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B-Boy and Buuz: A Study of Mongolian Hip-Hop Culture

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**B-Boy and Buuz:
A Study of Mongolian Hip-Hop Culture**

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Abstract

When walking down the streets of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, passersby will find countless material traits of hip-hop culture surrounding them, including snapback hats, skateboards, and tattoos. A powerful combination of urban growth, democracy, and a booming market economy has invited and stimulated contemporary forms of hip-hop, creating an active but unorganized Mongolian hip-hop sub-culture and community. In this explorative and analytical paper, I examine what Mongolian hip-hop artists express about present-day Mongolia through hip-hop mediums and why they are a unique critical voice.

While there are several facets of hip-hop, I focus on three modes of traditional hip-hop culture: oral (rapping), physical (breakdancing), and visual (graffiti). My primary research was conducted via interviews with Mongolian rappers, hip-hop dancers, and graffiti artists that are currently active in producing art. In total, I interviewed three graffiti/street artists, four rappers, and four hip-hop dancers who illuminated the foundation of Mongolian hip-hop's cultural themes and values. I complemented these interviews with an analysis of selected Mongolian hip-hop art pieces to better understand the uniqueness of Mongolian hip-hop culture and how hip-hop artists convey hip-hop values and commentaries through their creative work. Additionally, I analyzed academic readings, news articles, and documentaries concerning global hip-hop culture, the history of hip-hop culture, and hip-hop in Mongolia.

My findings convey the unique aesthetic and cultural characteristics of Mongolian hip-hop, and upon further discussion and analysis, I identify key underlying commentaries and values that hip-hop artists express through their work and hip-hop lifestyle—a life dedicated primarily to the production of hip-hop art. The multitude of artists' values and ideals create a unique Mongolian hip-hop sub-culture, and they act as a critical voice because of their defiance to comply solely with traditional Mongolian values, giving them a partially “outside” perspective of Mongolia.

I conclude that Mongolian hip-hop artists have no single explicit criticism of Mongolian society; rather, they actively choose to embody hip-hop culture and its values through the “alternative” hip-hop lifestyle. Through their actions and creative work, hip-hop artists highlight certain values to their audience that larger Mongolian culture fails to emphasize. These key values include individuality, authenticity, and freedom. Hip-hop artists continue to teach and represent these ideals to (primarily young) Mongolians through their artwork and hip-hop lifestyle, breaking the popular skeptical mindset that hip-hop cannot be Mongolian and empowering Mongolian youth to craft their own identities.

Warning: In dealing with “real” Mongolian hip-hop, this essay includes profane language and ideas.

Topic codes: Cultural Anthropology, Fine Arts, Music, Dance

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Introduction

A rapidly developing sub-culture, I hypothesized that Mongolian hip-hop exposes specific issues and ideas prevalent in contemporary Mongolian society. These concepts may surround Mongolian traditions and identity, gender inequality and domestic violence, poverty brought on by the market economy, or others. In my project, I identify a few key themes that manifest themselves across all, or most, hip-hop mediums. These mediums include rapping, breakdancing, and graffiti, which create the artistic groundwork enabling hip-hop culture.

In my research, I also read academic and popular press articles and watched documentaries that furthered my understanding of the social values of hip-hop, what global hip-hop culture entails, and what spurred the hip-hop movement. With this knowledge of global hip-hop culture and the origins of hip-hop, I articulate distinctive elements of Mongolian hip-hop culture and analyze this sub-culture's critical role in modern Mongolian society. I define a sub-culture as a group of people, within a larger society, whose values, choices, and behavior sets them apart from the popular, dominant culture. I justify that Mongolian hip-hop artists are critical voices in Mongolia because they abide by an "alternative" hip-hop lifestyle combining Mongolian and hip-hop cultural values, giving them an "outside" perspective of Mongolian society. Later in my essay, I articulate artists' specific perceptions and commentaries. Ultimately, I study hip-hop culture and its four creative agents to realize and share with my audience what and how Mongolian artists perceive and criticize their surroundings.

Rather than finding particular critical themes in hip-hop artists' work, I instead learned that artists' active pursuit of hip-hop—embodied in the hip-hop lifestyle—defies Mongolian societal expectations and norms. Mongolian culture and global hip-hop culture operate independently of one another, so as artists immerse themselves in global hip-hop culture but continue to live and exist in Mongolian culture, they must grapple with two sets of values and ideals, creating a unique cultural hybrid that is Mongolian hip-hop. I define cultural values and ideals as unwritten social codes by which cultural actors closely abide. Because artists actively choose to participate in and further develop hip-hop in Mongolia, they marginalize themselves in Mongolian society, to an extent, and are able to perceive Mongolia through a partially foreign lens. Artists' specific criticism varies from song to song, dance to dance, street artwork to street artwork. Moreover, artists believe that they diversify and improve

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Mongolia by representing and teaching hip-hop and its values, particularly to young Mongolians. Mongolian culture lacks emphasis on certain principles which hip-hop culture embodies, so hip-hop artists work to spread these ideals through their art. Thus, their active participation in hip-hop culture is hip-hop artists' most intensive criticism.

In this essay, I first briefly articulate the history of modern hip-hop. This history illuminates how hip-hop traveled from the U.S. to the world over in light of commercialization and, after the Democratic Revolution of 1990, to Mongolia. This section also emphasizes the importance of the four original creative outlets of hip-hop culture, which include DJ, graffiti, rap, and breakdance. Next, I discuss why Mongolian hip-hop artists' criticism is legitimate, based on their peripheral position in society and their active pursuits of the hip-hop lifestyle, an "alternative" life direction dedicated primarily to the production of hip-hop art. I then follow this discussion with descriptions and analysis of Mongolian hip-hop culture's aesthetic and underlying traits. These sections are vital to understanding the nature of Mongolian hip-hop culture, as they illuminate how Mongolian hip-hop is unique and how hip-hop artists interact with larger Mongolian society. Lastly, I articulate Mongolian hip-hop artists' most prevalent social commentaries and why the hip-hop lifestyle embodies these ideas.

Methods

Based in Ulaanbaatar, I conducted my primary research through interviews with local hip-hop artists who worked within three of the creative pillars of hip-hop. I conducted the majority of interviews with the help of a translator; my primary oral/aural translator was Myadagbadam "Myadgaa" Dulamsuranhkhор. Originally, I planned to include DJs in my research, but I found that there are extremely few active hip-hop DJs in Mongolia and was unable to locate any of their contact information. Thus, I decided to eliminate hip-hop DJs from my research and focus on professional artists working in the three most developed avenues of Mongolian hip-hop: graffiti, rap, and hip-hop dance. In total, I interviewed three graffiti/street artists (SAS Coze, Dasher, MRCK), four rappers (Mekh ZakhQ, Gennie, Desant, Tsetse), and four hip-hop dancers (K, Munkhjin of FakeBSH Crew, a representative of Hooliganz Crew, Temuk). Interviewing these professional Mongolian hip-hop artists was critical to my study because their answers conveyed the creative process and motivation that fuels Mongolian hip-hop culture and the hip-hop lifestyle. A comparative analysis of my

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interviewees' answers also illuminated the foundation of Mongolian hip-hop's cultural themes and values and how hip-hop artists convey these principles through their creative work (see the Appendix A for sample interview questions).

Observing live hip-hop events and analyzing a variety of hip-hop artists' work was another crucial component of my research. I attended a live rap show (The NWA Movie Party, November 5, 2015), a street artists' painting session (November 5, 2015), a hip-hop dance battle (POPPINGxHIPHOP Vol. 1, November 15, 2015), a Hooliganz Crew practice session (November 18, 2015), and a b-boy dance battle (Challenge Jam, November 23, 2015). My observations and notes of these events were a vital component of my research, as I was better able to understand how artists convey social criticisms and values through hip-hop's creative modes. For the same purpose, I also studied rap song lyrics, graffiti sites around Ulaanbaatar, and hip-hop dance videos. I selected seven current rap songs from a variety of artists and read and analyzed lyrics (translated by Myadгаа), and I chose three current videos in which some of my interviewees star and perform a variety of hip-hop dance. I was not always able to recognize the date of the ten graffiti sites that I photographed and studied, but because they remain a part of Ulaanbaatar's contemporary landscape, I include them in my study of current hip-hop artwork. I define "current" art as art produced within the last 1-2 years. Excerpts and photographs of current art appear in various sections of my essay.

I supplemented these interviews with scholarly and popular media articles. I read and analyzed academic work related to hip-hop culture in the United States (Blanchard, 1999), China (Liu, 2010), South Korea (Um, 2013), Japan (Condry, 2001), and Mongolia (Marsh, 2010) (Delaplace, 2014). I decided to focus on the origin of modern hip-hop in the U.S. and the development of hip-hop in Asia and, specifically, Mongolia because I wanted to understand hip-hop culture in a multitude of scales and contexts.

While conducting research, I found a severe lack of scholarly work focusing on Mongolian hip-hop and/or grappling with all of hip-hop's creative modes, so I turned to popular media sources and the film industry for additional information. I included three popular media articles, two of which focused on Mongolian hip-hop (Lim, 2009) (O'Dell, 2015). The other popular media article focused on hip-hop as a global phenomenon and culture (McBride, 2007), which presented another valuable insight into how hip-hop culture manifests itself in Mongolia. I also watched two

documentaries: one featuring Mongolian rappers (Ghazarian & Binks, 2012), another featuring breakdancing from a variety of countries, including Japan and Korea (Hergenrother & Lee, 2007). These documentaries were particularly informative because they depicted hip-hop's creative elements and values aurally and visually, giving me the opportunity to examine both the artists' ideas and work simultaneously.

A Brief History of Hip-Hop Culture

In this section, I explore how and why hip-hop culture emerged first in New York City, then throughout the globe, and finally in Mongolia. Understanding the history of hip-hop culture is vital to understanding why hip-hop was, and continues to be, a highly relevant, relatable art form for Mongolians. The history of hip-hop also identifies hip-hop as critical and grounded in reality; both qualities are still vital components of modern Mongolian hip-hop. After outlining the original purposes and characteristics of hip-hop, I am then able to focus on contemporary Mongolian hip-hop art and culture.

The emergence of modern hip-hop.

While there are various theories surrounding hip-hop's early origins, the Bronx of New York City is largely credited as the home of contemporary hip-hop. The four original creative modes of hip-hop include MCing (now known as rapping), DJ, breakdancing (also known as b-boy/b-girl), and graffiti (also known as street art). James McBride of National Geographic Magazine (2007) succinctly explains the first indicators of hip-hop and its creative avenues in the summer of 1973:

This is how it worked: One guy, the DJ, played records on two turntables. One guy—or girl—served as master of ceremonies, or MC. The DJs learned to move the record back and forth under the needle to create a 'scratch', or to drop the needle on the record where the beat was the hottest [most exciting], playing 'the break' over and over to keep the folks dancing. The MCs 'rapped' over the music to keep the party going. One MC sought to outchat the other. Dance styles were created—'locking' and 'popping' and 'breaking.'... The focus initially was not on the MCs, but on the dancers, or B-boys. Graffiti artists spread the word of the 'I' because the music was all about identity: I am the best (McBride, 2007).

When New York City was on the verge of bankruptcy in the 1970s, poor urban black youth were highly underrepresented and needed a positive, productive outlet for their time and energy. In hip-hop, young artists felt the "empowering"

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effects of creating new technique, skills, and rules (Hergenrother & Lee, 2007) in a brand new art form “informed by a rebellious attitude” (Liu, 2010, p. 147). At its beginnings, hip-hop told the stories of poor, black urban youth, representing a largely ignored group of people with a single (type of) voice. Rap became particularly significant, as it was able to “unify” listeners through a common critical voice that spoke the harsh truths of reality (Blanchard, 1999). In the U.S., “rap...developed as a form of resistance to the subjugation of working-class African-Americans in urban centers” (Blanchard, 1999), and it soon caught the attention of the commercial music industry. As hip-hop began to be commodified and reach a global audience, American mainstream rap lost its original purposes of giving voice to a minority and encouraging social justice and activism. Rap’s lyrics also became an easy target for governmental censorship because in being “real,” rap explicitly reflects reality and systemic violence that (especially) poor urban black youth face daily (Blanchard, 1999). Nevertheless, over the last 30 years, rap has “exploded across the world” and is arguably the most influential kind of American music since jazz (McBride, 2007).

Hip-hop as a global culture.

Now found in almost every corner of the world, hip-hop can exist in “all societies where inequality is a social reality” (Liu, 2010, p. 151), which includes every free-market, democratic state. The commodification and commercialization of American rap and breakdance were particularly helpful in spreading hip-hop around the world, as proven by the many Mongolian artists who were interested in and inspired by American hip-hop artists, such as Chris Brown (a representative of Hooliganz Crew, personal communication, November 14, 2015), the Jabbawoockeez dance crew (Munkhjin of FakeBSH Crew, personal communication, November 13, 2015), and A\$AP Rocky (Tsetse, personal communication, November 18, 2015). Also, in recent years, the “unprecedented explosion in worldwide communication, technology, and migration drove hip-hop’s influence and expansion” (Liu, 2010, p. 147), as products and ideas are now able to travel between continents quickly and with ease. Thus, hip-hop is now able to exist even in places where residents have relatively limited freedoms and choices, like China, when compared to the U.S., the home of hip-hop.

In its movement around the world, hip-hop has proven that it adapts, both culturally and aesthetically, to fit local landscapes. For example, Hae-Kyung Um (2013) portrays Korean hip-hop as a “mobile, not fixed, nexus between *global* and

local in terms of production and between *regional* and *domestic* with respect to consumption” (p. 53). While the four creative pillars of hip-hop remain, hip-hop has also evolved to include other facets depending on the place, such as skateboarding, fashion, and even “attitudes” (Temuk, personal communication, November 14, 2015). Thus, it is important to note that though hip-hop is a global trend spanning many continents and decades, it does not manifest itself identically across time and space. Hip-hop must hybridize itself to adjust to local norms and realities because it is a culture that is grounded in talking about “real” topics grounded in local truths. Furthermore, Korean hip-hop’s aesthetics and intrinsic values will vary from Venezuelan hip-hop’s material nature and cultural meanings, and both will vary from Mongolian hip-hop appearance and culture.

The development of Mongolian hip-hop culture.

Hip-hop made its first appearance in Mongolia in 1990, in the wake of Mongolia’s Democratic Revolution. The ruling party of the socialist era, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party, no longer controlled the country’s intake of Western popular culture, and the Revolution celebrated freedom of speech and anti-censorship ideals (Marsh, 2010). Rap “spearheaded the [hip-hop] movement” (Delaplace, 2013, p. 1) in Mongolia, as it was the first creative outlet of hip-hop to gain popularity and establish an influential musical and cultural reputation in Mongolia. Two of the earliest mainstream Mongolian rap groups include *Har Sarnai* (“Black Rose”) and *Dain ba Enkh* (“War and Peace”). Outside of the Mongolian rock and pop musical norms, rappers instead established themselves in an “art form that addresses the problems and needs unique to their generation’s experiences” (Marsh, 2010, p. 350). Copying Western hip-hop music was common until about the mid-2000s, when Mongolian rap started to become unique in its own right, exploring issues surrounding identity and society (Lim, 2009). Mongolians in their youth at this time particularly took to rap because the music expressed the “hopes, fears, and frustrations” (Marsh, 2010, p. 350) of their generation, most of which differed from their parents’ lingering socialist values and realities. Mongolian youth continue to identify with rap’s contemporary message and cling to its confrontation of “real” coming-of-age issues, such as identity and free will. Rap, with its self-empowering, strikingly direct lyrics, continues to grow in popularity in Mongolia, as “nearly two-thirds of [the nation’s population] is under the age of 30” (Marsh, 2010, p. 345). Mongolian youth are drawn to the illicit, male-dominated “bad boys” of rap who

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“stand in for issues of real importance...that many felt were not being addressed by the musical mainstream” (Marsh, 2010, p. 354). Now common within all forms of hip-hop, the first crews, ““new kind[s] of families forged with intercultural bonds that...provide insulation and support’ not unlike the social networks within gangs” (Marsh, 2010, p. 352), likely formed among rappers and further strengthened the voice and legitimacy of rap music.

However, rap is not the only form of hip-hop art that can be found around the world, including Mongolia. As rap music began to take off in Mongolia in the mid-2000s, a new kind of movement, known as “rap dance,” emerged in the Mongolia. It resembled krumping, a particularly aggressive form of freestyle hip-hop dance typically performed to upbeat music (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015). While the exact origins of rap dance in Mongolia are unknown, Mongolians may have borrowed the term from South Koreans who, in the late 1990s, also called rappers who danced while singing “rap dancers” (Um, 2013, p. 54). Though rap dance has mysteriously disappeared from modern Mongolian hip-hop culture, other forms of hip-hop dance are thriving, including urban dance and breakdance. Today, hip-hop dance varies greatly in style, setting, and success in Mongolia, which I will describe later in this essay. According to many of my interviewees, hip-hop dance is only beginning to develop in Mongolia, as most Mongolians outside of the hip-hop dance community did not recognize the legitimacy of hip-hop dance in Mongolia until, at the maximum, only a few years ago. Hip-hop dance teachers are just starting to emerge in Mongolia (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015), which has helped to legitimize and popularize hip-hop dance. Certain dance studios, most notably Aim4Revolution “Aim4R” Production & Dance Studio, have only very recently begun to commercialize and earn significant wages by working on advertisements for businesses, selling lessons for high fees, and working to build their reputations through social media and film projects.

Similarly, commercial graffiti—graffiti that street artists were commissioned to create—can be seen on various storefronts and even inside buildings around Ulaanbaatar. Graffiti is still in its early stages of development, according to the majority of my interviewees, but certain commercial projects and well-known pieces of street art around the city have made critics of graffiti change their perspective. Most older Mongolians simply do not think about street art, especially if they have never noticed or seen it on Ulaanbaatar’s streets, and younger Mongolians have a

wide variety of misconceptions about the backgrounds and intentions of professional graffiti artists (SAS Coze and Dasher, personal communication, November 5, 2015). As a relatively new art form, some Mongolians think graffiti is only for aesthetic appeal and is entirely disconnected from greater political meaning or hip-hop culture (O'Dell, 2015). Graffiti first appeared in Mongolia with an artist named ANZ in the late 1990s, and there are but a few bi-annual or one-time-only street art festivals in Ulaanbaatar that have further advanced the reputation and presence of graffiti in Mongolia. It is also important to note that street art is generally illegal in Mongolia, and graffiti artists risk arrest, high fines, and jail time for pursuing their work. Though graffiti artists receive no legal support, they may receive popular and social support; for example, most Mongolian passersby support MRCK when he paints by offering him food, drink, or a few minutes to rest and chat, and only the occasional person will shout at or complain to him about his work (MRCK, personal communication, November 14, 2015). Public perception of street art is a particularly important indicator of the development of graffiti, and hip-hop culture, because graffiti visibly infiltrates the public sphere with the most ease of all the creative avenues of hip-hop culture.

Additionally, I must note that I am unaware of the development of hip-hop DJ in Mongolia, except to know that several DJs of other kinds of music exist in Mongolia. I hypothesize that hip-hop DJ is in its very early stages of development or has died out in recent years.

The Legitimacy of Mongolian Hip-Hop Artists' Criticisms

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, a critic is “one who expresses a reasoned opinion on any matter especially involving a judgment of its value, truth, righteousness, beauty, or technique” (n.d.). Anyone can be a critic, so long as they have access to, and are willing to exercise, rights to free speech. Because of the Democratic Revolution of 1990, the Mongolian government now protects Mongolian citizens' right to free speech, among other democratic rights. Freedom of speech and behavior are particularly important values in hip-hop culture, as these are fundamental principles of the hip-hop lifestyle, including the creation of hip-hop art. In short, it is impossible, according to Tsetse, to have a hip-hop sub-culture in non-democratic societies, such as communist countries, because citizens have limited freedom (Tsetse, personal communication, November 18, 2015).

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However, the hip-hop lifestyle—one version of the critic’s lifestyle—comes at a social cost. As critics, hip-hop artists marginalize themselves from greater society in order to gain a “real” perspective of Mongolia and communicate this true version of reality through their creative work. Their adherence to and respect for hip-hop’s global cultural values also distinguishes them from larger society. However, in my essay I will detail the unique characteristics and traits of Mongolian hip-hop culture because as hip-hop has grown popular in most of the world’s countries, it is now clear that global trends, like hip-hop culture, are still subject to localization (Condry, 2001). Rather, hip-hop artists draw inspiration and learn from global hip-hop culture to create a distinctly Mongolian hip-hop sub-culture.

But because hip-hop is not traditional in or native to Mongolia, skeptics of hip-hop in Mongolia perceive hip-hop culture’s values and traits as foreign and simply not Mongolian. A common skeptic of Mongolian hip-hop might say that Mongolians do not have the “right” to express themselves via hip-hop’s creative mediums because Mongolia lacks American-like ghettos. However, these skeptics do not understand how hip-hop has developed into a global culture and that it can be localized in any relatively free corner of the Earth. Rap, for instance, has become the “universal expression of outrage” (McBride, 2007) and is transferable to any language. Hip-hop in Mongolia means expressing one’s self, angst, and perception of life, which requires no ghetto-like background or experience. Mongolians do not share the black urban American experience that sparked original hip-hop culture (Marsh, 2010), but they can relate to the struggle and outright expression that hip-hop promotes.

Mongolian hip-hop skeptics’ beliefs further alienate hip-hop artists from belonging in mainstream Mongolian society, but they also give hip-hop artists a clearer perspective on Mongolian realities and the motivation to publicly express their commentaries. This position and feeling of being “outside” of society makes hip-hop artists feel extremely free to criticize through their artwork, behave however they wish, and draw inspiration from international hip-hop artists. Thus, the Mongolian hip-hop lifestyle emerges. As Mongolian hip-hop artists become more famous and well known in popular culture, they do not abandon the hip-hop lifestyle for a more “normal” lifestyle because in doing so, they would lose their reputation as a hip-hop artist and critic.

Before I explicitly address hip-hop artists' criticisms, I first articulate the aesthetic and cultural traits of Mongolian hip-hop dance, rapping, and street art. These characteristics are critical to understanding the context and methods through which Mongolian hip-hop artists express their criticisms. Also, of the few individuals who have studied Mongolian hip-hop, all have focused exclusively on rap, overlooking how artists of hip-hop's other creative avenues contribute to hip-hop culture. Thus, in my essay I choose to include two other forms of hip-hop culture, dance and graffiti, to gain a more thorough perspective of contemporary Mongolian hip-hop.

The Aesthetic Traits of Mongolian Hip-Hop

Mongolian hip-hop artists have created a unique set of aesthetics that are "far more than just a mimicry of the American [hip-hop] icons" (Delaplace, 2013, p. 2). I describe some of the most prominent material traits of Mongolian hip-hop to thoroughly depict Mongolian hip-hop culture. Studying these aesthetics is also crucial to understanding how hip-hop artwork physically embodies the sub-culture's values and ideals and how global hip-hop culture has localized itself in Mongolia, creating a distinctive Mongolian hip-hop culture.

Graffiti.

Arguably the most legally dangerous form of hip-hop, graffiti is still thriving throughout the world, and Mongolian street and graffiti artists have created a niche style by incorporating distinctly Mongolian designs, figures, and issues into their work. With some exceptions, graffiti is predominantly made with spray paint and completed outside. Graffiti is generally illegal in Mongolia, though consequences are only strictly enforced when artists have not obtained permission to paint on prominent or government buildings. Some of the consequences of painting street artwork are fines, jail time, and erasure (thus, artists typically paint at night and continue to paint out of political defiance) (MRCK, personal communication, November 14, 2015).

According to SAS Coze and Dasher, there is no formal distinction between street artists and graffiti artists; colloquially, Mongolian street artists typically have more political messages in their work, while Mongolian graffiti artists are focused on visual aesthetics (SAS Coze and Dasher, personal communication, November 5, 2015). MRCK added that he identifies as a street artist because in addition to graffiti, he is involved in other forms of visual art, including graphic design, sketching, and photography (MRCK, personal communication, November 14, 2015).

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When open and aware of their surroundings, pedestrians will find a variety of graffiti while walking down the streets of Ulaanbaatar. Random expletive tags—likely spray-painted hastily by inexperienced teenagers who believe graffiti will make them popular among their classmates (SAS Coze and Dasher, personal communication, November 5, 2015)—splay across formerly untouched wall space. Passersby will also find traditional graffiti, an art form showcasing artists' names depicted in various styles, colors, and locations (Dasher, personal communication, November 5, 2015). As seen in Figure 1, Dasher's name can be found around busy street corners, in alleyways, on courtyard structures. In no two places does his name appear in the same style or colors, as he strives to perfect graffiti techniques and diversify his skills.



Figure 1. Three examples of Dasher's name in various locations.

In physically painting one's name in public space, graffiti artists, like Dasher, assert their selves and their identities into public space. Artists feel pleasure both in working in physical and legal risky circumstances (Dasher, personal communication, November 5, 2015) and in permanently painting their chosen name in a space among Mongolians that would, otherwise, not know or care about this specific person. Moreover, these effects are also empowering because a marginalized group of people, Mongolian hip-hop artists, claim a new role and new sense of belonging in public space. This space physically embodies how Mongolian society, through economic, political, and social systems, works against these artists. Because Mongolian graffiti artists come from a wide variety of backgrounds, some artists, like MRCK who grew up in Ulaanbaatar's *ger khoroolol* (urban districts made up primarily of *ger*, nomadic

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Mongolian homes), gain particular confidence in painting publicly and establishing themselves with a positive public reputation.

In addition to painting traditional graffiti techniques, MRCK also paints street art with more analytical messages. Through his artwork, MRCK shows Mongolians the problems of society that he perceives. For example, he decided to paint the sad face of a young boy on the side of a wood container in one of Ulaanbaatar's *ger khoroolol*, as shown in Figure 2. Behind the child and his sideways cap, MRCK painted *khuuhd[üig] [kh]airlaya* ("love the children"). In this piece, the artist wanted to demonstrate how youth, particularly from *ger khoroolol*, lack the love, education, and positive influence they need in order to become successful, happy adults. His words prompt adults to think of their behavior toward children and future generations of Mongolians (MRCK, personal communication, November 14, 2015).



Figure 2. MRCK's portrait of a young boy in Ulaanbaatar's *ger khoroolol*. Photo courtesy of "Mongol Graffiti" Facebook page.

Occasionally, street art festivals, foreign graffiti artists, and collaborative commissions occur in Ulaanbaatar. Ink Festival and Tatun Festival are two of festivals from recent years, while Heesco and Noe Two are two international street artists who have traveled to and painted in Ulaanbaatar. The Young Women's Club and Mongolian Ministry of Justice coordinated one particular street art commission, featuring many images representing Mongolian women's roles and illuminating women's issues. The artists' work appeared in an underground pass in northern Ulaanbaatar, but when I visited the site on November 11, 2015, I found it had been erased and replaced with the yogurt advertisement in Figure 3 done by an artist(s) commissioned by or working for *Maamu* (the yogurt brand).



Figure 3. Images of the underground pass formerly featuring a street art commission, now featuring a yogurt advertisement. Some outlines can still be seen of women under the newly white wall.

Erasing art is a common phenomenon in Mongolian street art, as that is a common consequence in arrest for painting graffiti and is an integral part of an artist's rise to prominence. A wall along *Narnii Zam* ("Sun Highway") is one of the most famous sites for graffiti in Mongolia and is considered the "first official wall" of Mongolian street art. When artists believe they are talented enough to paint in this revered spot, they erase a different artist's older work to paint their own (SAS Coze and Dasher, personal communication, November 5, 2015). This erasure is indicative of the necessity for Mongolian graffiti, and hip-hop, to reflect contemporary images, ideas, and individuals.

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Hip-hop dance.

In defining hip-hop dance, there are few clear distinctions, as every Mongolian dancer with whom I spoke had different perceptions of how various kinds of dance fit into hip-hop culture. The relative newness of hip-hop dance in Mongolia and a lack of academic research in Mongolian hip-hop dance both contribute to the conflict surrounding the definition of hip-hop dance. Thus, based on my own observations and my interviewees' ideas, I define hip-hop dance as inclusive of urban dance, funky styles (including popping and locking), and b-boy. It is a form of dance that celebrates individuality, free expression, strength, and is predominantly masculine.

Traditionally, b-boy is the only type of hip-hop dance included in hip-hop culture (representative of Hooliganz Crew, personal communication, November 14, 2015) and is highly influenced by Kung Fu movies, gymnastics, and James Brown-esque (eccentric and energetic) movements (Hergenrother & Lee, 2007). Figure 4 demonstrates a sample of the Hooliganz Crew's members' tricks and movements.

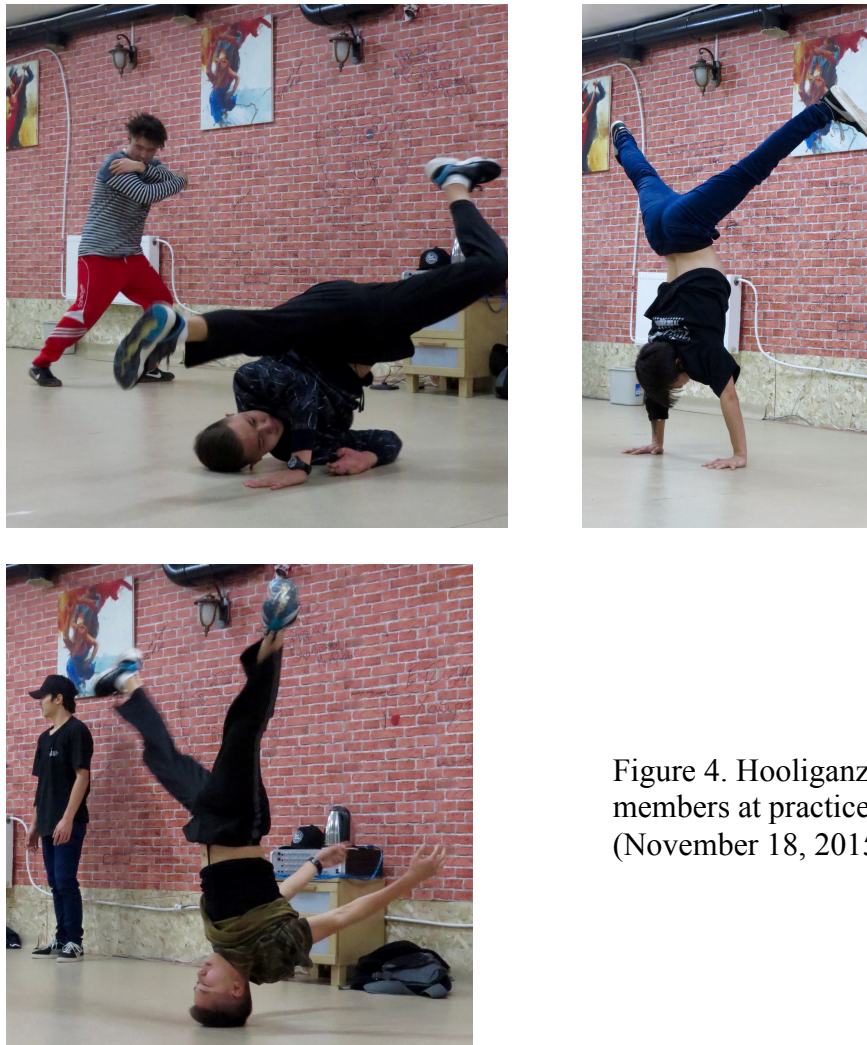


Figure 4. Hooliganz Crew members at practice (November 18, 2015).

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Mongolian breakdancers are mostly young, highly energetic men around the age of 18, each of whom interpret music matchlessly and have different strengths within the b-boy style. B-boy movements are floor-intensive, dependent on a strong core and upper body, and often appear to defy gravity. B-boys focus on developing skills and improvisation techniques to compete in battles. Battles “happen in an exchange” (Hergenrother & Lee, 2007), in which b-boys take turns dancing to a DJ’s beats and matching their opponents’ energy and intensity. Some movements imitate physical fighting, playing basketball, or driving a car. B-boys use these imitations as well as other gestures to communicate their superiority to their opponents; though, the Mongolian b-boy community is so small that every b-boy knows their opponent(s) well and are typically friends immediately before and after the battle, as proven by the many hugs and smiles between opponents at the battles’ end.

While b-boys focus on skills and tricks, urban dancers base themselves in choreography—a sequence of movements that are practiced repeatedly, typically to create a synchronized group of dancers—and can perform to many styles of music (representative of Hooliganz Crew, personal communication, November 14, 2015). While many artists told, or implicated to, me that urban dance is not a form of hip-hop dance, I have chosen to include it in my analysis because most Mongolian urban dancers began as hip-hop dancers and still maintain close relationships with other hip-hop dancers, blurring the line between “real” and “fake” hip-hop dance. Similarly, it is a form of dance that is “highly relevant” (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015) to urban Mongolia, and in its growing popularity through studios like Aim4R Production, urban dance demands to be taken seriously in Mongolian hip-hop and society. Because urban dance can easily be performed in commercial settings (such as advertisements and music videos), it can also reach a wider Mongolian audience, when compared to breakdance.

According to K, Mongolian people are starting to understand that hip-hop dance is a good, positive thing for Mongolian society, largely because people are realizing that dance provides an alternative outlet to violence and gives young people a purpose and direction. For example, K has seen dancers’ sense of community grow daily and is witnessing them “[become] a family” (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015). He also believes that compared to other countries’ dancers, Mongolian hip-hop dancers “see [the] bright side of life” (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015). Several of my hip-hop dance interviewees,

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including K, explained to me how hip-hop dancers of a studio or crew will do many things together outside of practices or performances, further tightening the hip-hop dance community in Mongolia and strengthening hip-hop dance's positive effect. This support system further keeps Mongolian youth out of and away from social issues, like street violence and gangs, which likely contributes to Mongolians and dance teachers' positive impression of hip-hop dance.

Rap.

The most developed and established form of hip-hop in Mongolia, rap is a highly influential form of music that consists of quickly “talking on beat[s]” (Gennie, personal communication, November 9, 2015) and encourages artists to speak the truth about life, including problems plaguing reality. Rappers speak quickly, confidently, and assertively about anything that they wish, including political and economic problems, women, the self, sex, family, and many other topics; they radiate tough attitudes through dark, baggy clothing and harsh, grainy voices, as seen in Figure 5 (The NWA Movie Party, November 5, 2015).



Figure 5. Rappers performing at the NWA Movie Party on November 5, 2015.

Some rappers, such as Gee (“Uu,” 2014), include traditional Mongolian instruments and singing techniques, like the *moriin khuur* (“horsehead fiddle”) and *khoomei* (throat-singing), in their songs and crews. Compared to the other creative avenues of hip-hop, rap can be the most direct in its social criticism and overall message (Marsh, 2010). Moreover, rappers aim to reflect reality by incorporating true stories and personal experience into their lyrics, illuminating the difficulty of living through cultural phenomenon. In American rap, hip-hop artists regularly reflect “political, social, and economic oppression” (Blanchard, 1999) constantly committed against African-American communities; Mongolian rappers regularly mimic African-American rappers’ violent lyrics, even though other social issues (namely political

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corruption and the struggling economy) are perceived as far more pressing in Mongolia. Ultimately, rap music “is freedom [and] you can say whatever you want” (Tsetse, personal communication, November 18, 2015), a way to get “money, power, [and] respect” (Desant, personal communication, November 9, 2015), or a tool to express an artist’s humor and unique character (Mekh ZakhQ, personal communication, November 7, 2015).

Words, rap’s primary tool, are a serious weapon that demand to be taken seriously by rappers, skeptics of Mongolian hip-hop, and hip-hop consumers. Tsetse explained to me that rappers have to be clever in how they criticize public figures, like politicians, because even though they have heard stories about corruption, rappers do not want to accuse a politician of something for which the public has no legal proof. Otherwise, they risk legal trouble (Tsetse, personal communication, November 18, 2015). Similarly, skeptics of Mongolian hip-hop are predominantly upset with the explicit nature of rap, which many of my interviewees say is likely a negative side effect on young Mongolians. At one point, Gennie even advised Gee, one of the most famous Mongolian rappers, to use fewer curse words in his music for the sake of his many young fans (Gennie, personal communication, November 9, 2015). In the imaginative use of their words, rappers teach people, including many of my interviewees, “how to show what they want to tell” (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015).

Most of my interviewees agreed that the artistic style and technique of Mongolian rap is well-developed and only improving, and its prominence in Mongolian hip-hop culture prevailed when I asked my interviewees to describe Mongolian hip-hop culture and most rappers, dancers, and street artists first—and sometimes, only—addressed rap’s influence. However, Desant believes that the hip-hop lifestyle and competition is lacking in Mongolian rap, leaving the culture incomplete and lacking depth (Desant, personal communication, November 10, 2015). (View a photo of Desant in Appendix B.) Other artists, like Gennie, believe hip-hop in Mongolia is “changing every day” (Gennie, personal communication, November 9, 2015) and that time will show Mongolians who true Mongolian rappers are, implying that authenticity is inherent to only some rappers.

Language also plays a key and controversial role in Mongolian rap; some artists believe it is a harsh language that makes Mongolian rap hard to hear and understand (Tsetse, personal communication, November 18, 2015), while others

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believe it is a perfect language for rap (Gennie, personal communication, November 9, 2015), an inevitably harsh form of music. Rappers also occasionally utilize English words and American pop culture references; though, most words are in Mongolian and references particular to Mongolia. The excerpt in Figure 6 is from “Segser” (“Shake It Off,” 2015) by 27-year-old Tsetse, and it includes a popular line from another rap song (“Ugzug Saihan Bol Zus Saihan” by Ginjin, 2014), refers to two kinds of traditional Mongolian food, grapples with growing older among a very young population, and echoes current American hip-hop artists’ fetishization of the female “ass.”

*Batsaanar ovoo bolj ee ueihan ovoo bolj ee
Baarand orcrn chin buduun akh namaig golj ee
Uuchlaarai uuchlaarai oor arga baixgui ee
Oonzij chin segser alagduulahaac aixgui ee
Burkhan oonztoi tursun bole ne duun deer segser
Banzan oonztoi bol bantan tsuivan segser
Segserden oonz er khunii muruudul*

Figure 6. An excerpt from “Segser” by Tsetse. Translation by Myadгаа.

Juniors are adults now
My generation of people [are] getting considered [to be] old men
When I’m in the club youngsters say [that I’m a] fat old man
I’m sorry; I’m sorry; there is no other way
I’m not afraid of getting a slap after shaking your booty
If God gave you booty, you should shake it off in this song
If you have [a] flat booty, then eat *Bantan* and *Tsuivan* (traditional Mongolian food)
Shaking ass is every man’s dream

Additionally, Mongolian language lacks many words that rhyme together, so most rappers do not attempt to make their lyrical endings rhyme (Tsetse, personal communication, November 18, 2015).

Commercialization is abundant in Mongolian rap, and many rappers choose to sell at least of some of their songs to the commercial music market. Gennie is a rare exception to this trend because she wants people to seek out her music, find it through friends, or discover it online. By staying away from the music industry, she also believes that she is better able to stay in touch with reality and learns through her many collaborative projects with other musicians (Gennie, personal communication, November 9, 2015). However, for many rappers, some commercial hits are a necessity to simply survive economically in Mongolia, and the rich and powerful music industry is a common tool in helping rappers to achieve financial success, after

starting in a poor position (Mekh ZakhQ, personal communication, November 11, 2015).

Similarly to graffiti and hip-hop dance in Mongolia, crews are common among rappers, particularly as new artists emerge. Crews act as small communities within Mongolian hip-hop, as crewmembers protect one another and typically rap within similar ideologies and themes to their fellow crewmembers. (Marsh, 2010) One of the most famous rap crews in Mongolia is Click Click Boom and also includes one graffiti artist and one *moriin khuur* (“horsehead fiddle”) player, furthering Mongolian hip-hop aesthetic distinction. Other crews include Backyard, a crew started by Desant made up of young Mongolian rappers who will record some music in English, and Gennie’s crew, *Yudenten* (“Hoodies”), that travels around rural Mongolia seeking out young and talented rappers. These crews further improve Mongolian rap and hip-hop by producing music made up of many powerful voices, making rap difficult for (especially) elder Mongolian skeptics to ignore.

Cultural Characteristics of Modern Mongolian Hip-Hop

Drawn from observations and comparative analyses, I have identified key cultural characteristics of Mongolian hip-hop, as depicted through live events, hip-hop artwork, interviewees’ answers, and other works of Mongolian hip-hop research. These characteristics make up Mongolian hip-hop’s rightfulness as a sub-culture that makes it distinctly Mongolian. However, the common perception that hip-hop is not Mongolian because it is part of a global, contemporary movement keeps hip-hop artists on the fringe of society, prompting them to lead “alternative” hip-hop lifestyles.

Hip-hop’s concentration in Ulaanbaatar.

Historically, hip-hop culture has thrived in cities because of its dense populations and quick spread of ideas and trends. In Mongolia today, hip-hop culture is concentrated in Ulaanbaatar because most Mongolian hip-hop artists, the primary actors of hip-hop culture, live and work in Ulaanbaatar. Hip-hop artists around the globe seize the opportunity to learn breakdancing, DJ, rapping, or graffiti with the help of other individuals or through the Internet; these opportunities are rare, if present at all, in the Mongolian countryside. For example, graffiti is dependent upon public structures and space. In the countryside, homes are mobile, and herders do not necessarily interact with permanent buildings and walls on a daily basis. The extremity of these rural spaces has produced very few street artists in *aimag*

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(“province”) centers (SAS Coze and Dasher, November 5, 2015) because graffiti lacks an integral part of its nature: the public and permanent canvas.

Drawn from an already small population that regularly and actively consumes Mongolian hip-hop culture, an even smaller portion of Mongolia’s population chooses to actively create and making a living from hip-hop art through the hip-hop lifestyle. These artists are most likely to stay in Ulaanbaatar where other hip-hop artists also live and work because they can easily attend and participate in live hip-hop events, collaborate with and learn from other artists, and find appropriate studios and spaces to work. Additionally, hip-hop lifestyles work against social systems by (often) producing little money, openly addressing real issues in Mongolia, and promoting global hip-hop values. Artists need the support of other artists and individuals who understand their work, most of whom live in Ulaanbaatar and have been exposed to, or also live within, hip-hop culture and its values.

Though, there are a few street artists who live and work in the second and third most populous Mongolian cities, Erdenet and Darkhan. According to MRCK, these artists occasionally come to Ulaanbaatar to learn graffiti techniques, and then they return to their home to paint locally (MRCK, personal communication, November 14, 2015). Onyx Crew, a competitive Mongolian b-boy group based in Erdenet, traveled to Ulaanbaatar to dance in the Challenge Jam, an international b-boy competition. Two of their members, in addition to six members from Ulaanbaatar’s Hooliganz Crew, were selected to travel to Taiwan, representing Mongolia in a b-boy battle between Taiwan, Japan, and Mongolia. Both Erdenet and Darkhan are within 350 kilometers, or about 220 miles, of Ulaanbaatar, so commuting to the capital city for events, competitions, and meetings is relatively easy and quick. For similar reasons, some b-boys are able to thrive in Baganuur, a small city outside of Ulaanbaatar (representative of Hooliganz Crew, personal communication, November 14, 2015).

Some hip-hop artists from Ulaanbaatar also travel to other cities and *aimag* to create opportunities for other Mongolians to experience hip-hop culture. However, this movement is typically a conscious effort that matters to some artists more than others, and it mimics international hip-hop artists’ coming to Ulaanbaatar and teaching Mongolians about graffiti, DJ, rapping, or dance techniques. For example, earlier this year, Temuk and other Aim4R Production members set up hip-hop dance competitions and workshops in Erdenet, Darkhan, and Dornod *aimag* (Temuk,

personal communication, November 14, 2015). A group of seven graffiti artists, on the other hand, traveled to Erdenet to spend one week painting on a large, white wall (SAS Coze and Dasher, personal communication, November 5, 2015). Because of hip-hop's relative newness in Mongolia, many Mongolians are still unaware of hip-hop—especially b-boy, graffiti, and DJ—as exhibited by the many faces of all ages, shyly watching the Challenge Jam competitors at Hunnu Mall (November 22, 2015).

Technology's essentialness to the influence of hip-hop culture.

The Internet and general technology are crucial to hip-hop culture because they improve both the quality of art produced and the quantity of art consumed, better demonstrating the values of hip-hop culture. Internet access increases Mongolians' likelihood of understanding, or even being exposed to, hip-hop culture and its four art forms. Simply, "artists can be anywhere [that] there is Internet" (MRCK, personal communication, November 14, 2015). Social media sites are particularly useful platforms in assisting artists to reach a wide audience because site users are able to access any number of artists' music from any device in the world. These sites also give users an insight into the hip-hop lifestyle, and users may even be able to communicate directly with artists, praising their work, asking for clarification on song lyrics, or suggesting a meeting to collaborate on a piece (Gennie, personal communication, November 9, 2015). Mongolian dancers can also learn from and be inspired by foreign dancers that they see on YouTube, both validating hip-hop dance as a legitimate Mongolian lifestyle and improving Mongolian dancers' skills (Munkhjin, personal communication, November 13, 2015). For example, three of K's favorite dancers include Pat Cruz, Anthony Lee, and Mike Song, all of whom are not from Mongolia and primarily identify as urban dancers. After being exposed to many kinds of dancers from many places around the world via the Internet, K has particularly come to like Asian dancers and is the most inspired by their styles, perhaps because he can best picture himself experimenting with their movements (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015). The Internet has been particularly crucial in bringing other kinds of hip-hop dance to Mongolia; it is no coincidence that rap dance died out around the time that many Ulaanbaatar dwellers gained consistent Internet access.

Social media sites, like YouTube and Facebook, have also made competition among artists fairer in recent years. When the television and radio industries monopolized Mongolian music, for example, rappers had to bribe the station to hear

their music played on air. Thus, wealthy and commercial artists benefitted from minimal competition and dominated the music industry (Tsetse, personal communication, November 18, 2015). Today's fairer competition from the Internet has helped to promote less commercial, more authentic rap among hip-hop listeners, and it has helped underground and lesser-known artists establish themselves as public figures without relying on a producer or music label. Social media facilitates artists' opportunities to individually represent themselves while creating music that is "real" to them, rather than being forced to produce music that will successfully sell to a diverse audience.

Improvements in technology have made, or will make, significant changes for, particularly, graffiti artists and rappers in Mongolia. Rappers often rely on a friend who has a studio in Ulaanbaatar to record their music (Gennie, personal communication, November 9, 2015) because most rappers lack the funds to buy and create a high-quality studio. Also, Mongolian youth have begun to demand better local music quality, forcing Mongolian hip-hop artists to compete with Western technologies and recording standards in an effort to appeal to young listeners (Mekh ZakhQ, personal communication, November 11, 2015). Among graffiti and street artists, there is general dissatisfaction from SAS Coze, Dasher, and MRCK concerning the quality of spray paint, which primarily comes from China (MRCK, personal communication, November 14, 2015). Perhaps street artists would produce better quality work that could compete internationally, if they had better quality paint? (SAS Coze and Dasher, personal communication, November 5, 2015) I also hypothesize that technology also significantly impacts DJs, who rely on computers and turntables to make music.

The dominant male perspective in Mongolian hip-hop.

The overwhelming majority of Mongolian hip-hop artists are male, who, in their work depict life and critique society through their experiences as men. However, this dominant male lens is indicative of Mongolia's social expectations and norms that has pushed many female artists out of the hip-hop lifestyle. The Mongolian hip-hop lifestyle is a self-focused, competitive way of living that is grounded upon the motto for hip-hop—"peace, love, unity, and having fun" (representative of Hooliganz Crew, personal communication, November 14, 2015)—and a commitment to producing one of hip-hop's art forms. Most hip-hop artists, like Mekh ZakhQ, generate little money from their work, but they continue working in hip-hop to build

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their reputations within the Mongolian, and global, hip-hop community (Mekh ZakhQ, personal communication, November 11, 2015). Because hip-hop artists are able to sing about anything, many male hip-hop artists depict or advise girls and women in their work (Gennie, personal communication, November 9, 2015), namely male rappers who sing about “bitches” (Mekh ZakhQ, personal communication, November 7, 2015) and who dictate how girls should behave. Women are frequent topics of rap songs and subjects of street art, like a sexual song called “The Midnight Remix” (2015) that utilizes women as symbols of men’s reputations, proof of men’s sexual dominance, and weapons to attack male enemies. Figure 7 features an excerpt from “The Midnight Remix.”

Chinii gichii zugeer l zag huiten teegch
Gichii narig khavirna bi bol seks Sumiyaabazar
Gichii zalgakhal khurdan irdeg Mr. Pizza
Amjikhgui nizdakuud baitsaa alaa doloo
Minii YOLO gichii nas arvan doloo
Chinii gichii kharaltsan sampirtsan yag l minii uushgi
Khii khooson ugtei zolbin khyamdkhan khairin duu shig
Minii bucgui burkhni khamgiin saikhan zurag shig
Chinii gichii yag l tamkhini khairtsagan deerkh zurag shig

Figure 7. An excerpt of “The Midnight Remix,” section sung by Lil Thug-E. Translation by Myadгаа.

Your bitch is just a carrier of gonorrhoea
I will conquer bitches I am a sex Sumiyaabazar [Mongolian politician and former wrestler]
Bitches come so quickly like a Mr. Pizza delivery
Unsuccessful bitches lick their own pussy
My YOLO bitch is 17 years old
Your bitch is blackened, worsened like my lungs
Like vain, stray, cheap love songs
My woman is like the best god has ever painted
Your bitch is just like the pictures on cigarette packs

While it is important to note that anyone can pursue the hip-hop lifestyle in Mongolia, women must make the active and difficult choice to pursue hip-hop or a “normal” (Gennie, personal communication, November 9, 2015) life. Familial and societal pressures shape Mongolian women as family-focused and selfless, qualities that work against the nature of the hip-hop lifestyle. Conversely, the quantity of Mongolian male hip-hop artists reflects Mongolian societal expectations for men to be independent, aggressive, and vocal, all of which are common hip-hop artists’ behaviors around the world. Compared to other countries, Mongolians exercise significant legal and social freedom, and Mongolians typically act as they wish, rarely minding others’ actions. There are no legal requirements that, for example, force girls

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to quit rapping to pursue higher education or marriage; though, many girls do this anyways after one to two years of rapping (Gennie, personal communication, November 9, 2015).

Perhaps the creative hip-hop field with the most female participants is hip-hop dance. There is one female Mongolian hip-hop dance crew called Kronos that are known for an aggressive style and for embodying young “female ninjas” (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015). After beginning about two years ago, Kronos now has nearly 3,000 likes on Facebook and continues to compete and perform. Other prestigious hip-hop dance crews, including Ninjas in Black and Assassins, include young female dancers. Both Hooliganz Crew and Onyx Crew, two of the most competitive Mongolian b-boy groups, do not have any b-girl members. However, Hooliganz Crew has several female students who are learning how to b-girl alongside the Crew, and during the final battle of the Challenge Jam, Hooliganz Crew members put one of their b-girl pupils forward to battle against Onyx Crew. Though she was only a beginner, she was wildly supported by the Hooliganz and received many of the judges and audience members’ smiles. The Crew’s utilization and pride of her skills made her appear as a sign of the Crew’s prestige and distinction, beating the opposing Onyx Crew in exceptionalism (Challenge Jam, November 22, 2015).

Though there are many young female hip-hop dancers, there are no female hip-hop dancers that led the spread of hip-hop to Mongolia or who own the most prestigious hip-hop dance studios. For example, there are five key Aim4R Production members, all of whom are male. The particularly famous Aim4R Production founder, Tuugu, is known as one of the first Mongolians to identify as a professional hip-hop dancer and to legitimize the existence of hip-hop dance in Mongolia (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015). However, his assertion also made his urban dance style and person, including his gender, the hip-hop dance norm in Mongolia. As K says, Aim4R Production is sparking a revolution that is going to significantly change Mongolian hip-hop culture (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015). In the future, young female hip-hop dancers will have to break the male norm in order to become highly successful, famous hip-hop dancers.

The reverence of live events and collaboration.

Many Mongolian hip-hop artists deeply admire and respect the value of hip-hop events, including competitions and festivals, particularly on an international platform. After seeing many hip-hop dance competitions in Korea, Temuk encourages

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dance, including competition, as an avenue for Mongolians to share their exceptional version of hip-hop with the rest of the world (Temuk, personal communication, November 14, 2015). Other dancers, like a representative of Hooliganz Crew, view dance competitions and events as opportunities to educate and inspire a larger Mongolian audience about hip-hop culture and its values. This representative also respects competition because it prompts dancers to continue improving their skills and training regularly (representative of Hooliganz Crew, personal communication, November 14, 2015). International competitions are especially beneficial to Mongolian hip-hop artists because they are able to connect personally with other hip-hop artists from around the globe and learn new styles, techniques, and hip-hop ideas. Upon returning to Mongolia, artists bring a new perspective and different aspects of global hip-hop culture to the country, improving Mongolian hip-hop culture by deepening its social impact and presenting new, creative ideas (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015).

In hosting international competitions and festivals in Ulaanbaatar, hip-hop artists also come from around the world to practice their work here, increasing both the quantity and, perhaps, quality of hip-hop art in Mongolia for a brief period of time. For example, one particular street art festival brought artists from France to Mongolia where they painted in a tunnel, at children's parks, and generally throughout Ulaanbaatar (MRCK, personal communication, November 14, 2015). It was a rare opportunity for Mongolian graffiti artists, who lack an official organization, to collaborate and learn from one another while working alongside international artists (SAS Coze and Dasher, personal communication, November 5, 2015). Many graffiti artists also come together once a year to paint with Heesco, a Mongolian living in Melbourne, Australia; at that time last year, MRCK painted his name and a skull on *Narnii Zam* (MRCK, personal communication, November 14, 2015).

While artists can now find international hip-hop artists' work easily online, there are still certain benefits to holding competitions and gatherings in Mongolia and attending international competitions. Young artists particularly benefit, as they are given an opportunity to perform and receive feedback and attention from more established hip-hop artists. Desant and his crew, Backyard, are holding a competition this year called "Backstage" that he claims is the first-ever rap competition in Mongolia. It will air on television, and viewers will text in their final votes of who

they believe is the best young rapper. Though there will only be one winner, Desant and Backyard are holding “Backstage” to bring the third and most current generation of rappers to the public’s attention (Desant, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

Gennie is known for collaborating with anyone and everyone, both inside and outside of hip-hop culture, and though she primarily wants to “learn from inside [of herself]” (Gennie, personal communication, November 9, 2015), she agrees to rap with many other artists because she is inspired and learns new styles of music from other artists. As one of the only female Mongolian rappers, Gennie has been selected to perform in Hos Ayas, a Mongolian-French hip-hop festival, in France, was prominently featured in “Mongolian Bling” (Ghazarian & Binks, 2012), a documentary about Mongolian rap and music, and contacted by an American rock guitarist who invited Gennie to the U.S. to collaborate and record music. In working with the American guitarist, Gennie learned how to rap with live instruments because in Mongolia, she typically only performs with an mp3 file of a pre-recorded instrumental. This could be a particularly useful skill for her if she performs in a live concert, or performs with live instruments in a collaborative project again (Gennie, personal communication, November 9, 2015).

Mongolian hip-hop’s young audience and cultural consumers.

Mongolian hip-hop culture primarily appeals to young people because hip-hop promotes the exploration of coming-of-age issues, like identity and love. Young people are also drawn to the illicit nature of hip-hop culture, which is accentuated when elder members of their family are skeptical of the benefits of hip-hop. Over 60% of Mongolians are younger than 30 years old (Marsh, 2010), which also makes youth a significant consumer population in Mongolia. Hip-hop artists, like the graffiti artist whose work is in Figure 8, learn how to appeal to a young audience and are typically young themselves. Generally, my interviewees are also extremely conscientious of the effects of hip-hop on youth and are very concerned with future generations of Mongolians.



Figure 8. An anonymous piece of graffiti featuring a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle character asking “really?” The character refers to a popular American kids’ series that likely only appeared in Mongolia after the Democratic Revolution.

Much like Japanese hip-hop culture, Mongolian “hip-hop is the defining style of [urban youth’s] era” (Condry, 2001, p. 373). Hip-hop expresses the whole truth to young people (Mekh ZakhQ, personal communication, November 7, 2015), who are eager to understand the world and make their own unique way through society. Additionally, today’s young Mongolians are some of the first Mongolians to grow up in a democratic, free society, and they want to explore the cultures and trends to which they have access. Hip-hop is a necessary sub-culture of democratic societies because it proves that citizens are exercising their free rights (Tsetse, personal communication, November 18, 2015). While young Mongolians’ parents and older family members watched the introduction and rise of hip-hop in Mongolia, young people are the first active participants and consumers of Mongolia hip-hop culture. In addition to learning hip-hop’s truth-telling style, Mongolian youth, like the hip-hop battle’s audience members shown in Figure 9, are keen to become part of the larger global trend of hip-hop culture. For some young people, knowledge of Mongolian hip-hop culture is a tool for helping Mongolians make international connections, learn new languages, and open their minds up to the world. Ultimately, Mongolian hip-hop artists represent and relate to young people, whose voices are largely ignored in a country—and world—managed by adults.



Figure 9. A glimpse of POPPINGxHIP HOP Vol. 1's extremely young audience. (November 15, 2015)

Hip-hop teaches young people to be proud of who they are, including where they come from, in Mongolia, and hip-hop artists believe that they show what is truly happening in Mongolian society (SAS Coze and Dasher, personal communication, November 5, 2015). It inherently prompts young people to question authority figures, like parents, who often dictate how youth should live. Hip-hop artists relentlessly preach freedom and individuality in their work, while they are also role models of the hip-hop lifestyle and hip-hop culture's values (representative of Hooliganz Crew, personal communication, November 14, 2015). For Munkhjin of FakeBSH Crew, dance frees his mind, "describes [him], and makes [him] happy" (Munkhjin of FakeBSH Crew, personal communication, November 13, 2015). Hip-hop artists exemplify hip-hop culture's values in their lifestyle, and they also maintain that hard work is critical in reaching one's dreams and goals. Through hard work, many artists, including Temuk, believe that the next generation of Mongolian hip-hop artists will make Mongolian hip-hop known throughout the world (Temuk, personal communication, November 14, 2015). Young Mongolians are attracted to this ambition and will want to be a part of hip-hop culture's movement (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015).

While hip-hop artists have many different opinions on the way that hip-hop affects young people, all of my interviewees believed that hip-hop mostly had a positive effect on Mongolian youth. All of my interviewees also felt a social obligation to empower and teach young Mongolians. A common belief among my interviewees was that foul language is necessary to rap because it must be shockingly truthful and explicit to comply with hip-hop's values. Parents especially dislike rappers' use of swear words. However, these "bad" words are reflective of hip-hop culture's values of truthfulness, freedom, and independence (Tsetse, personal

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communication, November 18, 2015). A powerful song called “Uu” (“Drink,” 2014) by Gee teaches his young listeners about the true plague of alcoholism in Mongolia and occasionally uses curse words to emphasize the urgency of his message. I selected an excerpt of “Uu” in Figure 10 below.

*Al gazrin yochooc, ailchlan ireed
Ard tumhiig min, aliv cukhur khemeev
Ardaas orj irev uu, al ecvel urdaas uu
Archaagui bolgokh kharaal idcen tsust uc uu*

*Arkhiar duurcen ayagaa, rashaan gej itguulj
Am khooloi davaad budiig n gazar khevtuulj
Avakh nesnee avaad, arkhi gedgee khayad yavcan
Ad chutguriin zan uilneec calakh yumsan*

*Ajil khiideggui arkhichin aavtai
Ailin khuukhdiin ireedui burkheg lavtai
Agsam sogtuu tavsan ar geriin zovlon tamtai
Adil bish gej uu, amdarya bugd tавtai*

Figure 10. An excerpt from “Uu” by Gee, one of Mongolia’s most famous rappers. Translation by Myadgaa.

From where this tradition came?
Telling my people to kneel down
From the south or the north?
It is this damned bloody water that makes Mongolians helpless

Made Mongolians believe that the glass filled with vodka is mineral water
After drinking make[s] everyone useless
[They] left only vodka after taking everything when they left
[We] would better get rid of this demonic behavior

With alcoholic dad who [doesn’t] work
Children’s future would be horrible definitely
Bad behavior from being drunk makes families suffer like a hell
Isn’t it the same? Let’s live peacefully everyone

The hip-hop lifestyle, including an artist’s words, behavior, and work, positively affect young Mongolians because it presents a strong “alternative” lifestyle that defies inherent social truths, like working a regular job or having children (Desant, personal communication, November 9, 2015). While Mongolian rap is particularly effective in illuminating issues and social problems, dance creates community and support networks that help young people cope with and combat these issues (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015). Others believe that hip-hop communities are “mostly about inspiration” (representative of Hooliganz Crew, personal communication, November 14, 2015) because a young person’s fellow

dancers, street artists, musicians keep them persistent in working toward their creative goals.

Communities within Mongolian hip-hop culture.

A Mongolian hip-hop community that includes all forms of hip-hop artists is largely unacknowledged and lacks formal organization. However, smaller Mongolian hip-hop communities are common through the formation of hip-hop crews and groups. These crews serve a variety of purposes, whether they are for young rappers, urban dancers, or well-established street artists. The number and types of crews are endless in Mongolia; they both provide support to their members and are often able to make a bigger impact than a single (especially, young) hip-hop artist in Mongolia. The positive effects of these small communities also prove to skeptics of Mongolian hip-hop that hip-hop is a positive, respectable sub-culture. Also, it is important to note that there is no equivalent translation to the word “community” in Mongolian, so interviewees likely interpreted my question about the existence of a Mongolian hip-hop community differently from one another.

Two notable Mongolian hip-hop dance organizations are Dream Big Studio, directed by Temuk, and Hooliganz Crew, one of the last remaining competitive b-boy groups in Ulaanbaatar. Onyx Crew is another b-boy crew from Erdenet that competes with Hooliganz Crew. Each of Mongolia’s 21 *aimag* (“province[s]”) has a hip-hop dance community of some sort, and in hip-hop culture, “everything has to go with dancing” (Temuk, personal communication, November 14, 2015). While it can be difficult to communicate with a wide Mongolian audience through only dance, one of the most powerful effects and messages of dance in Mongolia is the community that it creates among young Mongolians. This strong support system encourages young people in hip-hop dance to share what they know and love with the rest of the world and effectively aids in the deconstruction of elders’ mindsets, proving that hip-hop is in fact a valuable use of time and energy (Temuk, personal communication, November 14, 2015).

Besides crews and groups, there are also many collaborative projects both across hip-hop mediums and within hip-hop mediums. For example, hip-hop artists from all elements of hip-hop occasionally perform at live shows or in music videos. This is one way that artists get to know each other (representative of Hooliganz Crew, personal communication, November 14, 2015). However, some artists object to these collaborations because commercials and music videos can be too much work—on the

part of supporting artists—for too little credit (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015). Many tensions like this exist within Mongolian hip-hop culture, but there is general respect for one another among hip-hop artists, expediting the possibility of a stronger Mongolian hip-hop community in the future.

Mongolian Hip-Hop Culture’s Most Prevalent Commentaries

The following headings are Mongolian hip-hop artists’ most prevalent underlying messages, as portrayed through interviews and artwork. These statements make up Mongolian hip-hop culture’s core criticisms of greater Mongolian society because they emphasize ideas that are either non-existent or under-emphasized by those outside of hip-hop culture. While artists do not always explicitly articulate these commentaries inspired by hip-hop, they represent and promote these ideas by creating Mongolian hip-hop lifestyles grounded in these messages. This, in itself, is an act of defiance to Mongolian cultural norms and makes artists’ work inherently critical.

Authentic selves are the best selves.

Authenticity, otherwise known as “being real,” is founded in one’s attentiveness to “local realities” (Dondry, 2001, p. 386), including his or her own self. However, there is constant conflict among artists in the definition of “real” (Mekh ZakhQ, personal communication, November 11, 2015) because hip-hop culture emphasizes individuality and empowerment. Without any strict guidelines on the definition of authenticity, hip-hop culture gives artists the freedom to distinguish what and who is real, but pressure between Mongolian hip-hop artists forces fellow artists to grapple with authenticity in every aspect of their lives, deeply impacting the hip-hop lifestyle. Additionally, according to most of my interviewees, one of the best lessons that youth can learn from Mongolian hip-hop is to be themselves, implying that young Mongolians may not otherwise learn the value of this from popular culture or their families.

A common accusation from underground or less popular hip-hop artists is that another artist is “fake,” degrading the quality of another’s music and making him or her less credible hip-hop artists. Popular commercial artists are particularly branded as “fake” in Mongolian hip-hop culture, like the young and wildly popular Aim4R Production (SAS Coze and Dasher, personal communication, November 5, 2015). Hip-hop artists particularly admire the “real” perspective of those with a difficult background, like Gee who grew up in *ger khoroolol*. A common source of self-empowerment among Mongolian hip-hop artists, Desant told me that all rappers,

besides Click Click Boom and Backyard members, are “fake.” In short, “real hip-hop rappers are right here” (Desant, personal communication, November 9, 2015). Desant calls himself a “reallionaire,” a person who is extremely authentic and unafraid to speak the truth. He has faith that this quality is prevalent in his music and will eventually make him a millionaire (Desant, personal communication, November 9, 2015).

Money has a particularly complicated relationship with authenticity in hip-hop culture. Some artists pursue a hip-hop lifestyle that lacks wealth, like Gennie. She continues rapping simply because that is what she loves to do, even though she generates very little income from her work (personal communication, November 9, 2015). But perhaps this lower-income status also gives her a more “real” perspective of the poor majority of Mongolians? Others believe that artists need greater public support, financial and otherwise, in order to dedicate their lives to hip-hop. For example, a representative of Hooliganz Crew only wants to dance—and to dance until he dies—but can’t make enough money from shows and competitions. Rather, he believes that there generally needs to be more money in the culture (representative of Hooliganz Crew, personal communication, November 14, 2015). For many Mongolian hip-hop artists, especially rappers, the ideal hip-hop lifestyle compares to the American hip-hop lifestyle that includes partying and drinking, both of which require wealth.

Hip-hop artists feel a particular need to be authentic, and compete in “real”-ness with their fellow hip-hop artists, in order to promote and involve others in Mongolian hip-hop culture’s values. This competitive authenticity prompts hip-hop cultural consumers to imagine how authentic they are as individuals and how they define “real.” Ultimately, defining and understanding authenticity encourages people to question themselves and others, which Mongolian hip-hop culture and its critical, “real” artists celebrate.

Address what you know.

Hip-hop artists are known to rap, draw, dance, talk about anything and everything that they wish in truthful, heartfelt manners. After copying other forms of hip-hop to learn how to rap, paint graffiti, and breakdance, hip-hop artists in Mongolia began to develop their own uniquely Mongolian hip-hop styles with uniquely Mongolian topics. It is now popular among Mongolian hip-hop artists, especially rappers, to criticize political corruption and foreign investment in

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Mongolia, two very familiar and politically charged topics to Mongolians. Other artists prefer to focus on his or her self and work independently, as the self is the most familiar topic to artists. In working within their own knowledge, Mongolian hip-hop artists further differentiate and establish Mongolian hip-hop culture.

Over the last three years, Mongolian graffiti has come to look like its own special hip-hop art form (SAS Coze and Dasher, November 5, 2015), as street artists place special emphasis on drawing and painting works from their own minds. Mongolian street artists still admire other street artists from around the world, but rather than directly copying a foreign artist's work, they instead respect their art and draw inspiration from these artists (MRCK, November 14, 2015). Mongolian street artists' work now confronts more issues and incorporates Mongolian images, designs, and even calligraphy. For example, take note of how one street artist depicts his or her political perspective of modern Mongolia through the use of a native Mongolian animal, a two-humped camel, in Figure 11 below. Skyscrapers sprout out of its humps, while *ger* rest on the bottom of the humps and surround the cities. A truck full of gold drives out of the camel's center, revealing a rich mine inside of the camel's body. The camel's angry expression, spit, and backward-facing ears indicate defensiveness and agitation to the onlooker.



Figure 11. Street art found in a passageway to a courtyard on Peace Avenue, Ulaanbaatar.

One of the most individualistic, self-inspired forms of hip-hop art is breakdance. In a Mongolian b-boy battle, b-boys take turns dancing and flaunting

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their superior skills to their opponents and judges. B-boys' personalities and sources of inspiration are reflected through their countless variations of musical interpretations and their explosions into gravity-defying tricks in any given moment. Breakdance movements are free, dynamic, energetic, and carefree. But their seemingly impossible skills also indicate hours of individual, physically and mentally strenuous work. Opponents may copy a dancing b-boy's movement to prove that he, too, can do that trick or that their opponent's movements are predictable, a blow to the originality and creative credibility of their opponent. At the end of a battle's round, b-boys are rewarded for their physical fearlessness with hugs and smiles from their teammates and cheers from the audience. The closeness of the Mongolian b-boy community and hip-hop culture's motto (peace, love, unity, and having fun) shine through at the end of the battle, as opposing team members shake hands, hug, and congratulate one another (Challenge Jam, November 22, 2015). Other forms of hip-hop dance, like popping and urban dance, focus on choreography, detracting from the individuality of hip-hop culture. In urban dance especially, performances, classes, and competitions typically include multiple dancers showing the same choreography, likely choreographed by only one or two people. Choreographers can also manipulate formations to highlight themselves or one particular dancer, and dancers have limited freedom in fashion ("F*ck Up Some Commas | @Future | Tuugu Choreography," 2015). However, the individuality and creativity of the choreographer also shine through in this work, as Mongolian hip-hop dance has grown into its own original art form in the last two years (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015).

Rappers are no exception to Mongolian hip-hop's self-inspiring methods. A young rapper named Mekh ZakhQ, for example, grew up and rapped with Gee, one of Mongolia's most famous hip-hop artists. Mekh ZakhQ met Gee in 2006, but "misunderstandings" (Mekh ZakhQ, personal communication, November 11, 2015) between Mekh ZakhQ and Gee prompted Mekh ZakhQ to instead rap independently, allowing his own personality and humor to shape his music. Among many other topics, he likes to rap about new trends and communicate his emotions to his listeners. Similarly, Desant, who calls himself a "boss" (Desant, personal communication, November 9, 2015), raps about anything and everything, but his favorite song is "Uurtuu" ("For Myself") because at the time of writing, he deeply understood his feelings and expressed them sincerely. In this excerpt of "Uurtuu," Desant speaks to his true self like a much-needed friend, and though some lyrics (some of which are in

Figure 12) may not make sense to listeners, “Uurtuu” (2013) is an ode to Desant himself and does not have to be logical to outsiders.

*Khund khetsuu ueuuded nadtai chi en tentsuu
Hig egneend dairsan gevch urvagchid end tendgui
Medsen ch mededgui oldcon ch ix idedgui
Chi minii kham nadaas uur khund itgedgui
Gudamjind yanz yanzin nicakuud gants gants um
Toiruulan suukhad chi nadtai khamt khalzgancnig*

You are next to me in most difficult times
Fought with me [when] traitors were here and there
Don't take greedily even if money is earned easily
You are my buddy; I trust no one but you
On the street when folks drinking
You were there for me

Figure 12. An excerpt of
“Uurtuu” by Desant.
Translation by Myadгаа.

Another rapper, Gennie, often chooses to rap about women and how she perceives true life” (Gennie, personal communication, November 9, 2015). She follows only her own image and feels no need to learn hip-hop history or culture as an artist. In the past, she frequently rapped about Mongolia’s biggest problems, such as political and governmental issues. But now, when she raps about bad or negative topics, then she believes she brings about more negative things. Thus, in rapping about positive subjects, she dwells on the good things in her life instead, bringing about more positive things in Gennie’s hip-hop lifestyle.

Hip-hop will earn Mongolia its rightful international recognition.

Many Mongolian hip-hop artists are hopeful of the “bright” (Munkhjin, personal communication, November 13, 2015) future of hip-hop in Mongolia. Nationalist and personal pride fuels these artists to continue working to perfect their work, eventually making Mongolian hip-hop artists competitive and well known all over the world. Several artists, like 28-year-old K, believe that today’s generation of young, teenage Mongolians will achieve this: “they will grow, [and] they will take the crown [of Mongolian hip-hop dance] and make it bigger” (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015). Desant also has faith in the youngest, third generation of rappers in Mongolia who will rap in English, making Mongolian rap more accessible to international audiences (Desant, personal communication, November 10, 2015). Other artists even assert that Mongolia will be internationally known by its hip-hop culture because hip-hop artists will travel abroad and educate foreign audiences through their work (representative of Hooliganz Crew, personal

communication, November 14, 2015), much like graffiti artists who leave their painted name in foreign spots for all the world to find (SAS Coze and Dasher, personal communication, November 5, 2015).

A country of only three million people, Mongolian hip-hop artists understand that their work must be distinct and original, if it is to attract international attention and prestige. Desant estimates that there are only a few hundred thousand rap listeners in Mongolia (Desant, personal communication, November 10, 2015), and I estimate that there are even fewer Mongolians—perhaps only a few thousand, at the most—interested in hip-hop dance or street art. Further, even fewer are interested in pursuing hip-hop culture and creating a life devoted to hip-hop art, like Munkhjin of FakeBSH Crew. While he loves hip-hop dance and believes that hip-hop in Mongolia will continue growing, he also is unsure of how long he will dance. He has many other interests and is also a student (Munkhjin of FakeBSH Crew, personal communication, November 13, 2015), likely with a promising career in his future. Would he be willing to risk a secure livelihood for a hip-hop lifestyle?

In the (hopefully near) future, foreign validation of Mongolian hip-hop will challenge skeptics of Mongolian hip-hop culture, as skeptics will grow increasingly proud and understanding of the country's hip-hop culture. When hip-hop artists go abroad, they learn about both themselves and their work. Upon returning, they are better able to teach hip-hop through new kinds of events and projects, giving Mongolians a better understanding of hip-hop culture and earning them greater respect in Mongolia (Temuk, personal communication, November 14, 2015). Skepticism of Mongolian hip-hop will be eradicated largely when skeptics understand and learn more about hip-hop culture, particularly as it relates to Mongolians' identities and experiences. As the number and force of skeptics dwindle, Mongolian hip-hop will be accepted as truly Mongolian and will, furthermore, include hip-hop artists as a valid part of the Mongolian identity.

Respect is the foundation of success.

One Mongolian traditional value is respect for one's elders; hip-hop preserves this tradition by not only requiring respect of elders, but also prompting the respect of other artists. This respect facilitates artists' growth and enables artists to learn from one another, causing them to grow in popularity, wealth, or reputation. One of the most powerful examples of respect in Mongolian hip-hop is demonstrated through traditional background rappers at hip-hop shows, who sing with more established

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rappers not for aesthetic purposes, but rather to show respect on stage (Desant, personal communication, November 10, 2015). These rap shows can also include other elements of hip-hop culture, such as breakdancers and graffiti artists. Artists build connections through these events, encouraging future collaborations and strengthening friendships within the Mongolian hip-hop community. These friendships shine through in other events, like hip-hop dance competitions, and teachers pass the value of respect on to their students, as is evident through extremely tight-knit crews and studios (K, personal communication, November 13, 2015) (Desant, personal communication, November 9, 2015). Respect for other artists and their work can particularly benefit artists like Gennie, who has abundant “brothers and sisters” (Gennie, personal communication, November 9, 2015) in hip-hop culture. She also receives many requests from new artists or foreigners who admire and respect her work and want to make a collaborative piece with her.

However, respect from Mongolian hip-hop artists for those outside of hip-hop culture is more complicated. For example, “bitches” and “bad” girls are common subjects for rap songs; it is unclear if Mongolian rappers are predominantly simulating American hip-hop’s subjects, or if they actually view most women as “bad” or evil. As a female researcher, I must note that I felt no animosity or disrespect from any of my (male and female) interviewees, and though I was not always able to understand conversational subtleties due to the language barrier, I never believed that any of my interviewees had any ill intentions when interacting with me.

Additionally, “dissing,” a slang word for dis-respecting, is rare in Mongolian hip-hop culture. One of the biggest “disses” lasted about one year between two rappers. Their musical feud turned into a greater conflict between youth of *ger khoroolol* versus Ulaanbaatar’s downtown, and when one artist noticed kids “fighting and killing each other over [their neighbor]hood [origins]” (Tsetse, personal communication, November 18, 2015), he called a truce with his opponent. The artists’ respect for Mongolian youth prevailed over their lack of respect for one another and showed a fierce love and admiration for their young fans.

Conclusion

The prevalence and progression of hip-hop in Mongolia continues to astound me. In a single, average day in Ulaanbaatar, I can hear a taxi driver play Gee and Desant on his car stereo, find stunning street art inside of a local pub, watch a new dance video by Aim4R Production, and see dozens of Mongolians emulating hip-hop

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fashion on television. In this Project, the unique cultural and aesthetic traits of Mongolian hip-hop captured me and drew me into an under-researched aspect of life in Mongolia. Studying this inherently critical culture deepened my understanding of Mongolia because hip-hop artists have crafted a lens for recognizing both the best and worst qualities of their country. Whether they choose to focus on themselves, political problems, or social solutions in their work, hip-hop artists are speaking up—through dance, music, visual art—about what matters most to them. In devoting their thoughts, energy, and time to their work, Mongolian hip-hop artists create a dynamic and flexible hip-hop lifestyle that attracts many, especially young, people who find resonance in hip-hop’s values and messages. As the artists’ work grows in popularity and quality, hip-hop culture is proving to be a critical force that must be reckoned with in Mongolia. Brushing Mongolian hip-hop off as “foreign” and an invalid subculture is an increasingly difficult task for skeptics of Mongolian hip-hop, as artists travel, educate, perform, and work to spread Mongolian hip-hop throughout the country and the world, over.

However, there are many questions that remain at the end of my study. The most significant question is: do hip-hop DJs exist in Mongolia? If so, what is their role in Mongolian hip-hop culture? In articulating the history of Mongolian hip-hop, I found sufficient scholarly and popular media sources detailing the origins of rap in Mongolia. Though, there was no written information on the history of DJ, hip-hop dance, or graffiti in Mongolia. I instead had to rely on oral histories from my interviewees, who gave me only general dates, timelines, and origins of these creative forms of hip-hop. Most academic authors give very little attention to three of the four creative pillars of hip-hop—dance, DJ, and graffiti—in their analyses of hip-hop culture by focusing almost exclusively on rap in places like the U.S., Japan, Korea, and China. I chose to study three of the four pillars of Mongolian hip-hop to understand the culture aesthetically and culturally—as much as I could in one month. Similarly, in Mongolia there is a lack of sufficient research in the areas of Mongolian DJ, hip-hop dance, and graffiti, and I had a lack of time to deeply research and suss out the facts behind all of Mongolian hip-hop creative outlets. I encourage future Mongolian hip-hop researchers to include all creative avenues of hip-hop in their work and, if possible, to extensively study the origins of hip-hop dance, DJ, and graffiti in Mongolia. I look forward to seeing future academic work that seeks to

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understand Mongolian hip-hop culture, and to watching future generations of Mongolian hip-hop artists thrive.

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Retrieved from
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Appendix A

Below is an example of my interview questions. First, I asked questions to gather a brief background of the artist. Next, I asked about the artist's ideas, impressions, and opinions of Mongolian hip-hop culture. I also included a question about their prediction of the future of Mongolian hip-hop and, depending on the artist, asked them more about one of their particular songs, crews, experiences, etc. I frequently followed up my interview questions with further questions to thoroughly understand the artist's answer. The sample below is from my interview with a representative of Hooliganz Crew.

1. How long have you been dancing?
2. Why did you start dancing?
3. What kinds of music do you like to dance to? Where?
4. Who are other dancers that you admire?
5. Tell me about Mongolian hip-hop culture.
6. What issues do you and other hip-hop artists address?
7. How is Mongolian hip-hop different from other kinds of hip-hop?
8. What does the public think about hip-hop dancing?
9. How has hip-hop affected Mongolian youth?
10. Why is hip-hop important in Mongolia?
11. Is there a Mongolian hip-hop dance community?
12. Is there hip-hop dance in other Mongolian cities? *Aimag*?
13. What are the main studios and crews for hip-hop dance in Ulaanbaatar?
14. What kinds of hip-hop dance events happen in Ulaanbaatar?
15. Are hip-hop dancers connected with rappers and graffiti artists?
16. Tell me about Hooliganz Crew (if not already answered).
17. What will be the future of Mongolian hip-hop dance?
18. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

Appendix B



Wearing an "I LOVE HATERS" shirt, Desant is pictured here with three of his "homies" on November 10, 2015.

