Master's Thesis:

Exploring the interrelationship between hip hop literacies and international students' learner identities

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Abstract

An international student's hip hop literacies and learner identities are interrelated because the former influences how learners learn, perceive power, and engage in self-expression. As a practicing ESL/EAL teacher, I am interested in the learner identities of one former student, specifically, how his affiliation to hip hop may or may not have affected how he learns. Borrowing from previous literacy theories and hip hop pedagogies, a theoretical framework is constructed to better inform this study. Through the scope of this framework, the interviews with the student are analyzed to contribute to the understanding of international learners and hip hop affiliated adolescence. Furthermore, through extensive analysis of the interviews, new understandings of hip hop affiliated international learners are added to the existing literature.

Acknowledgements

The journey of this research is much longer and more complex than I initially intended. The simple, straightforward case study I had in mind became a complex, collaborative endeavor by my participant, committee members, my partner in life, and myself. I wish to acknowledge those who helped me stay on the course; this is a shoutout to you all:

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Finally, I devote this study to my partner in life, Riley. She is my homie, my muse, my drive, and the reason I wake up with a smile. She was my first student and the one I am most proud of. She is the one who constantly challenges my ideas yet embraces all my mistakes no matter what. Her dedication to education is why I started teaching; she is the base of my assertions in learning.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Exploring learner identities and hip hop literacies

"Maybe it's hatred I spew, maybe it's food for the spirit." How likely would you believe that the author of this quote is Shakespeare? Or Jay-Z? Hip hop has received widespread public criticism for exposing youth to violent, sexist, and racist language (Rose, 2008). However, as shown in the Jay-Z quote above, it could be argued that the language of hip hop is also poetic and educational; and that the message behind hip hop lyrics can potentially be useful to young people in thought-provoking ways. The lyrics above thus serve as a metaphor for how learners may use hip hop literacies to negotiate their identities. In my thesis, I plan to explore how hip hop literacies interplay with shaping a learner's identity.

I will use a specific case-study approach. My participant is a male learner of English as a Second Language (ESL) who was a student in my ESL class and continued his studies online in Canada during COVID-19. The class was for learners of B1 level from the age of 14 to 20; it consisted of 6 students, including the participant. The participant was a 19-year-old Chinese male student then, now 21; he is a hip hop fan and an amateur hip hop performer. Through interviews, informal conversations, exam papers, assignments, and report cards from the specific participant, this research will explore how the participant's hip hop literacies help shape his identity as an ESL learner, especially under the circumstance of the pandemic.

With a focus on international students, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. Do hip hop literacies affect the way learners learn? If so, how?

2. How do hip hop literacies enable or disable learners to foster their understanding of their experience of becoming and being a learner?
3. How may hip hop literacies be used for learners to find their voices?
4. How do hip hop literacies nurture learners' power, agency, and responsibility for social change?
5. How can hip hop be a tool to engage (international) students?

In addition, I will address my interest in international students. Maguire (2011) analyzes the pressures English language standards have on international students. According to him, International students have the dilemma of having to choose between different discourses to gain academic success, primarily due to the language barriers they already face; even international students who are native English speakers are challenged when they are not from dominant countries such as Canada or England (p.38). Thus, the linguistic homogeneity of the academic standard is a reason for the marginalization and disengagement of international students. My participant is an international student facing these challenges; I want to know whether hip hop can be helpful to students like him.

As a practicing teacher, I am interested in whether utilizing learners' hip hop literacies can improve their learning engagement. Having spent many years learning and performing as a musician before becoming an ESL teacher, I stumbled upon the idea of teaching pronunciation through popular songs during my pursuit of a bachelor's degree in Musicology. At first, it was mainly an attempt of combining two passions and finding an attention grabber to make a dull classroom more fun; when the learners responded well to the approach, I started refining my method by comparing music genres.

Though I was always a hip hop fan, it never occurred to me that hip hop could be the answer I was looking for until some of the students started asking if we could learn a rap song. Since then, I started using selected rap lyrics to teach ESL: first as speaking lesson material, later for reading, listening, even writing. Eventually, a particular piece of in-class rap writing caught my eye; it was filled with the students' suppressed feelings and emotions towards their unpleasant experiences with the school. I had no idea that the student was so deeply hurt and angry, and somehow those 16-bars of rap allowed him to recognize and express his feelings. That lesson was so engaging and meaningful that the whole class stayed connected long after graduation; their attitude towards writing shifted. This incident drew my attention to hip hop pedagogies and marginalized youth. Therefore, I would also like to address the potential of using hip hop as a teaching strategy to engage marginalized students and foster a learner-centered environment where powerful literacies may occur.

1.2 Background

The study took place in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic and at a time of intense debate and strife over racial injustice and the rise of the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM). These are factors that will be central to understanding the context of this study.

The spread of COVID-19 hurled through the planet. According to WHO (World Health Organization), 70 million cases have been reported worldwide with 1.6 million deaths (https://covid19.who.int/) by December 12, 2020; almost half the world's population was restricted from movement in some respect (Jetten, Reicher, Haslam & Cruwys, 2020, p.3). WHO strongly suggests that by all means possible, governments must fully utilize the extra time gained

through "lockdown" measures to "detect, isolate, test and care for all cases; trace and quarantine all contacts; engage, empower and enable populations to drive the societal response and more." Many individuals stayed at home for a long time following local situations; communication, interaction, entertainment, and education have changed drastically.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on all of our lives (Muller & Baum, 2020), specifically in the field of education. Measures such as classroom physical distancing were enforced to limit the threat of COVID-19's spread (Murray, 2020); many classes were moved to online platforms, creating challenges and opportunities for both educators and learners (Thompson & Lodge, 2020).

Meanwhile, a series of Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests took place during the lockdown period, making this research background even more distinctive. With a mission to "eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes", BLM gained increasing attention worldwide since 2013 (https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/). The year 2020 may leave a significant mark in BLM movements' history, as over 450 major protests were organized across all 50 states of the U.S. and 60 countries to call for justice for George Floyd by the end of May 2020 (Weine, Kohrt, Collins, Cooper, Lewis-Fernandez, Okpaku, & Wainberg, 2020).

Floyd's death continues to have immense impact, especially during the pandemic. Barbot (2020) believes the moral injury brought by Floyd's murder represents "a cumulative injury on top of the sustained acuity of health inequities playing out in horrifying details through the COVID-19 pandemic (p.1253)." She implied that a collective moral injury could be regarded as lasting emotional and spiritual influences on individuals and communities; given the unique background of lockdown and isolation, these influences may be powerful.

On the other hand, Weine et al. also believe the protests inspired by Floyd's death have global influences. They highlighted that the BLM movements in 2020 triggered a series of human rights movements from Brazilian's protest about the police brutality against a 14-year-old (Biller, 2020), Britain's and Europe's solidarity activities that call for attention to the effects of colonial histories (Dejong, 2020), to Australian's Aboriginal Lives Matter movements (Pilling, 2020). Weine et al. further state that the BLM movements during the pandemic forced a broader understanding of the problems rooted in socio-economic and political systems; this call for understanding was felt in homeplaces, schools, workplaces, and more. Educators need to pay attention to how BLM movements and Covid-19 have or will influence learners now and into the future.

As a sub-culture of Black culture, hip hop may be closely relevant to BLM movements. While referencing the rapper Kendrick Lamar's "*Alright* (2015)" as a civil rights anthem throughout the book, *Black Lives Matter and Music: Protest, Intervention, Reflection* (Orejuela, & Shonekan, 2018) provides ample examples of how music is related to BLM. Martin (2018) notes the linkage between Black resistance and go-go music; while Dalphond (2018) analyzed house music to provide ethnographic details of activists' lives and how they utilize various approaches to voice Black rights. As one of the most prominent types of music in our time, hip hop is the "sonic narratives of activism that can be heard over the headphones and speakers (Arksoy, 2020)."

My study's participant is identified as a Chinese international student interested and invested in hip hop culture. He was enrolled in a full-time language program; he stayed in Halifax, Nova Scotia, during the pandemic, learning online. In addition to the presumed issues and challenges that come with being away from home during isolation and drastic social changes, I wondered if

his hip hop literacies during this time would have more substantial impacts on his self-identifying process. During the lockdown period, he may have had an increased amount of time to spend on hip hop; while the BLM movements and hip hop artists took over social media spaces, my participant may have immersed himself in Black culture to a deeper degree. Therefore, it is important to consider how the background context in which this study took place may enhance the level of hip hop literacies' influence on the participant's construction of a learner identity.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to review the literature of literacies and hip hop pedagogy to establish an analytical lens from which to understand my participant's experience.

The literature review consists of three parts. First, after examining pre-established theories of literacies and hip hop, a theoretical framework is presented to define hip hop literacies. Combining literacy theories that broaden the idea of literacy (Anderson & Strokes, 1984; Barton & Hamilton, 1999; Gee, 1988, 2015; Hill, 2009; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002, 2004; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) with language theories that give ground to hip hop's language (Alim, 2006; Billings, 2005; Bradley, 2009; Brasch, 1981; Labov, 1972) while taking hip hop's globalization (Alim, Ibrahim & Pennycook, 2008; Blommaert, 2003; Chang, 2007; Lin, 2009; Osumare, 2007; Pennycook, 2007) into account, the definition of hip hop literacies draws from Fiske's (1987) vertical intertextuality system, Androutsopoulos's (2009) three spheres theory, and Krim's (2000) hip hop systems to add to its meaning.

Second, the ongoing debate of hip hop's influence on learners is presented and discussed. Hip hop, as a music genre, often appears as rap songs. By exploring how the language and content of rap songs are understood and used by language students, the use of hip hop texts as a teaching tool may be supported. As pointed out by numerous scholars, hip hop as texts and literacies provides people with various benefits. For international students like Vico, I find the following four aspects the most helpful: linguistic (Androutsopoulos, 2009; Belle, 2016), academic and ESL learning (Barrett, 2013; Forell, 2006; Kelly, 2013; Wetmore, 2006), identities

(Androutsopoulos, 2009; Kelly 2013; Sánchez, 2010), and social aspects (Akom, 2009; Love, 2014).

Finally, literature that discusses the criticality of hip hop pedagogy and its capacity to nurture learners' identities are presented. Though there are some concerns regarding hip hop's language and explicit content (Chung, 2007), educators and researchers have validated and defended hip hop (Belle, 2016; Rose, 2008; Sánchez, 2010), especially in terms of critical hip hop literacies (Alim, 2011; Kelly, 2013; Osumare, 2007; Pennycook, 2007; Sánchez, 2010), to help answer the research questions above. Finally, an andragogic view of hip hop is analyzed and combined with critical hip hop literacies theories to help answer the questions above.

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Defining literacy

To define hip hop literacies, is it essential we first ask ourselves, what is literacy? Morrell & Duncan-Andrade (2002, 2004) and Hill (2009) dissect and reinterpret the works of Freire (1970) and Freire & Macedo (1987). They discuss the meaning of "being literate" and concluded that it means being "present and active in the struggle for reclaiming one's voice, history, and future" (Morelle & Duncan-Andrade, 2004, p. 249). Thus, for Morelle & Duncan-Andrade, the purpose of education is to enable students to "critique the hegemonic practices that have shaped their experiences and perceptions in order to free themselves from dominant ideologies, structures, and practices" (p. 250). Their theory urges teaching strategies and philosophies that encourage the establishment of learner identities, reclamation of voices and culture, and awareness of ideologies.

In response to Morrell & Duncan-Andrade's (2004) and Hill's (2009) definition of literate beings, it is essential to mention Belle's (2016) findings. Through the testimonials of her students, she concludes that many of her learners attribute the use of rap texts in academic settings to their critical engagement and productivity in class. Belle believes that since many young people identitfies with the politicized language and narratives told in hip hop, this form of music can be a critical literacy model that challenges the norm and explore different paths of personal and social development (p.288). Her experiment of a critical hip hop literacy curriculum provides evidence of the criticality of hip hop lyrics and the potential of using hip hop texts to provoke critical thinking, to combat hegemony.

Meanwhile, Gee (1988, p.37) believes that our view of literacy is often too narrow. He argues that this view reduces literacy to coding and decoding language and enforces the idea that reading and writing abilities are privileges. It is dangerous to take up this view of literacy, as it undermines the importance of non-written communication and interpretation skills by believing that reading certain forms of texts is "fancier"(p.42). This definition also presumes that people can interpret what they are reading. However, the productions and interpretations of texts are both done through personal discourse systems and adjusted according to the context. "None of us speaks a single, uniform language, nor is any one of us a single, uniform identity. The different social languages we use allow us to render multiple whos (who we are) and whats (what we are doing) socially visible." (Gee, 2015, p.90) Therefore, we must understand that literacies are tools people use to accept and produce meaning through personal perspectives in specific contexts or social situations.

Drawing on Gee's studies, many scholars address the importance of considering learners' literacies obtained and employed at home and within communities (Barton & Hamilton, 1999;

Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). While their advocation brings some attention to the study of home literacies, Anderson & Strokes (1984) also tried to examine how literacies and family lives are related. As a result, many begin to believe that learners' literacies outside of school contexts impact their school performance, which gives insights into how these literacies can influence how learners identify themselves as learners. Embedded in the literacy theories above, it is likely that hip hop literacies can shape the learner identities of those who are affiliated with hip hop, albeit with varying degrees of affiliation.

2.2.2 The language of hip hop

As hip hop culture was initially generated from within Black culture, it is important to base this research on a holistic understanding and general perceptions of Black English (BE). Billings (2005) researches people's perspectives on BE users, the social influences of BE, and the degree of influences Black English has on dialects' developments in the midwestern regions in the United States. His work provides a credible analysis of the stereotypes that have been projected onto BE speakers and thus it is helpful for both instructors and learners to understand how these perceptions are related to hip hop. Billings' work supports the analysis of how hip hop languages and literacies may influence the construction of learner identities. Also, Labov (1972) analyzes the African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in his research. His work and Brasch's (1981) observation of Black English (BE) empirically demonstrates its language structure, use, and logic. The analysis of their work may be useful to reference in the linguistic analysis of hip hop lyrics.

Nevertheless, BE and AAVE must not be viewed as the entity of hip hop's language, especially when hip hop is now a global pop phenomenon. Alim (2006) analyzes the Hip Hop Nation Language [1] (HHNL) to promote the concept of which Black English and English used in hip hop is free of systematic control, in contrast to "standard English" (p.14). According to his findings, the Hip Hop Nation Language "refers not only to the syntactic constructions of the language but also to the many discursive and communicative practices, the attitudes toward language, understanding the role of language in both binding/bonding community and seizing/smothering linguistic opponents, and language as concept (meaning clothes, facial expressions, body movements, grafitti, and overall communication (p.71)". Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that the language of hip hop, originating from Black English, has its distinctive grammatical structure, lexical resources, phonetic system, and unique discursive patterns and styles. (p.71-72).

Bradley (2009) compares rap lyrics to poetry. He concludes that rap is essentially a form of poetry that bears a stronger affinity to a more traditional form than the dominant contemporary free-formed poems (p. XV). The reason why the structure of rap is more "old school" is because it follows a dual rhythm of the music and the language, or as rappers call it, the "flow" (p. 6). The "flow" urges the artists to begin a pursuit of innovative syncopation and stress to maintain the aesthetics of the beat while delivering witty phrases, and ultimately forges the unique structure, format, and stress patterns of rap.

Additionally, in the analysis of the languages of hip hop, it is helpful to introduce the concept of hip hop ill-literacies proposed by Alim (2006). By selecting the term "ill-literacies", Alim (2011) tries to direct our attention to the irony which hip hop affiliated youths and

[1] According to Alim (2003), the Hip Hop Nation (HHN) is a street-conscious identity that fosters a space of culture, creativity, cognition, and consciousness; and Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL) is the linguistic expression of the HHN people.

practitioners use the term "ill." It is used to refer to exceptional skills and abilities, though the majority of public discourses tend to accuse hip hop culture of illiteracy (p.121). By referring to hip hop literacies as "ill", we are taking up a perspective that appreciates the creativity and rhythmic values of the language of hip hop, expanding the definition of literacies, and embracing a diverse and innovative discursive evolution.

2.2.3 A global linguistic flow

Hip hop has moved beyond its origins in Black communities to permeate almost the entire world. The purpose of this research is to explore the ties between hip hop literacies and learner identities through understanding Vico, a young adult hip hop lover from Xinjiang, China, who has experiences of studying and living in Canada. With our participant's ethnic identities and lived experiences in mind, it is helpful we look at hip hop literacies from a transnational view. Therefore, there is a need to mention the globalization and localization of hip hop.

The globalization of hip hop has long come to scholars' attention. Osumare (2007) believes that the globalization of hip hop culture empowers local youths and undermines the power and authority of existing social, cultural, as well as economic systems (p.2). She thinks of Hip Hop Nation's expansion to Hip Hop Globe as a "power move" which demonstrates a "performative and sociopolitical dynamic of our contemporary postmodern world" (p.3). Specifically, Osumare points out that international hip hop culture presents a constituent of Africanist rhetorical and musical signification even as it incorporates local elements (p.63). While Osumare's studies put focus on Hip Hop Globe's succession of the Africanist aesthetic, others contribute to the study of hip hop's localization.

Blommaert's (2003) studies indicate that the localization of hip hop is not the full acceptance of an abstract language but the unique patterns and structures of speech and literacy practices (p.608). From Chinese *xi ha* to Ghana "hip life", hip hop has become a common tongue that connects youth worldwide while allowing them to re-create it through adding their own national flavor (Chang, 2007, p.60). Their research concludes that the spread of hip hop is not the spread of the English language but the vital progressive agenda that challenges the status quo. From indigenous youths' advocacy of reviewing local conversations in Chile, Indonesia, and Norway, to organizations in Cape Town and Paris that address environmental and social justice, hip hop remains a voice of the oppressed even with its popularity which has made it mainstream in many places (Chang, 2007, p.62). In other words, hip hop's localization lies heavily on its core value which challenges hegemony.

In addition to its characteristics of being people's voices, localized hip hop also presents a transcultural and transnational awareness in both linguistics and ideology. Lin (2009) describes hip hop's evolution in Hong Kong; her research is an excellent example of this point. With a focus on linguistics, Lin compares several local artists and groups as well as their targeted audiences and concludes that Cantonese youths use *Chou Hou* (a Cantonese term which refers to "vulgar language") in hip hop as a transgressive act to defy mainstream middle-class norms (p. 163). Meanwhile, local artists in Hong Kong use hip hop to foster an alliance with artists from other regions. Lin mentions MC Yan's collaboration with artists from East Asia in his album, *Respect for Da Chopstick Hip Hop*. According to Lin's interview with MC Yan, this album features artists from Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong to demonstrate solidarity and promote the awareness of transculturality (p. 166).

In sum, hip hop is a global phenomenon that exhibits a vast range of local manifestations that reflect powerful local innovations while carrying important threads of traditional culture and value (Pennycook, 2007). Rather than using BE or AAVE only, hip hop is a globalized and fluid art form; youths and practitioners worldwide inherit the form and culture of hip hop and localize them, drawing from their own reality and experiences.

2.2.4 Hip hop literacies

In addition to literacy and linguistic theories, hip hop's unique characteristics must be addressed to define hip hop literacies better. Drawing upon Androutsopoulos' (2009) and Keith & Endsley's (2020) theories, hip hop's distinctive features can be recognized through three spheres and five elements.

Based on Fiske's (1987) "vertical intertextuality" theory, Androutsopoulos' (2009) proposes a "three spheres" theory of hip hop to help develop the understanding of it as a system. According to Fiske (1987), vertical intertextuality discusses how texts relate to different functions in popular culture. He differentiates between primary, secondary, and tertiary texts. Primary texts refer to the core pieces of the culture. Secondary texts operate around the core pieces to promote selected meanings (such as commercials and reviews), and actively elaborate the multiple meanings of the primary texts. Tertiary texts are produced by the viewers or audiences of the primary and secondary texts; the audience appropriate and transform primary texts to create viewers' cultural artifacts. Supporting Fiske, Androutsopoulos believes that the spheres of discourses are interrelated and he applies Fiske's theory to hip hop. He proposes that the three spheres of hip hop include "artist expression (corresponding to Fiske's "primary texts"),

media discourse ("secondary texts"), and discourse among Hip Hop fans and activists ("tertiary texts") (p.44)."

Krims (2000) perceives hip hop as a "genre system" and a set of social practices evolved around its four elements: breaking, djing, rapping, and writing. Adding to Krims' (2000) concept, Keith & Endsley (2020) state that hip hop culture consists of five elements: "1) djing – layering beats/mixing records; 2) emceeing/mc'ing – speaking rhyth- mic words that 'move crowds'; 3) breaking -free style/improvisational battle dancing; 4) graffiti – public street art, writings/drawings; and 5) knowledge of self – competency of cultural knowledge and history (p.57)." They believe that through lyrics and live performances, hip hop emphasizes the relationship between the performer and the audience as the performer actively draws upon their lived experiences; the knowledge produced throughout the process adds to the participants' knowledge of self. By adding the fifth element, Keith & Endsley validates the power of self-knowing and reflection embedded in hip hop practices.

In my thesis, I understand hip hop literacies as the abilities of students to understand themselves and the world; and the abilities to express their thoughts and identities through hip hop cultural artifacts and interactions. With our participant's cultural and political background in mind, I must hasten to add that global and transcultural awareness should be considered when defining hip hop literacies. Thus, this view of hip hop literacies presumes that its users are able to interact using hip hop elements as media to engage in various discourses in different spheres of hip hop. These users establish understandings of self and others through exchanges of personal experiences; they make sense of the world based on social practices and, at the same time, present strong local and global cultural, social, and even political awareness.

2.3 Hip hop's critics and defenders

To those who lack knowledge or experience, it is easy to think of hip hop as "a sonic jackhammer, a visual eyesore, or a conceptual nuisance" (Chang, 2007, p.59) rather than a courageous, innovative art form. Critics tend to accuse hip-hop of materialism, misogyny, homophobia, racism, vulgarity, and violence. Or as Chang (2007) puts it, "It's a hot mess, the roar of total chaos" (p. 59). Although there are rising tides of advocacy towards the use of hip hop pedagogy, many people remain pessimistic about hip hop, viewing it solely as a form of entertainment that should only be presented outside of school (Akom 2009). Furthermore, hip hop can put teachers in an awkward and vulnerable position for not being the experts on the subject matter and losing the classroom's power and authority (Low 2010). The main criticism of hip hop is its explicitness and sexism (Chung, 2007; Rose, 2008). However, most hip hop critiques can be defended; the learners' hip hop literacies should not be viewed as a threat to front-line teachers but a medium for better communication and understanding. In the following, I will discuss three of the most common area of criticism of hip hop: its expression, violence, and sexsism.

2.3.1 Rap's expression

One of the perennial problems the public tends to pay attention to is the vulgarity of language used in rap lyrics. Bradley (2009) discusses the wordplay of hip hop while addressing this issue. He admits that there is no defense for certain troubling elements, such as violence and sexism, used in hip hop lyrics; sadly, the hip hop culture also endorses these disturbing beliefs to

an extent (p. 89). However, it is necessary to understand the reasons behind hip hop's explicitness.

According to Bradley (2009), the offensive language in rap lyrics are intentional as they try to challenge polite sensibilities (p.86). Since the beginning of hip hop, a revolutionary spirit has been generated and inherited by hip hopers; the use of language outside of the norm of what is acceptable is one of the most essential and effective ways of presenting defiance to the social norms that are oppressive to the minority. Therefore, instead of defending rap's use of foul language, I urge the understanding of why this language is chosen for the expression of the rappers' reality—or as Rose (2008) puts it, "just keeping it real" (p.133).

Furthermore, we must recognize the fact that hip hop is a system that entails knowledge greater than the literal meaning of rap lyrics (Bradley, 2009; Chang, 2005; Rose, 2008). In the following sections, I would like to further explore hip hop's expression through a discussion of violence and sexism in hip hop.

Violence in hip hop

Hip hop is violent. According to Rose (2008), the criticism towards hip hop violence started in the late 1980s; the critics believe that violent stories and imagery directly support violent behaviors (p.35). Laybourn (2018) conducted a quantitative research project where she collected and analyzed rappers and rap lyrics. Though Laybourn's research on hip hop's authenticity primarily examines the relationship between lyrics and skin tones, her study also proposes that rap music is often associated with criminal activities as demonstrations of reality. Thus, concerns about violence and criminal activities in hip hop are reasonable.

Another concern regarding the violent influences of hip hop literacies is related to social media. As mentioned earlier, the third sphere of hip hop indicates that people also use hip hop literacies to socialize and interact (Androutsopoulos, 2009). Based on this theory, it is necessary to expand the discussion of hip hop to include the interactions between rappers, rappers and fans, and among fans. Patton, Eschmann, & Butler (2013) study rappers and social media behaviors. One particular example mentioned in their research was a 17-year-old Chicago-born rapper, Chief Keef, whose music products get attention for mentioning gang affiliations and promoting violence. His Tweeter response to a rivalry rapper's death was analyzed: "Its Sad Cuz Dat [that] Nigga Jojo Wanted To Be Just Like Us #LMAO [laughing my ass off] (Keith Cozart @ChiefKeef, 3:24AM, September 5, 2012)". Though Keef later updated that his account had been hacked, he did not delete the post. Patton et al. concluded that Keef's mocking of another's death might lead to "a new trend in social media where gang violence, hip hop music and the Internet intersect that can potentially lead to or exacerbate violence in urban communities (p. A59)."

Moreover, alarming teen perceptions of violence in hip hop indicate that hip hop literacies could undermine the seriousness of violent activities in young adults' eyes. Hernández, Weinstein, & Muñoz-Laboy (2012) researched youth's perception of violence in hip hop. They concluded that adolescents involved in hip hop present varied definitions of violence and see violence as a way to entertain or gain respect. Though their research participants also criticize violence and those who fail to differentiate reality and entertainment, their depiction of violence shows that their hip hop literacies are inclined to make violence a less stressful topic. Similarily, without connecting the interpretations to subsequent violent behaviors, Jeffries (2011) reached a conclusion that the participants in his research interpreted misogynistic depictions of women and

violence from rap lyrics. Indeed, violent content in hip hop can bring harm to those who engage in hip hop literacies practices.

Nevertheless, rather than merely addressing the negative impacts of hip hop violence, perhaps it is useful to attempt to understand why hip hop is perceived in this way. Contrary to public opinion, there is no significant difference in violent activities across mainstream music genres live shows (Fearing et al., 2018). Fearing et al. collected data from all live music venues in Madison, Wisconsin from 2008 to 2016; they compared data of genres including Hip hop All, Live Hip hop, Hip hop All No Live, Jazz, Country, Latin, Bluegrass, Blues, Rock, Folk, Electronic Dance Music (EDM), and karaoke, with sub-genres of each type according to specific venues; the final data set includes 46,25 calls for police services in 46 venues. According to their data (Table 3., p.246), EDM Mix has the highest of total call of 314 and a relatively high proportion of calls that ended in an offense (0.38); Country is the second-highest in total calls (274) but with a slightly higher portion of offenses (0.40). Hip hop All venues reported 260 calls in total, with a 0.31 portion that ends in offenses, showing the average data amongst the charts. Though their research focuses on live performances and artists or fan's activities during these shows, the result can be viewed as proof that hip hop culture is not as violent as is publically believed. Therefore, what causes our perception of hip hop is a question we need to address.

Rose (2008) highlights two main reasons for public critics of the aggression and violence in hip hop: First, due to the negative impacts of the stereotypes of Black people, the violent imagery in rap lyrics are more likely to attract the attention of the public; second, literal interpretations of hip hop lyrics are commonly used by critics. Rose further notes that critics do so to steer away from the injustice of racial discrimination and justify multiple discriminatory acts. These include the more significant numbers of police and prisons in Black communities,

larger numbers of imprisoned Black youths, and more censorship of expression compared with white communities. Furthermore, critics tend to depict rappers as autobiographers, assuming that all the violent and indecent behaviors are genuinely lived by the artists, ignoring the metaphors within the lyrics (p.37-38). In short, violent explicitness is indeed a problem of hip hop; however, this problem is deeply rooted in hegemonic norms and racial discrimination.

As educators, we must consider the benefits of using learners' hip hop literacies to prevent violence. Some scholars propose the possibility of using hip hop to help young people deconstruct their attitudes and understandings of violence (Hernández et al., 2012; Pim, 2018). There is growing attention on teaching approaches that use Hip hop in schools and other settings with youths (Akom, 2009; Belle, 2016; Hill, 2009; Love, 2014; Morrell, 2004; Sánchez, 2010). It is more likely to empower the adolescence to engage in social issues if educators recognize and use multiple discursive practices; hip hop lyrics and culture can be a site in which various discourses can be recognized (Freire, 2002). Thus, hip hop literacies may help open dialogues that help learners reconstruct their understandings of violence.

Sexism in hip hop

Is hip hop sexist? While male rappers' depictions of female raise a major concern of sexism, studies of female hip hop artists also show that though they actively present and challenge gender norms, some also reproduce heteronormative views of gender and sexuality to some extent (Haugen, 2003; Rose, 1994; Skeggs, 1993; Smalls, 2011; Thomas, 2009). Chung (2007) expresses concerns about sexism in hip hop products, especially in hip hop's visual contents. In Chung's view, hip hop products induce teenagers to imitate the visual contents of hip hop; meanwhile, the teens are unaware of the sexism that perpetuates females as sexual symbols.

Chung also believes that hip hop products are to blame for young females' behavior of displaying their sexuality by wearing sexy clothing. Thus, he highlights that hip hop culture presents sexism and problematic gender representations, and is therefore dangerous to youths (p.37). His conclusion also could mean that hip hop literacies may have negative impacts on learners in terms of how they perceive gender, interpret others' behaviors, and their own sexuality. Chung's opinion is admissible; however, I argue he is too quick to blame sexism on hip hop.

Hip hop has its problem of objectifying females, but so do many other mainstream cultures. Rose (2008) made a reasonable argument that sexism is rooted in our society. It is an immense problem systemically inherited from the long patriarchal history, a problem much too big for hip hop to carry alone (p.151-153). Hip hop literacies may negatively influence how learners internalize gender identities, yet these influences are not only generated by hip hop. As an example of pop culture, hip hop is merely an angled mirror through which reality is reflected. If we were to steer learners away from hip hop literacies for its discrimination towards females, then many of the canonical texts already used in classrooms should be banned for the same reason. Pointing fingers at hip hop and calling it sexist does not change anything; however, following the accusation with a proposal on elevating female status does.

Furthermore, as self-expression tools, hip hop literacies allow people to disrupt misogyny and reclaim their gender and sexual identities. Smalls (2011) analyzes a female emcee named Jean Grae, pointing out how various female rappers and hip hop fanatics combat sexism through rap music. According to Smalls, Grae has a unique way of disrupting misogyny where she "takes on a masculine voice and role (mimicry) to highlight the severity of gender violence and discrimination (p.92)." Small uses Jean Grae's "God's Gift (2002)" as classroom material to induce discussions of heteronormative schema and sexuality; her example presents concrete

evidence of how hip hop literacies can be utilized as disruption of norms of gender and sexuality.

2.3.2 The linguistic potential of hip hop texts

With arguments justifying the expression of rap presented above, it is high time we continue our discussion of hip hop's expression from a linguistic perspective. Contrary to public belief, the lyrics in hip hop can be educational. Belle (2016) proposes the potential of hip hop text analysis. Though hip-hop-related materials are welcomed by teachers and are used as attention grabbers, teachers rarely use hip hop lyrics as the texts in class (p.288). We must recognize the potential of hip hop lyrics as stand-alone texts, as they can serve as good learning materials of multiple discourses, metaphorical languages (Androutsopoulos, 2009), and figurative languages (Belle, 2016).

Hip hop texts offer multiple discourses and opportunities to internalize information. In Androutsopoulos' (2009) "three spheres" theory of hip hop mentioned in the theoretical framework (chapter 2.2.4, para. 2), hip hop is regarded as an organism integrating three interrelated discursive practices. According to his definition of the tertiary texts, hip hop texts encourage users/learners to adapt to and engage in various discursive practices, which could help overcome institutional discourses' homogeneity.

Androutsopoulos' analysis of hip hop in the first sphere attests to its linguistic potential, pointing out that metaphorical language and cultural references are commonly seen in rap(p.48). According to Androutsopoulos' theory, the song *Reagan* (Render & Meline, 2012, track 6) stands as an excellent example. The rap song makes connections to the Reagan era to address present issues in the African American community. The following is a selected cut of the lyrics:

1) We brag on having bread, but none of us are bakers.

2) We all talk having greens, but none of us on acres.

3) If none of us on acres, then none of us grow wheat.

4) Then who will feed our people when our people need to eat?

With the background set in the Reagan era, this small selection dissects the root issue of racism. Line 1) depicts the situation where though Black lives are lawfully equal with whites' lives, they do not have access to the resources to make a living. In 2), the songwriters refer to the history when African American people were enslaved and without land ("acres") and connects to today's racial wealth gap ("greens") to point out that there is still a long way to go for the elimination of racism. Then, the writers point out in 3) and 4) that the long unbalanced societal structure of race and the power dynamics (African Americans not having the tools and power) make it difficult for Black lives to improve, even with seemingly promising political changes. The metaphorical language and cultural/historical references made in the example testify to both the linguistic and cultural potential of hip hop texts. Androutsopoulos' artist expression sphere theory thus further attests to Belle's (2016) theory that hip hop texts should not only be perceived as "baits," but texts that can stand on their merit, as they have the power to challenge the traditional conceptions of what constitutes knowledge, at the same time reconstituting schools as "sites of possibilities" (p.288).

The hip hop curriculum by Belle (2016, P.290) also supports the validation of figurative language use in hip hop texts. Her research participants joined a hip hop literacy session that includes a textual portion based on the song *Where I'm from* (1997) by the hip hop artist Jay-Z. Their analysis provides excellent examples of hip hop's figurative language use:

"I'm from where the hammers rung, news cameras never come" (verse 1). In this opening line, "hammer" refers to a gun, embodying the street slang element that I welcomed in my classroom, as described previously. In addition, "news cameras never come" alludes to the idea that the media is not interested in urban communities or black folks, which resonated with the young people in my class and encouraged them to critically examine the role of media in their communities. (p.290)

Belle's analysis thus gives additional credits to the linguistic value of hip hop texts.

2.3.3 Hip hop literacies for academic improvement

In addition to its linguistic value, hip hop can help learners connect to the classics. Situated in an ESL learning context, I find hip hop literacies' helpful tools for language learning.

Hip hop as a bridge to classic literature

Hip hop texts often make references to classics works, which are canonical texts used in schools. Wetmore (2006) believes that hip hop shares similarities with classic literature, so much that the works of Shakespeare can be encapsulated through hip hop (p.153). His mentioning of Malcolm McLaren's (also known as MC Hamlet) *II Be or Not II Be* (p. 147-148) is strong evidence of hip hop's referencing Shakespeare.

1) To be or not to be that is the question

2) Is it more noble of mind this decision?

3) To die and lie still for life's ills and torture

4) The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune

5) Much more important than winning is trying

6) Life should be more than just living and dying

7) Dare I bare arms against troubles

8) I see Opposing—to end them—to die—to sleep

Wetmore finds the lyricist McLaren making references and direct dialogue with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Line 7) "Dare I bare arms against troubles I see" makes references to the original line from *Hamlet* (3, 1, 56-60):

"Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,

And by opposing end them?"

with the wordplay of homonyms "bare" and "bear," "see" and "sea." The witticism of the lyrics is on "bare arms," which indicates someone rolling up their sleeves to start working or someone who has next to nothing (i.e. someone who cannot afford "sleeves"), homonymous to "bear arms"; while Shakespeare's text uses "take arms," sharing the same meaning as "bear arms": to take up weapons. Using the homonyms, McLaren implies the lack of resources and power of himself and the people represented by him. The verse ends with Shakespeare's original "To die, to sleep – to sleep, perchance to dream – ay, there's the rub, for in this sleep of death what dreams may come…" (3, 1, 65-66). Nevertheless, making a full stop after "sleep." In Wetmore's words, this rap song can be viewed as a modern hip hop version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, redeveloped based on the original texts with additional layers of meaning and connections to the current society (Wetmore, p.149).

Hip hop literacy for TESOL practices

In 2013, Barrett brought hip hop literacy to a more global perspective by viewing it as a TESOL (Teaching English to students of other languages) professional. She takes the view that hip hop as a global youth culture expands the American-centric hip hop pedagogy discourse. She uses an applied ethnographic approach to explore the relationship between scholarship, theories of critical literacy, and global hip hop in an authentic high school ESL classroom setting.

Barrett's findings primarily focus on ESL language skills development and critical literacy while addressing how hip hop literacies function as means for learners to "interrogate, reflect, and shape reality" (p.101). Through three hip hop-based classroom activities, the participants extended the sample hip hop text to address personal interests of social change, civic movement, and personal struggles. Through the example of the participants Cindy and Manik's classwork, Barrett points out that ESL learners can disrupt the commonplace, interrogate multiple viewpoints, and engage in sociopolitical issues (p.110). Barrett concludes that music and media-based pedagogy, such as a Critical Hip hop Literacy curriculum, can support second language users in improving all four language learning skills including reflection and realization of identities.

Hip hop for writing skills development

Forell (2006) presents a framework that attempts to integrate hip hop as an element into a developmental/primary writing curriculum. According to Forell (2006), the integration could fill the gap between literacy practices within and outside the classroom while supporting student

success. Having explored previous research related to using hip hop as a teaching strategy in basic writing to enhance learners' composition projects, she argues that "certain pedagogical practices construct barriers that lead to the attrition of students of color" (p.28). Forell highlighted that hip hop literacies inevitably exist inside and outside of the classroom. Using hip hop literacies as teaching tools only required educators to recognize, celebrate, and incorporate hip hop literacies into formal activities. Thus, she believes pedagogical activities that incorporate hip hop elements are more friendly to a culturally and ethnically diverse learner group.

Forell also stated that learning by familiar texts helps students with developing "valuable skills in all forms of academic writing (p.32)." Supporting Forell's view, Love (2014) explores hip-hop-based education and narrative writing. Love creates a hip-hop-based project called "Real Talk," in which students construct a view of reality by linking visual images to written texts to create comic-like narratives ("storyboard panels"), then transition the panels to videos. Love believes that this project encouraged the students to find their voices through hip hop and engage in multiliteracy practices, which helped develop their creative writing skills (p.57).

Taking creative writing further, Dando (2017) proposes an approach to utilize learners' hip hop literacies as tools to engage in academic skills development. In this approach, learners engage in a 3-week program where they analyze hip hop texts and produce their own in a final showcase. Dando's approach can be considered as an extended version of Forell's curriculum because it casts a bigger focus than academic writing skills; the learners presented various forms of writing (i.e. personal memoirs, traditional academic essays, rap lyrics, textual graffiti art) in Dando's project.

Though Forell's, Love's, and Dando's studies are based on pedagogical events where learners are guided and assisted, I believe hip hop literacies can induce active learning of writing

skills outside of school. When people listen to hip hop, they inevitably notice at least some fractions of the lyrics. Once they try to recall, retell, or recollect the lyrics, the same interpretation processes and negotiation of wording and register will occur. As a hip hop enthusiast with some level of competency in rap production, Vico may benefit from transferable skills learning through hip hop.

2.4 Critical literacy and identities

2.4.1 Hip hop can validate learner's literacies and identities

Hip hop literature can improve critical literacy and help educators to understand learners' identities. Sánchez's (2010) research brings attention to the validation of the learner's outside-of-school-literacies. Her research highlights that "allowing students to analyze texts of popular culture in the reading and writing classroom validates the language and literacy practices that students engage in outside of the classroom" (p.478). Sánchez believes that by validating learners' literacies, they can reclaim their identities and engage in self-reflection.

Sánchez initially invited 15 participants to her study, all of whom are identified as lower-performance learners in the high school where the research is based; later, an analytical writing assignment of one participant was presented. This assignment was written by a self-described African American male teenager from an urban Midwestern city. By analyzing the collected data, Sánchez stressed that the participant shows the ability to use his hip hop literacies for intellectual and academic purposes. Thus, Sánchez believes that validating the learner's hip hop literacies and identities can enhance his academic achievements.

Aligns with Sánchez's findings, Kelly (2013) proposes the significance of using hip hop as stand-alone texts to engage learners through validations of their literacies. According to Kelly,

establishing a separate course that mainly focuses on hip hop texts is necessary for recognizing hip hop's power as "creative, poetic, valuable, instructional, and cultural texts, worthy of academic study" (p. 52). Stressing that the power of learners' criticality is diluted when rap is solely used for canonical texts, Kelly believes hip hop could be a powerful tool for developing and enhancing learners' critical thinking for two main reasons. First, hip hop literature may provide a pathway to connecting the learners' lived experience with their learning. Second, with hip hop literature, educators may be able to acknowledge students' cultural and ethnic identities. Both advantages can contribute to better learning and performance.

2.4.2 Engaging in critical hip hop literacy

As hip hop pedagogy is gradually becoming more recognized, many practitioners/researchers provide evidence of hip hop's potential for critical literacy development. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) designed a classroom unit using hip hop; I find their example an early attempt of a critical hip hop curriculum. In the unit, students are divided into 8 groups, each group was assigned a classic poem and a rap song for further interpretations. Though their focus was to enhance the learner's academic literacies, they find the unit calls for critical dialogue and engagement to the texts through a social and policitical angle (p.91). Their study provides some insights to how hip hop can be used to scaffold the students' involvement with their critical literacies.

Sánchez (2010) developed her research based on a case study of an African American learner, Robert (pseudonym). In the study, Robert wrote an essay to analyze the rap song *WHY* by Jadakiss. Though Sánchez's research intends to validate African American youth's ability to meet the academic writing standards, I find Robert's case also serves as an example of how we

can teach critical literacy through hip hop texts. Through the lyrics' analysis, Robert proposed and asked questions regarding social norms and phenomena and drew a personal connection to the society through the lyrics (p.484), which are all benefits of critical hip hop literacy.

Belle's (2016) research can be perceived as a developed version of Sánchez's research with a more current social background. With the initiative to present a practical curriculum for fellow teachers, Belle's research is undoubtedly a successful case of critical literacy development through hip hop. Belle developed a hip hop literacy curriculum in which the learners analyze, study, and eventually reflect on themselves by composing an autobiographical rap piece. Through a set of questions raised by the instructor, the learners were able to take up a critical lens on the society through a collective experience (p.291).

In addition to Sánchez's (2010) and Belle's (2016) example, Love's (2014) theory also attests to the possibility of promoting learners' critical literacy through hip hop. She stresses the importance for teachers to challenge hegemonic ideas produced by cultural practices, take up a critical media literacy standpoint, and use hip hop as a vehicle of discussions and critique of materialism, discrimination, and aggression (p.125). Admittedly, though concerns are and shall be raised when discussing hip hop engagement among youths, we must consider the benefits hip hop literacies can bring. Explicitness and aggression are easily seen in our society; hip hop is only a representation of our reality. Instead of avoiding the appearance of such content, I urge the acceptance of hip hop literacies and using hip hop products as tools for critical literacy development.

In sum, hip hop can be promising stand-alone texts in a classroom. With reoccurring references to classics, an expanded lens on history, and carefully designed languages, its educational and linguistic values should not be ignored. With these qualities in mind, using hip

hop texts may help bridge learners from personal interests to institutional requirements while developing learners' linguistic capabilities. Thus, hip hop texts in an ESL classroom with international students are not only a feasible plan but may also be a promising one.

Chapter 3: The Case Study

3.1 Methodology

This research uses a case study design because it intends to explore "why" and "how" the participant's hip hop literacies interplay with his learner identities. Yin (2003, 2014) proposes the use of a case study design when the researcher seeks to understand a real-life case in a contemporary setting or context. Baxter & Jack (2008) further notes that the case study design helps explore a phenomenon using various data sources within its context, which ensures a variety of lenses and encourages multiple facets of the phenomenon to be understood (p.544). Meanwhile, the close collaboration between the participant and the researcher can encourage the participant to share personal stories (Crabtree & Miller, 1999), which further enables the participant to describe their views of reality and helps the researcher to better understand the case at hand (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Following this logic belief, my research uses a case study design.

Drawing on a case study methodology (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), I use multiple sources of data, including transcripts of face-to-face interviews, phone calls, text messages, and the student's submitted assignments. Due to Covid-19, all the material was collected through online platforms for safety reasons. Electronic copies of the PowerPoint slides and written essays were collected through Google Classroom; interviews, calls, and text messages were collected through personal cellphones. A preliminary examination of Vico's language competencies was done by analyzing his written and multimodal texts. Similarly, transcripts of the interviews were analyzed to help construct a more in-depth and multilayered understanding of him.

I rely mainly on transcripts to seek to understand the complexity of Vico's hip hop literacy participation and how he views his identity as a learner. Initially, I intended to follow Levinson's (1983) theory of conversation analysis to locate Vico's verbal response patterns during interviews and video assignments. I wanted to characterize how he verbally reacts and contributes to particular inquiries raised in relation to hip hop. However, as the interview process began, I realized that this analysis method might not be the best for my research. Our interviews are primarily done in Mandarin Chinese, making conversational analysis much too complex and redundant. As this research aims to foster a better understanding of our participant's identities, I find, instead of dwelling on the lingual patterns, dissecting the content Vico provided in the interviews was more important. To avoid unintentionally focusing on linguistics, I decided on a thematic analysis approach.

Braun & Clarke (2017) introduce thematic analysis (TA) as a method for "identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data (p. 297)". Their TA study started in 2006 and continued to develop through 2013 and has been cited and modified by many researchers. In a nutshell, TA can be used to generate systematic codes and themes from qualitative data, such as interview transcripts or other textual data. The main reason why I find this approach the most appropriate is that it is merely an approach to analyze data; it "does not prescribe methods of data collection, theoretical positions, epistemological or ontological frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 178)". This gives the approach the most freedom and flexibility, allowing it to be suitable for most research. Furthermore, this approach can encourage the use of open-ended questions in the interview process, which allows a more holistic understanding of our participant and could lead to more possibilities for future studies in this field. However, it is essential to keep in mind that there are limitations to this approach.

The thematic analysis approach could lead to findings that do no challenge existing theories. In their 2006 study, Braun & Clarke remind all researchers that the TA approach is done poorly when the interpretation of the data is too general or lacks depth (p. 11). The analysis process in this research is theory-guided, meaning the theoretical framework and existing theories of literacies and hip hop pedagogy are embedded when the interviews are conducted; the interview questions are constructed with presumed responses and strong biases. Consequently, during the interviews, the participant may answer based on "cues" hidden in the questions asked in order to please the researcher (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1283). With considerations of the limitations of the data collection and analysis approach of this research, I deliberately prepared questions that could challenge the participant's answers. By doing so, we may reach more accurate and balanced answers.

3.2 Introducing Vico

3.2.1 CLIH

The context in which I met Vico was a language school located in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The school's name is CLIH (pseudonym); it is one of 14 registered members of Languages Canada in the Maritimes provinces and one of the 6 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 2020. According to its official website, CLIH offers various language programs, including English as a Second Language (ESL)/English as an Additional Language (EAL), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), University and College Bridging Program (UBP), General Business English, English for Specific purposes, Summer and Winter Camps, Test Preparation Programs, and Additional

Language Training. The rationale for choosing CLIH as the context lies in my familiarity with it. As an ESL instructor, I worked at this school from November 2019 to June 2020; my work was postponed indefinitely due to Covid-19. I was in contact with the faculty and some students throughout this research.

According to Languages Canada, most language students in Nova Scotia are Chinese, approximately seven times more than students from other countries (Languages Canada, 2020); the length of study ranged from less than four weeks to a year, with the majority at 4-12 weeks. CLIH's student composition and students' average length of study are similar to the rest of the province's overall situation. Though CLIH has its distinctive features, they are of little influence on my research; I find CLIH a representative of the region's overall situation.

3.2.2 Who is Vico

This thesis explores one student's understanding of himself as a learner and his perceptions of the world. Specifically, I investigate the case of Vico (pseudonym chosen by the participant) as he navigates language programs at CLIH. He was 19 when we met in 2019 and had been learning at CLIH for about six months. He came to Halifax for English learning, and eventually, undergraduate study. He is from a Han Chinese family in Xinjiang, China; though he is a member of the largest Chinese ethnic group, growing up in Xinjiang allowed him to know and live with people of minor ethnic groups. According to casual conversations, Vico's interest in hip hop started in his junior high years when he became a fan of a local rapper named 艾福傑尼 (After Journey). He later became interested in American rappers, such as Kendrick Lamar, Run the Jewels, and NF, while remaining a fan of After Journey's and several other Chinese rappers. I

find Vico a complex and interesting case to analyze for three main reasons. First, the contrast between his language abilities and academic performance; second, the contrast of my perception of his amiable attitude and disrespectful behaviors in the school's record; finally, his investment in social justice and politics which is rare coming from his cultural and social background.

Though he presents good English language competency among learners at the same level, his academic performance is not ideal. Like most of the students in CLIH, Vico is required by his designated university to finish a certain level of language training (most often, UBP) before he can start his undergraduate study. Typically, students in similar situations go through EAP programs (varied entry levels, finish at level 5) and then complete UBP before entering university. The length of the process varies, but according to the data across the province its an average of 4-12 weeks. However, Vico's situation is distinctively different from the typical. By the time this thesis is written, he has attended seven programs (level 2 once, level 3 twice, level 4 three times, level 5 three times, but dropped out from two of the classes) with a length of 56 weeks. I found Vico's English language abilities sufficient, even proficient at times, for his level's standard, yet his performance in exams and quizzes present otherwise. Therefore, I am interested in understanding how his hip hop literacies may help improve his language proficiency and whether these literacies will hinder or enhance his academic performance.

Vico also had to repeat programs for exhibiting problematic behaviors such as low attendance. His attendance rates fluctuate in the three classes where we worked together (63.33%, 5%, and 92%) based on his "mood". In contrast to his low attendance, he always had a good attitude when we interacted. We eventually became so close that he would spontaneously share his daily life with me through an instant messaging app (WeChat). Yet, it seemed that our relationship had little effect on how he perceives going to school. Therefore, how he perceives

himself as a learner interests me; I want to know whether his affiliation with hip hop culture influences his behaviors and how he presents himself.

Furthermore, Vico appears to have strong opinions about social justice. In previous in-class discussions, he was more vocal and actively engaged in the discussions when social topics are involved. For the two final exams he attended, he chose hip hop as his topic for the individual presentations where he talked about political situations in his hometown and the BLM movements. I wonder whether Vico was already interested in social justice and he used his hip hop literacies to express his thinking of related topics, or whether hip hop literacies provided access to social topics to Vico and cultivated his interests in social justice. In other words, I want to know the role of hip hop literacies in how Vico learns; is it his access to information or is it a tool of expression, or is it both?

The following sections analyze the data gathered; the "flow" of the analysis consists of two main parts: 1) what I knew before the interviews, and 2) from the interviews. I intend that the analysis of my previous knowledge of him provide guidance to how the interviews will be conducted and examined; I hope to draw from the questions I have about Vico from the first part of the analysis when reviewing the transcripts of the interviews.

3.3 Initial analysis

This section recalls several occasions where Vico's hip hop literacies are demonstrated prior to this research. Upon the approval of the Ethics Board of Mount Saint Vincent University,

I gathered documented materials, including a written assignment and a set of PowerPoint slides from when I first met Vico. Through initial analysis of these documented materials, a tone is established for the phone interviews with Vico. In the following, I will explain how I started to understand Vico as a hip hop literate being and my impressions of him before the interviews.

3.3.1 My first impression(s) of Vico

Instead of one, I had two polar opposite "first" impressions of Vico. On the first day of school, I was warned by the school's academic director that there would be a disruptive student in my classroom and that I shouldn't be surprised if he does not show up. Indeed, not only did Vico chose not to come to school that day, he also chose not to ask for leave or give any notice of his absence. His behavior and the school's record of his attendance certainly made it difficult for me not to agree with the academic director. However, when he showed up on the second day with all assigned homework finished and well done, I started to wonder if he really is disruptive or if there was a reason behind his frequent absence—or "disruptive behaviors," as the school called it.

The second I finally saw Vico, I knew he was a member of the Hip Hop Nation. He dragged his feet as he entered the classroom; the class bells rang just as he sat down. Orange hair was sticking out of his green beanie, a pair of black and gold Beats' Solo headset hovered on the back of his neck, a grey hoodie with the pattern of gold chains printed around the collar, and a pair of saggy Harem pants dangling around his waist. He was a walking old-school rap music video. He was reticent and reluctant to talk to others even during instructed group discussions; the first thing he did when I announced, "break time!", was to gently put on his headset and rock

along with the beats in his ears. However, he made sure to hand in the homework assigned on the previous day—he had asked a few classmates to get the worksheet for him. If he did not care enough to show up, why bother doing the assignment? This strange behavior sparked my interest.

In addition to his "behavioral issues," Vico's talk of hip hop in previous encounters further provoked my curiosity. The first occasion is when he showed up on the second day with the homework assigned previously. The assignment consists of two parts: 1) the student chooses a song from the their first language and translate the lyrics to English; then, 2) write a mini-essay (250 words) introducing the song and why the they like it. The song Vico chose is *1992 Part 3 (Part 1)* by one of his favorite rappers, After Journey (艾福杰尼). As the introductory paragraph of his short essay, Vico wrote:

> *First of all, I think Xinjiang is a good place for the development of hip hop culture in China, because the life in Xinjiang is a little similar to the life in the western United States. In addition, the integration of various ethnic groups in Xinjiang has led to many bad situations. So, in this environment, Xinjiang has some very good rappers. One of my favorites is After Journey.*

Though he neglected to explain why he thinks that "the life in Xinjiang is a little similar to the life in the western United States", I find this statement a possible demonstration of his transnational awareness. He also presents what he believes to be the main reason "bad situations" happen—the unique ethnic demographics, which presents his understanding of his local circumstances. In the end, he concludes that the similarity of Xinjiang and the U.S. and Xinjiang's unique ethnic situation made Xinjiang a "a good place for the development of hip hop culture". I find his conclusion interesting as it fits in well with the hip hop globalization theories

reviewed in chapter 2.2.3. Therefore, his opinion on the globalization of hip hop will be analyzed further in chapter 3.3.3.

3.3.2 Hip hop as Vico sees it

Another work of Vico's that convinced me that he is indeed a hip hop affiliated person; he prepared a presentation arguing that "Hip hop is good for everyone" (see Figure 1). He did not give the presentation in front of the class because he was absent that day, but he later made up for the presentation in private with me. For the midterm exam, the students were asked to do a 15-minute presentation on their hobbies and interests. The purpose of the presentation is mainly a way to assess the learners' ability in English speaking. Therefore, linguistic criteria such as pronunciation, intonation, fluency, and grammar use are the main foci in the assessment. The content and depth of the presentation are overlooked at this point because the learners are at a beginner level. The students are encouraged to draw from existing materials, such as TED Talks, newspapers, published articles, and more, as long as they cite the sources.

Figure 1. Vico's presentation cover page

Note. Vico's presentation cover page [PowerPoint slides]. Halifax, NS, Canada.

Although Vico did not do a class presentation, he submitted the PowerPoint slides and presented them in a one-on-one session with me after the mid-term exam. His presentation demonstrates his understanding of hip hop as a culture, which is also an initial source on which I built the interview question. As shown in the PowerPoint slides, he first talked about certain aspects of hip hop that are "in crisis (see Figure. 2)", then drew from Akala's 2011and Bettina Love's 2014 TED Talks as examples to examine hip hop's poetics (see Figure 3) and educational values.

Figure 2. Hip hop is in crisis

Note. Hip hop is in crisis [PowerPoint slides]. Halifax, NS, Canada.

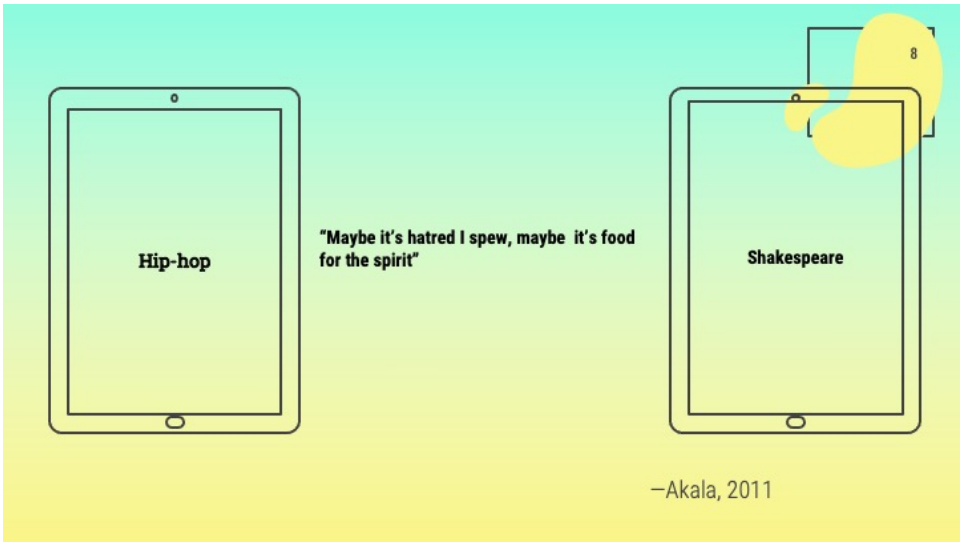
Vico believes that hip hop is facing critics and crisis of its own because of its culture, political views, explicitness, and violence. His beliefs mostly align with most hip hop pedagogy scholars' views as outlined in chapter 2. I find his observation of hip hop interesting, particularly his point about hip hop's cultural crisis. Unfortunately, I was not able to locate the recordings of this presentation. Therefore, I included relevant inquiries in the interviews that will be analyzed in later sections.

Vico's appreciation of the linguistics of hip hop amazes me as well. At the time of making these slides, Vico was at a beginner to intermediate level (CLB 4-5[2]). According to Canadian Language Benchmark (2015), language users at level 4 have "fluent ability on simple

[2] The Canadian Language Benchmark is a language ability indicator first proposed by the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to fit the assessment needs of the immigration process; most often, it is used to indicate a person's language ability in using English as a second or additional language. It consists of 3 stages, each divided into four levels; the higher the level is, the stronger the candidate's English language ability is. Level 4 is the highest in stage 1; level 5 is the lowest in stage 2.

tasks in non-demanding contexts", and level 5 users have "initial ability on moderately complex tasks in moderately demanding contexts" (p.13). It is not easy for an English as a Second Language (ESL) learner at this level to pay attention to the poetics of hip hop; even with aids such as dictionaries or translators, Vico's ability to internalize and then articulate hip hop's linguistics surpasses his language level. On the other hand, his advocacy of hip hop's language use further attests to his hip hop literacies.

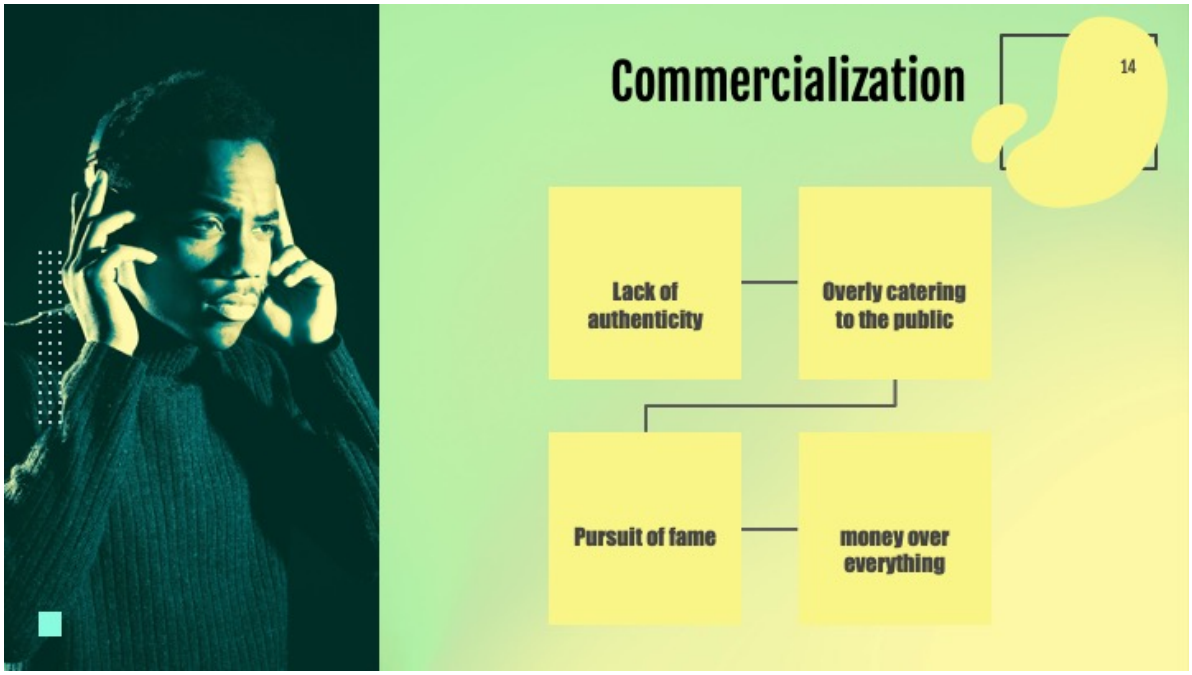
Figure 3. Poetics of hip hop



Note. Poetics of hip hop [PowerPoint slides]. Halifax, NS, Canada.

Vico's believes that commercialization is the most prominent concern people should have for hip hop. As shown in the image below (see Figure 4.), Vico thinks that hip hop is getting less authentic as it is being commercialized because it means that hip hop is "overly catering to the public" in "pursuit of fame" and money. In the later interviews, Vico speaks of this topic again with more elaborated opinions.

Figure 4. Hip hop's commercialization



Note. Poetics of hip hop [PowerPoint slides]. Halifax, NS, Canada.

Through the initial analysis above, I assume that Vico is hip hop literate since he had presented personal and in-depth opinions and understanding of hip hop in our previous encounters. Based on the initial findings above, I focus on the following points during the interviews and analyses: 1) how have his hip hop literacies affected how he learns and his behaviors at school (i.e. disengagement and frequent absence or better engagement)? 2) what has he learned from listening to hip hop (e.g. linguistic skills, power structures)? 3) can hip hop literacies aid his learning engagement?

3.4 Interview analysis

3.4.1 Thematic framework

This section provides the thematic framework for the analyses of the interviews conducted. Three phone interviews took place on three different occasions. They vary in length from 46 min 12s, 20 min 50s, and 1hr 31 min 9s. The interview questions were sent to the participant 72 hr before the interviews; each interview is scaffolded on the one before. During the first and second interviews, Vico was running errands at his university in mainland China; the third interview is done after he has returned to his hometown in Xinjiang. While all the conversations in the interviews evolved around Vico's interest in hip hop, we stumbled upon many topics and had the chance to discuss them in-depth. Though the interviews are led by pre-set questions, it is helpful to have a summary of how many times a topic has been brought up by the participant—guided or not. Please see the following table (see Table 1. Interview content overview) for an overview of the topics covered in the interviews.

Table 1. Interview content overview

Themes	Topics	Times
Knowledge of hip hop	i. Vico's knowledge of hip hop	99
	ii. Terms associated with hip hop	44
	iii. Hip hop influences people	10
Knowledge of the world	iv. Hip hop's localization	77
	v. Politics and social constructions	19
	vi. Social issues	31
Knowledge of self	vii. Vico's interest in hip hop	58
	viii. How Vico learns	38
	ix. Vico's description of himself	34
	x. How Vico interacts	17

It is crucial to keep in mind that this table is a rough presentation of the estimated time spent on different themes and topics throughout the interviews. The interviews are iterative processes where the participant touches on particular topics on multiple occasions from various angles; the topics (rationalized codes) above are calculated based on initial codes assigned based on the summative meanings of the participant's speech. However, there could be more than one way to assign the speech to topics depending on the perspective. The interviews overlap one another. Therefore, it is reasonable to allow crossovers of topics in the analysis process.

Please refer to the table below (Table 2. Initial Codes) for a list of initial codes.

Table 2. Initial Codes

codes	meanings	Times
1. Att	Vico's definition of Attitude	7
2. Au	Vico's talk of authorities	6
3. AutHP	Hip hop against authorities	3
4. CHP	Hip hop in China	6
5. CHP-Cha	The changes of Chinese hip hop	9
6. CHP-F	Chinese hip hop and feminism	2
7. CHP-Int	Interactions in the Chinese hip hop community	6
8. CHP-M	Mainstream hip hop in China	7
9. CHP-P	Politics and Chinese hip hop	18
10. CHP-SoCon	China's social construction and hip hop	23
11. CHP-V	Chinese hip hop as voices	3
12. Coo	Vico's definition of "Cool"	6
13. Coo-HP	Hip hop and coolness	3
14. CooRe	Rebellious and cool	1
15. Cov	Vico's mentioning of Covide-19	9
16. Cul	Discussing culture	1
17. Fr	Vico's definition of freedom	2
18. G	Genderism	3
19. HP-Cha	The changes of hip hop	15
20. HP-Cri	Critics of hip hop	10
21. HP-Fr	Hip hop and freedom	2
22. HP-Ge	Generation gap and hip hop	3
23. HP-GL	Hip hop's globalization and localization	17
24. HPInd	Hip hop and independence	3
25. HPInf	Hip hop's influences on people	3
26. HP-L	The languages of hip hop	3
27. HP-Mas	Hip hop and masculinity	3
28. HP-Mis	People's misunderstanding to hip hop	5
29. HPSc	Hip hop in school	10
30. HP-S	The styles of hip hop	5
31. HP-SE	Hip hop and self-expression	7
32. HP-V	Hip hop as a voice	7
33. Ind	Vico's definition of independence and individualism	13
34. Ra	Racism	11
35. Re	Vico's definition of being a "rebel"	7
36. SA	Vico's knowledge and understanding of certain songs and artists	38
37. SoCon	Vico's knowledge of social constructions in different places	10
38. V	The importance of voicing	1

39. VCha	Vico's changes	3
40. VDis	Vico describes his "disruptive phase"	3
41. VHP-E	Vico learns English through hip hop	9
42. VHP-F	Vico's general feelings of hip hop	13
43. VHPId	Vico's hip hop identity	4
44. VHPInf	Hip hop's influences on Vico	7
45. VHPL	Vico learns through hip hop	13
46. VHP-La	Vico's preferred hip hop-languages	4
47. VHP-Pe	Vico's hip hop people	2
48. VHP-S	Vico's start of hip hop	7
49. VInd	Vico's independence	3
50. VInt	Vico's interactions with others through hip hop	15
51. VLId	Vico's learner identity	6
52. VLo	Vico's local situation	2
53. VRe	Vico is not a rebel	3
54. VRHP	Vico's relationship with hip hop	6
55. VSelf	How Vico sees himself	13
56. VSId	Vico's social identity	2
57. VYHP-M	Why does Vico like hip hop – music	3
58. VYHP-OE	Why does Vico like hip hop – others' experiences	11
59. VYHP-VR	Why does Vico like hip hop –validation & resonance	10

Most of the codes are included in the analysis; more focus is put on the ones that are more closely associated with Vico (i.e., the codes starting with "V"). Based on the listed above, I have rationalized the codes into ten topics (See Table 3.), which are then allocated into the three main themes presented in Table 1.

Table 3. Rationalized codes / assigned topics, expanded codes, and initial codes

Topics /Rationalized codes	**Initial codes(Times)**
i. Vico's knowledge of hip hop	HP-Cha(15), HP-Cri(10), HP-Ge(3), HP-GL(17), HP-L(3), HP-Mas(3), HP-Mis(5), HP-S(5), SA(38);
ii. Terms associated with hip hop	Att(7), Coo(6), Coo-HP(3), CooRe(1), Fr(2), HP-Fr(2), HPInd(3), Ind(13), Re(7);
iii. Hip hop influences people	HPInf(3), HP-SE(7);

iv. Hip hop's localization	AutHP(3), CHP(6), CHP-Cha(9), CHP-F(2), CHP-Int(6), CHP-M(7), CHP-P(18), CHP-SoCon(23), CHP-V(3);
v. Politics and social constructions	Au(6), Cul(1), SoCon(10), VLo(2);
vi. Social issues	Cov(9), G(3), HP-V(7), Ra(11), V(1);
vii. Vico's interest in hip hop	VHP-F(13), VHPId(4), VHP-La(4), VHP-S(7), VRHP(6), VYHP-M(3), VYHP-OE(11), VYHP-VR(10);
viii. How Vico learns	HPSc(10), VHP-E(9), VHPL(13), VLId(6)
ix. Vico's description of himself	VCha(3), VDis(3), VHPInf(7), VInd(3), VRe(3), VSelf(13), VSId(2);
x. How Vico interacts	VHP-Pe(2), VInt(15).

Nevertheless, it is important to know that the rationalization process is generalized. It does not indicate the relations between the initial codes. The initial codes can be allocated in many different ways depending on the aspects of the analysis; a number of the initial codes are interrelated. For example, the code VHPInf (Hip hop's influences on Vico) is put into the category *ix. Vico's description of himself* in Table 3. However, it would make sense to put this code in *iii. Hip hop influences people* as well. These two categories are thus intertwined in the analysis process. Therefore, though the analysis below follows the logic of the themes, similar topics could arise in different themes with varied angles of analysis. Most of the transcripts analyzed are segregated and nonchronological.

3.4.2 Analysis of the themes

Vico's knowledge of hip hop

Vico has extensively demonstrated his knowledge of hip hop and its culture. Vico has vigorously announced his passion for hip hop throughout the interviews; he is conscious of how

hip hop has evolved through time and the public's judgments to hip hop. Therefore, in this section, the analysis focuses on two major points: first, hip hop changes; second, comment criticism towards hip hop.

First, Vico is aware of how hip hop has evolved. He compares hip hop from different times and places throughout the interviews, with elaborated details that add to his arguments; he also has established personal opinions towards this evolution. In the transcript below, Vico presents his opinions on how hip hop has changed:

Interview vol. 1

Speaker	Translated Transcript	Original transcript (Mandarin)
Researcher	73. Alright, so do you think hip hop is an ethnic culture or a popular culture? Or do you see it in other ways.	好的，那你觉得嘻哈它是一种民族文化还是一种流行文化呢？或者是你有没有就是对它的别的看法。
Vico	***74. It's probably a type of popular culture now.***	***它现在应该是一种流行文化。***
Researcher	75. But when we talk about hip hop, don't we still think it's a Black culture?	但是我们说到嘻哈的时候，不是还是会就是觉得它是一个黑人的文化吗？
Vico	***76. But I feel like, every country has a different hip hop culture. But they could be originated from the … Black. But when it spread to different places, it could form different styles and cultures.***	***但我感觉，每个国家都有一个不同的嘻哈文化。但他们可能根源是来自于这个…黑人。但当它流传到各个不同的地方，可能会形成不同的一种风格一种文化。***
Researcher	77. Uh-hum.	嗯。
Vico	***78. Like it's, well, when it gets to different regions, it's actually, uh, kind of its own system and style.***	***觉得它，呃，它到了不同地区之后，它其实就，啊，算是自成一派了，***
Researcher	79. So even though it's still hip hop, it's got its own characteristics?	就是虽然说它还是嘻哈，但是它有了自己的特色?
Vico	***80. Yes.***	***是。***
Researcher	81. So these characteristics are, well, given by what?	那你觉得它这些特色是, 呃, 什么赋予它呢？

Vico	***82.***	***Uh, probably being in different places, different people bring different feelings to it.***	***啊，应该是处在不同的地方，不同的人带给它不一样的感觉。***
Researcher	83.	Uh-hum.	嗯。
Vico	***84.***	***And the environment, { } the society the people who like it are in, changes it.***	***还有那些就是喜欢这个音乐的人所处的环境{ } 社会也会给它形成改变。***

By talking about the changes in hip hop, Vico exhibits transnational awareness. I find Vico's understanding of hip hop's changes shows his understanding of the spread and localization of culture. It is clear that he believes the local situations and social institutions change how hip hop is presented in different places. His opinion aligns with the global hip hop theories put forward by Pennycook (2007) analyzed in chapter 2.2.3. We continued to dwell on this topic:

Interview vol.1,

Researcher	295.	So do you feel like, since hip hop has been developing, has it changed?	那你觉得就是, 因为嘻哈一直发展，它有没有什么变化呢？
Vico	***296.***	***I feel like there is less content than before. I feel like now, it's, for example the um, on the Billboard Charts[3], hip hop music is now more, more and more capable of making it to the top one hundred, but the songs have shortened from four, five minutes to two, three minutes. I also think there will be fewer and fewer longer ones, { } maybe. I don't know why that is either.***	***我感觉内容好像没有以前那么多。我感觉现在，就是，打个比方就是那个，音乐公告牌上，嘻哈音乐就是现在越，越来越能上这个前一百，但是它的这些歌从以前的那种四五分钟变短到两到三分钟。我觉得同时会越来越少长的，{ }可能。我也不知道这是为什么。***
Researcher	297.	Uh-hum, got it, what about the content?	嗯，明白，那内容上呢？

[3] The Billboard Charts are lists that tabulate the popularity of music (mainly singles and albums) on a weekly basis across the globe. The list is published in Billboard Magazine and their website, billboard.com.

Vico	***298. I feel like a lot of the artists now are write boring stuff. Like how they make it rain, and how they party every day.***	***感觉现在很多的歌手都，就是写一些无聊的东西。就自己怎么挥金如土的呀,然后怎么天天开 Party 的。***
Researcher	299. What about in the past?	那以前的呢？
Vico	***300. Before it's like they'd…like for instance, talk about what they've been through or, like they would be speaking up like for the people of the grassroots.***	***以前他们会…就比如，讲述自己的经历或者是，就是为他们就是这个底层的人民发声了吧。***
Researcher	301. Oh, so why do you think there's such a change?	哦，那你觉得为什么会有这种变化呢？
Vico	***302. Maybe { } the society is progressing, maybe there few real…poor people now. but maybe I don't really know much about the society in foreign countries, it's hard to know. Maybe what I said is unilateral, I don't really know.***	***也是{ }社会在进步,可能，真正的那种…穷人已经很少了。但是我也对这个国外的社会不是很，很难了解。可能我讲的有些片面，我也不太明白。***

Continued,

Interview vol. 1

Researcher	331. So why, music-wise, do we feel like everything is like, like everything's alright? Like hip hop-music-wise.	那为什么,就是音乐上面,我们好像觉得一切都是，有点天下太平了的感觉呢？就从嘻哈音乐上面来说。
Vico	***332. It's probably the wealth gap.***	***那可能还是这种贫富差距吧。***
Researcher	333. Uh-hum, how?	嗯，怎么呢？
Vico	***334. Because the people who are rappers, they can make money, they can get rid the grassroots life. These rappers now, they don't see these things anymore, so they feel like these things are not in their lives anymore, then they are "high" every day, like feeling happy and throwing parties.***	***因为这些当说唱歌手的人，他们能挣到钱，他们能脱离那种，就是基层的生活。现在这些歌手他们，呃，看不到这些事情了，所以他们就觉得就是，他们的生活中没有这些事情了，然后他们就每天就很"嗨"，就很开心就开 party。***
Researcher	335. So they stop rapping that life.	所以他们不唱那种生活了。

Vico	***336. Yeah.***	***对。***
Researcher	337. So the rappers in the past are like, you think they were living the grassroots life, why can they represent the people of the grassroots?	那以前的歌手是，你会觉得他们是直接就是在底层生活，或者是，他们为什么能够代表底层的人呢？
Vico	***338. Because, for a long time, they are with these { } they lived in this type of environment.***	***他们长时间，和这些｛｝他们就生活在这种的环境里嘛，因为。***
Researcher	339. Oh.	哦。
Vico	***340. They've seen so many of these things, so they can like { } really be their voices.***	***他们见过了太多的这种事情，所以他们才能就是｛｝真正的为他们发声。***
Researcher	341. Uh-hum. Understood. So would you think that the hip hop now is still hip hop? If the content is different now.	嗯。明白。那你会觉得现在的嘻哈就是还是嘻哈吗？现在如果内容上已经不一样了。
Vico	***342. I think it still is, the music is the same type.***	***觉得也还是吧，音乐也是一种音乐形式。***
Researcher	343. So you think that hip hop is mainly a type of music now.	就是你主要觉得现在嘻哈是一种音乐。
Vico	***344. Yeah, but also a type of culture. But it will, like whichever culture, I think it will { } well { } evolve with time and development.***	***对，也是一种文化。但是肯定也会，就是不管什么文化，我觉得都会随着｛｝这个｛｝时间和发展去改变。***
Researcher	345. So the changes of hip hop now, is it a good change or a bad change?	那你觉得嘻哈现在这种改变它是一种好的改变，还是一种坏的改变呢？
Vico	***346. I think there are both good and bad. It can, it can help some people get out of their predicaments. But also because of { } but it, it feels different from the type [of hip hop] before.***	***我觉得有好有坏吧。它能，它能帮助一些人脱离这个困境。但也会因为｛｝但也跟，跟之前的那种［嘻哈］，给我的感觉不一样。***

To this point, Vico seems to attribute the change of hip hop's content to the rappers' becoming affluent and the change of the society. To him, hip hop used to be the voice of the oppressed, but now "it feels different (line 346)". This topic was once again brought up in the second interview when we talked about the rapper Lil Uzi Vert:

Interview vol. 2,

Vico	***12.***	***I also don't understand some of their behaviors.***	***我还很不理解他们的一些行为。***
Researcher	13.	Ah-hah?	啊哈？
Vico	***14.***	***Like embedding a diamond on their forehead. I think it's very, very scary.***	***就往自己头上镶一个钻石。我觉得很，很可怕。***
Researcher	15.	Uh-hum. Hahaha. So regarding the way they change their appearances, you don't really approve of it.	嗯。哈哈哈。就是你对于他们对于自己外貌的改造，其实并不是特别赞同。
Vico	***16.***	***Yeah, but there's this thing about him [Uzi] like I saw in a video online. He ran into one of his fans. And the fan's like, his family's financial situation is very bad, they didn't have money for college… like didn't have his tuition. [The fan] ran into him, so he[the fan] told him[Uzi] about is situation, he [Uzi] said { } he just gave his phone number to him[the fan]. Asked him to go home and send him his transcripts and college offer. If those are real, he will fund him to finish his couple of years of college.***	***对，但是他[Uzi]有一件事就是我之前在网上看那个视频。他碰到他一个粉丝。然后粉丝就是，家庭条件很不好，上大学没有钱…就是去交学费。[粉丝]碰到他[Uzi]，他[粉丝]就跟他[Uzi]说了这个情况，他[Uzi]就说 { } 他就把他的电话号给他[粉丝]。叫他回家把他自己的那个成绩单和录取的通知书那些可以发给他。如果是真的，他就资助他把这个这几年大学上完。***
Researcher	17.	Aww.	Aww。
Vico	***18.***	***These are actually kind of how they … give back to their community, which is pretty good. Like even though they are no longer living in that grassroots life, they are probably not writing about that life either, they still care about it.***	***这些其实算是他们对于自己的社区和就是这些…反馈吧，这个还是比较好。就是哪怕他们就是已经脱离了那个底层生活，他们可能也不在写底层生活，但是他们还是关注的。***
Researcher	19.	Oh, I see.	哦，明白。
Vico	***20.***	***Yeah, they still care about their past, well, where they lived.***	***对，他/她[4]还是很关注自己以前的，呃，生活的地方。***

[4] 他(he) and 她(she) in Chinese has the same pronunciation. To avoid predetermining the gender the participant is referring to, all non-gender-specific pronouns are noted as 他/她 in the transcripts; the pronoun "they" is used in the translated transcripts.

Researcher	21.	Uh-hum, I see, so if they care about it, why don't they write about it?	嗯 ，明白，那他/她既然关注，为啥不写呢？
Vico	***22.***	***They are probably just, going with the flow.***	***他/她可能也是在这个，顺应这个潮流吧。***
Researcher	23.	Oh.	哦。
Vico	***24.***	***Yeah, because the audience won't buy it. It has to do with the market.***	***对,就是听众不买账。肯定是会跟这个市场有关系。***
Researcher	25.	Oh, so… { } uh, do you feel like it's, well, the changes of the content of hip hop music, it is because of the changes of the demands of the market, not entirely because the hip hop artists stop talking about them.	哦，就是…{ }哦，那你会觉得是,呃，现在的那个嘻哈音乐的内容的变化，它是因为市场的需求在改变，不完全是就是嘻哈歌手们不说了。
Vico	***26.***	***Yeah.***	***对。***
Researcher	27.	Oh, then why the people in the past { } so the people in the past like to listen to those type [of content]? Or is it like, the rappers in the past are not money-driven?	R：啊，那以前的人为啥？那以前的人难道他就喜欢听那种[内容]吗？还是说，以前的嘻哈歌手不受金钱的驱动？
Vico	***28.***	***I feel like { } maybe in the past it's, it's relatively more fringe.***	***我感觉{ }可能以前就是，还是比较小众。***
Researcher	29.	Uh-hum.	嗯。
Vico	***30.***	***First of all, not that many people listened to [hip hop], and there was no capital behind to support them. But then it slowly changed…more and more people accept this culture, like these things, so things might be different.***	***首先听[嘻哈]的人也没有那么多，也没有背后的这些资本去支持。但是后面慢慢变得…越来越多人接受这个文化，喜欢这些东西，可能就会变的不一样。***

In this conversation, Vico mentions another factor that changes hip hop: the market. He thinks that hip hop's change of focus has something to do with the market's demand. As hip hop gains popularity, its audience group expands, so hip hop is no longer for the civil rights activists only—it is commercialized. This idea is brought up again when our conversation is taken to the topic of hip hop's localization, which will be analyzed later.

Second, Vico is fully aware of how the public views hip hop. He acknowledges the disadvantages hip hop possesses, but he also makes attempts to defend it. Below provides glimpses of how Vico addresses the public's criticism towards hip hop:

Interview vol.3,

Researcher	102. Uh-hum. So what are, for us ordinary people, some misunderstanding or opinions to hip hop?	嗯。那你觉得我们普通人的话，对嘻哈是有怎么样的误解或者是看法呢？
Vico	***103. Like there's, like [they] think { } there is some violence in this culture, mainly because there is a lot of swearing or stuff, they think these are not good for young people, actually it's the subculture. I think there are these understandings.***	***觉得里面，就[他们]觉得这个文化是｛｝里面就有一些暴力啊，主要是有很多脏话或者什么样的，他们觉得这个是对于年轻人来说是不好的，实际上是亚文化吧嗯。我觉得是有这些误解。***
Researcher	104. Uh-hum. So what do you think of some languages in hip hop, like the swearing?	嗯。那你怎么看待嘻哈里的一些语言，比如说像脏话这一类型的？
Vico	***105. They had their reasons. For example…I hate something, well, if I use normal lingo to describe it, it definitely won't be enough for me to lash out. I'd have to use swearing words against them, to scold them, that's how I can feel my stress released. Like I think it's related to emotions, right. It's like two persons arguing on the street, it's not likely for them to be like, reasoning with each other back and forth on the street. Well, there will be people who are in a bad mood, they will say something harsh. But it's also a type of power, because those rappers, they've got rage.***	***他/她也是有原因的吧。比如说…我很讨厌一些事情，嗯，我用普通的话语去描述它，肯定是，不足以泄在我心中这个气。我必须要用脏话去骂他/她，去说他/她，我才能感觉我这个压力被释放了。就是觉得这个是跟情绪有关的，对吧。就跟两个人在街上吵架一样，不可能两个人在那街上，就你一句我一句讲道理。嗯，肯定有[人]情绪不好的，肯定会说出一些不好的话嗯。但是也是一种力量，因为他们愤怒嘛，那些歌手。***
Researcher	106. So you also mentioned, like there is violence and things like that in hip	那还有你刚才也说到，就是嘻哈里面有暴力这些，对吧？那这你是怎么样看待的呢？

	hop, right? What do you think about those?	
Vico	***107. I think that first, the violence and sex, and narcotics and things, maybe those are those people's lives. Because they could have grown up with little, little education, or they were in poverty or something. They are in contact with these things since they were little, that's why they wrote them in the songs.***	***我觉得就是首先这个暴力和性行为，还有毒品啊什么的，就是，可能就是那些人的生活嗯。因为他/她从小可能就是教育，教育水平不高或者怎么样，或者家里穷或者怎么样。他/她从小接触的这些东西，所以他/她会写到歌里。***
Researcher	108. Uh-hum.	嗯。
Vico	***109. Well [sigh], about disrespecting women, I think this is really bad. Well, because we are all given birth by mothers.***	***哎[叹气]，我觉得这个不尊重女性，我觉得这个事情是很不好的。嗯。因为所有人都是妈生的嘛。***
Researcher	110. Yes.	对。
Vico	***111. Yeah, the first thing should be respecting females, there's no "you" without female. I think this side of hip hop is bad.***	***对吧，首先就该尊重女性啊，没有女性也就没有"你"嗯。我觉得这嘻哈这方面是很不好的。***

Continued:

<u>Interview vol.3,</u>

Researcher	114. So do you think, like what we were just talking about, the bad things, are they only in hip hop?	那你觉得这些就是我们刚刚说到的, 比较不好的这些内容，是只有嘻哈有的吗？
Vico	***115. I think it is everywhere, it's just that we are more… more often we think it's in hip hop. Maybe hip hop uses those things more. Like in hip hop it is more frequently heard, but actually those are everywhere.***	***我觉得其实是[到处]都有的，只是我们更…更经常觉得是嘻哈里面有。只是嘻哈的比较经常使用到吧。就是嘻哈比较常被听到，但是其实都有。***

And then:

Interview vol.3,

Researcher	236. Uh-hum, yeah. So, in China, only hip hop has things like this [violence, sexism, etc.]?	嗯，对。那是，难道是，只有嘻哈里面有这些东西吗[暴力，性别歧视，etc.]?
Vico	***237. Actually another one is the…like folk music, things like those also have that. So maybe because those things don't have something like…they don't have a show like* The Rap of China [5]*that makes a hit out of them, allowing a lot of people to get to know about them in an instance. So maybe that's why no one thinks that these things also exist in them [other popular cultures], just like in hip hop. It's mainly because there's money to make in hip hop.***	***其实再就是那个…民谣呀，那些东西里面其实也都有嗯。那可能就是因为那些东西没有像…没有一个《中国有嘻哈》这种节目让他一下爆火，一下让很多很多人知道。所以可能就，可能就没有人会觉得他们[其他流行文化]有些也跟这个嘻哈文化一样，就是这些东西。主要还是嘻哈有钱赚嘛。***

Vico touches on the criticism towards hip hop in the clips above. He acknowledges that there is vulgar language and representations of violence, sex, and narcotics in hip hop and further explains these topics. He defends the use of vulgar language in hip hop, stating that that language is emotional and exhibits power. This point interestingly aligns with Bradley's (2009) argument of vulgarity as a revolutionary spirit. Vico also proposes that the inappropriate contents, such as violence and narcotics, are the rappers' and their people's reality. This opinion corresponds to Rose's (2008) point that hip-hop is just "keeping it real." Though he agrees that there is no excuse for sexism, Vico argues that these unpleasant elements are not only represented in hip

[5] *The Rap of China (中国有嘻哈)* is a talent show broadcasted by IQIYI Inc., a Chinese online video platform that is now one of the most renowned entertainment company in China. *The Rap of China* has largely induced the popularity of hip hop in China since its premiere on June 24th, 2017; it is credited for making hip hop mainstream in China.

hop but in most popular cultures. He suggests that the public's presumptions of hip hop come from hip hop's becoming mainstream, which again ties into the commercialization of hip hop.

In sum, Vico unveils his understanding of hip hop as a culture in the interviews. He clearly realizes that hip hop, whether globalized or localized, is a means of self-expression and exploration, though this voice may get lost with the commercialization of hip hop. He is conscious of the existence of hip hop's bad reputation, and he apparently has a way of defending hip hop. Undoubtedly, Vico gets hip hop, warts, and all.

How Vico sees the world

In this section, I analyze Vico's core values that shape his perspectives of the world. Throughout the interview, Vico addresses his opinions and understandings of the world and his personal beliefs. Through analyzing the transcripts, I find that his local socio-political situation grounds his worldviews. Eventually, I have come to two central understandings: first, hip hop is a way Vico learns about the world; second, Vico believes the localization of hip hop in China is restricted.

To begin with, I believe hip hop aids Vico's comprehension of his surroundings. Vico's hip hop literacies allow him to gain information and perspectives through rap music. In the process, his own philosophical views shape his understanding of the information he receives from hip hop. Therefore, I have picked out specific terms he refers to frequently, as they are helpful for understanding Vico's perspectives.

There are certain lexical resources Vico repeatedly mentions when he addresses how he sees hip hop. His understanding of hip hop is elastic. Our conversation covers topics from artist and songs to the generation gap in hip hop, or from how hip hop has changed through time to the

masculinity of hip hop. However, it always goes back to the terms, "freedom," "independence," or "solitude," "cool," "attitude," and "rebel." I am curious about his "obsessions" with these terms. I suggest these terms may link to the core of how Vico perceives the world outside and within. Below is a clip of the interview where he first dived into the term "freedom."

Interview Vol. 1,

Researcher	247. So hip hop is, we usually see it as a culture, right? What do you think is in this culture?	那嘻哈它就是，我们一般会把它理解成一种文化，对吧？那你觉得这种文化里面它有什么呢？
Vico	***248. I think it's a type of freedom.***	***我觉得是一种自自由。***
Researcher	249. Oh.	哦。
Vico	***250. Like I can say whatever I want, even though it is not very possible in the Chinese environment. So I prefer this type [of music].***	***就是我想说什么就可以说什么，虽然在这个中国的这个环境里不太可能。所以我才比较喜欢这种[音乐]。***
Researcher	251. Oh, so you think it is{ } somewhat related to your country's situation? Or is it because the Chinese culture is more, uh, reserved? Or what?	哦，所以就是你觉得它是跟你{ }你所在的国家的情况有一定关系吗？还是说是因为中国的文化就是比较，呃，比较内敛? 还是怎么样？
Vico	***252. I don't really think it is very { } it isn't very reserved at this [stage] of the society's development, it is about the, about the social institutions. For ordinally people, well { } voicing [for themselves] is too difficult.***	***我觉得其实也不是很{ } 到已经发展到这个社会[状态]也不是很内敛了，就是跟那个什么有关，社会制度有关。一般人民的，这个{ } [为自己]发声，太难了。***

Vico feels his people's and his voice is suppressed by the system and that hip hop symbolizes freedom. This insight came to Vico when he was in junior high school.

Interview Vol. 1,

Researcher	253. Um-hum. So you realize that, like what you just said about your country, its, um, { } what do you call it, the limitation on the people's voices. When { } when did you start to realize there's such a thing?	嗯。那你意识到这一个点，就是你刚刚说到的你所在的国家，它的，呃, { } 叫什么，对人民的发声的限制。它是{ }你是什么时候开始意识到有这个东西的呢？
Vico	***254. Since junior high school [I] started noticing this. Before { } for example songs or services that [I] liked a lot before, or things like that, were discontinued or deleted.***	***上了初中就有这么意识到这些。以前{ }比如很喜欢的歌或者服务什么的, 嗯，就被下架了或者是删除了。***
Researcher	255. Um-hum, oh, I see I see.	嗯，哦，明白明白。
Vico	***256. Only things that are like, "jiǎ dà kōng"[6] remain.***	***就留下一些那种，很"假大空"的东西吧。***
Researcher	257. Oh. So can I say that the reason you're into hip hop, and what you just mentioned, that you think hip hop is very free, it is relevant to the social institutions or circumstances that you are [living] in?	哦。那所以我能不能说你，就是，喜欢嘻哈，包括你刚提到，你觉得嘻哈很自由，是跟你所[生活]在的这个社会制度或者是社会情况是有关系的?
Vico	***258. That's about it.***	***差不多吧。***
Researcher	259. Then I would like to know, the way ordinary people like us understand hip hop as [something] kind of aggressive, right?	那我想知道啊，像我们一般人理解中的嘻哈是比较激进的，对吧？
Vico	***260. Um-hum.***	***嗯。***
Researcher	261. Like what you just said, [you can] say whatever you want [in hip hop]. Then, why didn't it [hip hop] influence you? for example, to, um, fight the { } social institutions that you don't approve of?	就像你刚刚说的，[你可以]想要说什么就可以[用嘻哈]说什么。那，为什么它[嘻哈]没有影响你？比如说,对你现在所在的这种，呃，你{ } 你不赞同的社会形式去，呃，做出一些反抗呢？
Vico	***262. I feel like I'm just used to it, because [I] have been oppressed for too long, it's already a habit.***	***我感觉就是已经习惯了，因为[我被]这个压抑的太久了，已经形成一种习惯了。***
Researcher	263. Oh, I see, like you think it's society's…	哦，明白，就是你觉得就是这个社会的…

[6] Short for "假话，大话，空话", literally means words that are fake, exaggerated, and empty; it is slang in Mandarin used to refer to things or speech that have no connotation or practicality.

Vico	***264. Plus there's no, like, no strength for resistance, I feel like. { } Like, I'm relatively too small.***	***而且也没有，就是，没有力气去反抗，我感觉。{ } 就是，我相对而言还是太渺小。***

Meanwhile, his early realization of oppression came from hip hop.

Interview Vol. 1,

Researcher	265. Oh, understood. So hip hop doesn't lead to these behaviors [of resistance]. It's just, uh it's…	哦，明白了。所以嘻哈还是不会导致你去有这些[反抗]行为。它只是说，呃它是。。。
Vico	***266. It makes me realize [these things].***	***它能让我意识到[这些事]。***
Researcher	267. Oh, okay. So do you think it [hip hop] can { } like { } for instance, allow you to release this emotion you have? Or, um, find comfort? Or like what?	哦，好。那你会觉得它[嘻哈]能够 { } 就是 { } 比如说,让你释放你这种情绪呢？或者是呃去找到一种宽慰呢？或者怎么样吗？
Vico	***268. I think it's allowing me to find consolation.***	***我觉得是让我找到一种慰藉。***
Researcher	269. Ah, understood.	啊，明白。
Vico	***270. From listening to foreign rappers [I] can just { } he [they] can discuss their politics, discuss their president, discuss social phenomena happening [where] they are.***	***[我]就可以从听到国外的说唱歌手{ } 他[他们]可以去讨论他们的政治，讨论他们的总统，讨论他们[那里]发生的社会现象。我觉得就体了现他们{ }***
Researcher	271. Yes.	是的。
Vico	***272. They [their lives] are so interesting.***	***他们[的生活]太有意思了。***
Researcher	273. Um-hum interesting, so…	嗯有意思，那…
Vico	***274. We would be arrested [doing this].***	***我们[这样做]会被抓起来的。***

Interview vol.2,

Researcher	164. Oh, I see. Oh, so we were also talking about some civic movements and things. So I want to know, did you get to know this information because of hip hop? Or do you always have access to them?	哦，明白。哦，那我们刚刚其实还有提跟人权相关的。那我想知道呢，你是因为喜欢嘻哈而去接触到这些资讯呢？还是说因为你就是你本来就能接触到这些资讯？
Vico	***165. The thing is I started paying attention to those after I started being a fan of hip hop.***	***关键是因为我喜欢嘻哈以后才会更加关注这些。***
Researcher	166. Oh.	哦。
Vico	***167. Yeah. So it's actually kind of like a way for me to get in contact with some information about this society.***	***对。就是它其实也是一个就是接触这个社会的资讯的一个渠道。***

Though the interview is hip-hop-focused, it is not hard to tell that Vico has opinions and understandings of the social institutions and politics at home and abroad. He presents strong awareness of the social, political circumstances in his country (line 249, 251, vol. 1) and compares his local situation and abroad (line 271, 273, 275, vol.1). In addition, this clip of conversation is also an excellent example of how, in Vico's eyes, hip hop, social institutions, and politics are tangled. He sees the world and finds resonance through hip hop (line 253, 269, vol. 1). In a sense, Vico figures out the existence of hegemony (line 261, 265, vol. 1) through internalizing the resistance in hip hop. He realizes that he is oppressed, but too "small" to do anything. I wonder if his ability to comprehend transnationality is cultivated by hip hop or his socio-political background?

Vico continues to clarify certain aspects of hip hop in his local area. Specifically, he clarifies how hip hop can go mainstream in China.

Interview vol. 3,

Researcher	157. So you were mentioning that, like you don't think hip hop is actually mainstream in China. Why?	明白。那你刚刚有说到，就是你觉得就是嘻哈在中国其实还不算是主流。为什么呢？
Vico	***158. Although like we see it on TV, like in the* CHUANG[7] *series, or other talent shows like this, or music shows, including* The Rap of China*, those actually already put hip hop in China at a, well, from the market's perspective, its market value is very high already, and it's basically an industry that everybody wants to get their foot in. But first, in talent shows like CHUANG, they are also, they copy exactly the [South] Korean model. Because in [South] Korea there must be different roles -like rappers, vocals, and dancers in their [music] groups. So this model in China is borrowed from foreign countries. And then the other thing is the, Chinese, well, the Culture { }, the Ministry of Culture, in the year 2017 or 2018 they… explicitly? Maybe not explicitly banned, like they don't really support this culture. Because they think it's a bad culture. So hip hop in China is more a formality, it doesn't really have a cultural core.***	*虽然说我们看到啊电视上啊，比如说像什么*创造营*啊，或者是这类型的很多的选秀节目也好，音乐节目也好，包括*中国有嘻哈*，其实都已经把嘻哈放在就是在中国的，呃，从市场上面来看，它的市场价值已经是非常高的了，而且基本上是谁都想要做的一个行业。但是首先,在这个创造营选秀节目里，他们也是，照搬的就是[南]韩国的一种模式。因为在[南]韩国他们那个[音乐]团体必须要有说唱，然后主唱呀，舞担那些不同的分工啊。所以说国内这种形式也是从国外来借鉴的嗯。然后其他就是这个，中国这个，哈，文化{ }文化部，在那一年一七年还是一八年就…明令？也不算明令禁止吧，就是不支持不是很支持这个文化。因为他们觉得这是一个不好的文化。所以嘻哈在中国现在更多的是一个流于形式的东西，它并不是说真的有一个什么文化内核在这里。*
Researcher	159. Oh, alright. So there has to be a core?	哦，好的，所以必须是先有内核？
Vico	***160. Yes, and this is because it is not allowed based on political or like national regulations. Like last year there's a show on* B Site[8]*, called***	*对，然后这个是因为政治或者是国家的规章不允许。就像去年有一个节目是在那个 b 站上做的，那叫说唱新世代。里面有个人叫 C-low，他唱了一首歌，就是他把，就是，国家比做他的父亲。那首歌叫《一块胶布》，他就"一块胶布封*

[7] *CHUANG* or *Produce Camp* is a chronology of talent/music group survival shows distributed by Tencent Video. Following its prototype, *Produce 101 (2018)*, CHUANG continues to air every year and has produced 4 popular music groups as of April 24th, 2021.

[8] *B Site* is a common nickname of *Bilibili.com*. Started as a Chinese video-sharing website where users can upload, view, and add overlaid commentary on videos, Bilibili is now a listed entertainment company in NASDAQ.

	Rap for Youth[9]***. There's a person in there called C-Low, he sang a song, like he, well, compares the country to his father. That song is called* **A Piece of Duct Tape***, he's like "a piece of duct tape sealed my voice.". He's like, actually he thinks that the { } censorship of speech, is unnecessary, so he wrote a song about it, well, but he made a lot of adjustments to his lyrics, like make it totally different from the original version, that's the only way to get aired, or else it's not enough "positive energy.*[10]*"***	***住了我的嘴"。他就，其实他觉得这个事情｛｝言论审查，是没有必要的，他就把这个写成一首歌，嗯，但是他的歌词也改动了很多，改到跟原版的是根本不一样的，只能这样只有这样才能在节目里播出，不然不够"正能量"。***

Interview vol. 3,

Researcher	238. So you mean you think that, like once a subculture becomes mainstream in China, it is easily limited.	那所以说就是你觉得，这个亚文化它在中国它要是成了一个主流文化之后，它就更容易受到更多的限制。
Vico	***239. Yeah. But if it doesn't go mainstream, it cannot spread a lot of things. They will, like first of all these people who work in this culture, they need to eat, that is the most important thing. But they are also in a dilemma. They're like { } it is impossible to want to feed themselves and want to be like in the past at the same time.***	***对啊。但它不成为主流文化，它也传播不了很多东西。他们也就，就是首先就是这些，搞这文化的人，他们得吃得饱啊，这是最主要的。但他们也很纠结。他们就｛｝想吃饱肚子，但是又想像以前一样也是不可能的。***
Researcher	240. Uh-hum.	嗯。
Vico	***241. There is only one path for them, they either do hip hop with an***	***他们只能选择一条道路，要么就是饿着肚子做嘻哈，要么就是吃饱了上电视。***

[9] *Rap for Youth (说唱新世代)* is a rap music talent show produced by Bilibili.com.

[10] Positive energy is a political slogan used and advocated by the Chinese government and political leaders. Comments and speeches that are uplifting and positively influence society are "positive energy," while the opposites are regarded as "negative energy."

	empty stomach, or be on TV with a full belly.	

Interview vol. 3,

Vico	***298. Its' the, Communist Youth League, do you know what that is, sis?***	***就是那个，共青团，你知道那是什么吗，姐？***
Researcher	299. Uh-hum, yeah that kind of related to being a member of the party or something.	嗯，知道就是跟那个党员什么的有点关系的。
Vico	***300. Uh-hum, yeah, they have a Weibo[11], the Communist Youth League of China, and they will post things like { } and then there's a, a group called CD Rev, they often voice for some social phenomena. And the things they write are like "red and dedicated"[12]. Do you know what it means?***	***啊，对，他们有个微博，中国共青团，然后他们就会发些{ }然后那个，有个组合叫天府事变，他们就会经常针对一些社会现象发声嗯。然后他们就是写的东西都是"又红又专"。你知道这个意思吗？***
Researcher	301. Explain?	解释一下?
Vico	***302. Like, being very responsive to the, the society in China…{ } it is both "red" and "dedicated", like how do I put it? Senior party members, like how senior party members feel. Well, like all they talk about is the core ideology of socialism.***	***就是，非常响应这个，中国这个社会…{ }是那种，又"红"又"专"，就是怎么说呢？老党员，老党员一样的感觉。嗯，一开口就是社会主义核心价值观的那种。***
Researcher	303. Oh, I see.	哦，明白了。
Vico	***304. And, they, they often make songs like this, and get reposted by the Communist Youth League. Well, it's actually a kind of { } validation to hip hop culture, like a little bit.***	***然后，他们，他们经常会做一些这种歌曲，然后就会被那个共青团转发。嗯，这其实也算是一种{ }这个嘻哈文化被认可了一点，一点点吧嗯。***
Researcher	***305.*** So whether hip hop can be validated in China, the deciding factor is its	就是嘻哈在中国它被不被认可，主要还是由它的就是呃，它的内容是否红专来决定的。

[11] Specifically refers to Sina Weibo, a social media platform run by sina.com in China.
[12] 又红又专, literally translated as "red and dedicated" in this paper, is a term published by the CPC Central Committee in 1961. "Red" refers to one's being consistent with the Chinese Communist Party's political values, "dedicated" means one's dedication to expertise in their profession. This term symbolizes the party and the government's expectation of the public in China.

	um, whether its contents are red and dedicated.	
Vico	***306. More or less, like it's not really about the formality. Whatever formality it is, like even if it's rock'n'roll or something, as long as you { } fit in with our "positive energy", with the core ideology of socialism, you'll be fine.***	***差不多哦，就是跟这个形式其实没有什么关系。不管你是什么形式，就算你是那种摇滚什么的，你只要是{ }符合我们这个"正能量"，符合这个社会主义核心价值观，你都可以嗯。***

In Vico's understanding, the popularity of formality does not equal being mainstream. He believes that hip hop is not mainstream in China because its popularity is not based on its core value but its commercial value. Meanwhile, he recognizes that the Chinese rappers face a dilemma: they can either go mainstream by being politically compliant or "do hip hop with an empty stomach (line 241)". Vico's claim of why hip hop is not a mainstream culture in China is fascinating.

In addition, Vico's mentioning of the "core" of hip hop sparked my interest. Aside from the term, "freedom," mentioned earlier, I wondered if politics, or being political, is the "core" of hip hop to Vico.

Interview vol.3,

Researcher	163. So earlier we were saying that the general environment in the mainland, well, doesn't really support hip hop, right? So{ } in terms of the content of it or its development, do you think that this environment has any influence on the development of hip hop in China?	那刚刚我们有说到就是国内的大环境来说，就是，没有非常鼓励嘻哈，对吧？那你觉得这个大环境，它对于嘻哈在中国{ }就是内容上或者是这个文化它的一个发育，有什么样的影响呢？
Vico	***164. In the end it's mainly bad influences. The people are all, like singing things like ballads or stuff***	***总归还是不好的影响。人们都，就是去唱一些情歌或者怎么样的不会被禁止的东西。嗯，就没有人{ }没有人会去对这个社会上发生的事情什么***

	that are not going to be banned. Well, like nobody { } nobody is going to voice their opinions about what's going on in the society or things. Because I know that hip hop, since the beginning to now it has actually always been, well, how do I put it? Like it is something for people to make a sound, to resist oppression, like it is actually a type of music that is very political. It is political.	***进行，就是他们的发声啊什么。那因为像我知道嘻哈，它一开始包括到现在它其实嗯一直都是，呃，怎么说呢？就是人们用来发声的，用来去反抗一些压迫的这种呃，其实它是一个相当政治的一个音乐类型。它就是政治的。***

Hip hop being a voice of the oppressed and a tool for resistance is not an uncommon understanding of the genre. As summarized in chapter 2.2.3, many have shared similar opinions: no matter where, hip hop has remained a tool of youth empowerment (Osuamare, 2007), a voice of the oppressed (Chang, 2007), and the defiance of hegemonic norms (Lin, 2009). Vico obviously agrees with this view. However, as the conversation continues, his sharing of local reality tells us that hip hop's function may not be fully activated.

Interview vol.3,

Researcher	165. So do you think the political nature of hip hop has changed in China?	那你觉得嘻哈的这个政治化的性质在中国有没有改变呢？
Vico	***166. [I] feel like it's changed a bit. Like the incident about the cotton in Xinjiang[13] before, well, a lot of people, um, they wrote songs to be the voice for Xinjiang, but they can only post them in their own official***	***[我]感觉现在已经有点改变了。就是说就像之前新疆棉花那个事情, 嗯，有很多人就是，写了他们那种为新疆发声的歌，但也只能发在他们自己的公众号，或者是发一段视频在微博里，他们不{ } 不可能把自己的这种歌曲分享到真的音乐平台上。***

[13] The Xinjiang cotton dispute started in March 2021 was a boycott movement that broke out in China. The origin of this incident is the Swedish fashion company H&M stated they will no longer cooperate with any garment manufacturer in Xinjiang due to allegations of forced labor by Uyghurs. After many companies' followed H&M's action, mainland China started boycotting foreign goods. This incident is by far the largest boycott in China since 2012.

	accounts[14], or post a video on Weibo, it is impossible for them to { } publish those songs they wrote on real music platforms.	
Researcher	167. Uh-hum? Why?	嗯？为什么呢？
Vico	***168. Because if they do that they will be { } like on the music platforms, there is censorship. Well, those relevant to politics or those { } things that are happening in the society, if they talk about those things they [reviewers] will…{ }remove the songs.***	***因为那样就会被｛｝就是在那个音乐平台上，它会有审核啊。嗯，有关于政治或者那些｛｝社会上发生的事情，讲那种事情的话他们[审查人员]就会…｛｝把歌曲下架或者怎么样嗯。***
Researcher	169. But about the Xinjiang Cotton incident, wasn't the people's reaction to it in the mainland is like, they think that Xinjiang should be defended? Why censor that?	但是新疆棉花那个事情，其实不是国内大家对它的反应都是，是觉得要维护新疆的吗？为什么不让说？
Vico	***170. I don't know why they ban things like this, but like { } since the Dolce & Gabbana incident,[15] in 2018, 2019 when anything like this happens, it's like it's not allowed to talk about politics { } or things like that in songs.***	***这种事我也不知道为什么不让，但是就是｛｝从什么时候开始，从那个杜嘉班纳那个事情开始，那是一八年，一九年了。从那个事情以后，再有这种事情啊什么，感觉就是不让在歌曲里谈到政治或者是这些方面｛｝这些东西。***

Vico believes that censorship and the different socio-political institutions are the reasons why Mainland Chinese hip hop is different from the hip hop from other regions of China.

Interview vol.3,

Researcher	345. Oh, this is interesting. So are you only more familiar with Mandarin hip hop?	哦，这个很有趣。那你是只对国语这一边的嘻哈比较有了解吗？

[14] "Official accounts (公众号)" here refers to the official accounts on WeChat, a widely used instant messaging application in China. Anyone registered on WeChat can open their official accounts to create content, mainly short articles, and share them with any other user.

[15] The Dolce & Gabbana incident in 2018 occurred when Chinese consumers called for a boycott of Dolce & Gabbana after the Italian fashion house posted videos that are considered racist and insensitive to Asians.

Vico	***346. Oh I listen to Cantonese too, not very often though, um, maybe because of the language difference, but I listen to Cantonese pop songs pretty often. Cantonese hip hop, I think it's either very "red and dedicated", like the rapper's obviously from the mainland, or its the type that, swears a lot, and they are especially skillful being sarcastic about social phenomena. I feel like it's very different from the hip hop in the mainland. I feel like they are pretty similar to Taiwanese hip hop.***	***哦我粤语也听，但是听得很少，嗯，可能还是因为语言不通，但是粤语流行歌我听挺多的。粤语的嘻哈，我觉得好像要么就是那种特别红专的，就是那种一听就是大陆的粤语歌手，然后要么就是那种，特别多脏话，然后他们特别特别会讽刺社会的现象的。我觉得跟国内的嘻哈还很不一样。感觉他们跟台湾的嘻哈还是挺像的。***
Researcher	347. Uh-hum, the type in Taiwan is also more political?	嗯，台湾的也是比较政治化吗？
Vico	***348. I think so. It's because they { } the social institutions are different after all, theirs are less strict. They can talk about, like, political issues.***	***我感觉是哦。就是因为他们｛｝毕竟是这个社会制度不同，他们没有那么严格。他们可以去说一些，就是，政治问题。***
Researcher	349. So you think the political system in the mainland has suppressed hip hop's development to an extent.	那所以其实你觉得现在大陆的政治制度对嘻哈的发育还是有一定的压制的。
Vico	***350. Yes, suppressed largely. Currently, like, hip hop cannot be a mainstream culture because of its issue with social institutions. But actually to some degree, like for example, [the rapper] Kindergarten Killer mentioned earlier, it allowed this kind of rapper to be more, like boosted their skills. How do I put it, it makes him, like it feels like he is very different.***	***是，有很大的压制。现在，就是，嘻哈不能成为主流文化，就是因为这个社会制度的问题。但是其实也在一定程度上让，就比如说刚刚说那个[说唱歌手]幼稚园杀手，让这类型的嘻哈歌手更加的，就是提升了一些技能。就感觉，怎么说，就让他变得，就是感觉他与众不同一样。***

According to Vico, hip hop in China, at least the popular kind, has lost its core because of censorship. I find his observation of Chinese hip hop interestingly aligns with "the death of hip hop" in the North American context. In 2006, rapper Nas released his eighth album, *Hip Hop is Dead*, with a single of the same name. He claimed that hip hop is dead because of the lack of

political voice, that the commercialization of hip hop in the U.S. has hindered hip hop's ability to convey the reality of the people (Reid, 2006). Later, Rose (2008) addresses this claim and notes that hip hop "is gravely ill" due to commercialization, racial and sexual fantasy distortions, oppression, and alienation (p.ix). In Vico's description, censcorship in China becomes a parallel factor to commercialization in North America. Though there are still Chinese rappers who tell the story of the people, the resistance is undermined by the social institutions.

Interview vol.3,

Researcher	171. So if talking about these things is not allowed, do you think, well, there really is hip hop in China?	那如果是不能谈论这些东西的话，那你觉得，嗯，中国真的是有嘻哈的吗？
Vico	***172. Yes, but like, it cannot be brought to the surface. So in China, hip hop is actually divided into two genres. Well, one is the type that can be aired, the other is the type that cannot. So actually there are still ways to bring to voice, it's just a relatively more underground way to do it.***	***有，只不过就是，不可能被拿到台面上来。所以说就是在中国，其实嘻哈就感觉分为两种。嗯，一种就是能上电视的，一种就是上不了电视的。也就是说其实就是这种发声的这种行为其实还是有的，只是是相对比较地下的一个做法。***
Researcher	173. Oh, understood.	哦，明白了。
Vico	***174. Like, you can listen to these songs on their personal platforms, but you cannot see them like on TV or, like some video websites.***	***就是，你可以在这一些他们自己的平台去听到这些歌，但是你不可能在电视或者是，什么视频网页上看到他们。***

The reality of what Chang (2007) called "Da Chapstick Hip Hop" in its home is intriguing. Vico's depictions of the Chinese hip hop scene and the "underground" hip hop spirit sound almost like a civil revolution that is about to take place: the underground hip hop circle has its own expression and platform; people with the same political and social value exchange thoughts and voices through this circle, hidden from the public's sight.

Interview vol.3,

Researcher	339. So, the early hip hop in China, is it also political?	那，中国的早期的嘻哈，它也是政治化的吗？
Vico	***340. Uh-hum, it's more, more political. Oh, there's a very typical rapper named, um…Kindergarten Killer. His name is Kindergarten Killer, his songs are like often talk about the society, social issues. No one knows who he is even till now, he's an anonymous artist. Yeah, and his songs are processed by voice changers before they're released, he kind of feels like a masked hero. It kind of feels like that.***	***嗯，也是比，比较政治。哦，有一个很在这个方面很有代表性的一个 rapper 叫，那个…幼稚园杀手。他的名字叫做幼稚园杀手，他的歌曲就是经常会写一些社会，社会问题。到现在没有人知道他到底是谁，是个匿名歌手，相当于。对，然后他的歌曲也是经过变声器的处理然后发出来的，就有点蒙面大侠的感觉。就有一种那种感觉。***
Researcher	341. So will his songs be removed?	那他的歌会被下架吗？
Vico	***342. A lot of his songs are removed actually. And some of the songs are cryptic or something, those can be found online. Like the censorship makes some of the rappers pay excessive attention to wording when they write the lyrics, like become more skillful in encapsulation.***	***其实他也下架了很多歌。还是有一些写的非常隐晦或者怎么样的，才会能在网上搜得到。就是这种审查制度导致就是有一些嘻哈歌手在写歌词的时候变得更加的咬文嚼字，就是更加会去隐藏一些信息。***
Researcher	343. Uh-hum, so does that make finding the songs more difficult?	嗯，那会让这种歌比较难找到吗？
Vico	***344. For sure, but I think these songs are more interesting to listen to. Like you have to unveil something from them. Actually like hip hop fans, like the people who listen to these songs, they can still get what he means. It's kind of like secret signals and codes.***	***当然会呀，但我觉得这种歌曲听起来就很有意思。就是你要从中发现一些东西。其实像嘻哈粉丝们，就是听这歌的人，他们还是能够能够听懂他的意思的。就有点像是打暗号一样。***

Interestingly, Vico thinks that censorship pushes political rappers to elevate the levels of their skills. The underground artists must find a way to convey meaning through hidden messages and make sure these messages can be deciphered by the right people; the fans have to

learn to find and decode these messages. Vico's comparison of lyrics as ciphers is not unheard of, but it is no doubt challenging to imagine it at this level of secrecy. Being a part of something secretive and mysterious and being able to decode the secrets are exciting, which could be a reason why people like Vico enjoy being in the underground circle.

Interview vol.1,

Researcher	275. Well, so I want to know, do mainland rappers write [political] songs like that?	哎，那我想知道, 国内的嘻哈歌手会写这种[政治的]歌吗？
Vico	***276. They write songs like that, but they will be { } suppressed, deleted, and removed. So gradually it led to, these people they won't make those songs anymore. They will write things like, the type of music that can be trendsetters on TikTok. The type that makes them more famous and rich.***	***他们也会写这种歌，但是他们会被｛｝打压，会被删除，会被下架。所以就慢慢导致就，这些人就不会去创作这种歌曲。他们就只会去写一些，就是能在抖音上流行起来的歌。让他们更火更有钱那种。***
Researcher	277. Um-hum. So what do you think about that?	哦。那你对于这个现象有什么看法吗？
Vico	***278. I think it's also pretty good. Because, like in China, they were { } because this culture is very non-mainstream in China. Before, their shows are like 50 RMB per ticket. Since 2017, gradually they all do better, now the tickets are like 3-400, or 4-500. It's also kind of a type of elevation to this industry now. More people are listening to it.***	***我觉得也挺好的。因为，中国来说就是，他们之前{ }因为这个文化在中国是非常小众。他们之前一场演出门票才五十块钱一个人。从一七年以后，慢慢的大家都能走起来了，现在一场门票卖了三四百，四五百。这也是对这个行业的一种提升了吧现在。听的人更多了。***
Researcher	279. Aha, so with more people listening to it, do you feel happy, or do you feel like you'd rather fewer people listening to it, so they can make the hip hop you used to listen to?	啊，那你觉得听的人更多了，你是会觉得很开心，还是你会觉得宁愿听的人少一点，然后他/她可以做你以前听的那种嘻哈？
Vico	***280. I think I'm happy about it. Because after all everybody is { } these***	***我觉得这也是很开心嘛。因为毕竟大家都{ }这些人，他们都能，他们只有就更有钱了才能做出来更好的音乐嘛。***

people, they can all, they can make better music if they are richer.

Even though the anti-oppression voices in China are hidden underground, Vico remains optimistic about the future of these voices. He believes that even though mainstream Chinese hip hop concerns less about political stances, it is still beneficial to the future development of Chinese hip hop. This could implicate that Vico thinks of mainstream hip hop now as a phase; as rappers become richer, their accumulation of resources becomes more significant. Ultimately, these resources contribute to the quality of the music they make. This also means that Vico attributes the quality of music to the economics of the rappers.

Interview vol.3,

Researcher	175. So since these [political] songs cannot be spread widely or be heard by people outside of the hip hop community, is this type of voicing still meaningful?	那既然这样的[政治的]歌曲不能够被广泛的流传，不能到嘻哈圈外人的耳里，这种发声还是有意义的吗？
Vico	***176. It is still meaningful.***	***还是有意义的。***
Researcher	177. Why?	为什么呢？
Vico	***178. Because they are still brave enough to make a sound in times like these. Well, they know that these thing, um, will be known, will be recognized someday.***	***因为这时候他们依然敢于发声啊。嗯，他们知道这些事情，就，总有一天会被人知道，会被人认可。***
Researcher	179. So you think that the future of political hip hop is still bright?	就是你觉得政治嘻哈的未来还是光明的？
Vico	***180. Yes, but maybe there are still many years to wait in the current society in China.***	***对，但可能在中国现在这个社会下可能还是得等很多年吧。***

Vico's optimism is clearly based on his knowledge of the cultural and ideological differences between cultures and regions.

Interview vol.3,

Researcher	181. Why?	为什么呢？
Vico	***182. Because of this ideology [in China], it's not very much like the foreign ones.***	***因为就是[中国的]这种思想吧，还是跟国外那些不太一样。***
Researcher	183. Why is it different?	为啥不一样呢？
Vico	***184. Ultimately it's because of the difference of the social norms. In China everybody is all about collectivism, in foreign countries it's like they care more about individual interests.***	***最根本就是这个社会形式的不一样。在中国就是很大家都讲究一个集体嗯，在国外就是感觉是比较注重个人利益吧。***
Researcher	185. But take hip hop in the U.S. for example, well, they actually often mention solidarity, right?	但是就是拿美国的嘻哈为例，呃，他们其实经常的时候说到 solidarity，对吧？
Vico	***186. Right.***	***对。***
Researcher	187. So since it's also talking about collectivism, why can't hip hop be popular in China?	那同样都是讲集体，嘻哈为什么在中国就不能受欢迎了？
Vico	***188. The two types of solidarities are different.***	***两种团结是不一样的。***
Researcher	189. Uh-hum, how are they different?	嗯，怎么样不一样？
Vico	***190. Solidarity…their solidarity is about, them uniting to resist the oppression, it is impossible to resist { } these things in China.***	***团结…他们的团结是，他们团结起来反抗这个压迫，在中国你不可能去反抗{ }这些东西。***
Researcher	191. Oh.	哦。
Vico	***192. If you resist there will be…greater oppressions.***	***你有反抗就会有…更厉害的压迫。***
Researcher	193. I see.	明白。
Vico	***194. Like the development of it is extremely limited by politics or the social norms.***	***就是它在中国的发展是极度受政治或者是社会形态的限制。***

It seems that Vico has strong feelings towards the political and social institutions in his local situation. In the following, he further reveals his thoughts regarding local politics through sharing with me his personal experience.

Interview vol.3,

Researcher	198. Understood. Xinjian is actually a mysterious place to me because I've never been there. Can you tell me about Xinjiang?	明白。新疆对我来说是一个很神秘的地方因为我也没有去过。你可以跟我说说新疆吗？
Vico	***199. I feel like { } with the mainland it's still…{ } it's mainly because where we are is actually underdeveloped instead of mysterious, compared with the mainland. From where we are { } since 2009, since that time, that incident, the whole Xinjiang stopped developing its economy, only focusing on Weiwen[16] (stability maintenance). So that led to like there are things that… { } we cannot get out, some things cannot come in.***	***我感觉｛｝和内地还是…｛｝主要是我们这边，说是神秘其实是很落后，和内地比起来。我们这边｛｝从零九年开始，就是那一次那个，那个事件开始以后，整个新疆就不再发展经济，只持续关注这个维稳。所以说导致有些东西…｛｝我们出不去，有些东西也进不来。***
Researcher	200. What happened in 2009?	零九年是什么事情啊？
Vico	***201. It's the July 5th Incident[17]. It's this time when…it's a terrorist attack, kind of.***	***就是那个七五。就是有一次那个…恐怖事件吧，算是。***
Researcher	202. Oh, I see.	哦，我明白了。
Vico	***203. Since then it's um…the development of the economy paused, the only focus is the um,***	***从那以后就嗯…不再发展经济，只是关注这个，维稳。维护这个社会稳定。***

[16] Weiwen (维稳), the shorthand for stability maintenance in Chinese (维护稳定 weihu wending), is recognized as one of the essential policies of the Chinese government since the Tian'anmen Square protest in 1989. This is a type of official control that maintains the established ruling order and prevents all kinds of spontaneous social or civic movements that may diminish the administration or actions of the authorities.

[17] The July 5th Incident is the July 2009 Ürümqi riots (Uyghur: يەشىنچى ئىيۇل ۈرۈمچىسى). It was a series of violent riots over several days that broke out in the capital of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region which received global attention.

		Weiwen. To maintain the stability of the society.	
Researcher	204.	So do you think these things have influenced your local situation?	那你觉得就是这些对你们当地有没有什么影响呢？
Vico	***205.***	***The influences are major.***	***有很大的影响。***
Researcher	206.	How?	怎么样呢？
Vico	***207.***	***Like, even us ordinary people, we have to be careful when we talk, like fearing the mentioning of those things or something. Like when I was in junior high school， 12， 13-years-old… { } we would take exams at school, the results would be out 2-3 days later, then we would go back to school and pick up the report cards. Then a day, or two, before we go, a classmate messaged me, joking about if someone blew up the school we wouldn't have to go and pick up the report cards. It was just a joke. Then the next day the police showed up at the door.***	***就｛｝就拿我们普通人来说，就是说话都要很小心，就生怕就提到那些东西什么的。就在我上初中的时候，十二，十三岁…｛｝我们那时候考完试，隔三天以后会出成绩，我们再回学校去拿成绩单。然后临去的前一天，前两天，同学给我发个消息，开玩笑说要是有人要炸学校，我们就不用去拿成绩了。就开个玩笑。然后第二天警察就上门了。***
Researcher	208.	Woah……	哇……
Vico	***209.***	***Yeah, so in an…environment like this, it is…hard to express certain things.***	***对啊，所以说那在这个…环境下面是很…很难表达一些东西的。***

At around the same time of the police visit, Vico started listening to hip hop.

<u>Interview vol.3,</u>

Researcher	7.	Alright, so what about MC Hotdog?	好，那热狗呢？
Vico	***8.***	***Yeah, I have, like I found him myself, found him when I was listening to hip hop.***	***对，我是，就是自己找到了的，我听嘻哈的时候找到的。***
Researcher	9.	Cool, MC Hotdog. Well, when did you start listening to MC Hotdog?	酷, 热狗。哎，你什么时候开始听热狗？

Vico	***10.***	***Like when I heard their { } probably in junior high school.***	***就听到他们那个 { } 应该是初中时候。***
Researcher	11.	That's pretty early.	那也很早哦。
Vico	***12.***	***Ah, how old was I in junior high? Like 11, 12.***	***啊，初中我应该是多大？十一二岁吧。***
Researcher	13.	Oh, how old are you now?	哦，你现在多大？
Vico	***14.***	***21. It's earlier than that, I started listening to hip hop at least 10 years ago.***	***二十一。比那个早，我最起码十年前开始听嘻哈的。***
Researcher	15.	Oh, so you kind of started early in the mainland.	哦，那在国内的话其实你还是挺早开始的。
Vico	***16.***	***Uh-hum yeah.***	***嗯是啊。***
Researcher	17.	Uh-hum, very cool.	嗯，很酷哎。
Vico	***18.***	***I knew about MC Hotdog 10 years ago, and a Beijing [rapper] called, In, In3.***	***我十年前就知道热狗，还有一个北京的[说唱歌手]叫 In，阴三儿。***

I am convinced that Vico's desire for "freedom" is rooted in his lived experiences. His local history and political situation provoked his interest in hip hop—to him, hip hop is a tool of resistance and a glimpse of freedom—even though he knows that there is still a long way to go for hip hop to actually do something in China. He sees the world through his and Chinese hip hop's experience of being limited. For Vico, hip hop is a window, a whistle, and a coddle blanket. It helps him see the world around him to understand his internalized feelings of being limited, gives him the vocabulary and voice to say what he wanted to say, and comforts him by bringing people who share similar experiences to him.

Vico's knowledge of self

Vico knows himself. Through the interviews, I noticed that hip hop could be where some of his knowledge of self came from. In this section of the analysis, I will continue to find out how Vico finds resonance through hip hop, try to seek for deeper understanding regarding why he does so, explore to what extent does he feel limited in any way, and how hip hop has influenced him.

First, Vico wishes to see himself through the lives of others. In addition to the discussion of hip hop as a culture, Vico spent a good amount of time talking about artists and songs that he knows and likes and why he likes them. Continuing my point of hip hop being a way for Vico to find comfort and resonance, I have selected some of the most typical conversations where he talks about artists he is interested in.

Interview vol. 1,

Vico	***361. Well, recently I'm kind of like, I recently like a white rapper named NF, he…it's simple it's just the alphabet, like { } like in his lyrics, I feel like there's not much { } swearing.***	***嗯，我最近还就是，最近喜欢一个白人歌手，叫NF，他…就是字母很简单，就{}就是他的歌词里，我感觉就没有那种{}脏话。***
Researcher	362. So there's no swearing, but…	所以没有脏话，可是…
Vico	***363. Yeah, very { } very cool. And he is also, like he is { } he is telling his experience. Like he probably has relatively a lot of opinions to this world, maybe. And it's not like the type that constantly talks about how much money I've made, how I spend money every day.***	***嗯，很{ }很酷。而且他也是， 就是在感觉这{ }就是讲述自己的经历。就是他对这个世界的看法比较多，可能。而且也不是那种一直在说我挣了多少多少钱，我天天怎么怎么花钱。***

Vico likes NF for two reasons: the lack of vulgarity in NF's lyrics and the self-explorative content. Vico's description of NF implicates that Vico dislikes vulgar language use—which contrary public's impression of hip hop affiliates (Fearing et al., 2018). Also, Vico's interest in other's experience and their opinions of the world is implied.

Interview vol. 1,

Vico	***366.***	***Different……like the one I was just talking about also, Lil Uzi Vert. before he was also { } like European style. And Tavi$ Scott too, their earliest songs. But they weren't using effect units and stuff, they also talked about their { } lives.***	*不一样的……像那个就是我刚才说的那个也有,Lil Uzi Vert。他之前那个也是比较那种{ } 会有一点那种欧式的感觉。还有那个 Travi$ Scott 也是，他们最早的歌。但他们不会用那些效果器呀什么的，也会去讲述他们自己的，生活。*
Researcher	367.	Uh-hum.	嗯。
Vico	***368.***	***Like how they started from { } step by step through all the challenges.***	*就他/她怎么从 { } 一步一步摸爬滚打。*

From the example of Lil Uzi Vert and Travi$ Scott, Vico demonstrates good knowledge of the styles and history of the rappers. Also, he again mentions the rappers' personal experiences expressed through their music.

Interview vol.2,

Vico	***78.***	***My favorite song should be, a, a Chinese one. That [person] is called After Journey, his song is called { }* 1992 Part One.**	*最喜欢的一首歌就应该是，一个中，中文的。那个[人]叫艾福杰尼,他的歌，那个叫{ }1992 Part One。*
Researcher	79.	Oh.	哦。
Vico	***80.***	***It talks about, talks about his…um experiences.***	*就是讲述他，讲述他的…这个经历。*

Vico talks about his favorite song from his favorite rapper, After Journey. The topic of the rapper's personal experiences is again mentioned. I suspect that Vico is very interested in other's experiences. Therefore, I intentionally extended our conversation in this regard.

Interview vol.2,

Vico	***91.***	***That also could because of my … why am I interested?***	***也可能就是我…为什么感兴趣？***
Researcher	92.	Yeah, like why do you like this song so much?	对，就是你为什么那么喜欢这首歌呢？
Vico	***93.***	***Like maybe there's some resonance.***	***就可能有一些共鸣吧。***
Researcher	94.	Uh-hum? What do you feel resonance about, for example?	嗯？哪些地方有共鸣呢？比如说。
Vico	***95.***	***Like he has some experiences that are similar to mine.***	***就是他也有跟我很相似的经历。***
Researcher	96.	Do you mind sharing these experiences with me?	你介不介意跟我分享这些经历？
Vico	***97.***	***Like [he] also has the experience of leaving the country, studying abroad, and somethings about family.***	***就是[他]也有过就是出国，出国的留学的经历，还有就是家庭的一些。***
Researcher	98.	Oh.	哦。
Vico	***99.***	***Things like that.***	***类似一些事情。***
Researcher	100.	Understood.	明白了。
Vico	***101.***	***And he is also like me, [we're both] from Xinjiang, haha.***	***而且他也跟就是跟我一样都是，[我们]都是新疆的，哈哈。***

Vico may engage in self-recognition through listening to the lives of the rappers. He is primarily invested in the music and artists that share their lived experiences because his own experience and challenges can be validated and recognized in that way. In a sense, when he fails to express himself, these rap songs do it for him. Moreover, he gets to explore different lifestyles through these songs and rappers.

Interview vol. 1,

Researcher	410. Oh. So you, let me think. { } so, well, there are a lot of topics in hip hop, right? We were just talking about it. So what do you think are the most interesting topics?	哦。那你，我想一下。{ }那就是，呃，嘻哈里面有很多的话题，对吧？我们刚刚也提到过。那你觉得哪一些是你觉得最有趣的话题呢？
Vico	***411. The most interesting topics? It is still to talk about personal experiences.***	***最有趣的话题？还是就是讲出个人的经历嘛。***
Researcher	412. Uh-hum. Why?	嗯。为什么
Vico	***413. I just feel like I can see different people's lives, the person's path of growth, and their experiences growing up.***	***我就觉得我能看到不同人的生活，这个生活轨迹，和他/她的成长经历。***
Researcher	414. Oh. So you are actually curious about other people's lives.	哦。就是你其实对别人的生活很有好奇心的。
Vico	***415. Uh-hum, yeah.***	***嗯，对。***
Researcher	416. Why so?	为什么呢？
Vico	***417. I don't know, [I] just like this type [of content]. The type that I saw then, it's like they are millennials, when they're already very famous, I will be super curious about their experience. Like, experiencing a different life. Or the type that were, unheard of. Suddenly [they] have a song that's a hit. Then, I'll find their songs from the past and see what they were like.***	***我也不知道，[我]就是很喜欢这种[内容]。那个时候看的那种，就是他/她是那种零零后，等他/她已经很出名了，我就会很好奇他/她的经历。就是，体验不一样的人生。或者是那种之前一直都，默默无闻。突然[他/她]有一,有一首歌爆火。然后，我就会找他/她之前的歌就看他/她以前是什么样。***

Second, there can be a more rooted factor to Vico's preference. Aside from finding comfort, the hegemonic limitations on Vico could be a deeper reason for his curiosity about other's lives. Drawing from the section about Vico's personal political experience, I wonder if his curiosity of the rappers' experiences is, more or less, his desire for a different life—a life that is "free."

Interview vol. 1,

Researcher	119.	I see, so like the content of hip hop, the content of the lyrics may have a larger impact on you.	明白了，也就是说嘻哈的内容，歌词的内容可能对你影响是比较大的。
Vico	***120.***	***Yeah. Plus I don't really like to be controlled { } restrained.***	***Yeah。而且我本身就不是特别喜欢被控制{ }管住的。***
Researcher	121.	Oh.	哦。
Vico	***122.***	***And hip hop is also a relatively free form of expression.***	***然后嘻哈也是一种比较自由的表达形式。***

Vico likes hip hop for its unrestrained nature out of his personality. He does not like to be controlled; reflected in his attendance record, perhaps this personality is linked to his resistance to the language school. Vico later gives more information on his understanding of freedom in our last interview.

Interview Vol. 3,

Researcher	62.	Well, in the previous interviews, you always mention, like, you think somebody has "attitude" or things like that, like, you mentioned the word "attitude" a couple of times. So what is "attitude"?	呃,在之前的采访里面呢，你经常会提到说,呃,觉得谁谁谁很有"态度"啊或者怎么样，就是你,你提到"态度"这个词提到了好几次。那什么是"态度"呢？
Vico	***63.***	***I feel like it's your own { } own way of doing things or something like that. Uh { } to have something in you that is different from others, that's got attitude. Like "attitude" is to be different, to not…not swim with the tide.***	***我感觉就是自己的{ }自己的做事的方式或者什么样的。呃{ }有一个自己跟别人不一样的地方，就很有态度。就是"态度"就是与众不同，不随…不随大流。***
Researcher	64.	Good. So you've also mentioned "be me", so is "be me" an attitude?	好。那你也有提到过"做自己"，那"做自己"也是一种态度吗？
Vico	***65.***	***Yeah, "be me" has got a lot of attitudes.***	***对，"做自己"就很有态度了。***
Researcher	66.	A-hah. So how can you "be me"?	啊。那怎么样去"做自己"？

Vico	***67.***	***Like { } I feel like { } like it's free, like in your……like in my, in my understanding, it is to try to do what you want, like under the permission of the law or ethics.***	***就{ } 我觉得就{ } 就很自由啊，就是在你.....就是我，我的理解啊，就是在法律允许和道德允许的情况下做，就尽可能做自己想做的事情。***
Researcher	68.	A-ha. So is it like, like relevant to the "freedom" you were talking about?	啊。那跟你的跟，跟你之前说的自由是不是也是有点相关的意思？
Vico	***69.***	***Yeah.***	***对。***
Researcher	70.	Then can you be more specific and tell me about it, what do you think "freedom" means? Or is the word "freedom" important to you?	那你能够再就是具体一点跟我说一下，你觉得"自由"是什么意思？或者是"自由"这个词对你来说它重不重要呢？
Vico	***71.***	***That is very important to me.***	***那对我来说很重要。***
Researcher	72.	Um-hum, why?	嗯，为什么呢？
Vico	***73.***	***Like…{ } like I'll, I'll give an example, like in China there's a saying about puberty, so children grow up to twelve, thirteen { } fourteen, fifteen, the adults in the family will think the children are rebellious. I think it' s the awakening of the, what do you call it, the self-consciousness. They are not really rebellious, it is that they are at this age, they already have the ability to authenticate what's good or bad for them. But in China you'd feel like you're restrained, your freedom is limited. Children at this point should, like do what they want to do. Well, but they cannot { } like what I said earlier, they cannot break the law or the bottom lines of morality.***	***就…{ }比如我，我举个例子吧，就是在中国就有个关于青春期的说法，就是孩子到了十二三岁{ } 十四五岁的时候，家里的大人会觉得孩子很叛逆。我觉得这就是一种就是这个孩子的，这个什么，自我意识的觉醒。他/她其实不是叛逆，是他/她到了这个年龄，已经有自己的就是鉴别能力啊[对于]这些事情嗯。但是在中国就会感觉会被限制，限制你的自由。这时候的孩子就应该，就是做他/她自己想做的事情。嗯，但是也不能{ } 就是像我之前说的，不能就是突破法律的界限和一些道德底线。***

In this part of the transcripts, Vico associates the term "freedom" with "attitude" and "rebel/rebellious." He seems to think highly of "self-consciousness" and individuality; he thinks that being who one is, doing what one wants without violating lawful or moral standards, and

being different from others are three criteria for one to demonstrate their "attitude"—and "attitude" and "freedom" are internally bonded by one's presentation of self-consciousness ("be me"). Meanwhile, Vico argues that teenagers' self-consciousness is "rebelliousness" in the eyes of the "adults." This argument surfaces again later.

Interview vol. 3,

Researcher	90.	So do you think being rebellious is cool?	那你觉得叛逆酷吗？
Vico	***91.***	***I don't think being a rebel is cool.***	***叛逆我觉得不酷。***
Researcher	92.	Why?	为什么呢？
Vico	***93.***	***But I honestly don't think that's rebelliousness, that's really just { } like they transformed from children to be men/women, real men/women.***	***但是我觉得那真不是叛逆，那真的就是{ }就他/她从小孩变成人[18]，真正的人了。***
Researcher	94.	Oh.	哦。
Vico	***95.***	***Because you have your own thoughts now, that makes others think that you are rebellious.***	***因为你现在有自己的想法了，所以才会让别人觉得你叛逆。***

Ultimately, Vico does not define what really is "rebelliousness." Instead, he describes "being a rebel" as a misunderstanding people project onto adolescents' self-conscious behaviors. The way that he attempts to negotiate what is "rebelliousness" presents his resistance to internalizing hegemonic norms to some extent. Connecting this point to the song *A Piece of Duct Tape*, which Vico mentions in the interviews, where the rapper compares the country to his father, I am curious whether Vico also sees the political-socio institutions or authorities (i.e. his

[18] "人" in Chinese is a gender-neutral term that refers to human beings. To best describe it in the context, it is translated as men/women.

school, the government) in his local setting as the "adult" who is oppressive of his own voice as a conscious being.

Interview vol.3,

Vico	***160. Yes, and this is because it is not allowed based on political or like national regulations. Like last year there's a show on* B Site *called* Rap for Youth*. There's a person in there called C-Low, he sang a song, like he, well, compared the country to his father. That song is called* A Piece of Duct Tape*, he's like "a piece of duct tape sealed my voice". He's like, actually he thinks that the { } censorship of speech, is unnecessary, so he wrote a song about it, well, but he made a lot of adjustments to his lyrics, like make it totally different from the original version, that's the only way to get aired, or else it's not enough "positive energy".***	*对，然后这个是因为政治或者是国家的规章不允许。就像去年有一个节目是在那个 b 站上做的，那叫说唱新世代。里面有个人叫 C-low，他唱了一首歌，就是他把，就是，国家比做他的父亲。那首歌叫《一块胶布》，他就"一块胶布封住了我的嘴"。他就，其实他觉得这个事情 { } 言论审查，是没有必要的，他就把这个写成一首歌，嗯，但是他的歌词也改动了很多，改到跟原版的是根本不一样的，只能这样只有这样才能在节目里播出，不然不够"正能量"。*
Researcher	161. Oh, it's like that.	哦，这样呀。
Vico	***162. It's just that the country doesn't support it, actually. He wrote that as a child { } well, and to his father, which is the country. He made it like he's talking to his father.***	*就是国家不支持，其实。他写的那个就是他以一个孩子的身份{ }嗯，然后跟然后国家，就是他的父亲。他这样跟他父亲在对话那样一个形式。*

Third, Vico's sharing allows glimpses of how he is restrained. Dwelling on his views on freedom, I am surprised to find that Vico's preference for hip hop has changed.

Interview vol.3,

Researcher	34.	So what's your favorite style of hip hop?	那你最喜欢什么风格的嘻哈呢？
Vico	***35.***	***I used to like the type that's { } has educational meanings in the lyrics. But now I prefer the type that I can rock to.***	***以前比较喜欢那种{ }歌词有教育意义的。但是现在比较喜欢听那种能让我跟着节奏晃动的。***
Researcher	36.	Why?	为啥呢？
Vico	***37.***	***Maybe { } now it feels like, like it's relaxation. Like after listening to it it's like { } I'm tired after a whole day, so I'd lie on the bed, and I'd turn it up. Max the volume. That feels good, though it's a bit noisy. But it's satisfying.***	***可能{ }现在就觉得就，就是就把这个当一种放松吧嗯。就是感觉听完好像 { } 一天很累，我就躺在床上,我就把它打开。声音开到最大。就感觉很舒服，虽然有点吵。但是很过瘾。***

Apparently, Vico now enjoys the musicality more than the content. He no longer craves the meanings within the lyrics. Hip hop has become a pure aesthetics that soothes his nerves. I find this change intriguing. Therefore, I would like to combine his local situation with his personal history to understand this change better. Below is a clip where Vico introduces hip hop in his local context.

Interview vol. 3,

Researcher	56.	So in Xinjiang, what do they usually rap about?	那新疆的话呃，一般唱的内容是哪些呢？
Vico	***57.***	***It's also like { } they, it's like in their heart, they are also like the Black, they also feel like they are discriminated against. You know what I mean? They often write about their lives and the challenges and things.***	***也有就是 { } 他们，就是在他们心里，他们也是就是跟黑人一样，他们也是觉得他们受到了歧视。懂我意思吗？他们就是经常会写一些自己的生活和困难一些什么的。***
Researcher	58.	Why would they feel discriminated against?	他们为什么觉得自己受到了歧视呢？

Vico	***59.***	***It's because of the ethnic difference, they're…they believe in Islam, Uyghurs are basically Muslim, but fewer people are writing these things these past two years.***	***就是因为民族不同啊，他们是…他们信伊斯兰嘛，维族基本都是穆斯林，但是这两年,就是这个把这种事情写下来的人比较少了。***
Researcher	60.	Why so?	为什么呢？
Vico	***61.***	***Um { } I don't I don't …I'm afraid to speak carelessly about these things. Hahaha.***	***嗯{ }不太不太…这种事情不太敢乱说。哈哈哈。***

Vico's physical location could be a factor in the type of hip hop he prefers at a particular time. In contrast to his loquaciousness when talking about the general social institutions of China, Vico hastens to put an end to the discussion of his local politics. Drawing from Vico's sharing of the police incident in his junior high school years, it is possible the "duct tape" is more noticeable when he was living in Xinjiang. Though Vico might have stronger urges to resist when he is home, the strict censorship he feels at home could make it harder for him to express his views through hip hop. When Vico leaves his hometown, the limitation is removed.

Interview vol. 3,

Researcher	211.	Oh, I see. Well, then I am a bit curious, is it possible that because you have been through things like these, so you are more interested in hip hop? Because earlier you were talking a lot about, like topics like "freedom" and "attitude".	哦，明白了。哎，那我有一点好奇，那会不会是因为你就是有经历过这些事情，然后让你更喜欢嘻哈呢？因为你前面也提到很多，就是"自由"啊，"态度"啊这些话题。
Vico	***212.***	***I feel like it's definitely related. Because I really do feel very limited in this place. Some of my thoughts { } I'm afraid to say the things that I want to say. So I was like after I go to the mainland for university, after I went abroad, it's like this***	***我感觉肯定是有关系的。就是因为我在这地方就感觉真的是很受到限制。我的一些想法{ }我想说的东西我不敢去说。所以我就是到内地上大学后，出国以后，就感觉这种限制没有了。我也就是变得，就是想说什么我就能说什么。***

		limitation is gone. I just become, like I can say what I want to say.	
Researcher	213.	Well, would you think that going abroad has something to do with the type of hip hop you like?	咦，那你觉得你喜欢的嘻哈类型跟你出国什么的有关系？
Vico	***214.***	***I think it is actually related. Now that you say it that way I suddenly get it. Because I couldn't say things before, and now I can, so like, well, I am more inclined to listen to the music part of it now.***	***其实也是感觉也是感觉有关吧。你这一说我一下通透了。因为以前不能说，然后到现在能说了，所以就，就是，呃，我现在更加倾向于去听它的音乐的部分了。***

Rather than age, I am inclined to think that the changes in Vico's hip hop preference are more closely related to geography. As a child, Vico lived in Xinjiang. His experience from the past is oppressive. He could not speak his mind, so hip hop was his way of seeking recognition and comfort. Then, Vico grew up and left Xinjiang. As he finally enjoys free speech, he no longer needs to find recognition only through hip hop. Therefore, as he leaves Xinjiang, his preference changes from the lyrical content to the beats that he rocks to.

Another major topic in the interviews is how hip hop has, or has not, changed Vico. In most scenarios, Vico believes in self-autonomy rather than hip hop's power of influence. First of all, hip hop has no impact on how Vico chooses to see and interact with teachers.

<u>Interview vol.1,</u>

Vico	***30.***	***I knew about MC Hotdog 10 years ago, and a Beijing [rapper] called, In, In3.***	***我十年前就知道热狗，还有一个北京的[说唱歌手]叫 In，阴三儿。***
Researcher	31.	Who is that?	那是谁？
Vico	***32.***	***Like he has a song like, it's very rebellious.***	***就是他就是有一首歌是那种，就很叛逆。***
Researcher	***33.***	How so?	怎么呢？

Vico	***34.***	***Like it talks about the teachers, how the teachers were gunning at him at school and things like that…like it's a song to diss the teachers.***	***就是说老师，老师怎么在学校针对他怎么怎么怎么…就 diss 老师的歌***
Researcher	***35.***	Oh.	哦。
Vico	***36.***	***I thought it was funny so I listened to it then.***	***那时候就是觉得很好玩才听的。***

Then,

<u>Interview vol.1,</u>

Researcher	227.	Oh. So you were so young when you [listened to hip hop], right? Does it affect how you see teachers?	哦。那你那个时候那么小[听嘻哈]，对吧？它会不会影响到你对于老师的看法呢？
Vico	***228.***	***I think it doesn't affect how I see teachers. I always kind of have good relationships with the teacher.***	***我感觉它没有影响到我对老师的看法。我跟老师的关系一直都还是挺好的。***
Researcher	229.	Um-hum.	哦。
Vico	***230.***	***Yeah, because I wasn't { } first I wasn't oppressed by the teachers and my family, so I won't, like, be antagonizing the teachers and my parent { } just because I heard it in hip hop.***	***对，因为本身我没有{ }首先我没有受到老师和家里对我的压迫，所以我就是不会因为在嘻哈里听到这个东西{ }而跟老师和家长就产生对抗。***
Researcher	231.	Oh, understood.	哦，明白。
Vico	***232.***	***Yes, like hip hop doesn't really, um, like intervene in a lot of my choices. { } it is just mainly a, like if you run into things in your real life, then you can find some comfort in it, or through listening to it, you can get to know others' lives.***	***对，也就是说嘻哈并不会去，嗯，就是对我的选择有什么干预。{ }它只是说主要还是一个，比如说你现实生活中遇到了一些事情，然后你在那里面得到一些慰藉，或者是你通过听它，然后去了解了一些别人的生活。***
Researcher	233.	But it doesn't directly impact your lifestyle.	但它并没有直接去影响你的生活方式。
Vico	***234.***	***Yes.***	***是。***

I find it interesting that Vico does not project his resistance to the social institutions onto his teachers and parents, or the language school. From the previous analyses of the interviews, it is implied that Vico has a strong critique of social institutions and hegemonic norms. However, he does not have the same reactions to authoritative figures around him. Though he did find the song that "disses" teachers interesting, he does not appear to have the same feelings towards his teachers. Perhaps Vico's interpretation of hip hop is established on a relatively macro view: the "dissing" of the teacher or fathers in the rap songs he listens to are ultimately demonstrations of defiance towards social institutions and hegemony, it is indeed related to his life, but not necessarily the actual authoritative people in his microcosm or his lifestyle. Therefore, hip hop does not change Vico's view towards the "adults" around him, though the spirit of resistance resides in him.

The way hip hop has influenced Vico is internal. Hip hop does not tell Vico what to wear, how to speak, or how to think of his teachers or parents, but it does tell him to be himself. The following conversation further attests to the point.

Interview vol.1,

Researcher	388. Got it, okay. So do you think you can learn anything from hip hop?	明白了, 好。那你觉得你可以从嘻哈里面学到什么东西吗？
Vico	***389. Learn anything? Feel like I learned…to be confident. Like an attitude. Yeah.***	***学到什么东西？感觉学到的…自信。就是一种态度吧。对。***
Researcher	390. What else? Like for example to dress up trendily.	还有呢？比如说就是学到了打扮的很潮什么的。
Vico	***391. No not that, I'm okay as long as I look good, it's not like I deliberately copy [rappers].***	***那倒没有，就是自己穿的好看就行，没有刻意的模仿[说唱歌手]。***
Researcher	392. Oh, so it's …	哦，就是说…

Vico	***393. Like I don't really mimic how the rappers dress or something, uh, or the way they talk or something.***	***就是不会去刻意去模仿那些 rapper 的穿着或者什么的，呃，或者说话的方式什么的。***
Researcher	394. Oh.	哦。
Vico	***395. Yeah. I think it's better to just be me.***	***对。我觉得还是做自己就好。***
Researcher	396. Ah, I see I see.	啊，明白明白，
Vico	*397.* ***But "be me" is like a point that's pretty, frequently heard in hip hop.***	***但"做自己"这个也是一个还就是蛮，蛮经常在嘻哈里面听到的，一个观点。***
Researcher	398. Yes.	是的。

In Vico's opinion, hip hop and he are two individual organisms. In the last few sections where I analyzed Vico's understanding of hip hop and the world, Vico has made it clear that hip hop grows on its own and takes from its surroundings—so does Vico. He learns the ideas of "freedom" and "being oneself" from hip hop but acts on his own terms. While hip hop remains a source of new information and ideologies to Vico, it is not a factor in the choices he makes. Later, he mentions again how hip hop does not bring bad influences on him, especially in terms of his behaviors.

Interview vol.1,

Researcher	347. Uh-hum. So that means like, your parents don't find you rebellious.	嗯。也就是说呃，你爸妈是不觉得你叛逆的。
Vico	***348. Maybe a little, like I would talk back when I was little, and they would think that I'm rebellious. But to my age now, they stopped thinking that. Like my mom and dad don't especially limit my freedom, like if I told them about a lot of things, like what I want to do, they would agree. Unless there are***	***也会也会有一点，就是说，小时候跟他们顶嘴，他们就觉得我很叛逆。但是到了现在这个年纪，他们也就不会觉得了。就是我妈和我爸不会就是特别限制自由，就是有很多事情我给他们说了，我想干什么干什么，他们就会同意。就除非有些事情他们实在觉得不应该，就在他们的观念里，不应该是我这个年龄干的事情，他们就不会让我去做。***

		things that they honestly think I shouldn't do, like from their mindset, things that are inappropriate for my age, they wouldn't let me do those things.	
Researcher	349.	Why don't they find you rebellious now?	为什么现在他们不觉你叛逆呢？
Vico	***350.***	***Because I can negotiate things peacefully now, unlike when I was little. I get mad at whatever they asked me to do when I was little, and I would talk back loudly. Like now I just reason with them.***	***因为现在我就能跟他们就是心平气和地去商量商量一个事情，不像小时候。小时候要我干什么我就很生气，就会大声跟他们大声说话。到现在就是讲道理就行了。***
Researcher	351.	So do you think your "rebellious behaviors" in your adolescence have anything to do with your listening to hip hop?	那你觉得你青春期时候的那些"叛逆"跟你听嘻哈有没有关系呢？
Vico	***352.***	***Not really, I think even if I don't listen to it I would still be different { } when I reach a certain age.***	***没有吧，我觉得就算不听这些东西我到了一定年纪也会{ }和以前不一样。***

Continuing the topic about rebelliousness, Vico gives explanations on his disruptive behaviors at the language school.

<u>Interview vol.3,</u>

Researcher	96.	Uh-hum, I see. And um, like before when we were in language school, at the beginning you were skipping school and things. So why did you behave that way?	嗯。明白了。然后嗯，那么之前呃在语言学校的时候呢，一开始你不怎么去上学啊什么的。那你当事时是为什么会有这些行为呢？

Vico	***97.***	***There were { } like there were things going on at home. I was going through stuff too. And afterward, things got better, got back to normal. There were things that were…how do I put it? Like they're bothering me. So I wasn't in the mood to go to school. It wasn't my attitude to school, it's just I was going through things at that time.***	***当时也是{ }就是家里有些事情啥的嗯。然后自己的一些事情。然后后面，后面其实也就好了，也就开始正常了。是有些事情弄得我之前…怎么说呢？就心情一直都很不好。也没有心思去学习啊什么的。那并不是对学习的态度，只是说那一段时间里面遇到了一些事情而已。***
Researcher	98.	Oh that's how it is. So are those behaviors related to your interests in hip hop?	哦这样啊。那这些行为跟你喜欢嘻哈有关系吗？
Vico	***99.***	***Well I know what they say. But then I would say that's, one-sided. They're probably not only misunderstanding me, but they are also misunderstanding the hip hop culture.***	***呃我知道他们怎么说我的。那我觉得这就，片面了。他们就可能不只是对我有误解，可能是对嘻哈这个文化有误解。***
Researcher	100.	Uh-hum, how?	嗯，怎么了？
Vico	***101.***	***Like, for instance, even if I had worn a plaid shirt every day, oh, like dressed up very very ordinarily. And I didn't go to class, they wouldn't have thought it's because of hip hop, they'd simply think it's because of me as a person or something. But like because I { } but it's actually the same, like if … if I were just ordinary, and I came across these things, I wouldn't have gone to class, because I was really in a bad mood, I was very annoyed, they would think that maybe it's really because I was going through things or whatnot. But if they knew that I'm into this thing, this culture, they would think maybe that is why I became rebellious.***	***就是，比如说，如果就算我就天天穿个格子衬衣，哦，很穿的很就很普通很普通。然后我也不去上课，他们就不会觉得是因为嘻哈，他们就只会觉得是因为我这个人怎么样怎么样。但就是因为我{ }但其实是同一样，同样如果我是…就是很普通的样子，也是遇到这些事情，我也不会去上课，因为我心情真的很差，很烦，他们就会觉得可能我真的是有什么事情或怎么样。但是如果我他们了解到我喜欢这个东西，喜欢这个文化，他们就会觉得可能因为这些东西导致我变得很叛逆。***

Vico is fully aware of the misconceptions people have for him. He reinforces that hip hop does not account for his behaviors and explains that he was having personal challenges. Much

like how hip hop affiliates do not want rap songs to be interpreted as mere combinations of vulgar lingo, Vico wishes not to be defined by his occasional misbehaviors. Like hip hop, Vico is being misunderstood by others, and he knows it.

An essential part of Vico's identity is how he engages in self-expression. Earlier in the section about Vico's understanding of hip hop, he mentions that hip hop is a tool of expression for the oppressed. From the analyses above in this section, we can see that Vico feels his power to speak freely is restricted. Therefore, hip hop is also a way for people like Vico to manifest their emotions.

Interview vol.1,

Researcher	97.	Alright. So do you express yourself through hip hop?	好。那你会通过嘻哈表达你自己嘛？
Vico	***98.***	***Yes I do. Like if I heard a song, it feels like how I was feeling at the moment, I would share it on WeChat.***	***我会。就是比如说听到一首歌，感觉它很符合我现在的心情，我就会把它分享到微信上。***
Researcher	99.	Oh. So when you share, do you expect people to listen to the song?	哦。那你在分享的时候，你会期待别人去听这个歌嘛？
Vico	***100.***	***Well not really, I will just share it if I like it. But if a friend or, they heard it and they told me they liked it, I would be really happy. But I don't expect everybody to get it or understand me through the song.***	***也不会，我就觉得自己喜欢就会分享。但是如果有朋友或者，他们听到跟我说很好听，我也会很开心。但是并不期待每个人都懂或者是通过这个歌来理解我。***
Researcher	101.	So this is actually a relatively private behavior.	就是这个其实还是一个相对比较私密的行为。
Vico	***102.***	***Yes.***	***对。***

Vico's current way of presenting himself through hip hop is very private. He does not care much about being understood by everyone, meaning the action of sharing may be more about pure expression and self-recognition. Nowadays, he shares rap songs that speak his mind

only through relatively private platforms like WeChat, an instant messaging application that has the function of sharing short posts within each user's friend circle. I wonder if it was the same case in the past.

Interview vol.1,

Researcher	237. I see I see, that's very independent. So do you have friends who also like hip hop around you now?	明白了明白了，很独立哈。那你现在周围也有喜欢嘻哈的朋友吗？
Vico	***238. Yes.***	***有。***
Researcher	239. What do you talk to them about?	那你会跟他们聊些什么呢？
Vico	***240. Depends. Usually in the "fanquan[19]" we talk about, like for example all kinds of albums, who's going to have a show next or something. Oh, and the rappers' gossip.***	***看情况。一般饭圈的我们聊，比如说各种新专辑，接下来什么谁演出了什么的。哦，还会聊些他们歌手八卦。***
Researcher	241. Depends?	看情况？
Vico	***242. Yeah because the friends now are like, not many of them { } like stuff with contents. People are just, listening, they just like to listen.***	***对因为现在身边的朋友就是，喜欢这种{ }有内容的不是很多。大家都是只是，听，只喜欢听。***
Researcher	243. What does that mean?	什么意思呢？
Vico	***244. Like the type of people around me now like to listen to is not as deep. The friends in the past get it more.***	***就是现在周围人喜欢听的类型也没有那么有深度了。以前的朋友比较懂。***
Researcher	245. So do you find opportunity to, like talk to people who gets it more?	那你会找机会去跟，就是更懂这个东西的人去聊吗？
Vico	***246. Yeah, but I rarely come across any. If I did, like run into the people I can talk to we'd get together and { } talk about the lyrics and stuff.***	***会啊，但是很少碰到。如果我碰到了，就是，能跟我聊得来的就会一起{}聊一些歌词啥的。***

[19] Fanquan (饭圈) originally refers to the group of fans of certain celebrities. The term currently associates more often with fans who are more interested in their idols' personal lives than other aspects.

Evidently, there are different interaction patterns regarding how Vico interacts within his hip hop community. With the people who "get it," he engages deeper into the discussion of meanings. When interacting with the "fanquan," Vico keeps up with the gossip. His differentiated interactions in different groups are, to some extent, expansions to Androutsopoulos'(2009) "three spheres" of communication analyzed in the theoretic framework. His ways of interacting with other fans depend on the level and aspects of interests they share. Though he is at ease with both ways, it is implied that he prefers the first. However, his sharing remains private in whichever interaction. He only exchanges thoughts and opinions within his circle.

Expanding on this topic, Vico and his friend engage in their hip hop literacies differently. Compared with his friend, Vico's way is less explicit.

Interview vol.2,

Researcher	111. Uh-hum, understood. You also said that you use hip hop to express yourself…	嗯，明白。你刚也有提到你会用通过嘻哈来表达你自己…
Vico	***112. Um-hum,*** yes***, it's a tool of self-expression.***	***嗯，是，表达自我的一种工具。***
Researcher	113. So how do you usually use this tool to express yourself?	那你觉得一般是怎么样用这个工具来表达自己呢？
Vico	***114. Well…like my friend, he would write, like write lyrics about it.***	***嗯…像我身边的朋友，他就会写，把它写成歌词啊。***
Researcher	115. Uh-huh.	嗯。
Vico	***116. Like, when I went abroad, hum? Is it the first year? He wrote a song for me.***	***就，在我出国的时候，诶？第一年吧？他写了首歌给我。***
Researcher	117. Oh, that's nice. What else?	哦。挺好。那还有呢？
Vico	***118. And like what I said before, sometimes a song really fits into my mood, I'd share it. Or like use a***	***还有就是就像我之前说的，就是有时一首歌特别符合我的心情，就会把它分享出来。或者是用一句歌词去激励我或者怎么样。***

	piece of lyrics to motivate me or something.	
Researcher	119. Um-hum.	嗯。
Vico	***120. And this kind of sharing is actually um…mainly sharing on social media.***	***那这个分享其实嗯…就还是分享在社交平台上面。***

Though Vico's expression through hip hop is not as explicit, he still enjoys it. Vico is not eager to be heard, but that does not mean that he does not want to be. Vico shares another memory of how he used to interact with other rap fans.

Interview vol.2,

Researcher	121. Oh, what if there are no social media?	哦，那如果没有社交平台呢？
Vico	***122. Without social media, I'll just, haha, like use the lyrics like a motto or something. Or when I was in junior high, we'd get together with the classmate I told you about, the two of us. We share a speaker together, a very cheap speaker. The two of us would download the songs we like and put them in an SD card. We would sit near the court and listen to songs after playing basketball, the two of us together.***	***没有社交平台，那就只能，呵呵，就可以自己把它歌词当成座右铭或者是怎么样。或者我初中的时候，就会跟我之前提到那个同学，我们俩一起。我们俩一起有一个音响，很便宜的一个音响。我们两个就会把自己喜欢的歌下到那个 SD 卡里。然后我们俩打完篮球就会坐到球场旁边边听歌，咱们俩一起。***
Researcher	123. Oh.	哦。
Vico	***124. Oh, then like, for example like I heard a song that's really good yesterday, then I would download it to the card, and insert and play. Then he would say that there's another song that's good, then the two of us would listen to it. Like it's a mutual song-recommending process, with a lot of discussions.***	***哦，然后就是像，比如就是我昨天听到那个什么特别好听的歌，然后我想到下到这个卡里，我就插上听。然后他说他有一个什么好听的歌，我俩就会这样听。就是一个互推歌曲的一个过程，还很多讨论。***

Researcher	125. So does the way you share now feel different from the past?	那你觉得现在跟以前分享感觉有什么区别呢？
Vico	***126. It feels less…involved than in the past. Now it's like, just a click from the fingers and it's sent, whether they listen to it or not, honestly I wouldn't know.***	***就感觉没有以前。。。那么有参与感。现在就感觉，手指一点就发过去了，他/她听不听，这说实话我也不知道。***
Researcher	127. Uh-hum. Hahaha.	嗯。哈哈哈哈。
Vico	***128. Yeah, they could like, I share with them, but they don't listen to it, and later they reply "oh, that's really good".***	***对，他/她可能，我跟他/她分享，但是他/她没听过，一会儿回复"啊，真好听"。***
Researcher	129. Hahahaha, yeah. Well, let me think. So that means the way you communicate with others, and express yourself, through hip hop has changed.	哈哈哈哈，是的。嗯，我想一下。也就是说其实就是你现在跟别人用嘻哈沟通的方式，表达自己的方式也是产生了改变。
Vico	***130. Yeah, now it feels more egoistic. Like it's just about self-expression, no need for other people to get it. Well, it feels less social after there're social media. Sometimes I think it's more fun when the technology is less developed.***	***对，感觉现在更加自我。就是光表达自己就行，不需要让别人理解。嗯。觉得有了社交媒体之后反而没有那么社交了。有时候还是觉得技术不那么发达的时候比较有意思。***

Vico's point about social media's influence on interaction is intriguing. He feels less involved as even though there could be real-time responses, there is no guarantee that the response is authentic. He prefers interactions back in the old days, without social media. This also implies that Vico desires meaningful connections with others, the same ones he had sitting next to the basketball court.

Vico's cravings for interaction could be a result of his feeling of being limited. In the previous analyses of his local situation and personal experiences, it is conveyed that Vico was restricted by his local social institutions, that he could not say what he wanted to say for a long time. Therefore, his attempts to engage in meaningful conversations with those who "get" hip

hop like himself may be ways to seek further validation and recognition. This also means that he uses his hip hop literacies to find resonance not only through rap songs but also through the community.

Overall, Vico indeed sees himself through his hip hop literacies. By analyzing the transcripts, I realize that while Vico sees himself and makes sense of his experience and challenges through artists' sharing of their reality, he insists on making the choices of how he internalizes them independently. Vico is aware of the hegemonic restrictions of his local context, so he attempts to recognize the limitations and validate his feelings through interactions in different dimensions of hip hop. In Vico's case, parts of his understanding of himself are acquired using hip hop literacies.

Vico as a learner

As this research aims to explore Vico's learner identities and hip hop literacies, I find it helpful to analyze Vico as a learner specifically. The analysis in this section mainly consists of three components: 1) how does Vico learn? 2) how does hip hop influence how Vico learns? And 3) Vico's experiences of hip hop in a school context.

Firstly, Vico likes to learn interactively. Continuing the point of Vico's desire to find deeper connections, I find he has the same urges when it comes to learning.

Interview vol.1,

Researcher	167. Uh-hum. So how do you learn?	嗯。你是怎么样学习的呢？
Vico	***168. My interest in learning is more about like interactions, like interactive learning.***	***我这个学习的兴趣更倾向于就是互动，有点互动式的学习。***

Researcher	169. Uh-hum.	嗯。
Vico	***170. Because like growing up and studying in the mainland I only study to take tests, to do homework. Learning very passively. Like I hope I can be like, more active in the future, and learn things I am interested in.***	***因为我就是从小在国内上学的时候就是为了应付考试，应付作业。很被动在学习。就希望在以后的就是能，自己主动一点，然后去学自己感兴趣的事情。然后需要说跟老师和同学之间多一点的互动。***
Researcher	171. So your interest in interactive learning, aside from your past experience in the mainland, what are other reasons why you felt the need to have more interactions with you teachers and peers?	那你为什么想要互动多一点呢？
Vico	***172. Maybe because of my personality, I'm more like, more open, haha. And like restless, I want to talk to other people.***	***也可能因为我性格吧，是比较那种，我比较 open，呵呵。而且是坐不住那种性格的，想跟别人说话。***

Vico's preference for interactions in class could be a presentation of his urge for expression. As analyzed in earlier sections, Vico inherited his desire to interact with others through personal experiences of feeling restricted. Aside from interactive learning, Vico feels he response less well to texts.

<u>Interview vol.1,</u>

Researcher	179. So what other type of learning do you prefer?	还有那种学习方式你比较喜欢呢？
Vico	***180. Images, I think texts are too boring.***	***图像吧，我感觉文字太枯燥。***
Researcher	181. Uh-hum. Well, but when you listen to hip hop, you look up the lyrics, but isn't that also texts?	嗯。诶，但是那你听到嘻哈的时候，你会主动去查歌词，但那不是也是文字吗？
Vico	***182. Yeah. But it has the value of music. There will be melodies in my brain. There's a flow to the lyrics themselves too.***	***对。但是它有音乐的价值。会有旋律在脑海里。歌词本身也是有节奏的。***

Researcher	183. Oh.	哦。
Vico	***184. Yes. Like I think the audio effects are very helpful to me. It would be hard if you ask me to memorize texts, but lyrics are very easy to remember.***	***对。会觉得就是它的音效上面对我的辅助是比较大的。你让我记一段文字我记不住，但是歌词就很容易了。***

The value of the musicality of rap should not be ignored. Vico believes that even though rap lyrics are ultimately texts, they are rhythmic and are combined with sounds. Though Bradley's (2009) focus is to compare rap and poetry, Vico's opinion adds to his findings by acknowledging the educational value of the poetics of rap.

Secondly, Vico argues that hip hop is not a bad influence on learning. Corresponding to the early point of how hip hop does not change Vico's lifestyle, he thinks that hip hop also does not influence whether he wants to study or not.

Interview vol.1,

Researcher	123. Alright. So do you think that, your ability to express yourself through hip hop, has it influenced your learning negatively?	好。那你觉得啊，你用嘻哈来表达自己这种能力，它有没有负面地影响到你的学习？
Vico	***124. I don't think so.***	***我觉得没有。***
Researcher	125. So you think there's only positive influences?	就是你觉得只有正面的影响？
Vico	***126. I feel like, these thing are like, actually separated from studying. It doesn't { } influence specifically, I think I separate these things. Like I not going to not study because of something. If I want to study.***	***我觉得就是，这种东西感觉跟学习其实是，也是那种分开的感觉。它不会去{ }特别地有影响，我觉得这些东西我分的比较开。就不会因为一个东西就会让我不去学习或者怎么样。如果我想学的话。***
Researcher	127. Ph, so like it doesn't decide if you want to study or not.	哦，就是它不能决定你想不想学习。
Vico	***128. Yeah.***	***对。***

Nevertheless, hip hop does have some influences on Vico's learning:

Interview vol.1,

Researcher	129. Oh. So does it affect how you learn?	那它会影响你学习的方式吗？
Vico	***130. Then it indeed has some influences, like it helps a bit.***	***那确实有一些影响，就有一些帮助。***
Researcher	131. Oh, how does it help?	哦，怎么样帮助呢？
Vico	***132. Like for example I hear a sentence, and feel like I know these words, I'll look it up and see what they mean when they're joined together. Um then, what do they mean in the lyrics.***	***比如说听到一句话，就感觉这几个单词我都认识，我就去看一下到底是加在一起是啥意思。啊然后，在歌词里又是什么意思。***
Researcher	133. Oh. So the lyrics that you'd look up, does it have a Chinese translation? Or is it just in English?	哦。那你看的歌词，它是会有中文翻译吗？还是就是英文歌词？
Vico	***134. Some do, some don't.***	***有些会有，有些会没有。***
Researcher	135. So would you think the ones with a Chinese translation are easier to understand?	那你会觉得有中文翻译的更好理解吗？
Vico	***136. Yes.***	***对的。***
Researcher	137. I see, so it's…	明白，就是它是…
Vico	***138. Some are like…***	***有的就是…***
Researcher	139. Uh-hum, you go ahead.	嗯，你说。
Vico	***140. I will look it up if it's without translation, but sometimes I don't understand { } what it means. And like, ultimately the westerners and I probably have different ideologies, the wording could have other meanings in it, or like a pun or something, I may not get it.***	***没有翻译的话我会去看，但是有时候不会明白{ }什么意思。而且就是，终究我和这些西方人的这个思想可能不一样，那个单词放在那它可能是别的意思，或者是那种双关什么的，我可能就不太理解。***
Researcher	141. Oh, so you…	哦。那你…
Vico	***142. So I'll still have to look it up. I do look things up actively.***	***那我还是得去查。会主动去查的。***

Hip hop is an incentive for Vico to learn English outside of the classroom. Even without considering the rhythmics of rap, the process of cyphering lyrics still motivates Vico. Because of his desire to understand the lyrics, Vico actively looks up the meaning of the vocabulary in the context of the song. Thus, Vico's passion for hip hop becomes an extrinsic motivation for self-directed learning.

Finally, Vico's experience of hip hop in the classroom is relatively positive. According to the interviews, I was the only teacher who brought hip hop elements into the classroom. The following clips are his recollection of the feelings he had of the experience.

Interview vol. 2,

Researcher	55.	Oh. So you mentioned that, I'm the only one who used hip hop in class. Can you tell me how you really feel at the time?	哦。那你刚有说过，只有我在课上是用到过嘻哈这个元素的。那你能不能告诉我一下当时你的真实感受？
Vico	***56.***	***I think this teacher is very cool.***	***我觉得这个老师很酷。***
Researcher	57.	Uh-hum?	嗯？
Vico	***58.***	***Like you like the same thing as I do.***	***就是你跟我喜欢的东西一样哦啊。***
Researcher	59.	Oh…so how would you describe the experience?	哦…那你怎么描述那个经验呢？
Vico	***60.***	***I never thought I'd see this in a class, like things I am very interested in. Because I know these things, so I feel like I'm { } so motivated.***	***我就没想到我能在课堂上还能看到这些，就是很感兴趣的东西。因为我是会这些的，然后就会让我{ }就是很有动力。***

Presentations of hip hop in teaching contexts can be motivating as well. Aside from being motivated by hip hop itself, the experience of seeing hip hop in classrooms is also exciting for Vico because it is something he knows. Though Vico may not feel like a co-constructor in the classroom just because he knows hip hop, his opinion still supports Greenfield's (2007)

argument. His rich knowledge of hip hop necessitated a different level of involvement—even responsibility—for the lesson from him.

Vico also thinks that rap music in classes can be good memory stimulators. As Vico's daily life includes hip hop, I am inclined to consider the feasibility of making use of it as an attention grabber in class and a memory trigger. His further comments attest to this point.

Interview vol. 2,

Researcher	61.	Oh. So how do you think of the learning results from that way?	哦。那你会觉得那样的学习效果怎么样？
Vico	***62.***	***I think the knowledge is more solid. Like for instance you're teaching now, and you played their { } one of their songs. In the future in my daily life, every time I hear that song I will recall, like, the content of that class.***	***我觉得[知识]会更加牢固。就比如说你在上课，你放了一个{ }他/她的一首歌。在我以后的生活中，我只听到那首歌我都会想起来，就是，那节课的内容。***
Researcher	63.	Oh.	哦。
Vico	***64.***	***Yeah. Like it's more memorable.***	***对。就是他是一个比较有记忆点的东西。***

Furthermore, through hip hop, Vico and I have established a good rapport.

Interview vol. 2,

Researcher	65.	Oh. So after I used what you like in a class, do you think you and I are closer than before?	哦。那你会觉得就是当时我在课上用了这个你也喜欢的东西之后，你会觉得就是跟我的关系更近了吗？
Vico	***66.***	***Yeah, I do feel closer, because we have the same hobby.***	***对，我会觉得关系更近，因为我们有一样的爱好。***
Researcher	67.	Um-hum.	嗯嗯。
Vico	***68.***	***Yeah. I would feel like, well, I trust you more because of it. And then later we were chatting pretty often.***	***嗯。会觉得就是，呃，是因为这个事情更加的信任你。然后在后面我们其实经常有聊天啊什么的。***

Researcher	69.	So do you think our trust is because of this or is there anything else?	那你觉得就是因为这个事情我们产生信任呢{ }还是因为什么别的事情？
Vico	***70.***	***Because I already think that { } like you're different from the other teachers.***	***因为我本身就觉得{ }就你跟其他老师不太一样。***
Researcher	71.	Am I?	是吗？
Vico	***72.***	***Yeah, haha, you are especially cool. Plus you like the same thing as I. So I trust you more.***	***是啊，哈哈，你特别酷。而且还有就是跟我喜欢一样的东西。所以就更加信任。***
Researcher	73.	Um-hum, I see.	嗯，明白。
Vico	74.	It's, it's kind of like I am recognized in some way.	***也，也算是觉得是某种程度上得到了认可吧。***

Essentially, Vico feels validated through the experience. Vico's trust in me is mainly grounded on two points: 1) I am "different" from other teachers, 2) we share a common interest. As analyzed previously, Vico likes things or people that are "cool" and "different" because having an "attitude" is important to him—all terms that he associates with "freedom" and hip hop. Meanwhile, he wishes to connect with others who share similar interests in the lyrical contents of rap songs. As a result, when I employed hip hop elements in the lessons, Vico felt recognized because there are other "cool" people who like hip hop just like him.

In general, Vico's hip hop literacies are beneficial to his learning. Vico is a visual learner who also enjoys interactive learning. While he usually does not like texts, his investment in rap lyrics incentivize him to actively engage in textual meaning-making. His experience of rap in class is pleasant and validating. Therefore, I am inclined to think that Vico could advance his academic achievements by further exploiting his hip hop literacies.

3.5 Findings

The analysis of the interviews is fruitful. To address the three questions raised in chapter 3.3.2, I summarize the findings using three aspects:

1) Relations between hip hop literacies and learner identities.
2) Hip hop literacies and the nurturing of ownership and expression.
3) The feasibility of using hip hop literacies as tools of learning engagement for international students.

First, hip hop literacies affect how learners learn and how they view themselves. In Vico's case, his abilities to interact in different dimensions of the hip hop culture allowed him to gain information through lyrics and interactions within his hip hop community. Meanwhile, his hip hop literacies aided him in memory retention of class materials when rap music is introduced in the class. Thus, I conclude that hip hop literacies are worthy of being further used in educational contexts.

Furthermore, the way hip hop literacies interplay with Vico's learner identity is internal and obscure. One of the research questions of this study is: How do hip hop literacies enable or disable learners to foster their understanding of their experience of becoming and being a learner? Though the interviews offer limited insights to this question, they indeed shed light on how Vico's hip hop literacies have reconstructed his learner identity. Vico describes himself as a visual learner who finds texts boring, yet his interest in rap motivates him to engage in textual learning. This means that his hip hop literacies reshaped his learner identity, though he is unaware of it.

Second, I find Vico's hip hop literacies cultivates his understanding of power and resistance. Though the interview questions are revolved around hip hop, Vico finds a way of sharing political perspectives because hip hop is political. He came to realizations about censorship and local politics through his personal experiences, then internalizes these understandings through hip hop interactions like deciphering the hidden messages in the lyrics and noticing how hip hop is censored. Meanwhile, using his abilities to interact in various dimensions of hip hop, Vico comprehends local and global socio-political institutions and hegemony. He believes that hip hop is the voice for the oppressed because he has heard it in the songs he enjoys and resonates with. He has a plan to become a part of that voice.

Third, hip hop literacies may assist the engagement of international students like Vico. In Vico's case, he is motivated when rap appears in the classroom because his knowledge is recognized and validated in this way. Though it was only one encounter with hip hop in school, Vico demonstrated good improvements during and after the hip hop lesson I organized: he was actively participating in group discussions during the class; he insisted on making up for the mid-term presentation even though he missed the presentation day; he started to open up to his teacher—me—and started going to school more often. Expanding on this, I believe that other students who share different experiences and interests can also be engaged through hip hop. Though Vico's local experiences are specific, people from all over the world can use hip hop as a tool of resistance because globalized hip hop adapts to local situations everywhere it goes (Chang, 2007; Pennycook, 2007). This means that international students from other countries or regions can find validation through hip hop in classrooms.

In addition, one does not have to possess the same expertise Vico has to enjoy hip hop because it is a form of popular culture that has familiarized itself with people from all over the

world (Osumare, 2007). Validating the knowledge outside of school empowers the learners and brings balance to the power dynamics of regular classrooms (Barton & Hamilton, 1999; Belle, 2016; Sánchez, 2010; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Therefore, even international students who are not hip hop affiliated can find recognition in this way, as on the one hand, it de-power the teacher by inviting a subject outside of the teacher's area of expertise into the classroom; on the other, it demonstrates the teacher's effort and willingness to validate the students' and knowledge from outside of the classroom.

To conclude, the analysis of the interviews provides interesting insights. It is safe to say that hip hop literacies can shape a hip hop affiliated person's learner identities, nurture their sense of agency and expression, and provide incentives to learning engagement. These findings also implicate the necessity of continuing the expansion of our current scope of hip hop pedagogy.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

4.1 Conclusion

This study explored the interrelationships between hip hop literacies and learner identities through the case of an international language student, Vico. Through interpretations of the entire analysis, qualitative findings are used to enrich the descriptions of international students like Vico. I highlighted how his learner identities are shaped by his personal experiences and reshaped by his hip hop literacies. In many ways, I find Vico's case attests to the previous studies presented in Chapter 2.

At the beginning of this research, five research questions were proposed. In the following, findings from reviewing literature and analyzing the case of Vico are combined to better address the questions:

1. Do hip hop literacies affect the way learners learn? If so, how?

Vico's abilities to use and understand hip hop certainly change his learning preference. Even with common critiques against its explicitness of violence and sexism, hip hop literacies may have positive influences on language development. Learning through hip hop literacies may bring linguistic improvements (Androutsopoulos, 2009; Belle, 2016); ESL learners may benefit significantly from hip hop because it is a bridge that connects multiple domains (Barrett, 2013; Forell, 2006; Wetmore, 2006). This is especially true for Vico, whose abilities to decipher messages in rap lyrics elevated his linguistic capabilities. In addition, Vico's case indicates that his hip hop literacies helped to reconstruct his learning preferences, though he may be unaware

of it. With hip hop as an incentive, Vico actively engages in textual learning; this means his hip hop literacies reshape his identity as a visual learner. Therefore, not only may hip hop literacies changes how learners learn, but they may also contribute to language development for language learners.

2. How do hip hop literacies enable or disable learners to foster their understanding of their experience of becoming and being a learner?

Unfortunately, my research was not able to determine the relations between hip hop literacies and Vico's understanding of becoming a learner. According to the analysis, Vico's experience of becoming a learner is built more heavily on his early local experience in Xinjiang rather than his abilities to use hip hop. However, evidence is found on how hip hop is a tool for Vico to make sense of his local, social, and political identities. As concluded in Belle's (2016) study, with hip hop materials, learners may take up a critical lens on society and make personal connections through collective experiences with the instructor's guidance. In Vico's case, he was able to do so independently. His example broadens the possibility of using hip hop literacies to engage in critical reflections on society and self.

3. How may hip hop literacies be used for learners to find their voices?

Through the review of the literature, I found that hip hop literacies may be beneficial to critical literacy development, which encourages learners to understand themselves better. As many scholars attest, hip hop literacies are tools for expressing knowledge of self (Androutsopoulos, 2009; Belle, 2016; Keith & Endsley, 2020) and exchanging lived experiences (Haugen, 2003; Hernández, Weinstein, & Muñoz-Laboy, 2012). As a matter of fact, hip hop is

sometimes a symbolic system through which learners align themselves to negotiate their own identities (Ibrahim, 2009). Indeed, hip hop culture is a symbol of freedom to Vico. Though he has yet to explicitly voice his resistance to the hegemonic norms through hip hop, he has engaged in meaningful interactions with his hip hop community. His ability to communicate through different spheres of hip hop contributes to his personal construction of the concept of power and the negotiation of his identity. In this respect, I believe hip hop literacies can enable learners to understand their experience. Similarly, hip hop literacies may also be tools for learners to find their voices.

4. How do hip hop literacies nurture learners' sense of power, agency, and responsibility for social change?

In relation to hip hop's potential for voice, many believe that hip hop can be the medium where learners engage in discussions regarding social justice, civic movements, hegemony, and more (Arksoy, 2020; Kelly, 2013; Orejuela & Shonekan, 2018; Sánchez, 2010). In the case of Vico, I find his investment in hip hop culture prompts his understanding and engagement in social justice and equality. His personal experiences of being oppressed initiated his realization of social institutions and injustice, and his hip hop literacies fostered his understandings of agency and power. He is extremely concerned about local censorship as he believes it deprives the voices of the oppressed, so he actively engages in interactions with the "underground" hip hop community. Insisting on wanting to make authentic hip hop, he plans to have stability in life before making music. It is evident that Vico's hip hop literacies have nurtured his social responsibilities, albeit with political limitations.

5. How can hip hop be a tool to engage (international) students?

The findings of this research exhibit promising potential of using hip hop as a tool to engage international students. As examined by many researchers, validating the learners' knowledge outside of school empowers the learners and brings balance to the power dynamics of regular classrooms (Barton & Hamilton, 1999; Belle, 2016; Sánchez, 2010; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). In Vico's experience of seeing hip hop elements in a lesson, he felt motivated not only because his knowledge is recognized and validated, but also that his position as passive student was switched to a co-constructor of the lesson. I must hasten to add that one does not need to be hip hop affiliated to be empowered in this way, as hip hop is a global pop phenomenon which will be familiar to many of the learners. Embedded in the theories and evidence above, it is likely that hip hop in school can engage learners and foster better learning experiences, albeit to varying degrees of the learners' affiliation to hip hop.

On the basis of this study, hip hop literacies and learner identities are interrelated. While the learner's identities and personal experience cultivate their ability to interact through hip hop, their literacies of hip hop reshape how they learn and embody their resistance to hegemony. It is worth noticing that specific ways of how the interrelations and how learners demonstrate their resilience vary. Thus, the findings of this research have their limitations in terms of generalization.

4.2 Indications for future studies

By conducting this research, possibilities of future studies surface. Initially, I assumed the findings to be more language-learning related, or more closely centralized around Vico's experience with hip hop alone. However, as our conversations deepened, the dimensions of the interviews became amazingly intricate and multifaceted. It is a shame that many interesting points in the interviews had to be left out to avoid digression. I truly wish to make full use of the data in the future.

First, further investigations on hip hop's specific localization are important. During the analysis of data, I have come to realize that the restrictions of the mainland's policies and social institutions on hip hop's local development is unique. In the case of our participant, his local situation adds to the difficulty of social engagement through hip hop. The level of explicitness is limited by local politics. In contrast, studies on Hong Kong hip hop show that the local situation and policies aided the bald expressions of anti-oppression (Chang, 2007; Lin, 2009). This means that socio-political limitations on hip hop's development may vary in different regions and countries. Therefore, to gain further understandings about hip hop literacies and international learners' identities, it is necessary to take into account the locality of the learners.

Second, future studies could fruitfully explore learner interactions through social media. Vico made an interesting comment that he feels less social with social media. He also mentions various modes of online interactions with his peers. To Vico, social media discredits the authenticity of response. I am curious about how social media, as a pop culture phenomenon, influences how learners learn by changing their methods of interaction.

Last, future research might apply in the use of rap music in language learning contexts. As attested by a number of researchers, hip hop should be introduced in class for its ability to

empower and validate learners. However, few mention the practicality of rap texts in classrooms for ESL development. As presented in this research, similar to visual aids, the musicality and rhythmics of rap make hip hop texts very memorable when used as class materials. Thus, I urge further use of rap songs as teaching materials, especially for ESL/EAL educators.

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