

# Viewing the Mass Communication of Non-mainstream Culture from "The Rap of China"

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## ABSTRACT

With the advent of the new media era, the "non-mainstream culture" that was originally hidden in the mass culture has begun to emerge, and it has spread day by day through rich and broad communication channels. The rise of non-mainstream culture not only maintains the ecology and activity of cultural production and consumption, but also meets the public's demand for diversified production content. This article takes Laswell's 5W (Who — Says What — In Which Channel — To Whom — With What Effects) communication model as the basic framework, starts from the perspective of communication, and combines the background of new media to conduct an in-depth analysis of "The Rap of China" program that belongs to non-mainstream culture. Starting from the characteristics and communication methods of non-mainstream culture, it sorts out the universally applicable value of how non-mainstream culture is disseminated among the masses, in order to provide direction for more non-mainstream culture's mass communication.

**Keywords:** "The Rap of China", 5W communication mode, non-mainstream culture, mass communication

## I. INTRODUCTION

"The Rap of China" is the first large-scale hip-hop music reality show launched by iQiyi in 2017. During the period when the program was broadcast, the non-mainstream culture with the theme of "rap" has quickly become a new fashion, and it has quickly become popular among young people, which has led to the development of many industries related to rap culture and also made it a successful example of non-mainstream culture's popular communication.

## II. RAP CULTURE AND NON-MAINSTREAM CULTURE

Rap is a word in slang of black people. It refers to a special form of singing that speaks rhythmically, which originated in the impoverished black colony of New York. It is characterized by a series of rhyming verses quickly told against the background of mechanical rhythms. Rap culture is one of the four pillars of hip-hop culture. The other three are DJ, Graffiti, and Breaking. Rap styles are generally divided into Old School Hip-hop, New School Hip-hop, Hardcore Hip-Hop, Trap Rap, and Jazz Rap. Rap culture is a typical non-mainstream culture in China, with characteristics such as cohesion, self-consciousness, and

constructiveness.

## III. VIEWING THE COMMUNICATION ELEMENTS ABOUT THE POPULARIZATION OF NON-MAINSTREAM CULTURE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF "THE RAP OF CHINA"

### A. The disseminator

1) *Inviting suitable guests and contestants:* In the production of non-mainstream cultural programs, the invited guests must not only ensure the professional ability in culture, but also have a certain degree of influence and leadership, meet the laws of popular communication, and use the fan economy to lay the foundation for program flow, so as to realize the popular communication of non-mainstream culture. The success of "The Rap of China" precisely exploits "fan-oriented characters". Wu Yifan, as the most popular idol representative of the young group at the moment, is the first Chinese singer to be on the billboard list in the United States, and has excellent results in rap music. As one of the first Chinese singers to be exposed to rap music, MC HotDog is an opinion leader and representative figure in the Chinese rap circle. Pan Weibo belongs to the first batch of singers who combined pop music and rap music. Many of his music works are all the rage and are highly sought after by post-90s.

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In addition, the contestants are also one of the important communicators, which can bring the most direct and effective communication effect to the entire program, greatly affecting the popularization process of non-mainstream culture. Some contestants in "The Rap of China" have had a minor celebrity in the rap circle, using the popularity and cohesion of opinion leaders to attract the first batch of audience. That is to say, rap fans watch the program, make a big fanfare, and expand the audience of the program. It cooperates with the late stage of the program to carry out conflicting "story-based role settings" for contestants. While catering to the public's curiosity, it effectively enhances the public's acceptance of non-mainstream culture.

2) *Hiring a professional program creation team:*

The creation team's keen ability to communicate effects is an important factor in whether the non-mainstream culture can successfully enter the mainstream market. non-mainstream culture is the new blood of the cultural world, and the audience is relatively unfamiliar with its cultural forms.

On the one hand, hiring a production team with rich experience and a certain understanding of non-mainstream culture, standardization of production, formalization of form, and popularization of content provide a guarantee for the early publicity of non-mainstream culture. On the other hand, it recruits young team members. As a young production team, it can better understand the psychological needs and interests of young audiences, and have the correct ability to select the content and methods of the program, and give full play to the efficiency of horizontal communication within the team. For example, "The Rap of China" production team members are basically composed of post-90s, with an average age of less than 28 years old. Therefore, when the content of the program is produced, it will have an emotional resonance with the audience, and better realize the audience's "use and satisfaction".

*B. Content of communication*

1) *Cultural content and cultural concepts reshaped by localization:* The non-mainstream culture content must incorporate localized elements. First of all, it's necessary to incorporate the excellent Chinese traditional culture into the content of the communication. "The Rap of China" successfully localized the cultural content, and many singers began to emphasize "Chinese style". For example, when star producer Wu Yifan chooses songs for competition, he always uses Chinese style as the theme. "Heaven and Earth" and "Chinese Soul" incorporate the arrangement of traditional instruments such as Pipa and Guzheng. And many contestants incorporate dialects with strong local characteristics when singing. Among them, the Chongqing dialect represented by GAI and Bridge and

the Uyghur language represented by Nawukere and Aire add the locality of the form of rap music, which makes local audience have a sense of acceptance and intimacy, and is more easily accepted by the general public.

Second, it's needed to reshape the mainstream values of cultural concepts. For example, many singers' song creation concepts in the show began to change, from the original rap culture emphasizing "diss" and "bashing society" and other negative value orientations, to the spreading of positive and optimistic values and emotional experiences among youth groups. For example, popular contestant Jony J's songs "Faith" and "Don't Have to Guess", etc., show his confident and sunny attitude towards life, which is consistent with the cultural form of the passionate youth. In the dissemination of non-mainstream culture, it's needed to let correct values guide the production of the program and spread the positive energy with the characteristics of youth culture. Eliminating the negative cultural content of non-mainstream culture itself that affects public values and aesthetic judgments, and selecting cultural concepts that are closer to mainstream values will help the popularization of non-mainstream culture.

2) *The program format that fits the cultural style*

a) *Unique stage design:* Stage design is an important part of the visual experience of the program, and it is also an important means that can be recognized by the audience. For non-mainstream culture programs, brilliant stage design can bring more attention and beauty to the program. The overall tone of "The Rap of China" stage tends to be a dark metal style, mainly composed of black, red, and gold, which is in line with the cultural content of "society", "hot blood" and "gold worship" in the rap culture. Second, according to the different stages of the competition system, it designs an anastomotic stage. For example, in the team selection session, the entire stage is based on the theme of "Industrial Era". Contestants wait for their tutors to choose on a platform that resembles "central station". There is an industrial-flavor door between the tutors and the contestants. There are nervous and worried contestants in front of the door, and anxious tutors behind the door. This unprecedented stage design gives the audience a sense of shock and curiosity, and it is easier to attract the audience to have the desire to watch.

b) *Innovative comic-style subtitles:* "The Rap of China" program uses comic-style subtitles, ingeniously using a unique black and white comic font as its exclusive subtitle style. When the most important rhymes or finishing touches in music appear, the program team will produce special effects of flower characters to let the audience understand the rhyming part of the lyrics at a glance, and will explain the terms such as "single rhyme", "double rhyme" and "three or

four consecutive sounds" beside the lyrics. If the contestant sings the most wonderful part of the song, the subtitles will have the effect of flames and be accompanied by "rhyme multiplied by a certain number", "Punchline", etc. to let the audience clearly know the beauty of the song, and praise and cheer together with the rappers in the show, thereby creating an immersive experience. While adding the effect of the program, it gives the audience a simple, clear and timely explanation, so that the audience can better understand the cultural content, thereby promoting the popularization process.

c) *"Rap-style" creative advertising*: With the emergence of a large number of programs with different styles, the form of advertising in the programs has become the focus of many media people. For young people, unexpected advertising styles can capture their curiosity in pursuit of freshness. For example, the "rap-style" creative advertisement of "The Rap of China" invites popular contestants in the program to create rap songs related to the sponsor's brand, arranges a cool shooting venue for singing, and finally puts this advertisement in the program. Regarding the visual effects of the entire program, it not only emphasizes the rap theme of the program itself, does not violate the program style, but also satisfies the audience's psychology and increases the number of shots of highly popular contestants.

### C. Communication channels

1) *Using platform traffic to attract audiences*: The dissemination and development of culture is inseparable from the active dissemination of communicators, but it is more necessary to use an open dissemination environment to strengthen the dissemination effect. For example, "The Rap of China" program uses an open environment and uses high-quality iQiyi platform resources to screen out potential young users who are interested in the program, and then push it to the audience. The choice of platform enables the program to gain traffic and the first batch of audience, and maximizes the program's publicity effect and audience's reach rate.

Therefore, non-mainstream culture programs can take advantage of new mainstream video media platforms that are "younger", "innovative" and "diversified" like iQiyi, and take advantage of the traffic and popularity of the platform itself to attract China's younger user groups, laying a foundation for the traffic of programs and opening the way for popular communication of non-mainstream culture.

2) *Socialized media maintains the heat*: Due to the "non-mainstream feature" of culture, audiences tend to lack points of interest and attention. Therefore, in

addition to the high-quality content of the program itself, it is necessary to use social media for topic marketing and communication interaction, let the audience participate in the production of media products, become participants in cultural integration, increase the audience's sense of experience and participation, and enable non-mainstream culture to quickly enter the public's field of vision.

"The Rap of China" program has carried out targeted topic marketing since its broadcast, including hot topics such as "Do you have freestyle?" and "I don't think it will work". And the program will be broadcast live via Weibo, Yizhibo and iQiyi. Audiences can leave messages and vote to their favorite singers online in real time, and the results of the voting will largely determine the selection of champion. This three-in-one combination of voting, live broadcasting, and leaving messages has empowered individuals in society, released powerful interaction capabilities, maximized the scope of the program's influence, and promoted the popularization process of culture.

3) *Integrating business platforms to broaden the cultural mass market*: "The Rap of China" is sponsored by major brands such as McDonald's, Nongfu Spring and Chivas, and uses advertisers to open up its popularity. After watching the program, the audience will deliberately imitate the dress of the rapper in order to seek the satisfaction of their sense of identity and self-demand. The local Chinese fashion brand "R! CH" registered under the program name quickly arouses consumer behaviors.

### D. Audiences in communicating

1) *Independence — Clearing the goal of audience screening*: The rap culture conveyed in "The Rap of China" program is based on the original intention of "keeping real" throughout the entire program and embodies the cultural values of truth and individuality. Therefore, unlike the mass culture audience, the audience of the rap culture will shape the role due to the characteristics of the culture, and spread the connotation of the rap culture while sticking to the self.

In the popular communication of non-mainstream culture, attention should be paid to the match between the audience's aesthetics and cultural content. Screening suitable audiences for cultural dissemination, and targeted shaping of distinctive and standpoint cultural content are more conducive to the popular communication of culture.

2) *Autonomy — Focusing on content correction of feedback*: Compared with mass culture audiences, non-mainstream culture audiences have more conscious cultural pursuits. Since non-mainstream culture is mostly self-sufficient small circles, the audiences of

non-mainstream culture often act as creators. And thanks to the characteristics of network communication and the weakening of the "gatekeeper" power, audiences have more free and richer channels to receive and transmit information, become information creators, and express their ideas as they please.

3) *Cohesion — Promoting the communication process of culture:* Non-mainstream culture audiences have distinct characteristics of cohesion. In the era of new media, audiences can more quickly and easily find groups with the same aesthetics as their own. The audiences of "The Rap of China" are mostly young people of the generation after 90s as well as post-2000s generation. The passionate and expressive program style and the bold critical cultural content of life are very attractive to audiences in the rebellious period or youth stage. Groups with such aesthetic inclination and

psychological appeals quickly merged together in order to gain a sense of identity and belonging.

E. Communication effect

1) *Cognitive level: the transmission of cultural content:* By comparing the Baidu search index from 2017 to 2019, it is found that the search with rap as the key word has steadily increased. The number of rap-related entries on Baidu exceeds 70 million. And there are about 5.7 million information with "The Rap of China" as the key word. On Weibo, there were 64.251 million discussions on topics related to "The Rap of China", with more than 16.25 billion views. NetEase Cloud Music has over 500 rap-themed playlists. Songs broadcast in the second season of 2018, such as "Floating Northward" and "Falling of the Planet", are still on the hot song list. ("Fig. 1")

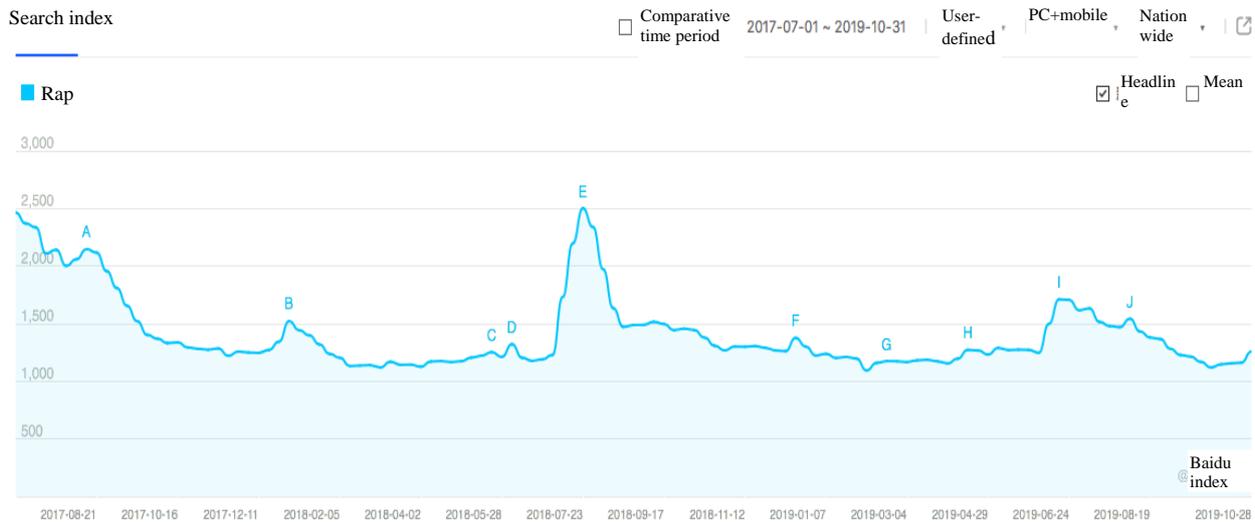


Fig. 1. "Rap" Baidu search index of 2019.07-2019.10.

From the objective data, it can be found that "The Rap of China" program successfully spread the rap culture to the public. The non-mainstream culture group uses various media to actively organize, share and disseminate cultural content, so that personal words and deeds are related to the non-mainstream culture content. It uses its interpersonal circle and social media to radiate to the public level, so that the non-mainstream culture content is recognized by the public. Nowadays, in daily life, people still often use some words in the rap culture, such as "battle", "diss", "skr" and other English words for dialogue and communication, successfully integrating the rap language into the lives of the people and achieving an excellent spread effect.

2) *Emotional level: multiple emotional satisfaction:* First, the content of the program meets the needs of the audience. On the one hand, the theme of "The Rap of

China" satisfies the curiosity of the audience. The emergence of China's first program with rap as the theme avoids aesthetic fatigue and gives people a refreshing experience. On the other hand, the overall style and cultural concept of the program conform to the spiritual pursuit of the audience. The audiences of the program are basically young people of the generation after 90s as well as post-2000s generation. Whether it is the cool behavior of the singer or the content of the true feelings of the rap song, the young group can be recognized by the individual and generate emotional resonance. And watching shows has become a form of entertainment for them to relieve the pressure in their busy work, and meet the needs of young people for the spiritual world. ("Fig. 2")

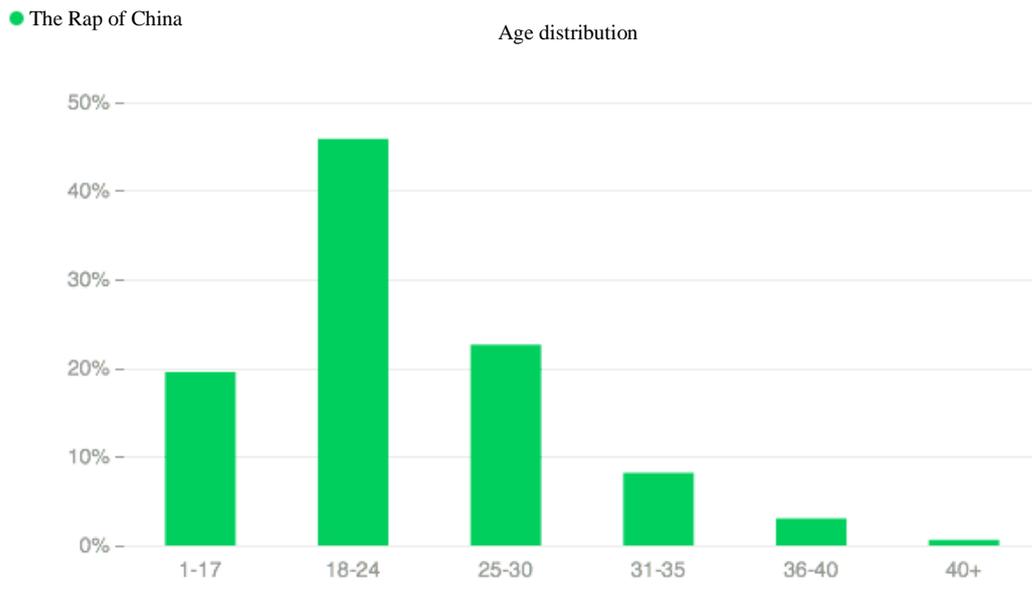


Fig. 2. The audiences' age distribution of "The Rap of China".

Secondly, the format of the program satisfies the aesthetic tone of the public, and the music style incorporating local elements is more easily accepted by the public. Using Chinese elements to arrange music and lyrics that tell the life of the Chinese masses, the audience will have a sense of intimacy and feel that it belongs to the cultural form of China. Compared with the most original form of rap, it is easier to make the audience have good impression and increase the acceptance level.

3) Behavioral level: generating group identity: "The Rap of China" uses iQiyi as the main channel of dissemination. When watching the program, the audience can express their views on the content of the program through real-time barrage and comments. At the same time, they can also give feedback to the program group to a certain extent, which is beneficial to the effective adjustment of the program. In addition, the program also cooperates with Weibo, Yizhibo and Tik Tok, the audience can vote for their favorite players through social media, determine the direction of the program through online interaction, communicate with the program producers, and play a very important role in promoting the popularization of the program.

On the other hand, with the popularity of "The Rap of China" program, rap culture began to gradually enter the life of the masses, and some non-mainstream fashion brands related to rap clothing have been rejuvenated. Many young groups take the purchase of fashion brands as a manifestation of their sense of

<sup>a</sup>. Data source: iQiyi index

fashion. Behind this consumption behavior, it also reflects the audience's sense of identity with the rap culture, and word-of-mouth communication by the general public is also the most effective and direct way for the mass communication of non-mainstream culture.

#### IV. THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF "THE RAP OF CHINA" TO THE POPULARIZATION OF NON-MAINSTREAM CULTURE

In the era of new media, non-mainstream culture has gained explicit expression, and with its independent characteristics, has become a part of the spirit of the times and cultural composition that can't be ignored. The success of "The Rap of China" provides communication ideas for how non-mainstream culture can display cultural values in the public's vision, and brings certain enlightenment to the benign communication of other non-mainstream cultures from four aspects.

##### A. Creating "individual role models" and opening up the cultural market

During the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the "Hip Hop at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China" program sang: Who says rappers never care about state affairs? I'm also a loyal guardian of the motherland when I put down the microphone. This shows the importance of individual communication role models for cultural communication. GAI, the champion of the

first season, was invited by the show "I'm Going to the Spring Festival Gala" after the show was broadcast. And GAI, originally expected to be a pioneer in criticizing social reality, used "long live the motherland" as the supporting word in order to adapt to the mainstream culture and positioning of the program under the framework of the nature of the program. For a while, he became the submitter of eulogizing society and the truth, goodness and beauty [17].

In the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the development of non-mainstream culture needs to conform to the spirit of the times, do well in ideological work, integrate the forms of mass media in the new media era, start from the positive energy of the individual communicator, lead by example, and use a positive image that can be recognized by the public to open the door to the dissemination of non-mainstream culture, and finally complete the popularization of it.

#### *B. Adhering to the principle of "content is king" to attract audiences*

At the opening ceremony of the Tenth Congress of the Chinese Federation of Literary and Art Circles and the Ninth Congress of the Chinese Writers Association, Xi Jinping proposed that works of art should be rooted in the real lives of the people and reflect the pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy in people's lives. Such works of art are true to life rather than empty. It's necessary to eliminate content related to "passive", "negative energy" and "mourning", spread the core values of socialism, persist in cultural dissemination with a positive and optimistic force, and let the audience feel the light and energy. By creating programs that are warm, powerful, and virtuous, it attracts audiences to be nurtured in aesthetic experience, making the audience have a good emotional experience and cultural interest, and achieving the purpose of expanding the audience.

#### *C. Deriving publicity channels to expand the scope of communication*

If non-mainstream culture wants to be spread through mainstream and authoritative media, in addition to the indigenized reproduction of culture itself, it is more important to select platforms and expand channels. The platform selection of iQiyi has become an important factor in the successful cultural communication of "The Rap of China" program. IQiyi has high-quality video resources and interactive modes, which meet the needs of young audiences to express and interact. Second, it's needed to derive multi-channel program promotion methods. The integration of online social platforms and offline rap tours has deeply expanded the effect and scope of communication, so that the content of communication can cover various

audiences and meet the needs of audiences of all ages and media contact mechanisms.

#### *D. Realizing commercial transformation and stabilizing cultural heat*

The prerequisite for non-mainstream culture to enter the public's field of vision is to grasp the focus of the public to open the market. First of all, non-mainstream culture can realize traffic monetization through advertising, games, live broadcasting, e-commerce, etc., and complete primary communication with the help of capital. Secondly, it's needed to develop the relevant industry chain of non-mainstream culture, including civilian production industries such as clothing, food, medical and health, etc. While expanding economic benefits, it exports cultural content, making the non-mainstream culture rapidly enter the public's vision as a kind of commodity shell, promoting the mass popularity of culture by utilizing the abundance of social commodities, and realizing the popularization of communication. Therefore, in today's prevailing consumer culture, the commercialization of non-mainstream culture needs to be paid attention to, and the identity of the audience of non-mainstream culture needs to be enriched by consumers.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

After the new media era, media technology, social conditions, cultural policies and other related aspects have begun to develop, and the phenomenon of successful popularization of non-mainstream culture tends to be frequent. However, in the process of mass communication of non-mainstream culture, its communication scope and audience have changed, so the following aspects need to be paid attention to. First, when the non-mainstream culture is popularized, it will cause some negative effects due to the sub-cultural nature of itself. Second, when the non-mainstream culture is commercialized, how to maintain the balance between the artistic quality and the commercial level of the culture has become an issue that needs to be discussed.

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