

Call For Papers: Catching Up with China's Hip Hop History

Guest editors:

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The origins of hip hop can be dated precisely to the “Back to School Jam” hosted by DJ Kool Herc and his sister 50 years ago at a Bronx apartment building at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue on 11 August 1973. A global phenomenon, hip hop’s golden jubilee is now being commemorated in the United States as part of American history. With its roots in South Bronx, Hip Hop has been part of the broader complexities of globalisation and is today integral to the landscape and soundscapes of global popular culture. Within the Cold War, and from the Asia-Pacific in particular, these complexities became particularly acute, with countries hosting American military bases and their accompanying radio networks accessible to the burgeoning local youth demographics of postwar baby boomers. The spread of rock and roll in the region was in this respect attributed significantly to the extensive involvement of the US military in the Vietnam War between the 1960s and 1970s (James 1991; Kim and Shin 2010). With the reopening of Communist countries such as China and Indochina in the 1980s, global American pop culture resumed its circulation (Ma 2022; Rupke and Blank 2009).

Compared to rock and roll, critical studies of hip hop histories in the region come across as less extensive due to what we, as guest editors, describe as the Afrocentricity and contemporality of the field. The aesthetics and politics of hip hop may have their cosmopolitan foundations in multicultural New York. However, as it morphed into more African American narratives that finds resonance within African diasporic and regional communities, its globality also became defined more in terms of the Afrocentric trajectories of Gilroy’s Black Atlantic (Harris 2019). This raises the universality and authenticity of the “Black” experience of hip hop in the Asia-Pacific in which reception can be haunted by the dismissively and accusatory claims of mimicry and appropriation of blackfacing (Kim 2023; Oh 2014; Condry 2007).

Hip hop historiography in Asia-Pacific, and in China is particular, is also linked to the scholarly evolution of popular culture studies. Developed gradually only by the late 1990s, the field had been late in providing the crucial initial levels of documentation and scholarly attention to the initial entry of hip hop cultures into the region that could have been dated back to the early 1980s, in the initial opening of post-Mao China. It was not until the mid-2000s that international scholars started to pay attention to the hip hop culture in China. References have been made to the presence of hip hop in local pop music productions, performances as well as clubbing scenes that were indicative of its growing popularity. The discussions on the cosmopolitanisation of the Chinese cultural scene with the absorption and localisation of the genre and its creative as emancipatory potentials accompanied this visibility (Barrett 2012; Strohmaier 2009; Fung 2007b; Liew 2006; de Kloet 2005).

This special feature therefore seeks to provide historical depth to uncovering the origins in the globalisation of hip hop in China based on archival records and oral history recollections of its reception in China. In pointing out the specificity of Chinese chronologies and chronicles with their own unique evolutionary historical milestones and personalities, periodisation and transitions, this special feature aims at participating in the development of decentered narratives of Hip Hop's glocal proto histories.

This project invites papers with historicistic emphasis on the proto history of hip hop in China. We suggest the following approaches:

- Local histories of hip hop based on selected site of study
- Djing, MCing, graffiti and breakdancing subcultures
- Circulation and globalisation of Chinese hip hop
- Archiving of Chinese hip hop history
- Media and public portrayal of Chinese hip hop
- Popularisation of Chinese hip hop and controversies surrounding mainstreamisation
- Hip hop's political dynamics and state responses to hip hop
- Social compositions and economic structures of Chinese hip hop scenes
- Hip hop amongst overseas Chinese communities

Submission Guidelines

Interested contributors should submit a 300-word abstract and a brief bio of no more than 100 words with their institutional affiliations, contact details, and research interests by **10 July 2025**. The first draft of the full paper is expected to be submitted by **10 October 2025**.

Interested participants should submit their queries and abstracts to the following address:

hiphopasia@outlook.com

All submitted papers will undergo a rigorous double-blind peer review process. Research articles (written in English) should be 9,000 words long, and follow the format of articles guidelines available here: <https://www.cefc.com.hk/china-perspectives/submissions/style-guide/>.

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