

RESEARCH ARTICLES

"I Have Become a Warrior in the Xiang Army": Legacies, Nostalgia, and Identity in Chinese Regional Hip-Hop

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Hip-hop and rap music culture have shaped various local cultural forms in Asian countries and regions. This study explores hip-hop cultural politics at a local level, drawing on Chinese regional traditions and knowledge and responding to Western-axis hip-hop culture making. Through an analysis of the corpus of lyrics, videos, and performances of the 'Huxiang Flow' hip-hop genre in Hunan, China and 20 semi-structured interviews with Hunanese hip-hop audiences, this study identified how the parochial hip-hop genre has conceived local discursive fields and cultural identity through the rejuvenation of dialects and cultural ingredients and how it has preserved local linguistic and cultural heritages. Our analysis revealed the thoughtful, philosophical, and moral transmission of locality based on school instruction and incorporated in hip-hop music that has been well received by local audiences and communities. Based on our findings, we propose that hip-hop music is a vehicle of identity in the local community, presenting a grassroots, interactive, and critical perspective on the interpretation of identity in locality.

Introduction

Scholars have recognised the important role of space and place in terms of both making music and creating identities (Bennett, 2000). In the context of music production and appreciation, identity is a dynamics process of self-experience that both recreates and reflects individuals within society and society within individuals. Music is an important cultural carrier of reminiscent and nostalgic discourse and is an effective mechanism of identity configuration (Driessen, 2019). Through a study of the modulations of Chinese regional hip-hop at the intersection of indigenisation and globalisation, this paper argues that there is a conjunction between hip-hop music, identity construction, and regional nostalgia.

In previous times, nostalgia was sometimes considered a social disease, a physical expression of homesickness, connoting ontological homelessness (Rosen, 1975). Discussions of nostalgia often involve fragmentation, alienation, and loss of autonomy (Chrostowska, 2010). People connect past,

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present, and future through nostalgia, and they use nostalgia to reflect on who they are and where they want to go (Jing, 2006). Nostalgia builds imaginary communities that consist of shared experiences (Wegner, 2002), assists in the recovery of past emotions (Bryant, 2005), and recreates positive and idealised memories and sites in which identities can be defined (Meng et al., 2021). People experience nostalgic emotions when they are dissatisfied with their current situations (Caton & Santos, 2007).

Hip-hop is both a culture and an art form with origins on the African continent that was developed by African, Latino, and Caribbean Americans in the Bronx, USA (Rivera, 2003). It began to take hold in China in the late 1990s, when a few Chinese pop artists tried to incorporate and merge hip-hop characteristics that were prevalent in the USA in their music. Hip-hop experienced major growth in China in the 2000s when a suite of Western hip-hop notions and styles were introduced to the country and emulated by Chinese artists. Beginning in the 2010s, especially following the release of the web series 'Rap of China' in 2017, the boom in digital and social media platforms has allowed hip-hop artists and audiences both nationwide and worldwide to contact each other. During this period of the Chinese hip-hop revolution, a substantial number of influential domestic hip-hop artists and groups became publicly visible.

Chinese hip-hop music has developed local characteristics, such as the amalgamation and incorporation of Chinese dialects, Putonghua (Mandarin), and English; traditional Chinese musical instruments; and the introduction of modern and traditional Chinese lifestyles in videos (Sherman, 2019). Chinese hip-hop has been marked by its regionality, and its genres can be divided according to territory. Examples are the Changsha-based C-BLOCK, the Xi'an-based group Honghuahui, the Chongqing-based group GO\$H, and the Chengdu-based CDC. Therefore, research on Chinese regional hip-hop genres, especially consideration of the genre's interaction with parochial society, community, and culture, is not only culturally meaningful but also socially relevant to academia.

In this study, 'Huxiang Flow' 湖湘流, a subset of Chinese hip-hop, is the object of analysis. Huxiang Flow emerged in Changsha City, Hunan Province, where rap is usually performed in hybrid languages, mainly Mandarin and the Xiang dialect, accompanied by some English. This form of rap reflects the multifarious cultural influences in this region, such as its tangible, intangible, and linguistic cultural heritage; spiritual and idealistic traditions and legacies; and rapid urbanisation and growth. This study examines the ingenious liaisons between the Huxiang Flow audience and rappers regarding the evocation of their regional identity through hip-hop music. Such correlations are bound to local educational modulations of parochial philosophical and spiritual heritage. Furthermore, spatiotemporal exchanges of regional cultural characteristics in hip-hop music have elicited nostalgic and resonant emotions, which support not only individuals' well-being during hardship but also their sense of identity and cultural confidence.

This study investigates Chinese hip-hop music as an instrument for regional identity construction and the evocation of emotional nostalgia. The following research questions are addressed: What are the ways in which Chinese regional hip-hop genres create a locally rooted community rhetorical field? To what extent have these hip-hop genres fostered the cultural identities of local audiences?

Hip-hop music, nostalgia, and identity

This paper has its theoretical basis in research at the intersection of music, nostalgia, and identity. In the field of popular culture, audiences are attracted by feelings of identity and self-confidence evoked by cultural products (Jing, 2006). Music, in any form and for all ages, has always been germane to the sense of place and identity (Hudson, 2006). Popular music is a process in which identity is conceived, created, and constructed (Mitchell, 2001), and it is an integral part of the continuous production and reproduction of the self (De Kloet, 2010). Music repertoires, composition, production, performance, appreciation, and a suite of other actions for both musicians and listeners are sites of identity formation and meaning-making (Hess, 2019). Personal experience is aligned with grand social and political movements. Music production assigns the historical origins of identity politics (Hess, 2019). As an aesthetic practice, music can reflect the understanding of music producers and receivers regarding group relationships, personalities, and value systems, which reflect the ethical norms and social contours of a specific community.

Within hip-hop scholarship, 'Knowledge of Self' (KOS) is commonly discussed as a core ideological practice for hip-hop artists. A crucial aspect of hip-hop music is its origins. As Rollefson (2020) notes, historical heritage has a significant influence on how hip-hop serves both as a cultural expression and a tool for political resistance. KOS places close attention on national and local heritage, which Rollefson (2020) refers to as 'gems of knowledge' that construct the essence of hip-hop music and serve as the lifeblood of its communities, showcasing how local groups emphasise their ways of life and cultures. In other words, hip-hop knowledge is built through local experiences, allowing artists and fans to find their identity and culture within it. The Hip Hop Interpellation thesis emphasises that the dissemination of hip-hop does not mean that genres globally are mere reproductions of African American expressions, but rather that they present a form of local knowledge and practice (G. Rollefson, 2020). The research by Rollefson et al. (2023) provides a method grounded in CIPHER ethnography, digital practices, and artistic practices for the Hip Hop Interpellation thesis. This approach encourages researchers to identify and examine local 'gems', believing that these distinct yet conceptually interconnected gems share links that inspire diverse hip-hop communities worldwide (Alim, 2006). By analysing these minimal units of hip-hop knowledge, researchers can understand the realities of global flows and localisation, as well as how artists construct their spirit, culture, and consciousness through both traditional and original postures. Pennycook and Mitchell (2008) argue that localised

hip-hop music, becoming part of global media forms and popular culture, can provide a locally grounded philosophy of global significance. This 'dusty foot philosophy' serves as a means for hip-hop to express localised identities, transcending mere appropriation of sound and representing an openness in the relationship between the global and the local. This philosophy constitutes a political statement regarding local knowledge and respect for the dignity of those who have been dispossessed. It is essential to understand the significance of struggle, engagement, and transformation within localised hip-hop music.

Important research has discussed topics such as the popular music's role in empowering local identity from a geographical perspective (Leyshon et al., 1998); local identity-making in national music through cultural syncretism and innovative forms (Harnish, 2005); urban, personal, and narrative popular music as strengthening Vietnam's national identity (Olsen, 2008); identity-making in musical exchange as arbiter of political agendas in Indonesia (Weintraub, 2010); music's influence in shaping the identity of Chinese youth (De Kloet, 2010); how popular music genres and styles influence Islamic identity in the Middle East (LeVine, 2008); the localisation of popular music in negotiations of gender identity in globalization (De Kloet, 2010); cross-racial and cross-border movements of identity politics in the field of popular music (Sterling, 2010; Sharma, 2010); the discursive presentation and metaphorical expression of ethnic identity in Xinjiang Uygur music; and the intricate relationship between ethnic identity politics and national unity in the post-colonial era (Smith, 2016). In Western black communities, hip-hop has been deemed an integral component of black urban culture and an explanatory tool for black street codes, norms, and experiences (Swidler, 1986). It is a cultural form that organises and constructs violent social identity to explain and rationalise the rhetorical strategies of violent behaviour, build the reputation of a community, and even garner social control (Kurbin, 2005).

Hip-hop music is a multi-centred activity involving global, national, and cultural discourses (Wang, 2012). Regionally based hip-hop is grounded in a sociotemporal contextual understanding of a specific cultural region. In hip-hop, regional identity is enunciated through language and vision (Sigler & Balaji, 2013). The conjunction and inflection of dialects in rap have become a global phenomenon (Wang, 2012), making local language an essential discursive element in the authenticity of hip-hop (Pennycook, 2007) and reinforcing the sense of marginalisation for out-groups vis à vis in-groups (McLeod, 1999). Local discourses of hip-hop create spaces that challenge the invisibility of marginalised groups (George, 2016). For instance, at present, digital vehicles provide opportunities for previously marginalised and peripheral local rappers to reiterate the local meanings of hip-hop. The innovative genre of hip-hop reflects certain political consciousnesses, explicitly in its use of unorthodox language and expression of anti-hegemonic ideologies, which serve to transform language and culture (Wang, 2012). The regional and identity affordance of music can strengthen the adherence of

specific individuals and groups to their communities (Hays & Minichiello, 2005; Hudson, 2006). From this perspective, hip-hop music is based on a resonant rhetoric of nostalgia.

Musical reception is individual, and people perceive music in relation to their personal experiences. As a result, music can prompt feelings of recognition and nostalgia for home, childhood, friends, and communities (Lundberg, 2010). There is conservative tendency underlying nostalgia, such as feelings of uncertainty and anxiety in response to change (F. Davis, 1977), and this can come to expression in feelings about music (Hirsch, 1992). Construed as a social vehicle, nostalgia can curb identity deconstruction and even become a space of escape (Newall, 1987). As a field of modernity, nostalgia can be used to critically reflect on social modernisation, particularly internal impediments within social movements (Jing, 2006). In a broad sense, the strategic adoption of nostalgic discourse can serve specific social, cultural, or political goals, and such strategies are likely to be performed in the periphery of society (Omojola, 2009). However, music moves with people from place to place as a transmitter of national ideologies and as a vehicle of language education. Thus, music can be considered a carrier of culture, a vehicle of communication, and a symbol of a community (Lundberg, 2010). The historical significance of music is that it is a medium that can elicit emotions and evoke selective reconstructions of memory in group environments (Bryant, 2005).

Although hip-hop music has become a global commodity, its texts still resonate in specific locales (Sigler & Balaji, 2013). Local and traditional materials are nostalgic cultural synergies that can shape personal identity as part of the liberalisation process (Omojola, 2009). Music represents an important cultural matrix of reminiscent discourse (Omojola, 2009), and it usually includes enduring nostalgic elements through narratives and images. As a symbolic system of cognition and a medium of subjective expression, music can foster the internalisation of historical and modern cultural elements (Ruud, 1997). In particular, use of local languages to prompt reminiscence can not only build a nostalgic space for regional community but also resist the incursion of foreign cultures and languages into the region (Agawu, 2023). Cultural and social researchers have suggested examining the logic of the multitude of nostalgic discourses and narrations in cultural presentation and exploring the sociopolitical issues that relate to them (Jing, 2006). This supports the theoretical premise of this study.

Chinese hip-hop regionality

Pennycook (2010) stresses that locality and regionality play important roles in communicative actions and practices. The present study's focus on issues pertaining to Chinese hip-hop regionality was inspired by Bennett's (1999) exploration of the cultural functionality of hip-hop as a local resource and how local settings are "appropriated and reworked as modes of collective expression" (Bennett, 1999, p. 78). According to Forman (2000, p. 66), "distinctive regional rap sounds and styles, as well as strong local allegiances

and territorial rivalries" have been observed in the field of global hip-hop. Regional hip-hop commonly incorporates local languages into local musical forms and topics, which include local social problems and expressions of local philosophy and aspirations (Mitchell, 2001).

China has continued to undergo "complex modes of indigenisation and syncretism" (Zou, 2019) in building a hip-hop form with Chinese features through a series of localised practices (Barrett, 2012) through which actors can claim ownership (Omoniyi, 2009). Chinese hip-hop has slowly burgeoned into localised, diverse regional hip-hop genres across China (Y. Zhao & Lin, 2020), comprising a "multimodal, hybridised semiotic ensemble" (Wang, 2015, p. 236) of Putonghua, English, and local dialects, as well as adaptations involving language, rhythm, emotion, and dance (X. Liu, 2010). Thus, Chinese hip-hop has become an art form that meets the interests and needs of the Chinese public (X. Liu, 2010). One of the most prominent peculiarities of the Chinese hip-hop genre is the combination of local languages, such as *fanyan* or dialect. Davis (2017) observed that Chinese dialects lend themselves to hip-hop because of their four tones, colourful colloquialisms, and monotonous flow than Putonghua (Mandarin), the official language. A substantial number of hip-hop songs have been circulated on the internet, many of which are delivered in regional dialects and convey strong social messages (J. Liu, 2014).

Chinese hip-hop rappers and genres have been studied from the perspectives of locality and regionality (Wang, 2012), such as 'Jianghu Flow'. This relates to the Chinese notion of authenticity, helping to localise hip-hop in a regional context (Y. Zhao & Lin, 2020), bearing in mind the complexity of and sociocultural foundations for the 'authenticity' itself (Bendix, 2009). The Sichuan-based hip-hop group CD-Rev uses Chinese traditional musical instruments to play hip-hop rhythms, thus evoking a nostalgic ancient Chinese image that is conspicuous in modern China and the China Dream (Zou, 2019). The rapper GAI's repertoire conveys signs of local identity, cultural uniqueness, and domestic self-imagination (J. J. Zhao, 2020). In the simultaneously localising and globalising dialectical field of hip-hop, innovative linguistic styles and translocal communities are continuously formed, leading to "glocal stylisations and style as glocal distinctiveness" (Alim, 2009, p. 107).

Chinese hip-hop remains an emerging field of research among both domestic and international scholars. Scholars' interests have comprised a wide range of topics, including historical and classical cultural logics (Chen et al., 2021; Chew & Mo, 2019; Khan, 2009; Sullivan & Zhao, 2021; Y. Zhao & Lin, 2020). There has also been research into the aesthetics, genres, and styles (Fung, 2008; Z. Liu, 2019; Zou, 2019) of Chinese hip-hop, such as the cultural and communicative cross-pollination of Chinese hip-hop with its Western origins (Flew et al., 2019) and cultural governance and hip-hop censorship (Amar, 2018; Luo & Ming, 2020; Nie, 2021). The increasing amount of practical research on Chinese hip-hop has examined

its connections with national and local identities, regional authenticity, and broad sociocultural significance, thus contributing to the study of Chinese hip-hop.

Methodology

In this study, two methods of analysis were applied: (1) discourse analysis of hundreds of lyrics and videos of locally themed Huxiang Flow hip-hop repertoires, and (2) analysis of transcripts of interviews conducted with members of a Hunanese audience to determine the perceptions of identity shaped by regional rap. The data collection and analysis aimed to reveal cultural distinctions in the regional hip-hop genre and its rapport with parochial society and local communities. The repertoires of C-BLOCK 西部洛克, which is among the earliest hip-hop groups in the region and the most representative Huxiang Flow genre group, were selected for analysis.

C-BLOCK was established in 2007 in Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province. In the name, 'C' refers to the first initial of their home city Changsha. The term 'BLOCK' can be translated as neighbourhood, or 'hood'. It also means 'project' or 'site' where it refers to 'housing block'. The name C-BLOCK can be interpreted to mean that the group is committed to erecting an exceptional hip-hop block in their region. The group has three members: Damnshine (also known as *da sha* 大傻; *sheng yu* 盛宇); Key L (also known as *Liu Cong* 刘聪); Kungfu Pen (also known as *gong fu pang* 功夫胖; *shi yi fan* 施逸凡). After a decade of growth and maturity, C-BLOCK has become the most influential hip-hop group in the Hunan region, conveying conspicuous peculiarities of regionality. Their popularity reflects a suite of sociotemporal transformations from dialect to Mandarin, from parochial levels to the national level, and from an underground subculture to the mainstream pop market.

By exploring the development and transformation of C-BLOCK's genre, style, and performance, the study reveals the cultural influence of Chinese regional hip-hop, especially in terms of its significance for local identity and discourse construction, based on the parochial and evocative elements of music production. The analysed data incorporates lyrics and music videos of C-BLOCK's repertoire of 100 hip-hop music productions (Main Source: Channel Zhong TV, the C-BLOCK collection on YouTube, and other music by C-BLOCK on YouTube). The repertoire investigated in this study includes rap songs in dialects, hybrid dialects, and Mandarin. Twenty rap songs by C-BLOCK were extracted for discourse analysis, as these works contained the most germane thematic components, such as local dialects, collective memories, settlers' reminiscences, and cultural legacies. The connections among these constitutive ingredients showed configurations of regional identity politics in hip-hop music. Table 1 lists the 20 extracted songs and relevant keywords the authors have identified.

In addition, this study conducted online and offline semi-structured interviews in February 2022 with 20 (F = 13; M = 7) Hunanese between the ages of 18 and 30. One interviewee, a musicology professor at a university,

Table 1. Extracted regional hip-hop music by C-BLOCK.

N.	Song Title	Release	Artist	Language	Analytical keywords
1	Qi li ba li 七里八里	2016	C-BLOCK	Dialect	Dialect slang, colloquialisms, swear words, underground societies, city life
2	Lao jie de wei 老街的味	2016	C-BLOCK	Dialect , A little Mandarin	Local food heritage, slang, old town memories, urban change, commercialisation, patronage, post-communism
3	Du chen 堵沉	2016	C-BLOCK	Dialect	Urban problems, criticism
4	Shang xue tang 上学堂	2014	C-BLOCK	Dialect	Childhood and school memories, slang and colloquialisms
5	Ni yao o gai lo 你要哦该咯	2014	C-BLOCK	Dialect	Slang and colloquialisms, local swear words
6	Sha ma zi 沙码子	2016	C-BLOCK	Dialect	Local food heritage, commercialisation and patronage, urban tourism promotion
7	Changsha ce Changsha 长沙策长沙	2014	C-BLOCK	Dialect	Local tangible, intangible, food heritage, landmarks, attractions
8	Ce Changsha 策长沙	2014	C-BLOCK	Dialect	City pride, city promotion
9	Jiu shi lo li 就是咯里	2014	C-BLOCK	Dialect	Local food, stories, experiences as collective memories
10	Xiang jiang shui 湘江水	2021	Lyrics by KungFuPen; Song by Yixing Zhang	Dialect	Nostalgia and local identity crisis, local spirit, pride
11	Shi nian chang sha 十年长沙	2014	C-BLOCK	Dialect, Mandarin	Urban modernisation, globalisation, collective memories
12	Jiang hu liu 江湖流	2017	C-BLOCK & GAI	Mandarin, dialect, and English	Jianghu, life, brotherhood
13	Dai wo hui jia 带我回家	2014	C-BLOCK	Mandarin and a little English	Immigration and homesickness
14	Sha si ren zhe 杀死忍者	2017	C-BLOCK	Mandarin and a little English	Nationalism, social criticism, censorship, national cultural symbols
15	Deng ta 灯塔	2019	C-BLOCK	Mandarin and a little English	Growth inspiration, local spirit and character, revolutionary personality
16	Li sao 离骚	2018	C-BLOCK	Mandarin and a little English	Nationalism, criticism, rap authenticity
17	Guan jun 冠军	2012	C-BLOCK	Mandarin and a little English	Education criticism, nationalism, rap authenticity
18	Gai bian 改变	2013	Damshine and Jony J.	Mandarin and a little English	Social criticism, antithesis to hierarchy, feudalism, freedom
19	Lao shi guang 老时光	2012	C-BLOCK	Mandarin and a little English	Nostalgia for school days
20	Changsha hood 长沙hood	2018	Key. L	Mandarin, dialect, and English	City life, revolutionary and communist legacies, social critique

was 40 years old. The interviewees were from different cities in Hunan Province. At present, 12 still live in Hunan, while the others reside in cities across China, such as Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hong Kong, for study or work. The respondents were in a range of occupations, such as college students, music producers, rappers, high school teachers, financial consultants, tattooists, housewives, and so on. In the interviews, their perceptions of local cultural constituents were explored. The authors recruited listeners of Huxiang flow hip-hop music through public and private networks, asking them to be fans of this type of music and to listen it at a high frequency. Participant recruitment and semi-structured interviews were conducted at the same time, and the interviews were stopped when the researchers confirmed that relevant information about hip-hop music, locality, and identity was sufficient.

This study examined three aspects of discursive strategies in regional rap music. First, the linguistic and semiotic aspects focused on the synergies and collaborations in local dialects, dialect slang, adages, and other regional linguistic and semiotic forms. The second aspect concerned narrative and rhetorical characteristics of hip-hop's textualisation of parochial reminiscences and retentions of regional cultural values. Third, the visual aspect comprised modern and traditional urban streetscapes and critical reflections on the cultural metabolism promoted by rapid urbanisation and social change in China.

Hip-hop, language, and identity (re)construction

Interview Data 1

I think dialect raps are meaningful. On the one hand, its lyrics can help us memorise old things; on the other hand, it can also preserve the dialect. Otherwise, with the popularisation of 'Putonghua' (普通话, Mandarin), more and more people will lose their ability to speak dialects. My children's generation now mainly communicates in Putonghua. They can understand a few dialects but are not able to speak them. Considering the current environment, I may worry that dialects will gradually disappear. (Respondent 2, age 28 years, homemaker, born in Changsha, lives in Nanning Guangxi Province. Interview on January 10, 2022).

China is officially a monolingual country that pursues "language and ideological standards and purity" (Blommaert, 2008, p. 68). Chinese language politics and norms concern the country's *lingua franca* Putonghua, which is also known as Standard Chinese or Mandarin. The People's Republic of China began to promote Putonghua in its education system in 1955. By 2020, the popularisation rate of Putonghua had reached 80.72% (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2020). At the same time, the use of local languages in families and schools was reduced exponentially. Thus, dialects are gradually disappearing. Chinese dialects are diverse. Ten major dialects are based on geographical divisions: Mandarin dialect (*guan hua fang yan*), Jin dialect,

Wu dialect, Min dialect, Hakka dialect, Cantonese dialect, Xiang dialect, Gan dialect, Hui dialect, and Pinghua dialect, which is also known as the *guang xi dialect* (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2021).

In the enduring collective context of globalisation and localisation of hip-hop, local language resources have played a fundamental role in promoting authentic articulation. Alim (2009) argues that young people around the world engage in the hip-hop movement and create their own versions of hip-hop national language. Despite differences in language, race, and ethnic identity, hip-hop styles have not become homogenised; rather, they have produced distinct resistance dialects in various countries and regions (Potter, 1995). Alim (2006) emphasises the necessity of grounding the study of hip-hop language in cultural contexts, advocating for an approach that not only examines the structural qualities of the language itself but also considers discourses, practices, and linguistic ideologies. These hip-hop practices inherently embody poetics and identity politics, illustrating how hip-hop connects with issues of race, class, and linguistic politics. Hip-hop language serves both as a source of joy and as a focal point for counter-hegemonic discourse (Alim, 2011).

Respondent 2 and other respondents express the concern that Hunan's Xiang dialect is in crisis. There are multiple reasons for this, such as rapid urbanisation and modernisation across the country, the intensification of labour mobility between and within provinces, and the nationwide educational promulgation Putonghua as the official lingua franca. The use of parochial dialects by younger generations has decreased, accompanied by dialectical attenuations, faintness, and impediments that induce them to abandon their homelands for more economically and technologically advanced areas. In other words, the dialect crisis reflects traditional society's collision with the social revolution of modernisation and urbanisation.

Huxiang Flow hip-hop music re-enacts and localises the Xiang dialect used in the Hunan region. The Xiang dialect has many variants and subdivisions across Hunan Province, including the Northern Xiang dialect, the Central Xiang dialect, the Southern Xiang dialect, and the Western Xiang dialect. One trait of the Xiang dialect is that heterogeneous intonations are pragmatically used by villagers in the mountainous areas, but the accent is homogeneous in plain or lake areas. The inflection adopted by Huxiang Flow hip-hop rappers, such as C-BLOCK, is the 'New Xiang' (*xin xiang yu* 新湘语). New Xiang is used in three Central Xiang municipalities in the plains (Changsha, Zhuzhou, and Xiangtan), which are the governmental, economic, and cultural hubs of the province. Compared with the 'Old Xiang' dialect (*lao xiang yu* 老湘语) and vernacular, which retains the enunciated plosives of ancient Chinese, New Xiang resembles modern Putonghua. The New Xiang dialect not only radiates from the central Hunan region but can also be identified in other parts of the province (Hunan Provincial People's Government, 2013). New Xiang hip-hop music has been disseminated across the province. In this study, some respondents were from Western (Jishou and

Zhangjiajie), Southern (Chenzhou and Hengyang), and Northern (Yueyang) Hunan. However, most respondents considered that the emblematic Huxiang Flow hip-hop was presented in the New Xiang dialect originating in the provincial hubs. Hereditary culture, values, and collective community memories have been disseminated throughout provincial society.

The cultural implications of hip-hop music for the preservation of local cultures and dialects is attributable to not only its elementary intonations and vernacular pitches but also local parlances, such as idioms, slang, adages, and so on. The following lists some expressions in the New Xiang dialect used in C-BLOCK's hip-hop. Dialectic slang consists mainly of informal, colloquial, and idiomatic everyday terms that are normally used in dialogue, and they are characterised as low brow, ignominious, infamous, ill reputed, notorious, rude, gossip, and so on. For example, the hip-hop song *Qi Li Ba Li* 七里八里 (literally, 'seven and eight') is in the full Xiang dialect. The song title is in vernacular slang, referring to interminable speaking and vacuous and random practicing. Slang is often bracketed within identifiable social clusters. It plays a role in identity composition, communal association and consolidation, and configurations of social frontiers and exclusions (Mattiello, 2008). In this hip-hop song, slang is used to express the rapper's satirical criticism of charlatans, hypocrites, and illegal multilayered marketing (MLM) gangs. Other vernacular patois is used overtly in the selected songs, such as *dai long zi* 带笼子 (alluring a person into a snare); *nao ke san ban* 脑壳散板 (one's head is not clear), and *yang wu lou zeng* 杨五六宗 (speaking unwarrantedly, fragmentedly, and frivolously). Further examples of local language use are listed in Table 2.

This study argues that regional hip-hop genres are meaningful for the documentation, exhibition, and distribution of parochial vernacular, slang, and colloquialisms. The cultural implications of dialects used in hip-hop are that they edify territorial codes that articulate and promulgate the life experiences, ethical attributes, and metaphysical intelligence amassed by local inhabitants over a millennium. Hip-hop culture operates in a similar manner globally, as noted by Pennycook and Mitchell (2008) in their study of Canadian MC K'naan, who argues that hip-hop music seeks to articulate its historical reasoning amidst the dust of experience, while Indigenous communities strive to find a means of achieving dignity and express their worldview. Rollefson et al. (2023) argue that hip-hop artists may convey local and Indigenous discourses in their cyphers, including ancient cosmologies, traditional knowledge, local insights, and anti-colonial rhetoric. In the case of Ireland, musicians express ethnic and national self-determination as well as resistance to structural oppression. Hip-hop culture has always been an integral part of local and Indigenous cultures, encompassing not only local attire, dance, vocal styles, postures, and movements, but also the deeply rooted oral narratives, poetry, and philosophies developed over thousands of years.

Table 2. Local Language in C-BLOCK's Huxiang Flow Hip-Hop.

<i>Local Languages</i>	<i>Chinese Mandarin Transcriptions</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Songs</i>
<i>Xia</i>	呷	Eat. For example, <i>xia yu hui bian ling fan</i> (呷鱼会变灵范) means 'Eating fish makes people clever'.	<i>Lao jie de wei; Shi nian chang sha</i>
<i>shuo</i>	硕	Bad. For example, <i>shuo xiang yang fan</i> (硕象样范) means someone who does not have a decent appearance.	<i>Lao jie de wei; Du chen; Qi li ba li; Ni yao o gai lo</i>
<i>niao</i>	嫖	It is often used as a dirty word and rude word, which is similar to the vulgar English word 'fuck'. It is also used to express surprise, similar to 'God'.	<i>Qi li ba li; Ni yao o gai lo</i>
<i>bie</i>	别	People. For example, <i>xi bie</i> (细别) is a disparaging nickname for young people, similar to 'little ghost'	<i>Qi li ba li; Lao jie de wei; Shang xue tang; Ni yao o gai lo; Ce chang sha</i>
<i>ye luan</i>	耶卵	Not good	<i>Lao jie de wei</i>
<i>yi za</i>	一杂	One	<i>Qi li ba li; Lao jie de wei;</i>
<i>ling fan</i>	灵范	Usually used to describe a person who is smart and sensible	<i>Lao jie de wei</i>
<i>fa jia</i>	发痴	Being dull	<i>Shi nian chang sha;</i>
<i>liao nan</i>	了难	Solving the problem	<i>Ni yao o gai lo</i>
<i>dai long zi</i>	带笼子	Decoy	<i>Qi li ba li</i>
<i>xiang li bie</i>	乡里别	An ignorant person	<i>Ni yao o gai lo</i>
<i>po luo huo</i>	筐箩货	Shoddy goods	<i>Lao jie de wei</i>
<i>bao bao zi</i>	泡泡子	Foam	<i>Qi li ba li</i>
<i>mo luo guai</i>	摸罗拐	Flattery	<i>Lao jie de wei</i>
<i>qi li ba li</i>	七里八里	Verbose; deliberately creating problems	<i>Qi li ba li</i>
<i>bao li bao qi</i>	宝里宝气	Describing people who are jumpy or stupid	<i>Qi li ba li</i>
<i>jie jing guang jing</i>	结精逛精	Not straightforward	<i>Ce chang sha</i>
<i>nao ke san ban</i>	脑壳散板	Someone's head is not clear	<i>Qi li ba li</i>
<i>shi shao pi duo</i>	屎少屁多	Speak useless words	<i>Qi li ba li</i>
<i>yang wu lou zeng</i>	杨五娄曾	Talking illogically and frivolously	<i>Qi li ba li</i>
<i>guo o si gao</i>	国哦肆搞	What can be done	<i>Du chen</i>

Dialect hip-hop among the diaspora groups

Today, the concept of cultural multiplicity has been acknowledged globally, and dialects are considered constituents of the miscellaneous ecosystem of a global culture. The performance of hip-hop in dialect is an inventive and ingenious means of promulgating local language and culture in the contemporary context. Compared with the prescribed official school education and the haphazard and arbitrary family exchange of domestic verbal customs, the captivation of youth by dialectic hip-hop music shows that it is an operation in transmission (Respondent 2, age 28 years, housewife, Hunanese living in Guangxi; Respondent 5, age 29, high school teacher, Hunanese living in Changsha). Regional hip-hop genres connect audiences to their local society and linguistic heritage, which influences young people who

have grown up in the era of globalisation, modernisation, and urbanisation. The study also finds that regional hip-hop has emotional significance for displaced populations, especially youth.

Interview Data 2

When I was in college in Chenzhou, I often listened to C-BLOCK because I missed Changsha so much at that time. Now, I work in Hong Kong. I'm always so busy that I don't even have time to be alone and experience nostalgic feelings, but I still think the existence of C-BLOCK can give 'foreigners' like us a lot of comfort. (Respondent 6, age 27, financial consultant, born in Changsha, lives in Hong Kong, interview on January 10, 2022).

The analysis revealed that the distinct identity and cultural locality of the Hunanese diaspora were upheld through listening to regional vernacular hip-hop music. Hunan is an inland province located in the central-south part of the country. Its development and per capita income are less than in economically and technologically advanced provinces and locales, such as the Greater Bay Area and the Yangtze River Delta. Every year, a sizeable number of young Hunanese move to the more affluent southern or eastern regions to gain a superior livelihood and profession (e.g., Respondent 2 in Nanning Guangxi; Respondents 6, 11, and 17 in Hong Kong; Respondent 7 in Shenzhen Guangdong; and Respondent 14 in Sichuan Chengdu). Despite life and work in a fast-paced Chinese metropolis, the young diaspora experiences isolation, apprehension, nostalgia, and abundant emotions. Dialectic hip-hop music has been adopted by the diaspora, which seeks emotional contentment, resonance, support, and self-identity. These deep-rooted oral traditions and narratives merge hip-hop with local culture, allowing audiences to hear about themselves and their communities (G. Rollefson, 2020). Extensive parochial cultural modules expressed in home dialects are performed by rappers. The entities that are deeply entrenched in local cultural memory are expressed in hip-hop, and by listening to this music, people can retrieve graphic and authentic portraits of their inner beings, including kinship, schools, communities, and societies. These hip-hop songs convey local and regional settings and experiences. Regional panoramas in hip-hop are never condescending or deceptive. Instead, they are space-time continuums that coincide with grassroots life trajectories, constructing affective regional identities.

Through the spontaneous promulgation of regional hip-hop by local audiences through social media networks (Respondents 8, 12, and 13), these rap songs have been distributed to the public. The cross-regional distribution of hip-hop has fostered cultural diversity and furthered cross-cultural communication. As a popular meme, hip-hop has become an apolitical instrument for promoting local culture throughout the country, which further fortifies the cultural identity and pride of local people (Respondent 6, Interview, February 2022). The regional hip-hop genre has been authenticated and legitimised through the narratives and lexicons of local

Lyrics Stanzas Data 1. From C-BLOCK dialect hip-hop *Changsha Ce Changsha*.

Lyrics	Elucidation of the terms mentioned
But the betel nuts I choose are nothing else but Laokouzi	Betel nut culture is provincial intangible cultural heritage item; Laokouzi is a local food brand of betel nuts industry.
You know Baisha Well, Baisha Smoke, and Baisha Wine	Baisha is a traditional site; and local food brand name.
But you don't know Honghuapo, Huangtuling, or Heishidu	Landscapes.
Xinzhui in the Mawangdui Tomb is living in the museum	Mawangdui is a cultural heritage site with historical relics.
The Provincial Library is full from Monday to Sunday	The Provincial Library is a marvellous modern landscape.
There are only ancient relics Zouma Tower and Tianxin Pavilion now	Zouma Tower and Tianxin Pavilion are historical landmarks of the city.
Aiwan Pavilion and Yuelu Academy, you need to be clear	Aiwan Pavilion and Yuelu Academy are famous historical cultural sites.
C-BLOCK You may have listened to Tanci, but you do not know C-BLOCK	Tanci, literarily 'plucking rhymes', is a traditional art form in Southern China.
The ancient culture of Xiangchu is only preserved in Changsha.	Xiangchu is a cultural genre from old Hunan.
Remember there are Flower Drum Opera and Xiang Embroidery in Changsha	Flower Drum Opera and Xiang Embroidery are Intangible cultural heritage items.
Do not want to leave after hearing Liuhai Kanqiao	Liuhai Kanqiao is a repertoire of the Flower Drum Opera.

dialects. Home tongues and lifecycle tales have been reproduced and represented by hip-hop. Rappers and local audiences have assigned identical verbal and rhetorical attributes to each other based on regional linguistic and cultural legacies. By re-enacting and localising languages, artists can express more truthful and precise expressions of themselves to local audiences. Moreover, the audience can discern the intentions that underlie hip-hop songs and music.

The discursive construction of nostalgic resonance

Drawing on an ethnographic approach to hip-hop music, this section identifies and examines local hip hop 'gems', providing a case study of hip-hop's cultural fluidity and the possibility for hip-hop as a generative glocal conversation (J. G. Rollefson et al., 2023). Rollefson (2020; 2023) uses 'gems' as the smallest unit for analysing hip-hop knowledge, paying close attention to local and national heritage in order to discover the essence of hip hop. Three cultural facets of local discursive construction in the Huxiang Flow hip-hop genre are discussed in this section: cultural heritage memories and landmarks, spiritual legacies, and urban transformation contemplations.

Cultural heritage memories and landmarks

As Rollefson (2021) mentions in the Hip Hop Interpellation thesis, hip-hop culture, along with its forms of performance and ideology, is rooted in specific communities through local origins. Irish hip-hop music highlights the rivers and streets of Ireland, reinforcing the identity of the Irish people. Hip-hop artists realise the core ideology of hip-hop practice, which is to find or regain 'knowledge of self' (KOS) through the representation of historical

Lyrics Stanzas Data 2. From C-BLOCK, Key. L's hip-hop *Changsha Hood*

Every time I pass the Monkey Stone Bridge and look at the Xiangjiang River,
Young Mao Zedong stands on the revolutionary river.
To be a real hustler, you must work hard.

heritage (G. Rollefson, 2020). The intangible representative regional cultural heritage referred to in Huxiang Flow hip-hop music includes *Hua Gu Xi* (flower drum opera), *Xiang Xiu* (Xiang embroidery), *Chang Sha Tan Ci* (plucking rhymes), and so on. Traditional local food includes betel nuts, chili, rice noodles, *Yang Yu Xing* (a well-known traditional food brand), *Tang You Ba Ba* (sugar and oil rice buns), Baisha Smoke (a local cigarette brand), and so on. Historical sites include Mawangdui (tombs of the ancient Changsha Kingdom in the Han dynasty), Yulu Academy (an ancient academy built in the Song dynasty), Tianxin Pavilion (Ming dynasty architecture), and Aiwan Pavilion (Qing dynasty architecture). Urban landmarks and streetscapes include Orange Isle (also Juzizhou Island, known for the immense statue of a youthful Mao Zedong), the Provincial Library, and the Xiangjiang River. Such assemblages of cultural icons can increase the audience's acceptance of local civilisation and enhance their cultural confidence (Respondent 12 and Respondent 8). Rappers draw from a suite of local cultural ingredients, both historical and modern, such as intangible cultural legacies, traditional food, ancient sites, and metropolitan landmarks, to elicit their audience's nostalgic feelings and local resonances.

Local education and spiritual inheritance

The spiritual marks and qualities imbedded in venerable regional traditions can be conveyed through hip-hop music. The data analysed in this study shows that such conveyances are rappers' ideological projections of particular educational regimentation in the region. The expressions of local attributes in hip-hop are also connections among spiritual, philosophical, and ethical aspects resonating between the rappers and the audience. To be more specific, a typical spiritual resonance concerns the history of revolution in Huxiang culture, which could be conveyed by local rappers to their audiences, thus communicating local history through music. Historical heritage is an important part of political resistance as cultural expression in local hip-hop.

Interview Data 2: Hunan is a hot land of revolution. In our education, teachers will teach us to be people with critical thinking and paying attention to social reality in class. Look at the authors of C-BLOCK and the rappers. They were educated in Hunan. They will use their way to promote the sense of justice in their hearts, even if it will cause their lyrics to be very sensitive and then 'off the shelf' (Respondent 3, age 19, college student, born in Hengyang Hunan, lives in Chenzhou Hunan).

Some respondents imagine that they will become warriors in the Xiang Army (Respondent 6, male, age 21 years, college graduate), bellowing the slogan "the Xiang Army is not afraid of death" (Respondent 1, female, age

19 years, college student) while listening to some of C-BLOCK's repertoires. Explicit or implicit spiritual resonance between artists and audiences is formed in regional-specific revolutionary discourse. Such an accordance of resonance dovetails with the regimentation of local education, such as the revolutionary spiritual education (*Ge min jing shen jiao yu*) and the cultural education received in school (Respondent 3, age 19 years, college student, born in Hengyang Hunan, lives in Chenzhou Hunan). As students, Hunanese youth and children are organised by their schools to visit and revere the memorial sites of pioneers or key figures in Chinese communist revolutionary movements and wars, such as the former residences of Mao Zedong, who was born in Xiangtan, Hunan and was the founder of the People's Republic of China, and Liu Shaoqi, who was born in Ningxiang, Hunan and was the first vice chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (Respondent 3, age 19 years, college student). Orations and sermons on the subject of revolutionary beliefs and inspirations continue to occur in local schools. Thus, students can learn about the feats of Hunanese revolutionary figures and the temperaments of members of the Xiang Army. Moreover, regional education focuses on Huxiang's ideological and philosophical heritage. Local students have learned about the life history and key philosophies of Hunanese philosophers, as mentioned by the interviewees. Examples are Qu Yuan, a Chinese poet and politician known for his patriotism in the State of Chu during the Warring States period; Wang Fuzhi, from Hengyang Hunan, Chinese philosopher, essayist, historian in the late Ming early Qing dynasties; and Zeng Guofan, Chinese statesman and military general in the late Qing dynasty, known for his formation of the Xiang Army of distinguished warfare capability (Respondent 8, age 19 years, college student). The local schools' inheritance, education, and dissemination of regional ideology and history significantly affects students' cultural identities, which are predicated on their regionally accommodated and transmitted beliefs and morality in the post-Mao era. Historical nostalgia and emotional resonance construct the realisation and evolution of local identity in the modern age. Intonations of local lifeforces and temperaments are reproduced through hip-hop by navigating a synergistic echo that reverberates between the producers and receivers of hip-hop songs and music.

Urban transformation contemplations

Hip-hop knowledge provides fertile ground for self-reflection and criticism of the social and cultural polity (J. G. Rollefson et al., 2023). The findings indicate that critical reflections on urbanisation, modernisation, and globalisation by rappers are evident in their music. Impressions before and after urban transformations are expressed in their lyrics and music videos. Examples are the timeworn, Soviet-style blocks built during Maoist China and the skyscrapers built after the Reform and Opening-up since the 1980s; old-style local snacks and the popularity of fast-food from the West; the

Lyrics Stanzas Data 3.

Changsha is changing.
 The shacks are being obliterated.
 Those who have money earn more money.
 Those who have no money have more pitfalls.

 In the past, people were satisfied by just eating Tang You Ba Ba (sugar oil rice cake).
 Now, they want DQ, Haagen Dazs, or Manji.

 Spacious roads
 Tall buildings
 The efforts of the workers
 The dream of migrant workers
 Changsha is embracing everyone's success and misfortune.
 ...
 Keep going or back to the past.
 ...
 I put down the luggage and realise that I couldn't go back.

non-internet, non-digital, participatory leisure of the past and the computer-generated, cybernetic entertainment to which a myriad of people are addicted. The following lyrics are stanzas in C-BLOCK's *Shi Nian Changsha*:

Hip-hop knowledge provides fertile ground for self-reflection and criticism of social and cultural polity (J. G. Rollefson et al., 2023); hip-hop music challenges the relationship between language, identity, and rights (Alim, 2011; Bell, 2017), and hip-hop artists become architects of the dusty foot philosophy, generating political statements about local knowledge and respect for the dignity of the disenfranchised (Pennycook & Mitchell, 2008). In the case of Huxiang flow, the authenticity of regional hip-hop connects with exponential urban development in the region, which is intensified by the social disparities between the present and the past. The 'disenfranchised' underground city rappers reflect upon and criticise the immense changes brought about by urbanisation and modernisation. The nostalgic criticism of urban construction in regional hip-hop consists of the following aspects: first, the non-preservation of urban historic sites in the process of urban construction, such as the demolition of the remaining ancient city wall in order to make space for a large commercial complex (C-BLOCK, *Sha Si Ren Zhe*); second, social injustice, predominantly the widening gap between rich and poor (C-BLOCK, *Shi Nian Chang Sha* and *Gai Bian*); third, the incursion of Western art, music, and literature into local culture through globalised commercialisation; fourth, youths' veneration of exotic brands and rejection of domestic brands (C-BLOCK, *Shi Nian Chang Sha*).

Conclusion

This study, which was conducted from a Chinese regional perspective, hypothesised that hip-hop music is a vehicle for local identity. The findings demonstrate the existence of a grassroots, synergistic, and critical perspective on the interpretation of local identity by rappers and their audiences. The findings indicate that a form of regional hip-hop authenticity has developed through the amalgamation of parochial linguistic, cultural, and spiritual legacies in hip-hop music. Such music is also found to critically reflect the

social challenges of urbanisation and modernisation in the region. Dialects, which are inherited carriers of folk wisdom and knowledge in a specific region, have been transferred to younger generations through globally trendy hip-hop music and culture. Hip-hop seems effective at language preservation and transmission, as well as for addressing the dialect crisis. The findings also indicate a partiality to local lexicons in the regional hip-hop genre, showing local defiance to the hegemonies of mainstream language, culture, and art.

Regional hip-hop has contributed to building collective memories of the region through both linguistic and multi-textual (i.e., visual and lyrical) means. Traditional heritage and modern streetscapes are commonly referenced in hip-hop music to elicit reminiscent, nostalgic, and emotive responses in the audience. The thoughtful, philosophical, and moral transmission of locality based on school instruction is incorporated into hip-hop music that is well-known by local audiences and communities.

The main limitation of this study is its regional perspective. In addition, because qualitative data were collected from a small population sample, the results may not be generalised to larger populations. Therefore, further examinations of the connections between hip-hop and regional identity should be conducted in diverse regions and countries worldwide to examine the rejuvenation of local cultures through hip-hop music.

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