

*"We Want to Destroy the World":
The Counterculture of the Shanghai
Underground Club Scene*

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Abstract

The underground club scene in Shanghai, China has emerged as a significant avenue for alternative expression for Chinese youth today. Under the conservative boundaries of mainstream Chinese society, the scene provides an opportunity for them to unleash their unbridled creativity and freedom. In this essay, our group analyses the music and performances of three prominent Shanghai club acts, Asian Dope Boys, Genome 6.66 Mbp, and SVBKVLT. Their work reveals the carnivalesque universe they have created to challenge, destroy, and discard the norms and restraints of Chinese society. By subverting typical formal conventions of visual and aural aesthetics, and even profaning traditional societal expectations by celebrating social taboos of sex and violence, they have obliterated societal constraints. In its wake, they have created a new identity for contemporary Chinese youth, one that is unique and specific to their generation, creating a space to exercise the freedom they so fervently desire.

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Introduction

Against the pervasive backdrop of state control, the counterculture of the underground club scene in Shanghai, China, has emerged as a significant avenue for alternative expression for Chinese youth today. Representing “freedom”¹ and “uncompromising spirit”², its music and performances are experimental and unique, allowing them to “break the boundaries, using it as an effective weapon to voice out for righteousness, justice, and fairness”³ (See Annex A) in rebellion against mainstream society.

The Shanghai underground club scene has grown exponentially in recent years. From a scene initially largely influenced by Western clubs, as well as heavily funded and populated by expats, the Chinese underground club scene has grown beyond its Western roots. Its clientele has flipped to a ratio of 70 percent locals and 30 percent foreigners, where “more and more Chinese people have become interested in underground music culture, and are trying to do something different.” (Feola, 2018). Moreover, its creative work has broken away from Western conventions, such as the standard “four-to-the-floor”⁴ element characteristic of Western club music, developing into a “very specific, unique, extreme sonic and visual technological aesthetic... scamb[ling] a lot of Western taste grids.” (Ravens, 2019). The scene has thus emerged as a unique local product of Shanghai, expanding into a vibrant counterculture of its own.

Prominent club acts of the scene include the Asian Dope Boys (ADB), Genome 6.66 Mbp (Genome), and SVBKVLT. ADB is a multi-disciplinary troupe helmed by Chen Tian Zhuo, performing both live and over video in clubs. Often accompanied by music from collaborators, the group stages performance visuals through fashion, theatrics, and dance. Genome and SVBKVLT are record labels known for representing local music artists and producers, dabbling and experimenting in various music genres including electronic dance music (EDM) and hip-hop, amongst others.

The artistic output of these three key club acts reveals the central tension of their experiences in modern Chinese society, caught between the reality of conservative boundaries in place and the desire for uninhibited, unbridled freedom. Their work suggests that this conflict is itself the foundation of a Chinese youth identity. As they chafe against and push past societal parameters, consequently, the acts create a new identity for the current generation that moves away from traditional norms towards the freedom desired and yearned for in the contemporary Chinese youth experience.

¹ 自由

² 不妥协的精神

³ 去打破边界，为正义公平公正发声的有效武器

⁴ A time signature commonly found in dance music, where the bass drum is played on every beat.

Boundaries of Chinese Society

The modern Chinese state is characterised by the high levels of control that the central government possesses, exerting much influence over the social climate. State-controlled media is a prominent feature of modern Chinese society, with the government heavily regulating accessible content through the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (Tartaglione, 2018). Consequently, the ability of the Chinese government to control the Chinese cultural outlook should not be understated. For instance, state programmes are regarded as some of the most iconic and influential cultural events in China, with occasions like the CCTV's annual Spring Gala on Lunar New Year considered unmissable, demonstrating the influence state media wields over the Chinese national consciousness in even dictating how they spend their most important cultural holiday (Xie, 2018).

Control over the people's cultural outlook extends to a shaping of perspectives towards social ills like sex and violence. Sexual expression in China today is "viewed with contempt as the least important activity of life" as a result of China's "official prudishness and restrictiveness" (Ruan, 1991), with writing about sex banned in China until the 1980s. With regards to depictions of violence, control is even more explicit. China's General Rules for Television Series Content Production prohibits the "display [of] violence", and "fighting, and other unhealthy behavior", (Horwitz & Huang, 2016) clearly reflecting the government's intention to portray violence as undesirable and discourage members of society from glorifying it or participating in it.

Censorship has also meant the clamping down on the underground club scene. While typical club parties have been largely ignored, the artists' more complex work in elaborate productions and performances, delving into frowned-upon themes of sex and violence, have been met with government restrictions. ADB, for one, has found it "difficult to perform in China" as "work [is] quite often being censored by the government", resulting in a need for "performances [to take] place in Europe." (See Annex B). This need to seek other pastures for their art is emblematic of the lack of acceptance these club acts have faced.

Drug raids by the police only showcase further government censorship and control over underground clubs. With the scene's expansion, raids have become more common over the past two years, with the "lights com[ing] on... music shut down... each person... rounded up and taken away for drug tests." (Polanski, 2019). This is part of a larger trend of greater control from the central government that is suffocating the underground club scene, where the "tight [drug policies cause] a lot of young people [to be] afraid of going outside in case the club gets busted by the police." (See Annex B).

Regardless, the Shanghai underground club scene has remained a burgeoning avenue for free expression. With policies and a social climate that are "a little bit more open and has a more artsy vibe and fashion", as compared to the harsher, more hostile atmosphere of other

cities, Shanghai has emerged as a perfect backdrop for their creativity and artistic expression, possessing the “biggest scene... [with] a new club open[ing] every few months in Shanghai” (See Annex B).

Pushing Boundaries

In response to mainstream Chinese societal norms, ADB, Genome, and SVBKVLT have created a ‘carnavalesque’ universe through their work. Most fundamentally, their performances and music are reminiscent of Bakhtin’s theory of the ‘carnival’, embracing the eccentric and unconventional in a “suspension of hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it”, evincing their desire for unbridled creativity and freedom, unlimited by societal restrictions (Vice, 1997).

This is seen through the absurdity of ADB’s work, often featuring bizarre set pieces, props, and costumes pieced together in disjointed narrative structures, interjected with clashing, random elements. Their work is a fearless pursuit of uninhibited and extravagant self-expression, in complete disregard for societal conventions (Schmidt-Rees, 2019). For instance, *ADAHA II* features strangely dressed performers dancing together (seemingly randomly) as tonally jarring rap music with meaningless lyrics (“I lick marshmallow poop in outer space”) plays in the background (Figure 1). The amalgamation of bizarre elements is contradictory and paradoxical, with extremes placed in harsh juxtaposition - for instance, toy bubble-guns being played with amidst a violent rave, or a performer in a playful bodysuit singing nonsensically child-like yet sexually-explicit lyrics (Chen, 2018). In forcing these diametrical opposites into direct proximity, ADB foregrounds the surreality of their performances, unbounded by the rules of society’s reality.



Figure 1: An absurd scene in ADAHA II
Source: Asian Dope Boys (2015)

This absurdity in content is complemented by experimentation with conventional musical elements. Disorienting light and sound effects disrupt the flow of their performances - disconcerting psychedelic colours and flashing lights feature heavily in *19:53*, while abrupt changes in the soundtrack to the performances in *19:53* and *Atypical* create a similar effect, with sudden, choppy transitions between melodies, beats, and even stark silence, all defying typical conventions surrounding performance visuals and music as beautiful and pleasant-sounding.

The music of SVBKVLT and Genome are likewise technically bizarre. They subvert musical norms by completely eliminating melodies and consistent rhythms, creating work foreign to mainstream music. In the artist Han Han's musical project Gooooose (SVBKVLT), he often uses heavily synthesised soundscapes with unusual syncopated rhythms and industrial textures, giving his music a peculiar sound. In "*lon [super hexagon]*", the track begins with a piano that transforms into a synth that is brokenly arpeggiated throughout, emphasised by haunting operatic vocals. Similarly, for "*siq~1**", the unconventional nature of its harsh-sounding mechanical beats and drops is enhanced by its lack of any flow or rhythm, with its beats often cut short to give them a broken, disjointed quality. Han Han distorts his vocals as well, accentuating his music's strangeness. The lyrics of "*siq~1**" are either gibberish and indecipherable, or decipherable but made to sound unnatural and inhuman. In "*Cow*", this technique is taken to an extreme, where each vowel is separated and made into a sound of its own to replace beats and notes, rendering all lyrics unintelligible. His work is completely alien from typical mainstream music, challenging rigid definitions of music requiring consistent, melodic harmonies, rhythms, and vocals.

Such experimental soundscapes are found in work under Genome's label too. Portento's "*un jardin de lamentos*" utilises a sound collage technique by layering samples ranging widely from vocals to piano strings to heavily reverberated guitars, merging them all with industrial soundscapes typical of club productions. From an atmospheric opening of soft and gentle background sounds with no obvious and emphasised melody, the track transitions into music from traditional Chinese string instruments, before morphing again with the introduction of conventional western musical instruments like the guitar and piano, capped off with Czech vocals over the music. The end-product is a tumult of psychedelic synths, creating a surreal atmosphere that diverges from established norms of music.

As such, the acts' work is wholly divorced from typical Chinese expectations of the acceptable and normal. In embracing such experimentation, the acts push against society's boundaries in protest against the restrictiveness of mainstream norms.

Destroying Boundaries

This subversion of typical norms is taken further by the acts' glorification of the taboo. Drawing again from Bakhtin, the acts create "a whole system of carnivalistic debasings and bringings-down to earth", delving into and elevating themes considered profane by society

(Vice, 1997). Such content explicitly transgresses mainstream societal expectations of an orderly life 'uncorrupted' by social ills like sex and violence, hence denouncing these norms as limiting and constrictive.

Under Genome, the artist Yoong's album *Into Character* alludes to themes of eroticism and sexuality. Typically shunned as something to be hidden away and censored, his music's evocation of a sensuous fantasy celebrates sex unabashedly, through soft, delayed, and watered-down synths, uncaged by any tight, rhythmic beat. In "Safeguard" - the soundscape the opening of white noise sets up creates a blank canvas that amplifies the rippling sounds that follow, lending an atmospheric, immersive quality to its cacophony of passion and desire. More strikingly, in "New Sight", he chooses the intimate sound of panting to serve as a backing track, foregrounding and even celebrating eroticism in blatant disregard of the prudish silence expected with regard to sex.

Beyond mere allusion, the acts empathically push further to portray 'deviant' forms of sex and sexuality, uplifting the profane in a clear rebellion against societal boundaries. ADB's incorporation of androgyny in its performances is one such example. Existing between two extremes of the gender spectrum, androgyny unsettles and displaces the rigid male/female binary of gender, creating a conversation that challenges typically conservative attitudes towards sex and gender in Chinese society (Luo, 2008). In *An Atypical Brain Damage (Atypical)* and *19:53*, androgynous performers blend markers of masculinity (close-cropped hair) and femininity (make-up; female clothing) to create an ambiguity surrounding gender. For example, in *Atypical*, a female performer is topless, exposing her breasts which clearly indicate her sex (Figure 2). Yet, with typical masculine traits like short hair and male-cut business-wear, together with a full face of plain white gender-neutral make-up, her gender becomes equivocal, disrupting the conventional gender binary.

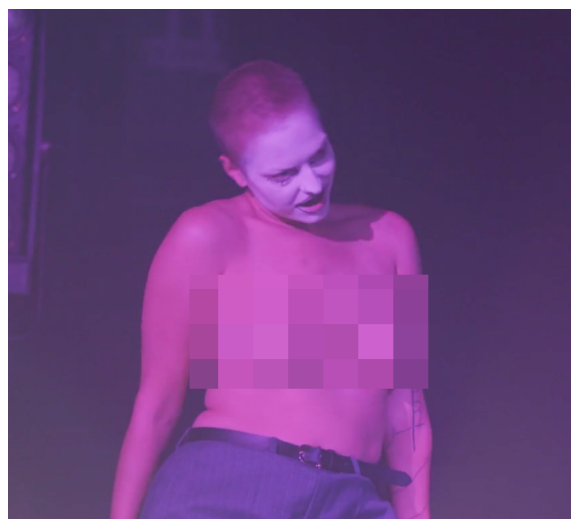


Figure 2: An androgynous performer in *Aytpical*
Source: *Asian Dope Boys* (2018)

Elsewhere, more graphic depictions of sexuality are displayed. Under ADB, transgressive sexual behaviours, such as nudity (Figure 2) and homosexuality are portrayed on stage. Such depictions flagrantly defy the established societal narratives of sex including ideas of modesty (Uskul, et. al., 2010) and heteronormativity (Puckey, 2021).

Moreover, ADB often adopts non-human imagery, warping traditional understandings of sex with debased, bestial elements (Giffney & Hird, 2008). In *ADAHA II*, a performer sensually licks the trunk of another performer's elephant mask, while in *Atypical*, a performer dressed as a demon-like character nibbles on the genitals of a male performer (Figures 3.1 and 3.2).



Figures 3.1 and 3.2: Bestial elements in sex in Atypical and ADAHA II
Source: Asian Dope Boys (2015 and 2018)

This is taken to extremes in *19:53*, where a male performer is dressed in bondage equipment (a muzzle and a collar), behaving like a dog as he drools and snarls on all fours, before another performer licks his muzzle (Figure 4). Intertwining portrayals of sex with societal conceptions of the vulgar, ADB shatters societal norms in not only frankly portraying sexuality, but provoking and 'sully' traditional understandings of it.



Figure 4: Profane and bestial elements into sex in 19:53
Source: Asian Dope Boys (2015)

Violence is also frequently represented, in defiance of typical state censorship. This manifests in SVBKVLT's music through their unnatural, discordant sounds. In the artist Hyph11e's debut album *Aperture*, he extensively uses deliberately grating sounds, with harsh feedback noises screeching at volumes almost too painful to listen to in "Encrust" and an industrial soundscape rife with jarring metallic clangs in "Doppelganger", creating discomfort through the dissonance. Such blatant evocations of violence contrast to the complete effacement of violence in daily Chinese life.

Visually, ADB conveys a similar brutality. In *Atypical*, a performer bashes a car with a baseball bat, as disorienting strobe-lights and throbbing synths dramatise the force displayed on stage (Figure 5).



Figure 5: A performer bashing a car in a display of violence in Atypical
Source: Asian Dope Boys (2018)

This brutality only escalates as he moves into the audience, threatening two other performers amidst the crowd with a butcher knife (Figure 6). By moving from the more detached stage into the immediacy of the audience, the brutish display grows in intensity, underscoring the barbarity being performed in explicit rebellion against societal norms.



Figure 6: A performer wielding a knife amidst the audience in Atypical
Source: Asian Dope Boys (2018)

Particularly, flesh and the body are powerful motifs in the work of all three acts. The motif of meat is doubly coded - it calls to mind blood-soaked imagery of aggression and death, hearkening all to primal origins in hunting, yet simultaneously, it reminds us of the vulnerability of our own corporeal body. Meat is hence an uncomfortably provocative motif, where the cruelty of violence, often enacted by humans, becomes acute when set against our own weakness and susceptibility to the very violence performed (Hamilton, 2006).

In adopting this loaded motif, the acts foreground the deviancy of the violence portrayed. In both *Atypical* and *ADAHA II*, performers eat raw meat in a frenzy, attacking the flesh in a reversion to savage instincts. In the former, the performer is dressed as a wild animal, chanting ritualistically “I am sucking on the meat. I love meat. I suck on the bones.” (Figure 7.1), betraying a grotesque appetite in his trance-like fixation on the meat. This is made discomfiting against the focus on the frailty of our flesh-and-blood bodies - in *ADAHA II*, two skeletons in the backdrop are ripped apart and destroyed (Figure 7.2), emphasizing the fragility of our human form.



Figure 7.1: A performer dressed as a wild animal tearing into meat in Atypical
Source: Asian Dope Boys (2015)



Figure 7.2: Performers tearing apart two skeletons in ADAHA II
Source: Asian Dope Boys (2015)

The grotesque quality of ADB's performances are paralleled by SVBKVLT artist Hyph11e's album *Aperture*. Many of the tracks have a guttural quality to them, with deep, coarse sounds that hurt the throat. In "Accretion", groans replace beats, viscerally conjuring a throat's rasping. The album art emphasises this focus on the physical body, depicting the cross-section of the tender flesh of a vocal cord (Figure 8). As such, violence is disturbingly underscored and flaunted, in defiance of repressive censorship and enforcement against such taboo behaviours under the Chinese state.

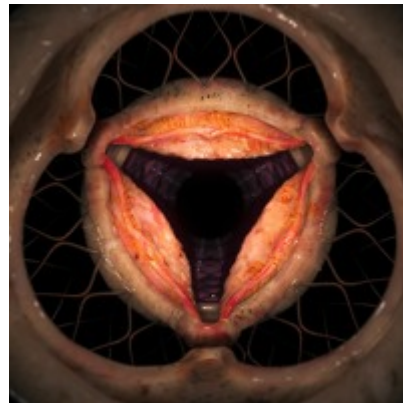


Figure 8: Album cover of SVBKVLT artist Hyph11e's Aperture of the image of a vocal cord
Source: SVBKVLT (2020)

Discarding Boundaries

From the carnivalesque chaos of breaking through societal constraints and boundaries, ADB, SVBKVLT, and Genome call for the discarding of these conventions in favour of a new identity. This identity encapsulates what the acts have identified to be the desire of modern Chinese youth: to be unfettered by traditional norms, free to exert their distinct individuality as a generation of their own.

Throughout the three acts, themes of purging and cleansing ourselves of the old are repeated, in a symbolic shedding of society's restraints. Under Genome, the artist Mang's album "*Ritual*" captures this process, shedding the darker themes of early tracks like "*Wrathful*" and "*Never Enough*" (a vicious neo-gabber track and a harsh bass jam respectively) by the closing track "*Love's Promise*", which ends the album luminously with a reverberating chorale of uplifting voices. The album even uses audio samples from the video game *Dante's Inferno*, tracing the trials the protagonist undergoes through the underworld in a journey of purification to redeem his sins (Sinatti, 2019). This forms a clear parallel album narrative of struggle culminating in eventual triumph.

Similarly, the first track of Kurama's album "*Tendre Promesse*", "*Seraph*", begins with a martial synthesizer suite of repeated thrumming instrumentals bearing down in strokes, evoking a plodding resistance grimly advancing towards an opposing force (Sinatti, 2018). Nevertheless, all the tension of its opening is released by its final track "*Oathkeeper*".

Coupled with its gentle guitar arpeggios and light, airy pads, the track's use of the major key throughout, typically associated with uplifting positivity (Parncutt, 2014), serves to emphasise its sense of triumph, imbued with a satisfied finality as the track fades out (Sinatti, 2018). These album narratives, tracing hard-fought battles through to contented victories, mirror the reality of struggle experienced by the acts, rebelling against society's restraints to emerge hopeful of new possibilities for creativity and expression.

This desire is emblemized in *ADAHA II*. The performance starts with the raising of a yellow flag, "representing the order that follows from chaos" (Chen, 2015). This rebellion culminates in the show's final scenes, where the performer's slow shedding of his ornate jewelry and clothing suggests a casting off of markers of the material world, before washing himself in a small hot spring in an act of cleansing purification (Figure 9.1). As he is suspended from the ceiling and lifted off into the rafters, spotlit radiantly amidst the darkness (Figure 9.2), ADB suggests a literal ascension beyond society, transcending its restrictiveness to embrace a new order accepting and welcoming of freedom.



Figures 9.1 and 9.2: Cleansing and ascension of a performer in ADAHA II
Source: Asian Dope Boys (2015)

A New Identity

In the vacuum left behind in the rejection of mainstream society's restrictions, the acts suggest a new identity that is modern and youthful. Incorporating specific cultural references and concerns, they imbue it with a generational hyper-specificity that Chinese youth are familiar and comfortable with. In doing so, this new identity attempts to carve out a space that accommodates the freedom yearned for by Chinese youth.

For instance, SVBKVLT's name is laden with cultural references - in a playful subversion of the word "sub-culture", its stylisation as all capitals and its subversion of orthographic forms

in its replacement of all 'U's with 'V's and 'C's with 'K's as derived from online communities, are unique to young people today (Sa'aleek, 2015). This is paralleled by the myriad of distinct cultural references in ADB's work, from Japanese manga-style imagery to marijuana to BDSM to hip-hop, electronic dance music, and rap, in a flood of diverse cultural information characteristic of the modern youth experience (Milia, 2017). In faithfully reflecting the lived realities of young people today, they create a friendly, welcoming space for Chinese youth alienated by traditional society.

Particularly, the acts embrace the prominence of technology in the lives of Chinese youths. All three acts rely on digital aesthetics - Goooose's album art features digital works that exist solely in cyberspace, with no identifiable parallel in the natural or even man-made physical world. Aurally, their music heavily experiments with technological mediums too, as electronic instruments replace typical acoustic instruments. Resultantly, they have created a hyperreal world of sound, exaggerating and distorting organic sounds beyond recognition, and even creating new sounds that do not exist and cannot be replicated naturally. By drawing on concerns and aesthetics familiar to the current generation, the acts imbue the identity they have created with a relevance to Chinese youth, indicating its commitment to allowing them to thrive free of the baggage of conventional expectations.

ADB takes the notion of a new youth identity even further - with the current generation's lack of a unique direction and purpose, ADB suggests that the new identity the acts have created must completely fill this void, giving modern Chinese youth a 'higher meaning' similar to that of a religion. The contemporary cultural references of their performances are intertwined with primitive religious imagery, imbuing its generational identity with ancient religious ideas of defining creation narratives and mythology (Whaling, 2019). This is seen in 19:53, where performances wear leotards emblazoned with the word 'Dope', a reference to marijuana, while donning masks mimicking the style of Japanese manga (Figure 10).



Figure 10: Contemporary cultural references with ancient religious iconography in 19:53
Source: Asian Dope Boys (2015)

Yet at the same time, they are positioned in ways reminiscent of religious iconography, arranged in ritualistic circles and ceremonial formations on a raised platform. The set is dominated by other religious symbols as well, such as the Eye of Providence and rune-like markings. In interweaving these markers of religion into their portrayal of their modern youth identity, ADB posits that this identity is not only able to represent contemporary youth, but able to provide them with an almost divine sense of purpose and meaning as well.

Evaluation

Overall, ADB, Genome, and SVBKVLT have created a carnivalesque universe that has challenged, shattered, and discarded the norms and boundaries of mainstream Chinese society, as well as pushed beyond to advance a new youth identity with the freedom desired by modern Chinese youth.

Western media has primarily portrayed these acts monolithically, only framing their work in opposition to Chinese society and the government - a reductive depiction the acts reject. Genome shares that “he [has] always felt that getting artists to explain their works is a little like getting other people to explain why they need to live, making them embarrassed and unsure of how to respond.”⁵ (See Annex A), while ADB likewise asserts that they “do not have to define everything that happens in [their work]”. In fact, the acts acknowledge the systems under the Chinese state that they benefit from (See Annex A), and the capitalistic structures that they are irrevocably “a part of” (See Annex B), showing an awareness of their inextricable complicity in the very systems they decry. The acts produce their work in a capitalist market for Chinese patrons and consumers, all under the auspices of the Chinese state - regardless of the subversiveness of their work, they are irrevocably participants and beneficiaries of these systems and their workings, problematising monolithic portrayals of these acts as solely outcasts and rebels.

Yet, this refusal to be defined solely in opposition to Chinese society is precisely why the acts are so successful in forwarding a new contemporary youth identity. Without limiting themselves to a rigid agenda or message of rebellion, they avoid being tied down to these pressures in a cheap provocation of repressive structures. Instead, they have established a community separate from the mainstream, creating a safe space for unique expression to flourish, regardless of what these expressions might be. In doing so, they uplift the importance of authentic freedom as the core principle of their modern youth identity.

Moreover, this new identity even casts off all vestiges of structures and limiting restraints. ADB explains that through their work, they aim to “construct temporary temples to suggest the ephemerality and fragility of contemporary life” (Foreman, 2017). In emphasising the provisionality of their work, they reject the possibility of this new identity being fixed and unchanging, which would be as limiting as the very systems they have condemned. They recognise that their art and the circumstances that surround it are continuously evolving,

⁵我一直觉得让 artist 解释自己的作品有点像向别人解释为什么我要活着一样，让我尴尬和不知所措

along with the shifting relevancy of the larger culture it projects, and in doing so, they liberate young Chinese people, allowing them to be free in their individuality and expression.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the underground club scene is one that has broken boundaries and continues to evolve past them. However, despite all that the scene stands for, the oppressive reality of the state continues to cast a shadow over its vibrancy. ADB shares, “ I think the mainstream clubs are going to get more popular because they always have a lot of money from... investments... and also the censorship is more serious than before... the underground club is going to [find it] pretty difficult to survive in the next few years.” (See Annex B).

Regardless, in the modern youth identity the acts suggest, the sense of community that the club scene values and celebrates remains pertinent. Even if the physical infrastructure and creative work of the scene is unable to withstand the repressive hand of the government and social climate, the spirit of the community it has created can live on. In an interview, ADB remarks blithely that “[they] just want to make fun parties for all the kids in China” (Wei, 2019), while Genome says that “The gist of underground club culture is that we create a safe space, letting people immerse themselves in any experiment that involves creating the stuff of dreams.”⁶ (See Annex A). The club scene stands for providing a space purely for enjoyment and exploration; an environment optimal for “collective learning and growing that eventually incubates a unique culture that truly belongs to [their] community.”⁷ (See Annex A). The modern youth identity of distinct individuality the club scene calls for hence emblematises the contemporary youth desire for freedom and their endless search for a place in society, ensuring that its essential spirit will be able to survive and flourish in spite of any attempt to eliminate its physical presence.

⁶地下俱乐部的主旨就是去创造一个安全的空间，可以让人们沉浸在其中创造梦幻般的体验

⁷共同学习成长并最终孵化出属于我们社群自己独特的文化

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Annex 1: Interview with Kilo

The following is an email interview conducted with Kilo on the 16th of April 2021. Kilo is the manager of the music label Genome Mbp 6.66, and we sought his expertise on the Chinese underground club scene.

Claudia Could you introduce / describe the Shanghai underground club scene?

Kilo 首先就像之前我和Hypebeast说过的一样，我个人现在不知道在上海怎样才可以算作一个地下的俱乐部。卖卡座的俱乐部可以算作地下俱乐部么？有的俱乐部他有两个房间，大厅播放商业嘻哈，小厅播放techno、house等电子音乐，通常在周末都人满为患。现在晚上去club玩的人很多，但对音乐抱有好奇心的人不太多。相对中国其他城市而言，上海还是最开放包容的城市。对于上海地下俱乐部场景，我想说现在他被商业侵蚀的有点厉害，主流很喜欢拿地下音乐、地下俱乐部为标签来达到自己额外的目的。作为在这个场景中的一份子，我时常感到焦虑，感到受到了资本压迫，感到不安，会有点消极的去看待事物与问题，但同时会让自己鼓起勇气去积极面对，去不停抗争。场景的未来发展也是完全不可预知的，这有时候让人有点迷茫，又让人觉得非常兴奋与期待。

(First and foremost, it's like what Hypebeast and I have previously said: I personally don't know what can count as an underground club in Shanghai right now. Can clubs that involve buying tickets to enter count as underground clubs? There are some clubs that have two rooms, playing commercial hip-hop in the bigger hall while playing techno, house, and other forms of electronic music in the smaller hall, and they are usually packed on the weekends. Right now there are many people who go clubbing at night, but those who possess a true curiosity towards music are not many. Relative to China's other cities, Shanghai is still the most open and accepting city. About Shanghai's underground club scene, it has eroded slightly under commercial influence; the mainstream enjoys taking the label of underground music and underground clubs for their own external agendas. As part of this scene, I often feel worried and unsettled, feeling oppressed under capitalism, and will pessimistically view things and issues, but simultaneously, I muster up my courage to optimistically face these challenges, and not stop fighting back. The scene's future development is completely impossible to foresee; this at times can make people uncertain, but also make people excited and anticipatory.)

Claudia What does the scene stand for?

Kilo 首先是自由，对我来说是一种不妥协的精神。还有社群之间的互相帮助与扶持，共同学习成长并最终孵化出属于我们社群自己独特的文化。

曾经我们也联合了西安，成都，北京，杭州，香港，台北，上海等地的青年厂牌共同发声为不平与不公正的歧视寻求正义。每个厂牌都贡献了制作人组成了我们在genome 发行的第三张合集 - Shanzai Compilation.并将所有收入捐给了慈善组织机构。这是让我非常印象深刻的场景中发生的一件事情。

我想地下俱乐部的主旨就是去创造一个安全的空间，可以让人们沉浸在其中创造梦幻般的体验。不管这种体验的持续时间是多久或者对周边社群是否有深层次影响。

(First and foremost, it's freedom; to me it's a kind of an uncompromising spirit. There's also a spirit of mutual help and support within the community, collectively learning and growing and eventually 'incubating' a unique culture that truly belongs to our community.)

Previously, we have also united the concerns of youth in Xi'an, Chengdu, Beijing, Hangzhou, Taipei, Shanghai, etc., representing the collective voicing out against the inequality and unfairness of discrimination, seeking justice. Each group contributed creators to form Genome's third collection - Shanzai Compilation. All our earnings were donated to charity groups. This was an event that left a deep impression on me.

I think that the gist of underground club culture is that we create a safe space, letting people immerse themselves in any experiment that involves creating the stuff of dreams, regardless of how long these experiments are sustained for or if they have any deep-seated impacts on surrounding communities.)

Claudia What kind of relationship does the scene have within traditional chinese society? ie. creativity in response to repression, etc.?

Kilo 没什么关系, 因为我很少去关注这方面的信息, 也没什么兴趣去进行一些深入的思考, 我专注于我自己所感兴趣的事物上。当然我知道西方媒体非常热衷于有意识无意识的把我们描绘成冲出长城包围圈压迫的西朝鲜人民哈哈。这有时候是他们的selling point。我只想说确实有时候我们受到了中国传统体制的限制, 但我们也获益于这个体制。我希望特别西方媒体可以做到客观的来看待这些事情, 或者说让事情变得纯粹一点。就像我们纯粹的希望有更多本土的制作人可以达到国际水准, 然后再去打破国际上以西方为音乐中心的标准与审美。

(No relationship, because I very rarely pay attention to this area, and also have no interest in deeply considering it - I focus on things that interest me. Of course I know that Western media is very fond of (consciously or unconsciously) portraying us as a new generation breaking through oppressive restrictions and progressing towards Western ideals. This is often the selling point they have attached to us. I only wish to say that in fact at times we have been restricted by the Chinese traditional system, but we also have benefited from this system. I wish Western media especially could objectively view this issue, or portray this issue more purely. Just like our wish is to let more local creators attain international recognition, and afterward subvert what, as the centre of music, the West has dictated as international standards of beauty and appreciation.)

Claudia Could you introduce / describe your work?

Kilo 我不是制作人, 我不制作音乐, 我只是一个播放别人音乐的DJ。我对我自己的DJ Set有着很高的期待与标准, 这个问题应该由别人来回答。我自己不会受到别人的看法和舞池反应的影响, 但我也不会陷入到一种自我放纵陶醉的境地。我一直觉得让Artist解释自己的作品有点像向别人解释为什么我要活着一样, 让我尴尬和不知所措, 哈哈。

(I'm not a creator, I don't create music; I am only a DJ who plays other people's music. I set very high aspirations and standards for myself as a DJ; this question should be answered by someone else. I am not affected by the opinions and reactions of actual clubbers on the dancefloor, but I also won't fall into the trap of a self-indulgent complacency. I have always felt that getting artists to explain their works is a little like getting other people to explain why they need to live, making them embarrassed and unsure of how to respond.)

Claudia What / who are your inspirations and/or influences?

Kilo SVBKVLT, HALYCON VEIL JANUS, GHETTOGOTHIC, RABIT, IVVO.NAKED.TOTAL FREEDOM.LOTIC.DARK0.EVIAN CHRIST. VISIONIST.DRIPPIN.MISSINGNO. 等等实在太多了

(SVBKVLT, HALYCON VEIL JANUS, GHETTOGOTHIC, RABIT, IVVO.NAKED.TOTAL FREEDOM.LOTIC.DARK0.EVIAN CHRIST. VISIONIST.DRIPPIN.MISSINGNO. etc. etc. there are too many)

Claudia Do you have any messages / concerns you want to convey / tackle through your work? Artistically, politically, etc.?

Kilo 我相信它始终链接着我的内部情感。也一定是政治化的，他是我去打破边界，为正义公平公正发声的有效武器。

(I believe that it has been connected to my inner feelings all along. Also definitely politicised; it's where I break the boundaries, using it as an effective weapon to voice out for righteousness, justice, and fairness.)

Claudia What do you hope for your work to accomplish?

Kilo 让我自己满意就好，这是我的核心标准。我不在乎是否他有影响力或者可以达到什么成就。

(Ensuring that I am satisfied is enough: this is my core (ultimate) goal. I don't care if it has any impact or if it can achieve any kind of success.)

Annex 2: Interview with Chen Tian Zhuo

The following is a Zoom interview conducted with Chen Tian Zhuo on the 28th of April 2021. Chen Tian Zhuo is the founder of the performance troupe Asian Dope Boys, and we sought his expertise on the Chinese underground club scene.

Nicholas I think first of all, maybe you can introduce the Chinese underground club scene a bit and what it's like in China?

Chen Tian Zhuo I don't know where to start because this is quite difficult to answer because the underground scenes in Beijing and Shanghai are a bit different and especially like after the pandemic, it's also challenging. I think this would be the best question to ask SVBKVLT because those guys - they're really good friends - have been involved in the scene for many years. Asian Dope Boys has been like five years. I think he was running a club called 'Shutter' from like probably 10 years ago. He was already in the club scene for way longer than myself.

I think the whole scene is changing pretty quick since the pandemic because all the borders were closed and they can only do the parties in Shanghai, so now all these artists cannot perform outside of China. Also, before, we were always inviting a lot of artists from Europe, America and other places from the world to come and play with us but right now we can only do parties with local DJs from Chengdu, Shanghai, Beijing so it's a bit different right now, a lot of local DJs are getting popular today because of the pandemic.

I think SVBKVLT does a lot for the underground scene because a lot of their artists have been reviewed by the outside world.

Nicholas I see. We wanted to ask about also COVID but I think you explained quite a lot about how the scene has been affected by the pandemic. But we also wanted to ask like before COVID-19, we understand that it's quite a lot of people that go for the parties and it's quite a big scene...

Chen Tian Zhuo Yeah, I think in Beijing and Shanghai, they have a bigger club scene because they have a lot of young people that go to parties and other cities have a little bit smaller scene. Especially of course, most of the young people go to the mainstream clubs, but still there's quite a big amount that go to the underground clubs, like "All" or the "Zhao Dai" was a club in Beijing and like, in Shenzhen, Luning and Hangzhou, there are a couple of underground clubs. And they have their sole crowd to go to the club quite often to check out different parties, like alternative parties.

Nicholas Is it a bigger scene in Shanghai than in other provinces?

Chen Tian Zhuo I think Shanghai has the biggest scene. Beijing was a bit similar, but like Shanghai definitely have more DJs and more clubs, definitely more clubs. There's like a new club open every couple of months in Shanghai. Beijing only has like three or four underground clubs. Shanghai has a lot of them.

Nicholas Is it because there are more younger people in Shanghai?

Chen Tian Zhuo Shanghai has a lot of things going on in terms of fashion and music. Part of the reason I think is just the different policies between the two cities. Shanghai is a little bit more open, and has a more artsy vibe and fashion. Beijing is still a bit under the control of the government. Everything is difficult if you want to have it in Beijing, it's more difficult than Shanghai. It doesn't matter like, cause Beijing and Shanghai, they all have a lot of young people. It's just the policies that are a little bit different.

Nicholas Okay. So even in Shanghai, since you mentioned the government's control in Beijing, what kind of relationship does the scene have with both the more mainstream Chinese people as well as with the government in Shanghai, even if it's more open? Are there more people who

don't get it or people like the government that try to control it as well?

Chen Tian Zhuo I mean in general, the whole China is the same thing. Basically the government controls everything, but in Shanghai, they have an easier policy. Like if you want to open a club, you just run your business. But in Beijing, you need to know people, you need to know people from the police, people from higher positions in order to avoid some trouble. So that makes opening a club in Beijing really difficult.

So definitely in Shanghai there are more places to hang out. I think there are about ten clubs.

Nicholas Okay. We also read online that the government will come to raid the club sometimes for drugs and things like that. Is it like a common thing, for the government to come and..

Chen Tian Zhuo It's pretty common. It's the same in every city. The drug policy is getting really tight in China. So, sometimes the police would come and bust the club and we had to shut down the party. We had a couple of parties that we had to shut down in the middle. Sometimes it's the loudness issue, like someone, maybe the neighbor, will call the police or sometimes it would just be the police running into the clubs and doing the drug tests.

Nicholas Is it just for drugs or sometimes do they want to censor the content?

Chen Tian Zhuo Not so much about the content because at the parties, we're just DJs playing music. Mainly it's for the drugs or for the loudness.

Nicholas Okay. We are also interested, when you produce music or the Asian Dope Boys performances that you guys produce, like your performances and your music videos and things like that, do you guys feel that you are responding to concerns that you have in China, politically or socially, etc.?

Chen Tian Zhuo As a promoter or a label, it's actually fine to just do some DJ parties. But for myself, producing a performance is a bit difficult here. So, most of my performance took place in Europe. Only a few times I got the chance to perform in China. Yeah, of course, I also got caught -- some work got censored or interviews got censored by the authority. That's quite common, but the parties' actually fine. You know, like they don't give us so much shit about parties. Because, they're just DJing and doing music. They probably didn't even know there's a party going on.

Nicholas We also got a chance to talk to Kilo from Genome 6.66 mbp and he told us when we asked him about how their label produces music and whether he feels that they are responding to government censorship and control, he said that he feels that like Western media likes to portray Chinese artists as always in opposition to the government. But, he feels that a lot of Chinese art also benefits from the government. So we wanted to ask if you also feel the same way and how do you, if you feel that you guys have, benefited from China?

Chen Tian Zhuo Oh, sorry. I think the connection, it was dark in the middle, I didn't get the part. Can you repeat the question?

Nicholas Oh, we said that we talked to Kilo from Genome 6.66 mpb, and he said he feels that the Western media likes to say that Chinese artists are always against the government and against society and he feels that the art, while it's controlled by Chinese society, it has also benefited from society and things like that. So do you feel that the Chinese mainstream or the Chinese government also has a positive impact on your work as well?

Chen Tian Zhuo I don't know, it depends because I think it's just different. Because our work is not making music, my work is just making performances. And a lot of my work are collaborations with other musicians and they're mainly from outside of China, with only some of them from China. So, I don't feel any obvious benefit because it is really difficult for me to perform in China and also my work, they're quite often being censored by the government. In this condition, everything that's banned in China got more interesting when looking at the Asian, like the different Chinese artists' work, just because of the differences between the West and

China. I don't feel that this interest is really from interest, they just want to say something different about what's happening in China. They want to say we're struggling in this community or in the society. I don't feel like there's a strong benefit from either side actually.

Nicholas Okay, I see. Also, something else Kilo mentioned is that they are also responding to what they feel is a lot of capitalism, a lot of money driven culture in China. So we also wanted to ask if you feel that's something that you also want to address through your work or whether there is a theme in your work against capitalism and its structures?

Chen Tian Zhuo No, I don't think anyone can say they're really against capitalism. Because that's something you can't really, that's the part of the structure. As an artist, I'm selling our work to collectors, to museums, to institutions that represent the most capitalist side of the artwork. This is the whole art market and how you see and how you treat our market depends -- you can really embrace it or you can make your work to comment on the art market. But overall, you're a part of it.

Even you comment, even you prioritise what can be observed of our market by the capitalists.

Nicholas Okay, alright, thank you. Maybe to change a bit, we watched quite a few of your performances and we really liked it. We watched an Atypical Brain Damage and we also watched ADAHA II, we watched quite a few. And something we noticed was that you have a lot of themes of sex and violence and things like that. Why do you feel attracted to these kinds of themes to portray in your work? And what makes it so interesting for you to portray them in your work?

Chen Tian Zhuo It's just part of life, like living in this society. And I think that like the actual world is way violent than the work I'm making and way sexual. Also like a lot of my work deal with the idea of death and observing bodies, like the Buddhist idea of observing bodies. So I'm always connecting two different levels of reality. One side is my secular life, living in this capitalist or socialist China and embracing all these desires from my life. The other side, I'm Buddhist. So, I have the knowledge of what is the ultimate goal of the pure side of life. So, I'm always in this conflict between these two sides of me. So, a lot of my work was a reflection of those two sides and it became contradictory, like they're fighting together, and that reflects my uncertainty about my life. So it's pretty personal sometimes.

Nicholas Yeah. Just now you mentioned also about religious themes in your work and things like that. We've also read some of your things online about your work and introducing new themes like sex and violence and things like that, and making it into a new, modern kind of religion. So we're interested in what interests you about the religious aspect? Do you think as modern people in a modern society, we don't have a belief in something higher, or do you think that it's important to have the sense of community that religion brings? We are curious about what interests you about the idea of making your work into a religious theme.

Chen Tian Zhuo I think it's really personal. I'm just obsessed with the idea of how being alive, especially when you're getting older, you see a lot of friends leave and your family members leave, you start really getting anxiety about death and the fears of death or fears of leaving. I think that is how everything started -- from my own anxiety and the fear. I think that would be quite common, living in this fast growing society, everything being about making money, making money for a living and so there's little time for everyone to think about their own death, which is the only thing we know for sure when we're born -- you're going to die one day. I think that was really the starting point of how I made all this work

Nicholas We are also curious about the response of the rest of Shanghai and the people who come to the clubs. Do you feel that they also share the same kind of anxiety or are they just there to have fun and to have a good time?

Chen Tian Zhuo No, no. I feel like everyone has their own anxiety, probably not the same anxiety, but I don't feel like everyone just comes to club for fun. Especially for our party or SVBKVLT's party or

Genome's party, it's definitely not just a fun party that you can purely kind of get drunk and get fucked up. Because there are so many other stuff in the party than just hype-y music and a hype-y mood. I would say Asian Dope Boy's parties are sometimes pretty dark, actually

Nicholas Is this something that mainstream or maybe more young people are embracing these days? The more darker party and with more, not so much just fun, but more complex..

Chen Tian Zhuo We are trying to give out something different and not just a happy party where you can hang out. We're just trying to create content outside of the party. Of course it's like a fun party. More than just this side, we are also trying to give something more energetic, and show something fresh and something actually interesting. So that was part of their purpose as to why I made the Asian Dope Boys parties. I just wanna bring the artists I like into in front of the audience. I don't think the crowd was, I'm not sure if the crowd is actually growing over the years. Especially with making a party getting harder. Those guys.. one power was the drug control, the drug policies are really tight so a lot of young people are afraid of going outside in case the club gets busted by the police or if they get caught by the police, it's pretty serious in China. So I feel like actually we are losing the crowd because of the really tight policy.

Nicholas Maybe just to finish up, do you think that this is going to continue? If the future of the club scene is going to get tighter and more not so positive and not grow fast overtime?

Chen Tian Zhuo Yeah, I think the mainstream clubs are going to get more popular because they always have a lot of money from, I don't know, investments. But the underground clubs are going to be more difficult. And also the censorship is more serious than before, more serious than ever. So I think that the underground club is going to be pretty difficult to survive in the next few years.

Nicholas Do you have any other questions? Yeah. Thank you for meeting us today. Thank you for the interview.

Chen Tian Zhuo If there's anything you can ask me on Instagram.

Nicholas Okay. Yeah. Thank you so much. Thank you. Bye.