

## The poet in the street

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**ABSTRACT:** *Stevv Tsui, a high school student who has just turned 18 this year, is also a senior hip hop lover. Hip hop, as an essential part of his life, has long been the goal he wants to strive for. He does his own rap and wants to spread his favorite culture through this way, so that more people can know its source and genuinely fall in love with the way of living, and maybe even understand the relevant history. This article will briefly show you the process of his work and his future ambitions as a newly arrived hip hop poet in the street.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Interview, Chinese music, Hip hop, Rap music, high schooler*

“This ain’t workin, let’s try it out one more time...” Stevv grabs a chair and sit down, and opens the phone to where his song’s lyrics are written. Taizhe Tsui, “aka” Stevv Tsui, is an independent hiphop artist at 17 has already made a name for himself. He’s a rising star in the brutally competitive Nanjing hiphop scene. Today he’s in the his friend’s recording studio to make his next song. This song will be collected in his upcoming mixtape, which is a brand new try for him. In center of the room stood a microphone for recording, and a pair of halter-neck headphones hung casually on it. The light was dim, everything was extremely quiet, and only the whispers and coughing of people outside can be heard. Raising his head, Stevv takes a deep breath and leans into the mic. Behind the thick glass of his booth, the sound engineer shows him a countdown gesture of "3, 2, 1". And then it began, the beat. The beat that took Stevv half a month of struggling to find and to modify. But when he found it, he said he knew that was it. The sound he was looking for. The beat that at that moment was pumping into his headset, waiting on Stevv to grab the moment and kick into his rhymes.

Though still young, Stevv said he feels he has been on this path a long time. “When I was in primary school, I began to listening to pop songs that everyone knows. But in those songs I was especially drawn to hiphop.” Starting from 2018, Stevv has released over 6 songs on a Chinese music stream platform called NetEase CloudMusic, which offers money according to the times of clicking. In addition, he put on 2 live shows and devoted that income to charity work like helping kids during the global pandemic COVID-19. His song covers a variety of forms, just like his personality. Many who have been in contact with Stevv are struck by how helpful and easy-going he is. He never puts himself above others. People say, instead he treats his fans like his family, and patiently answers questions from juniors.



Stevv sees himself as part a movement, the Chinese hip hop scene, that is rising up in China's music and dance scenes. Hip Hop first entered China in the late 1990s and went from a small subculture into one of the most popular music forms of all. While many think of it as the same as "rap music" that is just a small branch of the whole hiphop culture. Paddling, parkour, street dancing, dressing, etc. are all part of

it, and they all have become popular in China. As for rap itself, many consider 2017 as the real turning point. That was the year the larger capital market intervened in the growth of this culture with the launch of TV show called THE RAP OF CHINA. The audience for rap music went from being semi-underground to a skyrocketing industry. After the "hiphop wind" blew up, independent musicians have sprung up



throughout China. Different recording studios emerged in every city and make chance for everyone. Add to that the seismic shift in how music is made and marketed in those years. Making music is no longer as cumbersome as it once was. With The emergence of streaming media anyone can make hits at home. Stevv was able to break through with the help of this new trend.

Stevv says that, though the form has become a kind of pop music, he sees His music as more like an advocacy, "Hip-hop is originally a very emotional art of expression," Stevv explained, "You can use it to speak up, fight, or use it to chill, or to express the truest emotions and desires in life." When speaking of hip hop culture, he speaks of having a positive and thankful attitude. "My current lifestyle and way of thinking are inseparable from the nourishment of the hip-hop land. If I give up making songs now, I might not know what I should insist on." Stevv's audience also shows great supportive energy. Every time he drops a new song, followers hurry to listen and leave glowing reviews in the comment section. And not just his devoted fans leave comments. As a sign of his rising star, You can even see among the comments famous "influencers", and from well known colleagues in hip hop.

Stevv's songs are becoming more diversified, with a style that is constantly changing from the first single to the present. For him, this is actually a process of

constantly challenging himself, trying to find the style he really wants. He points to one of his biggest recent song Up, Up and Away, a song of hope in the face of the COVID virus crisis. "You might like and follow me because of the song Up, Up And Away, since its main idea is highly related to the current pandemic," Stevv said. Indeed, the song Up, Up And Away depicts "A protagonist who gloomily sees a group of bats taking off under the setting sun, and imagines taking his beloved girl far away after the epidemic is over" But Stevv's favorite new work is his latest song called Bacc On My Way. He describes his creative process in creating Up, Up And Away as similar to an exploration in a tunnel. He was just starting to find his way in the dark. His says his skill was still immature and he paid more attention to the addition of sound effects. Bacc On My Way, he says is more like the result of his exploring across a long time. Now he has turned to the style of basic and minimalistic. It also represents a new stage in finding his style and the maturity of hardcore rap skill.

The genre of this song is called NY Drill, a recent style that only recently became famous with rapper Pop Smoke, out of America. It's also a new direction for Stevv, one still little known of in the domestic China market. Stevv expressed his admiration for several artists who made this style famous, like Pop Smoke, and Nick Blixky who both died in the past few months. While spreading this style, he also wanted to pay tribute to these musicians. "I intend to keep doing more drills" says Stevv.

When talking about the future, Stevv has a clear plan "I will definitely go to America to study music after graduating from high school." he said, "and explore more about hiphop there, since it's the origin place of hip hop." When applying for college next year, Stevv will put his works into portfolio and use it as a bonus in the application.

Stevv says he hopes to do more with his music than entertain people. He wants to really contribute to the development of Chinese hiphop with his music. For him, the local audience still lacks the understanding of hip hop. "After listening to my work, I hope some of my audience can be inspired and maybe want learn something about the American hiphop history. Learning how to appreciate the beauty of such restricted lyrics is what we needed right now." He believes when they get to understand the context and meaning of hip hop culture it will help lead to more understanding, empathy and tolerance when acknowledging these contents. After all, he says, this is at the roots of what the hip hop culture has long advocated.

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