문학석사 학위논문

What is the Asian Cool in Hip−hop?
— Focusing on Rich Brian's "Dat Stick",
Higher Brothers' "Made in China", and
Keith Ape's "IT G MA"

힙합에서 '아시안 쿨'은 무엇인가?
—리치 브라이언의 "Dat Stick", 하이어 브라더스의
"Made in China", 키스 에이프의 "IT G MA"를
중심으로

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협동과정 비교문학전공
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Abstract

What is the Asian Cool in Hip-hop?
— Focusing on Rich Brian's "Dat Stick", Higher Brothers' "Made in China", and Keith Ape's "IT G MA"

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This thesis explores the essence and cultural connotations of "Asian cool" represented and promoted by the Asian cultural community 88rising which appeared in Western mainstream pop culture over the past five years. It tries to answer the following questions: what is "cool" in Asian cool? And, what is "Asian" in Asian cool?

The concept of coolness is complex and changeable. Considering the attributes of the research subject, this study focuses on the concept of what is "cool" in the field of popular culture, focusing on the close relationship between cool and rebellion represented in popular culture. Through the analysis of the rebellious message as well as the reappearance of the local specificities and three "cool" per-sonality traits in the respective works that 88rising represents—namely, Rich Brian's "Dat Stick", Keith Ape's "IT G MA", and Higher Brothers' "Made in China" —I offer the following hypoth-esis: By sharing Asianness and utilizing hip-hop, an extended and vibrant culture that carries modern coolness, 88rising tries to ex-press both an internal resistance to Asian stereotypes as well as the desire to establish new forms of Asian representation. In this case, 88rising is a vehicle for Pan-Asian unity, while Asian cool in hip-hop represents a powerful cultural movement initiated by the "cool

new Asian" ideal of 88rising, which aims to help Asians and Asian Americans rebuild their representation and identity in the Western popular culture landscape.

However, it is the pan-Asian nature of this cultural movement that on the other hand also makes Asian cool offer an "oversimplified definition of Asia". In other words, there is the potential for Asian cool to be a powerful cultural movement based on a radical, pan-Asian unity, but that potential cannot be realized if one looks at Asian culture from a homogenous perspective and dilutes it into neatly-packaged, marketable Asianness.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Representation. A word that is commonly used in the current media industry, but what does it mean? "Representation" refers to how someone is portrayed and described in the media; this links to why people wish for more representation on screen. People want to see people who look like them on the screen because they want to be able to resonate with a character that resembles them, acts like them, and holds some of the same characteristics as them. Media consumption is a common experience in modern life and such media use can influence one's overall sense of who one is and where one fits in society—also known as identity.[1] Likewise, the content of media representation can also shape how society views certain racial groups. Consequently, messages from the media can affect both an individual's sense of self and how society interacts with members of the group in question.

However, as Mok has mentioned in her study, media portrayals of Asians often lack such depth and diversity.[2] First, there has been a historic trend in terms of the under-representation of minorities in U.S. media, especially in the case of Asian Americans.[3] Secondly, the image of Asian people and Asian culture in the media is always closely related to stereotypes. For instance, research has demonstrated that Asian women are typically depicted as helpless,

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[1] Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis* (No. 7). WW Norton & company.
[2] Mok, T. A. (1998). Getting the message: Media images and stereotypes and their effect on Asian Americans. Cultural Diversity & Mental Health, 4(3), 185–202.
[3] Qiu, J., & Muturi, N. (2016). Asian American Public Relations Practitioners' Perspectives on Diversity. *Howard Journal of Communications, 27*(3), 236–249.

dependent, servile, docile, and submissive, while Asian men are often portrayed as reserved, studious, and socially awkward.[4]

In the last five years, a new representation of Asia has emerged through 88rising. 88rising (stylized as 88⬆ or 88↑) is a multi-cultural collective with Asian identity founded by Sean Miyashiro.[5] Since its foundation in 2015, 88risng has gained popularity as a musical platform and label primarily for Asian and Asian American hip-hop artists who release music in the United States. The growing popularity of 88rising represents a crucial step toward Asian representation in mainstream hip-hop culture. 88rising's success story is just the start of Asian representation in Western pop culture, as it creates a foundation for aspiring Asian artists waiting to break through in the industry.

It is evident that in the founding process of 88rising, "Asian cool" appeared as an essential keyword. A *Rolling Stone* article on 88rising described Miyashiro's goal as "teasing out the cool in Asian culture and amplifying it, on a global scale, to its highest possible volume by utilizing hip-hop culture".[6] The *New Yorker* also continued to make such references,[7] demonstrating a favorable attitude to "Asian cool", a new cultural phenomenon that had rarely existed in the Western pop culture landscape before.

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[4] Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. Vintage.

[5] 88rising has multiple cultural identities. As a media production company, 88risng has promoted an ever-growing collective of Asian rappers and R&B singers—provides a newfound representation of a group that has long been rendered invisible in the Western pop culture landscape. Meanwhile, it also provides support for Asian artists who actives in America. Although most of the time, 88rising is regarded as a music label and media production company, but this paper treats it as a cultural community with an Asian identity.

[6] Amy X. Wang. (November 13, 2018). "America Isn't Ready for Asian Rappers. They're Taking Over Anyway". *Rolling Stone.*

[7] Hua Hsu. (March 19, 2018). "How 88rising Is Making a Place for Asians in Hip-Hop". *New Yorker.*

The notion of coolness or "cool" is always with us; but, despite being expressed so often, it goes unnoticed. Although commonly regarded as a slang term, it is widely used among disparate social groups and has endured in usage over generations. In modern society, everyone wants to be cool. As John Harris has argued, "in terms of its endurance and ubiquity, no pop-cultural word comes close to cool."[8] Because of the varied and changing connotations of coolness, as well as its subjective nature, the word has no single meaning. One consistent aspect of it, however, is that cool is widely seen as a desirable quality. The behavior, attitude, comportment, appearance, and style that people call cool are all generally admired and aspired to.

Asian have always been considered uncool in Western society. This is not only reflected in the image of Asians in the Western media, but also affects the identity of Asians, especially Asian Americans. Matthew Allen has analyzed in his study the answer to the question "how to be cool and Asian?" posed on the *WikiHow* website,[9] arguing that "the desire to be 'cool' clearly identifies [that] the authors' perceptions that Asians simply aren't cool. They need help in achieving coolness, and once they have achieved this coolness, they can make friends, and indeed 'get a life'."[10] Similar to this case, Miyashiro's assistant, a twenty-three-year-old from Queens named Cynthia Guo, once said in an interview, "I think, growing up, I was always made to feel that Asian culture wasn't cool... There was no one brand I could pinpoint as this really cool Asian thing until 88rising."[11]

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[8] John Harris. (May 16, 2017). "Why Cool is still hot-How a 1920s jazz age term became and remains a global phenomenon". *Prospect magazine.*
[9] http://www.wikihow.com/Be-Cool-and-Asian This website is designed and built by a small team of Asian American teenagers, and is published under the '*WikiHow*' label. Its focus is on providing a guide in "how to be cool and Asian".
[10] Allen, Matthew (2012) *'Cool' Asia – really? Cultural relativism and the cool/uncool divide in studying Asia.* In: Cool New Asia: Asian popular culture in a local context. 1-14.
[11] Hua Hsu. (March 19, 2018), "How 88rising".

Through hip-hop—an artistic genre that represents modern Black coolness—88rising artists have established an "Asian cool" which has become widely recognized in the West. Therefore, the cultural connotations of Asian cool should encompass the collision between Eastern and Western races and cultures respectively. For this reason, I believe that it is necessary to conduct an academic discussion on the essence and cultural connotations of Asian cool in hip-hop.

The purpose of this thesis is hence to explore the essence and cultural connotations of "Asian cool" as represented by 88rising that has appeared in Western mainstream pop culture over the past five years. It then tries to answer the following questions: what is "cool" in Asian cool? And what is "Asian" in Asian cool?

1.2. Constitution of the thesis

To achieve the stated research purpose, I have divided my thesis into five chapters. The literature review comprises an examination of studies using Asian cool as the key term for understanding the specific references to Asian cool in previous studies. Through presenting its summary of previous studies, the present study makes clear the contents it will cover and confirms its own significance. In the third chapter, I will focus on establishing a theoretical background for the term "cool". Thereafter, I pose the questions to be addressed by this thesis, select the research materials necessary for doing so, and give the reasons for selecting the latter. Meanwhile, the methods of the thesis are also expounded upon. Chapter 4 is the core of the argument of this paper. I will display how "Asian cool" is applied in selected works and will answer the questions raised above. In Chapter 5, I summarize the research process and research conclusions. Later, I elaborate on what the present study brings to light in terms of its conclusions, and also propose potential future research topics in this field of research.

Chapter 2. Literature review

2.1. Studies on "Asian cool"

Cool is an (American) English word that has been integrated into the vocabulary of numerous languages around the globe. In *Coolhunting With Aristotle: Welcome to the hunt,* Southgate writes, "sought by product marketing firms, idealized by teenagers, a shield against racial oppression or political persecution and source of constant cultural innovation, cool has become a global phenomenon that has spread to every corner of the earth." [12] "Asian cool" is not only a historical development of coolness, but also confirms the applicability of it within the context of transnational culture. Generally speaking, studies with "Asian cool" as their keyword can be divided into two categories: first, those which explore traditional Asian aesthetics similar to coolness, and second, those which regard it as a "national branding strategy" which was developed to improve the cultural competitiveness of the country in question.

Research shows that there are traditional aesthetic ideals similar to the concept of coolness that have been developed in Asian cultures. Giannoulis discusses the concept of *iki* (いき), an urban aesthetic ideal as well as a lifestyle or a behavioral code, as a historical variation of *coolness*.[13] As a counter-cultural behavioral strategy of the increasingly prosperous merchant class (in distinction to the ruling samurai class) in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Japanese cities, *iki* must be understood as a form of emotional management that leads to a specific mode of communication and provides a ritualized answer to imbalances of power based on social differences.

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[12] Southgate, N. (2003). Coolhunting with Aristotle. *International Journal of Market Research*, *45*(2), 1−21.
[13] Giannoulis, E. (2013). Iki: A Japanese Concept of Coolness?. *The Cultural Career of Coolness: Discourses and Practices of Affect Control in European Antiquity, the United States, and Japan*, 215−236.

Furthermore, Hijiya−Kirschnereit argues that the "samurai narra−tive" is a modern Japanese form of coolness that reacts to the impact of the Western world on Japan in the late nineteenth century.[14] She demonstrates how the notion of coolness can also be employed in analyses of modern Japanese literature, which typically negotiate an awareness of emotional manipulation and of the performativity of rules of conduct. Finally, she points out the extent to which notions of coolness are shaped by growing transcultural entanglements.

In addition, several studies regard Asian cool as a "national branding strategy", with the research thereon carried out on a country−spe−cific basis. The related research on "Japan coolness" accounts for a large proportion of this category. The Japanese government em−barked on the "Cool Japan" Initiative in 2004 as a pop culture−centered public diplomacy device, utilizing anime, manga, Hello Kitty, and the Japan Creative Centre (inaugurated in Singapore in Novem−ber 2009).[15] In an attempt to take advantage of the worldwide pop−ularity of Japanese pop culture products (i.e., Pokemon and Hello Kitty), the Cool Japan Initiative aims to become an engine for Ja−pan's economic growth by aggressively marketing unique Japanese (pop) cultural goods and services on a worldwide scale. When we look at what has been written on Cool Japan so far, there is a con−sensus among scholars that Japan's interest in using its media cul−ture as a means of nation−branding started in the early 2000s. Scholars have analyzed this strategy from various perspectives.

The contemporary Japanese notion of "cool" has been pursued by Raz, who discusses it in conjunction with "cute (kawaii, かわいい)

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[14] Hijiya−Kirschnereit, I. (2013). Is Japan cool?. *The Cultural Career of Coolness: Discourses and Practices of Affect Control in European Antiq−uity, the United States, and Japan*, 155−179.
[15] Nakamura, T. (2013). Japan's new public diplomacy: Coolness in for−eign policy objectives. *Media and Society*, *5*(1), 1−23.

Japan" as the dominant trope by which Japan markets itself in a global consumerist world.[16] In conclusion, Raz explores the question as to whether a common denominator of the various facets of Japanese coolness can be seen in a cultural emphasis on external appearances—and hence on the marketing of self or nation, rather than on interiority and national character.

In "Repackaging national identity: Cool Japan and the resilience of Japanese identity narratives",[17] Tamaki argues that "Cool Japan's lack of definition means that [...] identity construction defaults to the familiar dual Otherness involving Japan that is neither Western nor Asian, and hence a unique entity." Moreover, Tamaki writes that "the ready recourse to the familiar national identity narratives suggests that the promotion of Japan's brand is effectively another iteration in the re-articulation of the so-called myth of Japanese uniqueness." In short, the essence of Cool Japan is "a twenty-first-century rendition of the myth of Japanese uniqueness."

Given that "Cool Japan" is a "brand" representing Japan's soft power, it is also interesting to note that a number of scholars have observed remarkable similarities between Korean and Chinese soft power strategies, in that both nations utilize a "charm offensive" centering on "being cool".

Hong's *The Birth of Korean Cool* (2014) offers an in-depth understanding of the concerted effort made by Korea to consciously increase its widespread cultural influence by exporting Korean culture

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[16] Raz, A. E. (2013). Marketing National Self Appearances: Cool and Cute in J-Culture. *The Cultural Career of Coolness: Discourses and Practices of Affect Control in European Antiquity, the United States, and Japan, edited by Ulla Haselstein, Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit, Catrin Gersdorf and Elena Giannoulis*, 251-9.

[17] Tamaki, T. (2019). Repackaging national identity: Cool Japan and the resilience of Japanese identity narratives. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, *27*(1), 108-126.

as a brand.[18] Hong recounts how South Korea vaulted itself into the twenty-first century, becoming a global leader in business, technology, education, and pop culture—in other words, how a really "uncool" country became "cool". She specifically focuses on the *Hallyu (Korean wave)* as the secret of Korea's global success.

By the same token, China has already built 541 Confucius Institutes (孔子學院) around the globe as of 2020, all of which are funded and arranged in part by Hanban (漢辦), which is itself affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education. The stated aim of the program is to promote Chinese language and culture, support local Chinese teaching internationally, and facilitate cultural exchanges.[19] It is worth mentioning that in the operation and development of the Confucius Institutes, "traditional Chinese culture" is not the only theme, with "science fiction, rock music, realistic films, modern dance" and other activities that show the "cool aspect" of Chinese modern culture also comprising an important part of the course.[20]

2.2. Summary based on literature review

Through the above literature review, it is evident that the research on Asian cool can be roughly divided into two categories. First, many researchers have tried to find a similar aesthetic or idea of "coolness" within the context of Asian culture. Take as examples samurai narratives and the concept of *iki*. Second, other researchers meanwhile regard it as a "national branding strategy" and carry out studies on the basis of country. "Japan cool" accounts for a large proportion of this category because Japan proposed and actively implemented it as a national strategy in 2004. The same strategy is being used in other Asian countries, such as South Korea and China,

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[18] Hong, E. (2014). *The birth of Korean cool: How one nation is conquering the world through pop culture*. Picador.
[19] *Confucius Institutes* Website: http://english.hanban.org/node_7586.htm
[20] "從傳統到現代，孔子學院這樣推廣中國文化". http://gjy.lnnu.edu.cn/index.php/index/detail/id/952. Last modified Oct 25, 2018.

in which soft power strategies seek to utilize "charm offensives" that center on "being cool". In short, "Asian cool" is not only a historical development of coolness, but also confirms the applicability of it within the context of transnational culture.

However, this thesis' review of the research on Asian cool shows that there are still gaps to be filled. For example, the research on Asian cool shows a monotonousness, especially in the category of the present study—the field of popular culture—in that research on Asian cool is rarely involved. Secondly, when existing research takes coolness as the theoretical basis and applies it to the interpretation of Asian culture, there is also a lack of a clear definition of the word "coolness".

As mentioned above, the absence and marginalization of Asian representation has long been a common phenomenon within the Western context. Asian artists from all walks of life have made many attempts to break through this barrier. In academia, much work over the past decade has addressed the internal flow, external expansion, and impact of Asian pop culture in the West. Scholars have shown considerable interest in deconstructing Asian popular culture from a textual perspective and placing it in the context of media and communication studies, literary theory, and cultural studies. Underwriting these studies is a subtext—namely, that "Asia is cool"—which serves as the basic foundation of the present study.

The purpose of this study is not to find out the origin of coolness in Asian culture, nor to explore the localization process of its concept in Asia; rather, it is to investigate the essence and cultural connotations of "Asian cool" within a transcultural context and from the perspective of comparative literature. Differing from previous studies when considering the attributes of the research object, the present study will first consider what is meant by the term coolness in the field of popular culture. Then, it seeks to establish whether an understanding of this concept can help how we read Asian cool within

the proposed context. In other words, once the concept of "coolness" in the field of popular culture is broadly defined, we can further consider how it can be applied to specific cultural objects and for the present study on "Asian cool".

By examining the essence and cultural connotations of Asian cool, this study can help Asian culture interact critically with Western culture within the context of globalization. Comparative literature is an academic field that deals with the study of literature and cultural expression across linguistic, national, geographic, and disciplinary boundaries. How East and West imagine each other has always been an important topic in the field of comparative literature. What's more, the representation of Asians in Western media discourse has always been one of the most important subjects in the imagology branch of comparative literature. This research innovatively takes 88rising as the research object, and regards it as an Asian cultural community, or a "new Asian representation" in the Western pop culture landscape. The exploration of Asian cool represented by 88rising is actually an investigation of the "new representation" of Asians in Western society. Such research is not only an investigation of the artistic practice of Asian artists in the West at this stage, but also a blueprint for future Asian artists to interact with Western culture in the context of globalization.

Chapter 3. Theory and methodology

3.1. Key concept of the study

3.1.1. Overall summary of research on "cool"

"Cool" is an aesthetic of attitude, behavior, comportment, appear－ance, and style which is generally admired. The Oxford English Dic－tionary offers the following definitions for the adjective "cool" [21]:
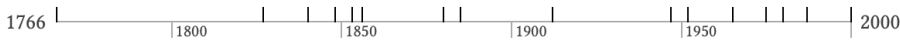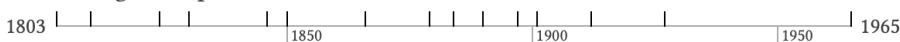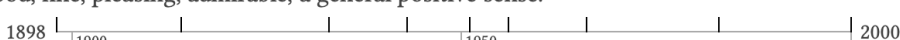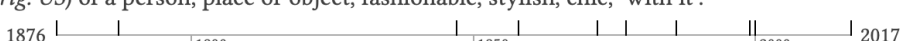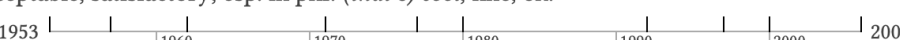
　・ of or at a fairly low temperature.
　・ showing no friendliness towards a person or enthusiasm for an idea or project.
　・ (*informal*) used to emphasize the size of an amount of money.
　・ approving: (*informal*) used to show that you admire or approve of somebody/something because they are/it is fashionable, attractive, and often different.
　・ (*informal*) used to describe something that you like or enjoy.
　・ (*informal*) used to show that you approve of something or agree to a suggestion.

Meanwhile, Jonathon Green, in his *Dictionary of Slang* describes its vernacular usages as follows:

　[ult. orig.] Eton College jargon cool fish, a cocky, self－possessed schoolboy, itself rooted in the older standard English meaning: dis－passionate, cold－blooded, later self－contained, calm; post－WWII use (initially US black) is usually associated with the cool jazz movement of the 1940s, especially Charlie Parker's record *Cool Blues* of 1947, but the available cits. show older usage in a number of senses, and as with a number of slang's (rare) abstract terms, it is less than simple to draw hard－and－fast lines between the senses, whether slang, colloquial or standard English.[22]

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[21] "Cool" in *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press. Edition 2020.
[22] "Cool" in *Green's Dictionary of Slang*. Digital edition 2020.

1. relaxed, calm, self-contained; often as imper., e.g. *be cool!*

1766 ———————————————————————————— 2000
　|1800　　　　|1850　　　　|1900　　　　|1950

2. insolent, arrogant, impudent.

1803 ———————————————————————————— 1965
　　　　|1850　　　　|1900　　　　|1950

3. (*orig. US*) of people, sophisticated, aware.

1895 ———————————————————————————— 2008
　|1900　　　　|1950　　　　　　　|2000

4. good, fine, pleasing, admirable, a general positive sense.

1898 ———————————————————————————— 2000
　|1900　　　　|1950

5. (*orig. US*) of a person, place or object, fashionable, stylish, chic, 'with it'.

1876 ———————————————————————————— 2017
　　　|1900　　　　|1950　　　　|2000

6. antonyms of ʜᴏᴛ *adj.*

  (a) (*drugs*) not carrying or owning drugs, or believing that one has hidden them well enough to defy any search of one's body or premises.

- 1952

  (b) (*US Und.*) not suspicious, either of people or objects.

1949 ———————————————————————————— 1960
　|1950　　　　　　|1955

  (c) (*US street gang*) not carrying weapons or acting aggressively.

- 1962

7. acceptable, satisfactory; esp. in phr. *(that's) cool*, fine, ok.

1953 ———————————————————————————— 2006
　|1960　　|1970　　|1980　　|1990　　|2000

8. comfortable, happy, on good terms.

1968 ———————————————————————————— 2017
　|1970　　|1980　　|1990　　|2000　　|2010

9. safe.

- 1978

10. trustworthy.

1972 ———————————————————————————— 1989
　|1975　　　|1980　　　|1985

Usage of "cool" during different periods in *Green's Dictionary of Slang.*

Although these various meanings accurately describe important as－pects of the term, at the same time they expose the elusiveness of its underlying essence. As the definition in the above dictionary shows, cool never has a constant concept. Although it is hard to

provide an accurate definition of coolness, there have been a few empirical studies thereof, which fall into a few broad categories.

First, coolness as a crucial component of the African American male character. In *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*, Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson examine coolness from an ethnic perspective, viewing it as a crucial component of the African American male character.[23] Majors and Mancini's study has revealed a correlation between coolness and African-American culture, even suggesting that the cool philosophy may have been at work in Africa as early as 3000–2000 BC. The authors argue persuasively that coolness was adapted and evolved by slave and ex-slave communities as a means of defending their pride and self-esteem in the face of continued racial discrimination and persecution.

Additionally, coolness is an age-specific phenomenon, defined as the central behavioral trait of teenagerhood. In *Cool – The Signs and Meanings of Adolescence* (1994), Marcel Danesi underlines:

> "the sum and substance of cool is self-conscious aplomb in overall behavior, which entails a set of specific behavioral characteristics that are firmly anchored in symbology, a set of discernible bodily movements, postures, facial expressions and voice modulations that are acquired and take on strategic social value within the peer context." [24]

For Danesi, coolness is a specific phenomenon of adolescence, and he attaches it exclusively to the semiotics of the teenage lifestyle and adolescent narcissism.

In *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style*, Peter Stearns argues that the concept is "distinctly American", and he seeks to place the subject within a broader historical

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[23] Majors, R., & Billson, J. M. (1993). *Cool pose: The dilemma of Black manhood in America*. Simon and Schuster.
[24] Danesi, M. (1994). *Cool: The signs and meanings of adolescence*. University of Toronto Press. 38.

context, seeing the rise of coolness as a gradual, century-long flight out of nineteenth-century sentimentalism.[25] Stearns uses the study of "emotional standards" during the Victorian era to introduce the causes and consequences of the emotional evolution in the American middle-class's emotional behavior. The main period that is focused on starts in the 1920s and ends in the postwar 1950s. Thus, it emphasizes the impact of the World Wars and the economic crises on cultural changes. Stearns mentions in his book that around 1920, people started to change towards a "cooler" way of expressing and feeling emotions, as well as to a more self-controlled time. The way people approach consumerism and their new relations to objects and private property is one of the main causes of emotional change. It is interesting to note that the word itself does not often appear in the book, because its ultimate purpose is to discuss the change of affect in the 20th century rather than to focus on coolness itself.

As a form of aesthetic appeal, coolness is an attitude widely adopted by artists and intellectuals, thus helping them to permeate into popular culture. In the book *Cool rules: anatomy of an attitude* (henceforth referred to as CR), Pountain and Robins trace coolness's ancient origins in European, Asian, and African cultures, examining its prominence in the African American jazz scene of the 1940s, and its pivotal position within the radical subcultures of the 1950s and 1960s by examining various art movements, music, cinema, and literature.[26] They argue that coolness began as a rebellious posture adopted by minorities that mutated to become mainstream itself. In the book, they propose a definition for coolness, which argues that "Cool is an oppositional attitude adopted by individuals or small groups to express defiance to authority—whether that of the parent, the teacher, the police, the boss, or the prison warden". And put more succinctly, they see coolness as "a permanent state of private rebellion." (CR,

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[25] Stearns, P. N. (1994). *American cool: Constructing a twentieth-century emotional style*. NYU Press.
[26] Pountain, D., & Robins, D. (2000). *Cool rules: Anatomy of an attitude*. Reaktion books.

19) The author also proposes three core personality traits of cool-ness, namely narcissism, ironic detachment, and hedonism.

Meanwhile, Joel Dinerstein's *The Origins of Cool in Postwar Amer-ica* (henceforth, OCPA) uncovers the hidden history of coolness and its new set of codes that came to define a global attitude and style.[27] It does so by tracing the history of the concept during the Cold War through exploring the intersections of jazz, film noir, existential lit-erature, method acting, blues, and rock and roll. As Dinerstein reveals in his book, coolness is a stylish defiance of racism, a challenge to suppressed sexuality, a philosophy of individual rebellion, and a youthful search for social change. He emphasizes that "cool has not faded, but its meanings have morphed with every generation. Its value remains intact since it is a crucial myth of the American self-concept". (OCPA, 411) Similarly, Southgate in *Coolhunting With Aristotle: Welcome to the hunt* writes: "sought by product marketing firms, idealized by teenagers, a shield against racial oppression or political persecution and source of constant cultural innovation, cool-ness has become a global phenomenon that has spread to every cor-ner of the earth." [28]

The scholars from the above research have made a detailed investi-gation into the concept of coolness from different fields. This itself shows that the concept of coolness can be widely applied in various fields such as ethnic studies, adolescent personality studies, emo-tional styles studies, and mass culture studies. It also indicates the attractiveness of coolness in transcultural and interdisciplinary fields. In this paper, Asian cool, as a keyword of the study, is analyzed in terms of the cultural practices of the Asian cultural community 88rising through the genre of hip-hop. Therefore, in order to un-derstand its cultural connotations more deeply, it is necessary to

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[27] Dinerstein, J. (2017). *The origins of cool in postwar America*. Univer-sity of Chicago Press.
[28] Southgate, N. (2003). Coolhunting with Aristotle. *International Journal of Market Research*, *45*(2), 1-21.

narrow the scope of the literature review to the concept of coolness within the field of popular culture.

According to the existing literature, it is possible to trace a "cool attitude" in the ancient civilizations of West Africa.[29] But "cool" in the full sense of the word, belongs squarely to the modern age and, in its many manifestations, has seized a central place in the American imagination. In terms of time, even though coolness's history can be traced back to West African culture, it didn't become a popular phenomenon until the two world wars. As Dick Pountain and David Robins note in *Cool rules: anatomy of an attitude,*

> "the First World War marked a watershed in the development of the Western psyche that prepared it for the coming of Cool, and sowed ironic seeds throughout the whole society that would only blossom after the Second World War, to contribute to 'Cool' as we now know it." (CR, 55-56)

Coolness is by no means solely an American phenomenon. Still, it is certainly true that "cool in its present form has roots in pre-war American black culture and is co-opted and disseminated by American popular culture". (CR, 23) That is to say: the emergence of cool ness and its early development are mainly linked with postwar American popular culture.

Therefore, in the following section, I will further summarize how coolness developed while relying on American popular culture, basing my analysis on *The origins of cool in postwar America* and *Cool rules:*

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[29] Art historian Robert Farris Thompson has traced attitudes similar to cool in the ancient civilizations of West Africa. In his studies *African Art in Motion* (1979) and *Flash of the Spirit* (1984), he suggests that the concept of *itutu*, which he translates as "cool", is a central concept in the animistic religions of the Yoruba and Igbo civilizations of West Africa, which built the ancient city-states of Ife-Ife and Benin. He states in *African Art in Motion* that the cool philosophy is a strong intellectual attitude, that affects incredibly diverse realms of artistic happenings, yet is leavened with humor and a sense of play. It is an all-important mediating process, accounting for similarities in art and vision in many tropical African societies. It is a matrix from which ideas about being generous stem.

anatomy of an attitude. By inspecting the above two books, I will conduct a vertical analysis of the manifestation of coolness in American popular culture after the 1940s. In addition to the representatives of coolness across various periods, the cultural connotations of the term will also be explored. Then, I will find a concept of coolness that can be applied to the present study on the basis of the above analysis.

3.1.2. Exploring cool in postwar American popular culture

1940s－1970s: from Jazz cool to Punk cool

In *The Origins of Cool in Postwar America*, Joel Dinerstein examines the development of coolness as both an individual characteristic and a larger cultural category of America in the mid－twentieth century. Dinerstein constructs a sophisticated examination of coolness as both process and product by analyzing a group of actors, musicians, and writers who developed new conceptions of coolness. Dinerstein wastes no time in the book. From the outset, he makes it clear that coolness is central to the making of American life after World War II; at the same time, he clearly explains the main content and purpose of the book, writing: "This is a theory of the origins and functions of the concept of cool in American culture as it manifested in the post–World War II arts of jazz, film, literature, and popular music". (OCPA, 7) He remaps this era (1943－1963) into two distinct phases, calling them Postwar I (1945–52) and Postwar II (1953–63) respectively. Dinerstein lays out a cohesive outline on how coolness started with jazz musician Lester Young and evolved to embody the vulnerable rebels portrayed by Marlon Brando and James Dean.

The late 1940s (Postwar I) was a makeshift period of recovery from war, social instability, and trauma. At the same time, Postwar II was a period of expansive middle－class prosperity and American triumphalism masking the underlying tensions of the Cold War. In the first

phase (1945–52), coolness represented dignity within limits and calm defiance against authority with little expectation of social change. By the late 1950s, during the Postwar II period, coolness inflected toward a certain wild abandon, a bursting of emotional seams that reflected a hopeful surge against obsolete social conventions. The following paragraphs outline the representative figures of coolness in each period and their cultural connotations as laid out by Dinerstein.

Jazz cool: Contemporary usage of the word and concept cool originate from jazz culture in the late 1930s. The word and concept of coolness first surfaced in the postwar African American jazz vernacular as an emblematic word synonymous with "relaxed intensity". (OCPA, 12) Lester Young first invoked coolness to refer to a state of mind. When Young said, "I'm cool" or "that's cool," he meant "I'm calm," "I'm OK with that," or just "I'm keeping it together". (OCPA, 37) He kept a hostile white world at bay with sunglasses, opaque slang, and a blank mask of disengagement that rejected racism. Young's sound and attitude inspired thousands of imitators. Between his dedication to expressing his inner pain artistically and the blank facial expression he wore to resist the white gaze, Young embodied two seemingly contradictory aspects of coolness: "artistic expressiveness and emotional self–control." (OCPA, 39) Young's example and his art placed African Americans' resistance to racism at the center of "cool".

Noir cool: Film star Humphrey Bogart represented the "ethical rebel loner" whose lower–class characters symbolized "the emotional costs of working through the instability and uncertainty" of the Depression and Second World War. (OCPA, 74, 78) The outer shell of noir cool was "impassive, edgy, stoic, darkly calm, and represented survival with style—something akin to existence with dignity." (OCPA, 210) Bogart's characters—gangsters, detectives, small men on the make—reflected the moral bankruptcy of American institutions, values, and politics. These average men developed personal ethical codes hostile to institutions and suspicious of the

powerful. Film noir, which gave Bogart his greatest fame, reflected the deferred traumas of the Great Depression and required a shift from aspirational virtuous upper－class heroes to realistic working－class anti－heroes. Audiences chose Bogart's noir cool as a transitional mode of survival, a mask over recent trauma. As mentioned in the book, Americans needed noir cool as an artistic mode, "first to face up to the sacrifices of the war, and then, in its postwar efflorescence, to hold off the fears of another economic depression." (OCPA, 73)

Existential cool: Coolness was also embraced by philosophers and activists. French existentialists realized from the American jazz and noir movies that the old European orders were outdated, so they began to pursue a new kind of existential cool. Existential cool depended on self－mastery and the conscious rejection of obsolete moral frameworks and master narratives, assuming the necessity of self－consciousness and self－creation—that is, "of taking responsibility for one's own identity and choices." (OCPA, 124) By definition, existential cool began with individual rebellion—or in Albert Camus's paraphrased version thereof, "with rebellion, awareness is born." Camus, the French－Algerian dissident and writer, exemplified existential cool. His spare, lyrical, cool prose with its characteristic "laconic brevity" (in Walker Percy's words) guided readers in a personal search for ethical renewal through secular, rational, activist humanism. (OCPA, 129) Camus' theory of the individual rebel as a catalyst for social change has worn well as an example of "the power of the powerless," to use Vaclav Havel's resonant phrase. Camus's novels and essays retain their power as literary texts and inspirational works of meditative philosophy. And, significantly, his works and theories have in particular been taken up by African Americans.

As Dinerstein mentions in his book, "the origins of cool are grounded in the performance of relaxed calm to cover the loss of belief in Western civilization". (OCPA, 198) Faced with the decline of

Western civilization, musicians, actors, and writers all adopted a cool attitude, which "marked the consideration of the possibility—even if unconsciously—of an end to classical Western tradition". (OCPA, 198) Meanwhile, the mask of coolness supplanted the mask of virtue, which "presumes the indoctrination of a class ideal through the in－culcation of traditional ideals, creating an instinctive call to self－sac－rifice for the sacred cause, religious or national". (OCPA, 199) In－deed, Dinerstein argues that "postwar cool involved the projection of authenticity and autonomy: it functioned as the outward sign of inner rebellion." To be specific, coolness replaced the aspiration to be good through specific moral frameworks with "self－creation and inner direction", maintaining social cost by alienation or rebellion. (OCPA, 200) Whether Lester Young's phrase "tell *your* story"—which functioned as a concise measure of the mid－century jazz mu－sician's artistic objective—or the Camusian *I rebel. Therefore, we exist,* both reveal the close relationship between coolness and re－bellion.

The second section of Dinerstein's book investigates a group of proponents of coolness in the postwar era: Marlon Brando, Jack Ke－rouac, Frank Sinatra, James Dean, Elvis Presley, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, and Lorraine Hansberry. It mainly argues that the coolness pursued by the new generation had shifted and had become a more intense kind of rebellion. In the Postwar II period, the term coolness became a password for something akin to generational desire. An iconic figure of coolness catalyzed youth culture organically: "something inchoate was communicated through new artistic ideas, styles, language, and gestures, as was embodied in new artists." (OCPA, 226)

Zen cool: The second part of Dinerstein's book starts with Kerouac and a new form of coolness called Zen Cool. Kerouac pursued the "cool mind" through Zen Buddhism, and "he was pivotal in the re－direction of the concept of cool as a synonym for rebellion for the '60s counterculture". (OCPA, 216) In Zen Buddhism, Kerouac

found an ancient method for controlling the mind— "first, cleansing the mind and then *cooling it*." (OCPA, 217) This *cool*-ing of anger and desire by emptying the mind remains central to cool as an emotional mode. Based on two noble truths of Buddhism: "the first . . . *All life is suffering*," and "*the suppression of suffering can be achieved*", Kerouac proposed the objectives of postwar cool as "self-mastery and de-sacralized individuality". (OCPA, 225) These two objectives also point to the connections between Buddhism and existentialism: both are systems of mind-training that jettison God, fate, and destiny; both systems pursue an abstract ideal of cognitive freedom in that each insists on individual independence and critical thinking; both systems provide a method for liberation from social and political dogmatism; and both methods found adherents in the postwar spiritual crisis. (OCPA, 237-238) For example, Zen Buddhism appealed to apolitical rebels weary of psychology, surrealism, phenomenology, and Sartrean ideas of freedom.[30]

Vegas Cool: Buoyed by the economic engines of the Korean War, the Marshall Plan, and the nuclear arms race, the United States at the time produced 75 percent of the world's goods and ushered in unprecedented prosperity in the 1950s. (OCPA, 243) This change led to a shift in the cultural imagination of the wartime generation. With such national prosperity, noir cool gradually lost its narrative energy, as the ethical rebel loner was no longer a desirable image. Instead, a new kind of Vegas cool gained traction with the American audience. The migration of noir cool to the irrigated neon fantasy of Las Vegas was mediated by Sinatra, the primary avatar of the cool renewal for the wartime generation. Sinatra's coolness was a new style of masculine rebellion. He "gave voice and words to the noirish urban soundscape left behind for the suburbs" and "combined swagger and vulnerability, charisma and romantic humility". (OCPA, 256)

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[30] Snyder, G. (1969). *Earth house hold*. New Directions Publishing. 113–114.

Rebel Cool: Representatives of coolness during the Postwar II pe-riod—Brando, Dean, and Elvis respectively—attracted the attention of the young generation through continuous but different rebellion. Dinerstein writes:

> "Brando and Dean created a new cultural circuit with an audience galvanized by their ambivalence, vulnerability, and sexuality. At the same time, Elvis crossed over the existential imperatives of African American music and dance to give European and white American youth the cultural permission to find sources of self-affirmation outside their racial boundaries." (OCPA, 276)

In the iconic bad-boy narratives of the 1950s featuring Brando, Dean, or Elvis, admiration from young women strengthened their cool cap-ital. When postwar girls screamed and cried for cool figures, they were trying to burst out of the domestic trap society had set for them.

Dinerstein reviews the development of coolness until the 1960s, with the authors of *Cool Rules*—Dick Pountain and David Robins—exam-ining the evolution of coolness until the present day under globaliza-tion and from a broader perspective. Like Dinerstein, Pountain and Robins also believe that by the 1960s, coolness was no longer a form of resistance against repression, but a more direct expression of the desire for social change. As mentioned in the book, by the early 60s, "the rebellion soon broadened into an attack on bourgeois lifestyles in general, offering as an alternative a hedonistic 'counter-culture' based on sex and drugs and rock n roll". (CR, 71)

A counterculture is a culture whose values and norms of behavior differ substantially from those of mainstream society, often in oppo-sition to mainstream cultural mores.[31] In the United States, the counterculture of the 1960s became identified with the rejection of the conventional social norms of the 1950s. The youth counterculture rejected the cultural standards of their parents, especially with re-spect to racial segregation, the initial widespread support for the

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[31] Staff, M. W. (2004). *Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary* (Vol. 2). Merriam-Webster.

Vietnam War, and, less directly, the Cold War—with many young people fearing that America's nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union, coupled with its involvement in Vietnam, would lead to a nuclear holocaust.[32] White, middle-class youth—who made up the bulk of the counterculture in Western countries—had sufficient leisure time, thanks to the widespread economic prosperity of the time, to turn their attention to social issues.[33] During the late 1960s, hippies became the largest and most visible countercultural group in the United States.[34] Hippies created their communities, listened to psychedelic music, embraced the sexual revolution, and many used drugs such as marijuana and LSD to explore altered states of consciousness.[35]

Hippie fashion and values had a major effect on culture, influencing popular music, television, film, literature, and the arts. Since the 1960s, mainstream society has assimilated many aspects of hippie culture. And for just a few years, "the counterculture wrought a striking transformation on the nature of cool, by grafting onto its rebellious individualism a broader desire for social change". (CR, 73)

In the early 70s, after counterculture imploded amidst a welter of violence, hard drugs, and bad vibes, cool may appear to have vanished between the 70s and the 90s. However, it was in fact present in the bloodstream of every new youth fashion designer and advertising

[32] Works, M. (2005). Rockin' at the Red Dog: The dawn of psychedelic rock. *Monterey Video/Sunset Home Entertainment*.
Hirsch Jr, H. D., Kett, J. F., & Trefil, J. (1993). *The dictionary of cultural literacy* (No. 909 H669d). Houghton Mifflin. They write about "members of a cultural protest that began in the U.S. in the 1960s and Europe before fading in the 1970s... [it was] fundamentally a cultural rather than a political protest."
[33] Krugman, P. (2007). The conscience of a liberal WW Norton. *New York*.
[34] Yablonsky, L. (1968). *The hippie trip*, New York: Western Publishing, 21–37.
[35] Davis, F., & Munoz, L. (1968). Heads and freaks: Patterns and meanings of drug use among hippies. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 156–164.

creative director, and mutated into dozens of different subcultures, from heavy metal to punk to hip-hop. (CR, 94)

Punk was of pivotal importance to the history of coolness and its mutations. The punk subculture included a diverse array of ideologies, fashion, and other forms of expression, including visual art, dance, literature, and film. It was largely characterized by anti-establishment views, the promotion of individual freedom, DIY ethics, and is centered on a loud, aggressive genre of rock music called punk rock. It seems that punk "had claimed to reject Cool and Hip along with Peace and Love, and professed to believe in nothing at all." (CR, 101) However, this just serves to illustrate the dynamic by which coolness now mutated from generation to generation. The author states in *Cool Rules*, "It was inevitable that the punks must reject the word 'cool' itself, as a despised reminder of their elder siblings' —even perhaps parents' —stoned ramblings, but they themselves exhibited a structurally identical attitude of ironic defiance". (CR, 101) In other words, in punk, there was a cool attitude in the same vein to the previous culture it had succeeded.

From the 1980s onwards: Hip-hop cool

A burgeoning drug culture controlled by gangs brought new levels of violence to the streets; in the USA, street gangs, "which had been sidelined during the countercultural events of the 60s, began to flourish again in the 80s, particularly in the Los Angeles area". (CR, 109) The gang life of the 80s created a new musical genre, *Gangsta rap*, and its attitude was perfectly in tune with the 80s' pursuit of fame, money, and sex. Given the newfound fascination with violence, it's hardly surprising that *Gangsta rap* was enthusiastically adopted by white youth of all classes and all nations as a stick with which to beat their parent's generation—songs about beating on hoes and bitches, were pretty well guaranteed to upset mums and dads who grew up with 'All You Need Is Love'. (CR, 111) As the authors of *Cool Rules* argue, "it was the hip-hop culture of the 80s and 90s

that restored to 'cool' (or 'kool') those transgressive and defiant connotations that it still bears for many teenagers today". (CR, 45) The following section will combine its analysis of the development and characteristics of hip-hop culture in order to discuss its relevance with coolness.

As Joel Dinerstein writes, "cool has not faded, but its meanings have morphed with every generation. Its value remains intact since it is a crucial myth of the American self-concept". (OCPA, 411) Within the last 30 years, the term "cool" has progressed toward sub-cultural capital representing youth culture and has become the popular zeitgeist of the new millennium.[36] Today, the concept of coolness is most often related to youth or youth culture, "mutating into dozens of different forms, from heavy metal to punk to hip-hop". (CR, 94)

In his article "What Does It Mean To Be Cool"[37], Thorsten Botz-Bornstein links the concept of modern coolness with hip-hop, claiming that the aesthetics of modern coolness were mainly transmitted through hip-hop culture. In David Brooks' book review of *The Origins of Cool in Postwar America*, he also mentions that in an interview with Joel Dinerstein, the book's author, Dinerstein answered two names when asked about the representatives of today's form of coolness: the renowned rapper Kendrick Lamar and Lorde.[38]

In terms of the reasons that hip-hop has become a representative of modern cool culture, there is, firstly, the significant correlation proven to exist between the development of coolness and black culture.[39] As one of the subcultures deeply rooted in African American

[36] Nancarrow, C., Nancarrow, P., & Page, J. (2002). An analysis of the concept of cool and its marketing implications. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour: An International Research Review*, *1*(4), 311-322.
[37] Botz-Bornstein, T. (2010). What does it mean to be cool? *Philosophy Now*, *80*, 6-7.
[38] Brooks, D. (2017). How cool works in America today. *The New York Times*.
[39] Not only is the origin of cool's attitude related to west African culture

identity, the cultural connotations of hip-hop interacts with the historical development of African Americans. In other words, from the perspective of their respective origins, both cool and hip-hop are rooted in black culture.

In addition to their shared origins, the decisive factor linking coolness and hip-hop culture together—in other words, the intersection between coolness and hip-hop—is "a rebellious attitude". From the perspective of the origin and development of hip-hop, it is an indisputable fact that African Americans have expressed their voice and rebelled against white authority through hip-hop culture. In the previous narrative, I have expounded the representative culture of coolness and the cool characters in the postwar American popular culture by sorting out relevant documents, in which "rebellion" appeared as a key word. Although there is no clear definition of coolness supplied by either book, all the descriptions above point to the correlation between coolness and rebellion. Through jazz cool, musicians demonstrated dissatisfaction with the social order enforced by white people and rebellion against black stereotypes. In Hollywood, film noir reflected the deferred traumas of the Great Depression and required a shift from aspirational virtuous upper-class heroes to realistic working-class anti-heroes. At this time, coolness became a new virtue expressing people's desire for new values and social norms. Similar conditions were to be found in existential cool, which depended on self-mastery and the conscious rejection of obsolete moral frameworks and master narratives. Postwar economic prosperity made the younger generation a consumer generation whose pent-up feelings were eager to be released. The rebellious characters like Brando, Dean, and Elvis Presley were welcomed by the young generation—especially women—reflecting an attitude of resistance to society and a desire for self-expression. The later

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(related research includes *Cool Pose*, etc.), but many representatives of cool in popular culture also use "Black" as the symbolic code. For example, Designer Christian Lacroix has said that "...the history of cool in America is the history of African American culture."

counterculture movements of punk and hip-hop also expressed the rebellion against the main-stream of society.

As mentioned in *Cool Rules*, "the history of popular culture is one of cross-fertilization". (CR, 111) Various cultures have captured the imaginations of new generations, and given fresh impetus to the spread of coolness. Since postwar American films and music dominated global popular culture, cool images containing elements of rebellion have emerged in many different societies, during different historical epochs, and have served different social functions. Due to the advantages of hip-hop, such as its inclusivity and being based on vocal abilities rather than instrumental virtuosity,[40] the genre has become a means for recent generations to express resistance to authority through creativity and innovation. Moreover, it has rapidly developed into a symbol of black coolness, which itself continues to export coolness to the world.

3.1.3. Defining cool in popular culture

By examining the prior literature on coolness, it is evident that researchers have discussed coolness from the perspective of their disciplines, hence offering a variety of definitions of coolness. Since the keyword "Asian cool" in this study is the American mass media's evaluation of the Asian cultural community 88rising thanks to the latter's cultural practices, before analyzing this term, we must first consider what is coolness in popular culture. By examining the above

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[40] In *Cool Rules* (110), Pountain and Robins explain why hip-hop was able to quickly become a global music genre:
    "this new style (hip-hop or rap) was based on vocal abilities rather than instrumental virtuosity, consisting of rhythmic declamation of lyrics over the backing of an existing dance record. As with punk, the fact that it did not require proficiency on a musical instrument made hip-hop highly democratic, and it spread throughout the world with a rapidity and breadth that punk had never achieved."

two books on coolness within popular culture, we can establish that the development of popular culture, especially the development of the postwar American popular culture, gave coolness both continuous dissemination and a trajectory of development. The development of coolness in postwar American popular culture has witnessed all of *Jazz cool, Noir cool, Existentialist cool, Zen cool, Vegas cool, Rebel cool, Countercultural cool, Punk cool, and Hip-hop cool*. Considering that 88rising, the subject of this study, has obtained the title of Asian cool through hip-hop culture, I have analyzed the relationship between hip-hop and coolness in particular as follows.

It is mentioned in *Cool Rules* that the revival of Gangs in the 1980s led to the emergence of *Gangsta rap*. This new musical style of hip-hop conformed to the cultural psychology of Americans in the 1980s. Since then, in the 1990s and even today, hip-hop still carries the connotation of coolness. From the perspective of their origins, both coolness and hip-hop are rooted in black culture, and the intersection of hip-hop, blackness, and coolness underpins its resistance to authority. Later, the United States exported its version of coolness to the world through its movies and music. Hip-hop became the new representative culture of black coolness due to its advantages as a musical genre.

Secondly, scholarly perspectives converge on the idea of coolness, agreeing that coolness always assumes a kind of rebellious and emotionally-self-protective stance against what is perceived to be mainstream. Starting with jazz cool was a rebellious attitude suggesting that an individual's importance could be registered only through self-expression and the creation of a signature style. As Joel Dinerstein reveals in his book, cool began as a stylish defiance of racism, a challenge to suppressed sexuality, a philosophy of individual rebellion, and a youthful search for social change. Furthermore, Cool Rules points out the relationship between coolness and rebellion, arguing that "cool is an oppositional attitude adopted by individuals or small groups to express defiance to authority" —or, put more

succinctly, the book sees cool as "a permanent state of private re-bellion." (CR, 19)

This study subscribes to the definition of coolness in *Cool Rules*, focusing on its rebellion against authority through popular culture. This definition of coolness will suffice until more of its properties are uncovered in later sections of the study.

3.2. Question & research materials

3.2.1. Research question

The literature suggests that coolness has never been a constant concept, and that it has emerged in many different societies during different historical epochs. However, coolness has a traceable history, because it is transmissible via culture and always attached to some cultural carriers. Through certain symbolic individuals or cultural objects, coolness constantly expresses the public's desire. Secondly, there has always been a close relationship between coolness and rebellion, which is mainly reflected in the attitudes of resistance of cool figures to social norms and authorities across various periods. This brings me to the first question of my research.

Question 1: As a "variant" of coolness, is there any rebellious content in the Asian cool displayed through 88rising's work? If so, what are its objects and strategies of rebellion?

As mentioned earlier, Asians have always been considered "uncool" in the West. The birth of 88rising has been considered to mark the emergence of a new Asian representation, with the term "Asian cool" hence coming into being. The reason why 88rising is referred to as Asian cool is certainly not just because it is Asian.

Question 2: In the previous question, I focused on the 'cool' of "Asian cool", which brings us to another question of this paper:

What is 'Asian' in "Asian cool"?

3.2.2. Research materials

In order to explain the essence of Asian cool, the study will take the following content as its primary materials of analysis.

Keith Ape — "IT G MA" (2015)
Rich Brian – "Dat Stick" (2016)
Higher Brothers — "Made in China" (2017)

"IT G MA" ("잊지마") was released on January 1, 2015, by Dongheon Lee (이동헌; born December 25, 1993), known profes-sionally as Keith Ape (Korean: 키스 에이프) and previously known as Kid Ash. The song was picked by *Billboard* K-Town and reached number five on the K-pop 2015 list of most popular songs.[41] Once the "IT G MA" music video was uploaded, it was widely reposted (mostly between Korean Americans at first) and gained a lot of views. With the help of 88risng, Keith Ape participated in 2015's South by Southwest rap showcase,[42] and his concert at SOB's in 2015 was listed as one of The New York Times' Top-40 picks.[43] As of today, the music video of the song has gained more than 76.01 million views on YouTube.

"Dat Stick" (styled as "Dat $tick") is the debut single by Indo-nesian hip-hop artist Rich Brian, previously known as Rich Chigga. The song was produced by Ananta Vinnie, and was released on March 11, 2016, on SoundCloud. The video of "Dat Stick" was uploaded to Brian's YouTube channel on February 22, 2016, quickly

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[41] Jeff Benjamin, Jessica Oak (December 30, 2015). "The 20 Best K-Pop Songs of 2015". *Billboard*.
[42] Kramer, Kyle (March 22, 2015). "The Craziest Rap Show at SXSW Was a Korean Import". *Noisey*.
[43] Jon Pareles, Ben Ratliff, Jon Caramanica and Nate Chinendec (December 29, 2015). "All the Best Concerts, of What the Critics Have Seen".

going viral on the internet. The single peaked at number 4 on the US Bubbling Under R&B/Hip-Hop Singles (Billboard) [44] and was later certified gold by RIAA. [45]

"Made in China" is the most well-known song of the rap group Higher Brothers from Chengdu, China. The song was first released on March 28, 2017, and was then incorporated into Higher Brothers' debut album *Black Cab* (released on May 31, 2017). With its rapping in the Sichuanese dialect and its celebration of Chinese culture in its music video, this song is considered to be the most representative work of Higher Brothers' discography. So far, this song has more than 20.88 million views on YouTube.

The reasons for selecting these songs as the study's primary research materials are as follows:

Creators of the first wave of Asian cool

88rising was founded in 2015, and has continued to grow and develop over the past five years. Current artists affiliated with 88rising include artists of Asian descent who release music in America, such as Rich Brian, Keith Ape, Joji, Higher Brothers, NIKI, and Lexie Liu. In addition, 88rising also actively cooperates with Asian artists in different fields to help their artistic activities in America. Among these artists, Keith Ape, Rich Brian, and Higher Brothers all cooperated with 88rising in the early stage of the latter's establishment, gaining great attention in the West with their respective works. In 2015, Miyashiro came across the music video of "IT G MA" and was attracted by Keith Ape's outstanding performance. He immediately invited Keith Ape to perform at 2015's South by

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[44] The Bubbling Under R&B/Hip-Hop Songs is a chart of 25 songs that are touted to progress to the main R&B/hip-hop charts.
[45] The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) is the trade organization that supports and promotes the creative and financial vitality of America's major music companies.

Southwest rap showcase in America. In 2016, the company began to work with other artists including Rich Brian, Joji, and Higher Brothers.

In addition, the works selected for analysis by this study are these artists' most well-known and best-represented works in the West. These works not only have a high number of views on YouTube, but also showcase the artists' distinctive personalities. Therefore, the three musical acts selected are the "creators of the first wave of Asian cool" represented by 88rising. The selected works can also highlight each's distinct artistic features, and can thus effectively help the study's exploration of Asian cool.

100% Asian heritage and upbringing environment

Another thing that the three acts have in common is their full Asian heritage and upbringing. Most of the members of 88rising at its early stage were artists with Asian descent who had grown up in the West. For example, its founder Sean Miyashiro is Japanese-American, while Joji is Japanese-Australian, and Dumbfounded—one of the most prominent Asian American rappers in the United States and known for his witty and socially-conscious lyrics—also grew up in America.

Among 88rising's collaborators, Rich Brian, Keith Ape, and Higher Brothers are all thus "pure" Asians. Before cooperating with 88rising, Keith Ape and Higher Brothers were active in the hip-hop scenes of their respective countries, while the Indonesian Rich Brian had not even traveled abroad before meeting Miyashiro. Thus, I believe that the above three artists with their "pure Asian descent and upbringing" can provide more representative analysis materials for this study.

To sum up, from the perspective of the artists' origins, cultural identity, dissemination, and recognition of their works, all three

selected artists and their works conform to the description of Asian cool. The analysis of these artists and their selected works will also provide effective help in resolving the problems posed by this study and achieving its research goals.

3.3. Research methodology

This study adopts two main research methods: the research synthesis method and the transdisciplinary method. The research synthesis method is an empirical research method based on literature, which makes a systematic analysis of previous research reports to generate new knowledge or analysis.[46] The research synthesis method plays an important role in the analysis of existing research literature. It not only contributes to a comprehensive understanding of existing literature, but also helps to enhance our understanding of the existing research and expand the latter's scope as well.[47] Using this research method, the existing research on coolness is summarized, and the contents related to this research are filtrated, so as to generate new explanations that can be applied to subsequent research and can pave the way for further discussion.

Transdisciplinarity denotes a research strategy that crosses many disciplinary boundaries to create a holistic approach. It applies to research focused on problems that cross the boundaries of two or more disciplines. Since Henry H. H. Remak of the American School proposed that comparative literature should include "comparison between literature and other fields of human expression," the study of the interrelationship between literature and other related disciplines has become a remarkable and controversial field of

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[46] Sheble, L. (2014). *Diffusion of Meta-Analysis, Systematic Review, and Related Research Synthesis Methods: Patterns, Contexts, and Impact.* University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
[47] Chan, M. E., & Arvey, R. D. (2012). Meta-analysis and the development of knowledge. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *7*(1), 79-92.

comparative literature.[48] Remak's stated purpose was not to be "transdisciplinary" for the sake of mere disciplinary comparisons, but to be necessary for holistic research. Transdisciplinarity is based on literature and examines other disciplines such as music, painting, sculpture, and other categories in the humanities such as law, politics, and social sciences with an attitude of "supremacy", so as to draw some "conclusions" and make some "discoveries" that a single discipline cannot.

This study will deploy the open-mindedness of comparative literature, and tries to integrate hip-hop culture, the concept of coolness, and cross-cultural communication between East and West into its research. In the analysis chapter, the concepts of various disciplines will be actively used to integrate the whole cultural phenomenon of coolness with certain macroscopic concepts, so as to draw new conclusions and discoveries.

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[48] Remak, H. (1961) Comparative Literature, Its Definition and Function. In: Stallknecht, N.P. and Frenz, H., Eds., *Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 3. For Henry Remak, writing in 1961, comparative literature was

> "the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand, and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts. ... It is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression."

Chapter 4. Analysis of Asian cool in the sample cases

If coolness is a permanent state of private rebellion adopted by individuals and small groups, how did 88rising display its rebellion by working as the widely-accepted representative of Asian cool in Western countries? Next, I will examine the forms of "Asian cool" shown in the works of the three widely-praised groups of rappers from 88rising in Western countries, and then analyze the essence of Asian cool that 88rising represents and the cultural connotations behind it. Before that, I will first examine the current situation of Asian hip-hop in the Western context.

4.1. A common dilemma: the "crisis of racial authenticity"

Hip-hop refers to both a musical genre and a subculture originating in the 1970s out of the Bronx, New York. It has roots in African American, Jamaican American, and Latino American communities and was borne out of resistance to dominant mainstream (predominantly white) American culture.[49] While initially a set of cultural practices rooted in diverse urban neighborhoods throughout the U.S., hip-hop is now a multicultural, global phenomenon that encompasses a range of activities including dance, music (i.e. rapping/MCing), DJing, and graffiti.[50] The youth of today engage in hip-hop to develop pluralistic, hybrid identities worldwide.[51] Despite its mainstream popularity, the

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[49] Chang, J. (2007). *Can't stop won't stop: A history of the hip-hop generation*. St. Martin's Press.
[50] Dimitriadis, G., & Bae-Dimitriadis, M. (2009). *Performing identity/performing culture: Hip-hop as text, pedagogy, and lived practice* (Vol. 1). Peter Lang.
[51] According to analyses by the music streaming service Spotify, hip-hop is by far the most-listened-to genre across the world. https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/hip-hop-is-the-most-listened-to-genre-in-the-world-according-to-spotify-analysis-of-

core essence of hip-hop remains tenaciously preserved by its dev-
otees. As Motley and Henderson have argued, the essence of hip-
hop is to bind collective marginalities.[52] Young people of color regard
hip-hop as both a physical and psychological space to foster political
engagement, resist racial hierarchies, and challenge stereotypes
crafted about young ethnic minorities by the dominant culture.[53] Ad-
ditionally, young people worldwide increasingly use hip-hop for cul-
tivating a sense of agency in their identity, expanding their possibil-
ities of identity, and critiquing/resisting the constraints of monolithic
identity choices dictated by their societies.[54]

Asian and Asian American youth have been at the forefront of hip-
hop's global growth since the 1990s.[55] The aspect of resistance
within hip-hop culture has been maintained across Asian hip-hop
communities in both Asia and the United States, leading to the fre-
quent use of the genre in the twenty-first century as a means of
voicing sociopolitical protest. It should be noted that in the process
of hip-hop's globalization, the development of Asian hip-hop
evinces two different contexts. One can be characterized as the out-
come of Asian pop culture's confluence in all of its regionally di-
verse manifestations and in American hip-hop. The other is led by
rappers residing in America of Asian descent, whose works largely
engage the issue of race and cultivate it to shape their own cultural
identity.

The Philippines is recognized to have had the first hip-hop music

20-billion- 10388091.html
[52] Motley, C. M., & Henderson, G. R. (2008). The global hip-hop Dias-
pora: Understanding the culture. *Journal of Business Research*, *61*(3),
243-253.
[53] Langnes, T. F., & Fasting, K. (2016). Identity constructions among
breakdancers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *51*(3),
349-364.
[54] Huq, R. (2006). Beyond subculture: *Pop, youth and identity in a post-
colonial world (1st ed.)*. London, England: Routledge.
[55] Lum, L. (2007). Carving out their own niche. *Diverse Issues in Higher
Education*, *24*(8), 18.

scene in Asia, originating in the early 1980s, and largely due to the country's historical connections with the United States, where hip-hop originated.[56] In 1980, singer and stand-up comedian Dyords Javier recorded "Na Onseng Delight," while Vincent Dafalong recorded "Ispraken Delight", both of which are considered to be the first rap records from Asia. Hip-hop films such as *Wild Style* (1982) and *Breakin'* (1984) also had a major influence on the development of hip-hop culture in the Philippines. As in the Philippines, with the arrival of hip-hop films emerged a generation of Japanese break-dancers, b-boys, DJs, and training grounds for future recording artists. Although hip-hop style — especially Japanese rap music — has had enormous commercial success in Japan since the 2000s, early hip-hop music was largely ignored by mainstream record companies and performance venues. As Condry has argued, the history of Japanese hip-hop shows that certain kinds of cultural exchange are not initiated through cultural understanding, but instead from certain interactions that incite a desire to learn, participate, and contribute individually.[57] In his study, Condry focuses on the interplay between local and global hip-hop within the *genba* (the "actual site" where hip-hop culture is discussed, performed, consumed, and developed) of Japan. For Condry, Japanese hip-hop was born out of the simultaneous localization and globalization of hip-hop culture, rather than a shift between the two binary factors. Korean hip-hop is widely considered to have originated in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since then, it has become increasingly popular, both in Korea and abroad. While Korea's hip-hop culture consists of various elements,

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[56] Even after the United States' nearly fifty-year-long occupation of the Philippines came to an end in 1946, the United States remained a palpable presence on the islands. Throughout the twentieth century, a continuous influx of American pop culture phenomena, including disco, funk, and soul music, paved the way for hip-hop to become popular among Filipino teens. Park, J. (2018). "Asian Hip-hop." *St. James Encyclopedia of Hip-hop Culture*, 16-19.

[57] Condry, I. (2006). *Hip-hop Japan: Rap and the paths of cultural globalization*. Duke University Press.

including rapping, graffiti, DJing, and b-boying,[58] rapping comprises a core part of the subculture. The term hip-hop is largely recognized and understood as "hip-hop music" or "rap music" in Korea.[59] Although Korean hip-hop directly adopted American hip-hop music elements, the difference in cultures naturally led to a difference in lyrical content, musical elements, and virtual and local scenes.[60] Similar to other East Asian countries, China is struggling to create a hip-hop culture that is more Chinese than American. Just as China has opened the country to economic free trade and financial liberalization, so too has the country also witnessed significant developments on its cultural fronts. One such development that is fast gaining currency is the presence of American-derived hip-hop music among Chinese youths.[61] In China, young people with lower socioeconomic status appreciate rap and hip-hop because it expresses their feelings, emotions, and attitudes, and, more importantly, it helps make their voices heard.

Smitherman notes that as hip-hop becomes more global, its languages and messages start to vary in many ways, but the rhetorical and communicative style rooted in stories of African American tribulation and triumph remains.[62] The globalization of hip-hop reflects the fact that it is a malleable, inclusive, and multiculturally accepted genre; indeed, as Alim has noted, hip-hop has a historic and quintessentially global place in the canon of cultural identities.[63]

At the same time, hip-hop is a battleground in which Asian American

[58] Lee, Hyo-won (July 04, 2011). " 'Ruthless' Koreans sweep B-Boy tournament". *CNN Travel*.
[59] 송명선. (2016). 힙합하다 : 한국, 힙합 그리고 삶 / 서울 : 안나푸르나.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Khan, K. (2009). Chinese Hip-hop music: Negotiating for cultural freedoms in the 21st century. *Muziki*, *6*(2), 232-240.
[62] Smitherman, G. (2006). *Word from the mother: Language and African Americans*. New York, NY: Routledge.
[63] Samy Alim, H., & Pennycook, A. (2007). Glocal linguistic flows: Hip-hop culture (s), identities, and the politics of language education. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, *6*(2), 89-100.

artists have strategically employed a culture viewed as an authentic expression of blackness to foster political engagement and challenge stereotypes crafted about ethnic minorities by the dominant culture. However, unlike the youth in Asian countries, Asian Americans' engagement with hip-hop is considered to have ignored the latter's history as a sociopolitical voice for the marginalized.[64] Studies have shown that Asian Americans' utilization of hip-hop culture to appeal to their rights is controversial and considered a form of cultural appropriation, arousing dissatisfaction within the black hip-hop community.[65] While Asian Americans may gain local social prestige by peppering their cultural practices with African American styles and references, they do so without suffering the daily experiences of discrimination that plague many African Americans' lives.

Under multicultural neoliberal conditions, the relationship between Asian Americans and Black Americans is complex and contradictory. The multicultural neoliberal state depicts Asians in American society as a "model minority," which is often utilized to blame blackness for its "inherent" flaws. As Chang has argued, the uplifting of the Asian image relied on the characteristics of Blackness on the other side of the racial spectrum.[66] Additionally, in the 1980s, as hip-hop culture started to enter the mainstream, or to put it another way, when hip-hop started to invade spaces of whiteness, white fears of blackness started to perpetuate the "gangsta-ization, and criminal-ization of hip-hop culture," [67] and conflate hip-hop with specific images of blackness, hyper-masculinity, and violence. The image of

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[64] Osumare, H. (2001). Beat streets in the global hood: Connective marginalities of the hip-hop globe. *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures*, *24*(1-2), 171-181.
[65] Dao, L. (2014). Refugee Representations: Southeast Asian American Youth, Hip-hop, and Immigrant Rights. *Amerasia Journal*, *40*(2), 88-109. Reyes, A. (2005). Appropriation of African American Slang by Asian American Youth 1. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *9*(4), 509-532.
[66] Chang, M. M. (2015). *Rice and Rap: Hip-hop Music, Black/Asian American Racialization, and the Role of the US Multicultural Neoliberal State* (Doctoral dissertation, UCLA).
[67] Ibid., 29.

black rappers provided a polar opposite of the model minority nar-
rative, "further perpetuating the criminalization, demonization, and
marginalization of blacks, along with their exclusion to the national
body as model and productive citizens." [68] Meanwhile, the hip-hop
scholar Rose points out, a result of the mass commodification of hip-
hop is that "the language, styles, and attitudes associated with hip-
hop are coded and understood and performed as 'Black'." [69] Many
corporations began to realize that profit that could be made off this
youth culture movement by capitalizing on selling "Blackness".
Thus, Asianness became an "inauthentic" part of hip-hop.

In his study, Oliver Wang mentions an "authenticity crisis" of Asian
rappers.[70] First, he points out the absence of Asian rappers in the
mainstream hip-hop scene and then mentions that the common ex-
cuse given for this absence is that "it is a matter of talent" —mean-
ing that there are no Asian Americans recording caliber. However, in
fact, as Oliver Wang writes, "talent is an ill-defined and ambiguous
concept most often deployed after the fact," and in the case of Asian
American rappers, their relative invisibility is a result of "the issues
of marketability and, intimately related to that, how racially *in*au-
thentic Asian Americans are in a social world of fans, artists, media,
and industry, where blackness is normative." [71] Wang also argues
that the definition of hip-hop's origins is inextricably linked with
black culture, which is certainly a by-product of how powerfully hip-
hop's Afro-diasporic roots dominate conversations around rap and

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[68] Ibid., 5.
[69] Rose, T. (2008). *The hip-hop wars: What we talk about when we talk about hip-hop--and why it matters*. Civitas Books. Preface-xii.
[70] Wang, O. (2007). Rapping and repping Asian: Race, authenticity, and the Asian American MC. *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*, 35-68.
[71] Ibid., 36.

race.[72] Scholars have raised concerns over this phenomenon,[73] but these attempts to diversify hip-hop within scholarly discourse still cannot change the fact that "the consumption habits by mainstream rap consumers, which are often cited as the rationale behind industry decisions, are still vastly tilted toward African American artists." Thus, non-black rappers, especially rappers of Asian descent, face a dilemma since their racial difference does not meet the standard of black authenticity held by rap fans and music executives alike.[74]

"Asian American rappers walk into hip-hop with an authenticity crisis on their hands before they even open their mouths to

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[72] Perry, I. (2004). *Prophets of the hood: Politics and poetics in hip hop.* Duke University Press.
Perry argues that hip-hop is nevertheless black American music, and that despite its syncretism, the music and culture must still be understood within the context of American blackness. Perry cites the roots of hip-hop in the cultural practices of disenfranchised black and Puerto Rican youth within the postindustrial urban ghettos of 1970s New York. Few disputes this history or the power of its narrative. The idea of black and brown youth crafting a vibrant subculture from the burned-out streets of urban America has helped hip-hop fuel the imaginations of marginalized youth across the world as they come to identify hip-hop with their own alterity.
[73] See, notably, those writing on the Latino contribution to hip-hop, for example Kelly, R. (1993). Hip-hop Chicano: A separate but parallel story. *It's Not About a Salary: Rap, Race+ Resistance in Los Angeles*, 65-76./ Del Barco, M. (1996). Rap's Latino sabor. *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, 63-84./ Flores, J. (1996). Puerto rocks: New York Ricans stake their claim. *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, 85-105./ Flores, J. (2000). *From bomba to hip-hop: Puerto Rican culture and Latino identity.* Columbia University Press./ Rivera, R. (2003). *New York Ricans from the hip hop zone.* Springer. There are also others who challenge the Americentrism that posits the United States as the sole country with a legitimate hip-hop narrative. For example, Mitchell, T. (2001). Global noise. *Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA. Middleton: Wesleyan UP.*
[74] Kembrew McLeod mentioned six major semantic dimensions of meaning inductively derived from the data that may be active when hip-hop community members (i.e., hip- hop fans, artists, and critics) invoke authenticity. The six semantic dimensions are labeled social-psychological, racial, political- economic, gender-sexual, social-locational, and cultural. And to the core community members, hip-hop remains strongly tied to Black cultural expression. (McLeod, K. (1999). Authenticity within hip-hop and other cultures threatened with assimilation. *Journal of Communication*, *49*(4), 134-150.)

rhyme." [75] This also leads to a contradictory circulation pattern: as Asian rappers are considered to be lacking in business value, few labels intend to sign a contract with them. As a result, few Asian rappers are active in the Western mainstream hip-hop field; simultaneously, the long-term absence of Asian rappers also emphasizes their "lack of authenticity". This leads to a feedback loop that is difficult to break. Therefore, fewer and fewer mainstream outlets and companies are willing to offer a platform to Asian hip-hop artists. Consequently, on the one hand, the globalization of hip-hop verifies the malleability and inclusiveness of it, but on the other hand, Asian Americans have met suspicions of "cultural appropriation" when they participate in hip-hop. Until now, in the American mainstream hip-hop scene, or in the global hip-hop field, whether it is Asian or Asian American, hip hop artists of Asian descent are considered as lacking authenticity and commercial value.

Generally speaking, the existence of 88rising rectifies the current situation, namely "the lack of Asian representation in Western music". Specifically, 88rising takes "discovering and spreading coolness in Asian culture" as its goal and has made many unprecedented achievements to this end. Since it launched in 2015, 88rising has become a vital artery connecting Eastern youth culture to Western audiences and beyond. In 2019, its artists—including Indonesian rapper Rich Brian, Korean rapper Keith Ape, and the Chengdu-based hip-hop group Higher Brothers—generated more than 7 billion streams on Spotify and 3 billion video views on YouTube. The label also pulled in more than 20,000 attendees to its music festival, Head in the Clouds, which was held in Los Angeles in 2018 and 2019. The festival was dubbed by *Rolling Stone* and *Los Angeles Magazine* as the "Asian Coachella".[76] Later this year (2020), 88rising will debut its own channel on Sirius XM, becoming the first

[75] Wang, O. (2007), "Rapping and repping Asian", 37.
[76] Stuart, Gwynedd (August 17, 2019). "Head in the Clouds, aka the 'Asian Coachella' Returns for Another Year of Representation". *Los Angeles Magazine.*

major Asian radio channel in North America.

As mentioned above, 88rising is a multicultural collective based in America, whose main members include Asian hip-hop artists and Asian American hip hop artists, which makes the aforementioned two kinds of Asian hip-hop context coexist in 88rising. I argue that it is the identity of "coexistence" that makes 88rising create the cross-cultural concept of "Asian cool" and solve the dilemma which Asian hip-hop faced mentioned above. In the following content, I will first interpret the works by using the theories and research methods mentioned in Chapter three, aiming to solve the two problems mentioned earlier. Then, at the end of this chapter, the "coexistence" identify of 88rising will be discussed again, leading to the elaboration of the essence and cultural connotation of Asian cool.

4.2. 'Cool' in Asian cool: the rebellious content in 88rising artists' works

4.2.1. Rich Brian: proof of Asian talent

Rich Brian (formerly Rich Chigga) was born Brian Imanuel, in Jakarta, Indonesia, on September 3, 1999. Rich Brian was mostly homeschooled and never received a formal education, and as a teen, he spent most of his time in front of a computer or a TV. Soon, he became addicted to YouTube and Twitter, and one of his American online friends introduced Brian to American hip-hop music. In July 2015, Brian adopted his screen name, "Rich Chigga," and started uploading music videos of his rap songs to the internet. He is known for his viral single "Dat Stick", which was later certified gold by RIAA. The music video of the song was uploaded on YouTube in February 2016, before crossing national borders and reaching the US. With the help of 88rising, a few rappers and YouTubers joined to create reaction videos for the song, thereby making it more famous. The video has amassed more than 150 million views on

YouTube since its release.

While "Dat Stick" spread across YouTube and various social plat—
forms rapidly, Rich Brian experienced a lot of trouble. He has been
criticized for cultural appropriation,[77] stirring up controversy to
drum up publicity,[78] and, perhaps most frequently, for his former rap
moniker, "Rich Chigga" — a portmanteau of Chinese and a racial slur.

Cultural appropriation is the adoption of an element or elements of
one culture by members of another culture. This can be controver—
sial when members of a dominant culture appropriate from disad—
vantaged minority cultures.[79] When cultural elements are copied
from a minority culture by members of a dominant culture, these el—
ements are used outside of their original cultural context—sometimes
even against the expressly—stated wishes of members of the origi—
nating culture. Those who see this appropriation as exploitative state
that the original meaning of these cultural elements is lost or dis—
torted when they are removed from their originating cultural contexts,
and that such displays are disrespectful or even a form of desecra—
tion.[80] For example, because of Rich Brian's frequent use of the n—
word in his songs, many people have criticized Brian for making a
mockery of American hip—hop music and black culture. However, the
criteria for cultural appropriation are often hard to define because the

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[77] Wei Tchou. (June 07, 2017). "Rich Chigga and the difficulties of keep—
ing it real". *The New Yorker*.
[78] Aaron Williams. (January 04, 2018). "Rich Chigga changed his name
but the damage is done and the joke's on us". *REDDIT*.
[79] Young, James O. (February 01, 2010). *Cultural Appropriation and the
Arts*. John Wiley & Sons. 5.
[80] Houska, Tara. (April 18, 2015). " 'I Didn't Know' Doesn't Cut It
Anymore". *Indian Country Today Media Network*.
Mesteth, W. S., Elk, D. S., & Hawk, P. S. (1993). Declaration of War
against Exploiters of Lakota Spirituality. *Declaration made at Lakota Sum—
mit V*.
Taliman, V. (1993). Article on the "Lakota Declaration of War." *News
from Indian Country*.
Keene, A. (2010). But Why Can't I Wear a Hipster Headdress? *Native
Appropriations*, *27*.

concept of cultural appropriation has been heavily criticized.[81] Critics note that the concept is often misunderstood or misapplied by the general public, and that charges of "cultural appropriation" are at times misapplied to situations such as eating food from a variety of cultures or simply learning about different cultures.[82] Others state that the act of cultural appropriation as it is usually defined does not meaningfully constitute social harm, or that the term lacks conceptual coherence.[83] Another argument against the term asserts that it sets arbitrary limits on intellectual freedom, artists' self-expression, and reinforces group divisions or itself promotes a feeling of enmity or grievance rather than liberation.[84]

Rich Brian has explained that at the time that he was recording "Dat Stick", he was basically just trying to make people less sensitive to the word and take the power out of it, but then he realized he's totally not in a position to do that.[85] In other words, he did not intend to engage in an act of "cultural aggression" against hip-hop and

[81] Frum, David. (2018). Every culture appropriates.
  Young, C. (2015). To the new culture cops, everything is appropriation. *The Washington Post*.
Chen, Anna (May 04, 2018). "An American woman wearing a Chinese dress is not cultural appropriation". *The Guardian*.
[82] Friedersdorf, Conor (April 03, 2017). "What Does ' Cultural Appropriation' Actually Mean?". *The Atlantic*.
Soave, Robby (May 05, 2019). "Cultural Appropriation: Don't Let the Woke Scolds Ruin Cinco de Mayo". *Reason: Free Minds and Free Markets*.
[83] McWhorter, John (July 15, 2014). "You Can't 'Steal' A Culture: In Defense of Cultural Appropriation". *The Daily Beast*.
[84] "Lionel Shriver's full speech (September 13, 2016): " 'I hope the concept of cultural appropriation is a passing fad' " . *The Guardian.*
Mali, Malhar (March 27, 2019). "I Am a Minority and I Prohibit You". *Areo.*
Patterson, Steve (November 20, 2015). "Why Progressives Are Wrong to Argue Against Cultural Appropriation". *Observer*.
OTTAWA (May 25, 2017). "Canada's war over 'cultural appropriation' " . *The Economist.*
Cathy Young (August 21, 2015). "To the new culture cops, everything is appropriation". *Washington Post*.
[85] "Rich Chigga "Dat $tick" Official Lyrics & Meaning. *Genius*.

black culture. The controversy turned Rich Chigga into Rich Brian[86], and at the same time also revealed another message, which Christina Lee has discussed in her article: "His (Rich Brian's) 'mistake' had drawn attention to the pitfalls Asians and Asian Americans have faced in rap. No matter how close they come to mainstream success, they must first confront an idea that they don't belong in hip-hop." [87]

As mentioned in Oliver Wang's research, because of black people's primacy in the field, nonblack rappers become "unreal" before they open their mouths. In other words, when a nonblack rapper, especially a rapper with Asian descent who is labeled with the stereotype of "model minority" steps into the artistic field of hip-hop, his rationale will be questioned. So, when faced with statements like "Asians don't belong to hip-hop", and "Asians can't rap", how did Rich Brian fight back?

The answer is that when faced with the disputes caused by his "mistakes" and statements about Asian rappers lacking "racial authenticity", Rich Brian positively took advantage of both the resources of the internet age and creative media strategies to fight back with the help of 88rising. One of the most important responses among these was the "reaction video". Reaction videos are videos in which people react to events; in particular, videos showing the emotional reactions of people watching episodes of television series, film trailers, and music videos are numerous and popular on video hosting services such as YouTube. Sam Anderson, commenting on the phenomenon for the New York Times Magazine, describes reaction videos as encapsulating the "fundamental experience of the Internet," in that it involves watching screens in which people watch screens, in a potentially infinite regression. Many reaction videos notably

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[86] Renz Ofiaza (June 25, 2018). "Rich Chigga Officially Changes His Name to Brian". *HIGHSNOBIETY.*
[87] Christina Lee (February 11, 2018). "As Asian rappers rise, some must face questions about race and hip-hop". *NBC News.*

feature reactions to items of popular culture—providing, in Anderson's words, the appeal of experiencing "at a time of increasing cultural difference, the comforting universality of human nature" by showing people of all backgrounds reacting similarly to a shared cultural experience.[88]

As mentioned above, since the release of "Dat Stick", the track has witnessed much controversy and debate. Fortunately, the reaction video shot in cooperation with famous American rappers helped Rich Brian to overcome these difficulties and further helped him become famous around the world. In the reaction video of "Dat Stick", black rappers watch hip-hop music videos of young Asian men.[89] To some extent, this shows the universality of hip-hop culture. That is to say, it demonstrates that hip-hop is no longer a culture only belonging to a certain racial demographic and that there is also no need to relate it to a specific area—America—anymore. On the contrary, hip-hop has gone global and influenced youth culture as far as Asia. In this way, through highlighting the "universality" of hip-hop, the privileged position of black people in this field is partially dispelled.

When watching Rich Brian's musical video, many rappers like Tory Lanez, Desiigner, Cam'ron, and Ghostface Killah show their approval of his hip-hop potential. They speak highly of his flow and voice and are surprised to find that an Asian man with a babyish look should possess a low and deep voice that disagree with his age. As a matter of fact, in addition to his excellent rap skills, Rich Brian also displays his excellent English ability and profound understanding of hip-hop culture in his song. Brian, born and bred in Indonesia, shows

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[88] Anderson, Sam. (November 25, 2011). "Watching People Watching People Watching". *New York Times Magazine*.
[89] On July 13th 2016, a video named "Rappers React to Rich Brian ft. Ghostface Killah, Desiigner, Tory Lanez & More" was uploaded on 88rising's YouTube channel. A number of rappers sat down to watch the video and express their thoughts, including Ghostface Killah, Cam'ron, Desiigner, Tory Lanez, GoldLink, Flatbush Zombies, and more. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KMBELyZ_sM

his surprising talent for languages. His interpersonal communication during adolescence, learning of English, and discovery of hip-hop all began with the internet. Having been home-schooled, Rich Brian's English knowledge stems exclusively from YouTube, Twitter, and other social media platforms. In line with this style of learning, when speaking English, Brian hardly has a local accent, which makes many people think that he is from America, as English speakers from Asia are generally faced with trouble in terms of English fluency and accents. Additionally, there is a dominant standard in the U.S. for the correct use of language—one that is in fact tied to a person's accent. Research has corroborated that Asian American adolescents who speak English with a non-standard accent are more likely to report being stereotyped as foreigners.[90] Individuals with non-standard accents often have to deal with both negative stereotypes and prejudice because of an accent. Researchers have consistently shown that people with non-native accents are judged as less intelligent, less competent, less educated, having poor English and/or language skills, and unpleasant to listen to.[91] However, through his independent learning of the language, Rich Brian's English is remarkably fluent and his pronunciation makes it hard to identify an accent, which also greatly surprises Western audiences and media. In one of *GQ*

[90] Kim, S. Y., Wang, Y., Deng, S., Alvarez, R., & Li, J. (2011). Accent, perpetual foreigner stereotype, and perceived discrimination as indirect links between English proficiency and depressive symptoms in Chinese American adolescents. *Developmental psychology*, *47*(1), 289.
[91] Gluszek, A., & Dovidio, J. F. (2010). "The way they speak: Stigma of non-native accents in communication." Personality and Social Psychology Review, 14, 214–237.
Bradac, J. J. (1990). "Language attitudes and impression formation." In H. Giles & W. P. Robinson (Eds.), *Handbook of Language and Social psychology*, pp. 387–412. London: John Wiley.
Bresnahan, M. J., Ohashi, R., Nebashi, R., Liu, W. Y., & Shearman, S. M. (2002). "Attitudinal and affective response toward accented English." *Language and Communication*, 22, 171–185.
Nesdale, D., & Rooney, R. (1996). "Evaluations and stereotyping of accented speakers by pre-adolescent children." *Journal of Language and Social Psychology,* 15, 133–154.

magazine's interviews with Rich Brian,[92] the author in fact uses "Rich Brian Learned How to Rap from YouTube" as the article's title, and displays great surprise at and interest in the fact that Rich Brian learned English by himself on YouTube. When interviewed by American media, he has also been frequently asked questions on learning English on his own, which also reflects people's approval of his English ability and gift for the language. Apart from his fluent spoken English and ac-curate pronunciation, Rich Brian is also extremely familiar with English culture. Before being a rapper, he often uploaded short selfie videos to Vine and other social media platforms. During the period in which he was active on online video platforms, he mostly shot his videos in Ja-karta, but the language used in all of his videos was English. Besides, most punchlines in his videos were also much easier to understand for people within an English cultural circle. For example, he once uploaded a joking video on Vine in which he played two roles, including an ex-cessively polite robber and a calm victim who applauds the robber's manner of robbing. The short video was matched with the subtitle "Canadian muggers probably" —with the punchline consequently much easier for people from North America to understand.

Famous rappers' recognition for Rich Brian and their intention to collaborate with him deconstructs the image of traditional rappers (of course, this includes race), and not only shows that Rich Brain's works are "real", but also proves that Asian rappers have the abil-ity to be as outstanding as those famous black rappers in the hip-hop mainstream. Indeed, as pointed out by the rapper 21Savage in the reaction video, "although the music is not well-matched with him, his song is rather good". At first, many people may well have been as surprised as 21Savage when seeing an Asian rapper, and likely harbored suspicions about his ability as well. However, over time, they began to find Brian's talent. Meanwhile, as Brian's rap was approved of by famous rappers in the reaction video, people's

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[92] Alex Wong. (February 02, 2018) "Rich Brian learned how to rap from YouTube". *GQ.*

attitude toward Asian hip-hop shifted into appreciating it instead of simply accepting it.

To sum up, through making the best of the internet and media resources at his disposal—most notably, with the "reaction video" — Rich Brian not only successfully quiets down the criticism caused by his "mistakes", but also shows his rebellious attitude towards the reservations that "Asians don't belong in hip-hop" and "Asians lack racial authenticity in hip-hop". The significant outcome of the "reaction video" was that it conveyed a universal concept, that is to say, it highlighted the saying "hip-hop is a universal language", thus weakening the excessive emphasis on "race" in hip-hop and avoiding the various problems caused by it. The other significance of the video was that mentioning famous rappers and rising Asian rappers in the same breath deconstructs rappers' traditional image and shows that Asian rappers actually have the ability to step into the mainstream hip-hop field even though Asian rap hasn't been immediately accepted. With the Indonesian artist's talent becoming increasingly visible and approved of, Western audiences and media not only see a fresh Asian rapper rising, but also the talent and force that Asians have brought—and can bring—into the limelight.

4.2.2. Higher Brothers: redefinition of "Made in China"

When Rich Brian and other aspiring Asian rappers gradually enter into Western audiences' sight, they resist and correct the phenomenon of Asians' long-term absence from the Western mainstream pop scene. However, some other artists of 88rising remain nevertheless unsatisfied with the current situation, appealing for more in terms of music and art. Just as Niki, an Indonesian female singer in 88rising once said:

> "too often where there is a minority on screen pursuing a career in the arts, they are faced with outdated stereotypes and ideologies

associated with being Eastern [...] On the total opposite end of the spectrum, they are sometimes forced to abandon their roots and cultural identities to comply with Western-ness or even whiteness. 88rising was born with that in mind, and thus now we are spearheading a movement to not only combat, but also transcend what it means to be Asian in mainstream media." [93]

Higher Brothers is a Chinese hip-hop group from Chengdu consisting of four members: MaSiWei（馬思唯）, DZknow（丁震）, Psy.P（楊俊逸）, and Melo（謝宇傑）. They are part of the Sichuan-based rap collective Cheng-Du City Rap House（成都說唱會館）, aka CDC. The quick cycles of media consumerism in China allowed Higher Brothers to enter the underground Chinese hip-hop scene and explode in popularity within a matter of months after they decided to form a group in 2015, and their international success would soon follow after signing with 88rising in 2016. Their debut album *Black Cab* was released on May 31, 2017. It was named after the unlicensed black cab drivers in Higher Brothers' native Chengdu. The album contains the song "Made in China", which *Noisey* describes as their "most famous track to date".[94] The video for the song also went viral and has received over 20.63 million views as of August 2020. As an early rap group that joined 88rising, Higher Brothers gained recognition as part of the "representation of Chinese hip-hop" through their song "Made in China". At the same time, they have also exemplified resistance to and transcendence of some stereotypes in Western society, thus exhibiting a distinctive "Asian cool".

When it comes to the stereotype about Asians mentioned by Niki, first we need to be clear about the concept of a stereotype. In social psychology, a stereotype is an over-generalized belief about a

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[93] Dan Q. Dao. (June 03, 2019). "How 88Rising Raised the Bar for Asian Representation by hip-hop". *GQ.*
[94] Teixeira, Lauren; Ross, Alex Robert; Horn, Leslie; Friedlander, Emilie. (January 28, 2018). "Higher Brothers Are Chinese Hip-Hop's Greatest Hope". *Noisey.*

particular category of people.[95] It is an expectation that people might have about every person of a particular group. The type of expectation can vary; it can be, for example, an expectation about the group's personality, preferences, or ability. Usually, the stereotype is negative and prejudiced by first impressions. In history, the Eastern and the Western have served as mirror images of each other. Throughout the ages, each has had a great imagination with regards to their understanding of the other—some of which has invariably led to misunderstanding and corresponding stereotypes.

Oriental study is the academic field of study that embraces Near Eastern and Far Eastern societies and cultures, languages, peoples, history, and archaeology. European interest in the region formerly known as "the Orient" had primarily religious origins, and religion has remained an important motivation in this pursuit until recent times. Modern study on the Orient has been influenced both by imperialist attitudes and interests, as well as a sometimes naive fascination in the exotic East on the behalf of Mediterranean and European writers and thinkers, and captured in the images of their artists; this popular theme in the history of ideas in the West is known as "Orientalism".

Since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, much academic discourse has begun to use the term "Orientalism" to refer to a general patronizing Western attitude towards Middle Eastern, Asian, and North African societies. In Said's analysis, the West essentializes these societies as static and undeveloped—thereby fabricating a view of Oriental culture that can be studied, depicted, and reproduced in service of imperial power. Implicit in this fabrication, writes Said, is the idea that Western society is developed, rational, flexible, and superior.[96]

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[95] Cardwell, Mike. (1999). *Dictionary of psychology*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn.
[96] Mahmood Mamdani (2004), *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terrorism*, New York: Pantheon.

Concretely, although Orientalism may involve different objects, its internal logic is consistent: Europe and America invented "the Orient" in modern and contemporary history so as to create and affirm a uni－tary self－identity. That identity had to correspond to European and American political superiority and have certain values attached to it like activeness, power, civility, reason, and order. In response, the Orient was attributed with certain opposing values, such as passivity, weakness, incivility, sensitivity, and chaos.

Although many Western people have little idea about the concrete geographic concept of "the Orient", when applying and spreading the achievements of Orientalism, people who prefer to understand it only in terms of words are more likely to apply narrow nationalistic opinions to try to understand exoticism. In particular, Western works of literature and television have gradually solidified the image of the Orient in their imagination, conveying the idea of an ignorant, uncul－tivated, and backward cultural environment, with peculiar national dresses and strong sexual desires. Hence, the image of "the Orient" and "Asia" that is constructed and defined by Western media has a deep influence on Western people' s cognition and public opinions. As a result, all kinds of stereotypes about the East have come into being.

The intro of the song, voiced by Lana Larkin, band mom and anthro－pologist, opens by asking, "Rap music? China? What are they even saying? Is this Chinese rap music? Sounds like they' re just saying *ching chang chong*." It' s followed by a hook, in which MaSiWei points out how everything—from his new gold watch to the ping－pong ball they use to play table tennis, to all the designer goods they buy—is "Made in China".

Ching chong and *ching chang chong* are pejoratives sometimes em－ployed by speakers of English to mock or play on the Chinese lan－guage, people of Chinese ancestry, or other East

Asians or Southeast Asians perceived to be Chinese. The term *ching chong* is based on how Chinese supposedly sounds to English speakers who do not speak it.[97] While this word is usually intended for ethnic Chinese, the slur has also been directed at other East Asians. Mary Paik Lee, a Korean immigrant who arrived with her family in San Francisco in 1906, writes in her 1990 autobiography *Quiet Odyssey* that on her first day of school, girls circled and hit her, chanting:

> "Ching Chong, Chinaman,
> Sitting on a wall.
> Along came a white man,
> And chopped his tail off." [98]

The same slur also appears in John Steinbeck's 1945 novel *Cannery Row* and a ragtime piano song entitled "Ching Chong", co-written by Lee S. Roberts and J. Will Callahan in 1917.

How does Chinese rap sound? Will it be like *ching chang chong*? Faced with such ironic questions, Higher Brothers fight back against this prejudice with their characteristic linguistic rapping strategies.

Chinese is a tonal language; the meaning of Chinese characters depends on the pitch of their pronunciation. In English-language rap, rhythms are underscored by vocal stresses. However, when transplanted to Chinese, these stresses can cut across the tones of Chinese characters and muddy their meaning. The mirror effect of this is that Chinese rap that strictly adheres to the tones of standardized Mandarin pronunciation often comes off as staccato and rigid. This isn't too much of a problem for "boom bap's" (a genre of hip-

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[97] The "ch" reflects the relative abundance of voiceless coronal affricates in Chinese (six in Mandarin Chinese: [ts], [tʂ], [tɕ], [tsʰ], [tʂʰ], [tɕʰ], respectively in Pinyin ⟨z⟩, ⟨zh⟩, ⟨j⟩, ⟨c⟩, ⟨ch⟩, and ⟨q⟩), whereas English only has two: /tʃ/ (written ⟨ch⟩) and /ts/ (⟨ts⟩ or ⟨z⟩), of which only /tʃ/ regularly occurs.
[98] Paik Lee, Mary (1990). Sucheng Chan (ed.). *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America.* Seattle: University of Washington Press. 16–17.

hop that was prominent in the East Coast during the mid–1980s to the early 1990s.) insistent rhythms, but makes a difficult fit for trap's slurred nature. However, the country is home to over 275 indigenous languages and thousands of regional dialects categorized into eight major groups, providing fertile ground for the development of Chinese rap. Among them, rappers from Chengdu such as Higher Brothers have been blessed with a linguistic toolbox that perfectly suits trap. Unlike other Chinese dialects, which make heavy use of flat tones that can give the musical impression of monotony, the Sichuanese dialect is rich with rising and falling tones. The tone for one character can sound as its polar opposite when spoken in standard Mandarin or Sichuanese. This means that, when used together with Mandarin, the dialect unlocks a wealth of options as to where stresses can fall within a bar. Combined with the dialect's propensity for exaggerated pronunciation that the locals call YaJian(牙尖)—literally, "sharp tooth"—Chengdu rappers have largely avoided the disadvantages of Mandarin pronunciation, and adopted a linguistic strategy that perfectly suits trap. In this way, they not only fight back against the sarcastic Western stereotype that "Chinese rap sounds like *ching chang chong*", but also avoid disadvantages in pronunciation and form a wealth of flexible and characteristic linguistic strategies that can be deployed in their music.

In fact, in Higher Brothers' song, the stereotypes about the East are not only limited to the character images, language, and text. The stereotype also now encompasses all aspects of the song, such as its title "Made in China". "Made in China" is the designation for goods that have been manufactured in mainland China. The "Made in China" label is the most recognizable label in the world today, due to the country being the largest exporter in the world.[99] Although "Made in China" has noble intentions of promoting products "Made in China", critics of China have utilized the slogan to mock low–

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[99] Monaghan, Angela. (January 10, 2014). "China surpasses US as world's largest trading nation". *The Guardian*.

quality products or indeed geopolitical misbehaviors as "Made in China", in order to criticize the Chinese Government for its mishandling, censorship, propaganda, imperialism, and public misbehaviors. It has now often become a pejorative for anything that comes from China, regardless of if it is products, censorship, imperialism, or people.

Since China's reform and opening-up policies in 1978, the Chinese economy has made significant forward strides through globalization, and China has become the center of the global manufacturing industry. "Made in China" has almost become the label to describe a rapidly-developing China and its massive industrial manufacturing system around the world. However, for a long time, foreign consumers have had a negative assessment of products "Made in China", which, to a great extent, is driven by the "country of origin" (COO) and "country of origin labeling (COOL)" phenomenon. Country of origin (COO), refers to the country or countries of manufacture, production, design, or brand origin of an article or product.[100] Meanwhile, country of origin labeling (COOL) is also known as "place-based branding", the "made-in image", or "nationality bias". It refers to the different origins of imported commodities that cause consumers to evaluate them differently, thus forming an invisible barrier to imported commodities entering the local market.

Following Schooler's pioneering research proving that there is a preference for brands of origin in the American market, a large amount of research on the "COO effect" has been conducted.[101] According to domestic and overseas literature, it can be found that

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[100] Johnson, Z. S., Tian, Y., & Lee, S. (2016). Country-of-origin fit: when does a discrepancy between brand origin and country of manufacture reduce consumers' product evaluations?. *Journal of Brand Management, 23*(4), 403-418.

[101] Schooler, R.D. (1965), "Product bias in the Central American common market." *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol 2, No 4, 394-397

consumers show a rather obvious preference for brands "made in America",[102] in France, in Germany, and in Japan, but think poorly of products made in developing countries. Meanwhile, in terms of the market, a stereotype that the brands of developed countries are superior to brands of developing countries consequently developed. Within the American context, Schniederjans and other researchers have investigated how consumers assess the quality of products "Made in China", and came to the following two conclusions: at first, the quality of products "Made in China" is believed to be poor; secondly, most consumers believe that products made in other countries are more valuable than products "Made in China".[103] While benefit ing from the low costs, foreign consumers also form a permanent and set impression of "Made in China", thus creating a stereotype of it. Such stereotypes not only prevent the Chinese manufacturing industry from catching up with the pace of the global market, but also influence China's national image. In recent years, foreign consumers have shown an increasing acceptance of items "Made in China", but this acceptance still isn't matched by the quality and level of Chinese products. In a report titled "Foreign Consumers' Recognition of "Made in China": the situation, problems and countermeasures(2019)",[104] after combining four pieces of research on foreign consumers' acceptance of "Made in China",[105] it is evident that although the recognition of the "Made in China" logo in the foreign market is increasing, it is still not matched by the quality of Chinese products, and hence, the products remain underestimated. As for the reasons for these results, apart from the generally short history of

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[102] Reierson, C.C. (1966), "Are Foreign Products Seen as National Stereotypes?" *Journal of Retailing*, Vol 42, 33-40.

[103] Schniederjans, M. J., Cao, Q., & Olson, J. R. (2004). "Consumer perceptions of product quality: 'Made in China'." *Quality Management Journal, 11*(3), 8-18.

[104] 米健, & 宋紫峰. (2019). 國外消費者對 "中國制造" 的認同度: 現狀, 問題 與對策. 江淮論壇, 294(02), 37.

[105] Including Future Brand's *"Country of Manufacturers in 2014"* report, Statista's *"Country Manufacturer Index 2017"*, *the Research of Top 30 Export Brands in 2017*, and the CIPG and WPP Group's *Investigation of China's National Image.*

the manufacturing industry in China, the fact that its manufacturing systems and environments need to be optimized, and some internal reasons—like insufficient impetus and ineffectiveness in Chinese enterprises' brand development—there are some external factors as well. For example, the foreign media also encourages consumers to distrust brands "Made in China". As Chinese manufacturing is in a trade surplus in the main regions and countries around the world, it is much easier for its "industrial transfer", "employment", "product safety", and other issues to attract foreign consumers' attention and arouse their distrust thereof. Therefore, as some problems with an item being "Made in China" can be easily exaggerated, so can the quality problem be overemphasized. Under the impression of the magnified and exaggerated quality problems of products "Made in China", consumers always retain the stereotype that products "Made in China" are shoddy. Consequently, Chinese manufacturing is associated with some negative labels, including "poor quality", "low value", "insecure", and "knock-off".

Although "Made in China" is not a brand that is worth trust and approval to the minds of foreign consumers, Higher Brothers named their song "Made in China" so as to directly announce to their audience(s): the property of the song is also "Made in China". In the song, through redefining the phrase "Made in China", Higher Brothers fight against and refute the common maxim in Western society that "Made in China" represents shoddy goods. At the same time, it shows the group's determination to overturn and change the stereotypes associated with the phrase. Faced with different negative labels attached to "Made in China", Higher Brothers do not directly explain their argument or fight back literally. Instead, they use an aside to justify "Made in China" and the Chinese image. In the verse, MaSiWei says:

> "闹钟把你叫醒 Made in China/牙膏牙刷上面挤 Made in China 把早餐放进陶瓷碗 Made in China /擦唇膏出门打起伞 Made in China /座到公司里 wu /旋转办公椅 wu/360度 熟悉的印记 wu/钢笔画了一朵莲花/cookin需要放点盐巴/相框里面框住全家/全是

Made in China"

This verse transfers the impression that "Made in China" stands for poor quality and knock-off into the impression that everything people use from the moment they open their eyes, from daily life to work, is from China; "Made in China" and Chinese soft power begin to invade the world like wildfire. There will always be something "Made in China" from your head to feet and even at the University of Arizona, there are also Chinese lessons. What's more, Chinese people have begun to step into the field of hip-hop—once considered to be unrelated to China because of certain stereotypes. If someone says that they do not like "Made in China", then they are certainly lying.

As for Western people's distorted understandings, prejudices, and stereotypes of China, Higher Brothers deploy a skillful narrative technique by pointing out that "Made in China" is everywhere. They highlight that "Made in China", which has been considered synonymous with poor quality, low value, safety problems, and shoddy goods for a long time, occupies an important part in the global market and plays a role in the lives and jobs of people around the world, thus stressing the phrase's (and country's) global importance. Thereafter, according to Higher Brothers, with "Made in China" already all over the world, the Chinese language and culture are also invading the world at a lightning pace. What's more, in (and through) the song, China is even actively joining the field of hip-hop, which also further highlights the profound vitality of China's cultural power.

To sum up, as the spokespeople for "Made in China", what Higher Brothers have needed to face first are Western concerns about Chinese rap. As a strategy for responding, they take advantage of their Sichuanese dialect and combine standard Chinese, and Sichuanese with intermittent English, which thus significantly counteracts their disadvantage as rappers due to the Chinese system of pronunciation. This specific linguistic strategy not only fights back against the

stereotyped criticisms that "Chinese rap sounds like *ching chang chong*", but also makes the identity of Chinese rap clearer. Furthermore, when aiming to fight the negative labels attached to "Made in China", Higher Brothers did not choose to explain literally. On the contrary, they applied an indirect description strategy to justify the phrase as well as the Chinese image, indicating their sense of fight and transcendence, as well as their determination to rebuild the image of "Made in China" and China's esteem.

4.2.3. Keith Ape: transcending K-pop and re-appropriated exoticism

Similar to Rich Brian and Higher Brothers, Keith Ape's works also display a rebellious attitude. If Rich Brian exposes Western people to the talent of Asians, and Higher Brothers maintain and rebuild the image of "Made in China" in their respective works, then Keith Ape's work aims to express a rebellious attitude against the "K-POP factory star system" and the negative imagery it causes.

K-pop is an abbreviation of Korean popular music, but in South Korea, popular music is referred to as "Gayo" (가요). The English abbreviation "K-pop" first appeared in Japan. It is the name used by the Japanese media when introducing the album released by H.O.T in 1998, and it is used to refer to the overall Korean popular music.[106] However, a more precise definition of K-pop is a genre of popular music originating in South Korea after the 1990s, which was produced with idol as the center, and was influenced by Western music styles such as hip-hop, R&B, and rock music. According to Shin's research, the use of the word K-pop in South Korea can be divided into three stages: until the 1990s, the word K-pop did not exist in South Korea; by the 2000s, K-pop was used internationally but not used in South Korea; the third stage is after the 2010s, the word was

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[106] 신현준. (2013). *가요 케이팝 그리고 그 너머*, 돌베개, 45-46.

widely used in both South Korea and abroad, meanwhile the term gradually replaced Gayo as the main genre of Korean popular music.[107] The above information reveals the fact that the term K-pop was originally named overseas rather than in South Korea. The difference in the names of Gayo and K-pop contains the differences in their respective historical contexts and the target audience, which was related to the problem of identity.

One of the most noteworthy claims in the research on the cultural identity of K-pop is that K-pop cannot be said to be "Korean" but a "stateless" type of music, because it has a hybrid characteristic, and it is a cultural product targeted for export. Lie argued in the study, "there isn't very much 'Korean' in K-pop, the K in K-pop is merely a brand, part of Brand Korea that has been the export-oriented South Korean government since the 1960s." [108] Lee also believes that K-pop is a product of expanding and replicating cultural capital through the new ideology of cultural nationalism, and emphasizes that the essence of K-pop is cultural capital that transcends national boundaries.[109] Similarly, Shin denies the originality of K-pop, believing that K-pop is the global productions produced by entertainment companies that want to be incorporated into the global capital.[110]

Other scholars believe that the above-mentioned criticism of K-pop is a one-sided analysis based on "archetype and essentialism",[111] and believe that the shadow of the Korean sensibility can be glimpsed in the production and consumption of K-pop. Kim& Kim believes that Lie is only looking for standards or entities of "Korean-ness" /

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[107] Ibid.
[108] Lie, J. (2012). What is the K in K-pop? South Korean popular music, the culture industry, and national identity. *Korea Observer*, *43*(3), 361.
[109] 이동연. (2011). 케이팝 (K-pop): 신자유주의 시대 초국적 국민문화의 아이콘. *내일을 여는 역사*, (45), 250.
[110] 신현준. (2013). Ibid.
[111] 김수정, & 김수아. (2015). '집단적 도덕주의' 에토스: 혼종적 케이팝의 한국적 문화정체성. *언론과 사회*, *23*(3), 15.

"Korean cultural identity" in the traditions or Confucian culture, that is, his definition of culture is based on past heritage, not based on the values and culture of current people. They not only doubted the rationality of Lie's criterion, but also tried to find South Korea's national cultural identities from the three aspects of K-pop—— which were production, text, and recipients. In their research, they proposed that the "collective moralism (집단적 도덕주의)" which carries the Korean national identity is the organization principle of K-pop, and it is also an important ethic of contemporary Korean culture.[112] Similarly, Shin& Kim admit that K-pop is a hybrid cultural production, but they emphasize that from the perspective of industrial form and institutional practice, the whole process of K-pop is full of Korean characteristics.[113]

As Procter mentioned when describing Hall's theory of popular culture "there is no authentic popular culture uncontaminated by dominant culture; no youth culture free of parent culture; and no self-contained identity untouched by the identity of others." [114] Therefore, before defining and discussing K-pop, we should not ignore the history of K-pop's "self-growth". In other words, we should not separate modern K-pop from the development of Korean popular music before it.

The history of the development of Korean pop music can be said to have begun in the era of Japanese occupation. Although before that, there has been some "popular music" with modernity consciousness in the folk spontaneously, these musical cultures have not been inherited and developed successfully. It was not until the foreign forces invaded that the Korean peninsula ushered in a brand-new musical culture. Given the Japanese rule over Korea — including

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[112] Ibid., 18.
[113] Shin, S. I., & Kim, L. (2013). Organizing K-pop: Emergence and market making of large Korean entertainment houses, 1980–2010. *East Asia*, *30*(4), 255–272.
[114] Procter, J. (2004). *Stuart hall*. Routledge, 5.

cultural and musical education — the Japanese influence over Korean musical sensibilities was profound. During the Japanese rule (1910–1945), the popularity of changga(창가) songs rose as Koreans expressed their feelings against Japanese oppression through music. Trot music, which still occupied an important position in Korean popular music today, originated during the Japanese occupation of Korea. It is generally admitted that Trot's closest ancestors were Japanese enka(演歌).[115] They were formed in little time intervals, during the colonial period they were influenced by each other.

After the Korean Peninsula was partitioned into North and South following its liberation in 1945 from Japanese occupation, Western culture was introduced into South Korea on a small scale, American music started influencing Korean music. Rapid and compressed urbanization brought South Koreans in close proximity to imported cultural products, which in turn disseminated by means of modern communication technologies: radio, movies, and television. During this period, with the rise of Western pop music and Korean rock music, trot was no longer predominant in South Korea.[116]

At the end of the 1960s Korean pop music underwent another transformation. Unlike their predecessors, who were influenced by war and Japanese oppression, musicians of the new generation were heavily influenced by American culture and lifestyle (including the hippie movement of the 1960s). Like the activists of the student movement in America, they turned to folk music as the preferred music, wrote the desire for freedom and dissatisfaction with the government into their lyrics to against the authoritarian government. Not surprisingly, the authoritarian government banned folk and rock music due to its association with the students' anti-government

[115] Provine, R., Hwang, O., & Howard, K. (2001). Korea. Grove Music Online.
[116] Jermy Mersereau, (June 14, 2017). "A brief history of K-pop". A SIDE.

movements.[117]

In addition to folk songs, some trot songs are also banned in order to bolster the government's anti-Japanese credentials because of the influence of Japanese enka songs on trot. Trot performance usually employed ostensibly Western presentation, but in terms of singing and performance style, it was still closer to Korean traditional musical scale and emotions. [118]

The 1980s in Korean popular music saw the rise of "ballad singers," whose slow, syrupy songs focused entirely on romance and other affairs of the heart. Cho Yong-pil(조용필, born March 21, 1950) is a consensus superstar of South Korean popular music in the 1970s and 1980s. Although he dabbled in several musical styles, his initial popularity owed to "trot" that he sang in traditional, pansori style. Cho's music signified Korean-ness, except for Japanese fans who appreciated him because of the persistent proximity of Japanese and Korean cultures, his songs were rendered alien to those uninitiated to the national culture and the dominant musical style. Lie explained in the study, "his music was almost inevitably in the pentatonic scale, he sang without moving, employed melismatic and pansori singing techniques, and relied on his vocal skills, rather than on his looks, to achieve stardom".[119]

As Lie argued in the study, "Change is inevitably quantitative and

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[117] In the 1970s, the Park Chung-hee government banned American pop music and Korean rock music for their association with sex and drugs.
[118] Lie explained in the study (2012, Ibid., 344),
"the register of Korean musical sensibility remained stubbornly rooted in traditional musical meters——the singers belted out tunes employing the pentatonic scale , and performers usually stood still, dressed in traditional ethnic garb or conservative 'western' outfit and projecting an utterly respectable appearance ——which showed apparent differences with the gyrating Elvis or the ruffian Rolling Stones."
[119] Lie. (2012). Ibid., 344-345.

gradual but often expresses itself as a qualitative jump." [120] The quantum leap in Korean popular music was the emergence of Seo Tai-ji and the Boys in 1992. As the first group to add hip-hop style to Korean popular music, they abandoned the traditional pentatonic, and instead used the contemporary diatonic. In their songs, we "no longer heard the soul-screeching wails of melismatic singing but the percussive and syllabic singing signaling the urban cool." [121] In addition, they also introduced dance into the performance, and "struck a resonant political chord for the increasingly affluent youths liberated from the demands of anti-government politics." [122]

Until the mid-1990s, except for occasional trot singers with warm receptions in Japan and Taiwan, South Korean music industry was resolutely domestic in orientation and consumption. The IMF crisis in 1997 led to a massive downturn in South Korean consumption. Few record companies left after the "disaster", and the introduction of digitized music and largely unprotected internet downloads (mp3 players were introduced in 1996) exacerbated the pain of the South Korean music industry. CD sales declined propitiously, more strikingly, the South Korean domestic market was inherently limited. In brief, all viable roads for the industry pointed to cultivating the export market.

Since the 2000s, South Korean popular culture has set off a wave (Korean Wave; 한류, Hallyu) in Chinese-language areas, and then spread rapidly in Southeast Asia. The Korean Wave, in its initial articulation, seemed to be all about South Korean soap operas. By the late 2000s, however, the driving force of the Korean Wave seemed to have shifted to the rapid ascent of K-pop.

Through the review of the development of Korean popular music, it can be known that before K-pop, Korean popular music has always

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[120] Ibid., 349.
[121] Ibid., 349.
[122] Ibid., 350.

been influenced by western music, but this acceptance is not just a simple imitation, it is related to the emotions of Korean society. The reason why K-pop is criticized for lack of "K- identity" is that compared with the music genres of previous generations, K-pop fails to express the Korean national identity fully. I argue that K-pop is a product of the self-growth history of Korean popular music. Although Korean popular music has always been influenced by foreign cultures, especially Western music and culture, and now the most representative music genre of South Korea in the world—— K-pop is considered to be stateless music with a hybrid characteristic, it has evolved from changga in the era of Japanese occupation, to trot, which is in the same line as Japanese enka, to folk and rock, which embodies the spirit of resistance of South Korean youth generation in the 1960s-1970s, to nowadays, K-pop, which continues to rise all over the world, the development process of Korean popular music itself is full of "Korean-ness".

To borrow the words of Procter's summary of Halls' mass culture theory again: "there is no authentic popular culture uncontaminated by dominant culture; no youth culture free of parent culture; and no self-contained identity untouched by the identity of others." Regardless of whether it is the changga that formed the resistance to Japanese rule during the Japanese occupation, or after the IMF crisis, all indicators of South Korea's economy, society, and culture pointed to the development of overseas markets, forming the popular music genre—— K-pop with global ambitions, the history of Korean popular music itself is a testimony to the historical development of Korean society.

K-pop's global ambition is a quality that distinguishes the genre from other Korean music. As a cultural strategy, exporting K-pop to the rest of the world is not only a goal of the Korean music industry, but also a government priority. The South Korean government has acknowledged the benefits to the country's export sector as a result

of the Korean Wave[123] and has thus subsidized certain K-pop endeavors.[124] In addition to reaping economic benefits from the popularity of K-pop, the South Korean government has also taken advantage of K-pop's influence in interior and diplomatic affairs. For many young Koreans, K-pop stars represent their ideal image of themselves; for Korean leaders, they symbolize the promising future of their country. In an age of mass communication, soft power (pursuing one's goals by persuading stakeholders through one's cultural and ideological power) is regarded as a more effective and pragmatic diplomatic tactic than the traditional diplomatic strategy of hard power (obtaining what one wants from stakeholders through direct intimidation such as military threat or economic sanctions).[125] Cultural diplomacy through K-pop is an established form of soft power.[126]

Susanna Lim has noted in her article that, the biggest aspect of K-pop's appeal is the group members' relentless pursuit of perfection.[127] Universally speaking, K-pop is visual music, meaning that it is a musical genre that combines music with the visual senses. [128] In

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[123] Arirang News. (May 31, 2012). "Korean Wave Gives Exports a Boost". *The Chosun Ilbo*. This article writes: "it was estimated in 2011 that a $100 increase in the export of cultural products resulted in a $412 increase in exports of other consumer goods including food, clothes, cosmetics and IT products."
[124] Rousee-Marquet, Jennifer. (November 29, 2012). "Kpop: the story of the well-oiled industry of standardized catchy tunes". *INA*.
[125] Wagner, Jan-Philipp. (May 12, 2014) "The Effectiveness of Soft & Hard Power in Contemporary International Relations". *E-International Relations.*
[126] Kim, Tae Young; Jin, Dal Young (2016). "Cultural Policy in the Korean Wave: An Analysis of Cultural Diplomacy Embedded in Presidential Speeches". *International Journal of Communication.*
[127] Susanna Lim. (June 07, 2018). "How Korean boy band BTS toppled Asian stereotypes—and took America by storm". *AEST.*
[128] *NPR* has summarized the reasons for K-pop's success in gaining global attention ("Gangnam style: three reasons K-pop is taking over the world" on October 12, 2012) as follows:
1. The output-led music industry model
2. Audience are listening to K-pop through screens

his research, Lee Jiun points out that just as rap or jazz have a distinct aesthetic significance, K-pop also has its own aesthetic significance.[129] Of the several elements that make up K-pop's aesthetics, K-pop dances and performers—performing the role of a pop idol—are its core. Lee points out that Korean group dances(군무) and point choreography(포인트 안무) embody the core spirit of K-pop.[130] Lee believes that Korean emotions and feelings are integrated into group dances to show the "harmony" between members—an important distinguisher from European and American singers, who value personality a lot; as such, Korean group dances reflect the identity of K-pop. The characteristics of the group dances are as follows: first, even a small mistake is forbidden and the choreography must be exactly as scheduled, which visually creates a dynamic combination of sorts. Then, the dance usually contains some kind of point gestures, which can be easily copied by the audience. In the repeated and representative dances, the actions of point dances mostly accord with the meaning of the lyrics.

As the lead performers in K-pop, the idols and their image are also an important element in K-pop aesthetics. As Susanna Lim pointed

> "Their performances involve perfectly synchronized choreography. They also tend to have a very specific look that reflects idealized Caucasian beauty standards: a small, chiseled face, large eyes, a straight nose, long legs and trendy outfits."[131]

3. It makes good use of YouTube

[129] 이지언.(2017). 대중예술의 이미지 재현에 관한 미학적 논의 : 케이팝 춤 (K-POP Dance)을 중심으로. 예술교육연구 2017, 제 15 권, 제 2 호, 143-162

[130] After analyzing the dances of some Korean idol groups, Lee notes that their choreography is summed up in "칼군무" (perfectly organized group dance as sharp as a knife) and "포인트 안무" (the most prominent move of the choreography, usually performed at the beginning of the chorus). Additionally, the camera angle dynamically moves in an original one-take manner, which not only makes the choreography look three-dimensional but also increases the sense immersion. Group dance is also designed in various combinations so that each member's individuality can be revealed, rather than performing uniformly identical moves.

[131] Susanna Lim. (June 07, 2018). "How Korean boy band BTS toppled

Furthermore, each idol's every action is managed so that they "perform perfectly". In their research, Won and Kim have pointed out that idols are created by entertainment companies aiming to realize the former's overall development. The management companies that train idols devote to making their idols both singers and entertainers that can carry out diversified activities. They aim to cultivate all-round "TV and music performers" who are qualified in performing, joking, MC (short for master of ceremonies or mic controller), and singing.[132] After being trained and marketed for a long time, each movement of the idol will be exposed to the camera, so they are required to focus on maintaining a perfect image at all times. In other words, idols are exposed to cameras anytime and anywhere, so on all occasions, they need to behave perfectly and pay attention to their image. Won and Kim believe that the process is emotionally hard work and in Korean mass music, the spirit of K-pop aims to allow people to have fun with the stars' emotional labor.

K-pop's core value of pursuing perfection is widely discussed in the Western world. A report by the *New Yorker* entitled "Factory Girls: Cultural technology and the making of K-pop" describes K-pop's "factory system". This article mentions the cruelty of the idol-making system, in which the agencies recruit twelve-to-nineteen-year-olds from around the world, through both open auditions and a network of scouts. In addition to singing and dancing, the idols study acting and foreign languages—Japanese, Chinese, and English. They also receive media coaching and are made ready for the intense scrutiny they will receive on the Internet from the "netizens" of Korea. The article believes that K-pop is made in "factories" based on "cultural technology". It also points out that because of this, personal creativity is restricted. Within a system that takes "pursuing perfection" as its ultimate criteria, all of the dirty aspects

Asian stereotypes—and took America by storm". *AEST.*
[132] 원용진, 김지만. (2012). 사회적 장치로서의 아이돌 현상. *대중서사연구, 18(2)*, 319-361

hidden behind the beautiful facade of K-pop are revealed in quick succession, which often can be more attractive to Western media. Meanwhile, the reservations caused by these dirty aspects also influence Western audiences' imagination and judgment of Asians. Research has shown that Westerners tend to stereotypically view Asians as a vague, collective mass that robotically imitates the West.[133] They assign to Asians the negative qualities of capitalism—materialism and cutthroat competitiveness—while downplaying Asians' self-assertion and individuality, both of which are qualities valued by Western societies. As far as Western audiences are concerned, behind K-pop's gorgeous appearance are the idols' repressed personalities and natural beauty.

The shadow around K-pop not only affects Western audiences' understanding of it, but also has an influence on K-pop stars who try to step into the European and American mainstream musical field. The K-pop industry has made several major attempts at promoting some of its most successful artists in the U.S mainstream since 2010. However, those attempts have failed to appease the mainstream American viewer and have been unable to transform their viewership into a profitable commercial commodity. Daisy Kim has noted in her thesis that K-pop stars such as Rain, BoA, Se7en, Wonder Girls, and Girls' Generation have all made active attempts to enter the mainstream American pop market, all of which have ended in failure. The nine girls in Girls' Generation, for example,

> "had been fully re-appropriated to fulfill the imagination of Korea's appropriation of America's idealized imagination of an Asian female aesthetic, to mirror the beauty proportions and appetites of what its perception of America's ideal female Asian pop star would

[133] Roh, D. S., Huang, B., & Niu, G. A. (2015). *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media*. Rutgers University Press.
Lizzie. (May 29, 2013). "K-pop and the role of race in the Western music industry". *Beyondhallyu.*

be." [134]

However, this kind of deliberate "intention" is not enough to attract or sustain the attention of Western audiences.[135]

One special exception to have gained worldwide success, however, is the artist Psy and his song Gangnam Style. In his article in the *New Yorker*, John Seabrook mentions that Psy is a Korean pop star, but he does not belong to K-pop, with his success taking place largely outside of the factory system and in fact by satirizing standard K-pop tropes in "Gangnam Style."[136] Even though Americans have shown great interest in Psy and Gangnam Style, people's appraisal of Korean music is unchanging. In his research, Song Jeehye (2012) has mentioned that Korean media have described Gangnam Style as "affect[ing] the whole world", but he also shows that it is a completely different case in America.[137] Indeed, Fisher (2012) has stated that because of Korean nationalism, most evaluations of Gangnam Style are friendly, but in America, it is completely different.[138] Both Kang and Oh (2013) connect how Psy and Gangnam Style are viewed in the minds of European and American audiences to Westerners' stereotypes about Asia. Kang believes that Americans still hold the same deep-rooted racist attitude towards Psy as to other "Orientals".[139] Oh similarly believes that although Gangnam Style is popular in Europe and America, it is not based on natural feelings

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[134] Kim, D. (2012). *Reappropriating Desires in Neoliberal Societies through K-Pop* (Doctoral dissertation, UCLA). 45.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Seabrook, J. (2012). Factory girls: Cultural technology and the making of K-pop. *The New Yorker*, *8*.
[137] 송지혜.(December 25, 2012). "161 일 만에 10 억 클릭 … 세계가 '강남스타일'에 감염됐다". *중앙일보*, p.11
[138] Fisher, M. (2012). Gangnam Style, dissected: The subversive message within South Korea's music video sensation. *The Atlantic*, *23*.
Fisher, M. (2012). Visual music: How 'Gangnam Style' exploited K-pop's secret strength and overcame its biggest weakness. *The Washington Post*.
[139] Kang, I. (March, 2013). Gangnam style' nationalism: South Korea's pop culture exports and its nationalist desire for globalization. In *Conference paper, PCA/ACA Asian popular culture national conference*.

of affinity, and is on the contrary only "racist love".[140] Meanwhile, Psy's joker's image intensifies the European stereotype of Eastern males as "unnatural marginal men". In other words, even though Gangnam Style has gained the attention of Western audiences and success in America, it still has not changed Western opinions on Korean music and even Korean society at large. On the contrary, it has served to deepen European and American stereotypes of Eastern men.

It is evident that neither mainstream nor non-mainstream K-pop stars have changed Westerners' negative perceptions of Korean music, and K-pop has also not shaken Westerners' long-standing stereotypes of the Asian community. However, Keith Ape's "IT G MA" has attracted the Western audience's attention in an unprecedented way. It could be said that this song has bridged the cultural gap between Eastern and Western culture for the first time, and has made Western audiences aware of the vitality of Korean music beyond K-pop. *Complex magazine* assessed that with Keith Ape, "Korean rap finally had a song and artist with genuine traction in the U.S.",[141] while *Vice*'s music platform *Noisey* called "IT G MA" "historic".[142] .Western listeners began calling him the "Korean Trap Lord", and "IT G MA" would subsequently be re-released as a remix featuring Dumbfoundead, Waka Flocka Flame, A$AP Ferg, and Father. As mentioned in *Complex*, "IT G MA" and Keith Ape are both a "Korean song and artist that could escape the K-pop playlist quarantine and maybe even commingle on Migos' Pandora station".[143] The reason for this is because the content and genre of

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[140] Oh, C. (March, 2013). Performing divine nationalisms through "cheesy horse dance": Transnational consumptions of Psy's Gangnam Style. In *Conference paper, PCA/ACA Asian popular culture national conference*.
[141] Donnie Kwak. (July 30, 2015). "Keith Ape is ready to be the world's next trap star." *COMPLEX*.
[142] Dexter Thomas. (February 03, 2015). "IT G MA" Made Asian Rap History (In Addition to Sounding Like OG Maco's "U Guessed It"). *Vice*.
[143] Donnie Kwak. (July 30, 2015), "Keith Ape is ready".

the song disrupt people's common understanding of K-pop.

K-pop isn't simply a genre of music, but a multifaceted art form of inexplicable sounds, powerhouse choreography, and high-concept narratives and visuals. The "IT G MA" music video is neither delicately produced, nor does it present a well-dressed Asian image or group dances that embody the spirit of K-pop. Instead, it gives off a free and casual vibe and features some young, exuberant Asian individuals. The song's music video is shot in a hotel in Itaewon with one-take filming techniques; in it, Keith Ape is the one who leads the camera to other rappers in the music video. The content of the video is very simple: Keith Ape wears a Bape coat, transparent goggles, a hat, and a mask, all of which make it difficult to distinguish his face. He holds a bottle of rice wine in his hand and walks into the rooms of his cohorts. When he finishes singing his verse to the camera, he leads the camera to the next rapper. Keith Ape doesn't have any deliberate actions to perform, and nor do the rest of his cohorts. Consequently, the music video is full of freedom and casualness. Meanwhile, the music video is roughly produced, without much powerful or skillful post-editing—meaning there are occasionally some representative symbols visible, like the cohorts' logo and symbols of the South Korean won and Japanese yen. At the same time, the one-take filming technique even creates a feeling of dizziness for the audience generated by the occasionally shaking camera. As a *Noisey* article on the song has written, "they [Keith Ape and his cohort crew] aren't wasting time trying to pander their Asianness to Americans. Everything is one long, overexposed take of a bunch of 'orca ninjas going rambo' in a hotel suite. It looks like any other trap video, just with more Asian dudes." [144]

The images of these "Asian dudes" are worth some concrete analysis. At a first glance, it is obvious that Keith Ape and his crew are

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[144] Dexter Thomas. (February 03, 2015). "IT G MA" Made Asian Rap History (In Addition to Sounding Like OG Maco's "U Guessed It"). *Vice.*

different from the general idealized image of K－pop idols in terms of both style and action. They are no longer K－pop idols who are well－dressed, and perform uniform actions and flawless group dances. They are also unlike the "Asian uncle" type of Psy who makes European and American people laugh with his funny dancing and appearance. On the contrary, they are young Asians who are dressed unusually, hold wine bottles, give the finger to the camera, and yell out frequently. In the video for "IT G MA", they go crazy. The image of Asian men represented in Western media has always been belittled and emasculated, ranging from Fu Manchu—who represents the "yellow peril"—to Charlie Chan, the representative of model ethnic minorities. Indeed, Asian men as often depicted in the media lack personality, passion, and masculine charm. However, the image that Keith Ape portrays in the music video is completely different, with his peculiar outfits and outlandish behaviors—as well as his performing style—enabling viewers to share his emotions. Although unable to understand the lyrics, Western audiences are seemingly willing to get crazy together with him. As Keith Ape himself once said, this is probably because people from around the world can feel the power from his performance, which has a distinctly antisocial vibe.

The free and wild attitude that is unwilling to be restrained within the video belies a fighting attitude against the negative assessments that Korean music restrains personality and creativity. Besides, the biggest difference between Keith Ape from K－pop stars who try to step into the American mainstream is that he properly coordinates his exoticism with Western tastes. Kim has cited Savigliano's text on Tango's success as a "re－appropriated consumable culture" for Western audiences to explain why the attempts by K－pop idols have failed.[145] She writes that

> "it is the exoticism as well as [the] appropriately re－appropriated essence and presentation of Tango that was its selling point. For the K－Pop artists that had previously attempted crossovers, the effects

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[145] Savigliano, M. (1995). *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion.* Boulder, CO: Westview.

of its exoticism need to be further and differently re-appropriated into a desirable commodity."[146]

According to Kim's research, the most important thing for Asian artists in gaining a Western audience's attention is to balance Western tastes while "keeping [an] exotic flavor". Keith Ape's work does exactly that, giving Western audiences a new understanding of both Korean music and Asia at the same time. Meanwhile, his song's "exoticism as well as its appropriately re-appropriated essence and presentation" can be analyzed in terms of the following aspects.

First of all, in terms of its musical style, the song clearly pays tribute to the young Atlanta rapper OG Maco, trying to break the characteristic of K-pop's musical style that stresses readability. To some extent, "IT G MA" transcends the aesthetic range of Asian audiences. This is a song whose musical style belongs to the trap subgenre of hip-hop music that originated in the Southern United States during the late 1990s. The genre's name stems from the Atlanta slang word "trap", which refers to a place in which drugs are sold illegally.[147] Trap music uses synthesized drums and is characterized by complicated hi-hat patterns, tuned kick drums with a long decay (originally from the Roland TR-808 drum machine), atmospheric synths, and lyrical content that often focuses on drug use and urban violence.[148] Since crossing over into the mainstream in the 2010s, trap has become one of the most popular forms of American music, consistently dominating the Billboard Hot

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[146] Kim, D. (2012). *Reappropriating Desires,* 46.

[147] Richard Stacey. (January 25, 2020). "Types Of Rap: A guide to the many styles of hip-hop". *Redbull.*

[148] Taliesin. (June 11, 2012). "Quit Screwing with Trap Music: An Interview with Houston-Born Producer Lōtic". *Vice.*
Shawn Setaro. (February 15, 2018). "How Trap Music Came to Rule the World". *Complex.*
Raymer, Miles. (November 20, 2012). "Who owns trap?" *Chicago Reader.*

100 throughout the decade. In 2018, hip-hop became the most popular form of music for the first time ever (according to Nielsen Data)—coinciding with trap's continued rise in popularity.[149] Its influence can also be heard in reggaeton and K-pop, meanwhile.[150]

However, for Asian audiences, the fierce and original atmosphere evoked by this type of music is strange. Since the 1990s, Asian hip-hop has developed gradually. Especially in Korea, since the mid-2000s, hip-hop has begun to be recognized and its existence is no longer only dependent on Korean musical idols. As a result, many hip-hop labels began to appear, like Hilite Records, to whom Keith Ape had once been signed. However, it is still antithetical for such rappers as Keith Ape—whose musical style and performing style are deeply influenced by American rappers—to stay in Korean hip-hop.[151] That is to say, compared to K-pop, which has mixed stylistic characteristics, "IT G MA"—which is so greatly influenced by American hip-hop musical and performing styles—still aligns more with Western audiences' taste and demand for music. However, though deeply influenced by American hip-hop culture, the song still retains and marginalizes its racial traits, so that for Western audiences, it is familiar but strange, thus making appreciating the song a nevertheless strange experience.

Judging purely from its musical style, a Western audience will be familiar with "IT G MA"; simultaneously, however, for this audience, it is still a song that is full of exoticism that can't be easily understood. This inscrutable quality first originates from the language problems the song poses. At first, the title of the song is a series of words that are full of mystery. The phrase "IT G MA" is similar to

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[149] Lynch, John. (January 05, 2018). "For the first time in history, hip-hop has surpassed rock to become the most popular music genre, according to Nielsen". *Business Insider.*
[150] "How Trap Music Took Over | Sound Field". *PBS Learning Media.*
[151] Hyeonseung Hwang. (February 28, 2018). "키스에이프 인터뷰 발췌-미국에서 홀로서기". *HYPEBEAST.*

the pronunciation of the Korean *잊지마*, which means "don't for-get". Compared to directly applying "don't forget" as the song's English title, the phrase consisting of three simple English words is not only easy for foreigners to pronounce, but also functions like a code word that renders the song mysterious.

The song's inscrutable quality is also evident in its lyrics. As the song mostly consists of Korean and Japanese, it is difficult for a Western audience to understand the meaning of the lyrics. In most cases, although the song is regarded as Keith Ape's works, it was actually completed collaboratively by five rappers, namely, Keith Ape, JayAllday, Loota, Okasian, and Kohh. Among them, Keith Ape and JayAllday are Korean. Okasian is a Korean-American and the other two are Japanese. JayAllday was born in Seoul and lived in Boston and Philadelphia for six years, before residing in Tokyo for four years; hence, it is not difficult to understand why JayAllday's verse consists of English and Japanese words. For example:

"잊지 마, 잊지 마, 우리가 이찌방 (一番)"

Don't forget, don't forget that we are *Ichiban*.

According to a rough estimate, the lyrics of the song are 50% in Korean, 40% in Japanese, and 10% in English—meaning even Koreans or Japanese can seldom completely understand the meaning of the entire song's lyrics. Meanwhile, even a speaker of the three languages can hardly master the key points of the song, as there are some catchphrases that belong uniquely to Keith Ape's cohorts—for example, "orca ninjas going Rambo". The enigmatic nature of the title and lyrics adds a mysterious color to the song. However, with some familiar Japanese words like *ありがとう*, which means "thanks", Western listeners can quickly identify that it is Asian hip-hop. (Interestingly, after analyzing the reaction video to the song, it can be concluded that most Western audiences can't distinguish between Japanese and Korean, but through some such words as "*ありがとう*"—the Japanese word for thanks—they can quickly locate the song's Asian identity.)

Furthermore, the song and music video also combine some Asian cultural elements to create an appealing exoticism to a Western audience. The magazine *Noisey* lists some of these cultural syntheses in the song: for example, Kohh, a Japanese rapper, raps an extended meditation on The Blue Hearts (a Japanese 80s punk group) while gripping a can of Cass, a Korean beer, all while framed by Yen and Won symbols. And the bottle that Keith waves around while wearing a mask is a cheap plastic bottle of Makgeolli(막걸리), a cloudy, unfiltered Korean rice wine.

The custom of facemask−wearing began in Japan during the early years of the 20th century, when a massive influenza pandemic known as the Spanish Flu spread around the world. Then, in Japan, after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, the sky was filled with smoke and ash for weeks, and air quality suffered for months thereafter. Facemasks came out of storage and became a typical accessory on the streets of Tokyo and Yokohama. Later, a second global flu epidemic in 1934 cemented Japan's love affair with the facemask. Then, in the 1950s, with Japan's rapid postwar industrialization leading to rampant air pollution, mask−wearing went from being a seasonal practice to a year−round habit. Neighboring countries to also face such chronic pollution issues—most notably China and Korea—have also been influenced by Japan's "mask culture".[152]

In recent years, mask−wearing has become rooted in new and

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[152] When asking "why has the mask−wearing trend primarily been limited to East Asian nations?" Jeff Yang posits in his article "A quick history of why Asians wear surgical masks in public" (https://qz.com/299003/a−quick−history−of−why−asians−wear−surgical−masks−in−public/) that "the underlying reason could be that in East Asia, the predilection toward using face−coverings to prevent exposure to bad air is something that predates the germ theory of disease, and extends into the very foundations of East Asian culture—— Taoism and the health precepts of Traditional Chinese Medicine, in which breath and breathing (in Chinese "Qi" 氣) are seen as a central element in good health."

increasingly postmodern rationales. Studies have found that among many young Japanese, masks have evolved into social firewalls.[153] Masks are even becoming an element of East-Asian style. In Japan, surgical masks bearing chic designs or the images of cute licensed characters can be purchased in every corner drugstore, and Chinese designer Yin Peng unveiled a line of "smog couture" clothes paired with a variety of masks in fashion weeks of 2014.

Compared with Korean music idols' idealized image in well-made K-pop music videos and the high-angle metropolitan night scenes of tourist brochures, the music video of "IT G MA" presents Asian cultures from a brand-new perspective. Through coordinating the tastes of Western audiences and the song's exoticism, "IT G MA" creates a new cultural space for Korean music. Not only did Keith Ape become the first rap star in South Korean history to actually succeed in the US, he also made Western audiences realize that South Koreans can be cool and crazy, too. Through "IT G MA", Keith Ape not only musically and visually impressed the Western hip-hop audience, but also expressed his resistance to the general and vague misunderstanding of Korean music and/or Korean people caused by the "shadow of the factory system" of K-pop.

4.3. What is 'Asian' in Asian cool?

Although Asian cool is a cross-cultural product borne out of Western media, if we want to understand the cultural connotations of this phenomenon, we must turn our attention to the hip-hop environment in which Asian creators are located. Indeed, the creators' social environments shape them, because at different stages of social development, their states of existence and personality traits will change, and these changes will accordingly be reflected in their work. In other words, these environmental influences will be deeply embedded in

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[153] Casey Baseel. (February 23, 2014). "Why do Japanese people wear surgical masks? It's not always for health reasons". *Japantoday.*

the works, and thus also provide the best answer to the question of what is Asian in Asian cool. In the following sections, I will explore the meaning of "Asian" in Asian cool from the perspectives of the hip-hop and social environments in which the authors of selected works are located.

4.3.1. Questions of identity: local specificities of Asian hip-hop

As Mitchell has argued, hip-hop is a "vehicle for global youth affiliation and a tool for reworking local identity all over the world".[154] Since the late 1980s, hip-hop culture has swept through the Asian continent and become an important part of youth culture in Asian countries. While borrowing from American hip-hop sampling techniques, clothing, and dance styles, hip-hop culture in Asian countries has also developed some distinct local characteristics over the past three decades. This process of appropriating African American hip-hop culture into Asian musical form is accomplished through multiple adoption and adaptation strategies of associated cultural, musical, and linguistic components.

To start with the conclusion: 88rising's artists come from different Asian countries, so their works are characterized by the localization of hip-hop across different countries. In the following sections, I will first refer to relevant research to give a brief overview of the hip-hop localization process in the selected rappers' countries, as well as the characteristics of those rappers. Based on the previous chapter's analysis, I will elaborate upon the local specificities of the hip-hop localization process evident in the selected works. Finally, I will compare the localization specificities displayed in the selected works from the perspectives of language, content, and vision.

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[154] Mitchell, T. (2001). 'Introduction: another root—hip-hop outside the USA', in *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-hop Outside the USA*, ed. T. Mitchell (Middletown, Wesleyan University Press), 1–2.

Local specificities of Korean hip-hop in "IT G MA"

In the early 1990s, hip-hop culture began to gain popularity among the South Korean youth, becoming a cultural identity marker of the new generation. South Korea's economic, political, and social changes provided the context in which hip-hop could take its roots as part of the contemporaneous local youth culture.[155] The youth of the 1990s was born into an era of economic stability and cultural abundance; they embraced Western popular culture while rebelling against established social rules. Hip-hop culture — especially the attitude of freedom and resistance conveyed by hip-hop music — deeply attracted the young generation. While the term hip-hop is often used to refer exclusively to hip-hop music,[156] hip-hop is characterized by four key elements: rapping (also called "MCing" or "emceeing"), DJing (and turntablism), breakdancing (movement/dance), and graffiti.[157] Rapping comprises a significant part of Korean hip-hop culture, and the term hip-hop is largely recognized and understood as rap music in Korea.[158]

Nowadays, hip-hop music has become an indispensable genre in Korean music. Hip-hop songs frequently dominate the Korean music charts, while various hip-hop related programs, performances, and cultural activities have become important sites of Korean popular

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[155]According to the World Bank's Country Brief (http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/ COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/KOREAEXTN/0contentMDK:20205 120~menuPK:324653~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854~theSitePK:324 645,00.html), South Korea had become the tenth-largest economy by the early 1990s. Additionally, during this period, South Korea was also experiencing some major changes politically: in 1993, authoritarian military rule finally ended, and a civilian government headed by Kim Yongsam was inaugurated. During the same period, South Korea began to relax its censorship towards popular music, allowing artists to explore artistic freedom and creativity (Mun, O. (2004). *A Social History of Music Censorship in Korea*. Seoul, Yesol)

[156] Kenon, Marci (May 06, 2000). "Hip-Hop". Billboard. 112 (23): 20.

[157] Chang, J. (2007). *Can't stop won't stop.*

[158] 송명선. (2016), 힙합하다.

culture in recent years. If we trace the origin of the popularization of hip-hop music in South Korea, the emerging importance of hip-hop among Korean teenagers is exemplified by the term 'Seo Taiji syndrome' — named after the iconic Korean artist Seo Tai-ji.[159] Seo Tai-ji (서태지, born Jeong Hyeon-Cheol 정현철, on 21 February 1972), is a South Korean singer, musician, songwriter, and record producer. He is recognized as one of the most prominent and influential cultural icons in South Korea, with many referring to him as "the President of Culture".[160] Seo Tai-ji formed "Seo Taiji and Boys" (서태지와 아이들) in 1992 with Yang Hyun-suk (양현석, born 9 January 1970) and Lee Juno (이주노, born Lee Sang-woo, on 10 February 1967). Their debut song "Nan Arayo" (<난 알아요>, I Know) was credited with changing the South Korean music industry with its pioneering introduction of rap and social critique to Korean pop music.[161] Not only did these musicians try to add musical elements of hip-hop to their album; they also drew on hip-hop styles in terms of dance and appearance. With authentic, powerful messages within their songs, Seo Tai-ji appealed to young Koreans as a defiant expression of Korean youth culture.

In their song "Hayoga" (하여가) (1993), Seo Taiji and Boys added a short solo with a *taepyeongso* (태평소, a traditional Korean conical oboe), becoming the first Korean hip-hop musicians to adopt Korean musical elements in a hip-hop song. Since then, many Korean rappers have begun to add traditional Korean music elements to their songs to emphasize the Korean identity. MC Sniper (born Kim Jung-yoo 김정유, on 8 February 1979), an underground rapper, is known for his use of traditional Korean musical and religious elements, including the *kayagum* (가야금, 12-stringed zither), the *daegum* (대금,

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[159] Kim, C. (2010). *Understanding Popular Culture*, revised edition. Seoul, Hanul.
[160] Cho, Chungun (March 23, 2012). "K-pop still feels the impact of Seo Taiji & Boys". *The Korea Herald*.
[161] Suh, Hye-rim (03 July 2013). "Seo Taiji and Boys chosen as K-pop icons". *The Korea Herald*.

transverse bamboo flute), and the *moktak* (목탁, Buddhist wooden percussion) in his productions.[162] Similar examples also appear in the works such as Bullhandang crew's (불한당 크루)의) "Bullhandang Ga" (<불한당가>) and Mino of Winner's (Song Min-ho 송민호, born 30 March 1993) "Geobukseon" (<거북선>). The local specificities of this music's auditory elements conform to local tastes and emphasize the identity of Korean hip-hop music. In the same context, by presenting both a background and objects with Korean references in their music videos, these songs' Korean identity is also displayed visually. For example, Deepflow's (born Ryu Sang-gu 류상구, on 1984) "Jakdu" (<작두>), Beenzino's (born Lim Sung-bin 임성빈, on 12 September 1987) "January," and DPR Live's (born Hong Da-bin 홍다빈, on 1 January 1993) "Eng Freestyle" all establish a distinct Korean identity by incorporating Korean symbols into their music videos.[163]

The aesthetics of language is the most important part of the poetics of rap; as Krims has stressed, linguistic features can help us to understand how culture works and how identities are formulated.[164] In the linguistic aesthetics of hip-hop, rhyming is the most basic and important technique. At first, rhyming was perceived as too difficult to be done accurately due to the grammatical differences between Korean and English. Thus, early Korean hip-hop artists naturally started using AAVE (African American Vernacular English) in their lyrics, creating rhymes by employing syllables with similar sounds from both Korean and English. The dominance of Korean American rappers in the Korean hip-hop scene also contributed to the use of mixed language in Korean hip-hop. Later, some artists deliberately refrained from using English in their lyrics to maintain the Korean

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[162] Um, H. K. (2013). "The poetics of resistance and the politics of crossing borders: Korean hip-hop and 'cultural reterritorialisation'". *Popular Music*, *32*(1), 51–64.

[163] 김태룡. (2019). 트랜스컬처의 관점으로 본 한국힙합의 확장 가능성과 과제 — <잊지마>와 <응프리스타일> 의 사례를 중심으로. 대중음악, 24, 37–63.

[164] Krims, A., & Krims, A. (2000). *Rap music and the poetics of identity* (Vol. 5). Cambridge University Press. 1–2.

identity of their song.[165] In the early days, most Korean hip-hop musicians adopted the "end rhyme" method , i.e. using the similarity of sound between the last stressed syllables at the end of rap lines. Although this approach now seems a basic rhyming technique, the understanding that hip-hop should have rhyming was a remarkable thing by the standards of the day. Early Korean rappers such as Kim Jin-pyo (김진표, born 13 August 1977) and Deux (듀스, a Korean hip-hop duo formed by Lee Hyun-do 이현도 and Kim Sung-jae 김성재), who took the lead in using the end rhyme method, were pioneers of the "language game" of Korean hip-hop music.[166] In 2001, Verbal Jint (버벌진트, born Kim Jin-tae 김진태, on 19 December 1980) released *Modern Rhymes EP*, an album of great significance in the history of Korean hip-hop music. As the title suggests, it is an album that pioneered a new era of Korean rhyming methodology. Verbal Jint presented a formula in which he applied basic Korean grammar to create actual rhyme schemes in Korean. Korean hip-hop journalist Kim Bong-hyeon describes Verbal Jint's rhyming method as follows: "It [the rhyming method] does not utilize the same word, rather, it crosses between Korean and English, and the number of syllables is also different. Some rhymes used one word, while others span between syllables. Nevertheless, they have become rhymes. It was the revolution in Korean rhymes." [167] The rhyming methods used by the current generation of Korean rappers contribute to Verbal Jint's efforts to officially mandate a rhyming method in Korean.

In terms of content, Korean hip-hop embraces aesthetic and ethical themes rather than political controversy. As Um has argued, "many of the 21st-century Korean hip-hop lyrics are about everyday life

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[165] 송명선. (2016). 힙합하다.
[166] 김봉현. (November 30, 2018). "한국어 라임의 기본틀을 최초로 제시하다." *대한민국정책브리핑.*
김봉현. (January 11, 2019). "한국말 라임을 개척하고 '말장난'의 즐거움을 안기다." *대한민국정책브리핑*
[167] 김봉현. (February 11, 2019). "한국어 라임의 체계를 정립하다." *대한민국정책브리핑.*

or personal stories (underground/non-mainstream) or love (main-stream)".[168] The reason for this phenomenon might be because "since its inception in the early 1990s, South Korean hip-hop has always been associated with the middle-class, educated, moderate and religious (e.g. Christian) elements of society." [169]

The main creator of "IT G MA" — Keith Ape — was active in the Korean hip-hop scene before joining 88rising. He used to be a member of the Korean hip-hop label Hi-lite Records.[170] Although significantly influenced by American hip-hop music, various local specificities of Korean hip-hop can still be seen in "IT G MA". As analyzed in the previous chapter, "IT G MA" displays the characteristic of a "properly coordinated exoticism [in alignment] with Western tastes," which reflects the influence of Korean hip-hop's localization on his music. Firstly, the song's mixing of languages makes its rhyming styles more diversified and highlights the unique relationship between Korean and English, which outlines the special linguistic aesthetics of Korean rap. Meanwhile, in the music video, a variety of modern elements that reflect the uniqueness of Korea not only visually express the aforementioned "exotic" flavor but also separate the Korean hip-hip scene from the images of orthodox Korean mass culture (such as K-pop music videos and tourism films), reinforcing the close correlation between Korean hip-hop and youth subculture.

Local specificities of Chinese hip-hop in "Made in China"

Hip-hop is called *xiha* (嘻哈) in Chinese. In the late 1980s, with the introduction of *Beat Street* (1984), *Breakin'* (1984), and other American hip-hop movies, the young generation in mainland China began to be exposed to hip-hop culture. Many young people were

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[168] Um, H. (2013), "The poetics of resistance and the politics", 58.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Hi-Lite Records is a South Korean independent record label founded in 2010 by the rapper Paloalto.

deeply attracted by the special looks and rhythmic dance movements depicted in the movies. Breakdancing became the most fashionable interest and hobby among the young for a time, while young people imitating the dress styles in the movies also began to appear on streets in large cities like Beijing and Shanghai. In 1989, *Xin Chang Zheng Lu Shang De Yao Gun*（《新長征路上的搖滾》）, or "*Rock On the New Long March*" — the first original rock album in mainland China by Cui Jian（崔健, born 2 August 1961）— was released. One of its songs, "Bu Shi Wo Bu Ming Bai"（《不是我不明白》, "It is Not That I Don't Understand"）was seen to contain certain hip-hop music elements and was considered the first attempt at hip-hop music in mainland China. In 1992, Dai Bing（戴兵）and Tian Bao（天寶）formed "D.D. Jie Zou"（D.D.節奏, "D.D. Rhythm"）, the first hip-hop group in mainland China, and released the album *Ku Re Jie Pai*（《酷熱節拍》, *Hot Beats*）, which contained hip-hop songs such as "Ni Xiang Tiao Wu Ma"（《你想跳舞嗎》, "Do You Want to Dance"）and "Ta Zhen Hao"（《她真好》, "She Is Really Good"）. D.D. Rhythm's album represented the first formally released hip-hop album in the Chinese pop music scene.[171]

While in this early period the popularity of breakdancing brought the hip-hop craze to mainland China, "rapping" surpassed it in the 21st century and became the dominant factor in the development of Chinese hip-hop culture. Nowadays, in mainland China, hip-hop is widely considered to be "rap music". In the shift between the two centuries, the record industry foresaw the huge commercial value of hip-hop music, with some original Chinese rap groups like "Yincang"（隱藏）and "CMCB Group" born at the beginning of the new millennium. However, although it took record companies much effort to promote them, it was a generally difficult period for the record market — let alone the rap market, which at the time was considered music for a minority of the population. As a result of rap music's

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[171] 王琦. (2020). 嘻哈音樂在中國的興起與發展. *戲劇之家*, *21*.
孫啟輝. (2020). 文化混雜視野下嘻哈音樂的中國本土實踐分析 (Master's thesis, 廣東外語外貿大學).

correspondingly small－scale market promotion, the genre shrunk comprehensively in the Chinese pop music scene.[172] Simultaneously, however, a group of hip－hop lovers was establishing many crews and carrying out certain "underground" activities through performing on the internet or in clubs. These hip－hop groups had a purer cultural output, as they ignored the standards of business value and instead insisted on the rebellious spirit and attitude of hip－hop, revealing both their dissatisfaction and their life stories through rapping.

Today, the cultural soil of Chinese hip－hop is becoming increasingly fertile, and the genre has been endowed with more social and prac－tical significance. Although Chinese hip－hop was suspected of imi－tating and copying American hip-hop in its early period, after nearly thirty years of development, it now displays certain special, unique attributes. On the visual and auditory levels, "Zhong Guo Feng" (中國風, "Chinese style") has become the most common style used by Chinese rappers. Zhong Guo Feng, or Chinese－style music, is a popular Chinese music genre considered to adopt a more traditional musical style in its instrumentation than normal popular music.[173] Vincent Fang has highlighted that there is no fixed genre for Zhong Guo Feng music; popular Zhong Guo Feng music has been evident across a diverse range of genres, including R&B, rock and roll, hip－hop, punk, jazz, country music, and Peking opera.[174] Apart from being used in creative realms related to music — like arrangements,

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[172] X博士. (July 09, 2017). "從尹相傑到《中國有嘻哈》——中國說唱的歷史進程". *Sohu.*
[173] Broadly, Zhong Guo Feng music usually uses the minor scale or the pentatonic scale, or includes traditional Chinese instruments in the musical arrangement, in addition to using language with elements of ancient music and scenery. It is distinguishable through its fusion of clas－sical Chinese melodies and global music styles, or through the use of tra－ditional cultural elements in its lyrics, either implicitly or explicitly in con－temporary contexts. (Chow, Yiu Fai; de Kloet, Jeroen (2010). *Blowing in the China Wind: Engagements with Chineseness in Hong Kong's Zhongguofeng Music Videos.* Intellect.)
[174] Fang, Vincent (2008). *青花瓷：隐藏在釉色里的文字秘密* [*Blue and white porcelain: The hidden literary meanings in the glaze*]. 作家出版社.

lyrics, and music videos — the "Chinese style" also functions as a specific vehicle for adding a distinct Chinese charm to songs. Meanwhile, Chinese rappers not only flexibly apply music with Chinese elements through the technique of sampling, but also actively integrate all kinds of traditional Chinese imagery in the textual and visual domains of their lyrics and music videos. Moreover, both mainstream and underground hip-hop rappers regard "using Chinese elements" as a way to manifest the identity of Chinese hip-hop; thus, Zhong Guo Feng rapping becomes an exemplary local model of the localization process of Chinese hip-hop music.[175]

An important aspect of understanding the transregional structure of hip-hop culture is the relationship between local languages and English. Composing through integrating different languages enables the skillful application of diversified timbres and tones of different languages to deal with rhymes. Simultaneously, as Loureiro has noted, adding some English to the lyrics offers a way for rappers to announce that they belong to an international hip-hop culture.[176] Apart from mixing English with Chinese lyrics, the most prominent characteristic of rapping in Chinese is the application of different local dialects. There are seven dialectal regions in China, so it is not difficult to understand the specific position of dialectal rap in Chinese hip-hop.[177] As mentioned in Liu's research, "Chinese local-language rap articulates a comparably intense sense of place and locality, which functions as a local cultural resource for Chinese urban youth to construct a musicalized local identity".[178] These rap songs in local languages are infused with distinctive knowledge and sensibilities

[175] 孫啟輝.(2020).*文化混雜*.
[176] Loureiro-Rodríguez, V. (2013). "If We Only Speak Our Language by the Fireside, It Won't Survive": The Cultural and Linguistic Indigenization of Hip-hop in Galicia. *Popular Music and Society*, *36*(5), 659-676.
[177] The varieties are typically classified into several groups: Mandarin, Wu, Min, Xiang, Gan, Hakka and Yue, though some varieties remain unclassified)
[178] Liu, J. (2014). Alternative voice and local youth identity in Chinese local-language rap music. *positions: east Asia cultures critique*, *22*(1), 281.

that originate from the particular place in which the languages were acquired. In short, dialectal rap not only provides more abundant material for rappers' rhyming patterns, but also contributes to the formation of a soundscape that fosters a strong sense of local community and constructs a distinct local identity.

Judging from its content, Chinese hip-hop does not copy American hip-hop's content and themes. Several critics point to Chinese hip-hop's lack of rebelliousness and explicit social or political commentary. They thus dismiss Chinese rap as being too mainstream and further suggest that Chinese youth have been brainwashed by the official ideology of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).[179] Nevertheless, as Liu has argued, these critiques assume "an explicit US-centric approach".[180] As a matter of fact, demonstrated in Liu's research, between 2000 and 2010, the content of Chinese underground hip-hop engaged with many social problems. Through rap, young people constructed a subculture and space in which they could actively express their opinions and attitudes to society and their lives instead of passively obeying their parents' cultures and hierarchies. However, because of the regulations and censorship of the Chinese government, much rap music is considered to contain improper content, so it fails to spread on internet platforms.[181]

In 2017, a variety show named "Zhong Guo You Xi Ha" (《中國有嘻

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[179] Ralph Frammolino (November 13, 2004). "Chinese Find a Way to Tame Hip-Hop." *Los Angeles Times*.
Marian Liu. (March 29, 2018). "Hatin' on hip-hop: China's rap scene frustrated by crackdown." *CNN*.
[180] Liu, J. (2014). Alternative voice, 264.
[181] On 10 August 2015, People's Daily announced that the Chinese Ministry of Culture had placed 120 songs promoting "obscenity, violence, and crime, and jeopardized morality" onto a blacklist. These 120 songs were withdrawn from all musical distribution platforms, and the artists involved were banned from performing in public. (Huang Wei. (10 August 2015)
"The Ministry of Culture has published online a blacklist of 120 songs which are due to be examined before the law," *People's Daily*.
http://culture.people.com.cn/n/2015/ 0810/c87423-27439050.html)

哈》，"The Rap of China"）became extremely popular among Chines audiences; with the show's popularity, hip-hop culture, especially rap, stepped into the public limelight. Although the program revealed a determination to spread hip-hop culture through its popularization of knowledge on rap, it was still regarded to have presented hip-hop culture from an "apolitical" perspective. [182] As hip-hop scholar Tricia Rose has noted, "the resistant hip-hop culture, while contradicting and subverting ideological positions, is vulnerable to incorporation".[183] Faced with the contradiction between official discourses and cultural expressions, Chinese hip-hop applied the strategy of "ideotainment" to balance its position and achieve localization in mainland China.[184] In this process of localization, Chinese hip-hop was combined with local dialects as well as the audio-visual style of "Zhong Guo Feng". Meanwhile, Chinese hip-hop's content synthesized traditional and modern images that could arouse national pride and personal stories full of positive energy — all of which evince the local specificities of Chinese hip-hop.

Higher Brothers' works is thus a microcosm of Chinese hip-hop's local specificities mentioned above. At first, coming out of Chengdu Rap House, a local Chinese rap label, they display the most significant linguistic characteristics of Chinese hip-hop — with their lyrics

[182] 王嘉軍.(2018).《中國有嘻哈》與嘻哈的文化政治 文藝研究(06),113-123.
[183] Rose, T. (1994). *Black noise: Rap music and black culture in contemporary America* (Vol. 6). Hanover, NH: Wesleyan university press. 101.
[184] Sheng Zou. (2019). When nationalism meets hip-hop: aestheticized politics of ideotainment in China, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies, 16:3*, 178-195.
In this essay, the author examines patriotic hip-hop music videos of a Chinese youth band and reveals how bottom-up popular nationalism coalesces with top-down state-led ideological work. He borrowed the concept of ideotainment from Johan Lagerkvist, who argues that ideotainment "entails the intermeshing of high-tech images, designs, and sounds of popular Web and mobile phone culture with subtle ideological constructs, symbols, and nationalistically inclined messages of persuasion."
(LAGERKVIST*, J. O. H. A. N. (2008). Internet ideotainment in the PRC: National responses to cultural globalization. *Journal of Contemporary China, 17*(54), 123.)

integrating the Sichuanese dialect, Mandarin, and English. As ana−
lyzed in the previous chapter, the strategy of combining dialects,
Mandarin, and English avoids the disadvantages of rapping in Man−
darin. It also adds a distinct Chinese identity to the songs. Apart from
the dialects in "Made in China", in other songs of Higher Brothers'
album like "We Chat", they describe the daily life of young Chinese,
while in "Black Car", they rap about illegal cabs (black cars) in
Chengdu. From a visual perspective, the music video of "Made in
China" further highlights Chinese identity: the main color of the
song's scenes and clothing is red, and every object in the music
video represents Chinese culture. As mentioned above, the song aims
to fight against stereotypes of China and redefine "Made in China"
and China's image internationally. Therefore, judging from its con−
tent, the song is regarded as a response to "The Chinese Dream"
(中國夢) and represents a piece of ideotainment that can arouse a
sense of national pride and belonging for both foreign and domesti−
cally−located Chinese citizens.

"Dat Stick": A beneficiary of internet and social media platforms

For many young Indonesian rappers today, Rich Brian's success has
proven a great source of inspiration. However, Rich Brian is not the
first Indonesian rapper — even though he has left a deep impression
on young Indonesians. Indeed, in the early 1970s, Benjamin S had
already added rapping to his songs and combined it with *gambang
kromong* (traditional orchestration from Betawi with Chinese influ−
ences). In the 1990s, Iwa K led the public to regard rap as an inde−
pendent music style. Meanwhile, during this period, many Indonesian
leaders did not recommend rap because of the widely−held negative
stereotypes towards American hip−hop music.[185] Therefore, by the
2000s, Indonesian hip−hop was still floundering and hidden beneath

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[185] Former president B.J. Habibie raised objections against organizing an
Indonesian rap festival in 1995. (Bodden, M. (2005). Rap in Indonesian
youth music of the 1990s: "Globalization," "outlaw genres," and social
protest. *Asian Music*, *36*(2), 1−26.)

the surface of mainstream music. Fortunately, in the 2010s, with the development of the internet and social media, Indonesian hip-hop experienced a renaissance of sorts. Indonesian rap artists in the early period usually sang along with traditional Indonesian music to highlight their difference from American hip-hop, while young rappers today pay more attention to American hip-hop and imitate everything they see in American hip-hop music videos. Many music lovers have maintained that the popularity of the internet and social media has led to the disappearance of Indonesian hip-hop's local specificities. However, these same phenomena have built a relationship between some Indonesian artists like Rich Brian and international hip-hop, and thus enabled Indonesian hip-hop to go international.

Although Indonesia has its own processes of localization, as the most representative and influential Indonesian rapper, Rich Brian's hip-hop career is closely connected with the internet experience. Brian learned English through YouTube videos and made an American friend on the internet who then introduced hip-hop to him. After imitating American hip-hop singers on the internet and gaining a deep understanding of American hip-hop, Brian formed his characteristic music style and created hip-hop music whose nationality is difficult to identify. At the same time, because of the internet and social media, his works are able to be appreciated by transnational audiences, and so, a hip-hop star was born in Indonesia.

Generally speaking, 88rising greatly owes its success to the development of the internet. In its early stages, the founder of 88rising looked for and actively contacted potential Asian artists on the internet every day. For example, Keith Ape, Rich Brian, Joji, and Higher Brothers were all found by Miyashiro on the internet. Then, through the use of social media, those Asian artists' works quickly crossed national boundaries and rapidly swept across the internet. As a result, YouTube became a platform on which 88rising also developed and promoted audiences' participation in the initial stages of music discovery. At the same time, many 88rising artists already

had a close relationship with meme and viral internet culture on plat-
forms like YouTube, Vine, and Instagram.[186] Osumare contends that
the internet functions as a literal connection between collective mar-
ginalities.[187] It is the internet that has gathered Asian hip-hop artists
from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds and created
88rising, a community of and for Asian cultures.

The development of the internet and social media platforms has not
only made a great contribution to the global "flow" of hip-hop, but
also influenced the localization process of hip-hop in many countries
around the world. In fact, whether in Asia or any other parts of the
world, the production and spread of pop music are closely associated
with the development of the internet. As Mattar has written, the in-
ternet facilitates interaction between hip-hop consumers and helps
promote commonalities in the issues discussed, the hip-hop com-
munity's awareness of current events, and even patterns of lan-
guage.[188] Similarly, the internet and social media platforms have
played an irreplaceable role in the localization processes of Korean
and Chinese hip-hop in particular.

Unlike American hip-hop, Korean hip-hop originated on the internet.
Korean hip-hop in its early phase was closely related to the web-
based PC community. At the end of the 1990s, many hip-hop lovers
actively joined these online communities. Then, later in the 2000s,
these web-based communities gradually developed into specialized
hip-hop websites, many of which — such as *hiphopplaya* (since May
2010) and *hiphople* (since November 2010) — still have a deep

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[186] Joji (born George Miller) was responsible for the original clip behind
the Harlem Shake meme in 2013. Rich Brian, who speaks and raps in Eng-
lish without any accent, grew up absorbing and learning a distinctly
American sense of humor through memes and YouTube videos.
[187] Osumare H. (2007). *The African aesthetic in global hip-hop: power
moves*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
[188] Mattar, Y. (2003). Virtual communities and hip-hop music consumers in
Singapore: Interplaying global, local and subcultural identities. *Leisure
Studies*, *22*(4), 283-300.

influence on the development of Korean hip-hop today. It is hence evident that Korean hip-hop began from online communities and then developed into broader offline communities.

Similarly, in China, cyberspace has also been the main space for producing, distributing, and consuming rap songs. Early Chinese rappers applied beats and samples downloaded from the internet to record and produce songs with music software on their computers at home. After finishing their home-made works, they would upload the demo files onto cyberspace to communicate with people who had similar interests or feelings to themselves. The internet represents a largely unofficial space for Chinese youth to voice their discontent, frustration, and rebellion against their parents' culture and hierarchies.[189] In 2017, a self-made internet variety show named "The Rap of China" by IQIYI (愛奇藝), an internet video platform in China, became the hottest video variety show of the year, setting a record for breaking 1 billion views in the shortest period of time in the history of Chinese variety shows. Apart from its extremely high audience ratings, some catchwords like "Do you have freestyle" (你有free-style嗎？) created by the show have also greatly influenced social media. Consequently, the variety show that embraced the internet as its platform of transmission initiated another stage of Chinese hip-hop by making full use of the convenience of the internet, promoting hip-hop to enter the public eye, and showing the essential influence of the internet on the development of Chinese hip-hop.

Differences and similarities of the local specificities shown in the selected works

Asian hip-hop is not an imitation of American hip-hop. On the contrary, it displays local specificities in terms of language, content, and audiovisual characteristics. These local specificities not only represent the efforts that artists in Asian counties have made to construct

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[189] Liu, J. (2014). Alternative voice, 268.

a local hip-hop identity, but also offer the best explanation for the question of what is "Asian" in "Asian cool". Whether by the Korean Keith Ape, the Chinese Higher Brothers, or the Indonesian Rich Brian, in all of their works can be found microcosms of the specificities of each Asian country's local hip-hop scene. On the one hand, these specificities represent the achievement of hip-hop's globalization in Asia. On the other hand, they witness the various developments and offshoots of hip-hop culture in Asian countries. In the following section, I will compare the local specificities shown in the selected works in terms of language, content, and audiovisual qualities. According to the above sections' analysis, it can be concluded that both Keith Ape's and Higher Brothers' works show rather prominent local qualities of hip-hop in their own countries, while the scene of Indonesian hip-hop has less influence on Rich Brian, as his hip-hop career is closely related to his internet experience. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, I will center on "IT G MA" and "Made in China" to compare the local specificities evident in each.

The reason that 88rising has become a "collection of the coolest in Asian culture" is first because of its visual strategies. When spreading hip-hop culture with distinct local Asian characteristics to the West, 88rising closely connected musical creation with the visual and made the best of its powerful visual advantages in music communication, especially in transcultural communication. Through presenting local cultural scenes or integrating several elements with local specificities, both "IT G MA" and "Made in China" had an inherent Asian label attached to them, which was then transmitted to audiences through their music videos. What is different is that "IT G MA" shows Korean identity through certain modern elements representative of Korea (like wines, masks, and currency symbols), whereas "Made in China" depends a lot on applying traditional Chinese images (ancient architectural structures, weapons, and mahjong) to highlight the local specificities of Chinese hip-hop.

As Barrett has mentioned, "language choices reflect not only those

varieties for which they can claim a 'native' relationship, but also interweave an array of languages into their lyrics to create complex, multilingual rhyme patterns, and cross-cultural symbolic references".[190] Both "IT G MA" and "Made in China" integrate local languages and English together. In "IT G MA", there are three languages on display: Korean, English, and Japanese. Simultaneously, the lyrics of "Made in China" also display the harmony of integrating English with Chinese. While the lyrics of the two songs show the integration of local languages with English, "IT G MA" is sung by rappers from Korea and Japan in their mother tongues. Hence, there are four kinds of linguistic integration that take place in the song, namely Korean and English, Japanese and English, Korean and Japanese, and Korean, and Japanese and English. However, the lyrics of "Made in China" showcase an important characteristic in Chinese hip-hop's localization — rapping in dialects. The integration of Mandarin, Sichuanese dialect, and English creates a specific linguistic feature that has a distinctly Chinese character.

As for the songs' content, "IT G MA" is full of flaunting personal abilities, yearning for material and monetary possession, and longing for the pursuit of personal interests and freedom. Simply judged from this aspect, it cannot be concluded that "IT G MA" evinces unique characteristics of Korean hip-hop in its content. Rather, this characteristic is a common topic in foreign and domestic hip-hop. However, what is worth noticing in the song's lyrics are the following lines from the Japanese rapper KOHH, as they carry the message of cultural reconciliation: "Talking about the past is lame so, Forget about what happened long ago!" It is well-known that in both ancient and modern times, Japan and Korea have shared an antagonistic and contradictory relationship. However, in this song, Korean rappers and Japanese rappers cooperatively sing together on the same track, showing the same emotions and interests, which

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[190] Barrett, C. (2012). Hip-hopping across China: Intercultural formulations of local identities. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, *11*(4), 248.

seems to indicate that they are crossing the limits of the countries and their past generations to try to build a relationship between two opposing cultures and societies. On the other hand, "Made in China" thoroughly centers on China — from the song's title to its content — and describes "Chinese power" from the perspective of "positive energy" (正能量), a response to the vision of "The Chinese Dream".

4.3.2. "Cool New Asian": Asian generation with cool characteristics

In *Cool Rules,* Pountain and Robins maintain that there are three basic personality traits necessary for "coolness": narcissism, ironic detachment, and hedonism. (CR, 26) Can these personality traits be applied to all cultures? The answer to this question should be verified. Certainly, within all cultures, people who evince such characteristics categorically exist. However, when these "cool traits" exist in certain cultures—Asian cultures, for example—and affect people with an Asian cultural identity, there are more possibilities and meanings yet be explored. This then brings us back to the theme of this thesis. However, the question "what is 'Asian' in Asian cool?" should be addressed.

I argue that the "Asian" in Asian cool refers not just individuals resembling Asians physically or Asian ancestry in the general sense, but—like most of the 88rising artists—refers to "new Asians" with cool personality traits. The reason they are called "new Asians" is that they show different personality traits and psychological characteristics from the previous Asian generation. According to common sense, a society's social personality is the psychological traits and characteristics shared by most members of that society. The definition of social personality here invokes the American scholar Riesman's statement: so-called social personality is not the unique temperament, talent, or physical and psychological attributes of an individual, but rather refers specifically to the part of the personality

shared between specific social groups. It is the personal driving force and the structure of satisfying needs formed under the combined weight of historical factors.[191] That is to say, at different stages of social development, the existing status and personality traits of people in society will yield obvious differences. So, what is the social and cultural background that gave birth to the "new Asian" with those three cool personality characteristics? In the musical works of the "new Asian", how are these cool personality traits displayed? This question needs to be answered so that further research can be conducted on it. Therefore, in the following section, I will first evaluate the description of the three cool personality traits mentioned in *Cool Rules*. Secondly, I will conduct a brief analysis of the historical background of these characteristics in Asian society. In this way, the historical and social causes of the three personality traits within an Asian cultural context can be determined. Thereafter, I will focus on the reorganization and reproduction of these personal characteristics in the cultural practices of "new Asians", by focusing on this paper's main research object—the works of 88rising artists in hip-hop—and thus investigating the representation of cool personality characteristics within those works.

Three Cool personalities: narcissism, ironic detachment, and hedonism

Pountain and Robins maintain that there are three basic personality traits comprising "coolness": narcissism, ironic detachment, and hedonism.

Ironic detachment is "a stratagem for concealing one's feelings by suggesting their opposite, for example feigning boredom in the face of danger, or amusement in the face of insult" (CR, 26, 27). Socrates used this quality a lot in his work, with Socratic irony referring to "the dissimulation of ignorance practiced by Socrates as a means

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[191] Riesman, D., Glazer, N., Denney, R., & Gitlin, T. (2000). *The Lonely Crowd*. Yale University Press.

of confusing an adversary".[192] Describing Socratic irony, Zoe Williams of The Guardian writes: "the technique of Socratic irony demonstrated in the Platonic dialogues, was to pretend ignorance and, more sneakily, to feign credence in your opponent's power of thought, in order to tie him in knots." [193]

Beyond Socratic irony, irony can be categorized into different types—including verbal irony, dramatic irony, and situational irony—and applied to various ends. Romantic irony, for example, is "an attitude of detached skepticism adopted by an author towards his or her work, typically manifesting in literary self-consciousness and self-reflection".[194] In her book entitled *English Romantic Irony*, Anne Mellor writes:

> "Romantic irony is both a philosophical conception of the universe and an artistic program. Ontologically, it sees the world as fundamentally chaotic. No order, no far goal of time, ordained by God or right reason, determines the progression of human or natural events." [195]

This quote mirrors *Cool Rules*' description of romantic irony as "a profound skepticism which questions the validity of everything" (CR, 26).

Cool irony partakes in both meanings of Socratic irony and Romantic irony, making it a "verbal weapon equally effective in aggression or defense, and crucial to the maintenance of a protective Cool persona" (CR, 26, 27). That is to say, as a personality characteristic of cool, through being unconventional, indifferent, or playing dumb and making jokes, irony detachment encourages the opponent to reveal their stupidity so as to satirize and rebel.

Narcissism is the pursuit of gratification of one's vanity or the

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[192] *The Oxford English Dictionary*, "irony".
[193] Williams, Zoe. (June 28, 2003). "The Final Irony". *London: Guardian.*
[194] *The Oxford English Dictionary,* "romantic irony".
[195] Mellor, Anne K., *English Romantic Irony*, Harvard University Press, 1980, 4, 187.

egotistic admiration of one's idealized self-image and attributes. In *Cool Rules*, Pountain and Robins identify narcissism as one of the personality characteristics of cool, describing it as "an exaggerated admiration for oneself, particularly for personal appearance, which gives rise to the feeling that the world revolves around you and shares your moods" (CR, 26). Within the field of psychology, there are two main branches of research on narcissism: (1) clinical psychology and (2) social psychology. These two approaches differ in their view of narcissism, with the former treating it as a disorder, and thus as discrete, and the latter treating it as a personality trait, and thus as a spectrum. Obviously, narcissism—as one of the cool personality characteristics mentioned in *Cool Rules*—is also a personality trait. Campbell and Foster have reviewed the literature on narcissism, and argue that narcissists possess the following "basic ingredients":[196]

> *Positive:* Narcissists think they are better than others.[197]
> *Inflated:* Narcissists' views tend to be contrary to reality. In measures that compare self-reporting to objective measures, narcissists' perspectives tend to be greatly exaggerated.[198]
> *Agentic:* Narcissists' views tend to be most exaggerated in the agentic domain, relative to the communal domain.[199]
> *Special:* Narcissists perceive themselves to be unique and special people.[200]

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[196] Campbell, W.K., Foster, Joshua D. (2007). "The Narcissistic Self: Background, an Extended Agency Model, and Ongoing Controversies". In Sedikides, Constantine, Spencer, Steven J. (eds.). *The Self. Frontiers of Social Psychology*. Psychology Press.
[197] Campbell, W.K., Rudich, E., Sedikides, C. (2002). "Narcissism, self-esteem, and the positivity of self-views: Two portraits of self-love". *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. 28 (3): 358–68.
[198] Gabriel, M.T., Critelli, J. W., Ee, J. S. (1994). "Narcissistic illusions in self-evaluations of intelligence and attractiveness". *Journal of Personality*. 62 (1): 143–55.
[199] Campbell, W.K., Rudich, E., Sedikides, C. (2002). "Narcissism, self-esteem".
 Gabriel, M. T., Critelli, J. W., Ee, J. S. (1994). "Narcissistic illusions in self-evaluations".
[200] Emmons, R.A. (1984). "Factor analysis and construct validity of the

Selfish: Research on narcissists' behavior in resource dilemmas supports the case for narcissists as being selfish.[201]

Oriented toward success: Narcissists are oriented towards success by being, for example, approach-oriented.[202]

In *Cool Rules*, the authors also mention that "at its most positive, such narcissism is a healthy celebration of the self, while even in its more negative manifestations it can be an effective adaptation to any oppressive circumstances that sap self-esteem" (CR, 26). Certain research indicates that being devalued in a social group can encourage narcissism in some members of that group, as said individuals attempt to compensate for their low social status (due to the fact of being a member of a stigmatized group) by exaggerating their own self-worth through engaging in narcissism—which may also help them psychologically cope with their negative treatment at the hands of others.[203]

Hedonism is a school of thought that argues that seeking pleasure and avoiding suffering are the only components of well-being. In *Cool Rules*, as one of the personality characteristics of cool, hedonism is described as "the belief that pleasure, or the absence of pain, is the most important principle in determining the morality of a potential course of action" (CR, 28). Hedonism is a type of consequentialism, and has several forms. For example, normative hedonism is the idea

Narcissistic Personality Inventory". *Journal of Personality Assessment*. 48 (3): 291–300.

[201] Campbell, W. K., Bush, C. P., Brunell, A. B., & Shelton, J. (2005). Understanding the social costs of narcissism: The case of the tragedy of the commons. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *31*(10), 1358–1368.

[202] Rose, P., & Campbell, W. K. (2004). Greatness Feels Good: A Telic Model of Narcissism and Subjective Well-Being.

[203] Zeigler-Hill, V., & Wallace, M. T. (2011). Racial differences in narcissistic tendencies. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *45*(5), 456–467. Pickard, J. D., Barry, C. T., Wallace, M. T., & Zeigler-Hill, V. (2013). Ethnicity, ethnic identity, and adolescent narcissism. *Self and Identity*, *12*(5), 489–503.

that pleasure should be people's primary motivation.[204] Unlike normative hedonism, "cool hedonism tends toward the worldly, adventurous and even orgiastic rather than the pleasant" (CR, 28).

After the end of World War II, developed Western countries took the lead in entering and promoting a consumer society. In a consumer society, consumption—rather than work—constitutes the core of people's lives. Compared with production, consumption is completely personal and prioritizes individual experience. Therefore, the culture of the consumer society differs significantly from the social culture it succeeded: where the latter centered on production promoted diligence and asceticism, the former promoted hedonistic values. Because different stages of social development will create different typical personalities, there is endless research on typical personalities in a consumer society. The most illustrative thereof is Reisman's research, which focuses on American society after World War II, and maintains that the social personality of the time underwent a transformation from being "internally-oriented" (i.e., based on beliefs) to "others-oriented" —a typical modern personality based on the behavioral standards of others in early industrial society.[205] Reisman's research on personality types in consumer society has been strongly supported by many sociologists, but it has also been questioned by others. The most prominent of his skeptics is Sennet, who argues that American and Western societies have not, as Reisman states, transitioned from being internally-oriented to others-oriented, but rather from being internally-oriented to highly self-focused, which he calls "narcissism". As such, Sennet notes that consumer society is a society with a loss of public space, in which everyone becomes extremely narcissistic and all interpersonal relationships are permeated with narcissism.[206]

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[204] "hedonism" *Ethics Unwrapped*.
[205] Riesman, D., Glazer, N., Denney, R., & Gitlin, T. (2000). *The Lonely Crowd*. Yale University Press.
[206] Sennett, R. (1987). *The Fall of Public Man*. Capital & Class, 11(1), 132–134.

Comparing the above two perspectives on consumer society's typical social personality, it can be seen that although both scholars' descriptions of the typical personality characteristics are quite different, their analysis of the social factors producing this typical personality is consistent. Both believe that this social uprooting is due to the elimination of subjectivity by the hedonistic values of the consumer society and the "nihilization" of human inner value, preventing people from forming a clear self and leading to emptiness, anxiety, and a lack of sense of existence within the individual. Individuals lose their core sense of self, and their self-formation and development are either geared toward the affirmation of dependence on others (the other-oriented personality), or toward extreme attention to their own physical feelings and satisfaction of desires (narcissism). It can be said that in a consumer society, the attitudes of narcissism and hedonism are always inseparable.

The birth of the "new Asian"

As mentioned above, these three personality traits can exist in any culture, but when applied to people with a specific cultural identity—in this case, the Asian cultural identity—the situation becomes a little more complicated. The traditional predominant Asian belief system, Confucianism, advocates for ethical concepts and practices include *ren* (仁, benevolence or humaneness), *yi* (義, righteousness or justice), *li* (禮, proper rite), *zhi* (智, knowledge), and *xin* (信, integrity).[207] These concepts either deviate from or even contradict the three personality characteristics of coolness. Take hedonism as an example: its emphasis on individual pleasure as well as its tendency for egotism are greatly deviant from the Confucian values of *ren*, *yi*,

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[207] Confucian ethical codes are described as humanistic. They may be practiced by all the members of a society, and are characterized by the promotion of virtues, encompassed by the Five Constants, *Wuchang* (五常) in Chinese, elaborated by Confucian scholars out of the inherited traditions of the Han dynasty. The content in the body text identifies the five constants in Confucian culture.

and *li*, and are even destructive to them. With hedonistic values, in-dividuals can only rationally care for their own pleasure and desire, and do not naively have to care about the instructions of other people, even if it means opposing their superiors. In this sense, hedonism is a "direct attack" on Confucianism, by implying that the power of the emperor, defended in Confucianism, is baseless and destructive and that state intervention is morally flawed. Moreover, narcissism and ironic detachment also run counter to the basic moral concepts and practices of *rang* (讓, modesty, self-effacing) and *Ji Ji Ru Shi* (積極入世, active engagement) emphasized by Confucianism. How-ever, the emergence of Asian cool proves that these personality traits do actually exist and may be prevalent among the "new Asian" generation. As the British scholar Giddens has written, "human characteristics, needs and motivations are largely the product of so-cial development".[208] As mentioned above, cool's three personality traits—narcissism, hedonism, and ironic detachment—obviously go against traditional orthodox Asian culture and subvert its values. The formation of these personality characteristics in the New Asian is closely related to the changes in their social context.

Kim has described Korean youth in the 21st century as the genera-tion of survivalism(생존주의, 生存主義), because, compared with pre-vious generations—whose keywords were "heroic youth", "re-sistance", "freedom", and "political enthusiasm" —the motto the young generation live according to is "to survive amid the cruel competition".[209] The social context behind the survivalist genera-tion is, on the one hand, the long-term economic downturn in South Korea in recent years, the rising unemployment rate of its youth, and the uncertainty of a stable future. On the other hand, at the root of the formation of the "survivalist generation" is a structural

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[208] Giddens, A. (1971). *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analy-sis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber*. Cambridge: Cam-bridge University Press.
[209] 김홍중 (2015). 서바이벌, 생존 주의, 그리고 청년 세대. 한국사회학, 49(1), 181.

transformation—namely, the neoliberal transformation of Korean society after the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Under such circumstances, the collective mindset of today's young Korean generation has changed compared to that of the previous generation, producing four different manifestations thereof: survivalism (生存主義), coexistentialism (共存主義), soloism (獨存主義), and exitism (脫存主義).[210] In these different manifestations, we can see the shadows of the three personality characteristics of cool. For example, the soloist has several cool personality characteristics to some extent: they keep a distance from social life, focusing only on themselves, and advocate a lifestyle of freedom, self-interest, and happiness.

The same phenomenon is also occurring in China. The phenomenon of a youth subculture that clearly deviates from orthodox mainstream cultural values has also appeared in post-90s generation(九零後, The Post-90s generation is a generation in China, especially in urban areas, generally considered to be born between 1990 and 1999 though sometimes considered to start with those born in fall 1989.) in China, for example "*jiong*(囧)"[211], "*Sha Ma Te*(殺馬

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[210] Soloism (독존주의/獨存主義) refers to the mind/status of seeking to secure a personalized autonomous life, with a certain distance from survivalism. Here, 독(獨) represents a transcendental attitude to break away from socializing with others.
Coexistenceism(공존주의/共存主義) is a mindset that seeks alternatives to various forms of collective lifestyle while raising problems with the era of the survival life. Here, 공(共) means to create a community with others, tries to find the meaning of life in it, and embodies the attitude to speak out and respond to public problems.
Exitism(탈존주의/脫存主義) is a movement of radical departure from survivalism(생존주의/生存主義). 탈존(脫存) refers to the desire to break away from the various forms of "existence" (social, biological and political), to cut off life, and not to give birth to a new life in such a miserable world.
[211] *Jiong*(囧) is a once-obscure Chinese character that means a "patterned window". Since 2008, it has become an internet phenomenon and is widely used to express embarrassment and gloom, because of the character's resemblance to a sad facial expression.

特)＂[212], ＂*sang*(喪)＂, ＂*Fo Xi Qing Nian*(佛係青年)＂[213]. These subcultures challenge the authority of mainstream expectations of what image and qualities Chinese youth should display—such as pos－itiveness and vigor—and instead move closer to the cool personality trends, with its characteristics of hedonism, narcissism, and ironic detachment. As for the causes of this rebellion, scholars have also pointed to the ＂uncertain future＂, ＂modernity and materialistic consumer culture＂, information ＂dissemination in the media age＂ and other contemporary and social factors.[214]

As Wang Hui has written, modern market relations are a force that is inherent in our daily lives but cannot be defined by the boundaries and power of the nation－state.[215] This is especially obvious with the prevalence of neoliberalism nowadays. The various social structural problems embodied by the ＂appearance of the new Asian with cool personality traits＂ in the young generations of South Korea and

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[212] The word ＂*Sha Ma Te*(殺馬特)＂ is a homophone of the English word ＂smart＂, and is a continuation of the urban ＂post－90s＂ subculture from 2000s to 2010s. In terms of style, this subculture is aesthetically influ－enced by, but has nothing to do with, rock and roll. The evolution of ＂殺馬特＂ in China is a unique social state, a form of life, and a cultural trend. According to an article in the *Foreign Policy* magazine titled ＂Vanity Fail＂, 殺馬特＇s unusual fashion choices reflect a deeper sense of collec－tive alienation—a byproduct of the wave of Chinese immigrants and the widening stratification of the country.

[213] *Sang*(喪) culture is a subculture that is popular among young people in mainland China, triggered by negative emotions such as decadence, pessi－mism, and despair. It is spread on the internet through texts, videos, and emoticons. In December 2017, the media outlet *Xin Shi Xiang*(新世相) published an article titled ＂The first batch of post－90s children have be－come monks（《第一批90後已經出家了》）＂. The article introduced the liv－ing conditions of ＂*Fo Xi Qing Nian*(佛係青年)＂, born in the 1990s, and shows their life philosophy which is quite similar to the Buddhist philoso－phy. This article made the concept of ＂佛係青年＂ popular in China, and some researchers have also regarded ＂佛係青年＂ as a manifestation of 喪 culture.

[214] 宋德孝. (2018). 青年＂佛系人生＂的存在主義之殤. 中國青年研究, 000(003), 41－45.

[215] 汪暉. (2008).《去政治化的政治: 20 世紀的終結與 90年代》. 北京: 三聯書店. 50－51

China can be described as a basic feature of the development of cap-
italism in the 21st century. In this case, the self-observation activ-
ities of the youth group and its various cultural practices also entail
the real appearance of the youth group's survival, as well as the
"cool personality characteristics" that subvert orthodox cultural
values.

Three cool personality characteristics in the works of New Asians

In the first part of the study, I focused on the rebellious character-
istics of cool when applied to the field of popular culture, and analyzed
the rebellious message against Asian stereotypes conveyed by the
"Asian cool" of 88rising. In this section, I will focus on the "Asian"
aspect, trying to investigate the three personality characteristics of
coolness mentioned in *Cool Rules* within the context of 88rising's
cultural practices.

Rich Brian's musical style has been called "ironic" by *Urban-
Daddy,* even though that irony "eventually transcends itself to be-
come a legitimate piece of art." [216] In the article "Indonesian rap p
rodigy Rich Chigga has a hot new track", Sam Eichner mentioned
that "the discord between his baritone voice and his pubescent per-
sonage, his appropriation of traditionally black argot and his self-
conscious Asianness" conveyed an "inherent, immediate irony to
his music videos".

As the article has remarked, there is a strong contrast between the
image Rich Brian gives off in the music video and his rap style. In the
music video, Rich Brian is in a pink polo shirt and pants which are

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[216] Sam Eichner. (August 16, 2017). "Indonesian rap prodigy Rich Chigga
has a hot new track". *URBANDADDY.*
According to the article on *UrbanDaddy*, Rich Brian's viral debut comes
off as a Weird Al-style rap parody that, due to his obvious talent, eventu-
ally transcends itself to become a legitimate piece of art. The murky space
between irony and sincerity is difficult to navigate for any artist these
days, but is strangely matter-of-fact for the modern rapper.

hardly related to Gangsta rap, matched with a fanny pack on his wrist, which is not related to current fashion trends at all. Now and then, he wears sunglasses and pours out a bottle of cheap whiskey towards the camera on a backroad in the countryside. Meanwhile, the hype men around him are also in simple clothes, standing around Rich Brian and performing clumsy dances expressionlessly, which also has little relation to authentic Gangsta sensibilities. There is no highly－produced scene or well－designed content, but instead a weak and thin Asian young man with hollow eyes and funny outfits and postures, swearing that he is going to "murder" policemen with a serious look and a low voice. The contrast between sight and sound makes the irony of the work self－evident. But when we read the lyrics carefully, we will find that behind the eye－catching music video, Rich Brian voices a distinct dissatisfaction towards authority:

> People be starvin'
> And people be killing for food
> With that crack and that spoon
> But these rich mothafuckas they stay eatin' good
> Droppin' wage livin' good

These first 5 lines of the second verse of "Dat Stick" point out that people are starving and killing each other for food, that drug abuse and drug trafficking are everywhere, all while the rich live a life of drunken obliviousness. These lines evince his deep regret at the famine and drug abuse in slums in Jakarta and his anger with the corrupt Indonesian government. Through hip－hop, Rich Brian presents an image of Asian youth that looks ridiculous and full of irony with every move, but out of his mouth come words full of cruel reality. This image actually reproduces the ironic and detached "cool" personality. Through his detachment, indifference, silliness, and humor, Rich Brian conceals his true emotions and thoughts, making the corruption and inaction of the Indonesian government more vivid, thus achieving a simultaneous effect of both irony and resistance.

In the lyrics and music video of "IT G MA", a narcissistic,

hedonistic attitude is readily apparent, and not only concerns the presentation of coolness, but also has a deeper cultural connotation. On the whole, "IT G MA" doesn't directly cover the same "critical content" as in most hip-hop songs, nor does it bring rappers of different languages together to discuss themes like "one world" and "love and peace". On the contrary, the song unabashedly flaunts specific individuals and the "squad" they belong to, and contains a strong focus on personal interests and freedom. Moreover, as some of the few cultural symbols in the music video, both "alcohol" and "money"—which offer the finishing touches to the content of the music video—not only show a certain desire for success and wealth but also strengthen the song's adventurous elements of "cool hedonism".

In the lyrics, the rappers stress that their team is *ichiban* (一番, which means "the best" in Japanese) and shines like stars ("잊지 마 잊지 마 우리가 이찌방/빛이 나 빛이 나 우리가 빛이 나"); they highlight that they are as valuable and special as Kim Yuna(김연아), a nationally-renowned figure skater in Korea, all of which belies a narcissistic attitude.

Meanwhile, instead of highlighting social problems, they attach more importance to personal interests and freedom (너는 너 나는 나 받아들여 어서/ 너는 남들 욕할 때 나는 돈 벌러); they don't recall the past or historical or political issues, and instead only pay attention to their present and future value (過去の話すんのださいから/昔のこと忘れちゃったらいい). They don't blindly follow others' value systems (신경 꺼 너는 너 나는 나" "너네는 컴퓨터로 구경해), and only do what they want to do, (やりたくないことやってる暇はねー), never compromising with people outside of their team. All of this content shows a hedonistic attitude in an age of consumerism.

In the music video, they also choose money symbols—something that young people all over the world pursue and long for—as one of the video's few decorations. Whether it is the cash that the rapper holds

in his hands and then discards or the money symbols that frequently appear on the screen, it all conveys a desire for money in the most simple and common way.

What is worth mentioning is that their pursuit of happiness also brings an extreme and adventurous attitude of cool hedonism, which can be reflected in the lyrics. The Japanese rapper compares himself to a ninja to show his fearlessness（dem ninjas on the mission／邪魔者は容赦なく斬る/死ぬ生きる賭けてりゃ当然の義務），and states that people only live once, so they should try their best to go ahead in their own way（人は最後 lonely/ 残せるものは多いに越したことない この一生に/俺は俺の足で歩く），which also shows the extreme and adventurous side of cool hedonism.

Similarly, certain aspects of narcissism also appear in the work of Higher Brothers. The narcissism revealed by "Made in China" is as follows. Firstly, both the introduction and the lyrics of the song reveal the message that "everything "Made in China" is the best"—which at the same time shows an attitude of celebrating Chinese culture. The introduction of the song has the following lyrics: "My chains, my watch "Made in China" / The luxury goods I buy for my girl are also "Made in China" / You say you don't love me but everything you own is "Made in China"."（My chains, new gold watch, "Made in China"／ We play ping pong ball, "Made in China"／給 bitch 買點奢侈品 "Made in China"）This refrain then features through the whole song as the hook. Additionally, the music video of "Made in China" applies a lot of Chinese elements and serves as a microcosm of Chinese culture. In the main scenes of the music video, the brick walls and alleys, red dresses, Nezha's(哪吒) hairstyle, playing Mahjong(麻將), drinking tea, and bowing all represent classical Chinese aesthetics. Listing the aspects of Chinese culture one-by-one, highlighting Chinese elements, and making the latter visual show Higher Brothers' confidence and pride in Chinese culture. There is no other subject in both the song's lyrics and music video than "China", so the rappers' exaggerated descriptions and

flashy behaviors are also exhibitions of narcissism.

There has always been a saying in Chinese culture that "humility is a virtue". If the exaggerated descriptions of Chinese culture and "Made in China" products above express a sense of national pride and reflect a kind of "national narcissism", then the following content to be analyzed contains both individualistic narcissism and hedonistic traits that contradict the much-lauded value of humility in Chinese culture.

Dzknow sings that the things "Made in China" are not only products that make people joyful, but also make champions and Higher Brothers that people can't touch. ("Made in China" 的冠軍 / "Made in China" 別挑釁 / "Made in China" 的貨/老百姓用得開心 / "Made in China" 的know know / "Made in China" 的trap / "Made in China" 的higher / "Made in China" 的帥). In the lyrics, Dzknow compares the responsibility on his shoulders to the national team that wins glory for the country, which is similar to Okasian's comparison of his value to Kim Yuna in "IT G MA". Psy.P meanwhile raps in the second half of the lyrics: "I was Li Bai in my previous life / looking at how well I write lyrics" (我的上輩子是李白/看我寫歌那麼厲害), emphasizing his own preciousness and particularity, which is full of self-centered narcissism that contradicts the traditional culture of "humility".

In summary, as new Asians, when 88rising artists produce works of culture through hip-hop, the works contain innate cool personality characteristics to a certain extent, which proves that these personality characteristics have been deeply integrated into their psychological level and have deeply influenced their cultural activities as well as guided their social behaviors. Rich Brian's works may seem like a parody, but there is a similar personality trait of ironic detachment hidden in them; the whole song of "IT G MA" explicitly expresses the pursuit of personal interests and freedom as well as the desire for material and money; as for Higher Brothers, their song not

only has a kind of "narcissistic complex" of national pride in Chinese culture, but also contains a self-centered individual characteristic of narcissism that contradicts the "humility" of traditional Chinese culture.

4.4. Another aspect of "Asian cool": an oversimplified definition of Asia

From the above analysis, it can be seen that "Asian cool" presented by new Asians 88rising is a kind of resistance to certain Asian stereotypes and misinterpretations through hip-hop—arguably the representative culture of modern coolness. This is not only an application of coolness, but also an inheritance and development of it. As mentioned above, in the context of hip-hop globalization, Asian hip-hop and Asian American hip hop are cultural devices that act on different societies and groups. These two kinds of devices co-exist in 88rising, thus created the cross-cultural concept of "Asian Cool" which gained attention in the global hip hop field. The attribute of "coexistence" means the sharing of Asianness. In America, Asianness is a form of racial discourse represented by model minority. However, as Huang argued, in the works of Asian artists, "Asianness" refers to the Asian subjectivity in artistic creation; it is a form of expression engraved with cultural identity, and a cultural discourse based on the differences in language, tradition and belief.[217] Sharing Asianness means constructing a new cultural space in which Asians and Asian Americans jointly resist the "discourse hegemony" of Western culture by emphasizing the Asian subjectivity of artistic creations. Through sharing Asianness between members, 88rising introduced hip hop music created by pure Asians, which showed the malleability and inclusiveness of hip hop in the process of globalization and played down the historical contradictions between Black and Asian Americans. As a result, when the Black community is facing to

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[217] 黄笃. (2005). 超越 "亚洲性" 与亚洲当代艺术. 文藝研究, 2005(7), 5-17.

Asian hip hop, the first thing they realize is not that Asian Americans have "stolen" their culture, but that as Smino, a Black rapper who participates in Made in China's reaction video, puts it, he appreciates that his culture reach so far, all the way around the world.[218] At the same time, through a platform based in America and dedicated for Asian artists, Asian hip hop can be recognized by the mainstream in a short time, and the "Asian cool" led by hip hop culture can be greatly glorified.

In other words, by sharing Asianness and utilizing hip-hop—a vibrant genre that embodies modern coolness—to do so, 88rising not only tries to express its internal resistance to Asian stereotypes and the desire to establish new forms of Asian representation, but also manages to change two dilemmas Asian hip-hop have faced. One is to alleviate the criticisms of cultural appropriation faced by Asian American hip hop, the other is to provide all artists with Asian descent a headquarter in America, where they can easily get a sense of culture belonging.

In this case, 88rising is more like an emblem of pan-Asian unity, while Asian cool is a powerful cultural movement initiated by "new Asians" and led by hip-hop culture, which aims to help Asians and Asian Americans rebuild their representation and identity in the Western popular culture landscape.

However, it is the pan-Asian nature of this cultural movement that on the other hand also makes Asian cool an "oversimplified definition of Asia". "Asia" is, broadly speaking, a geographical and geopolitical concept in a global framework, but in the field of contemporary art, it has become a complex and diverse space. Just as scholar Huang Du has argued, "Asian culture contains various cultural traditions, customs, religions and political factors, so it is difficult to generalize

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[218] "Rappers React to Higher Brothers" | Migos, Lil Yachty, Playboi Carti, KYLE, & more.
 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDrLlIj0qes

Asia with any single culture." [219] However, the distinctions drawn by statistical categories inevitably simplify a complex kaleidoscope of histories, cultures, and lived experiences. Many scholars—most notably the sociologist Yen Le Espiritu in his book *Asian American Pan-Ethnicity*—believe that forging a uniform Asian American identity is possible and necessary in order to gain certain political rights and representation.[220] While all pan-ethnic identities involve a certain amount of glossing over of difference—this is also one of Rivera's key points of criticism in the case of pan-*latinidad*—Asian American pan-ethnicity is especially held together by a very fragile thread of political necessity rather than cultural, historical, or social similarity.[221] In the multicultural society of the United States, all people with Asian descent are often reduced to "Asian American", which ignores the huge heterogeneity between different Asian American groups and thus provides fuel for racial stereotypes.

This oversimplified definition of what it means to be Asian is everywhere in Western pop culture. The film "*Crazy Rich Asians*" (2018), for example—which was heralded as a victory for Asian representation in film—presented a single experience of being Asian that leaves out most actual Asian people.[222] Although it was

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[219] 黄笃. (2005). 超越 "亚洲性".
[220] Le Espiritu, Y. (1992). *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*. Temple University Press.
[221] Schloss, J. (2005). Review of Raquel Z. Rivera (2003) *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, in *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, *17*(2), 210-212.

> "In New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone, Raquel Z. Rivera did a rigorous analysis of Puerto Rican hip-hop. She convincingly documents, for example, how Puerto Ricans were assimilated into the pan-*latinidad* category of 'Latin rap' that was in vogue in the early 1990s—an attempt at creating a subcategory of hip-hop that was meant to acknowledge Latino contributions but also had the effect of erasing differences. Under this pan-*latinidad* rubric, Puerto Ricans were lumped in with Dominican, Cuban, and especially Chicano rappers, despite the significant social differences that exist between these ethnic communities."

[222] "*Crazy Rich Asians*" is a 2018 American romantic comedy film directed by Jon M. Chu, adapted from a screenplay by Peter Chiarelli

set in Singapore, it effectively erased the city's Malay and Indian minorities, instead exclusively depicting its dominant Chinese majority. As Ian Wang has argued in his article, "whether in film, music or elsewhere, the pop cultural moment that Asians are experiencing right now exists only in the form of a palatable, sanitized version of Asianness which perpetuates inequality rather than combating it." [223]

This oversimplified definition of Asianness is reflected in the "Asian cool" represented by 88rising. There seems no room in the Western discourse surrounding Asian hip-hop for alternative versions of Asian cool, and the idea of Asian hip-hop promoted by most media outlets has no context, nuance, or history before 2015, the year 88rising was founded. As Wang has noted,

> "there is no space in this narrative for the Japanese DJs like DJ Krush, who brought hip-hop turn-tablism to Tokyo in the 80s, or Asian American pioneers like 90s Philadelphia trio Mountain Brothers, who released their first album before Rich Brian was even born." [224]

Meanwhile, focusing on these artists' Asianness as a unifying characteristic erases the true diversity that exists within Asian rap. For example, Higher Brothers rap in standard Chinese and Sichuanese about Chinese phenomena, such as the message application WeChat, and mention "Black Cars(黑車)" which has its own unique local connotation. These cultural specificities are integral to understanding

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and Adele Lim, and based on the 2013 novel of the same title by Kevin Kwan. It follows a Chinese-American professor who travels to meet her boyfriend's family and is surprised to discover they are among the richest in Singapore. It is the first film by a major Hollywood studio to feature a majority cast of Asian descent in a modern setting since "*The Joy Luck Club*" in 1993. Despite the praise it received for this, the film did receive some criticism for casting biracial actors instead of fully ethnically Chinese ones in certain roles. Additional criticism was directed at the film for failing to include non-Chinese Singaporean ethnic groups—notably Malay and Indian actors—as characters.

[223] Ian Wang. (August 8, 2019), "What do we mean when we talk about 'Asian rap'?". *DAZED.*

[224] Ibid.

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these artists' work—but in most English-language coverage, they have been flattened into a reductive, homogenized version of Asianness, in which distinct cultural contexts are treated as if they're fundamentally the same. This is not only a negation of efforts made by Asian hip-hop artists before, but also an obliteration of Asian cultural diversity; indeed, Asian hip-hop became a fashionable new trend, with Spotify and Apple Music playlists describing it as a "New Era" and "The New Asia" respectively—phrasings which can be capitalized on without being truly understood.

There is potential for Asian hip-hop to be a powerful movement based on radical, pan-Asian unity, and can further be used as a constructive tool to create a new form of Asian representation. But in fact, the other side of "Asian cool" entails a simplified definition of Asian culture, and the obliteration of Asian cultural diversity. This label, which seems to herald the victory of Asian representation, however, may dilute Asian culture into a neatly-packaged, marketable version of Asianness, thus reinforcing existing stereotypes in the West.

In conclusion, through sharing Asianness and making use of hip-hop culture, 88rising has become the pioneer of Asian artists' expressions of resistance and created an "Asian cool" as well as new Asian representation in the scene. Of course, this "Asian cool" seems to be highly appreciated. But in fact, it also risks eradicating the diversity of Asian culture. In other words, there is potential for Asian hip-hop to be a powerful cultural movement based on a radical, pan-Asian unity, but that potential cannot be realized if one looks at Asian culture from a homogenous perspective and dilutes it into a neatly-packaged, marketable form of Asianness.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the essence and cultural connotation of "Asian cool" represented by 88rising that appeared in Western mainstream pop culture in the past five years. And try to answer the following questions: what is "cool" in Asian cool? Then, what is "Asian" in Asian cool?

In the first chapter, I explained the study's research background and purpose. In the literature review, I examined studies of "Asian cool". The research on Asian cool can be roughly divided into two categories: first, exploring traditional Asian aesthetics similar to cool ness, and second, regarding it as a "national branding strategy". In short, "Asian cool" is not only a historical development of coolness, but also confirms the applicability of it within the context of trans－national culture. But a review of the existing research on Asian cool shows that there are still gaps to be filled. For example, the research on Asian cool shows a monotonousness—especially in the field of popular culture. Secondly, when the research takes coolness as its theoretical basis and applies it to interpretations of Asian culture, there is a lack of a clear definition of what constitutes coolness. Thus, I clarified the scope and purpose of this study, which is not to find out the origins of coolness in Asian culture, nor to explore the local－ization process of the concept in Asia, but rather to investigate the essence and cultural connotations of "Asian cool" in a transcultural context from the perspective of comparative literature. As such, this study first considered what is meant by the term "cool" in the field of popular culture, and then determined whether an understanding of this concept can help how we read Asian cool in the proposed context.

In the third chapter, I focused on establishing the theoretical frame of the present study. First of all, I reviewed the research on cool in general, the existing researches show that the concept of cool can be widely applied in various fields such as ethnic studies, adolescent

personality studies, emotional styles studies and mass culture stud—ies. This also indicates the attractiveness of cool in transcultural and transdisciplinary fields. This study examined how Asian cool mani—fested within the cultural practices of the Asian cultural community 88rising, and thus, in order to understand its cultural connotation more deeply, it narrowed the literature review's scope to the "concept of coolness in the field of popular culture". Based on the research of two key books, I then examined how the concept of cool—ness developed in American—which can roughly be traced linearly through the following "cool" subcultures: Jazz cool, Noir cool, Ex—istentialist cool, Zen cool, Vegas cool, Rebel cool, Countercultural cool, Punk cool, and Hip—hop cool. Meanwhile, scholarly perspectives converge on the idea of cool as always entailing some kind of rebel—lious and self—protective stance against what is perceived to be mainstream. Thus, I decided to follow the definition of coolness in the book *Cool Rules*, seeing it as "a permanent state of private rebel—lion", and focused on the rebellious aspect of coolness against au—thority in and through popular culture. This definition of coolness brought the study to the following questions:

Question 1: As a "variant" of cool, is there any rebellious infor—mation in the Asian Cool displayed through 88rising's work? If so, what are the objects and strategies of rebellion?

As mentioned earlier, Asians have always been considered "un—cool". The birth of 88rising is considered to be the emergence of a new Asian representation, and the term "Asian cool" also came into being. The reason why 88rising is called Asian Cool is definitely not just because they are Asian.

Question 2: In the previous question, I focused on the 'cool' of "Asian cool", then this brings us to another question of this paper. That is, what is 'Asian' in "Asian cool"?

In order to explain the essence of Asian cool, the study mainly adopts

two research methods: research synthesis method and the transdis—
ciplinarity method, taking the following contents as the materials of
analysis.

Keith Ape— "IT G MA" （2015）
Rich Brian— "Dat Stick" （2016）
Higher Brothers— "Made in China" （2017）

The reasons for selecting these songs as the primary research ma—
terial was as follows: first, the three groups of artists selected com—
prised the "creators of the first wave of Asian cool" represented
by 88rising. The selected works highlighted each artist's distinct
colors, which provided effective help for this study's exploration of
Asian cool. Secondly, the above three groups of artists, with their
pure Asian descent and upbringing, provided a more representative
material for analysis. This thesis meanwhile applied the "open"
mind of comparative literature by integrating hip—hop culture, the
concept of coolness, and cross—cultural communication between East
and West into its research.

Chapter 4 is the core content of this thesis and consists of four sec—
tions. In the first section, I elaborated on the development of Asian
hip—hop and Asian American hip—hop respectively. On the one hand,
the globalization of hip—hop verifies the malleability and inclusive—
ness of it, but on the other hand, Asian Americans have met suspi—
cions of "cultural appropriation" when they participate in hip—hop.
Even with different context of development, Asian hip—hop and Asian
American hip—hop face the same dilemma. That is in a social world
of fans, artists, media, and industry in which blackness is normative,
rappers with Asian descent are racially *in*authentic. Generally
speaking, the existence of 88rising rectifies the current situation,
namely "the lack of Asian representation in Western music", and
resists the claim that Asian hip—hop is inauthentic.

In the second section, I analyzed the "rebellious" content in the
three selected songs. The results thereof show that each artist

adopted different rebellious tactics against Western stereotypes of. Specifically, through making the most of internet and media resources—i.e., the "reaction video" —Rich Brian not only successfully addresses the criticism caused by his "mistakes", but also shows a rebellious attitude towards statements like "Asians don' t belong in hip-hop". The "reaction video" significantly conveys a universal concept by highlighting the saying "hip-hop is a universal language", in addition to proving that Asian rappers actually have the ability to step into mainstream hip-hop. As the representatives of "Made in China", Higher Brothers meanwhile address the stereotype that "Chinese rap sounds like *ching chang chong*". As a response strategy, the members of the Sichuanese group take advantage of their language skills and combine standard Chinese, Sichuanese, and thus avoiding the disadvantages of Chinese pronunciation in rap. This specific linguistic strategy also makes the identity of Chinese rap clearer. Next, Higher Brothers dispel the negative opinions attached to the phrase "Made in China", by choosing to not debate this prejudice directly and instead to use clever asides in their song to justify the image of "Made in China". This not only shows their fight and transcendence but also their determination to rebuild the image of "Made in China". Keith Ape presents Asian cultures from a brand-new perspective, by coordinating the tastes of Western audiences and exoticism, and thus creating a new cultural space for Korean music. Not only did Keith Ape become the first South Korean rap star to succeed in the US; he also made Western audiences realize that South Koreans can also be cool and crazy. Through his song "IT G MA", he has impressed Western audiences musically and visually, and has also expressed his rebellion against the general, vague misunderstanding of Korean music and Korean people caused by the K-pop phenomenon.

In the next section, I shifted the focus to what constituted the "Asian" in Asian Cool, exploring the meaning of the word "Asian" from the perspectives of the hip-hop and social environments from which the creators of the selected works hail. In the process of hip-hop

localization, Asian hip-hop has formed unique aesthetics with distinctly local characteristics. These local specificities are the result of the localization of Asian hip-hop, which also has had a profound impact on the works of local rappers. "Asian" in Asian cool, I argue, is precisely reflected in the local specificities of hip-hop from the various countries of the selected hip-hop works in question. After a brief overview of the hip-hop localization characteristics of the countries of the selected rappers under analysis, I described the local specificities evident in the latter's works. Then, I compared the local specificities of the selected works in terms of language, content, and audiovisual characteristics. The results indicate that combining music with visual elements and local characteristics to imbue the works with an Asian identity is an important feature of the localization process of Asian hip-hop music. This is evident in both music videos of "IT G MA" and "Made in China". What is different is that "IT G MA" reflects Korean identity through certain elements of modern Korea (like wines, masks, and currency symbols) while "Made in China" depends more on applying traditional Chinese images (such as ancient architecture, gestures, and mahjong) to highlight the local specificities of Chinese hip-hop. In terms of language, both "IT G MA" and "Made in China" integrate local language and English together. However, more specifically, the lyrics of "Made in China" evince an important characteristic of Chinese rap — namely, the linguistic strategy of utilizing regional dialect. As for content, in "IT G MA", rappers from Korea and Japan collaboratively rap on the same track and share the same emotions — in so doing crossing the limits of their countries' past generations to try to build a relationship between two traditionally opposed cultures and societies. However, from its title to its content, "Made in China" thoroughly centers on China, describing "Chinese power" from the perspective of "positive energy" (正能量), which can be seen as a response to the vision of "The Chinese Dream".

Then I investigated new Asians with cool personality traits like 88rising. First, this study highlighted the three principal cool

personality traits identified in *Cool Rules*, and then noted their con-
tradictory nature to the "*ren, yi, li, zhi, xin*(仁義禮智信)" concept
advocated in Confucianism. Second, it conducted a brief analysis of
the historical background of these characteristics in Asian society.
Hence, the historical and social causes of the three personality traits
within an Asian cultural context were derived. Among these are
Kim's theory of the "survival generation" and some Chinese
scholars' discussions on the social psychology and personality
characteristics of today's generation of youth. The "new Asian"
with cool personality traits was born out of this environment. This
thesis proceeded to focus on the reorganization and reproduction of
these personal characteristics within the cultural practices of "new
Asians", centering on the main research object of the entire study—
the works created by 88rising artists through hip-hop. In summary,
while Rich Brian's song may seem like a parody, there is an element
of ironic detachment hidden within it; meanwhile, "IT G MA" ex-
plicitly expresses the pursuit of personal interests and freedom—as
well as the desire for material and money—throughout; as for Higher
Brothers, their song not only displays a "narcissistic complex" of
national pride in Chinese culture, but also contains a self-centered
narcissistic individualism that contradicts the "humility" of tradi-
tional Chinese culture.

The last section of Chapter 4 accounts for another aspect of Asian
cool. First of all, by analyzing the aforementioned artists and songs,
this thesis has established the essence and cultural connotations of
88rising and Asian cool. These are, namely, that Asian cool is a pow-
erful cultural movement initiated by new Asians who share a sense
of Asianness, and thus aim to help Asians and Asian Americans re-
build their representation and identity in Western popular culture,
while 88rising represents a sort of means to the ends of pan-Asian
unity. However, the pan-Asian nature of this cultural movement
creates the risk that Asian cool comes across as representing an
"oversimplified definition of Asia". In conclusion, I argue that alt-
hough there is potential for Asian hip-hop to be a powerful movement

based on radical, pan-Asian unity that can further new Asian representation through hip-hop, the other side to "Asian cool" is that it represents a simplified definition of Asian culture and the obliteration of Asian cultural diversity. The label 88rising, which seems to herald the victory of Asian representation in the West; however, it may dilute Asian culture into a neatly-packaged, marketable version of Asianness, and thus reinforce existing stereotypes.

Today, Asia has gradually transformed from facing resistance, bitterness, prejudice, and discrimination from the West to coordination and development with it. Asians should not only rethink the new Asian order but also reorient their Asian culture. As the Chinese scholar Huang has said, the question of how to establish a new Asian cultural strategy amid a rapidly-changing and hybrid culture is a question for today's practitioners of Asian culture to grapple with. To solve the problem , Huang has proposed the artistic ideal of "transcending Asianness" , which provides Asian artists with new ideas in their cultural practices.

In fact, this strategy is already being applied. When faced with a new crisis, after "Asianness" and "Asian cool" became the new trend in the West, and more time was given to maximizing commercial value rather than cultural significance, Asian artists have begun to resist it. Take "Kids" , the second single from Rich Brian's second studio album *The Sailor* (2019), as an example. Here, Brian does not just rap about Asians in general; he also raps about Indonesians specifically, in both the lyrics ("Victorious tropical flow coming straight from Indo") and in the song's music video.[225] As Ian Wang mentioned in the article, "none of this is diluted or Orientalized to pander to a Western audience, nor does it kowtow to a narrative of Asian homogeneity – but it also doesn't turn its back on Asians outside of

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[225] The music video is filmed in Brian's home city of Jakarta, and it is rich with signifiers of Indonesian culture: Sundanese music cassettes, for example, or the martial art *pencak silat*.

Brian's home country."[226] Brian shows the attitude that Asian a
rtists active in the West should have today: stand alongside
Asians, recognizing the struggle shared with them, without effacing
the nuances that make his/her own culture unique.

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[226] Ian Wang. (August 8, 2019), "What do we mean."

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Abstract in Korean

본 논문의 목적은 최근 5년간 서양 대중문화에서 나타난 88라이징(88rising)으로 대표되는 '아시안 쿨(Asian cool)'의 본질에 대해 고찰하고 아시안 쿨(Asian cool) 중 '쿨(cool)'과 '아시안(Asian)' 각자의 문화적인 의미를 탐색하는 데 있다.

88라이징은 션 미야시로(Sean Miyashiro)가 창립한 다중 문화 아이덴티티를 가지고 있는 아시안 문화 공동체이다. 2015년 창립 이래 88라이징은 아시아인 래퍼와 알앤비(R&B) 가수들을 발굴하는 데 힘을 쏟았으며, 그들이 미국에서 음악 활동을 할 수 있게 도와준 동시에 유례없는 성적을 얻었다. '아시안 쿨'은 88라이징이 발전하는 과정 중 하나의 키워드로서, 많은 서양 미디어에 의해 인용되고 88라이징의 예술적인 특성을 묘사할 때 쓰인다.

기존의 연구와 달리 연구 대상의 속성을 고려하여, 본 연구는 우선 '대중문화 속에서 쿨니스(coolness)란 무엇인가?'에 초점을 둘 것이다. 대중문화 분야에서 쿨니스의 개념이 광범하게 정의되면 이를 각종 유행 문화와 특정 문화 아이덴티티인 아시안에 어떻게 적용할 것인지에 대해 한층 더 깊이 검토할 수 있기 때문이다. 그 다음으로 <The Origins of Cool in Postwar America>와 <Cool Rules: anatomy of an attitude> 두 책을 바탕으로 하여 대중문화 분야에서 쿨의 발전 과정을 정리하였다. 또한 <Cool Rules> 중에서 내린 쿨의 정의인 '영구적인 사적 반란의 상태(a permanent state of private rebellion)'를 본 연구의 핵심 정의로 하여, 대중문화 속에 재현될 때 쿨의 권위에 대한 반항적인 표현에 초점을 맞췄다.

이어서 88라이징의 세 팀 예술가의 대표 작품(리치 브라이언의 "Dat Stick", 하이어 브라더스의 "Made in China", 키스 에이프의 "IT G MA")을 중심으로 하여, 작품 속 '반항적인 메시'에 대해 분석한다. 이 과정은 "아시안 쿨 중의 '쿨'이 무엇인가?"의 답에 대한 고찰이기도 하다. 분석 결과를 요약하면 세 팀 아티스트는 각자 다른 전략을 통해 서양에서 온 인종차별적인 담론에 대해 저항하였다. 다음으로 필자는 아시안 쿨의 '아시안'에 초점을 맞추며, 연구 대상이 속한 힙합 환경과 사회 환경 두 가지 측면에서 '아시안'의 의미를 탐구한다. 먼저, 아시아 각국 힙합 현지화의 과정 속에서 본토 특색을

지니고 있는 독특한 힙합 미학이 형성되었다. 이러한 본토 독특성(local specificities)은 아시아 힙합 현지화의 성과이며, 본토 래퍼들의 창작에 깊은 영향을 끼친다. '아시안 쿨' 중의 '아시안'은 마침 본토 특수성이 작품 속에 남아 있는 흔적으로 표출된 것이다. 또한 '아시안 쿨' 숙 '아시안'은 88라이징의 구성원과 같이 전 세대와 다른 인격 특성을 가진 쿨 뉴 아시아인(cool new Asian)이다. 사회 구조의 변화로 인해 아시안 신 세대는 전 세대가 추구하던 가치체계와 차이점이 있고, 인격 특성 측면에 '쿨의 인격적 특징'에 더 가깝다. 이러한 쿨 특징은 그들의 작품 속에서도 나타난다.

위 분석하는 것을 통해 필자는 다음과 같은 결론을 도출하였다. 아시안이 오랫동안 서양 미디어에서 왜곡되고 서양 주류 문화 속에 장기적으로 등장하지 않는 상황을 마주할 때, 88라이징으로 대표되는 아시아 신세대는 힙합이라는 현대 쿨니스의 대표 문화를 통해 아시아에 관한 고정관념(stereotype)에 대한 내적 저항은 물론 새로운 아시아의 대표(Asian representation)를 확립하고자 하는 열망을 표현하는 것이다. 이러한 상황에서 88라이징은 범아시아적인 공통체(pan-Asian unity)와 더욱 비슷하고, '아시안 쿨'은 88라이징이란 아시아 신 세대가 일으킨 영향력이 있는 문화 운동을 의미하며, 이는 쿨의 활용일 뿐만 아니라 쿨에 대한 일종의 계승과 발전이기도 하다.

그렇지만 이러한 문화운동의 범 아시아적인 성질로 인해 '아시안 쿨'의 또 다른 면이 '아시아에 대한 지나친 단순화 된 정의(oversimplified definition of Asia)'가 되었다. 바꿔 말해, 급진적이고 범아시아적인 공동체를 바탕으로 '아시안 쿨'은 영향력이 있는 문화운동이 될 가능성이 있지만, 아시아 문화를 동질적이고 단순화된 시각으로 바라보면 그 잠재력은 실현될 수 없다는 것이다.