between American and Chinese hip-hop, it is more fruitful and interesting to look at hip-hop as an embodied value of the

self, related to subjective expressions of identity, wherever it occurs. Sarah Thornton's 'subcultural capital', Mitchell's idea of hip-hop as a tool to enable local identity, Condry's suggestion of skill and musicality performed in the present as a way to authenticate hip-hop, de Kloet's *pollution* theory and Goffman's arguments of sociality as performed by various forms of 'acting', we can start to see how "Keeping it Real" are able to change its content to fit any given situation. The way I see it, subjective performance of style, skill and musicality in the present, and the sociality at play in the given context enables "Keeping it Real" to legitimize the series of events taking place. It is a way to explain and compare what they are doing as meaningful, important and as 'the right thing' to do. The way I see it, debating hip-hop and authenticity is not about validating its translation as correct or not in relation to its American origins, but rather to explore how the content of these translations and how they come play a decisive role wherever they occur. This is not to say that African American culture has no influence on Chinese hip-hop, on the contrary, it is important to remember that American hip-hop is the very reason hip-hop exists in China. *Nasty Ray* and *D-Yosef* both got introduced to hip-hop by famous American Rap artists such as Snoop Dogg, Eminem and 50 cent. The very first mainland hip-hop album released in China, by Yin Ts`ang (2003), consists of four members where three of them are foreigners bringing hip-hop to the Chinese mainland from America. The very idea of a *polluted* translation of Afro American hip-hop only reveals the multiple layers in which globalizing cultural forms travels the world and settles down in different localities. With this said, American hip-hop and Chinese hip-hop are not a contradiction as much as it is mutually constructed. To make an example of reversed influence, from Asia to the U.S, Wu Tang Clan as one of the most famous and successful American hip-hop groups in history, have borrowed Chinese martial arts and 'Kung Fu' as their key activity in presenting their distinct musical form (Mitchell 2001:26). How can African Americans calling themselves Wu Tang Clan (drawing on the name of an ancient Chinese temple) wrap their music in cultural attributions of Chinese martial arts to present authentic hip-hop in an urban American context such as in New York and 'the Bronx'? This makes American hip-hop, by appearance, seem just as farfetched, imitating Chinese culture, as Chinese Rappers become labelled as imitators of American culture, if authentication and imitation is scrutinized by measures of mere influence.

## Summary

This chapter has been exploring the trails of "Keeping it Real" in Beijing, and I have been doing so through the lenses of 'subcultural capital' (Thornton 1996), by researching 'performances in the present' (Condry 2006), by comparing notions of "Keeping it real" in Beijing with McLeod's semantic dimensions of "Keeping it Real" in America, and by posing de Kloet's idea of translation



and *pollution* of globalizing cultural forms as a plausible explanation to understand contradictions between Chinese hip-hop and American hip-hop (and ambiguities within the Chinese hip-hop environment itself).

To echo Condry's concern from the very beginning of this chapter; how can a 'Chinese' (emphasize mine) artist "Keep it Real"? Artists within the hip-hop environment in Beijing experience that "Keeping it Real" or producing "Real hip-hop" is something that you need knowledge, commitment and skill to achieve. My discussion shows that these standards have somewhat indefinite measures, employed into actual life, measures which are most evident by what they are *not*. Simply not knowing the basic history of American hip-hop, not knowing how to dress and behave in a certain context are creating the boundaries in which authenticity gets invoked. Chinese hip-hop enthusiasts are openly addressing the American form of hip-hop music as main inspiration and influence from which their own hip-hop becomes created. By rapping in Chinese about their own experiences and daily life they manifest hip-hop as a gateway to express themselves, in a Chinese context. A few merited and respected artists and organizers within the hip-hop environment regulate the production of hip-hop by definition of interest, evaluating quality by standards of authenticity.

The importance of collecting hip-hop records, knowing the difference between Rapping and DJ'ing, creating your own 'style' as an artist, "Keeping it Real" and crafting your knowledge and performance-skills are all values translated into Chinese hip-hop culture from American hip-hop culture, and they are constantly expressing and negotiating these values among each other. These are various interpretations and *polluted* translations of globalizing cultural forms as de Kloet puts it (2007). Chinese standards of authenticity are not to be taken unserious simply because it's *polluted* and built on an imaginary construct, being slightly different from where the inspiration comes from. *Polluted* constructs are rather examples of how cultural forms travel the world, settles down in different locations and become meaningful expressions of identification. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, "Keeping it Real" works as an ideology binding producers, musicians and audiences together within a set of rules, values and notions of quality. A somewhat 'floating' and fluid ideology, constantly being under scrutiny in order to alter itself - to fit the given situation in which it appears. To echo Goffman's notions of 'reality, in this case, Chinese artists are able to authenticate their music, not just because they are good at imitating the sound and style of American hip-hop, but because they are doing it in such a convincing way that participants experience something which feels like "Real" reality to them.

As already been said by Condry, hip-hop in Japan (or China) is imitation, all of it is (2006:34). At the same time there is something profoundly local in the way hip-hop is imitated. If I interpret Mitchell (2001) correctly, Chinese hip-hop artists and fans are adopting hip-hop as cultural practice, inspired by African American culture in such a way that it looks and sounds similar, but are not simply mirroring it. I have been analyzing these dynamics by exploring how a relocation of hip-hop is intimately related to processes of identification. It is very important for Chinese hip-hop artists to be taken seriously because they are seriously into what they do and experience hip-hop as a meaningful part of their self-expression.

The way I have approached it, analytically, it is difficult to gain a clear sense of what “Keeping it Real” really means because it does not signify a singular explanation. “Keeping it Real” in Beijing seems to comprise a various set of shifting values that forge authenticity, but does not eternalize the basis on which the authenticating process takes place. On the one hand, “Keeping it real” may be part of the ‘package’ adopted from American hip-hop culture, alongside with its sounds, appearances, styles, gestures, notions of worldview, values and so on. On the other hand it seems like the very interpretations of it, the moment this practice of hip-hop becomes imitated and reproduced in Beijing the content subtly gets distorted and the emerging relocation of hip-hop becomes slightly different than the original. Now, if not anything else, this highlights the very cultural complexity in which the phenomenon of “Keeping it Real” and authenticity in hip-hop exists, and it reveals the multiple layers in which these concepts needs to be addressed. The academic debate about hip-hop and authenticity enables us to reflect and continue to pursue an understanding of the process of authenticity within hip-hop and other subcultures as such.

I believe notions of authenticity are closely related to processes of identification, and may analytically be approached as such, looking at subjectivity as gateways to gain deeper understanding of how such social constructions produce meaning. This leads me to think of music as an important element of the production and reproduction of the self. As de Kloet suggests;

“(music) (...) helps us related to other people, it serves to regulate our well-being, it makes us relate to our bodies, and it helps us to position ourselves in society and hopefully navigate the cracks of the disciplinary discourses that impose prefabricated identities upon us” (de Kloet 2010:140).

I want to bring this idea of music as something located within us, creating and re-creating notions of self and identity into experiences I had during my own fieldwork. At several occasions I spent hours together with *D-Yosef* producing music, negotiating sounds and tastes through non-verbal ways of communication. Despite our huge language barriers we came to know each other deeply and

personally without much verbal communication, but rather through music production and body languages. I want to look deeper into our bodies as constituting technologies of the self, where body becomes the primary means of communication and interpretation.

# Chapter 4

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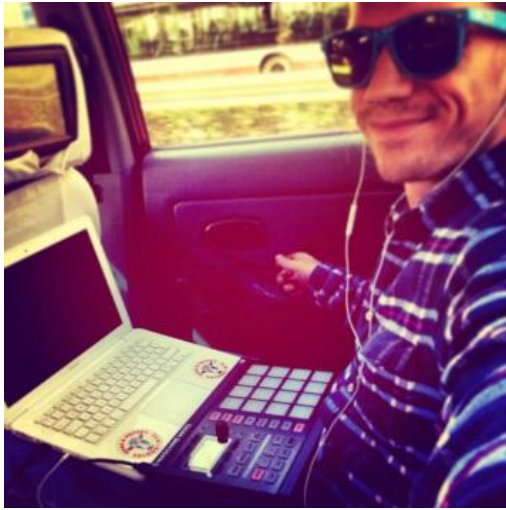
## Music, Embodiment and Communication of Self

As discussed earlier, Foucault calls for analysis of “(...) specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves,” (1988:18) and with ‘technologies of the self’ Foucault points to the ways individuals form their own identity and subjectivity (Tovar-Restrepo 2012:104). My analysis of leisure activities among urban youth in Beijing in chapter 2 inspired me to view music as a ‘technology of the self’, a term which has been elaborated by Tia DeNora (1999). According to her, music is “(...) a cultural resource that actors may mobilize for their ongoing work of self-construction and the emotional, memory and biographical work such a project entails” (DeNora 1999:32). Music constitutes subjectivity and contributes in production of self-identity over time (ibid., 1999). Music does so through the ways it is used by different people in different contexts. To DeNora’s informants, music has transformative powers, powers to (among other things) inspire, to change and to elevate your awareness. Music are used to shift and shape moods and energy levels, as means to attain, enhance and maintain desired states of feeling in relation to experiences with the outer and inner world (1999:34-38). The idea of music as something actively used to define and redefine your self- identity enables DeNora to look at music as a ‘technology of the self’, and it is music’s relationship to your subjective perception of self which makes it a ‘technology of the self’. Now, if music works as a tool for self-identification, then I find reason to believe that music may well serve as a tool to communicate and to negotiate your sense of self in relation to others. That is one of my quests with this chapter. DeNora’s extensive work on individuals subjective relationship to music as constituting self-identity enables me to discuss how *D-Yosef* and I came to know each other rather personally through music production. Producing music- and sharing time with music together constituted the very basis in which we negotiated and communicated ourselves and our experiences. That is at least what I mean to argue with this chapter.

I want to leave you with DeNora’s idea of music as a ‘technology of the self’, for now, as key to understand my empirical evidence below, highlighting music as means of communication between two actors with limited capabilities of verbal communication. I will return to theory, to the discussion of music as a ‘technology of the self’, as a way for subjectivity to become mediated in social interaction and through music production later, after I have presented my empirical material.

### **5050 Studio and Technologies of Music Production**

At four or more occasions I visited *D-Yosef* in his apartment where he and his Rap-companion *Odd Pluton* had their home-recording studio (5050 studio) to produce music. As mentioned briefly in the former chapter they had rebuilt their living-room into a fully functional home-recording studio; a microphone set up inside a closet stuffed with fabric to minimize acoustics for vocal recording (vocal booth), connected to a soundcard enabling them to record vocals into a sequencer on a computer (using a music-program; Logic 9), having a headset to play the backtrack through the ears while only recording the sound of the vocals on to the music-project on the computer, in order to adjust the vocals and the instruments separately. They had two turntables and a mixer also connected to the soundcard enabling them to cut musical pieces from vinyl (sampling) or to create rhythmical cuts and scratches onto the beat (scratching), in addition to a synthesizer providing sounds from the synth itself or enabling them to trigger sounds from the computer (via the music-program) through a midi-cable providing midi-signals, all to enhance creativity in music production. Everything is wired through a soundcard to bring out the sounds from the microphone, the turntables, the synth and the computer at the same time via two Phillips stereo speakers and a sub speaker connected to the soundcards output, filling in a room plastered with soundproofing fabric with homemade hip-hop music. As a music producer myself I love to spend hours in a studio or wherever there is equipment to do so creating drums and melodies. With technology, today, you do not need to be an instrumentalist owning a bass-guitar, knowing how to play a bass-instrument, in order to produce a bass-track. You are fully capable of producing drum-patterns, melodies with sounds simulating various instruments and form arrangements layering several tracks (drums, bass, leads, vocal, etc.) on-the-go, alone in a headset whenever, wherever you are. This is not to say that you do not need to be an instrumentalist playing bass to create a `great` bass-track, I am simply stating that through my plastic console (*Maschine Mikro* by *Native Instruments*) consisting of 16 pads and buttons connected to a certain program on my computer I can create music arrangements anywhere (in taxi, at airports, at home, in a studio) and anytime, in my headset, as long as there is battery power on my computer to do so (figure 6 and 7.)



(6) Producing music in a taxi.



(7) D-Yosef playing the drum-pad in his home-studio.

I experience the creative process of making music very differently being alone or creating it together with someone else. There is a social and communicative element in a one-to-one context which encapsulates two minds to negotiate the sound and ideas of taste, trends, preferences and quality which is not present in the same way when creating music by yourself. A one-to-one process is more socially and communicatively situated than being alone. I personally experience this process as social “mirroring”, whereas the ideas you `throw` out are consequently received and “mirrored” by the other participant and `thrown` back, either the idea is perceived as great by the other, as “neutral” (being a `not too good` idea since we both are looking for something to be excited about), or the idea might be dismissed as bad and thus subdued. The “successfulness” of our music endeavor together, might, in some ways be measured by our ability to cooperate (be creative together) and to create something that we both find exiting, new and moving. There are obviously several layers present in the social construction of two people creating music together, my personal experience of `exiting, new and moving` are only humble fragments of social elements present in the bigger picture, so please bear with me. To follow DeNora`s suggestion of music as an extension of the self, *D-Yosef* and I might be able to “mirror” each other`s notions of self, to “meet” in music, metaphorically, and learn something about each other, personally, through the communication related to the music we are making. This is exactly what I experienced in my fieldwork and it represents the grounds in which I want to discuss the relationship between music production, representation of self and music as communicative tool, anthropologically.

### ***Anticipation and Motivation***

I arrive *D-Yosef*’s compartment building in the afternoon, it takes about one hour with taxi from the side of Beijing where I live to where he lives and I have been preparing for our music session in the

taxi (arranging some simple drum-loops, preparing some samples from an African disco LP I had previously recorded) which I think we might be able to play with. I buy potato chips, coffee, cigarettes and beers. I know it seems to be early for drinking (it is), but we are going to hang-out all day and alcohol might work as a tool for `loosening up` socially to create music together, at least that is my reasoning for buying it. I leave the grocery shop downstairs and head up to 26<sup>th</sup> floor where *D-Yosef* resides. Its two o'clock in the afternoon and *D-Yosef* are just waking up from a late night playing X-box with his friends. He happily invites me in as he tries to dodge the sharp white hallway lights penetrating his eyes. I give him a coffee to wake up, he politely nods upon my gesture and lights a cigarette before we sit down on the couch. This is a moment where we talk, verbally, about anything, right? It feels natural to chat before we get to the music production in order to make a friendly and informal atmosphere. I am using my limited ability to speak mandarin (basically every Chinese word I know which is about 100 basic words), mixed with simple common English phrases for which I hope he understands, complemented with a dozen common hip-hop slang words such as “yeah man”, “yo man”, “fo` sho`” (slang derived from “for sure”) and “dope man” (a slang for “cool, great, nice etc.). He responds politely as if he understands what I am trying to say, and he talks back with a limited vocabulary of English, with simple Chinese words for which he hope I understand (90% I do not, I have to guess what it might mean contextually) and by using the same type of hip-hop slang described above to highlight certain points. I am trying to understand, or at least to pretend that I understand simply because I *want* to get along with him, there are already certain elements about *D-Yosef* that I like from `hanging out` before which has already have shaped my impression of his personality.

About three weeks before this music-production session a Norwegian friend of mine (*Xiao Ou*) which rap in Chinese and I met with *D-Yosef* and *Odd Pluton* in this very apartment to discuss music and `hang out`, and we did so all afternoon and all night sharing each our recorded songs and productions while *freestyling*, chatting and having beers, cigarettes and sharing food together. From that day I got a feeling, or a sense that *D-Yosef* and I would get along and that very day he invited me to visit him anytime to create music together with him. That is why I am here now, and that is also why I am making an effort to understand what he is saying, at least pretending that I do, simply so we can hang out together and get to know each other without awkward moments and potential emotions of helplessness being `lost` in translation. Personally, I want us to make *good* music together, I want him to like me and I cannot do anything but guess that the same is on his mind. After chatting a bit about last night and sharing a coffee our conversation shifts quickly into talking about music, and implicitly about our own music productions. As we turn towards his music gear he

swiftly turns on his equipment; all these little knobs around the studio starts to light as he powers on his computer, turntables, soundcard and speakers. It feels like something great is going to happen as he powers on one instrument after the other effortlessly in a certain order, setting off what is going to become thick sound filling the room very soon. I feel anticipation and excitement as he is going to play one of his recent tracks. He humbly utters to me that his song is not finished yet, that it is `just a sketch so don't expect too much`. From one music producer to the other I can relate to what he is saying, as a way to lower the expectation and to place humbleness upon the process of producing your own hip-hop compositions. I am simply looking forward to hear something that he himself has made, with an open mind as to `realize` the potential of his song and to understand the style and means of this particular production.

### *The (heart) Beat*

What comes out of the speakers are a thick thumping bass on top of a deep kick-drum in the bottom frequencies literally shaking in the floor below my feet, accompanied with a `crisp` and splashing snare-drum and a single repetitive chord filling the higher frequencies of the sound-picture. His beat is simple and minimal, consisting of five layers or less in a repetitive loop, yet the sound is fat and full enough as for me to perceive it as complete, nothing crucial is missing, if anything, all it needs now is for him to rap over it. I remember thinking to myself that I like *D-Yosef's` style`*, as to reaffirm something that I have already thought from before. The repetition in *D-Yosef's* loop feels hypnotizing as it captivates us both in rhythm. Our heads are reassuringly nodding to the beat, and our body movements are growing as the beat goes on, now having our backs waving into the rhythm as well. *D-Yosef* facing down, moving, listening, and I have my eyes fixed on a dot on the wall, not really looking, but rather listening and concentrating. I am entering *D-Yosef's* world by `letting myself go` into his music, and I really like what I am listening too as it appeals to my apparatus. With a simple blink and smile I communicate to *D-Yosef* that I like this beat, and I am doing so without planning consciously how to communicate it. I am naturally engaging with his music because I feel a pleasure of bodily sensations, and before I know it we are both smiling to each other, moving simultaneously, communicating through moving and listening. *D-Yosef* starts to rap loudly and I can hear that he is *freestyling* and improvising by the way he is constantly changing his flow and stumbling on his rhymes. I can tell that this is not a prewritten lyric in the way he concentrates and flows on the beat and by the way his hands are visually `picking words from the air` as he goes on. I also hear that my name is in there somewhere and he would most likely not put my name in a prewritten lyric, I perceive it as a sign of respect and a friendly gesture to involve me into his improvisation. Besides hearing my name in there I do not understand much of what he is



saying, he is rapping in Chinese and I am rather listening to the way he flows rhythmically, how he is adjusting the pitch of his voice to fit with the beat, configuring the paste of his words to fit with the tempo and how his whole body are moving simultaneous with the rhythm of his words as they come out. His rap moves me; the excitement of improvisation in the moment, the intriguing fact that he is skillfully *freestyling* in Chinese which to me is a profound experience since I am used to Norwegian and American Rap music, and better yet, the wonderful feeling of relating to each other through what we are *doing*, sharing experience through hip-hop and creativity.

### **Appeal and Mutual Intelligibility**

My experience and preferences with hip-hop music portrays *D-Yosef* as an experienced and talented Rapper. That is my personal opinion and no matter how subjective that statement is, it is undeniably subjected onto the very basis of our becoming relationship as friends and cooperating producers. The perception of *D-Yosef*'s skills brings me *faith* and inspiration that we might create something `great` together. His recent production reaffirms my precondition that we are going to `get along` and his music resonates with my feeling of self, like DeNora explained in the beginning of this chapter; the song are defining and redefining my feeling of self as a hip-hop fan and producer, it appeals to- and reaffirms my subjective notion of self-identity. Consequently, I feel that I understand something located inside *D-Yosef*, as notions of his self-identity are projected through the music that he produces. I applaud his *freestyling* when he is done and offer him a `typical` handshake gesture (one slap with the palm of our hands like a `high five`, just sideways, followed by one light punch with our knuckles/fists against each other). I did not Rap or *freestyle* myself, however it seems like what just happened was a two-ways communication; we were both indulging with his hip-hop music, moving and `feeling it` together. In fact, he said to me “you`re cool man” after he finished rapping implying that my presence and body language were in part contributing to his performance, that his rapping were something that we did together.

### **Music Production; a Series of Communicative Events**

The song finishes, and I, automatically without saying a word, open my backpack to connect my computer and music-gear to his sound system. We are now moving into the actual production of music which my visit both explicitly and implicitly is all about. I can see that *D-Yosef* is excited about my music equipment as he instantly starts to press the pads on my `Maschine-Mikro` uttering “niubi” (牛屄;litterally meaning *a cows pussy* which is a common slang for “great” or “cool”) as I connect it to my Mac on the table in front of him (figure 6 and 7, Page:90). I show him, mechanically, adding descriptive language “like this...” and “like that...” how to open sounds and assign them exclusively to the different pads. I do not need to tell him *what* I am doing because he

already knows that, I am simply showing him *how* to do it on this particular device, adding certain English words simply to fill the silence in a merely mechanical explanation. I have opened up the song-project which I already have prepared in the taxi before I came here, and *D-Yosef* immediately approves of the drum-sounds and the samples at play as he hits the pads on my device sending fragments of a potential song through the speakers. He hits the pads and quickly gets into a groove, hitting the kick-drum, the hi-hat and the snare-drum forming a drum-pattern in a certain tempo. I communicate that I like what he is playing by saying “yeah man” and by nodding my head to his drumming. “Let’s record this” I tell him, he nods and moves away from the pad as if he invites me to record the drum-pattern he just played on my device for him. While I press record and plot in the different drum-hits in a pattern similar to what he played, yet slightly different because I cannot recollect and reproduce exactly what he just played, he responds with excitement that this is `really cool` as if it’s even a better version of his idea.

We have now both made a simple drum-loop together fixed in a certain tempo drawn on both of us` aspirations. We take a moment to enjoy and reflect on the style of our drum as I turn to some prepared rhythmical guitar samples derived from an African disco record from the 70s, as mentioned earlier, which I recorded from my own record collection some time ago. Luckily the tempo and sound of the sample fits `perfect` to the drums we just made raising a slight feeling of euphoria between us as if this is just `too good to be true`. We laugh and both of us know simultaneously that `this is it`, and so I record the rhythmical guitar as well. Now we have two layers created onto our project and *D-Yosef* starts to walk around in the room gesticulating to the music almost hypnotically rapping to himself with a lower voice. We are both taking a moment to reflect on the song while we contemplate on `what’s next`, leaving the music loop out in the open for new ideas to rise to the surface. With me I also brought an I-pad, with some downloaded synth-applications which might contribute with some melodic patterns. As I am connecting this device to the soundcard *D-Yosef* is still moving around in the room smoking a cigarette enjoying the beat patiently as we both seem to be comfortable with the process we have started. I begin pressing my I-Pad screen creating sounds on top of the beat coming out of the speaker, changing sounds rapidly looking for something that could fit. To me, this is a process of patiently trying and failing looking for the `right` sound to appear. I stop for a bit pressing one sound in different patterns as I turn to *D-Yosef* asking him implicitly with a certain facial expression what he thinks, he is gesticulating that this is not `it` by moving his head in a certain way. I agree with him and move on to next sound hopefully to find the `right one`. As I switch from one sound to the other suddenly a light bell sound appears through the speakers leaving us both baffled with excitement, `this sounds good`, we both

know that and I instantly start playing around with it trying to form a suitable pattern for us to record.

Forming a pattern to me is a process of not adding too much and not adding too little, finding the `perfect` amount of sound in a suitable tonal composition to add to the beat. *D-Yosef* are now positioned right beside me looking at my finger pressing the pad taking part in the process of creating a distinct pattern for us to record. I feel like there are so many suitable patterns to choose from with this sound that I have problems deciding what to record. Trusting *D-Yosef*'s taste in music I am waiting for him to feedback on something that I am playing in order to us `land` this sound together. With emotionally loaded verbal utterings of *yeah, no* or *mmmh* (there are good “mmmh`s” and bad “mmmh`s”) from *D-Yosef* beside me he is able to form the way I am playing until it sounds satisfying. We finally record the light bell sound and take another step back to contemplate the new layer of sound. I am satisfied with the new layer and *D-Yosef* seems to be excited too. This process goes on and on with layers of bass, percussion, piano chords and so on, we are patiently communicating with each other through negotiating choices of sounds, moving around the room, looking at each other, sharing beers and cigarettes, laughing, frowning, communicating through music, drawing on each other's involvement and aspirations. The process is time-consuming and time metaphorically “flies” by as we both are switching positions pressing the pads at each turn shifting from `listening` position and physically pressing the instruments in our creative process. However, I am for the most part the one who records the patterns and arranges the structure of the song since I am more experienced with the workflow of the particular music program we are creating our song in. It seems like elements of efficiency and productivity are present and are naturally forming role-patterns between us. The most important thing is the development of sound coming out the speakers, which is a product deriving from us both, and not from *who* is pressing the actual sound to be recorded. Non-verbally, we are carefully constructing the process in which we are in.

### ***Performance and Memory***

“(...) (home-recorder`s) are, at the level of everyday life, forming themselves and their social worlds” (Merrill 2010:457-458). Bryce Merrill's article about *memory work in home-recording`* draws on DeNora's concept of `technology of the self` and argues that there are technologies of memory which sensitizes interactional and intrapersonal dimensions between `interactionists`. In short; “memory practices are aided by technical equipment that contribute to the mnemonic construction of self” (Merrill 2010:458). The way I understand Merrill is that in addition to creating

music together, *D-Yosef* and I are also creating memory together and this became clear to me as *Odd Pluton* opened the door and entered the room.

*D-Yosef*'s roommate, *Odd Pluton*, comes home around 19.00 at night, and by that time we have been so far into the world of production that the sound of the door opening and closing almost violently pulls me out of hypnosis, metaphorically speaking. It takes a second to adjust to reality as I lift my head from the computer-screen to greet *Odd Pluton* as he enters the room. We are all smiling and handshaking, inviting *Odd Pluton* into the atmosphere of music production. He is a Rapper himself and understands immediately what we are doing, or what we just have been doing. With a small nod with my head and a gentle smirk on my face I communicate that something productive and potentially `great` have just been made. I have to say it is quite a thrilling feeling to take part in this moment, showing a potentially great hip-hop instrumental to someone who can relate to the sound and process of making it, a song which now only three people in the whole world knows about. The sound-picture is fat and full, it has enough layers and depth to be rendered as complete, and we have even managed to arrange an intro, a main body for rapping and a possible refrain. I can tell by the way *D-Yosef* moves and talks that he is expressing his excitement about the song to *Odd Pluton*. He looks at me while explaining and I can sense that what *D-Yosef* are explaining to *Odd Pluton* is a profound shared experience we have just had together. The production of this particular song has already manifested itself in my memory with positive sensations and certain emotional content attached to it, connecting *D-Yosef* and me together in this particular context. *Odd Pluton* is now standing between us with his eyes fixed on the computer screen wanting to hear the beat from the very beginning. The silence from stopping the beat fills the room with anticipation as we are about to show the song from the start, to `fill` *Odd Pluton* `in` and hopefully having him as excited about the new song as we are. The intro starts and as soon as *Odd Pluton* recognizes the groove and the tempo of the song he starts to move his head approvingly, with a concentrated frown on his face, carefully and `seriously` listening. The song builds up as the deep bass and `juicy` drums kicks in. *Odd Pluton*'s face develops from a serious and critical expression and into a bright and smiling face as if the sun just woke up in him. First he looks at *D-Yosef* approvingly that he likes the beat, reaffirming *D-Yosef*'s explanation and expressions of excitement when *Odd Pluton* first entered the room. *Odd Pluton* looks at me with a respectful smirk on his face followed with an approving nod a handshake (the same type of handshake explained earlier). We do not exchange many words, a simple "cool man" is enough, we already know what this *is* and what this *means*, and consequently we are rather continuing listening and moving

together instead of talking. *Odd Pluton* opens a can of beer and we make a toast to the music session, to hip-hop, to the creative production of “cool” music.

Drawing on DeNora and Merrill the beat might be understood as symbolizing our self-identities, in musical form so to speak, and as we are sharing this experience together the beat are representing a sense of “togetherness” or affiliation between us. *Odd Pluton* starts to rap and plays around with different ways to `flow` on the beat, and then *D-Yosef* shows to *Odd Pluton* a plausible Rap idea he`s been thinking of while producing this beat, a theme if you will, and this idea actually turned out to be the `hook` (the song-refrain). He was rapping repetitively “women de shijie, women de shijie” (“this is our world, this is our world”; 我们的世界, 我们的世界). I recognized that this became the `hook` because the very next day I received an excited message on my phone from *D-Yosef* that I had to visit them and listen to the finished track. I was not sure what he meant because I did not think they would be able to make a Rap to that song- and much less record it so quickly. However, that was exactly what happened; they had been rapping over the song during the following night, each one with a verse followed by a `hook` in the middle and in the end of the song chanting “women de shijie, women de shijie”.

### **Creating Music, Creating Relationship**

During my fieldwork, *D-Yosef* and I produced four songs together, with only one of them actually being recorded Rap on to. Our friendship and experience of each other grew from each time we met and made music together, and the music production lead to social interaction outside the production context as well. Now and then if there was a hip-hop event or anything `fun` happening in Beijing we would message each other, meet and go there together. It also became easier for us to communicate verbally since our language proficiency improved as we spent time together, and I was no longer afraid of not understanding his English or Chinese as I came to feel more and more comfortable around him. At times we were able to communicate deeper political and emotional content with limited vocabulary using body language and mere *will* as supplements to communicate content. Using my own terms, we were “mirroring” each other, communicating senses of self-identity through music, drawing on each other`s former experiences, building memory together at these creative events, with layers of social interaction, forming the very basis of trust and knowledge which our friendship build upon. This is the way I came to know *D-Yosef* rather personally and deeply during my fieldwork. I have been baffled and puzzled by the depth of our communication ever since, and I am privileged to be able to pursue an understanding of this experience, anthropologically.

## Tuning-In-Relationship

The way I see it, getting to know each other personally during music production would simply not be possible if music didn't inhibit personal content, and if personal content were unable to be communicated through music. My empirical material described above are reflecting DeNora's idea of music as a 'technology of the self', however, it does not depict in which ways our senses of selves are able to become communicated. I want to turn to one of the pioneers within the study of music and sociality, Alfred Schutz (1951), to explain the social process of making music together.

"It appears that all possible communication presupposes a mutual tuning-in relationship between the communicator and the addressee of the communication. This relationship is established by the reciprocal sharing of the other's flux of experiences in inner time, by living through a vivid present together, by experiencing this togetherness as a "We." Only within this experience does the other's conduct become meaningful to the partner tuned in on him - that is, the other's body and its movements can be and are interpreted as a field of expression of events within his inner life" (Schutz 1951:96-97).

With this argument, Schutz in his article about "*making music together*" (1951) highlights the communicative aspect of music production as something enabled through shared experience in inner time. By "living through a vivid present together" Schutz is referring to the actual time and context enabling the shared experience and the communication between two people to take place. This generates the grounds in which people are "tuning-in" to each other through social processes of, say, making music together, which in turn creates a sense of relationship, a subjective experience of togetherness. By emphasizing "tuning-in" as experiencing inner time together Schutz allow one to consider the flux of communication in all its plausible forms within the particular context; sharing experience, body language, knowledge, reciprocity, listening, moving, verbal communication and so on. The idea of communication in music as something expressing the communicator and the addressee's inner life resonates with Tia DeNora's notion of music as a 'technology of the self' described in the beginning of this chapter. In this way, Schutz enables music production between two people to be understood as both an experience of self and a communication of self, happening at the very same time. Thus, the communication and experience of self can be understood as the very basis in which music production takes place. Music Therapist Even Ruud explains vividly how this "tuning-in-relationship" manifests itself bodily. You fall into a generic musical pulse, answering each other's initiatives, you create and play with expectations as the musical excitement builds up. Through the feeling of living together in music, while expectations become answered and fulfilled, powerful senses of belonging arise; "It is like breathing together" (Ruud 1997:37). "Tuning-in" or "breathing" together points to a social

construction of “we” in music production, a sort of connection where expressions of inner life takes bodily and audible form. It seems to me that the presupposition of music as an extension of self-identity and the idea that this enables participants to communicate the `self`, using it as a tool to `tune-in` with another person reveals the layers in which communication between to people take place. Schutz are referring to communication as expressions of *inner life*, suggesting that there are already something located within you from the past becoming relevant in the present moment. As he brilliantly exemplifies;

“We may also say that two chess players who both know the functional significance of each chessman in general, as well as within the unique concrete constellation at any given moment of a particular game, communicate their thoughts to each other in terms of the “vocabulary” and “syntax” of the scheme of expressions and interpretation common to both of them, which is determined by the body of the “rules of the game” (Schutz 1951:77).

## Preknowledge

“The rules of the game” posed by Schultz indicates knowledge and experiences already present upon social interaction between two chess players. Similarly, as musician, or between musicians there exist knowledge`s and experiences becoming evoked in the process of music production.

“Even before starting to play or to read the first chord our musician is referred to a more or less clearly organized, more or less coherent, more or less distinct set of his previous experiences, which constitute in their totality a kind of preknowledge of the piece of music at hand” (Shutz 1951:85).

It is quite clear that both *D-Yosef* and I have former experience with music production, with hip-hop as musical and cultural form. We have different, yet related mechanical experiences of production, practically, and as already mentioned, we have experiences of personal affiliation and identification with the particular form of music. As Schutz forcefully argues, *D-Yosef* and I already carry a whole range of preknowledge about music and hip-hop which will be subjected to our social process of producing music. According to Schutz, preknowledge implies;

“(…) (the) stock of experiences (which) refers indirectly to all his past and present fellow men whose acts or thoughts have contributed to the building up of his knowledge. This includes what he has learned from his teachers, and his teachers from their teachers; what he has taken in from other players' execution; and what he has appropriated from the manifestations of the musical thought of the composer. Thus, the bulk of musical knowledge - as of knowledge in general - is socially derived” (Shutz 1951:86-87).

Schutz example builds on an idea that a “pianist” set to create a piece of music is not isolated from the historical time and place in which the particular form of music at hand exists. His or hers becoming composition is built on a series of socially derived experiences which in turn has

manifested itself as knowledge about music. This means in the simplest form that the process of creating a piece of music draws on personal and social experiences. His example from 1951 is very much applicable to my experience in Beijing. The very basis of hip-hop knowledge forcefully creates the boundaries in which *D-Yosef* and I are about to “meet” in music, so to speak. We both have references and preferences about how hip-hop music is mechanically build up and how it “sounds” already before we meet. As my empirical material above exemplifies, *D-Yosef*’s preferences and taste in `hip-hop drums` resonated with my own. Thus, how we created a drum-loop together may in variable ways explain how preknowledge, or preconditions if you will, came to be communicated and negotiated upon production. *D-Yosef* did not have to explain to me with words *what* he was doing while improvising a specific drum pattern fixed in a certain tempo, and I did not have to explain with words *how* it resonated with my ideas of a “cool sound” or “great style”, it just simply did, and we both knew that.

Our shared experience involved actively improvising with technological equipment providing the means to utter ideas of certain musical expression, which in turn became negotiated, in part, by levels of preknowledge and former experiences. This happened through mechanical communication via music equipment, and in large by bodily communication through perception and “mirroring” or reciprocal bodily gestures, by approving nods and facial expressions of excitement. Now, this does not explain what exactly a “hip-hop drum” refers to, it only exemplifies how preknowledge came to be communicated in a certain context. Which preconditions does *D-Yosef* and I share in order for us to negotiate a recognizable `sound`, `style` and pattern of a “hip-hop drum”?

### **Familiar Structures of Hip-Hop**

In my former chapter about hip-hop and authenticity I elaborate how leading figures within the Chinese hip-hop community values knowledge, skills and originality as key to create or generate `authentic` hip-hop music. *D-Yosef* in his time learned what this means and how to achieve these standards through careful consumption of hip-hop music and by constantly “mirroring” himself in a social landscape of other hip-hop enthusiasts. By trying and failing, *D-Yosef* learned how to create hip-hop music technically and culturally, and learned how to build his craft from knowledge deriving from his teachers. In a similar way, yet in a completely different time and place, I carry a similar story, having learned about sounds and styles of hip-hop through careful consumption and by trying and failing, “mirroring” my ideas in a social context in Norway, building experience upon what I learned from my teachers. It is important to note that I am together with *D-Yosef* not only as



an anthropologist, I am foremost there as a hip-hop producer with explicit knowledge and experience about cultural production.

My experiences of hip-hop are built on a different series of events compared to *D-Yosef's*, yet somehow we share something profound that enables us to negotiate a particular `sound` and `style` in music. How is that possible? Drawing on the former chapter about authenticity we might say that *D-Yosef* and I share subcultural capital, knowledge and ideas of what's `correct` and `right` hip-hop music, as we build upon this common ground to express and negotiate our `selves`. In discussing music as social constructs Steven Feld argues that “we always attend to form in terms of familiarity or strangeness, features which are socially constructed through experiences of sounds as structures rooted in our listening histories” (Feld 2005:85).

*Histories* here are referring to past experiences, which resonates with Schutz idea of preknowledge, implying structures of familiar sound (former experience) forming social processes. This familiar sound shaped as a distinct hip-hop *groove* represents a uniquely and recognizable musical form (Feld 2005:109). I am able to `let myself go` into *D-Yosef's* music and resonate with it by involving my own former experiences with the sound in the present moment. I am recognizing a familiar sound and consequently I am engaging with the music as the sound pattern appeals to me, or as Steven Feld puts it, I am “getting into the groove” (Feld 2005:111). Feld is theorizing how socialized listeners anticipates patterns in a certain style and how feelingful participation creates a positive physical and emotional attachment, a move from being “hip to it” to “getting down” and being “into it” (ibid., 2005). What is a *groove*?

“(…) a *groove* refers to an intuitive sense of style in process, a perception of a cycle in motion, a form or organizing pattern being revealed, a recurrent clustering of elements through time. (.) Groove and style are distilled essences, crystallizations of collaborative expectancies in time” (Feld 2005:109).

The way Feld are highlighting *time* seems to be very similar to Schultz idea in “making music together”, shared experience in *inner time*. The way I see it, sharing music in *time* enables two people to form a `tuning-in-relationship`, and the preknowledge, subcultural capital and former experiences being present enables people to do exactly so, to “tune-in” or to “get into the groove”. To Feld, *groove* and *style* are “crystallizations of collaborative expectancies in time”; melting together recognizable musical patterns, on the one hand, with subjective and bodily emotions on the other. Together, *groove* and *style* creates “collaborative expectancies in time”; anticipations and emotions in a present context ignited by familiar sound. In hip-hop, Feld's structures of familiar sound (*groove* and *style*), might be understood as part of our subcultural capital as “hip-hoppers”, to

know and to be able to perform valuable knowledge and experience. To understand how our *history* of experiences with a particular form of music is socially constructed, Feld suggests that “(...) (music) acquire meaning through social interpretation” (Feld 2005:85). This reveals a rather interesting concept understanding the social process of music production.

“Both kinds of engagement (music as social construction and as form acquiring meaning through social interaction) are socially real regardless of the ultimate importance or value of the musical sound and regardless of how consciously it is formed, attended to, and understood. Interpretation of a sound object or event (that is, of a construction) is the process of intuiting a relationship between structures, settings, and kinds of potentially relevant or interpretable messages. When we first listen we begin to “lock in” and “shift” our attention, so that the sounds momentarily yet fluidly polarize toward structural or historical associations in our minds. The immediate recognition is that sounds are contextual and contextualizing, and continually so” (Feld 2005:85).

The way I understand Steven Feld is that interaction with sound structures are highly related to social contexts in a way that it bridges the gap between subjectivity and familiar constructions of sound, in social interaction. Musical form becomes social interaction by the very way former experiences of musical form acquires social interpretation, contextually, as if there are *potentially relevant or interpretable messages* resided within the music. When I listen to *D-Yosef*'s music I begin to “lock in” and “shift” my attention, so that the sounds *momentarily yet fluidly polarize toward structural or historical associations* in my mind, and so I begin to interpret *D-Yosef*'s *messages* in the music.

Subcultural capital in relation to familiarity of distinct sound structures are important elements present in our musical communication, but are by far the only social and cultural element present in our relational processes, as we will see, our common grounds in hip-hop serves merely as a platform for us to communicate identity and to build memory together. If we are not explicitly telling each other how our shared experiences at any given time are affecting our feelings, projected by preknowledge and associations in our minds, then how does it become communicated, translated and manifested onto our becoming relationship?

### **Body Language and ‘Tacit Knowledge’**

There are several examples in my empirical material described above where *D-Yosef* and I are not talking, where we are simply moving, listening and pressing the pads on a music controller. When we listen to the music together we both move in a similar way, similar to the way hip-hop fans move their bodies at hip-hop events, similar to how Rappers move their bodies performing on stage and so on. The body becomes a vehicle in communicating preknowledge and our subcultural

capital. This preknowledge, or former experiences, is often communicated unconsciously without words and without conscious thinking. Specific knowledge about hip-hop, once learned, becomes embedded into the body over time, as Hanne Müller exemplifies in her article about embedded knowledge (1996).

She defines the processes of `learning` - and `performing` body languages as becoming “*taus kunnskap*” (*Norwegian language*; direct translation of *taus* is `silent` and *kunnskap* is `knowledge` - `silent knowledge`) over time. She argues that knowledge and culture are shaped and formed both by silence (embedded knowledge) and verbal communication, through the intersection of individual experience and public performance (Müller 1996:232). Instead of using `silent knowledge` as a translation of “*taus kunnskap*” I choose to understand this concept with Michael Polanyi’s theory of “tacit knowledge”, as a more widely used concept, describing in the most simple form; “we know more than we can say (with words)” (Polanyi 1967:16). Parallel with Hanne Müller’s idea of `silent knowledge` as I have described it above, Polanyi looks at our body as the fundamental tool for all our knowledge about external things, both intellectually and practically (1967:25), as such, ‘tacit knowledge’ resonates with Müller’s idea, the way I see it.

If I were to translate Müller’s understanding and empirical work of learning-processes becoming `tacit knowledge`, learning how to weld in a mechanical garage in Bergen, Norway, and compare it to my empirical material of creating hip-hop music in China, her theory are strikingly applicable to my experience. She points out that to weld (or produce a hip-hop beat in my case) are contextually dependent and can only be learned through being present at a particular place with particular tools at hand. Knowledge about welding (producing hip-hop) are bound to professional criteria’s (hip-hop is not bound by specific scholarly criteria’s as a profession, but hip-hop production similarly require certain instrumental and technological expertise, and are regulated by hip-hop ideology constituting ambiguous standards of authenticity, as explained in the former chapter), and these criteria’s are transmittable to all garages where welding takes place (studio’s or any other location where hip-hop production takes place) (Müller 1996:226).

Müller argues that individual and subjective experiences are necessary conditions to understand the exact practice of knowledge, as knowledge becomes more and more `tacit` (embedded) over time. Knowledge becomes habit, and thus performed mechanically without thinking. Once knowledge becomes embedded and `tacit`, Müller believes that it precedes the text as such knowledge often becomes difficult to explain verbally, but easier to show mechanically (cf. Müller 1996). In this sense one might say that `tacit knowledge` works as an extension of the self,

just like Merrill's "technology of memory" or DeNora's "technology of music". Hanne Müller's idea of "tacit knowledge" highlights the ways in which large parts of the music production conducted by *D-Yosef* and I came to be created through mechanical (embedded) knowledge, and how this knowledge became mediated through bodily movements, communicated intuitively and "tacit". To raise our awareness about body language, and to show exactly how important and subtle body comes to play in social interaction I want to translate and recite Even Ruud's words about eye-contact. I am trying to translate as accurately as I can to justify his wise words. He argues that it is through eye-contact that we realize ourselves and what we think about ourselves in relation to others. By becoming *real* in relation to others we become *real* to ourselves. Eye-contact reflects trust related to our own experiences, it activates empathy and creates awareness and attentiveness towards our own qualities. To Ruud, identity needs to be confirmed. Communication is important because it represents the foundation of interpersonal understanding. This foundation is based on a mutual exchange of affective qualities shared between people as responses to each other's presence in social interaction, and may, by terms be understood as "intersubjectivity" (Ruud 1997:77-79). I will elaborate and discuss the term "intersubjectivity" later in this chapter, as it will be a key-concept in understanding the social process between *D-Yosef* and I. However, Ruud's powerful words about eye-contact reveals the complex reality in which communication between people takes place.

Now that we are gaining a deeper understanding of the complexity in interpersonal communication, I want to discuss another element which might elaborate just how preknowledge and body language came to connect *D-Yosef* and I in a way that even seems to transcend our mutual understanding of music. To understand the next paragraph we need to keep in mind DeNora's theory of music as an extension of self-identity, Schutz's theory of sharing experience in "inner time", Feld's description of "getting into the groove" and *style* revealing the expectancies of familiar structures of hip-hop music and Müller's experience with knowledge becoming mechanically embedded and "tacit" over time. There is a process in social interaction which might explain, in part, how continuous interaction creates "collective memory", over time.

## Creating Memory

Bryce Merrill has focused on the production of memory in his article "Music to Remember Me By" (2010). As mentioned earlier he is inspired by DeNora when he is discussing memory as a practice of the self. While DeNora are more concerned with her respondent's *listening* experience of music, Merrill are more concerned with *creative* experiences, about recording music and how technology and social processes is related to memory work and construction of self (Merrill 2010:460). He is

referring to John Dewey's definition on *memory* as "knowledge of particular things or event once present, but no longer so" (Dewey 1967:154 in Merrill 2010: 459). At first glance, seemingly objective, Dewey goes on to explain memory as a rather subjective process, enabling one to use memory, or *remembering* (as a verb), to view the past through the lens of the present, idealistically (Dewey 1967:155 in Merrill 2010: 459). Merrill argues that "memories are not artifacts of the past; they are the idealized products of remembering selves" (Merrill 2010:459). In this sense one might consider memory as something actively used, subjectively, to fit with the experience of 'self' in the present context. In my case, former experiences with music might be understood as memories about music actively used to fit with the present moment of its production. Contextually I might choose to remember all the "good times" I have had creating music, boosting my own confidence, despite having experienced hours and hours of struggles, immense frustration and emotions of "failing" in music as well. I might use memory as an idealized product of remembering my 'self', purposely to enhance productivity, and in the same way I might use memory as an idealized product of remembering *D-Yosef*, in order to elevate our creative process. To the extent that a "technology of memory" is present in social interaction, as idealized products or not, memories are still undoubtedly created and stored in our bodies. This "technology" leaves *D-Yosef* and I, over time, with a significant amount of memories about each other, information telling us about shared experiences and shared understanding. As familiar sound and feelingful participation might create positive physical and emotional attachment, as posed earlier by Feld (2005), Merrill's suggestion of memories as idealized products of mnemonic work may have the same implications.

As described in my empirical section, when *Odd Pluton* came home and *D-Yosef* wanted to show him our new song, the process of creating that particular song might be understood as a process of creating a particular memory. One might say that we are performing our *shared experience* in front of *Odd Pluton* as a performance of *memory* shared between *D-Yosef* and I. Studies of collective memory emphasize that all memories are created through interaction (Merrill 2010:460), and this example seems to support this idea. Layers of memory are embedded into our forming relationship, music as a 'technology of the self' becomes communicated through *creative experience*, enabling two people to share experiences in creativity and to build collective memory.

Producing music serves as an example of how mechanical devices, preknowledge and body language are almost transcending verbal communication in social processes. This is not to undermine verbal communication in social interaction, quite contrary, my goal is rather to reveal the multiple layers in which social interaction takes place, layers which cannot fully be understood

in isolation, processes of communication needs to be addressed with this multiplicity in mind. The way I see it, all layers are mutually inclusive, and are mutually constructing each other. When Merrill talks about “building memory” he is pointing to experience and emotional sensations attached to certain memory. When I listen to songs that *D-Yosef* and I made together today, I can smell and feel the context of *D-Yosef*'s apartment and it “brings me back” revealing positive sensations as memories unfold, because, as mentioned earlier, my experience of producing music together with *D-Yosef* simply felt `great`. In this way, through several occasions of music production, through several talks and events that we attended together, we built layers of memory, and this process contributed in bringing us closer as together as individuals. If our communication is based on a mutual exchange of affective qualities shared between people as responses to each other's presence in social interaction, as argued by Ruud earlier (1997:79), communication as it becomes interpreted by the other seems to be founded on levels of interpersonal understanding.

## Intersubjectivity

We `throw` our bodies into the music and communication, our preconditions are present in our musical context and this seems to create the platform in which *D-Yosef* and I are able to communicate our notions of selves. However, there must be an instrument, a motivation or something enabling us to translate our bodily, verbal and instrumental *messages* as we communicate with each other, the way I see it. I want to look into which feature(s) that actually enables two people to interpret each other. Let us remember my empirical material above and the discussion so far, and look through the lenses of `intersubjectivity` to see if this can bring any clarity in terms of how two people are able to bridge their senses of self through music and social interaction. In the realm of my theoretical journey I find, either implicitly or explicitly, notions of social life as something manifested in the crossroads between subjectivity (experiences, senses of self-identity and so on), communication (verbal, bodily or aesthetically) and translation (processes of understanding communication). It seems to me that the mechanisms enabling these three parts to meet rests, in large, on individual's *willingness* to comprehend each other's actions as social beings. I will tell you why I think so.

“Intersubjectivity refers to shared understanding. Intersubjectivity recognizes that meaning is based on one's position of reference and is socially mediated through interaction. In other words, knowing is not simply the product of individual minds in isolation. In qualitative research, intersubjectivity not only points to the ways in which we share understanding with others but also indicates that meaning and understanding lie along a continuum of mutual intelligibility” (Anderson, Kate. T 2008:468-469).

What enables a `tuning-in-relationship` between two people in the context of music production, by terms of intersubjectivity described above, the process of sharing experience or sharing understanding are enabled by the ability of mutual intelligibility. In other words, our ability to intelligibly extract meaning in communication whether it is through verbal, bodily, instrumental or any other ways of interaction creates the grounds in which two people or more are able to interpret each other`s messages. The idea that all knowledge and all communication is socially constructed forces us to consider social life as one`s ability to interpret the other. It makes an objective reality almost impossible to comprehend if one is to assume that all communication and translation both are socially constructed and subjectively constituted. However, what is apprehended as “true” or “false”, the way I see it, by any subjective mind does not make subjectivity any less part of the objective world, or the other way around. By saying this I mean to elevate this discussion to a level where we consider subjectivity and objectivity as mutually inclusive, and as such, actively try to grasp subjectivity as key to understand social life.

## Resonance

To the extent of `mutually intelligibility` one might find Unni Wikan`s theory of resonance (2012) as a fruitful example suggesting how subjectivity and personal experience serves as a tool in the process of understanding others. Wikan experienced how a mere semantic translation of words where insufficient in trying to understand her Balinese informants. In her case, intersubjectivity seemed to precede verbal communication. She had to “tune-in” and “resonate” with her informants in order to understand implicit content in verbal communication.

“Resonance (...) demands something from both parties in communication...: (a) willingness to *engage* with another world life, or idea; an ability to use one`s experience – (...) – to try to grasp, or convey, meanings that do not reside in words, “facts”, nor text but are evoked in the meeting of one experiencing subject with another (...)” (Wikan 2012:57).

According to Wikan, as we`re socially engaging in time and place with music production, *D-Yosef* and I have been resonating with each other. We have willingly been *engaging* with one another in music, drawing on our experiences to communicate and to translate explicit and implicit content from one another, forming a sense of shared understanding between us. Meeting in `mutual intelligibility` or `resonating` as Unni Wikan proposes reveals the ways in which subjectivity are able to be mediated and consequently translated in such a way that all forms of communication whether it is verbal, bodily, instrumental or aesthetically are equally important sources of information. Music, evoking personal emotions, representing subjective worldviews, forms shared understanding between people simply because participants are able- and willing to understand each

other's actions and reactions. *Willingness* is an important feature which seems to enable our ability to understand each other, and thus reveals how our senses of self and our former experiences are able to be shared and thus able to connect people. Apart from being a discussion about music, identity and communication, my empirical material and theoretical discussion serves as an example of how 'intersubjectivity' enables two people to form a relationship through social interaction, across lingual and cultural boundaries. One might say that people willing to *engage with another world life* use all plausible forms of communication in order to communicate and to grasp *meaning*. It seems to me that establishing social relationships does not rest solely on one's ability to communicate, or one's ability to understand, but in large on one's willingness to communicate, and willingness to understand.

## Summary

I have been discussing how music as 'technology of the self' becomes a vehicle in expressing your 'self' in relation to others upon social interaction. I have presented a detailed empirical description of how *D-Yosef* and I, coming from different cultural contexts and backgrounds and with limited capabilities of lingual communication were able to express ourselves and understand each other in ways that preceded verbal communication. Empirically, I have been exploring how we used technological equipment to produce music together, and how a series of communicative events related to the music we were making created a mutual intelligibility between us. By creating and performing music we were able to bridge our shared interest and experience with hip-hop, gaining insight and understanding of each other's qualities and experiences, of values and worldviews.

As analytical point of departure, processes of identification in relation to music and leisure activities has inspired me to view music as constituting subjectivity and as a vehicle in processes of self-identity (DeNora 1999). By comparing my empirical material to Alfred Schutz's theory of music production as a 'tuning-in-relationship' (1951) I am able to view the reciprocal sharing of experiences such an activity entails. To Schutz, communication reveals fields of expressions of our inner lives, becoming meaningful to each other as we are 'tuning-in' and interpreting each other's conducts. Both Schutz (1951) and Feld (2005) argue that our knowledge and experience with hip-hop are socially derived, implying that in the process of creating music together, we are drawing on personal and social experiences. Our knowledge and experiences (preknowledge) about the musical piece at hand are already present upon interaction, and takes form as music production unfolds, in a flux of communicative variations. Through experiences and knowledge about technological and



instrumental equipment in music production, by verbal expressions, gestures and body movements, and even as audible form, we were able to communicate our preknowledge in the present moment.

Feld (2005) highlights social mechanisms becoming present in such processes and argues that we always attend to form in terms of familiarity and strangeness, and that distinct sound structures of hip-hop are rooted in our listening histories. We are able to negotiate our knowledge and taste in hip-hop, and indulge with its familiar *sound*, *groove* and *style*, through feelingful participation, and resonate with each other's anticipations, creating positive physical and emotional attachment. According to Ruud (1997), powerful senses of belonging arise in such social processes, as we are answering and fulfilling our initiatives and expectations. Feld (2005) argues that social constructions acquire meaning through social interpretation, and so we are bridging the gap between our subjectivity and ideas of familiar structures of hip-hop continuously in an effort to interpret each other within the social context we are in. I have explored how knowledge once learned has become embedded and 'tacit' knowledge over time, leaving knowledge to be communicated through what we *do* rather than what we *say*. Hanne Müller's brilliant example about welding in a mechanical garage serves as a fruitful comparison in describing how knowledge about hip-hop and its production becomes communicated bodily and mechanically, even unconsciously, as knowledge and experience have become embedded into our bodies (1996).

I am referring to Bryce Merrill (2010) and his article about memory as a 'technology of the self' in exploring how social processes in music production are related to memory as a construction of self. His theory resonates with Schutz's (1951) idea of preknowledge and Feld's (2005) idea of familiar sound arguing that memory is actively and subjectively used as idealized products of remembering selves to "fit" with the given situation we are in. At the same time, *D-Yosef* and I are sharing experiences, creating memory together, leaving positive physical and emotional attachment rooted in our memories for us to enjoy as time goes by, and as we continuously "meet" in music and continue to add experiences onto our evolving relationship.

I have been discussing intersubjectivity as a plausible way to understand how processes of sharing experience and mutual intelligibility are enabled by our ability and *will* to interpret each other in communication. Unni Wikan (2012) exemplifies this process and suggests that through 'resonance' we may be able to grasp or convey meaning which precedes words or text, using your own experiences and a willingness to engage with another world-life in processes of understanding. Her idea vibrantly exemplifies how *D-Yosef* and I came to communicate ourselves in a (almost) complete absence of words and text, where our former experiences played an active role in both

communicating and in grasping meaning residing within, *behind* and *beyond* our actions and gesticulations. How do I know that the mutual understanding between *D-Yosef* and I are in fact real, and not simply built on *willful* imagination? My empirical material and analytical approach echoes Talal Asad's concern posed in the very beginning of this thesis, where cultural translation almost inevitably is asymmetrical in its reproduction, in any methodological way. This is an important reflection to keep in mind as an understanding of others unfold, either as text or speech, visibly or audibly, by analysis, experience or by mere observation, any translation is asymmetrical as reality belongs to the context and moment in which it emerge. I have undoubtedly learned something about *D-Yosef* (and vice versa) through our social interaction with music, but have I been able to translate and analyze my empirical material into anthropological text?

Theoretical frameworks has enabled me to analyze and understand some of the many personal and social aspects present in a one-to-one context of music production, and how music works as a tool for us to form a social relationship. Through empirical process and by academic analysis I believe that sharing experience and time together, in music or any form of social interaction, enables senses of self to be communicated in a flux of communicative variations. The accuracy of our understanding of each other is disputable, however, theoretical approach highlights the ways in which an understanding of each other emerge in communication and interpretation nonetheless. This, at the very least, serves as compliment discussing participant observation, methodically, as an important key to understand social behavior and human interaction. You need to involve socially with people whom you want to understand and describe knowledgeably, and as processes of cultural translation unfold, it is in the depth of yours- and others' experiences which enables an interpretation and understanding of cultural translation to be made, the way I see it.

## Concluding Remarks

In this thesis, I have been exploring the cultural production of music in China, with emphasis on the hip-hop environment in Beijing. I have presented a historical backdrop of social, political and economic shifts and developments since the 1980s, 1990s and until the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century in order to understand the cultural context in which contemporary youth cultures emerge. The characteristics of musical expressions, the way I have approached and presented it, have continuously been addressing an ongoing friction between state and population. *Gangtai*-, *xibeifeng*-, “prison songs”, rock- to hip-hop music, have all addressed the current state of public discourse at some level, and have even inspired and infused social upheaval. My fragmented depiction of modern Chinese history have consciously highlighted and exemplified frictions and resistance, and as such, I exhort the reader to be critical and view my approach as one of many perspectives in which an understanding of developments in the Chinese society deserve. Musical variations have emerged on the Chinese mainland since its opening-up reforms of the 1980s and can be read as reflections of individuals’ - and collectives’ social, political and economic desires as processes of modernization have developed rapidly during the past three decades, especially within the Chinese urbanities. Introduction to modern technology enabled segments of the population to consume and re-distribute music independent from state-controlled media, and popularity grew parallel to the government’s effort to ban it. The first chapter reveals the dialectical relationship between state and population and suggests that despite governmental effort to regulate and control cultural production, foreign-influenced music was undoubtedly satisfying the people, compelling the government to compromise with its growing distribution in order to communicate with its population. Among the various musical forms presented in this thesis, *gangtai* music is the only *style* which has fully flowered and become incorporated into the monopolized state-media market, the way I see it. During the era of commercialization (1990s), the popularity of rock music and its counter-political sentiments was declining, and *gangtai* music was all the while dominating the musical landscape in China. Despite its decadent nature, the nonpolitical, sweet and romantic sentiments of *gangtai* music seemed to serve the government’s attempt to direct public attention from “stronger” counter-cultural idealism and effectively stimulate a more materialistic and consumer oriented market. *Gangtai* music seemed to be the “lesser unpleasant” of musical choices, if not the most natural choice, taking part in directing the population towards mass-consumption. Ambiguous definitions of censorship, state-laws and regulations have provided the government with the means to define what is acceptable and what is not. Scholars argue that the government seems to allow for public speech and musical expression going on accord with overarching

ideologies, to some extent, as long as it does not mobilize the masses, and this argument resonates with my experience of hip-hop in Beijing.

I have been tracing the individualization process in China since the 1980s though its implications can hardly be explained with a few sentences. During the 1980s, the individualization process were empowering people's individuality and autonomy, it developed into social upheaval among segments of the population demonstrating against the political discourse in efforts to change it, but it did not develop into democratic political reforms. The government successfully subdued counter-political resistance and consequently continued to assert authoritarian control over its population into the 1990s. The individualization process in China can be read as a stimulation of the individual's self-interest, a freedom to choose by own will and to take responsibility for one's own actions, while at the same time being subjected to authoritarian control, which regulates the fullest expression of self-interest from a distance. Political changes and shifts during the past three decades in China have coined scholars to look at China in terms of 'socialism from afar' (Ong & Zhang 2008) or 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' (Liu 2011). Following Liu which view the Chinese government as both embracing- and resisting modernity at the same time has inspired me to formulate modernization in China as 'modernity with Chinese characteristics'. A dual approach in state ideology which inspire youth to take responsibility for their own choices on the one hand, while at the same time asserting authoritarian control towards youth and expectations towards their choices on the other have resulted in a two-facedness affecting identity construction. The way I understand Yan (2006) is that youth rationalize these contradictions by dichotomizing their desires to choose for themselves and to fulfill expectations somewhat separately, in a distinction between a private and a public sphere. This becomes evident by exploring youth's leisure activities, in which this thesis has mainly been concerned with hip-hop activities. I have discussed how overarching ideals of mainstream media and youth's reactions towards public expectations becomes negotiated and expressed through leisure activities, consumption and through creativity in music production. The hip-hop environment is creatively paving a space for themselves, enabled by the abundance of cosmopolitan consumption possibilities in Beijing (embraced by the state's intention of stimulation a consumer market), where a multitude of self-interests takes place in ways that often contradict ideals of the state-controlled media, which may exemplify a consequence of 'modernity' which the state may not like to embrace as much. The repercussions of *Yin San*'s controversial lyrics criticizing social life in China may serve as an example of how the relationship between government and music cultures is an ongoing process of identification, which does not always involve agreement and coherence. In fact, theories show how participants of the hip-hop

environment understand themselves by their ‘differences’ towards others as much as by ‘similarities’ within their fellowship in processes of identification. Hip-hop artists and fans define themselves by distinctions when social boundaries overlap and interfere, where both contradictions and coherence between values, norms, desires, worldviews, and so on may be traced and read analytically. It is important to outline, here, that my discussion, regarding processes of identification in the intersection between personal goals and desires, and state-idealism and authoritarian control are only pointing in a few directions in which subjectification takes place in urban Beijing. As such, my ethnographic material calls for a broader analytical and empirical investigation.

I have been comparing my empirical material of young consumers in Beijing with academic literature portraying the one-child generation of the 1980s as privileged fun-seekers on the one side and as pressured pragmatics on the other. The way *suzhi*, by implications of terminology have been fuelling expectations towards the only-children to become “high-quality” individuals are intricately connected to the patterns of consumption among the ‘emerging middle-class’. The way I have presented *suzhi* and its relation to visible markers of social-status and identity has not been addressed explicitly in my discussions of processes of identification or in my depiction of standards and values within the hip-hop environment. During my fieldwork I did not encounter the term *suzhi* and I did not learn about the significance of this term until I encountered it in theory afterwards. I have implicitly been pointing to *suzhi* and its connection to public expectations, but it would be interesting to explore if there is a connection between “high quality” personhood and being a “high quality” Rapper or artist, as they gain autonomy for being a “rebel”, embracing the self-enterprising ethos, as artists gain a significant amount of followers due to the appeal of their self-expression.

Hip-hop artists and fans in Beijing are intimately connected to and shaped by their historical and contemporary social context as Chinese citizens, but their self-expression and integrity as hip-hop artists and fans are also connected to hip-hop as a distinct musical form, which originated in America. How hip-hop as a global cultural flow has been adopted and incorporated into day-to-day activities by urban Chinese youth has been discussed and analyzed in this thesis in terms of authenticity. Certain standards and values of validity is constantly being addressed, negotiated, discussed and expressed referring to a set of requirements in which hip-hop seems to be culturally founded. Inspiration to involve with hip-hop music is entangled with the *look*, *style* and *sound* of American hip-hop, it reflects an urban urge of being “hip” and “cool”, but at the same time, it also serves as a vehicle for self-expression, an expression of certain locality. In analyzing and debating authenticity by the measures hip-hop artists and fans themselves validates as “true” and “real” hip-hop, authenticity becomes a rather ambiguous concept. Chinese hip-hop artists admit that

it was all imitation in the beginning, but as knowledge and experience, skill and devotion developed they gained access to hip-hop as a distinct cultural production, they were able “break the codes” and understand how it is produced and expressed, over time, and it eventually become embedded into their life-world as an extension of their self-expression. Measures and standards in which the hip-hop environment recognize and distinguish their cultural practice by may be viewed as subcultural capital, a social logic which reveals itself mostly by what it is not. In this way, subcultural capital seems to be closely related to ‘similarity’ and ‘difference’, and ‘social boundaries’ in processes of identifications. My analytical point of departure was that “Keeping it Real” refers to a hip-hop ideology binding producers, musicians and audiences together within a set of rules, values and ideas about quality. Empirically, “Keeping it Real” evidently had that effect, in regulating the cultural production of the hip-hop environment in Beijing. However, analytically, defining the standards and measurements in which these producers, musicians and audiences are bounded revealed a complex and ambiguous reality of these standards. As swiftly as notions of authenticity becomes invoked, it alters its interpretations to fit with the given situation in which it occurs. Tracing the semantic implications of “Keeping it Real” back to its “roots” in America, we find how the term is arguably based on an imaginary construct itself, turning an originally *polluted* interpretation of hip-hop to be *polluted* again, in China. This highlights the very cultural complexity in which the phenomenon of “Keeping it Real” and authenticity in hip-hop exists, and it reveals the multiple layers in which these concepts needs to be addressed. The fact that hip-hop in China was introduced, in large, by Americans rapping in Chinese about “real” Chinese hip-hop exemplifies the ambiguity in hip-hop, as “Keeping it Real” assess a constant fear of imitation. In my thesis, I have not approached the half Chinese half American Rappers and DJs which introduced hip-hop to the mainland of China analytically. Some Chinese youth are socialized abroad, eventually returning to China with different experiences, influences, practices and knowledge than their Chinese peers. This is pointing in directions of how global cultural practices travel, in ways that I do not address explicitly, and I believe this dimension calls for elaboration.

In order to understand how hip-hop and its ambiguous notions of authenticity become meaningful to the various artists and fans I encountered in Beijing, I have approached hip-hop as a ‘technology of the self’. Theoretical framework has pointed in the direction of music as constituting subjectivity and as a contributing factor in the production of self-identity over time. By exploring how processes of identification and sujetification are able to be communicated and interpreted between two hip-hop enthusiasts in music production we are able to understand the ways in which experiences and knowledge travels in social interaction. I have made an account for the flux of

communicative variations upon social interaction and they all seem to be connected with subjectification and subsequently serve as potentials in interpreting and understanding each other's conducts. There are evidently many personal and social aspects present in a one-to-one context of music production. However, there are certainly reasons to dig deeper into preknowledge and try to elaborate its cross-cultural nature within hip-hop. I also find that my theory of body language is merely touching a "tip of an iceberg" in explaining how it contributed to the social processes between *D-Yosef* and I. As Polanyi's theory on "tacit knowledge" within the field of psychology reveals, there are ways to understand body language to a much larger extent than what I have done here. Both mnemonic work and cognitive *learning processes* are psychologically situated and deserves elaboration through interdisciplinary frameworks. It is with great humbleness I am leaving these aspects as they are, hopefully inspiring you to view my discussion's relevance in a bigger picture, where it belongs, reaching further and wider than the discourse of music and anthropology.

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