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Headbanging on the Open Door: heavy metal music, globalization, and politics in contemporary China

When I present myself as a metalhead coming from China, I often get curious looks and questions such as "Is there heavy metal music in China?", or "Does your government allow you to listen to heavy metal music?" Initially, I was equally surprised by the questions as those who were surprised by the presence of heavy metal music in China. As I start to contemplate why these questions are raised repeatedly, as well as how to address them appropriately and sufficiently, I become cognizant of certain gaps and biases in both media outlets and academic literature on state-society relations in China. The presence of heavy metal music in China catches people by surprise, not only because it manifests globalization in an unconventional way, but also because it betrays what Jeroen de Kloet calls the double bias – that "music was inherently provocative, and China was ruled by a monolithic totalitarian state without any freedom" (2010: 16). Conceivably, these questions denote a misunderstanding, or a lack of understanding of the relationship between heavy metal music and the Chinese state. I eventually embark on a research project that involves extensive field research on heavy metal music in China. I aspire to use the phenomenon as a case study to illuminate the blurring and fluid boundary between the Chinese state and society and demonstrate how globalization insinuates itself into the redefinition of state-society relations in China.

In this paper, I hope to lay out the theoretical framework and methodological approaches that have guided my thoughts on state-society relations in the context of globalization, which become crystallized through my empirical research. To achieve this goal, I will first point out the limitations of conventional wisdom on heavy metal music and state-society relations in China that could possibly lead to a dichotomous understanding of Chinese politics hence the seemingly dramatic presence of heavy metal music in China. This will be followed by a literature review in which I situate the topic of heavy metal music in China. Third, I introduce some classic works in International Relations and Political Economy that can be adapted to study Chinese politics and particularly fill in the gaps of current literature. These theoretical frameworks will be fleshed out by empirical analyses, where I discuss some of the preliminary findings from my field research that unravels the myth of heavy metal music in China. Finally, I conclude by theorizing and reformulating the complex state-society relations in China in the context of globalization.

Contextualizing/ problematizing the novelty of heavy metal music in China

Heavy metal music, or in short, metal music, "has come to denote a cluster of rock music styles that emphasize loud, distorted guitars; prominent and aggressive drums; emotionally extreme singing techniques; and musical complexity and esotericism" (Wallach, et al., 2011: 4). As a prominent feature of youth culture that started to take shape in the 1970s in the Western world, heavy metal music "has a history of controversy in terms of its relationship to dominant ideas, institutions, and societal and political moralities" (Brown, et al., 2016: 4). Being frequently denunciated by authorities since its emergence notwithstanding, metal music and culture has persisted through the following decades of drastic changes in world politics and has been flourishing across the globe, regardless of its intersections with and heightening of the issues of race, gender, religions, cultural variations, economic disparities, and political control.

Despite the music genre's eccentricity in and of itself, heavy metal music outside the Western context often draws peculiar attention and tends to be interpreted with extra novelty. In most cases, it is either celebrated as the "'soft' promoters of Western capitalist values and individualist consumer identities and lifestyles" (Brown, et al., 2016: 4); or heralded as the sound of resistance that preludes the collapse of oppressive local regimes, in the same vein as seen in the literature of 'rock and roll and the fall of communism'. Ostensibly, each of the above-mentioned features of heavy metal music is in conflict with the political environment and cultural background of China, a place where any form of social activities associated with individualism, anarchism, immorality, promiscuity, etc., is strictly prohibited by the state. Indeed, the reverberating political campaigns against 'Western values' and the draconian censorship in the country seem to have taken its toll on heavy metal music in China. Occasionally, metal concerts in China are cancelled or disrupted, such as the famous incident that, when the iconic American heavy metal band Metallica finally made their tour to China, they were not allowed to play one of their major hits "Master of Puppets" due to state censorship (Burkitt and Karp 2013).

Oddly enough, despite all the adversities, heavy metal music is thriving in China in recent years. In a sense, somehow it has even made it to the mainstream, state-approved cultural realm. A prominent example of this rather bizarre phenomenon is that, in early 2016, both the Wall Street Journal and the China Daily overseas edition published articles that make mention of the "330 Metal Fest", an annual metal festival in China started a decade ago in Beijing but later on has been held in multiple Chinese cities each year. While the Wall Street Journal article is titled "The Weird Global Appeal of Heavy Metal", and refers to the "330 Metal Fest" as evidence of heavy metal music becoming the "unlikely soundtrack of globalization" that transcends language and cultural barriers (Shah, 2016); the China Daily article, on the other hand, promotes the upcoming "330 Metal Fest" with details of the event, while emphasizing that the success of Chinese metal scene is attributed to "the use of traditional (Chinese) cultural elements in the music of many homegrown bands, rather than copying performances by Western bands" (N. Chen, 2016). The irony is, a year ago, the authorities called off the "330 Metal Fest" for "fear of violence" (Fullerton, 2015).

The tug of war between the 'global' and the 'local' is certainly nothing unique to heavy metal music. However, the confrontation does not simply take place and wrap up at the boarders but entails far-reaching sociopolitical consequences. The binary view of heavy metal music in China or elsewhere as either the sound of resistance against the regime, or plainly a commercialized cultural product of global capitalism taking over a new territory, resembles a dichotomous

understanding of politics in China between the authoritarian regime under the rule of CPC and the Chinese economy subsumed under global capitalism. However, such an approach becomes problematic in explaining why heavy metal music is both approved and curbed by the Chinese authority at the same time, as the situation of "330 Metal Fest" shows.

Situating the study of heavy metal music in China within the larger literature

The popularity of heavy metal music in China is thus a striking microcosm of the paradox that China's continuous opening of its economy and society presents with its Leninist regime. Although there is a rich literature on the economic model, the mode of governance and state-society relations in China since the country's reform and opening up, it fails to address the paradox as it focuses primarily on assessing the stake of the CPC's legitimacy given the daunting task of preserving the Leninist political regime while promoting a capitalist market economy. Otherwise it spills much ink on the adaptive strategy and coercive capacity of the CPC in response to sporadic political resistance and transnational social movements, in the hopes of locating sparks of democracy. Findings of either the top-down approach that examines the possibility of CPC's opening-up or collapse, or the bottom-up approach that searches for indigenous political rebellion, tend to portray the Chinese society as politically inert by and large. The scarcity of, or the lack of interest in research into heavy metal music and generally rock music in China is not a coincidence but reflects the epistemological and methodological preferences in studies of Chinese politics, and in social science at large.

At first, China's economic reform and opening up from decades of isolation and hostility towards the West catalyzes a series of studies attempting to delineate the prospective and agenda of China's democratization. Scholars have exhausted classic theories of democracy to examine the preconditions of the democratization of China, and identified some promising progress towards democratization, such as the economic privatization; the growing middle class in China; the internal factions of the CPC, or the so-called "intra-Party democracy"; village elections in the rural area; the changing political culture after Mao's death; the "state-led civil society", the influence of international democracy movement, so on and so forth (for example, Brook and Frolic, 1997; Fukuyama, 2014; Gilly, 2006; He (Baogang), 1996; He (Kai) and Feng, 2008; Link, 2013).

On the other hand, for a number of other scholars, such progress does not necessarily warrant or signify China's transition to democracy. Instead, it consists of the CPC's adaptive strategy to preserve and boost its legitimacy. Indeed, the political reform of China which was anticipated to come along with the economic reform barely falls in line with the democracy theories and practices initiated by the West. Although, in the early stage of the reform, political democracy was not ruled out entirely but postponed indefinitely by the priority of economic development task (Meisner 1999). Debates among Chinese intellectuals over the path to modernization and the utility of Chinese wisdom vis-à-vis the Western model of liberal democracy reached a new height in history and culminated in the democracy movement in 1989 (See Deng, 2010; Yu, 2009; Zheng, 2004). The out-turn of the 1989 incident came as a great shock to China watchers. It buried the hope of a smooth transition to democracy in China and prompted a number of scholars to probe the legitimacy crisis of the CPC.

In the aftermath of 1989, when communism has been abandoned in all but name, many China observers subscribe to the idea that economic development has become the pillar of the CPC's legitimacy. Scholars such as Bruce Dickson (2004) and Harley Balzer (2004) see a corporatist turn in the trajectory of the CPC's dramatic self-transformation and spotlight its co-optative strategy to ameliorate the stark discrepancies between the economic model and the political and ideological ones. Hart-Landsberg and Burkett (2005) believe that this fundamental contradiction is likely to generate endless resistance and conflicts. Nevertheless, Kevin O'Brien's study of popular protest in China rejects the image of traditional class conflicts. Rather, he characterizes them as "rightful resistance" and "boundary-spanning contention" that "goes on partly within the state and hinges on the participation of state actors", that "exists in a middle ground that is neither clearly transgressive nor clearly contained" (2004: 107). In a similar vein, Balzer notes that the corporatist or "managed pluralist" regime is becoming tolerant of demands that are economic in nature, while endeavor simultaneously to encourage and to place limits on cultural and political diversity (2004: 238).

Arguably, the CPC has spent great effort to redress the confusions and frustrations among those whose communist dream or democracy dream is crushed, by upgrading its image in all aspects including ideology, culture, media, and above all, the continuous economic development. Although modernization remains the overarching task, the adoration for Western models is called off immediately after 1989. Geremie Barmé notes that, after 1989, the officials and the intelligentsia endeavor to affirm the value of local and nativist cultural elements, and even a cultural and political status quo – to reject "Western" thought as colonizing, imperialist and altogether unsuited to Chinese realities (1995: 218). To reclaim its ideological righteousness, the Party has experimented with reinventing Marxism, deploying nationalism and consumerism, and rebuilding national pride of the great Chinese ancestry that was once buried in the ashes of the Cultural Revolution. A succession of new ideological innovations has been carried out, such as Jiang's "Three Represents", Hu's "Scientific Outlook on Development", and the President incumbent's "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era". As Dickson's (2004) comment on the "Three Represents" suggests, although the slogans are often derided as window dressing at best and hypocritical at worst, it reflects that the CPC expends efforts to publicize ideological innovations, while adopting corporatism and co-optative strategy to incorporate various social classes and groups into the party.

These revamped ideological narratives alter between a mixture of residues from Marxist-Leninist narrative, i.e., socialism; traditional Chinese values, most importantly harmony and order; and reinvented concepts from Western liberal democracy, such as freedom, democracy and rule of (by) law. Although the different sets of concepts are not without contradictions, Vivienne Shue suggests that the present regime has, like all its predecessors, inherited the old values of Truth, Benevolence and Glory, but only stretched them by modernity to encompass some new contents and meanings – new knowledges, new social projects, and new measure of grandeur (2004: 33). She further contends that the legitimacy of the present regime stakes not on its technical capacity to steer and to grow the economy, but on its political capacity to preserve a peaceful and stable social order under which, among other good things, the economy can be expected to grow (2004: 29). Additionally, Jeremy Paltiel documents that the Party pushes for legal reform in an instrumentalist manner and sustains a discontinuous campaign to champion the cause of justice, as it is "the Party's own interest in refurbishing its own legitimacy as the bearer of the interests

of the vast majority" (2006: 382). The social analysis and significance of Marxism, which is presumably the ideological foundation of the Party-state, is diminished to the altered 'historical materialism' which reduces human beings to wealth-pursuing creatures on individual level (Zhao 2002) and interprets economic power as the basis for the nation state to "stand proudly among nations of the world" in a collective sense.

These early works almost unanimously depict the adaptive strategies of the CPC as proactive and successful albeit unsustainable. After all, studies that focus on reading and analyzing the official statements, reports and documents, all of which dominate the political discourse in the era of traditional media, are highly likely to portray the Chinese state as a fearsome authoritative entity that is overwhelmingly powerful. Nevertheless, research into Chinese society and unofficial culture exhibits much more diversity and dynamics in terms of how the society interacts with the state. Although the state is still deemed to hold the dominant position, researchers have discerned various kinds of relations between state and society, official and unofficial culture in China, including subordinate, exploitative, parallel, schizophrenic, symbiotic, improvisatorial, etc.

For example, in the immediate post-Mao years, Paul Pickowicz's (1989) study of serious political melodramas produced by elite film-makers and Stanley Rosen's (1989) survey research on the value changes of young Chinese expose a declining interest in politics, for both cultural elites and young Chinese see that the market economy creates proliferating investment other than joining the Party. Party membership has become nothing but a tool to bolster their ambitions. Helen F. Siu's (1989) study of the reviving rituals in Post-Mao China, Richard Levy's (2002) research of public discourse on corruption, and Yuezhi Zhao's (2002) reading of the popular street tabloids in China, all indicate that local society actively cultivate a symbiotic relationship with the state culture rather than oppose it. Unofficial discourse that starts from the assumption that the system does not work, does not usually lead to a conclusion that the system can or should be fundamentally changed, but rather survival within – and if possible benefit from – an inevitably corrupt system (Levy, 2002: 44-45). Likewise, Perry Link holds that Chinese political language has penetrated into and influenced everyday thoughts and practices of Chinese people. "Chinese people have used adaptation more than resistance in response to the government's political use of language. They have found ways to adjust to the language game, defend themselves within it, and use it to advance their own interests." (2013: 321-322). O'Brien's (2004) illustration of villagers in China resorting to official language and rules to appeal to higher authorities for justice to be done resonates with Link's observation.

In Shue (2004)'s framework, some most obvious challenges to the Party's legitimacy include religious practice that goes against the socialist ideology promulgated by the state; prevailing corruption that erodes the value of Benevolence; and heterogeneous claims of patriotism that does not fall in line with the love for the Party-state. However, she also concedes that the people's ambivalent attitude and mixed feelings towards the regime should not in itself, be taken as evidence of crisis of the regime's legitimacy (Shue, 2004: 43). On the subject of nationalism, Riyun Cong (2009) points out that nationalism has always been conflated with love for socialism and the Party. He perceives the large scale and multilayered nationalist campaigns as a state-manipulated totalitarian tool that have encouraged radical, irrational and bellicose attitudes and behaviors of Chinese people, which is detrimental to the democratization and continuous reform of China. Meanwhile, Peter Hays Gries (2004) and James Reilly (2011) examine a number of

prominent nationalist campaigns initiated or encouraged by the Chinese government, all of which more or less involve the public sentiment of intense self-loathing of the "a hundred years of humiliation" and craving to catch up and surpass the "western imperialists". However, Gries (2004) ascertains that popular nationalism is not always congruent with state nationalism and even contains counterclaims. In particular, the Chinese national identity has long been disputed, especially among the ethnic minorities residing in China (Mackerras 2004; Wang 2005) and ethnic Chinese residing outside of the People's Republic of China, as well as a cultural nationalism in the Greater China area that distinguishes from the identity with the PRC regime (Guo 2004).

Beyond the heterogeneity of political language and culture itself, the reform and opening up of the country does not just bring an inflow of global capital. "What is looming ever larger, on the other hand, are the exciting new opportunities and terrifying new pressures of a global market economy and the models of aspiration conveyed by a global popular culture" (Link, et al., 2002: 3). Certainly, the Party has not forgotten the indoctrination of Mao that the role of culture is "to serve politics", but in the reform era when culture has become a commodity, it has to relinquish its monopoly over culture and cater to the cultural demands of the mass. In the early years of the reform, the influx of popular culture from Hong Kong and Taiwan prompted the CPC to shift its strategy of self-promotion from directly imposing its political propaganda to advertising and "selling" itself to the people by appropriating and assimilating the unofficial consumer culture (Barmé, 1999). Barmé characterizes the Party's appropriation of the burgeoning unofficial culture as a process of "mutual cannibalization", which is "continuous and beneficial to all parties concerned" (1999: 22).

It is within this context that rock music was introduced to China. The economic reform has not only let some people, especially Party leaders and their families, get rich first, but also let their kids learn to rock and roll and bump against authority first. In the early stage of reform and opening up, TV sets, cassettes, radios and Western cultural products, along with other scarce and expensive resources are available exclusively to elite cadres and their families. The privilege to access the enclave of popular culture outside of the communist rule turned these 'successors to carry on the cause of socialist modernization' to be the first and most 'spiritually polluted'. When the regime tried to halt the derailed economic reform that spurred all kinds of economic crimes and started a campaign against "bourgeois liberalization", it exacerbated confusion, despair and rage that exploded in 1989. Cui Jian's "Nothing to My Name" ignited a frenzy of rock and roll among the hunger strikers in Tiananmen square. The novelty of Chinese rock and roll is rooted in the democracy movement in 1989 and echoed by the end of Cold War worldwide. For a long time, it was championed as the "sound of resistance" and "anthem of democracy" in China.

After 1989, Cui Jian was seen "co-opted" and recruited by the Party to raise funds and promote solidarity among youth in the nation for the Olympic game, although the Party soon found the strategy too risky and called it off. Carlos Rojas suspects that it appears that the government tolerates, and even encourages, the perception of Cui Jian as a symbol of political dissent precisely because in doing so they hope to lower the likelihood of the emergence of genuine protest (2013: 327). Heavy metal bands such as Tang Dynasty and Overload were founded around this time, yet they were not so interested in making harder sound and noise against the

regime but eager to challenge the orthodoxy of Cui Jian in Chinese rock and roll (Campbell, 2011). For Barmé, Cui Jian's later work, castrated by the process of what Cui claimed as negotiating performing space for the rock scene, "probably would have condemned him to a short-lived career in a normal cultural market, but the unsteady politics of mainland repression lent him a long-term validity and the appeal reserved for a veteran campaigner" (1999: 131). Consequently, the novelty of rock music starts to fade away.

If scarcity of cultural variety was what amplified the novelty of Cui Jian and rock and roll in the first place, the abundance of cultural products in the digital era might be what watered it down. In the early 1990s, Andrew Jones (1992) would still categorize rock music as an underground subculture embraced by young educated Chinese as a means for the articulation of political dissent, existing outside the strictures of mainstream popular music and cuts like a knife with an oppositional ideology. However, starting from the mid-90s, "in addition to bootleg music CDs, there suddenly appeared what were dubbed in Chinese as *dakou*, or 'cut hole' disks and cassette tapes that were overstock or discontinued audio products that had been shipped to China as junk to be recycled, but were diverted off to be sold for much greater profit on the street" (Moser, 2006). These flooding cheap pirated or counterfeit audio and video products are only to be followed and replaced by free downloads on the Internet later on. When rampage piracy enables the new generation of Chinese youth to be in step with culture in the rest of the world, Cui Jiang's music is only to be shelved and covered by dust. Xuelin Zhou laments that much of the indigenous power of rock and roll music "was weakened by the saturation of commercialization" (2007: 106). In all likelihood, the "indigenous power of rock and roll music" that Zhou alludes to no longer resides in rock music, or indeed, any form of culture per se. Thereafter, there is not much attention but disdain for rock music in China.

Notably, the pattern of the government's cultural control and appropriation shifts drastically when new media hits China in the 1990s. The proliferation of the Internet and the associated technologies enables massive flow of information and ideas that both enlighten and disturb people's conceptualization of their own identities and interests in relation to the state and the outside world. Social media provides a relatively safe public space for people to express and exchange ideas, challenge and reformulate existing discourse and narrative, connect to each other and organize events. Not surprisingly, Link and Xiao (2013) predict that the Internet and social media might be the most potent challenge to the CPC as it not only nurtures rights-conscious citizens, but cyber activities also resemble physical forces and give birth to organizations.

Unlike the previous studies that underscore the strong capacity of the Party-State to adapt to changing sociopolitical circumstances, research on China's new media implies a much more complex and difficult situation that the Party-State is dealing with. The government's reaction to the booming new media changes from a laissez-faire attitude to an increasingly draconian censorship and pre-emptive engagement in the mediasphere. These tactics are at best coping mechanisms rather than proactive actions for online activism (Yang 2008; Marolt 2015) and netizen language and techniques (Cockain, 2015; Kloet, 2010; Lagerkvist, 2011; Link and Xiao, 2013), that to a great extent avoid, nullify and subvert government censorship. Apart from the notorious Great Firewall that blocks most widely-used social media websites outside China - where the most acidic criticisms towards the regime reside, Gary King, Jennifer Pan and Margarete Roberts' (2013; 2016) ground-breaking study demonstrates how censorship in China

has given up on preventing government criticism but aims at silencing collective expression. Their later study reveals that the government even constantly fabricates and posts numerous social media comments to regularly distract the public and change the subject.

Underlying the phenomenon of new media becoming the game changer, is the Chinese state being caught "in the dilemma of both desiring economic development and fearing ideological pluralism, and also on the verge of losing political control of the country in the disarray of a global market economy (Pang, 2006: 100). The global interconnectedness has become a prerequisite for China's continuous economic growth, which prevents the Party-State to completely shut the media industry off from the outside world. Specifically, Haiqing Yu identifies a number of remaining and rising forces that altogether generate discourses of convergence and creativity which implicate the cultural transformation of China, including "an industry desperate for audience share and maximal profit, a consumer market that privileges active audiences and media participants, a media intelligentsia willing to intervene in national politics, a party-state seeking ideological legitimacy and political control, and a transnational mediasphere that affects domestic changes" (2009: 4). Additionally, Jie Chen (2012) points out that the Chinese state needs transnational expertise and innovation in tackling problems which cause popular discontent and community grievances and tarnish China's international image.

It is worth noting that these recent works tend to be more nuanced and cautious to draw conclusions that infer causal relations or dichotomies among various factors. For instance, James Masterson (2015) acknowledges that social media technologies are a double-edged sword, on the one hand help the government's surveillance and interaction with citizens, while on the other hand greatly expand citizens' access to information from sources both inside and outside of China. Wendy Su (2016) and Jennifer Y. J. Hsu (2015) both make remarks that media globalization or NGOs in China do not constitute an opposing force to the state but the two are mutually constitutive. Furthermore, Jie Chen proposes that the politically meaningful impact of transnational civil society should not be interpreted from the much-touted parameter of international promotion of democracy but lies in stretching the boundaries and pushing the envelope of the dominant state (2012: 177). Most recently, Maria Repnikova's (2017) work depicts the Chinese state's relationship with critical journalists in China, a seemingly highly contentious group that is on the frontline of Chinese activism, as "a fluid collaboration sustained through guarded improvisation".

As Pang points out incisively, in the era of globalization, "any imagination of a totalizing oppositional collective action and experience is doomed to collapse under the consumerist indifference and fragmentation China is now experiencing (2006: 99). Moreover, Richard Kraus debunks the "rock mythology" and counters that "the charismatic view of the artist as a heroic figure, locked in constant struggle against repressed and repressive authority, is a product of nineteenth-century Western romantic ideology" (2004: 2). In Pang's (2006) view, the political meaning of Chinese people watching pirated movies "might ultimately reside in its being non-political", as it turns movie-watching from a collective public event aimed at projecting official ideology to a private activity distanced from any form of control. Nimrod Baranovitch (2003) further argues that the new ideologies, technologies, and mode of economy challenged not only the state, but also dominant social groups that traditionally have had more access to and control over the means of cultural production and dissemination (2003: 3).

These new perspectives and theoretical approaches in a way respond to Sidney Tarrow's (2008) lament that the study of Chinese contention is largely historical, "big" events based, and structuralist rooted, thus tends to pay little attention to the shifting aggregation, scale, and location of contention. Instead, they shed light on the multifaceted and interwoven forces that interact with and exert influence on each other, the process of which embodies the political transformation of China. My research is inspired by and concurs with the studies that delve into political processes that facilitate incremental political changes. Nonetheless, it is not yet clear from these recent works where the agency of the massive cultural consumers lies, especially in light of the still dominant Chinese state and the sweeping force of global capitalism. In particular, globalization is still presented as an exogenous factor that only seems to exert influence on domestic politics through the involvement of powerful players such as the state, international institutions and transnational groups and organizations.

Theorizing heavy metal music, globalization and politics in contemporary China

It is now safe to say that, heavy metal music and subculture in China in general, is understudied for a number of reasons. First of all, popular perception of heavy metal music in China tends to fall under the binary new of metal music as subversive or complicit with capitalism. Either way, it is not deemed "political" in the Chinese context. For those who conceive of metal music as subversive and romanticize rock culture in general, Chinese rock and roll "died after 1989". The first Chinese metal band Tang Dynasty was formed in 1988, only to stumble into the repercussions of a historic political turbulence. The excitement of "hey-check-this-out-they're-doing-stuff-we-did!" (Campbell, 2011: 17) upon learning of metal music in China, is soon to be followed by the disappointment that it is not genuinely political, and an assumption that it is nothing more than another piecemeal consumption of Western culture only to be discarded as a subject of study.

Second, even though occasionally there are reports pointing to the striking popularity or the controversies of metal music in China in light of the censorship in the country, it is nothing close to an organized collective action. Show cancellations or disruptions by officials, restrictions on artists and music activities, are certainly not as thrilling as massive protests and social movements. Western media and analysis, in Repnikova's words, "…often emphasize the work of dissidents and lay hope on social activism in overturning China's authoritarian political trajectory" (2017:22). For most China observers, to locate and trace the sporadic and contingent confrontation between metal community and the state, is not as rewarding or fruitful as to study large scale and acute political conflicts.

Third, heavy metal music in China is still a marginal existence in light of the Chinese media culture as well as global metal scene, in spite of the nascent music industry and the booming live music market. Although metal music is rarely mainstream in any national context, the global metal market is dominated by Anglo-American repertoire (Brown, et al., 2016). Presently, the metal archives website Encyclopedia Metallum records 122,340 bands drawn from nearly 150 countries, with only 270 entries from China[1], compared to 25,727 from the US and 4,858 from

[1] On top of that, Hong Kong and Taiwan have 36 and 70 entries respectively. Data retrieved on May 23, 108. https://www.metal-archives.com/lists/CN

the UK. Studies of the social and cultural dimensions of metal music are placed in the Western context predominantly, while little attention is paid to the “rest”.

Finally, cultural studies are always a little “messy” for those who endorse positivism and quantitative research methods. Theoretical approaches that draw on hard data and causal laws and generate parsimonious and prescriptive conclusions are much more preferred in contemporary social science. As Marolt notes, larger social concepts such as capitalism or democracy may be useful as hermeneutic devices in understanding politics and the world, but they often create a fatal indifference towards the empirical; nor are they very helpful when it comes to grasping the complexity of a society and culture in which huge numbers of individuals are thinking very differently from what their governments say or do (2015: 5). Admittedly, there are also methodological obstacles to study a peculiar culture such as heavy metal music in China. It not only requires cultural and language familiarities in both the original and the new localities of the culture, but also entails insider knowledge and immersing the researcher in the local community.

Granted, heavy metal music in China does not manifest a particularly significant political practice, nor is it in the minimal sense representative of the mass culture of China. But it is precisely because the popularity of heavy metal music cannot be explained as either a subversive or mainstream culture, that makes it clear that there is political significance of studying this subject that lies in between or beyond the binary explanations. It is also the feature of heavy metal music in China as a small-scale but conspicuous community that lends us a useful lens and sample to examine the power dynamics behind the intertwined and muddling forces.

Globalization is “a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power” (Held, et al., 1999). Globalization is a key concept and the starting point of my research. However, I am less concerned about where globalization is going, nor am I focusing on the direct impact of globalization on states and/ or societies. Rather, my interest centers on how the influence that globalization exerts on the Chinese state and society becomes internalized and plays into the redefinition of state-society relations in China. I propose that, the Party-State’s own investment in the market and globalization as a means to reinvigorate its legitimacy by fostering economic development places control of society beyond its reach.

Robert Cox’s classic work on social forces, states, and world orders provides a heuristic theoretical framework to understand how globalization alters the interaction between the Chinese state and society. In what Cox names “framework for actions or historical structures”, there are three categories of forces that interact within a limited totality (in this case, a state): material capabilities, ideas and institutions. Although institutions tend to stand out as they represent the dominant power relations, the relationships between these forces are reciprocal. Thus “one must beware of allowing a focus upon institutions to obscure either changes in the relationship of material forces, or the emergence of ideological challenge to an erstwhile prevailing order”. Cox then applies this method of historical structures to the three interrelated spheres of activity to facilitate the configuration of world politics: organization of production, or social forces

engendered by the production process; forms of state as derived from a study of state/ society complexes; and world orders, that is, the particular configurations of forces which successively define the problematic of war or peace for the ensemble of states (Cox and Sinclair, 1996: 218-220). Just as the reciprocal relationships among the three forces that configure historical structures, there is no one-way determinism or unilinear relationship among the three spheres of world politics.

For the purpose of this research, I reverse the sequence of Cox's analysis, with a special focus on how the historical structure of contemporary China bares the influence of world order and the social forces engendered by the process of global production. To begin with, it is necessary to draw a contour of the current world order that is China/ communism /authoritarianism versus the West/ liberalism/ democracy, as exhibited most blatantly in the official propaganda, mainstream intelligentsia and foreign policies on both sides[2]. Second, when China opens up its economy and integrates itself into global capitalism, the fundamental contradiction between the official ideology and the economic model as well as the consumer culture that becomes an organic part of the economy alters the ways in which the state and the society interact with each other. While the Chinese state's daring manoeuvre on its participation in global economy and adaptation to the restless society are well documented in the literature, studies on the far-reaching influence of global capital flow on Chinese society are limited to the involvement of relatively powerful actors such as transnational companies, NGOs, rights groups, etc.

In this respect, my research on heavy metal music in China supplements two observations to the existing literature. First of all, once an economy opens up to global capitalism, its operation and composition extends far beyond the blueprint of the state. For instance, if the popularity of Hollywood movies and other mainstream western cultures in China is part of the WTO deal that Chinese government has to compromise for its participation in global economy; heavy metal music, on the other hand, is brought to China through the pirated CDs and online downloads, an illegal market created by the plastic garbage imported from the West and later on the Internet (Moser, 2006). Second, the inflow of global goods and ideas changes individual perception of themselves in relation to others, the state, and the outside world and alters their attitude and behavior towards the state. This altered attitude and behavior, when congregated, constitutes societal change and hence the state's policy making and institutional setting. Importing plastic garbage including cut-hole CDs is certainly part of the state's plan; what about turning them to treasures to make a profit, and enabling generations of Chinese youth to keep up with global culture?

These two observations are consistent with, and I believe illustrate Cox's remark that, "the broad context in which states are shaped includes, below the state, the society which may sustain it; and, above and beyond the state, the external environment that influences its form and behavior. It is more complicated than that. External influences penetrate states not only directly, but also through the domestic society; and forces within domestic societies participate along with states in shaping the external political and economic environment" (Cox and Schechter, 2002: 32-33). To flesh out and further explore the nexus of the interacting forces and continuous changes below and beyond the state, I turn to Albert Hirschman's theory of exit, voice and loyalty.

[2] On a site note, the structural opposition between China and the West in part explains, if it is not responsible for, the obsession with democratization or regime change of China in the bulk of literature on Chinese politics.

According to Hirschman, there are two alternative routes that management of either a firm or an organization can find out about its failings or deterioration in performance: the exit option - customers stop buying its products or members leave the organization; voice option - the firm's customers or the organization's members express their dissatisfaction directly to the management or to some other authority to which management is subordinate or through general protest addressed to anyone who cares to listen. The exit option functions on two elements - competition (in terms of both quality and price) and management reaction to the loss of customers or members (1970, 4; 22-23). Voice, is defined as "any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilize public opinion". Voice is thus also known as "interest articulation", which is "nothing but a basic portion and function of any political system (1970: 30). Since both exit and voice option could be inefficient or overdone thereby failing to meet the end of quality/ service improvement, Hirschman suggests that the two can complement each other when either of them is not available or failed to work. Additionally, there is a niche - loyalty, that exists between the exit and voice options which further complicates the situation by nullifying the exit option yet without necessarily contributing to constructive voice. These "loyalists" might participate in actions designed to achieve changes from within, but "some may simply refuse to exit and suffer in silence, confident that things will get better soon" (1970: 38). The latter as an irrational decision undermines the incentives for the management to make changes and sharply reduces the effectiveness of voice option, which in turn might make exit option more desirable for those non-loyalists.

Insofar as many believe that the Chinese state has become a "corporatism" as the economic privatization and marketization deepens, it has often been described as a gigantic monopoly that thrives on placing limits to exit and spends much more effort to eliminate competition than to provide its people with quality products and services. Timothy Garton Ash (2017) applies Hirschman's theory to Chinese politics and remarks that,

"In China, voice is being reduced to the deferential whispers of the courtier. Exit is on the up: witness the lengths to which wealthy Chinese go to move their capital and their children abroad. A junior party member confided to me that he's got some of his money out to Hong Kong – "not as much as others, but some". However, there are still formidable reserves of loyalty, grounded in both an extraordinary economic performance over the past 40 years and pride at the way a once impoverished and humiliated country has won global recognition".

In my view, such an observation is at best partially accurate, and at least incomplete. First of all, Hirschman's theory allows us to conceptualize the Chinese state as an entity that vows to provide with Chinese people quality goods and service, both in terms of concrete commodities and public service such as social justice and equity. In this respect, not only the straightforward out-migration of wealthy Chinese creates competition for the state, even more so the uninvited products and ideas injected into Chinese market thanks to globalization. By simply denouncing heavy metal music as an 'unhealthy' 'Western' culture that is not compatible with the 'socialist culture' or traditional Chinese values, the state not only loses competitiveness and profits to the

illegal market of piracy; but also its recurring political campaigns against “harmful Western values” are caught in embarrassment by the popularity of heavy metal music in China; moreover, its image as the self-proclaimed sole legitimate authority in leading and prescribing what Chinese people ought to listen to, think and behave is undermined by the outpour of Chinese expatriates and especially the wealthy (Party) elites, who tend to speak of the regime unfavorably, which greatly deteriorates the social basis of the regime.

Meanwhile, I disagree with Ash’s observation that “In China, voice is being reduced to the deferential whispers of the courtier”, as if the mundane do not speak, or their voice has no channel to reach policy makers. The possibility of choosing another government over the one in China, purchasing goods and services from global market, as well as adopting alternative ideas and values, enables Chinese people to conceive of alternative options between exit, voice, and loyalty. Based on interviews with over 70 individuals in and outside China who are involved in making, consuming, promoting and observing heavy metal music in China, my research demonstrates that the individual perception of which option is more favorable is mainly affected by three factors: first, whether their source of information is state media or non-state media, including media outlets in and outside China; second, their personal experience and social status, such as their relation to the regime; and whether they have overseas living experience; third, their material capabilities.

Not surprisingly, those who access information solely from state media are most inclined to the loyalty option, whether rich or poor, even though some consider themselves treated unfairly by the regime. It is not so much, as Ash (2017) suggests, that they buy into the official discourse of national pride, but rather that the idea of moving to another country where they have to start from zero and learning a new language is simply not an option. Meanwhile, those who hold positions in the government are more likely to stay loyal considering their vested interests in the regime. Exit option is most preferred by those who actively seek information from non-state media and in particular those who have witnessed or experienced oppressions by the regime. Some other findings worth noting is that there is a group of “seaturtles”, i.e., who return from overseas, that are critical of both the regime and Western democracy but good at using tactics and ideas from both systems to get things done. On the contrary, those who have never lived outside of China tend to have polarized views towards China and the West.

Among the metal music consumers, some state that they only listen to Western bands because Chinese metal bands all suck, they will make an all-out effort to obtain music that is not accessible in China; others are more supportive of local scene yet complains about the problems in the music industry; they also vary in terms of their views and actions on issues such as copyright, musical authenticity and cultural policies in China. The artists, labels and local promoters’ engagement with the authority varies among different locations and their connections with the local government. Some affirm that their activities related to metal music have never been affected by the cultural context and government policies, as long as they follow the rules and regulations that are out there and pretty reasonable. Among the rules and regulations, censorship is detested by some interviewees who believe that Chinese culture can only develop when the state alleviate control and surveillance on culture. Others even state that they will only release music and put on shows in the underground scene or overseas rather than conform to cultural control. Most of them end up having to deal with the "cumbrous" voice option, or what

James Scott calls "everyday forms of resistance" - a usually unorganized, opportunistic and non-revolutionary form of resistance that leaves the dominant symbolic structures in command of the public stage but intact, by not openly contesting the dominant norms of law, custom, politeness, deference, loyalty and so on (Scott, 1989: 57). Without holding back from expressing their grievances and criticisms towards certain rules and regulations, they adopt a pragmatic approach to avoid censorship and other restrictions by playing tricks and modifying their artworks and documents in a creative way. Most of the interviewees agree that the government's reaction towards heavy metal music has become much more relaxed and professionalized. Occasionally both the central and local governments even fund cultural events and activities that include heavy metal music.

Concluding remarks

The trajectory of heavy metal music in China, from its appearance to its current status, embodies the larger context of a fluid state-society relations in China in the context of globalization. As John Street states, one of the sources of music's perceived power – the power that states seek to repress and to harness – lies in its ability to convey ideas and embody communities; and its capacity to engage in politics include at least three elements - organization, legitimation, and participation (2012: 41; 71-72). My research into heavy metal music demonstrates that, states that are opening up to globalization not only have to deal with open challenges and voices of discontent from both international and domestic society, but also the silent facts of diminishing control and allegiance.

I hope I have now answered the two questions posed in the beginning of the paper without simply uttering a "Yes" or "No". These questions were raised because of entrenched biases and stereotypes (albeit not without truth in them) of state-society relations in nondemocracies. As Joel Migdal puts it, "…All societies have ongoing battles among groups pushing different versions of how people should behave. The nature and outcomes of these struggles give societies their distinctive structure and character. States are no different from any other formal organizations or informal social groupings in this regard. Their laws and regulations must contend with other, very different types of sanctioned behavior, often with utterly unexpected results for the societies that states purport to govern – and for the states themselves" (2001: 12). Apart from structural configuration of world politics that shows the "big picture", it is helpful to delve into specific political communities and societies if we are to capture the detailed and full picture.

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