

(Hip) Hopping between cultures: A study on international fandoms' perception of the Hip Hop artist Jay Park and his cultural hybridity.

A qualitative multimodal discourse analysis of Hip Hop and its adaptation and reception in South Korea.

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Abstract

Music has always been a means to understand and represent each era's culture. In the 2010s, as the world became increasingly globalised and different countries emerged as new leaders within popular culture, South Korea appeared as a new power. While the world turned their eyes to South Korean content - in a phenomenon known as Korean Wave, or Hallyu - the K-Hip Hop scene also became subject to scrutiny. Because of Hip Hop's close relation to race, often Korean rappers are accused of cultural appropriation and the K-Hip Hop scene is considered illegitimate. While there is some research on K-Hip Hop as a result of cultural hybridity, not much of this analysis has been conducted from the perspective of its fandom. This thesis aims to fill this academic gap, by answering the following research question: How does Jay Park and his online international fandom make sense of cultural hybridity within South Korean Hip Hop music? 11 music videos and five interviews of the Korean American artist Jay Park were analysed through multimodal discourse analysis, as well as approximately 30 comments in each video's comment section. As the focus of this research was the international fandom, only content and comments available in English were accepted as part of the data set. The main concepts which guided the research were cultural hybridity, Hip Hop culture, the Korean Wave and its related fandom practices. The study showcased how Jay Park found in Hip Hop music a space to represent his own hybridity as a Korean American. This representation was often presented through key elements of Hip Hop culture, such as the emphasis on one's own community or hard work. Hustle culture was also closely linked with the expression of South Korean cultural values, thanks to which the country progressed rapidly in the past decades. Jay Park's attention in portraying South Korean values was interpreted as a way to deal with its diasporic experience and showed to be highly appreciated by fans who wished for K-Hip Hop to homage its African American tradition, while also showcase the specificity of the Korean scene. Through the adaptation of Hip Hop to the specific context of South Korea, or through its glocalization, Jay Park was able to find the means to express his artistry freely, in contrast with his regulated and challenging career in Kpop. Jay Park's efforts in consolidating the K-hip hop scene provided a successful example of Asian American representation within the Hip Hop industry.

Keywords: Hip Hop culture, K-Hip Hop, Jay Park, glocalization, cultural hybridity.

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1. Introduction

In 2019, I was introduced by a friend interested in the Korean language to Kpop and Kdrama. During the Covid pandemic, one of the ways to broaden my room's horizons was to look up content related to countries far away and Korean content kept my days interesting. Soon after, I discovered the world of K-Hip Hop. It interested me seeing how Korean rappers adapted Hip Hop culture to tell their stories, as well as the reaction of the African American community who created it. While looking for topics I could write my master's thesis on, I discovered that 2023 marks the 50th anniversary of Hip Hop music and I wanted to celebrate its contribution to the world, while linking it to contemporary and relevant phenomena of globalisation, such as The Korean Wave, or *Hallyu*. This is how this research started.

Hallyu has taken over the world and through its process of globalisation and commodification was able to thrive in the global entertainment market for more than two decades (Fithratulla, 2019). Hallyu started by embracing South East and Central Asia in the beginnings of the 21st century, to then expand all over the world. Fithratulla (2019, p.89) argues that it was a mean to “preserve the country culture but yet justifying the commerce of culture” as it focused on promoting the development of the country, while both maintaining true to the Korean culture as well as intertwining with various popular influences (Fithratulla, 2019).

As Korean music, also called Kpop, has received much attention globally thanks to popular groups like BTS and Blackpink, its impact, strengths and shortcomings have been researched throughout. Much research on Kpop deals with the concept of cultural appropriation and how often black music and culture have been influential, yet not credited or misrepresented. In this regard, Kpop has been criticised multiple times by both fans and scholars as it strengthened stereotypes about other cultures, as well as for its very selective appropriation of black American and Latin American cultures (Garza, 2021; Williams, 2020). Another booming scene is that of Korean Hip Hop - referred to as K-Hip Hop. This scene is made out of rappers who focus on portraying Hip Hop culture and producing rap music, instead of more commercial and vocals-focused music with synchronised choreographies, which characterises Kpop. Some examples of popular K-Hip Hop artists are Tiger JK and Yoon Mi-rae. Throughout the paper Hip Hop will be mentioned in capitalised letters and without hyphen, in an homage to how the Hip Hop community refers to itself, rather than the shared academic jargon of “hip-hop” (Iglesias & Harris, 2022).

Before presenting the research question this thesis aims to answer, an important figure

within the South Korean music industry will be introduced: Jay Park. Jay Park is a rapper who was born and grew up in the United States by Korean immigrant parents. His association with Hip Hop started back when he lived in Seattle, his hometown, and was part of the b-boy crew Art of Movement. Then he moved to Seoul, South Korea, to pursue a career in a Kpop band as the leader of 2pm, but was kicked out after a scandal where old texts of him criticising South Korea and its Korean fans were made public. After the scandal, Jay Park discovered which values were really important for him, and based his future career on those: (creative) freedom, authenticity and community. Back in the US, he worked various jobs and started to upload numerous covers on youtube, which attracted the attention of many old and new fans. From there, he came back to Korea to pursue a career as a rapper, which at the time was not yet very accepted within Korean culture. He ended up founding three music companies: AOMG, HIGHR MUSIC and More Vision, as well as a *soju* - a Korean popular alcoholic beverage - brand.

This research aims to investigate the following question: How does Jay Park and his online international fandom make sense of cultural hybridity within South Korean Hip Hop music? This thesis is socially relevant because it analyses how a cultural and local phenomenon, such as Hip Hop, can become a global mode of expression and can be localised to different traditions and people. In this particular case study, Hip Hop is linked with a second cultural phenomenon, namely Hallyu. This thesis analyses how culture and music genres are re-interpreted and adapted due to globalisation. This is important as Hip Hop and Hallyu are both musical phenomena, yet also part of respectively African American and Korean culture. As a consequence, the discussion will treat current issues such as cultural appropriation and appreciation, as well as how to merge more cultures with respect and without losing value from both sides - especially in the context of a world that is increasingly interconnected. Similarly, the academic relevance of this thesis has to do with the analysis of the contemporary multicultural Hip Hop scene. More in particular, this thesis builds knowledge on K-Hip Hop and fills the gap of research from the perspective of (international) fandoms, as much of the previous analysis focuses on how cultural hybridity is showcased within the lyrics and videos of songs. In doing so, the thesis tackles topics related to online fandoms and how they make sense of these transnational phenomena - especially when they are more and more involved through the media in their creation, enjoyment and distribution.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Cultural hybridity

This thesis aims to build on previous research by attempting to focus on the fandom perception of the cultural hybridity within K-Hip Hop. Burke (2019) defines cultural hybridity as the intermingling of different cultures together - whether online or offline, whereas Yoon (2018) understands the concept as a challenge and fragmentation of the established notion of culture. Both agree that cultural hybridity is not a synonym for Americanisation, but rather the latter is an example of it (Burke, 2019; Yoon, 2018). In fact, cultural hybridity comprehends all the cultures in the world open to an exchange and how those exchanges take place; for example, how certain cultures react to imported cultural media and localise it (Burke, 2009). Yoon (2018) claims that cultural hybridity is an alternative to concepts such as cultural homogenisation or imperialism, which were not able to acknowledge the complex relation between the media users and the political economic context of their experience. Burke (2009, p.6) suggests that “cultural encounters encourage creativity”; this thesis will research if and how this creativity takes place within the musical and cultural products, but also whether this creativity can be seen within the international fandom’s reaction to K-Hip Hop music.

In which ways does hybridity manifest? Ackermann (2012, p.14) describes hybridity as a metaphor that is used to “come to terms with processes of cultural transformation” and that is constructed on three elements: *borrowing*, *mixing* and *translating*. *Borrowing* is a slightly negative term which implies that the borrowers’ culture is not as inventive and interesting as the one they are imitating. However, in relation to hybridity, transculturality and negotiation are more relevant as the former stands for a mutual exchange between two counterparts and the latter highlights how culture is sometimes adapted in order to be proper for the context (Ackermann, 2012). *Mixing* initially also had a negative connotation, but ended up being used with the meaning of *melting pot* - a place where different cultures, its people and traditions can be incorporated (Ackermann, 2012). As an example, a mix of English and a second language lyrics are used within music of non-native English countries as a way to bridge the language barrier between foreign audiences and bring a more global message (Yoon, 2018). Lastly, cultural *translation* originates from the idea that cultures are just like languages and, in order to be understood by foreign people, they need to be translated (Ackermann, 2012). Yoon (2018) argues that it is within the process of translation

and interpretation that transcultural commodities engage with their fandoms and named this element of hybridity as *participatory globalisation*.

2.2. Globalisation

Cultural hybridity deals with issues of globalisation, which is often negotiated in between the homogenisation of different cultures, societies, political stands, economies and the adaptation of those imported ideas and media to the new locations, which on the other hand encourages heterogenization (Robertson & White, 2007). Cultural globalisation is strictly linked with power dynamics, as certain countries are more likely to import their goods and media because of their political and economical state. Up until recently, the US has been dominating the entertainment media market, by means of big firms which act transnationally and offer entertainment based on American culture (Mirrlees, 2013). Entertainment - such as TV-series and music - is a means to bring the American value systems to other countries and create regulation as well as discourse around determined topics (Mirrlees, 2013).

However, in the past decades, research has shown how the US has functioned as an intermediary between the cultural products of various countries and the world; only after having succeeded in the US, many cultural texts have reached global appeal, in what was named the *megaphone effect* (Bloch & Lemish, 2016). While it can be acknowledged that the *megaphone effect* allows local media to become global phenomena, it also raises questions on why the US are the catalyst of this type of process, and often results in a fear of Americanization. An example of this can be found in Hallyu, which will be further discussed in the following paragraphs. It is important to notice how the transnationality of Korean media increased drastically after an increased mediatised interaction with the US. This has also partially to do with the huge East Asian diasporic community present in the US, which appreciates content portraying East Asian people and their culture positively (Ju & Lee, 2015). Nonetheless, the success of Hallyu is not limited to the consumption of Korean commodities by the East Asian community, as the fandom is increasingly global. Kpop, for example, provides “non-Korean fans with opportunities to re-imagine cultural flows beyond the Western-oriented process of globalization” in what Yoon (2018, p. 380) names the *imagination of cosmopolitan globalisation*.

One of the effects of globalisation is that people - whether they are aware of it or not - often engage in practices of cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation can be defined as nonconsensually taking other cultures' aspects and doing damage to those communities

through perpetuating prejudices, discrimination and racism (Howard, 2020). Rogers (2006), on the other hand, defines four different categories of cultural appropriation, but bases them on their socio-political and economic context rather than on the purpose of the people who appropriate. Therefore, he defines the following categories. *Cultural exchange* consists on the mutual exchange of culture grounded in equity of power; *cultural dominance* is when people of a subordinate culture utilise symbols of the dominant one, even as resistance; *cultural exploitation* happens when the dominant culture uses elements of the subordinate one without any credit or permission; and lastly, *transculturation* happens when there are cultural elements of which origins are hard to track down to one single culture, as more were involved in their creation (Rogers, 2006).

2.3 The Hallyu

From the 1990s, next to the previously dominant American and Western media, other influences started to become relevant producers and distributors of media. Particularly, as mentioned by Noor (2022, p.77), East Asian countries such as China, Japan and South Korea, have become to “pose a challenge to Western cultural imperialism” , while also being responsible for dominating other East and Southeast Asian media cultures.

For the sake of this thesis, let us look at the specific case of South Korea. After the Asian financial crisis of 1997, the country started to invest in the media and cultural fields, to promote cultural identification despite Korea’s colonial past (Noor, 2022). In particular, K-pop and its international fandom are an example of commodified industry which aims to re-shape South Korea national identity by a hybrid and transnational cultural exchange (Yoon, 2018). Hallyu was able to attract other East and Southeast Asian markets thanks to its sense of relatability and empowerment for the Asian community, thanks to its capacity to give the viewer a “fresh view of gender relation, lives of the youth and justice of their own societies through the perception of spatial temporal distance and closeness of other East Asian modernity” (Noor, 2022, p.82). As a matter of fact, the K-pop industry itself took inspiration from the Japanese pop idol industry, which started to attract attention in the 1980s (Yoon, 2018). Nonetheless, Hallyu was also able to appeal Western markets by marketing products that were inspired by Western music and TV shows, but instilled with original Korean characteristics (Noor, 2022; Yoon, 2018). This way the audience would be familiar with the products yet admire their individuality and new sensibilities (Hennig-Thurau &

Houston, 2019).

Bok-Rae (2015) defines four stages of Hallyu which are now co-existing simultaneously: Hallyu 1.0, based on K-drama, Hallyu 2.0, based on K-pop, Hallyu 3.0, which stands for K-culture, and lastly Hallyu 4.0, which represent K-style. The success of Hallyu is then explained as a result of hard power, namely the rapid economic and industrial development of South Korea, as well as soft power, as in Hallyu is based on popular culture. This soft power is “based on the culture industry providing emotion and pleasure as value-added services” (Bok-Rae, 2015, p.156). Yoon (2018) also underlines this soft power, which they refer to as *cute globalisation* - namely the fans’ consumption and appreciation of the cute images created within K-pop through the idols. However, this cute globalisation often is used to conceal the “commodifying and disciplinary forces behind innocent images of K-pop idols” (Yoon, 2018, p.385). Indeed, Hallyu’s success is also due to Korean drama and Kpop's relation to capitalism, as they are not only a product of it but also an expression (Bok-Rae, 2015). As a matter of fact, Korean drama and music are very competitive and creative fields, but also often portray those characteristics of competitiveness and expression of sensibilities.

Let us look at how cultural appropriation is intertwined with Hallyu. To begin with, Hallyu 3 - namely the Korean music industry - is highly inspired by music genres such as Hip Hop and R&B, which are renewed styles of black music (Bok-Rae, 2015). These influences come from the presence of American soldiers in South Korea during and after the Korean War, which happened between 1950 and 1953, and are the result of a strategic operation that aimed to promote the liberal democracy of the US in South Korea through cultural media (Anderson, 2016). When South Korea changed from a dictatorship to a democracy, Hip Hop and R&B provided a new form of creative expression. Specifically in relation to music, cultural appropriation can be defined as “using elements of a marginalised culture without demonstrating an understanding of the historically and emotionally significant elements of the music culture” (Howard, 2020, p.69). As a matter of fact, while sometimes Kpop might be utilising those historically black aesthetic and musical features as an element of imitation or resistance within a highly Western industry - music -, many instances showcased how blackness is often portrayed as a fetishized coolness (Kim, 2020).

2.4 Fandoms

Hills (2017) suggests that rather than considering fandom “as a singular or coherent “culture” (n.p.), we should acknowledge contemporary fandoms “as a network of networks, or a loose affiliation of subcultures, all specializing in different modes of fan activity” (n.p.). Consequently, fandoms are not simply one community nor to be seen as individuals coming together; there should not be a quest for hierarchy or authenticity, but rather an understanding of a set of relations that follow no specific rules other than those who are peculiar to the case (Hills, 2017). Lee (2016), contrarily, defines three patterns that can be seen across the majority of fans: distinction from normal consumers, an active consumption which turns into production and a loyal relation with the respective cultural industry.

Nonetheless, research has shown how fandoms are essential - especially within online spaces of communication - for two main reasons: they are actively involved in the process of creating new media as well as reacting to pre-made ones on the topic of their fandom, but also they are important figures in the mediation between new culture and in influencing new trends (Jaakkola, 2023; Verboord, Koreman & Janssen, 2021). Indeed, due to the increasingly engaging media platforms of the contemporary world, fans have the opportunity to interact and co-produce media with and for their favourite artists. This type of commitment can be referred to as *passionate labour* - where the word labour should not be seen as exploitation but rather as a willing act that fans choose to do to contribute to their artists success and show their support creatively both to other fans and the artist (Morris, 2014). This could also work oppositely, as fans create and share media to show resistance to certain cultural phenomena.

Due to the transition from in person to digital fandoms, fandoms have become liminal spaces of transculturality where a lot of discussion on globalisation, cultural hybridity and appropriation take place. Through new technologies, not only fans have been able to have access to local media on different sides of the world, but also fandoms themselves have been able to become global spaces of discourse (Lee, 2016). With the increased consumption of non-English cultural products, fandoms have progressively become spaces of literal, but also cultural translation between different countries. Through the daily use of social media, fans are able to negotiate the cultural proximity between the object of the fandom and the fandom itself (Yoon, 2019B). To name some examples of cultural products which are highly mediated and distributed online by fans, there are Latin American telenovelas, Japanese anime and mangas, as well as Korean dramas and music (Lee, 2016). While fandoms are an agent of the increasing transculturality of these pop media, they can also be places where the socially

constructed concept of otherness is strengthened (Yoon, 2019B). Many fans find those non-Western media products as an alternative to their daily life and an escape to imagined far away places (Yoon, 2019B).

2.5 The Hallyu's fandom

The peculiarity of Hallyu does not only reside in its products, but also in its fandom practices. Choi and Maliangkay (2014) underline how Kpop fandom practices are perceived differently by each individuals: while some follow Kpop because that is what is trending at the moment, other started following it back when it was the more alternative option; while many fans are vocal about their passion for Kpop and support openly the industry, other admitted to have hidden their passion because they feared how other would perceive them. Many Kpop fans fear the still-present stigma about Kpop, who is often considered by Western audiences as immature or for fetishizers of Asian culture (Yoon, 2019B). However, the reasons why fans follow and engage with Kpop are various and range from the vocals, dances, virality, fashion, visuals and multiculturalism of Kpop, as well as for its positive Asian representation (Choi & Maliangkay, 2014). While the differences between the Western music markets and Kpop are slowly narrowing down, initially the Kpop industry provided a different image of the performers compared to the West: while the former created idols who seemed approachable, humble and innocent, the latter focused more on sexual and politicised themes (Yoon, 2018). While many fans showcased awareness of the underlined commercial aims, the commodification of the idols and the double standards based on gender, consumers also admitted the pleasure that comes from engaging with apolitical-presenting pop culture which allows them to romanticise their favourite singers and escape their daily life (Yoon, 2018).

Citing Choi and Maliangkay (2014, p.8): "It can be argued that K-pop is a meta-commodity that can commodify a host of other cultural goods as pseudo avatars of K-pop idols", which in more simple words means that Kpop is not only the music and its performers, but becomes a lifestyle where fans partakes in consuming every aspect of the lives that their favourite idols endorse. Nonetheless, the K-pop fandom is an example of an audience which not only consumes a product, but actively takes part in the promotion of it. As a matter of fact, many K-pop fans engage, promote or create media content related to the culture in their day to day life - becoming popular culture managers who collaborate actively in the success of their idols (Jang & Song, 2017). Sun (2020, p.391) explains how most

fandoms engage in the so-called “unpaid immaterial labor”, which consists of those practices that generate information and commodify cultural media and content. Through those micro-participation, fans are able to feel part of the community on a daily basis and transform the Kpop subculture into a more powerful movement, which will thus lead to macro-changes; indeed many fans feel proud for the achievements of their idols, as they often contribute actively in their success (Yoon, 2019B). Furthermore, Sun (2020) argues that fans are both producers and consumers of those fan-made products and thus engage in a form of almost free creative labour. For example, many fans engage in the translation of Kpop content and Kdrama in English and/or their native languages, to fight the lack of accessible content in their local area. Indeed, practices such as dubbing raise awareness of the fact that sometimes fan practices undermine the commercial success of a product, as their distribution becomes free and unregulated (Lee, 2016). On the other hand, sometimes fandom practices overcome the linguistic gap by playing with the polysemic nature of Kpop, which is open to many linguistic, musical, visual and cultural interpretations (Yoon, 2019B).

Within the international fandom of Hallyu, certain practices draw back to the concept of cultural appropriation. As fandoms are engaged in dialogue and exchange between different cultures - problems often arise as “result of different degrees of access to and identification with power, and vulnerability to textual misrepresentation or violence mirrored in fandoms” (Morimoto & Chin, 2018, p. 184). With the increasingly international reach of Kpop, Kdrama and all that is part of Hallyu, the fandom has also become global. While many global fans enjoy various entertainment products related to South Korea, *koreaboos* are those specific fans who are so immersed in Kpop, that they wish they could be or even act as if they are of Korean ethnicity (Rosenau, 2022). Those fans appropriate Korean culture, alter their aesthetic to look more Korean and even utilise - whether correct or not - Korean language. All of this is a consequence of their idolised and fetishised vision of Korean culture and people, presented through the media (Rosenau, 2022). Many international fans have started to distance themselves from *koreaboos* and even fight their appropriation by mocking their language and behaviours, in an attempt to highlight their absurdity (Rosenau, 2022). This thesis aims at starting to fill in the academic gap in the research of the international fandom of K-Hip Hop and analyse what the fandom expresses on topics such as cultural appropriation and how they make sense of the power dynamics that are intertwined with the concept of cultural hybridity.

2.6 An introduction to Hip Hop

This study will focus particularly on the cultural hybridity within Hip Hop music and culture. To trace back the origins of Hip Hop, it is necessary to consider the socio-political climate of the US in the 1960s and 1970s. Those decades were years of struggle for the Black American community, who fought against segregation and in favour of the right to vote as citizens of the US, under the guidance of Martin Luther King Jr. (Price, 2006). Other Black power movements who need to be referenced are the Black Panther Party, guided unofficially by Malcom X, and the Black arts movement, which was the demonstration and celebration of Black people's creativity (Price, 2006). By the 1970s, the Bronx, one of the neighbourhoods of New York, hosted a great number of Black, Latino and Caribbean families of the working middle class. Hip Hop was created by the African American community in the South Bronx neighbourhoods in the 1970s. The Jamaican immigrant Kool Herc (Clive Campbell) is often credited as the first disk jockey for the Hip Hop genre (Price, 2006).

The genre rapidly spread across the country and expanded from its four foundations -djing, b-boying, graffiti and mc-ing - to also include elements such as beatboxing, fashion, specific idioms, and street entrepreneurship (Arya, 2021; Harrison & Arthur, 2019). The commodification of this culture made it rapidly become mainstream and lose its original essence of "expressions (...) employed as survival strategies to cope with subjugation, racism, and poverty" (Arya, 2021, chapter 4) and its motto: "peace, love, unity and having fun" (Prince, 2006, p.13). Harrison and Arthur (2019) define Hip Hop's ethos - its essential spirit - as the *ethos of the subaltern*, which stands for those sentiments and actions of people who fight against cultural oppression and marginalisation. Nonetheless, although Hip Hop is nowadays often utilised as a trendy aesthetic, there are still artists around the world who engage and maintain alive the original meaning of Hip Hop, while still adapting it to their own cultures and lives.

Hip Hop and R&B are a black musical genre "not because of who performs them, but because the genres themselves contain elements that reflect black aesthetics" (Anderson, 2016, p.291). As already explained, Hip Hop is culturally and historically tied with the black diasporic community, its resistance and creativity in the US. Some of the qualities that are often linked with black aesthetics are "performative dramatization and extraordinary ornamentation surrounding the way black people walk, talk, dress and act-out their everyday lives" (Harrison and Arthur, 2019, p.3), an accentuation of asymmetry and surprise factor, emphasis on originality and conscious re-interpretation and, finally, mimicry (Harrison and

Arthur, 2019). Those elements were adapted to music and created the Hip Hop genre through the three main elements of *flow*, *layering* and *rupture*, but also shaped the culture by emphasising creative repurposing of media/materials in order to promote new meanings and new collective identities (Harrison and Arthur, 2019). In order to grasp the audiences' attention, Hip Hop relied heavily on *hype*, as well as on the personal and collective hustle, based on local trust within one's own circle, to be heard (Harrison and Arthur, 2019).

While reporting different takes on whether Hip Hop culture is authentic only if related to blackness, Kim (2023) raises an important question: is the authenticity of Hip Hop a construct? For example, are mixed race Black artists authentic? Surely, as Kim (2023, p.141) explains, while K-Hip Hop is a subculture that originates from Black culture, K-Hip Hop was mostly “monoracially and monoculturally Korean” and most of its artists were and still are male. This thesis will aim to see how the hybrid expression of Hip Hop by Korean American rapper Jay Park is received by the international fandom. Can non-black Hip Hop still be considered authentic? Is the possible authenticity of Jay Park somehow linked to his cultural hybridity and thus related to feelings of discrimination against a racial societal group? In the following section, the currently available research on K-Hip Hop will be presented.

2.7 Previous research on K-Hip Hop

While much research has been done on Kpop and its fandom, less research is to be found in relation to K-Hip Hop and its fandoms. Due to the collectivism which characterises South Korean society, Koreans prefer to fit in rather than expressing their individuality. This explains why most Korean subcultures are originally from Europe or the US, such as K-Hip Hop. The K-Hip Hop subculture, similarly to the American one, is more and more part of popular culture; while maintaining its more rebellious attitude, its visual and auditory aesthetics are widely accepted (Ha & Park, 2011). Not much research has yet approached the question of cultural hybridity within the K-Hip Hop music scene from the perspective of the international fandom. The concept however has been touched upon from other points of view. For example, Kim (2023) took Yoon Mi-Rae, a Black Korean rapper also known as the “queen of K-Hip Hop”, as a case study to analyse the relevance of race within the K-Hip Hop scene. She is a part of the second generation of K-Hip Hop artists and an example of *gyopo* - the Korean diaspora - artist who challenges the fixed construct of Koreanness, or “*한*” (*Han*) (Kim, 2023). “*한*” (*Han*) stands for a feeling of oppression and resistance that is believed to be intrinsic but also inherited to all Koreans, and a result of Korea's long history of foreign

exploitation (Kim, 2023). It should also be noted how Yoon Mi-Rae's gender and blackness, opposed to the traditional Korean male rapper, were “Korean enough” to be accepted by the hegemonic and racist K-Hip Hop industry (Kim, 2023). Song (2019) researched the limited portrayal of female rappers within South Korea television. One example of which is the program *Unpretty Rapstar*, which showcases how tightly a female rapper’s career is linked with her physical appearance (Song, 2019).

Lopez-Rogina (2017) provided a visual analysis of K-Hip Hop videos, as well as a thematic analysis of contents and lyrics related to those; they discovered that, while there was a huge resemblance to American Hip Hop, K-Hip Hop artists preferred to localise their own products. As an example, Korean rappers preferred to talk about discipline, pressure of society, their dream of success, fame as well as their desire to be rich, rather than violence and weapons - which are not part of the majority of South Koreans’ everydayness (Lopez-Rogina, 2017). Kim and Sung (2020) discovered how K-Hip Hop sometimes refers to black people and their struggles in a superficial way, without really much knowledge neither on the history of black people or Hip Hop. However, the researchers recognized that Korea has also a more authentic community of Hip Hop artists who were able to reconstruct their own culture through the power of Hip Hop and used this culture to overcome their own localised struggles (Kim & Sung, 2020).

Many researchers agreed that K-Hip Hop struggles to find a balance between the imitation of African American Hip Hop and the desire of creating an authentic South Korean scene (Um, 2013). More particularly, this negotiation has been analysed through the lens of language, namely on how Korean rap often uses English. Hare and Baker (2017) claim that the mimicry of Afro American Hip Hop - whether in language, gesture, fashion - is often due to a lack of knowledge on the struggles of the original Hip Hop community. This phenomenon is accentuated by popular programs such as *Show Me the Money*, which commodify the global and domestic Hip Hop culture rather than educate about the topic (Hare & Baker, 2017). Following the success of *Show me the Money* and in line with the commodification of Hip Hop culture, other programs were created - for example *High School Rapper* focuses on the journey of younger rappers, *Unpretty Rapstar* and *Good Girl* are dedicated to highlighting female rappers and *SignHere* was a program that AOMG, Jay Park’s label, created to recruit new talents (Kim, 2023). Lee (2007) shared that Korean rappers use English for two reasons: either because a lot of their artistic inspiration comes from English speaking artists, but also because they think that using English lyrics will legitimise their rap. Indeed, K-Hip Hop artists with a diasporic past were seen as having a

higher degree of cultural wealth - or cultural knowledge, understanding and connection - to the (African) American community, and thus were considered as closer to authentic Hip Hop culture (Kim, 2023). On the other hand, recent research discovered a new trend in Korea where rappers prefer singing only in Korean, as it will create a more personal Hip Hop and build a local independent scene, not linked to the American one (Lee & Lee, 2021). This process is also referred to as “linguistic emancipation” and stands for the shift to one’s own native language after attempting to use English. Kim (2023) disagrees with this pattern towards Korean language and mentions how words that come from Hip Hop culture such as “swag” (romanized Korean: *seuwaegeu*), “respect” (romanized Korean: *riseupeck*) and “self criticism” (romanized Korean: *selpeu dis*) are now commonly used within Korean media.

3. Research design and methods

3.1 Description of the method

Qualitative analysis was used to conduct the investigation, as the research question was interested in knowing how people make sense of a determined phenomenon in their everyday life (Boeijs, 2010). To provide a cohesive answer to the research question, it was necessary to conduct multimodal discourse analysis of all the Youtube content - both music videos and interviews - as well as for the comment section. Precisely, the researcher first scanned through multiple music videos, in order to gain an overall understanding of Jay Park's musical career. Then, the focus shifted onto finding the right interviews, to better understand Jay Park's mindset, cultural background and relationship with Hip Hop. Only after, the researcher analysed both the music videos and interviews in depth. The fans' comments under those videos were analysed after seeing each individual video, to better contextualise them.

Drawing back to the main question “how does Jay Park and his online international fandom make sense of cultural hybridity within South Korean Hip Hop music?”, meaning making is the core of this master research and it is investigated via discourse analysis. Johnstone (2017, p.2) describes discourse as “instances of communicative action in the medium of language” but does not limit communication to language and highlights how there are other media such as the creative outlets of music and photography. In other words, discourse includes all different processes of meaning making as well as how people gain and make sense of this knowledge. Critical discourse analysis tries to solve the previous lack of acknowledgment of the interrelation between language, forms of power and political and ideological advocacy (Machin & Mayr, 2012). In particular, multimodal discourse analysis’ focus on different media of communication makes it ideal to study human beings and their processes of communication, as its understanding of language also welcomes visuals (Johnstone, 2017; Machin & Mayr, 2012). While critical discourse analysis believes that “language both shapes and is shaped by society” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.4), multimodal discourse analysis believes that “visual communication, as well as language, both shapes and is shaped by society” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.10). It has not just been useful in studies of language, but also in how this language is used in multiple forms of human cognition and communication, such as the creative industries. Scollon and Levine (2004) point out how discourse - as well as discourse analysis - is strictly linked with the technology through which we access the data: language is expressed “across multiple modes of communication” (p.2)

and encompasses spoken and physical language as well as the context and physical spaces in which those actions take place. Multimodal discourse analysis was the preferred method because it allowed to research different types of texts; texts that can be present in the form of written language - such as the music's lyrics or the interview script - but also through visual aspects - as for example through the aesthetics of the music videos (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Similarly, in both the music videos and the interviews, social interactions are shown not just through spoken language but also physical language and cinematography (Scollon & Levine, 2004). As a matter of fact, visuals are a fundamental element in processes of mediation and thus allowed a better understanding of the topics mentioned in the comments in relation to their context (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The comments' analysis was conducted in order to discover recurrent patterns, as well as to understand the comments' meaning by describing and interpreting them. The patterns which the study looked for were related to the concepts of cultural hybridity, the culture of Hip Hop, fandom practice and Hallyu and will be later discussed in the paragraph on operationalisation.

3.2 Sampling

Within qualitative analysis, the positionality of the researcher influences their studies greatly (Holmes, 2020). In this specific case, as the researcher could not speak Korean, the international fandom was the subject of investigation. Similarly, only comments in English were taken into consideration for this research. As people with Korean origins might interact online with other fans in English, this research referred to the international fandom as the fan spaces of communication that make use of the English language. It could be criticised that a focus on English speaking fans for the sake of transculturality is a limit because it dismisses the experience of those fans that either cannot speak the language or do not have access to determined media (Morimoto & Chin, 2018). While a perpetual emphasis only on English speaking fandoms is indeed a problem that needs to be addressed within the academic world, this thesis prioritised addressing the gap of research on the specific international fandom of K-Hip Hop music. Further research could work on broadening the investigation to more diverse fandoms and analyse those, either singularly or comparatively.

As previously mentioned, the researcher combined the analysis of Youtube videos and of comments related to those videos by means of multimodal discourse analysis. The videos which were analysed, as well as the comments, were chosen through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling can be a way to choose the data based on their relevance in relation to the

topic of research (Rapley, 2014). The researcher selected which of Jay Park's music videos and interviews to analyse based on their relevance to his evolution, passion for and legacy within (Korean) Hip Hop. Similarly, comments which were relevant to cultural hybridity, Hip Hop culture and Hallyu's fandom practices were the subject of analysis based on their significance in relation to the research question. Furthermore, since the research took place on the internet, it was not possible to sample comments based on specific demographics such as gender, nationality or age. Rai & Thapa (2015) exemplify the processes that are used in sampling. They begin by underlining the need to identify the population of interest and specify a sampling frame; respectively, in this study, the population of interest is composed of Jay Park and its international fandom, whereas the sampling frame is the group of people who comment under video related to Jay Park on Youtube. The sample size was determined by thesis guidelines from Rotterdam Erasmus University. Finally, the researcher had to choose between random and non-random sampling; in this study, non-random sampling was chosen, allowing the researcher to select data based on "common sense, experience, intention and expertise" (Rai & Thapa, 2015, p.4). In particular, purposive sampling is the method which allows one to focus on a characteristic part of the population or of a phenomenon which is deemed interesting to study and focus on the data relevant to answer the research question (Rai & Thapa, 2015). This sampling method was the most suitable to investigate the particular meaning-making processes of international fandoms in relation to transcultural forms of Hip Hop.

As already mentioned, the case study of Jay Park was also chosen because of its relevance in relation to the research question. Jay Park has two Korean parents, but was born and grew up in the US, yet he moved back to South Korea in order to pursue a career with music and became a bridge between the Asian public and Hip Hop culture, which originated in the US. The choice of conducting a qualitative analysis based on a case study was dictated by the advantages of focusing on a single example of a phenomenon. Starman (2013) explains how working with a case study improves the conceptual validity of the research, as it allows a better measurement of the concepts relevant to the research as well as focusing on specific contexts. Moreover, a case study allows a more in-depth study of a particular reality and the causal mechanisms related to it (Starman, 2013).

In accordance with the guidelines of Rotterdam Erasmus University, this thesis was built on the analysis of 16 videos: 11 music videos of approximately 3 minutes and 5 interviews of different lengths. Those videos were selected purposely, after collecting most of Jay Park's music videos and going through approximately 60 of them to find the most

relevant to the research questions. In music videos that featured other artists, the lyrics that were analysed are only those of Jay Park. Similarly, the 5 most significant interviews were chosen from a group of 13 Jay Park's interviews which discussed the topics of transculturality and its relationship to Hip Hop. Followingly, approximately 30 relevant comments under each video were analysed, for a total of around 450 comments. If relevant to the research, viewers' reply to the original comments were included in the selected comments under each video. The only exception is the music video for the song *DNA Remix*, as there are two versions which have both been analysed, together with approximately 15 comments under each video. The first version of the *DNA Remix* video has been retrieved from a fan account, namely Cooperation of Notorious Kaleidoscope Care, as the video has been removed from the official H1GHR MUSIC channel due to a controversy which will later be addressed in the paper.

3.3 Operationalisation

This paragraph illustrates some of the relevant concepts to the operationalisation of this research. The main themes which the videos and comments were analysed through are the following: cultural hybridity, Hip Hop culture, Hallyu and its related fandom practices. Cultural hybridity was researched by way of concepts such as globalisation, heterogenization/homogenisation, deterritorialization, transculturality, cultural appropriation/assimilation/appreciation and the resultant creative outlets and cultural symbols (Burke, 2009; Robertson & White, 2007; Howard, 2020). Fandom practices were also understood through creativity and symbols, as well as how fans' communication deals with knowledge, power, admiration, identification and community (Bennett, 2014). Lastly, Hip Hop was analysed by means of its characterising elements - emceeing, deejaying, bboying, graffiti art, boxing, street fashion, community, etc - and a particular attention was given to how those elements were created through language and visuals (Forman, 2004). Furthermore, the knowledge on Hip Hop and the representation and respect for black culture and its community were also crucial themes of analysis (Forman, 2004).

In the discussion which follows the report of the research's results, those were compared with the findings by the study of Lopez-Regina (2017), which had a similar approach in analysing both music videos and comments; however, this thesis' analysis differs from Lopez-Regina's as it focuses on the specific case study of the Hip Hop artist Jay Park. The results were also compared to Kim's (2023) recent research on the Black-Korean rapper

Yoon Mi-Rae; the two studies are relevant to each other in the understanding of how transculturality affects Hip Hop, but differ in methodology and case study.

3.4 Analysis of the data

Accordingly to Van Leeuwen (2004), multimodal discourse analysis make use of different genres of speech, named “performed” genres, and writing, called “inscribed genres”, as the author explains: “speech genres combine language and action in an integrated whole, written genres combine language, image, and graphics in an integrated whole” (p.10). The research was conducted as follows: firstly the researcher focuses on the denotative speech and writing genres and, in a second moment, the emphasis switched to the connotative value of those attributes, also referred to as “meaning potential” by Machin and Mayr (2012, p.51). These potential meanings are the more relevant ones in terms of socio-cultural analysis and are very dependent on the context within which the texts are created and reproduced. Subsequently, the researcher searched for the salience in the visuals and verbal texts, which stands for how certain elements are made to catch the viewers’ attention; salience manifests through emphasising the size or the colour of an elements, or through choices in tone, volume, positioning and focus, as well as using strong cultural symbols (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Some meaningful techniques that are used to analyse written or spoken communication are the following: over lexicalisation - the repetition of concepts, absence, structural oppositions - namely using opposing concepts, and the expression of authority within the communication (Machin and Mayr, 2012). On the other hand, visuals can be analysed through iconography, their attributes - or the values they represent, and the settings.

The comments’ analysis was conducted through multimodal discourse analysis and was driven by the previously acquired theoretical knowledge which has been presented in the operationalisation section of the paper: cultural hybridity, Hip Hop culture and Hallyu, with its specific fandom practices. This allowed the results to be relevant to the research questions. In order to conduct a qualitative analysis based on multiple concepts, the dataset had to be segmented and then reassembled in themes in order to report the findings (Boeije, 2010).

Multimodal discourse analysis is particularly fit for this research as it pays much attention to *representation strategies* and how those are used to represent people and their culture: some examples of practices that will be taken into consideration are *(im)personalisation, individualism/collectivism, specification and genericisation, functionalisation and objectivation, use of honorifics, anonymisation and suppression*, the use

of *us versus them*, and *suppression* (Machin and Mayr, 2012). *Individualism* will be a particularly important practice, as it will highlight when subjects are referred to as individuals, thus emphasised on a personal level and brought closer to the reader, versus when they are described as a collective, which is often used to dehumanise people (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Linked to this concept, *specification* and *genericisation* respectively refer to the description of data as particular to individuals or as falling under a bigger group of people; those more generic terms often hide politically charged ideologies (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Those representation strategies were researched within the words of the artists, as well as in those of his fans through the comment section. As an example, the principle of “us versus them” was often seen on fans’ comments to point out Jay Park’s ethnic background and separate him from Black rappers. Furthermore, the music videos were also subject to an investigation guided by those principles.

An example of how the data was coded is provided in the appendix, taking as an example the video and comment section of Jay Park’s single *SOJU*, featuring 2 Chainz.

3.5 Reliability & ethical issues

Multimodal discourse analysis is always influenced by the research who conducts it because certain discursive choices might seem natural to them based on their upbringing, knowledge, personal ideologies and context (Machin and Mayr, 2012). As multimodal critical discourse analysis is a form of qualitative research, the researcher continuously conducted constant comparison and integrated previous analysis with news discoveries, to treat all the different images and text similarly and produce valid results (Boeije, 2010). The number of data analysed is in accordance with the thesis guidelines of Erasmus University Rotterdam; furthermore, the researcher recognised that the amount of data granted a certain degree of saturation, in particular in relation to the 30 comments after each video and the 5 interviews. On the other hand, future research can be conducted on other Jay Park music videos, as they might bring new discourses to the attention. Through a transparent approach in the creation of the dataset, as well as in its analysis, the use of literature and in the report of the results, the research gained credibility (Tracy, 2010).

Some issues might arise from using public online data in research (Stommel & Rijk, 2021). To begin with, all the comments in the Youtube comment sections of the analysed videos were anonymised by omitting their usernames, since they were irrelevant to the research and could protect the users’ privacy. A link between the comments and the relative

youtube video was not provided, even though the name of the Youtube videos were specified for the clarity of the research. Even though there was no direct permission to utilise the data for research, all the comments are publicly available to all the viewers of the videos and each user had the choice to keep their identity anonymous during the creation of their profile (Stommel & Rijk, 2021). Nonetheless, there was no personal information shared through the comments which could help to identify the commentators other than the username, which was not shared within this research. While the topic of race is particularly sensitive, none of the comments were violent or strictly offensive, but rather an explanation of one's own point of view, thus not posing an apparent threat to those exposed to the research.

4. Results

The following section will explore the result of the multimodal discourse analysis conducted on the data set. The first theme which was found in the data is that Jay Park's Hip Hop career is strictly linked with the concept of ethnicity: in particular, the perception of the artist's ethnicity appears to be closely linked with whether the audiences are from Western countries or Asian. Secondly, Jay Park, while being a bridge between those different cultures, was also identified as a bridge between different genres: from Kpop, to USA Hip Hop, to the local K-Hip Hop scene, as well as R&B. Lastly, Hip Hop culture and mentality were essential means of understanding Jay Park's career and growth as a musician, which was dictated by scandals, breaking stereotypes, creating a new community of Asian artists with creative freedom and leaving a legacy for future Asian (American) rappers.

Table 4.1

A guide to the different chapters of the results' section.

Chapter	Sub-sections
4.1 A question of ethnicity	4.1.1 Is being Korean-American enough? 4.1.2 What is Koreanness? 4.1.3 The quest for a sense of community
4.2 Building a bridge	4.2.1 Bringing diversity in an homogenous country 4.2.2 The Korean experience in the US 4.2.3 The scandal 4.2.4 Is your success based on geographics?
4.3 Hybridity of genre	4.3.1 Between Korean and American aesthetics 4.3.2 Between Jay Park's Kpop past and Hip Hop present

Chapter	Sub-sections
	4.3.3 Between Hip Hop and R&B.
	4.3.4 The K-Hip Hop industry

4.1 A question of ethnicity

Kim (2023) argues that, since its beginnings in the 90s, K-Hip Hop has been strictly “monoculturally Korean” (p.141). The second generation of K-Hip Hop artists, from the late 90s to the 2010s, is the one where the division between Korean and *gyopo* - people from the Korean diasporic community - began to be drawn. Considering this history, as well as the relation between Hip Hop and race from its beginning in the US, this section analyses how much Jay Park and its fandom intertwine his contribution to K-Hip Hop with the concept of ethnicity.

4.1.1 Is being Korean-American enough?

Jay Park himself reflected on his fragmented life in an interview with SWAY’S UNIVERSE (2018). He mentions how, when he was young, most of the Asians involved with Hip Hop in the US were dancers, not rappers. When he moved to Korea, he was pointed out for being different, specifically for being “too American”. Following the newly found success in South Korea and the consequent scandal, Jay Park moved back to the US and faced a new problem: in the US, often, every artist that does music in South Korea is classified under the Kpop umbrella, even when they are not necessarily (SWAY’S UNIVERSE, 2018). From the constant lack of belonging, Jay Park felt the need of proving himself as an Hip Hop artist. Through his Hip Hop music, Jay Park was essential in the authentication of Korean Americans’ experience in Korea and the US. This is in line with Hip Hop’s initial aim, namely to provide a voice for the younger black and Latino generations who felt helpless in between their local and global presence in North America and the country of origins of their parents (Forman, 2000).

An example of this sense of inadequacy can be seen in an interview with the US based youtube channel No Jumper (2019, 0:10), where Jay Park is introduced as the “first overseas Hip Hop sensation” guest. Nonetheless the host seemed well aware of Jay Park being born

and growing up in the US, since during the interview he and Jay Park discussed the similarities and differences between Jay Park and Rich Brian: they both are rappers of Asian descent who are creating more visibility for the Asian Hip Hop community, but Rich Brian is an Indonesian who moved to the US, whereas Jay Park was born and grew up in the US, but later moved to South Korea. Many comments sympathised with Jay Park's feeling of exclusion, and narrated: "Sadly, everybody who isn't in the dominant populace in the U.S. is being made to feel that way". It should also be noted how often Jay Park is named as the Korean version of other American rappers, such as Kendrick Lamar or J Cole, denying his own American identity.

Most of Jay Park's songs are in a mix of English and Korean. By using Korean, Jay Park allows Korean audiences the opportunity to better understand and expand their knowledge on Hip Hop. On the other hand, Jay Park's Korean skills were criticised because he learned Korean later in life and does not sound completely fluent. Jay Park himself talks about his efforts to learn Korean in the lyrics for *To Life* (JAY PARK, 2022), "Got better at Korean, but the heart of my lyrics has stayed the same". The use of both English and Korean is a reflection of Jay Park mixed identity, as well as a manifestation of hybridity within K-Hip Hop, which takes place through means of literal translation - through the use of different languages - as well as metaphorical translation - through the use of different symbols (Ackermann, 2012).

Many fans commented on the fact that "Jay is like 'too American' for Koreans and 'too Korean' for Americans", to which many fans responded explaining that that is the essence of being Korean American. Korean American people are often subjected to a double marginalisation: in the first place, minorities are considered as "the other" within the "white world" and, secondly, they are also dismissed within their homeland (Kim & Sherry, 2022). The latter is sometimes related to the fact that male Korean Americans are not required mandatorily to do the military services as Korean males are. This has to be taken into the current context, where K-content and representation is on the rise and Korean Americans are more proudly wearing their Koreanness, often even going back into their homeland in a phenomenon called "reverse immigration" (Kim & Sherry, 2022). Once they are back in South Korea, "Korean Americans are seen as either the traitors who deserted the motherland or the subject of envy" (Kim & Sherry, 2022, p.201). This explains the importance of Jay Park, as creator of a space of representation and acceptance for the diasporic community of Korean Americans, successfully interacting with both cultures.

In the song *SOJU*, which was shot in the US, Jay Park (2018A) combines both sides

of his persona: in the first half of the video Jay Park is surrounded by black people at a car station listening to his song, whereas in the second half the featuring artist, the black rapper 2 Chainz is in a Korean restaurant surrounded by Asian women.

Image 4.2

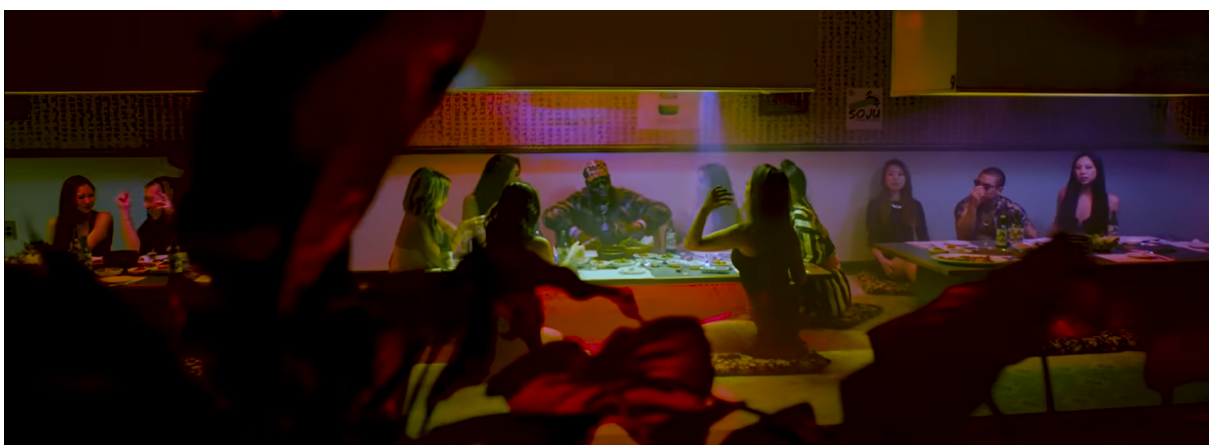
Screenshot from the single Soju. Jay Park is at a gas station, surrounded by black people.

(JAY PARK, 2018A)



Image 4.3

Screenshot of Soju's music video. Rapper 2 Chainz is in a traditional Korean restaurant, surrounded by people with Asian traits. (JAY PARK, 2018A)



During the video, Jay Park is seen wearing an hanbok style type of clothing, which Lopez-Rogina (2017) discovered being common in K-Hip Hop videos, as rappers tend to

wear clothes that are related to Hip Hop style, but also to Korean culture, decorated with Korea flags or inspired by the traditional garments. The comment section had discordant opinions regarding a scene where Jay Park shares a handshake and a bottle of soju with 2 Chainz. Some saw the scene as a coming together of different cultures while experiencing each other's, whereas others took it as display of tokenism - a manufactured effort to seem politically correct and inclusive. Fans' reactions were also fragmented for the video in general: one group of fans praised Jay Park for bringing "his culture into Westernized music", whereas others disagreed by claiming that his culture is American, mentioning that his first language is English and he had to learn about Korean culture later in life. In between, some fans claimed that this is the essence of being Korean-American and the fact that he had to learn about Korean culture does not take away from his ethnicity. Others expressed their disappointment in how many mixed people are often assumed as non-American, based on their physical appearance. In conclusion, many agreed that Jay Park is Korean American, and thus belongs and embodies two cultures. Jay Park himself seems to underline this duality in lyrics such as "Korean, English and I talk money so I'm trilingual" or "Seattle to Seoul" (JAY PARK, 2015A).

Similarly to Yoon Mi-Rae case study, Jay Park has also shown how he utilises Hip Hop as resistance to both Western lack of Asian representation, as well as the portrayal and discrimination of the Korean diasporic community within South Korea (Kim, 2023). Yoon Mi-Rae and Jay Park were both able to do so thanks to their identity which has been dictated not only by their Korean descent, but also by their lives in the US. Saeji (2022) studied the career of K-Hip Hop artists who resided outside of South Korea in the past, such as Yoon Mi-Rae's husband Tiger JK, and explains how often "a turn towards pride in Korean roots can be part of their concern, as former residents in the diaspora, with search for identity, belonging and community" (p.265). Kim (2023) explains how the Korean music industry recognized an opportunity for commercialization in the gyopo community, as they are often perceived as a more authentic representation of Hip Hop's culture and hybridity. Gyopo artists were perceived as having more community cultural wealth, which is the ability to understand how each individual's intersectionality influences one's life (Kim, 2023). Intersectionality explains how race, sex, gender, wealth, religion and anything related to one's own social status dictate how they will be treated within society. However, the success of mixed or diasporic artists was dictated by their outspoken and constant support for Korean culture, which was not asked of Korean rappers (Kim, 2023). Similarly, it can be seen how this might have influenced the career of diasporic artists, like Jay Park, and raises questions

such as: how much is the representation of Koreanness within gyopo artists' music an authentic expression of creativity, rather than an attempt to be digestible for the Korean audiences?

4.1.2 What is Koreanness?

Korean identity is particularly important for South Koreans because of the many years of occupation the country was subject to and because of the recent Korean war. Since then, South Korea even instilled in its education system the promotion of the idea of Koreanness to create a stronger sense of identification with the country (Won & Huntington, 2021). Similarly, Hallyu was promoted by the Korean government as a means of cultural identification for people of Korean descent and to reshape the image of South Korea internationally (Noor, 2022; Yoon, 2018). As previously mentioned, “한” (Han) - a feeling that is believed to be within all South Koreans - stands for being strong against whatever difficulty one encounters in its life, just like South Korea was able to resist years of colonisation, poverty and wars (Kim, 2023).

In more recent content, Jay Park has been proudly promoting his “Koreanness” with words such as “I’m Korean with Korean blood” (Spotify, 2023, 4:06) or “Cuz I got the soul of a tiger” (JAY PARK, 2021) - the tiger is one of the elements often used to symbolise Korean people and culture. Lim (2009) explains that to be considered authentically Korean “one must not only have Korean blood, but also speak the language and embody the values, the mores, and the mind-set of Korean society” (p.1), hence why children of Korean immigrants often struggle to feel accepted within the Korean community. One reason why Jay Park is now promoting more his Asian side could be the following: at the beginning Jay Park needed to prove his authenticity within the Hip Hop scene, and might have benefited from his Americanness, whereas once he established himself, he has been able to focus on his goal of Asian representation within Hip Hop, thus focusing on his identity as Korean American, or even just Korean. This is strictly linked with Hip Hop’s tradition of authenticity, as well as racial identification; in particular, one of Hip Hop’s goals was that of saving those cultures which were threatened by being assimilated by the mainstream ones (McLeod, 1999). Similarly, Jay Park might have used - especially given his flourishing career in South Korea - his success to promote Asian, and particularly Korean, representation.

In *DNA Remix* (Cooperation of Notorious Kaleidoscope Care, 2021), Jay Park and

other Korean rappers featuring on the track rapped about being proud of their Korean heritage. While doing so, many wore braided hairstyles, durag - which is a piece of cloth used by black people to protect and style their natural hair - and clothing very similar to that of African American Hip Hop music videos.

Image 4.4

Screenshot from the first DNA Remix. Jay Park wears a braided hairstyle and other rappers can also be seen wearing braids and a durag. (Cooperation of Notorious Kaleidoscope Care, 2021)



Within K-Hip Hop music videos, it is not uncommon to see rappers appropriating African American hairstyles and cultural elements (Lopez-Rogina, 2017). Nonetheless, Saeiji (2020) argues that, being a country with a conspicuous colonial history, members of Korean society are clearly able to distinguish between Korean and foreign elements, and has often tried to incorporate traditional elements of Koreanness within Western cultural media. The video received a lot of criticism as many fans shared their disappointment in “how embarrassing it is to rap about being proud of being Korean yet appropriate other people's culture”. Other fans defended Jay Park claiming that in our contemporary world “Hip Hop is global ” and the adaptation of culture - the one that previous comments label as appropriation - is inevitable. Saeji (2020) explains how Hip Hop has intrinsic potential of glocalization, since it is by nature a process of hybridisation between different music styles and cultures who came together to create a new form of expression. Nevertheless, the *DNA Remix* video was

removed and a second video came out on the National Liberation Day of Korea (*Gwangbokjeol*; 광복절). The newer *DNA Remix* video (H1GHR MUSIC, 2021) represents Korean culture in its multiplicity of experiences and showcases South Korea's success in becoming a free and rapidly progressing country. Saeji (2020) claims that Koreanness is portrayed in K-Hip Hop music videos in three forms: locality, iconography from Korean tradition and social engagement with Koreanness. Location can be found in the second video of *DNA Remix* in traditional elements such as the *hanok*, a building in typical Korean style of architecture, as well as all the shots representing modern South Korea, like those in bars, karaoke rooms, study cafes and street shops.

Image 4.5

Screenshot from the second DNA Remix video. Jay Park shoots in a typical Korean style house while wearing a traditional Korean cloth. (H1GHR MUSIC, 2021)



Location is also relevant in relation to Hip Hop, as it is one of the constituting elements of identification and authenticity within its culture (Saeiji, 2020). One example of Korean symbolism is the use of the *hanbok*, a form of traditional Korean clothing (Saeiji, 2020). Finally, Korean rappers often engage in their lyrics with the concept of Koreanness, often referring to their ancestry or community, by making sure to pinpoint that what they are narrating is a Korean story which they are proudly part of (Saeiji, 2020). This is showcased with lyrics such as: “Korean blood in my veins / I won’t ever back down Man, it’s in my DNA” (H1GHR MUSIC, 2021). Saeji (2020) sees these efforts to showcase Korean culture

as a new cultural trend which aims to create a new yet characteristic image of South Korea which can increase the touristic value of the country, as well as a nationalistic sense of pride. It should be noted how Saeji (2020) emphasises how many K-Hip Hop music videos are built around an ancient and traditional image of South Korea. Jay Park, on the other hand, uses only a few traditional symbols and mixes them with more current visuals, as well as specific Korean American experiences.

Generally, fans reacted positively to the second *DNA Remix* video, pointing out: “This is so much better than the first and works perfectly with the message. How easy it was to just do this from the get go” and “Jay makes mistakes but he learns from them and always tries to improve himself”. On the other hand, fewer fans thought that re-doing the *DNA Remix* music video was the “bare minimum”, nonetheless pointing out that it was a better reaction than other Western artists appropriating Asian culture, such as Nicki Minaj and the Wu Tang Clan, as they never removed nor changed their videos. Jay Park talked about the appropriation of Asian cultures in Western music, expressing how most of the time he found it harmless and appreciative (SWAY’S UNIVERSE, 2018). Similarly, he feels like using braided hairstyles is not necessarily cultural appropriation, because it is done out of appreciation and an attempt to be as cool as black Hip Hop artists (SWAY’S UNIVERSE, 2018). Nonetheless, Kim (2020) explains how this frequent reduction of black aesthetics to coolness is also a form of fetishization. The comment section seems to showcase a degree of understanding of (online) fandoms’ possible role as mediators between different cultures (Jaakkola, 2023; Verboord, Koreman & Janssen, 2021). In relation to the second version of the *DNA Remix* video (HIGHR MUSIC, 2021), a fan mentioned:

I want Korean rappers to take black American criticism (although western thoughts and ideologies should rarely matter in a completely different cultural country or region); and through that, evolve in ways to completely differentiate themselves from black music in the US. Rap is hip-hop and hip-hop is a culture, not tied down to one race regardless of where it originates.

As the comment explains, African American fans have space within comment sections to provide constructive criticism to South Korean rappers and educate them in how to make Hip Hop music without disrespecting its origins. This does not take Korean rappers’ accountability away, as they should still attempt to learn and respect Hip Hop culture, but rather suggests a new opportunity provided by contemporary media for fans to point out and correct problematic behaviours.

4.1.3 The quest for a sense of community

As claimed by Morgan (2016), one's authenticity as a rapper is not defined by his place of origin or his ethnicity, but rather, by their commitment to create music that showcases the reality of one's own community - with a particular focus towards the empowerment of the marginalised people and the youth. In the song *Sexy 4 Eva*, Jay Park (2018B) chooses his native city, Seattle, as the shooting location for his music video. A fan explained: "This is Seattle, this is his home, his breakdancing crew, his local neighbours, and to him all his loved ones will be sexy forever!". Fans praised him for not forgetting his roots even when finding success in a different country and thank him for the representation of Seattle.

Image 4.6

Jay Park dancing with a local community in a screenshot of Sexy 4 Eva. (JAY PARK, 2018B)



Seattle is a city with a particular relation to Hip Hop, as the genre was not as widely appreciated as in other major cities, also due to its marginal location within North America. This allowed the city to create its own characteristic sound and voice the struggle of the marginalised communities within an underrepresented city (Forman, 2000). The music video for *Sexy 4 Eva* (JAY PARK, 2018B) is particularly symbolic as rap is authentically based on receiving the approval from one's own crew or place of origin, to which a rapper should always pay homage (Forman, 2000). Jay Park sings "All of the family they fuckin' proud", which could refer to his blood related family, but also his local group of acquaintances, as

well as his hiphop friends. Perhaps it is exactly within the latter, his Hip Hop community, that Jay Park found a sense of belonging.

The whole song *To Life* (JAY PARK, 2022) can be interpreted as a celebration of Jay Park's own career, as he announces his retirement from the role of CEO in his two Hip Hop labels. Jay Park visually represented that in the music video by taking off the AOMG ring and the H1GRH GROUND necklace. Often Korean artists tend to showcase a lot of jewellery, as an indication of their wealth and social status (Lopez-Rogina, 2017) - which is a pattern particularly expressed by the younger Korean generations as a way to fit in within the newer and richer portrayal of Korean society. While Jay Park is surrounded by pedestals holding his musical trophies and screen showcasing live performance he recites: "For the achievements that I've worked hard for / And things that are to be achieved". Fans praised his efforts and particularly appreciated a shot portraying all the artists under Jay Park's labels surrounding their (previous) CEO. Fans mentioned: "Got emotional when he put down his ring and his chain, it hit me hard seeing all the artists surrounding him. He leaves behind a legacy he can truly be proud of." Other than portraying his Hip Hop family around him, he also gives shout outs to Art of Movement, his bboying crew, as well as to Seattle and Seoul, his two homes.

Image 4.7

A screenshot from To Life showcases Jay Park surrounded by the artists under AOMG and HIGHR MUSIC. (JAY PARK, 2022)



This attention in portraying and mentioning his crew aligns with his words in *ALL IN*, where Jay Park (2021) sings "My sacrifice, my time, my efforts will not be in vain / For my people,

I'm one with". Within the Hip Hop scene, community is an integral part of the culture and provides strength as well as motivation (Harrison & Arthur, 2019). Fans also praise him for his role within not only his labels but within the Korean music industry, by claiming that "He left a big print in the khh/Krnb industry or even within the K-pop community". Jay Park himself seems to be aware of his weight within the Asian music industry, boasting in an interview: "if you talk about Asian Hip Hop you cannot leave Jay Park out of the conversation" (No Jumper, 2019, 21:49).

Other fans affirm that Jay Park should be thanked not only for his role within the music industry, but more generally for the positive representation he provided for the Asian community. Jay Park has received the Game Changer Award at the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, honouring his contribution as Korean American to both of his cultures. Jay Park refers to culture as ways to build a bridge and connect others while learning about them (All Def Music, 2019). He claims that his goal is not limited to bridge between cultures, but also between genres like Hip Hop and R&B. One of the organisers praised him with the following words: "You are the future ... You give a lot of kids hope. You give a lot of people inspiration. You are what I have been waiting for!" (All Def Music, 2019, 3:56). On May 26th of 2023, NPR Music's Tiny Desk released an episode featuring Jay Park in celebration of the Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month (NPR Music, 2023). These moments of recognition verify Jay Park's status as someone who fought through Hip Hop against the marginalisation and oppression of his community, Asians and Asian Americans (Harrison & Arthur, 2019).

4.2 Building a bridge

This chapter discusses more how, given Jay Park's Korean American background, he was able to expand Hip Hop culture outside of the US, to South Korea and Asia. Similarly, his efforts to provide a more uplifting representation of Asian and Asian Americans and their lives in the US is subject to investigation. Finally, it will be questioned if and how much Jay Park and his fans' definition of success is based on the achievement within a specific geographical area.

4.2.1 Bringing diversity in an homogenous country

South Korea is a very homogenous country with precise beauty standards. Lookism - the discrimination of people based on their physical appearance - is very normalised within Korean society and it is believed that having a good aesthetic appearance equals to having a better social status, to the point that plastic surgery is a common procedure used to reach those unachievable standards and their consequent advantages, so called pretty privilege (Hamdon & Timur, 2020). Jay Park often challenges these beauty standards by bringing or mentioning people with diverse backgrounds, body types and ethnicities in his music videos. In *ON IT* (JAY PARK, 2015A), his lyrics recite: “Want a girl with a fat ass / Mexican, Black, or Brazilian”. Similarly, in *몸매 (MOMMAE)* music video, Jay Park (2015B) - while still having mainly Asian looking women in the music video - recites the following lyrics: “Dark skin, your thighs are firm / Like a taxi driver, curvy body and long legs”. Considering the fact that South Korean beauty standards include attributes such as a very skinny body, pale skin, a v-shaped jawline, a small face and double eyelids, a “fat ass” and darker skin tones are definitely challenging those norms (Hamdon & Timur, 2020). As South Korea is a country with high levels of lookism, discrimination is a major issue for those who do not fit in (Hamdon & Timur, 2020). In particular, the beauty standard of pale skin is dangerous in regards to the discrimination of black people; for example, a common issue that expats in Korea register is that some clubs do not allow foreigners or discriminate black people specifically, even though they play music by black artists all night long. Nonetheless, as Morgan (2016, p.138) mentioned, “the music and culture has historically traveled when and where African American bodies could not”, in what he defines as an “Hip Hop diaspora”. Indeed, through Jay Park’s music, black music and culture were able to enter South Korea and, virtually, also the black bodies showcased in his music videos. Most fans reacted positively to Jay Park’s appreciation of different women, whereas others expressed confusion and found his lyrics fetishising. Under the video for *Sexy 4 Eva*, many comments shared words of praise for the diversity showcased in Jay Park’s videos, which included “different communities (classes/races) and different bodies in multiple stages of life to convey sexiness”. As a fan explained, the music video did not only feature conventionally attractive people, but also included those who are not necessarily fitting societal standards of beauty.

Hip Hop by Korean artists rarely addresses issues of racial or gender discrimination, even though they are common within South Korea; this could be due to the normalised concept of *Koreannes*, which marginalised the experience of mixed/diasporic Korean,

foreigners and women, but also could be a result of Korean artists' preference in expressing the struggles of their own life rather than their political stances (Kim, 2023). In general, Jay Park's lyrics also reference more his dreams of fame, wealth and success as an Asian Hip Hop artist, as well as a strong sense of community, rather than violence, weapons and discrimination, as more typical of American rappers (Lopez-Regina, 2017). While this could be justified as an attempt to maintain authenticity as an Hip Hop artist and telling one's own story, Hip Hop is a very political type of music, deeply ingrained within a history of racism and the lack of interest in related issues is questionable. Nonetheless, Korean rappers are subject to implicit speech restrictions and often have to avoid topics that are too political or too explicit or they will be subject to heavy criticism and hate (SWAY'S UNIVERSE, 2018). However, there are sporadic efforts by gyopo artists like Jay Park or Yoon Mi-Rae to open up spaces of discussion for topics such as oppression and discrimination. As a matter of fact, Jay Park is often praised for being one of the artists who really made a difference within the Korean entertainment industry and fits the definition of an MC who tried to "deal with the realities imposed by society's often-hostile dominant communities that attempt to regulate youth speech" (Morgan, 2016, p.135). Jay Park believed in allowing musicians to have their own freedom, rather than being strictly controlled as usual for Kpop idols and created two Hip Hop labels where artists can develop and pursue their passion without being treated as products. This is an example of how the encounter between two different cultures, the US and South Korea, promoted new forms of expression, in line with Burke's (2009) understanding of cultural hybridity.

Another example of how Jay Park's self-expression brought more diversity within South Korea is that he was one of the first Korean celebrities with multiple visible tattoos, which are still not allowed to show in Korean television. Jay Park expressed how, when he started getting tattoos, his own fans were often opposed to each of his new ones (SWAY'S UNIVERSE, 2018). Some fans wrote how proudly they were of "watching him grow to break tattoo stigmas in South Korea". Tattoos nowadays often appear in K-Hip Hop music videos, even though they have yet to be accepted by the majority of Korean society, due to their previous associations with criminal organisations (Lopez-Rogina, 2017).

4.2.2 The Korean experience in the US

Multiple Jay Park music videos contain both American and South Korean cultural elements, in what could mirror the experience of a Korean American. Jay Park videos' use of African American culture has been mainly interpreted in two different ways: on the one hand, he is thanked for giving visibility to the creators of Hip Hop culture, the black community; on the other, he has been accused multiple times of cultural appropriation towards those communities. In most cases, fans recognized an attempt to merge American and South Korean culture. Morgan (2016) explains how Hip Hop is a “translocal” phenomenon, namely it intertwined the general North American Hip Hop tradition with that of the local scene one rapper lives in. In the case of Jay Park, that local scene appears to be either Seattle or Seoul, but also spaces of Korean-American culture, such as Korean restaurants in the US or Koreatown. As an example, Jay Park has a song called *K-TOWN* (JAY PARK, 2019) whose video showcases the Korean district in Los Angeles.

Image 4.8

Screenshot from K-TOWN, shot in a karaoke bar within the Korean district of Los Angeles. (JAY PARK, 2019)



Jay Park sings lyrics such as “Pulling up in K-TOWN yeah / I'm feeling like the president” and “U an outsider why u actin' like a resident”. Fans commented how they appreciated Jay Park's effort to represent his Korean culture, but also inserted scenes which are usually taboo for Korean artists, such as clubbing or girls dancing provocatively. Another viewer answered

that Jay Park is “rapping Korean American culture more so than actual Korean culture. This video was filmed in Ktown in Los Angeles, so nothing is taboo...”. The conversation continued - referring to the *SOJU* music video - when other fans questioned if soju is part of Korean or Korean-American culture, implying that Jay Park’s music is promoting purely Korean elements. Other comments replied that “there is no Ktown in Korea”, hence Jay Park’s music is more a representation of his identity as Korean American, than a purely Korean one.

Another instance of debate for fans is the song *니가 싫어하는 노래 Most Hated* (JAY PARK, 2017B), featuring Dok2. The artists were accused of cultural appropriation because they were wearing braids - “the braids say it all” - and for what they assumed to be the “n-word”. Many fans came to the rescue and explained that what seemed to be the “n-word” was actually the Korean word “네가” (*neega*) - a very common word which means either "you" or "you are" in Korean. Fans pointed out the hypocrisy of claiming someone is guilty of cultural appropriation without an understanding of the other’s culture first. Many fans also explain how Jay Park has many black friends, as well as knowledge of the English meaning of the N word - clarifying that he would not be disrespecting black people like that.

Under the already mentioned and discussed music video for *DNA Remix* (Cooperation of Notorious Kaleidoscope Care, 2021), fans began a conversation regarding cultural appropriation within Hip Hop culture. Some of the factors which were indicated as definitive of appropriation are: reducing Hip Hop culture and black culture to a negative perception, such as gangs, or claiming that culture as originally yours and benefiting from it. Other fans pointed out how in the US there is just as much of a stereotypical view on Asians. Fans commented that if Hip Hop is limited to black people, then Kpop should be limited to Asians and that Jay Park is an example of cultural exchange, rather than appropriation. Others disagreed and saw too big of a discrepancy between rapping about loving one’s own culture yet choosing other people’s culture as an aesthetic, as a trend.

4.2.3 The scandal

Being in between two different cultures is not an easy task and Jay Park himself struggled to find his balance between understanding both Korean and North American’s costumes. In many comment sections, fans discuss Jay Park’s previous scandal: after having debuted as the leader of the Kpop group 2pm, some messages were shared where he was expressing his dissatisfaction with life in South Korea and his Korean audience. Some of the

reactions were more accepting, as fans claimed he apologised for his wrong doing and blamed his youth in combination with the cultural shock of moving from the US to the strict trainee system in South Korea. Jay Park mentioned how, when he auditioned for becoming a part of the Kpop agency JYP Entertainment, he did not know how the Korean music industry worked. Particularly, he expressed his doubts about pursuing that same career if he knew beforehand how the system worked, if not for helping his family financially (No Jumper, 2019). His rebellious actions were led, even if not justifiable, by a cultural shock from the Korean society and entertainment business, which saw idols as a consumer product to design, rather than artists with creative freedom and agency. On the other hand, many fans point out more current behaviours labelled as problematic, such as the instances of cultural appropriation which were discussed previously. Fans defended Jay Park by highlighting how even though he makes mistakes, he always admits when he is wrong and apologises.

Jay Park emphasised how his experience as a Kpop idol made him an even more special case of Asian Hip Hop artist, as Kpop idols should often maintain a pure image in contrast with the more rebellious image of rappers. As a matter of fact, when Jay Park focused on making more Hip Hop centred music, he was met with a lot of doubtful people who were sceptical of a kpop idol trying to make rap music. He felt like the first three to four years after the scandal were dedicated to changing people's perception about him in regards to the scandal and to his kpop image (MTV News, 2019). Jay Park also admitted that being American was an advantage as it allowed him to have a second chance to move back home to the US after the scandal while allowing the hate in South Korea to calm down (No Jumper, 2019). Fans praised his resilient personality as being able to recover from such a controversy: "If people knew how serious that scandal s**t was ... Dude wasn't just in a kpop group they were the hottest kpop group at the time." When Jay Park returned to Seoul and started a different career, his fans labelled him as "the best comeback in Korean music history". It should be noted how scandals have the potential to destroy the career of people working within South Korean entertainment, as their strictly managed persona requires them to keep an immaculate image of innocence and purity (Ahn & Lin, 2019; Yoon, 2018). In line with the Hip Hop value of authenticity, fans appreciated Jay Park for staying true to his persona, while still working to become a better version: "being an ALL IN person is a huge and risky decision ... and this gang right here y'all is a living legend that can prove us that it's all worth it. Respect!" (McLeod, 1999).

4.2.4 Is success based on geographics?

In his lyrics, Jay Park often references the hardships that led him to change his life as well as the communities he was able to build, which are some of the characteristic elements often present in Hip Hop music (Forman, 2000). Those hardships are also deeply appreciated and inspirational for his fans, who wrote: “people are gonna have to respect Jay's hustle & quality music [...] Jay Park is the definition of hard work & it has worked so far.” Jay Park often talks about his successes as well, which as fans point out is somehow part of Hip Hop culture: “he ain't humble in his songs (which is kinda part of the whole Hip Hop culture, ... but when he meets fans and during interviews he is so down to earth imo”. Other fans promoted his activities and claimed that Jay Park has many reasons to brag about; one of which was the founding of the successful K-Hip Hop label AOMG in 2013. The rise of artist-owned labels is strictly related with the rise of Hip Hop artists who looked for ways to maintain creative freedom over their music (Forman, 2000). Many fans point out his legendary status in South Korea, as he was labelled as “one of the bigger R&B artists in Korea”, with a huge influence in the K-Hip Hop scene, considering also his second label H1GHR MUSIC. Other times, fans highlight his influence within the entirety of Asia, thanks to the many brand endorsement deals, musical collaboration with other Asian artists as well as his participation in different local shows, such as his own TV show *The Seasons: Jay Park's Drive* or the rap program *Show Me the Money*, and international ones like *The Rap of China Season 4*, *The Rap of China 2023* or *Asia's Got Talent*.

Many comments refer to Jay Park's career as splitted between the newly found independence in South Korea, versus his American promotion, brought about by his American distribution label ROC Nation, Jay Z's music company. Many fans' wishes that through Roc Nation, Jay Park will get “more recognition from the mainstream now”, as “his style is more American than Korean” and they feel like he is underrated within the Western scene. Lopez-Rogina's (2017) analysis of forum comments on K-Hip Hop music highlights the high frequency of discussions on racism, comparison with Western artists, levels of popularity with the US and nationalism. The study concluded that talents were recognised as such based on their success in the US and what were supposed to be compliments, often were just comparisons with Western rappers (Lopez-Rogina, 2017). This constant analogy with the US leads to the idea that Korean rappers are taking Hip Hop from the West and copying it without any individuality or understanding. Furthermore, it transforms Korean rappers into a threat to Hip Hop culture, disregarding “the ability of youth outside of the US to experience

hardship and use an art form such as rap” to deal with them (Lopez-Rogina, 2017, p.28). Fans often point out the US discrimination against non Western Hip Hop artists, by writing: “American media won’t give any publicity to Asian artists, it’s a struggle that those artists often face when doing music in America”. Contrarily, other commenters posed the challenging question of: “Have you ever seen an American, or just any non-Korean artist invited to an awards show in Korea?”, which calls attention to the bias of considering the US as the only place where talent can be recognised and made into an international success. As Bloch and Lemish (2016) explain through the concept of Americanization and the *megaphone effect*, artists’ success within the music industry is often compared with and dictated by their success within the US market. Within the fandom of Jay Park, it is possible to see how a significant number of fans challenge the US’s position of power in the music world and claim that his success in the US is irrelevant, as the “US is not the world”. This statement relates to Yoon’s (2018) notion of cultural hybridity as a way of challenging the normalised culture, which in this case would be the US, since they are often considered as central within popular culture. On the other hand, within rap and R&B music, it is worth questioning how much of this influence can be justified by Hip Hop’s tradition within the Afro American context, and thus the US.

Fans attribute Jay Park’s relatively smaller influence in the Western market to the fact that he focused more on establishing his career first in South Korea. Furthermore, his smaller success in the USA might be partially because of the still present discrimination based on gender and race within the music industry (Zhen, 2023), but also dependent on the fact that “most people that are into Korean music are into KPOP & IDOLS. Jay Park is neither anymore”. Under the comment section for *K-TOWN*, while discussing Jay Park’s attempt to promote Korean culture in the Western market, some fans confronted Jay Park’s success with that of BTS, one of the biggest male Kpop group. One comment explains how Jay Park is less famous because “Americans only want to hear native Asians and not their own”, referring to how Koreans - like BTS - are more interesting to Western audiences than Korean Americans - like Jay Park. Many claimed that it was not fair to compare a kpop group to an individual rapper, as the type of content they produce is very different. Jay Park was asked in an interview if he would like to collaborate with BTS, to which he answered saying that he would take the opportunity if the music would match both parties’ personal style (SWAY’S UNIVERSE, 2018). Some fans also wrote: “I love that Jay Park and BTS are about to conquer the US from opposite ends of the K-Music spectrum...” and seemed to recognize the

difference in musical styles between the two artists.

4.3 Hybridity of genre

Jay Park is often praised for his multiple talents, as fans comment “I actually like whatever this man does, be it singing, rapping, dancing ... [...] but also a hard working person... RESPECT!”. Another fan adds to this list the fact that he was then CEO of two companies, as well as his input as producer and his capacity to write songs in both English and Korean, affirming “ I have mad respect for Jay”. Let us look at how those different talents allowed him to connect different markets and bring together different musical genres to create his own path.

4.3.1 Between Korean and American aesthetics

In the video for *Raw Sh!t* (JAY PARK, 2017), many of the shots highlight elements that are often related to traditional visuals in US Hip Hop such as a basketball court or graffiti.

Image 4.9

A screenshot from Raw Sh!t where Jay Park raps on a basketball court. (JAY PARK, 2017)



Image 4.10

A different screenshot from Raw Sh!t where Jay Park looks in a mirror with a baseball bat, in a building covered with graffiti. (JAY PARK, 2017)



Similarly, in music videos such as *ON IT*, Jay Park (2015A) inserts traditional elements of Hip Hop culture, like b-boying moves and a DJ set, but also more stereotypical ones, such as police siren lights and cones, as well as a general dark scenery (Arya, 2021).

Image 4.11

Screenshot of ON IT music video. Jay Park includes multiple items which are linked to police imagery. (JAY PARK, 2015A)



Even if limited within Jay Park's videos, the widely accepted denotation of Hip Hop, and thus black culture, with elements that are related to violence and transgressive behaviour is problematic, as it builds on the "dominant images of Black criminality" (Rose, 1991, p.284). Those discourses are closely linked with stereotypes that strongly impact the relationship between black people and government institutions and perpetuate the presence of discrimination based on race (Rose, 1991; Howard, 2020). In other instances, such as in *ON IT* music video, Jay Park (2015A) inserts typical Hip Hop visuals, but also more traditionally Asian elements, such as dragons portrayed through shadows, accompanied by lyrics that word play with Asian culture: "I will blow through all my foes who hate / I'm Goku super saiyan" and "Yeah, young Jackie Chan when I stunt".

Image 4.12

An example of Asian imagery in a screenshot of ON IT. (JAY PARK, 2015A)



In the music video for 몸매 (*MOMMAE*), Jay Park (2015B) portrays a party where a lot of Asian looking women are showing skin and dancing in a sexy way, such as twerking; in the music video there is alcohol, people smoking and the sign of “parental supervision advised”.

Image 4.13

Screenshot 몸매 (MOMMAE). In this scene Jay Park is laying down with three women on top of him. (JAY PARK, 2015B)



This type of imagery is normalised within the USA music scene, yet was still not widely

accepted within the Korean society of 2015. Alcohol and smoke are sometimes part of K-Hip Hop videos, yet they tend to be used more as a background than the focal point (Lopez-Rogina, 2017). One fan writes how they thought Jay Park “was blacklisted from music shows because he brought a new style of rap to South Korea that everybody didn't agree with”; while this information is wrong, it still shows how influential Jay Park's contribution was to bringing a more Western-inspired music and aesthetic to South Korea. In an interview with MTV News (2019), one commenter mentioned how Jay Park is far from being authentic, as he is a Kpop star trying to cross over in the USA by emulating a Western style and sound. The commenter completely disregards the fact that Jay Park was born and grew up in the US. Contrarily, other fans even claimed: “He more Hip Hop than most black artists in the music industry”. This might be linked to the fact that many fans appreciated how within his music releases under his US label Roc Nation, Jay Park focused on the creation of music with an uplifting and genuine message and in showcasing his rap, rather than *flexing* on his status and wealth within Asia. Fans seem to recognize Jay Park's effort to honour the roots of Hip Hop and stay in line with the authentic and empowering aim of Hip Hop music, especially in relation to racial and social discrimination (Prince, 2006).

In the past, most of Jay Park's songs were predominantly in English. One fan mentioned how their brother is racist and “dislikes Kpop or anything to do with Asians, (...) except Epik High/Tablo”, specifying that their brother appreciates those musicians because of the use of English in their songs. Multiple fans shared similar experiences with their acquaintances, who refused to listen to other artists' music because they were Korean, yet were okay with Jay Park's because of his use of English lyrics. More comments suggest an appreciation of Jay Park based on his English lyricism: “What?? He didn't use Korean? Respect...”. Recently, it can be noted how - perhaps because of his goal of showcasing more diversity in Hip Hop - Jay Park's lyrics almost always include a good amount of Korean. On the other hand, Jay Park's career is more established in Asia rather than the West, thus using Korean allows his primary audience to better understand his lyrics. The preference for Korean lyrics might also be a consequence of glocalization, namely the processes through which cultural media which flow globally are adapted to the local context (Androutsopoulos, 2009). Furthermore, it should be noted how different languages allow different degrees of freedom of expression. Jay Park (SWAY'S UNIVERSE, 2018) recognises how Korean Hip Hop artists are not encouraged to talk about political matters or they might get heavily criticised. Old lyrics from the song *Raw Sh!t* like “I don't support dirty politicians”, however, showcase Jay Park (2017A) political English rap. Nonetheless, Jay Park's freedom of speech

might be an exception because of his complex identity as a Korean American. Nonetheless, Rose (1991) states that rap's political nature is not only expressed through its lyrics, but also in the negotiation of meanings, spaces and visibility. Accordingly, Jay Park's political nature is expressed in his promotion of spaces for the Asian community within Hip Hop.

4.3.2 Between Jay Park's Kpop past and Hip Hop present

Multiple fans seem to give a lot of importance to setting a structural opposition between the concept of Kpop and K-Hip Hop, as well as in identifying themselves as part of the latter's fandom only (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Then, they emphasise that Jay Park is also currently in the latter category. Jay Park himself mentioned how his past work as a Kpop idol was not a reflection of his persona, as he raps in *Raw Sh!t* (JAY PARK, 2017A) "You can try to rap but you can't win over my authenticity bro / Listen carefully / Whatever I do, Jay Park is honest now", as well as clearly stating "This right here ain't / For K-Pop fans / No K-Pop dance". In the video for *니가 싫어하는 노래 Most Hated* (JAY PARK, 2017B), one comment highlights the scene where there are people trapped inside of glass boxes as "a way to show the modern Korean music industry idols as a whole", which uses people as products while disregarding their humanity.

Image 4.14

In this screenshot of 니가 싫어하는 노래 Most Hated, different people are enclosed in glass boxes. (JAY PARK, 2017B)



In contrast with the critics towards Kpop, fans praised Jay Park for choosing artistry and

authenticity. Jay Park often expresses how he felt trapped within the box of Kpop, as in the lyrics of *DNA Remix* (HIGH R MUSIC, 2021), where he sings “They tried to imprison me but I escaped before I became a slave”. While some fans still associate him to his Kpop past, mentioning “I am not into kpop but this song (...) Jay Park a legend!” or “The Kpop industry should produce more songs like these”, newer fans seem to be unaware of his Kpop past: “Bruh he ain't some kpop gimmick. He is an American artist who happens to be of Korean roots”.

Jay Park shared how even his own parents at first could not understand why he would drift away from the more mainstream kpop culture and focus on Hip Hop (SWAY’S UNIVERSE, 2018). In an interview with *No Jumper* (2019), Jay Park claimed that he found himself in a limbo: in South Korea he is considered too Americanised, too Hip Hop, whereas in the USA he is labelled as Kpop. Fans add that there are many differences in behaviour between K-Hip Hop artists and kpop idols: for example, the former are able to talk about everything (but drugs and Korean politics), whereas idols have to maintain a (presumed) apolitical, more pure and innocent figure, to the point that even interacting with the other sex is seen by fans as controversial. Commentors also recognised that some kpop idols are great yet “vanilla rappers like top, g-dragon, Mino etc.”, as to imply that the image of a rapper should necessarily be stronger and more provocative. As previously mentioned, given Hip Hop’s association with people of colour, the correlation between rappers and a more rebellious image is somewhat damaging, as it reinforces negative stereotypes of black people and their culture (Rose, 1991).

4.3.3 Between Hip Hop and R&B.

Another instance where Jay Park showcases genre hybridity is between rap and R&B music. He himself highlights this aspect in his lyrics for *Raw Sh!t* (JAY PARK, 2017A) where he says “Release a hit R&B album then rap on this beat, boom bap”. Fans appreciate both musical releases from Jay Park and say: “I honestly can't choose which Jay I like better: R&B Jay or rap Jay. Like, they're both so good”, to which other viewers commented that they enjoy when the artist sings and rap within the same songs, as that way he can showcase his great capacity in both. In the comment section of Jay Park’s interview with Spotify (2023), some fans even commented on how they believe he would “be the perfect “ambassador” and “bridge” between [the Korean] ... Hip Hop and R&B scene and the international one.” Again, Jay Park is considered as a bridge between Korean and Western culture, possibly because of

his identity as Korean American and his fluency in both Korean and English. Androutopoulos's research (2009), explains how Jay Park's ability to speak English grants him a greater hybridity as it is "a hallmark of the interplay of the global and the local in Hip Hop discourses" (p.56). Certain comments, however, express disbelief in Jay Park's capacity to successfully produce music in both South Korea and the US, as they claim he would not stand the comparison with other American Hip Hop music. Nonetheless, they admit that he could receive more attention by focusing on his R&B side. Similarly, another commenter under an interview with All Def Music (2019) shared the same opinion: "The US market would be more open to him if he'd come out with a bop with him singing, not rapping". While this might just be a question of personal taste, it could also be a sign of how strictly intertwined the concept of race is with Hip Hop, as many seem more open to follow Jay Park's career evolve within R&B rather than Hip Hop (McLeod, 1999).

4.3.4 The K-Hip Hop industry

In an interview with Spotify (2023), Jay Park was asked to pinpoint the unique elements of K-Hip Hop. He mentions the Korean lyrics, as well as the experiences which are included in those lyrics as they are related to the life of Korean people. Jay Park mentioned how he is able to share his story and philosophy of life without limitation through Hip Hop culture. When explaining the "K" in Kpop, Yoon (2019A) describes the musical genre as a mixture of pop music inspired by Western mainstream sounds and Korean media, which in Korean immigrant families are often passed on by the older generations, as well as the results of the branding of South Korea's soft power. Similarly, for Jay Park, K-Hip Hop might be a bridge between his homeland's culture, as well as his ties to the West with the musical genres of Hip Hop and R&B. K-Hip Hop, being less regulated than the Kpop industry, allows artists more freedom and thus enhances the possibilities of expression of more hybrid experiences such as that of Jay Park, to which many Korean Americans can relate to. Jay Park explains how K-Hip Hop is freedom for him, not in its specificity but as it is part of the Hip Hop culture as a genre and art form to which he is really grateful for, as it allowed him to shine his own light honestly and achieve his dreams (Spotify, 2023). As a matter of fact, Hip Hop culture is a space of imagination, where the ordinary has the potential to be transformed into something outstanding - just like originally it was a way to re-conceptualise positively and find potential within the life in the 'hoods' (Morgan, 2016).

Jay Park mentioned how K-Hip Hop has rapidly developed together with the Korean economy and society in the past years, and the market has become so competitive, that now every rapper focuses on showcasing their unique colour with authenticity. Back when Jay Park started making rap music, there was not yet much interest in Hip Hop within South Korea, whereas the latest *Show Me The Money* edition saw the application of over 10,000 rappers, as now Hip Hop is widely appreciated by the younger generations (Spotify, 2023). One of the pressures that many young Koreans feel subjected to is the academic one, often imposed by the older generation who did not have similar opportunities (Ha & Park, 2011). Members of South Korean youth subcultures find an escape through the identification within those subcultures, which break their routine and allow them to be different from the expectations put on them. Subcultures, such as Hip Hop, provide resistance to the side of Korean society that is more competitive, materialistic and conservative (Ha & Park, 2011).

In a more recent interview with FO Squad Kpop (2023), when asked why Korean rappers seem more humble and hard-working than American ones, Jay Park expresses how this has to do with South Korea's preference towards manners and respect over "flexing". Furthermore, he also mentions how while people now know South Korea for Kpop, Kdrama or Korean barbecue, just a few decades ago South Korea was a very poor country which suffered years of invasions and war crimes (FO Squad Kpop, 2023). In order to build up and raise the country to its current situation, people had to come together and work hard - this is why status is something Korean people care a lot about and boost about (FO Squad Kpop, 2023). Ideally, a Korean person should have a good status, yet do not stand out too much, as collectivism is usually preferred. This links once more to the concept of Koreanness, or "한" (Han) - Koreans' supposedly intrinsic capacity to resist in spite of adversities - a resistance that draws strength from unity and conformity (Kim, 2023).

As a consequence of the current worldwide fascination with everything related to Korean culture and content, Jay Park recognised a good opportunity for K-Hip Hop to flourish internationally too (Spotify, 2023). Jay Park often mentions how all the sacrifices he made were always for his people and for creating a space for the representation of Asian (Americans). Jay Park refers to his hard work in *ON IT*, with lyrics such as: "Guess I'm an architect / the way I've built my career / from the bottom up" and "I do this for my people / so they can eat too" (JAY PARK, 2015A). The idea of "working your way up" is very much related to South Korea, a country which, after the Korean war (1950-1953), went through immense socio-political and economical progress (Lim, 2009). "빨리! 빨리!" (*hurry! hurry!*) is a Korean expression which represents speed and high-efficiency service; this approach is

deeply ingrained in the South Korean mindset and allowed the country to progress rapidly after the war. As Lopez-Rogina's analysis (2017) suggests, K-Hip Hop artists often infuse their lyrics with their ambition - as that is particularly important in relation to South Korea past and present, which is dictated by rapid progress, rising cost of life and a competitive environment. This justifies Korean rappers' attempts to be real and homage the authenticity of Hip Hop culture, as they prefer to talk about those elements rather than topics that are often portrayed in the US, like street violence, which however are not present in the Korean circumstances (McLeod, 1999).

Nonetheless, Korean rapper's ambition, including Jay Park, led to their commercialisation of Hip Hop. This is one of the main contradictions that many Hip Hop artists have faced since the 1990s: they position themselves as real and not mainstream, yet they were slowly more and more influential within mainstream culture, to the point of being a part of it (McLeod, 1999). Perhaps because of his complex history, as well as his early interest in Hip Hop culture, no fans seem to comment on Jay Park's influence in the commercialization of Hip Hop. This could also be due to the fact that since the 2010s and 2020s, most Hip Hop labels and artists are not necessarily considered underground anymore and most forms of music have been commercialised through social media. On the other hand, the fact that Hip Hop is becoming so influential in mainstream culture, while being somewhat oppositional to it, exemplifies how the movement was able to bridge between "popular culture and social criticism" (p.279) and give voices and space to those who previously were allowed none (Martinez, 1997). In particular, the relevance of Hip Hop is only increasing, as the amount of people who feel like outsiders in an increasingly globalised world is also rising. Hip Hop historically appealed and gave meaning to people who were excluded and discriminated within society, but also within diasporic communities who were far from their families and their countries (Martinez, 1997). Jay Park is aiming to leave a legacy that is strongly connected with his diasporic identity, namely to create Asian representation within the Hip Hop scene. Again, the fight for public, institutional, discursive and mediatic space is also part of the very intrinsic nature of Hip Hop (Rose, 1991). Jay Park expressed how in 2010, being a rapper and being Asian were two things that did not go together, whereas now it is a possibility thanks to his and many other Asian artists' efforts (No Jumper, 2019).

Within the context of South Korea, Kim (2019) argues that the commercialisation of rap through programs such as *Show Me the Money* and *High School Rapper* was essentially an attempt to re-create the Korean tradition of storytelling, which appears in different traditional Korean art forms like *p'ansori* or *mandam*. Those forms of speech which were

highly based on satire were not allowed during the years of military occupation of the Korean peninsula. Furthermore, since in *Show Me the Money*, Korean rappers were encouraged to talk about their hardships and find resolutions through music, part of the success can be attributed to the autobiographical aspect of the program, which is highly appreciated by a public so used to personal storytelling through social media (Kim, 2019). Personal storytelling is also a crucial part of Hip Hop culture; Jay Park has successfully used it to narrate his own story as a Korean American who navigated the music industry in both South Korea and the US and contributed in changing the way Asian Americans are perceived in both countries and their respective Hip Hop communities.

5. Conclusion

This study attempted to answer the following research question: How does Jay Park and his online international fandom make sense of cultural hybridity within South Korean Hip Hop music? The content which was taken into consideration included music videos and interviews of Jay Park on Youtube, as well as the comment sections underneath those data. The analysis was conducted mainly through four concepts: cultural hybridity, Hip Hop culture, fandom practices and Hallyu. As previously mentioned, the researcher's socio-political identity is always influential within qualitative analysis (Holmes, 2020). While the researcher's inability to speak Korean limited the media that could be analysed, the research question focused on the international fandom's perception of Jay Park, Hip Hop culture and its expression within South Korea; therefore the investigation concerned only content available in English. As a consequence, the language limitations were not as relevant. Nonetheless, the results of this research are only indicative of the international K-Hip Hop fandom and not of the Korean one. Further research could focus on the Korean population's perception of the topics treated, such as the creation of a local K-Hip Hop scene.

Drawing back to the research question, while many fans were able to value Jay Park's identity as Korean American in its hybridity, other fans struggled to do so and diminished Jay Park's cultural background as either South Korean or American. Without being fully accepted into either cultures, he was able to bridge between the two by bringing more diversity and showcasing the Korean American experience in both countries. Future research might discover interesting findings if investigating a different Korean American rapper who was born and grew up in the US, yet moved back to South Korea to pursue a career in music, first as an idol and then within the K-Hip Hop scene: Jessi. Given that Jessi is a female, the research could also touch topics such as feminism and gender inequality within the Hip Hop scene and South Korea.

From Jay Park's perspective, his career in Hip Hop started as a quest to navigate his existence within two different cultures and prove his value. As he gained more following, his understanding of Hip Hop changed from a place of self- and outer-validation to a space of representation for Asian and Asian Americans who wanted to pursue a career in music. Consequently, cultural hybridity was understood as the essence of Hip Hop as a culture which historically has been involved with diasporic communities and their need to fight against discrimination: while African Americans had to fight for their freedom in the US, Jay Park fought for that of Asian Americans in both Asia and the US. In line with Hip Hop tradition,

Jay Park underlined the importance of one's own community through the repeated participation of it in his music videos, such as the artists under his label in *To Life*, the portrayal of relevant location to the life of Korean Americans, like in *K-TOWN*, and the repeated shoutouts to family and friends.

Based on the fandom's comments, their understanding of K-Hip Hop's hybridity is more focused on its portrayal of Koreanness. Rather than focusing on Jay Park's specific experience, most fans were concerned with the general adaptation of Hip Hop within the South Korean context. In other words, fans were interested in seeing a balance between acknowledging the tradition of Hip Hop and showcasing Koreanness; a good example is the second video for Jay Park's *DNA Remix*. However, as in the first *DNA Remix* video, this balance is not easy to reach and phenomena like cultural appropriation are often debated by fans. Fans' appreciation for the expression of Koreanness might be linked with the general growing interest with South Korean media, in what is known as Hallyu. The result is a search for a glocalized culture, which homages the African American culture of Hip Hop but also remains authentic to its new home, South Korea. While focusing on specific case studies - such as Jay Park - was important to understand the hybrid experience of a Korean American within the Hip Hop industry, the results are limited to the specific artist in question. Further investigation, on the other hand, could focus on comparing more rappers.

Jay Park and his fandom's view collide in the wish to create a local Hip Hop scene that discusses topics related to South Korea. This is because of Hip Hop's strong emphasis on "being real" and writing lyrics based on one's own experience. The result is an Hip Hop with a strong sense of "한" (Han) - the intrinsic strength that South Koreans are believed to possess, which allowed their resistance in spite of years of wars and colonisation (Kim, 2023). This also relates with Hip Hop as a means of resistance against the assimilation of minorities within mainstream culture (McLeod, 1999). Koreanness is also shown in the verses which hint at hustle culture, or the culture of "빨리! 빨리!" (hurry! hurry!). Jay Park is a representation of South Korea's efforts to work hard, as he created a legacy within Hip Hop as an Asian American and founded three different labels and a soju brand. To continue the investigation of K-Hip Hop culture, further research could remove the bias of a mixed identity - such as that of Jay Park - and focus on Korean rappers who were born and grew up in Korea. Would their experiences lead to a different understanding of K-Hip Hop?

Furthermore, K-Hip Hop is connected with both the past and present of South Korea. Its relation to the past has to do with a rebrand of South Korea's image that underlines its historical traditions: this is done through showcasing historical sites or clothes in the music

videos, but also through reconnecting Hip Hop as an autobiographical cultural form to the Korean tradition of storytelling (Kim, 2019). On the other hand, K-Hip Hop is linked to South Korea's present as it is a subculture utilised by its followers to break free from the downside of the country's rapid progress, such as the high competition and the rather conservative society (Ha & Park, 2011). Moreover, K-Hip Hop is a means for the Korean diasporic community to reconnect with their homelands.

This thesis societal relevance resides in the analysis of two current phenomena: Hip Hop culture and Hallyu. Their result, namely the K-Hip Hop scene, was analysed through concepts such as cultural hybridity and glocalization, as well as through the lens of fandom studies. The results show fans' conscious consumption of online cultural media and their attention to concepts such as cultural appropriation and globalisation. In analysing both Jay Park and his fandom's understanding of K-Hip Hop as a culturally hybrid phenomena, this thesis filled an academic gap in relation to fandom studies and K-Hip Hop research. Furthermore, this thesis highlights music's important role in society as a space of expression for marginalised communities. Jay Park's Hip Hop is a symbol of resistance: not only he fought against the underrepresentation of Asians within Western media, but also against the discrimination of diasporic Asian communities in their Asian homeland. For the future, my hope is that music will continue to provide a respectful and creative space to (Hip) Hop in and get to know different cultures.

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7. Appendix


7.1 Amount of data

Number of comments analysed per music video (approximately 3 minutes long):

1	 박재범 JAY PARK - ON IT (Feat.DJ WEGUN) Prod.by GRAY	32
2	 박재범 Jay Park - 'Raw Sh!t (Prod. by DJ Wegun)' Official Music ...	30
3	 박재범 Jay Park - 몸매 (MOMMAE) Feat.Ugly Duck Official Mu...	35
4	 박재범 Jay Park & Dok2 '니가 싫어하는 노래 Most Hated' [Offi...	37
5	 Jay Park - Sexy 4 Eva	37
6	 Jay Park - DNA Remix (Reupload)	17
7	 DNA Remix - 박재범, YLN Foreign, D.Ark, 365LIT, pH-1, 릴보...	21
8	 Jay Park - SOJU ft. 2 Chainz	31
9	 Jay Park, Hit-Boy - K-TOWN	31
10	 박재범 Jay Park & pH-1 - 'ALL IN (Prod. GroovyRoom)' Official ...	32
11	 박재범 Jay Park - 'To Life' Official Music Video (ENG/CHN)	34

Total of 337 comments.

Number of comments analysed per interview & the interviews' length:

1	 Jay Park World Premieres New Single "Soju" Featuring 2 Chai...	33	38:15
2	 The Jay Park Interview	32	37:43
3	 Jay Park Wants To Be Hip-Hop's 1st Asian-American Music ...	33	8:43
4	 Jay Park Follow All Def Music	31	6:36

5	 Spotify KrOWN: Interview with Jay Park 스포티파이	10	5:13
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Total of 139 comments.

7.2 Example of music video and comments analysis

The video and comment section which will be used as an example are Jay Park's SOJU, featuring 2 Chainz. The themes through which the video and the comments will be analysed are cultural hybridity, Hip Hop culture and fandom culture/Hallyu wave.

7.2.1.Music video

Cultural hybridity	<p>The place where Jay Park buys soju seems like an American neighbourhood, representing the life of many Korean American buying Korean products in the US.</p> <p>Jay Park reaches a group of black men and brings them the soju bottles to share.</p> <p>Jay Park, as a Korean American, is seen wearing a braided hairstyle and having multiple visible tattoos. Considering that braided hairstyles are a cultural tradition of the black community and tattoos are still not completely normalised in South Korean, those two elements showcase his interest and influence for his American side.</p> <p>2 Chainz enters the Korean BBQ restaurant. He is the only black man, surrounded by Asians. As 2 Chainz moves outside to dance together with the group of Asians, Jay Park joins him. It seems like an invite to unite different cultures.</p> <p>At the end of the video, together with multiple Korean flags, one US flag can be seen - almost at showcasing Jay Park's transnational cultural background.</p>
Hip Hop culture	At the beginning of the video, a shot shows a group of black

	<p>people outside of a building. Perhaps this is a way to show respect to the black community within a rap song or to give it a more authentic feeling.</p> <p>In multiple shots Jay Park can be seen as the only non-black person within the group of black people, almost as to show how he is accepted by the community as one of them. They are dancing and seem to be enjoying themselves together, again this might seem like an invite to bring different people together.</p>
<p>Hallyu and fandom culture</p>	<p>The music video starts with a black screen and the Korean word 소주 (<i>soju</i>), with an explanation of what that is, namely a “Korean traditional alcoholic drink typically made from rice or sweet potatoes”. Hallyu is a cultural phenomenon aimed at promoting Korean culture through forms of soft power, as in this video.</p> <p>Jay Park is seen leaving a gas station shop after buying some bottles of soju.</p> <p>In one of the outfit changes, Jay Park can be seen wearing hanbok style (traditional Korean dress) clothes. The clothes have big letters in the back that say “KOREA”.</p> <p>Jay Park is seen walking across an American city and going to a Korean style BBQ, again showcasing Korean culture.</p> <p>At the end of the video, multiple Korean flags can be seen to proudly show his Korean blood.</p>

7.2.2 Lyrics

<p>Cultural hybridity</p>	<p>“This ain't that vodka or Henney” → This feels like an invitation from Jay Park to try something different than drinks popular in the West. It could also seem like a distinction “us” (the soju which will be later introduced) and “them” (those who drink vodka and Henney)</p>
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<p>Hip Hop culture</p>	<p>“I’m with Cha Cha / I’m with Woogie” → Cha Cha and Woogie are friends of Jay Park as well as producers for his music and that of the people under his labels H1gher music and AOMG. He gives them a shoutout and shows a very hiphop sense of community.</p> <p>“All my bills paid / You fucking with the best” → These sentences can be considered as “flexing”, a currently popular part of hiphop where the artist boosts about themselves.</p> <p>“D’usse and ace I love it but only tonight” / “Hov and I / we living that soju jan life” → These quotes are also a shoutout, this time to Jay Z, also known as Hov. Jay Z acquired D’usse in 2012. Jay Park is currently under Jay Z’s label Roc Nation.</p> <p>“The homie law getting married soon” → This is a shout out to Lawrence Parker, Roc Nation’s A&R manager. Again, those references to people that are close to Jay Park are a sign of his respect for people who worked before him in the Hip Hop industry, and that are now part of his community.</p>
<p>Hallyu and fandom culture</p>	<p>“So we bout to get lit off the soju” / “Pour me up a shot” / “I want them green bottles” / “That soju jan life” → This is the alternative to the “wodka or henney” mentioned above. Soju is a Korean drink that is usually found in green coloured bottles and is drunk by shots.</p> <p>“I need that 잿순탕 (<i>Jackson tang</i>) / That 석쇠갈비 (<i>suksae galbi</i>) / Them good 안주 (<i>anjoo's</i>) / Mix it with beer or straight up” → These lyrics refer to typical ways in which Korean drink soju, the name mentioned are respectively a stew, grilled ribs and a type of snack, often accompanying a</p>

	<p>shot of soju.</p> <p>“Come to Seoul” / “Karaoke from room to room” → here Jay Park invited Lawrence Parker, mentioned above, who is about to get married to come to Seoul for his honeymoon and enjoy the city. Karaoke can be found everywhere in South Korea as they are a popular form of entertainment.</p> <p>“한잔더 (<i>one more / another drink</i>) show me love” → These are the only Korean lyrics in the songs, as the rest of the song is in English.</p> <p>In general, all those references to South Korean culture showcase Jay Park’s willingness to promote and share his Korean background with the Western audiences as well as provide some representation for Asian American.</p>
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7.2.3 Comments

Cultural hybridity	<p>“I love how he brings his culture into Westernised music”/ ”he’s American....English is his first language...he had to learn Korean culture too 🙄”/ ”Just because he had to learn it doesn't mean it's not his culture tho, he is of Korean descent...”/</p> <p>→ These comments tend to show a sense of “us vs them”, opposing Korean and Western culture and music.</p> <p>”it’s called “Korean American”” / ”wait no don’t get me wrong I totally agree with you but one thing that really upsets me is when Americans automatically think someone isn’t American based off their looks like many POC that aren’t white or black they get lumped into being immigrants and America is the only place they know I’m just saying don’t take that away from him or from ppl in</p>
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general do your homework to know someone I know a girl who is Chinese American and one thing she can't stand is for people to assume she isn't American or to ask her where she come from he's Korean American he has two cultures but don't make it seem he isn't a part of his home country"/ "i never said he wasn't "american" it seems like you're implying that his Korean identity is less than. He has made Korean music (& a record label in Korea) which is a big part of his identity. He's doing English(westernised) music with a theme of Korea (his culture)ex: soju. You're honestly thinking too hard about my comment, it's not that serious." / "I mean Jay is American so technically he's putting on Asian American for Hip Hop lol. His rap experience is from America" → those comments exemplify the struggle in understanding the term Korean American, with some hints of the generalisation of both Asian Americans as if Korean American and Chinese American have similar experiences, as well as the generalisation of how people react to their mixed identity.

"Don't worry, I got u. And totally agree with ur comment. These comments are pretty dumb. No offence. The whole big thing with Jay is merging the two cultures together. You were trying to applaud him for doing so (which is what I really admire about him, that's always been my vision for myself and my culture) He's both American and Korean. Some of these comments like, when u think of America, it's all about us. When u think of other cultures, can barely break into the western culture like Jay and Cardio B (random to bring this in, but same idea with blending the cultures). Like, glad to celebrate the merge of the cultures, not saying he's not American. Cuz fans know that about him, that he's American. We talking about what he's doing with his music. Also, it's a really big thing to grow up here and make it out there and then come back. That's the real feat that I can't even I for myself. Only being able to merge everything I do here."

→ This comment seems to resort to over-lexicalisation to express their idea of Jay multicultural persona.

”The scene when Jay Park and black man danced together shows us we can be good friends no matter what your race, that's a good message Jay.” / ”isn't the offering of the bottle a symbol of sharing cultures and having a good time?” / ”I agree. because then the video also had 2 chainz sitting with the korean girls and eating korean food so it's like they're taking turns experiencing and sharing each others' cultures" / ”I love how this video seems like an appreciation for both cultures.” / ”Love the integration and cultural love all around! Jay park uniting brothers w/ liquor & good music!” / ”I think the best part about this song as a whole. Is the fact that two cultures are coming together and uniting as one. No matter what the skin colour is. And I just love that 🥰🥰 KEEP IT UP”

→ this comments point to how the video for SOJU promotes the enjoyment of two different cultures and their respective community

”I got the opposite message, to me it looked like tokenism. “Here’s the token Asian homie, he’s down with the culture, he’s black too”! Smh. I don’t think that’s the right way to market him.”

→ on the other hand, this comment points towards the concept of “us vs them”, asian people VS black people.

”Tbh this aint the best from Jay BUT im loving the racial representation, the intercultural mix and how jay is putting SOJU/SOUTH KOREA on the international map. That's all that matters. Jay out here HUSTLING really hard to put them on the Hip Hop map.” / ”Yea Jay always been bringing diversity to his work and always paying respect to the history and culture bridging gaps”

	<p>→ these comments refer both to Jay Park’s hustle within the Hip Hop scene, and thus its tradition, as well as to Jay Park’s ambition to create representation for Asian (and Asian Americans) within that Hip Hop scene.</p> <p>”I see a lot of comments like this I'm guessing from foreigners who don't see a lot of diversity in daily life. It's good to keep an open mind so that's good he can show this to your country since you may not see hundreds of black Indian biracial etc in your environments. In America tho he is trying to become known to our culture and paying a lot of money to do it, to buy a 2 chainz verse, in America we are not perfect but you gonna have to show respect and pay dues if you aren't black and make Hip Hop or r&b to be accepted it has to look authentic.”</p> <p>→ This commenter presents themselves as in a place of authority and explains to assumed foreigners how the Hip Hop scene works in the US.</p> <p>”This was filmed on Buford Hwy in Georgia. It’s an international area as you call it”</p> <p>→ this comment explains the setting of Jay Park’s video, claiming that the diversity in the video is also a result of the diversity within the area, rather than Jay Park’s will and somehow suppresses his agency on the choices regarding his music.</p>
Hip Hop culture	<p>”Westernised music just say BLACK AMERICAN MUSIC”</p> <p>→ This comment refers to Hip Hop’s history of being an African American musical genre.</p> <p>”Local Hip Hop is huge in Korea. Fake news.”</p> <p>→ As an answer to the previous comment, another fan replied that the local scene is huge in South Korea, suppressing Hip Hop’s</p>

	<p>relation with the black community.</p> <p>”JYP's biggest mistake turned into A big blessing to Jay park! Keep growing!” / ”It actually was. He felt chained and controlled while he was at 2pm bec he couldn't make his own music, even his image was restricted by the company. Boii hustled and expressed himself when he got back to The business” / ”I think we should stop giving credit to JYP for rejecting him. Let's be real, Mr Jay can choose not to get up after the rejection, but he took his time and effort to be where he is right now. Shout out to Jay Park!”</p> <p>→ These comments refer to Jay Park’s past as a Kpop idol and the scandal that resulted in him being removed from the entertainment industry he was under. Furthermore, the comments praised Jay Park for the hard work it took him to be welcomed again in the music industry, as well as for choosing the path of authenticity. Hustle and originality, as well as rejection from the mainstream path, are key elements of Hip Hop culture.</p> <p>”To be honest, not my favourite song, but I still respect Jay Park for everything he does. He does what he wants, not what he’s told; but he does that in a good way that’s not stupid or reckless, but it’s fun and enjoyable. Much Love Jay Park!”</p> <p>→ one more comment praising Jay Park and identifying him as an individual who is able to create and follow its own path.</p> <p>”We need a remake of this - as he has his own brand now!” / ”The best soju commercial so far”</p> <p>→ These comments refer to Jay Park having his own Soju brand and being good at advertising products, which relates to Hip Hop’s key element of entrepreneurship.</p>
Fandom practice	<p>”Most of Jay Park's songs are underrated as the Korean audiences only prefer mainstream K-pop music. Jay Park could make it big in</p>

the west!” / ”Not true at all lol all those kpop is for foreign kpop fans and teenage girls in middle school. Most Korean audiences listen to something else. The Korean pop chart is hugely dominated by big entertainment companies and teenage fandoms. It's far from the true representation of music Koreans listen to.” / ”you are right. Most Koreans starting from around college usually listen way more to soloist, RnB and khiphop than only kpop” / ”I'm not generalising. I am just pointing out the fact that LJ Wong's comment is not true at all. I never said older ones never listen to kpop, but Majority of the audience is foreign k pop fans and teenage girls. What I meant by kpop is idol music like EXO, BTS, girls generation and so on. No one over 20 in the state really listens to Justin Bieber or Taylor Swift. It's like that. Jay Park, Zico, Dean, Crush, Haze, IU..their music isn't really regarded as idol music. There are still a decent number of people who listen to theirs.”
→ Those comments are generalising Western and Korean people's listening habits in relation to Kpop and K-hiphop, reducing them to patterns (also contradictory) for which they provide no evidence.