

The George Washington University  
Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures  
Kim-Renaud East Asian Humanities Lecture Series

## Linguistic Tones in Chinese Rap Songs

*Dr. Jin Liu (Georgia Institute of Technology)*

Friday, November 11, 2022 4:00 PM–5:00 PM Eastern Time, via Zoom

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Pitch is an essential component of both the Chinese language and vocal music, as Chinese is a tonal language. In this talk, Dr. Liu will focus on how the linguistic tones interact with rap music in Chinese. She will first trace back how the Chinese rap pioneers such as Cui Jian and Jay Chou dealt with the tension between the musicality, particularly the rhythm and flow, and the lyrical intelligibility in rap. Then she will talk about how the tonal congruence in rap is related with sub-genres, which have evolved with time: While the linguistic tones are largely preserved in the earlier “old-school” boombap style, more tonal distortions and deviations occur in recent trap music, such as the songs of Higher Brothers. She will also share a statistical finding that the falling, fourth-tone syllables account for 38% of ending tones in 140 rap songs, which suggests that the preeminence of the rhyming fourth tone may be a generic feature of Chinese rap, particularly in boombap. There is also a tentative observation about gender difference that the female rappers use the ending 4<sup>th</sup> tone less frequently than the male rappers. Finally, drawing on her interviews with 5 national award-winning Chinese rappers, Dr. Liu concludes that the restriction of tones in rap has been increasingly weakened, and there is decreasing correlation between tone and rap with the emergence of new trends such as mumble rap and melodic rap.



**About the speaker:** Dr. Jin Liu is Associate Professor of Chinese Language and Culture in the School of Modern Languages at Georgia Institute of Technology. She received her B.A. and M.A. in Chinese Linguistics from Beijing University, and her Ph.D. in East Asian literature and culture from Cornell University. Dr. Liu is the author of the book, *Signifying the Local: Media Productions Rendered in Local Languages in Mainland China in the New Millennium* (2013), and co-editor of *Chinese Under Globalization: Emerging Trends in Language Use in China* (2012). She has widely published articles on topics such as Chinese independent films, eco-cinema, rap music, Internet culture, youth culture, sociolinguistics, pedagogy and second language acquisition, as

well as digital humanities in peer-reviewed journals including *positions: Asia Critique* (Duke University Press), *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture*, *Journal of Chinese Cinema*, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, *Twentieth-Century China*, *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese*, *Chinese Language and Discourse*, *Chinese as a Second Language*, and *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* (Oxford University Press).

*Please register by clicking on the RSVP link below.  
Zoom info will be sent to registered participants one day prior to the event.*

**RSVP**