ASIAN REPRESENTATION AND HIP-HOP IN THE AGE OF NEW MEDIA: AN

ANALYSIS OF RICH BRIAN AND HIS MUSIC

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INTRODUCTION

"You don't understand how important representation is until you see it and realize

you've been missing it your whole life." - Awkwafina, *Time* Magazine.

The issue of representation remains a sensitive yet an important topic in the field of cultural studies and media. Perhaps the main reason why it is such a sensitive issue is because of how closely linked it is to the act of mimesis, or imitation. In other words, we tend to follow and imitate what we see. Representation then matters due to its influential power over the masses. In the modern world, mass media plays a crucial role when it comes to social representation and the discourse of identity formation. The problem thus arises when there is a lack of or rather no diversity in social representation in mass media. Throughout decades, Hollywood and the West have had an upper hand in mass media and the entertainment industry. It therefore is not news to say that the people that we see and hear on-screen are predominantly white. When there is less to no representation of other races and communities, it becomes problematic to those groups as it creates a sense of marginalization. It becomes even more problematic when there is misrepresentation or appropriation of certain communities and cultures.

Hollywood and America have played a major crucial role in this industry and remain culturally hegemonic. In the American context, the demographic is ever-changing and there have been a few attempts to diversify the content seen on-screen. Apart from the Black and Latino communities, Asian-Americans remain almost invisible in the mass media and entertainment industry. According to the 2016 census, there are about twenty-one million Asian-Americans and in 2018 they comprised about 5.4% of the U.S. population. To comprise such a large section of the total population, not only nationally but also on a global level, representation then becomes of crucial importance. In the context of race and identity formation,

20th century philosopher, Frantz Fanon in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) argues how the identity of the Black man exists in binary opposition to the White man. He points out that due to the White man's self-righteousness for believing de-colonization is the right procedure to be carried out, the Black man spends his life trying to be like the white man. Eventually, it occurs to him that he can never be fully White and therefore, feels there is a lack in his existence and de-humanized. White culture remains relevant and evident in mass media and the entertainment industry even today. In other words, it makes the white race as the Subject and the rest of the racial groups and identities as 'the Other'.

The year 2018 was perhaps the most progressive in the entertainment sector when it comes to representation and diversity with movies such as *Black Panther* and *Crazy Rich Asians* hitting the box-office. Apart from its success at the Box-office, *Crazy Rich Asians*' cast member such as Constance Wu was nominated for a Golden Globe, forty-four years since an Asian woman received a nomination for a lead role in the award show. John Cho also played the lead role in the movie *Searching*. The year also saw a few more on-screen Asian representation on television with actor Awkwafina hosting *Saturday Night Live* and Sandra Oh's credible performance in *Killing Eve*. Nevertheless, on-screen visibility of Asians has only been a recent phenomenon in the past decade where actors of Asian heritage play a role outside racial typecasting, and have written and directed their own shows. Although Hollywood might have come past extreme "yellow-facing", such as the fictional character of Mr Yunioshi from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* played by Mickey Rooney, there are still many movies that have casted white actors to play Asian roles even in the recent decade. Some examples are Scarlett Johansson playing the lead role of Motoko Kusanagi, in the Japanese anime live-action movie *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), Tilda Swinton playing a Tibetan high-priest in Marvel's *Dr. Strange (2016) and* Emma Stone casted as Allison Ng, a character of Hawaiian and Asian heritage in *Aloha* (2015).

This paper however focuses on the music industry and more particularly on the hip-hop and rap genre. It will further narrow its focus on the Asian population and its diaspora and how they identify with hip-hop. Hip-hop music, and more specifically rap, are often known as the voice for the voiceless and performed as a prophetic language that addresses silence, the silenced, and the state of being silenced (Ibrahim 366). Started from the boroughs of the Bronx in New York City during the 1970's, hip-hop often strikes certain conceptions and misconceptions about its music and the artists. The genre came to be mainly by artists who were either African-American and Latin-American, whose communities were mostly socially and economically marginalized. Apart from America's history of racial segregation and institutionalized racism, immigration was another factor for marginalization. A popular misconception about the genre, specifically its sub-genre rap, is its racial affiliation with the black community. Granted that majority of hip-hop artists are black, but there are many of other racial identities which have made a successful career in the industry such as Eminem, Cypress Hill, Macklemore, etc. Hip-hop, then should not viewed solely through a racial lens. Other social and economic factors play a role in shaping the genre and its artists. It is due to these factors and common experiences which have been felt by people across the globe that forces us to analyze hip-hop and its culture beyond racial and national identity. Hip-hop culture is a multifaceted and a complex popular culture today which expands its influence all over the world. Although it started in the borough of the Bronx, its influence however has travelled so far and is so powerful, that various governments of many countries, including America's, have made efforts to either control its influence by either depreciating it or outrightly banning it. This highly suggests that hip-hop culture comes with some sort of power and acts a tool for the powerless.

In the context of Asians and hip-hop music today, 88rising becomes an interesting and relevant example to study and analyze. 88rising is a mass media company founded by Sean

Miyashiro. He first launched the media brand in 2015 as a platform or a medium where cultures from all across Asia can be displayed, represented and appreciated. 88rising is a "hybrid management, record label, video production, and marketing company" as described by Miyashiro in an interview with *Bloomberg,* December 2019. The brand is best known in the music industry with artists such as Joji, Rich Brian and Keith Ape signed under the management label. Although predominantly seen as a music label, 88rising has not limited itself to just music. It has tapped into other spheres of creative industries such as clothing, video producing, film making and storytelling. As a company, 88rising is in collaboration with other artists, brands and companies like Soryama, Sankuanz and Guess. Miyashiro himself admits at first 88rising started as a company to primarily represent Asia, the company has now shifted its focus to represent immigrant culture as a whole.

This paper will analyse how people, more specifically the current youth, have been able to identify themselves with hip-hop and rap music. The analysis on Rich Brian and his label 88rising lead us to the research question, i.e. how is Rich Brian and his music bringing about a paradigm shift in the music industry and regarding Asian representation? In order to answer this, I first give a background on what hip-hop is about and how masses have been able to relate to its style, narrative and themes across the globe. I further explain how the Asian population has been able to empathize and have been attracted to the genre. This shows that there existed a certain demand for Asians to participate in the hip-hop culture and why Rich Brian, along with 88rising as a whole, is such so important to the community and regarding representation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to elucidate my argument, I firstly present some of the research that has already been done by scholars regarding identity in the context of hip-hop and rap music, and Asian representation in the western popular music industry. Many scholars have observed that there exists a lack of Asian representation in the western popular music industry. A few factors why this is so are due to problems regarding language, authenticity, accessibility and censorship. A few believe that the language barrier problem exists not only between the East and the West, but also within Asia itself. Phil Benson in his work "English and identity in East Asian Popular Music" points out that, "language choice becomes a significant element through which artists enact identities, or project images of themselves and their music to audiences" (7). The hip-hop industry predominantly and essentially being a production of western culture, more specifically American culture, English becomes the preferred language. Furthermore, other scholars such as Mina Yang argue that it is difficult to make an impact in the music industry as Asians, due to certain stereotypes and expectations associated with certain genres such as hip-hop and rap. In her article "Yellow Skin, White Masks" she discusses how there have been Asian dancers and musicians who have influenced the industry but often face a kind of "authenticity crisis" in the process. This authenticity problem also leads to the possibility of appropriation of some sort or an act of simply imitating the west without any genuine purpose and meaning. Thirdly, accessibility or lack of rather, is another factor which has contributed to the lack of representation of Asians in the creative sector. Doris Ruth Eikhof in her essay "Analysing decisions on diversity and opportunity in the cultural and creative industries: A new framework" identifies the barriers which restricts the access to the cultural and creative industries and therefore effect the dynamics of social identities in the workforce. The first two barriers she recognizes are social and economic capital. Networking becomes an important aspect if one wants to work in the industry. Furthermore, economic capital undoubtedly

becomes a crucial aspect while considering a job in the industry. As most creative jobs offer a little to no money for the work you do, having an economic back-up becomes a must for aspirants in the creative field. Moreover, in order to gain experience in the field, one needs economic support as the experience itself can become expensive. Regarding just these first two obstacles mentioned, it becomes hard for many Asians to even consider a job in the creative industry and therefore leads to an under-representation of Asians in the industry. Considering that there exists a huge income-gap between the rich and the poor in many Asian countries, and that the migrating Asian diaspora usually start from humble beginnings in their new countries, social and economic capital inevitably becomes a problem. Lastly, censorship affects creative expression in many Asian countries due to different models of government and a different take on freedom of speech compared to that of the US.

Furthermore, hip-hop and rap culture is often associated with blackness regarding racial identity, more specifically, African-American. Intertwined within race and nationality, hip-hop inevitably takes into account space, politics, language, and social and economic issues as recurring or common themes in their expression through music, lyrics or even dance. These themes align with similar experiences felt by people across and beyond borders, race and gender, and hence, hip-hop and rap music becomes a voice of dissent as well as power for people across borders. Jennifer Milioto Matsue in her work "Stars to the State and Beyond: Globalization, Identity, and Asian Popular Music" analyzes how Asians have reciprocated and responded to this experience of being black or African-American in relation to their own personal experiences (15). Other than race, Murray Forman in his work ""Represent': Race, Space and Place in Rap Music" studies the relation of space and rap music. He points out that the spatial discourse which happens in the "hood" or wherever the artist grew up in, also have an effect on their music and identity as well.

Against this backdrop, I will attempt to show how Asians since the early days of hip-hop till today, have been able to empathize with the experiences and the themes expressed in rap and hip-hop music of America, and how they have absorbed and incorporated certain style and conventions as their own. I further state that all this has been possible due to new media, like the internet and social media platforms. What might have hindered access and growth of Asian representation in the entertainment and creative industries before, can now be conquered through the use of internet. In relation to Forman's idea of space and identity, I argue that the internet has now created a new concept of space called the cyberspace. The idea of social and public space expands through the internet. This virtual idea of space performs the conventional functions of physical space in terms of social interaction such as communication, exchange of ideas and intermingling, but pushes the boundaries further in such a way that space has expanded beyond physical borders and social concepts of identities such as race, gender, class, etc become either anonymous, ambiguous or unknown. This new space brings in new forms of identity.

It is imperative to consider new media such as the internet and social media in order to study the influence of Rich Brian and his label 88Rising and to fully understand how they are bringing about a paradigm shift when it comes to Asian representation in the music industry as their inception is all due to the internet. The idea of space being expanded through the internet is also an important backdrop to analyze Rich Brian and his music, and identity and music. The paper first looks into the discourse of space and community and how they are crucial factors which influence hip-hop and rap music. The next segment studies Rich Brian's song "Yellow" and its music video from his album *The Sailor* released in July 2019.

CHAPTER 1: SPACE AND IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF HIP-HOP

Space is an important factor to consider while talking about identity. This paper studies identity and its formation through the non-essentialist perspective put forward by existentialist thinker, Jean-Paul Sartre in his work *Existentialism Is a Humanism (1946)*. Sartre believed that "existence precedes essence" which argues that there exists no inherent or essential identity, but rather identity is formed over time through interaction with the outside or the external surroundings (22). Similarly, post-structuralist thinker Jacques Lacan also believes that it is the external world that helps in forming one's identity. He puts forward his theory of the "Imaginary" and the "Symbolic" order, where the latter is the real world in which we live in, full of codes. It is the desire to fit-in with the Symbolic world that urges an individual to follow codes (specifically language) and norms of the particular society and culture, which ultimately shapes our identity. Therefore, we must take into account how the external or the outside world remains a crucial factor while forming one's identity.

Hip-hop as a genre, emerged during the 1970s in the Bronx in New York city by African-American and Latino-American communities. The demographics of the Bronx consists of African-Americans as the majority. In addition to this, the 2009 American Community Survey showed that 31.9% of Bronx's population was foreign-born, which means quite a number of immigrants reside there. The Bronx therefore brings in an interesting social and economic dimension to culture. Due to America's long history of racial segregation and institutionalized racism, many neighborhoods came to be homogenized in terms of race or economic conditions.

"Rap may frequently portray the nation's gritty urban underside, but its creators also communicate the importance of places and the people that build community within them" (Forman 73). Murray Forman explains how crucial physical and geographical space is essential to hip-hop music. In most songs, there is a particular emphasis on place, with groups explicitly

advertising their home environments with names, or else they structure their home territory into titles and lyrics (Forman 68). Giving a "shout-out" or explicitly mentioning the names of the place the artists grew up in, along with rapping about the situation and their experiences in the 'hood' are expected from the artists as well (Forman 72). Experiences of social and economic hardships, violence and injustice, are all common themes to hip-hop music. These experiences are also common to immigrants and racially categorized groups considered as the Other. The themes and experiences expressed in hip-hop music echo the experiences of those identified as the Other. The influence and the reach of hip-hop music then, becomes an inevitable global and transnational phenomenon.

Physical and geographical space

As much as Sartre believes that the absence of an inherent and essential identity makes humans free when it comes to defining who they are, he also mentions a term called the "in-itself" in his work *Being and Nothingness*, which is similar to the term used in philosophy called "facticity." Facticity are the certain "givens" or the external world that cannot be simply changed. These are the physical attributes that one inherits or the temporal society in which we live in. Therefore, some individuals are freer than others due to these inevitable circumstances in which they are born into. This is where factors such as race, gender, and location play an influence in the identity formation of a person.

The issue of race and the struggles which come with it also makes it relatable within and amongst the Asian community as they can also identify themselves as the Other in binary terms with the White population and postcolonial history. Since Asia is the largest continent consisting of the highest population in the world, there are bound to be differences and diversity amongst nationalities, cultures and language. Moreover, politics also plays a major role in Asian history and society, which has led to wars, border conflicts and mass migration. All this contribute to the process of Othering even within Asia. On a global level, the Asian diaspora

further attempts to go back to their roots during identity formation. Regina Lee in her work "Theorizing Diasporas: Three Types of Consciousness" states the three factors which affect identification in diasporic communities as homeland idealism, precepting themselves as exotic and the Other in the host land, and them being conceptualized as being in a constant transitional or transformational state (55). Bishops and Phillips further state that the traumatic situations which lead to and come with most Asian diasporic experiences play an important role in identity formation as they are "firmly woven into the warp and woof of the communities' understandings of themselves in relation to the past and the present, the global and the local" (165). There is a constant conscious and sub-conscious process of identifying themselves in relation to the people of the host land. Therefore, the process of Othering, as well as experience of violence and socio-political injustice, can be contributing factors as to why hip-hop and rap become relatable to the Asian community. Rap may have emerged as a voice for black and Latino youth which, as a large subset of North America's socially disenfranchised population (Forman 88) but the music resonates with the youth worldwide.

Cyberspace and its culture

In the 21st century, the internet has created a whole different idea of space called cyberspace. The internet has given birth to a whole new form of culture in which people from all over the world can connect, communicate, exchange and create. The internet expands the idea of the public and social space. Moreover, the cyber world welcomes you as you are. There exists a whole different culture on the internet. Often times, who you are on the internet may not be who you are in reality. This can mean that people either play a different role on the internet or fake their identity, especially on social media platforms.

The internet greets with open arms to anyone from any part of the world regardless of their race, gender, sexuality, etc. This open-access has birthed an abundance and a plethora of opportunities and space for people to come together, exchange ideas, communicate and create.

In the music industry before the onset of the internet, artists often had to get a record deal or a contract signed with a music label in order to make it big in the industry. Thus, apart from certain financial resources one needed, it was common for a few artists to be denied the opportunity or abused in the industry due to their race or gender. There existed a certain red-tapisim in the industry. Eventually, with time, there came self-owned labels and independent artists who established themselves as autonomous entities and were able to maintain control over their creativity and production (Forman 69). This practice has been further made possible with the onset of the internet and platforms such as YouTube. Artists now have a wider, global platform accessible where they can put out their creation for almost no to little financial resources required. The internet gives everybody a chance to express their creative work and a chance to be recognized by the public or by bigger record labels. It has expanded the reach for both top-down, as well as bottom-up approach between individual artists and music labels and companies. The internet brings in a new approach to one's identity. It goes beyond borders and nationalities and even race.

However, the problem of censorship remains a heavy issue when it comes to access to the internet in most Asian countries. Taking the example of China, the Communist government has put barriers and restrictions when it comes to what type of content its citizens can access to called "The Great Firewall of China". The Chengdu based rap group signed under 88rising, Higher Brothers, faced charges by the Public Security Bureau for the line "I don't write political hip-hop. But if any politicians try to shut me up, I'll cut off their heads and lay them at their corpses' feet" in their song "Uber Rap". Knowing that the Chinese government is known to have little to no tolerance for anti-authoritarian stances, it is interesting to see how the hip-hop culture, which is essentially known for its anti-establishment quality, is making its way in the country.

The Identification with Hip-hop by Asian Communities

Marvin Sterling and Nitasha Tamar Sharma in their respective works show how certain Asian communities have identified with hip-hop and particular "blackness" that is associated with it. For example, some Japanese identify with blackness/ Rastafarianism/ dancehall/ etc., because as they identify themselves as another repressed minority, just like black Jamaicans (Matsue 16). Sharma, in her book *Hip-hop Desis* mentions that "some young South Asians negotiate their racial invisibility in the United States by developing newly racialized identities that express a political consciousness of inter-minority solidarity" (3). We must keep in mind that although there is an influx of culture coming from the West, this has not led to homogenization in Asia, but rather its increased exposure to global culture feeds play with local identity (Matsue 17). Artists rap in their native language or incorporate English words into songs, written in their language. Moreover, through hip-hop and rap, artists express the struggles and their experiences pertaining to their own personal hardships or to current issues they experience in the places they live in. Space and place, as mentioned before, plays an integral part in hip-hop and artists tend to continue highlight this identity and connection to their respective environment, space or "hood".

Previously mentioned example of the Higher Brothers' song for Uber, the lyrics express the problem of poor quality of taxi services in the city and favor international taxi services such as Uber. Vietnamese rapper, Suboi raps both in English and Vietnamese about life in Vietnam, addresses the gap between the rich and the poor which exists in the society and also attempts to empower girls and women in Vietnam by being unapologetically outspoken about it.

CHAPTER 2: AN ANALYSIS OF RICH BRIAN AND HIS MUSIC

Against the context of physical and virtual space, 88rising's artist Rich Brian has been able to mediate his personal identity with hip-hop and American culture through the internet. Born and brought up in Jakarta, Indonesia, Brian was homeschooled and claims that he spent a lot of time on the internet and on social media platforms such as Twitter and YouTube. Interestingly, he also learned the English language through the internet by communicating with friends he made on the internet and watching videos of how to solve the Rubik's cube. Brian became accustomed to the "meme" culture on the internet and also participated in it by making videos and posting them on platforms like Vine and YouTube. Brian was shot to fame over his single "Dat $tick" and its music video went viral in 2016. Brian rapping in a serious tone with visuals of guns and alcohol, juxtaposed with him wearing a light pink, polo neck t-shirt and a fanny pack, struck a balance between a humorous and serious approach to his music. He first started off with the stage name "Rich Chigga" which raised eyebrows and created controversy over the term "chigga". He immediately apologized for it and realized how hurtful and inappropriate it was as it alluded to the N-word slur. I believe this further highlights the problem regarding lack of representation in the industry. Brian learnt the English language solely through the internet, which is predominantly unmonitored and there is only so much one could learn about the various connotations and semiotics language carries with itself. Problems regarding misrepresentation or cultural appropriation tend to occur where there is lack of awareness and lack of representation in any form of media.

I will analyze Brian's sophomore album *The Sailor* which was released during July 2019. It consists of twelve tracks, out of which two of them, "Kids" and "Yellow", will be analyzed in detail for the purpose of this paper. In an interview with Sean Evans on his YouTube channel *First We Feast*, Brian states, "The sailor is me, and all the kids that feel like they're curious and very determined. Just kids who are explorers and are not afraid to explore

uncharted territories." He further mentions that it is also a metaphor for all the (Asian) immigrants and their journey of leaving their family and home for a better life.

Kids

The song "Kids" was released as a single along with a music video which was shot in Brian's hometown, the city of Jakarta, Indonesia. As discussed previously, space, community and home plays an integral part of hip-hop music. Artists often pay homage to their "hood", community or the place even after years of success in their music. They do so by either explicitly mentioning it in their songs and lyrics, or through visuals in music videos, album covers or in their merchandise. Similarly, Brian pays a tribute to Jakarta in his music video for "Kids". The video features his family members, scenes from different parts of the city and its people going about their daily life working, commuting, playing sports, etc. A few notable features which showcased a few cultural facets were Jakarta's iconic Selamat Datang monument, the *"Ondel-ondel",* a large puppet figure used in traditional Betawi folk performances, Sunda Kelapa Harbour which is a historically important port of Indonesia especially during the colonial times, and *"warungs"* which are local, street-side restaurants in Indonesia where traditional food is often served. Brian also imitates the old-school style of street hip-hop, or in other words, hip-hop's inception. In the 1970's hip-hop first started out with people gathering together for house parties or neighborhood block party events held outdoors. The event centered around emceeing or an MC who would sample beats together and hosted the music for the night. Often times this would be joined by freestyle rap or dance. Similarly, in Brian's "Kids" music video, Brian is featured surrounded a group of people who are moving and dancing to the music as Brian raps. The scene also has a DJ booth for the MC and overall imitates the neighborhood block parties.

Lyrically, Brian expresses his experience as an immigrant, his journey to chase his dreams in a new country, and yet not forgetting his roots and his heritage. In table 1, I have analysed and interpreted the lyrics along these themes.

Lyrics	Meaning/Interpretation/Analysis
Verse 1: "They said the fruit never gon' fall far from the tree I used to be the kid, now the kids wanna be me"	In these lines, Brian acknowledges his roots and is proud of his Indonesia identity. The next line is a proclamation of his success and journey in the music industry. He also poses as a role model for the future generation.
"If my vision ain't scarin' me, then I don't go for it 'Member my first days here when it was all foreign Now I'm on TV with James Corden, that shit was crazy Just got a place with a backyard, I feel amazing Nothin' can get between me and the dreams I'm chasin'"	Brian is expressing his ambition to chase his dreams as an immigrant. He says how things at first was foreign and new to him, but a few years down the line he was featured on James Corden's talk show. He also expresses the grit and hard work one has to put in in order to achieve their dreams
"Started off as the sailor, look at me, now I'm the captain I won't lie, this shit is fun Tell these Asian kids they could do what	The figure of the sailor is referenced here. The sailor figure represents the immigrant and his journey to search, explore a new land or home. Brian here directly expresses how he rose from

they want Might steal the mic at the GRAMMYs just to say we won That everyone can make it, don't matter where you from"	the sailor figure, lost and searching, to the figure of the captain, who now holds control and knows the direction. The captain figure also means Brian recognizes himself as the leader. In continuation to this line, the line "Tell these Asian kids they could do what they want" is like a preach to the future generation, particularly to the Asian community.
Verse 2: "Whole country of people proud, so I'm never worried" "We crossed oceans for a chance just to feel somethin' better Generations to sacrifice, that we'll always remember It's that circle of life shit, they hold me up like I'm Simba" "Victorious tropical flow comin' straight from Indo'"	In this verse, Brian explicitly mentions his nationality, I.e. Indonesia and expresses the two-way pride which exists between him and his country. Words like "crossed oceans", "generations" and "sacrifice" evoke the imagery of the sailor and the immigrant figure. Allusion to the movie The Lion King is made through "circle of life" which is a song from the movie and by mentioning the protagonist of the story Simba. The movie portrays themes of family and pride of one's heritage, which align with Brian's journey as an immigrant.

Yellow

Brian in his interview stated that the song "Yellow" is about "...identity, specifically it's about Asian identity. But it's something that a lot of people can relate to even if you're not, you know, Asian." Through "Yellow" he showcases the multi-layered nature of his identity as an Asian, an artist, an immigrant and the self. The music video for "Yellow" was directed by Dave Meyers, a several MTV Video Music and Grammy awards nominee and winner in the past decade. The analysis of this song is done with reference to its music video as the visual guides the lyrical and vice-versa. The sound, image and text of "Yellow" compliments each of its components and therefore, time stamps to the music video has been provided.

The music video has a cinematic feel to it due to its deliberate choice of lighting, colors, mise-en-scene and editing techniques. The video starts with the camera moving on a dolly, passing through a suburb neighborhood. The video has an overall cool blue tone giving an impression that it is a little after twilight. The scene shifts its focus on a house where we get a glimpse of what is going on inside through a large window. Apart from the light which is coming from the window, the rest of the frame remains dark with cool tones. Similarly, the next house it shows also has the same lighting but with a different set of people. The editing technique in the intro segment of the music video is rhythmic as the scene cuts according to the piano accents. Accents cause notes to stick out and grab our attention. Here, the accent lies on the first beat of the song. Thus, the titles and credits on the screen in the intro change on the first beat. However, when it shows the houses, the scene changes after two intervals, i.e. eight beats, giving the audience more time to observe the image.

The intro segment of the video can be analyzed in terms of its symbolism. On a closer look, we notice that the people in the first house are all white and the second house has a group of people of black ethnicity. The scene then shows the artist, Rich Brian, in another house all alone. The houses which consists of white and black people symbolizes the American music

industry, more particularly the genre of Rap music within the industry. Both the houses consist of a group of people with the same ethnicity, whereas Brian remains alone in his house. This hints towards the lack of Asian rappers or Asian representation within the American music industry.

Brian standing alone in his house is symbolic for other aspects too which this essay attempts to elucidate. The song starts with the chorus at 0:25. The lyrics "will anybody even miss me when I'm gone" is an expression of anxiety and loneliness the rapper feels. This could be due to the lack of Asian people in the industry with whom he can identify and mingle with, keeping in mind the first two houses consist of racially homogenous groups. Perhaps it could also be an expression to show the feeling of loneliness and the fear of being forgotten which occurs while trying to pursue one's dreams and goals. This is further being expressed in the second verse with the lines "Will I make it? Who the hell knows?" Coming far away from his home country, the rapper expresses the anxiety and moments of doubt he feels as an immigrant. In his other song called Curious from the same album, he illustrates the feeling of homesickness in the lines:

"I miss my family, miss my home

Wish I could visit a little more

The journey's 20 hours, flight too long

I only get to see 'em on my phone."

By expressing such feelings of anxiety, loneliness and homesickness, Brian's music becomes relatable and personal to many immigrants in today's globalized world. In addition to this, his music becomes relatable also to those people who leave their homes in order to pursue their dreams and goals, regardless of their race and identity.

In the music video there exists several motifs, i.e. a dominant recurring theme, which demonstrates the act of breaking through struggles and achieving liberation or success. These are symbolically shown as the plastic wrapping, the hands which hold and choke him, and the glass window. The glass window remains the ultimate and final obstacle, and therefore the climax point, in the narrative of the music video. Once Brian starts to sing the lyrics, the camera comes closer to him inside the house and we notice that he is not only alone in the house but also entirely covered in plastic. This suggests the restriction and restraint in movement and space which the rapper experiences or has experienced through in his life. The rapper performs rigid movements as he struggles to break free from the plastic wrapping. This demonstrates the need to liberate yourself from hinderances and obstacles in order to express your creativity. The plastic wrap can also signify that something is new. In this case, Brian is showcased as a fresh-face in the industry. At 0:38 we get a glimpse of the room inside and notice a few alcohol bottles placed all around. It is interesting to note that all the furniture, the walls and the floor, and Brian himself is covered with plastic, except for the alcohol bottles. If we interpret objects in plastic wraps as a symbol for something that is unopened, untouched and new, it is fair to say that the alcohol is not a new concept in this context; that the influence and the use of alcohol is familiar and old. If so, is the artist hinting that alcohol consumption or substance abuse was a part of his old lifestyle and refrained the artist from movement and from expressing himself?

When it comes to the editing technique while establishing a relationship between image, text and music, Goodwin notes that "rhythm may be emphasized by gestures and movements" (69; Ch. 3). This means that there may be certain visual aids or cues that emphasize or bring attention to the music. This can be done by adding deliberate changes in the scene or through abrupt cuts while editing in sync with the beat, melody or even lyrics. During the first verse, Brian creates cracks in the glass window which coincides with an accent on the beat and the word "tonight" at 1:14, and the word "try" on 1:22. The visuals help in emphasizing on the

assonance of the two words. Every time Brian comes in contact with the glass, he is able to make only a crack or a few scratches on the window. There are only two instances when the glass shatters, i.e. at 1:22 when Brian deliberately punches the glass and at 2:50 when he throws his whole body against it. Both these moments occur after Brian fights an obstacle. At 1:22, he is able to do so after freeing himself from the plastic and 2:50 he does so after fighting the hands that are restraining him. Both instances portray a sense of victory for Brian.

In the second chorus the percussions disappear and it becomes a little quiet again, just like the first chorus. This technique draws our attention to the lyrics of the song which discussed previously, expresses feelings of anxiety, doubt and loneliness. The video image makes the chorus even more intimate at 1:53 as Brian looks into the camera and walks towards the glass window, creating an illusion that the screen is the only thing that is separating the viewer and the artist.

It is interesting to note that the second verse of the song sounds a different from the previous segments of the song due to a change in the key from G# minor to C, which is abrupt and noticeable, and fits the supernatural imagery that the viewers might not have been prepared for. The video image during the second verse portrays another symbolic representation of obstacles which are holding back the artist and literally choking him as well. This may be interpreted as Brian's own consciousness and self-doubt which is restraining him. In other words, it is a representation of a mental barrier. Here, the collective identity associated with the artist is stripped down to being an individual identity. He no longer is representing a collective identity regarding race or nationality but showcasing a more authentic and personal self. The hands are controlling him not only from the outside, but appear inside his body too from 2:14-2:25.

At 2:50 he breaks through the entire glass window by throwing himself at it and raps "I did it all without no citizenship. To show the whole world you just got to imagine." This becomes the climax point of the music video. Brian is able to break through the ultimate obstacle and lands outside the house. Vernallis states that "The semiotic categories of icon, symbol, and index can be useful for understanding the relations among sound, image, and lyrics" (183). In semiotics, there exists many signs in our society which eventually form certain meanings in the cultural context. Semiotics, through signs and symbols, in music videos can act as metaphors and symbols. In this music video, the house can now be seen as an icon that signifies the artist's previous life, which includes his home, his habits and his mental anxiety. The house starts to burn which indicates that the artist is ready to start his new endeavor. As the song enters the bridge, the "white" neighbor turns to watch the flames. We recognize the man as Bekon and he lip-syncs the line "but ourselves". This scene shows how Rich Brian has been able gain attention from other rappers in the industry, including Bekon himself. This might also be an allusion to how Brian first became famous back in 2016 when his single "Dat $tick" went viral on the internet. It instantly became popular and hip-hop artists such as 21 Savage, Ghostface Killa and Desiigner reacted and responded to the music video.

The shift in key in the second verse merges euphoniously with the orchestra playing in the outro. The symphony produced by the orchestra evokes a feeling of triumph as well as nostalgia. The images portray this visually by zooming into Brian's eyes and transition to a completely different location. The setting shifts from the suburban neighborhood to the city streets of Jakarta, which is the artist's hometown. The cinematography compliments the nostalgic effect which the music is aiming to achieve. Along with the use high contrast lighting and rapid cuts, the use of low count of frames per second gives it a dreamlike impression. This segment is shown as a flashback to his older lifestyle and hence we get instances of a young Brian living recklessly and practicing various indulgences such as smoking, drinking, violence,

and vandalism. At 4:09 we get a glimpse of his mother while he hugs her farewell. His mother is another recurring trope which pops up in his other songs from the same album, such as "Kids" and "Curious". The video ends by shifting back to the scene where Brian stands in front of the burning house.

 In conclusion, through the combination of text, image and music, "Yellow" by Rich Brian empathizes and reaches out to his audience beyond borders and a single identity. We are only looking at the surface level if we simply say that Brian has made an impact solely due to his racial identity. Through the lyrics he expresses his political identity as an immigrant, as well as his social identity by expressing his coming-of-age story as young man pursuing his dreams. The use of image for "Yellow" also helps in expressing his personal identity which comprised of mental anguish and his history.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Rich Brian and his label 88rising have been able to bring a paradigm shift for Asians through the use of the internet. In the 21st century, the internet has brought a paradigm shift across industries and all around the world. It has led to changes in the way we think, connect, live, trade, travel, etc. Similarly, the internet has brought a paradigm shift in the music industry. Often times, artists would have to sign up with an established label or record company to start off their music careers. This used to be the first step and still is, in most cases. Rich Brian however, gained recognition in the music industry without signing a contract with any label first but instead, recorded, produced and filmed his song and the music video for his single "Dat $tick" by uploading it on YouTube. Because the video went viral, he was contacted by Sean Miyashiro, founder of 88rising, who then signed him under its label. Another point to consider is the expansion and the change in the idea of space which the internet has brought about. YouTube made it possible for Brian to reach millions of people, all the way from his hometown, Jakarta. The internet made it possible for Miyashiro to be able to connect to Brian from the US to Indonesia.

Moreover, as mentioned previously by Eikhof, the barriers which cause lack of representation of diverse groups in the creative industries are namely, social capital, economic capital, socio-ethnic background, weather the individuals can be considered as objects of decision making, and finally, whether those individuals have the ability and flexibility to cope with the fast-paced demands and the dynamic work environment. As the internet is free (in most countries) and the influence of social media has spread sporadically, people are able to overcome the need of social and economic capital to gain access to the creative industries. Taking YouTube as an example, in the past decade there have been millions of users who have been able to gain popularity and express their creativity for free and out of their own will. A few notable examples of successful Asian or part-Asian Youtubers are Michelle Phan, Ryan

Higa and Lilly Singh. As ordinary people from their bedrooms, many are able to post one's own authentic creative content online and gain an audience. Identity and capital become less of a concern while creating content on the internet, compared to approaching the creative industry in the traditional sense. By "traditional" I mean to say getting qualified education at an institution, or working under a company or an agency. New media has made it liberating and easy, to an extent, for many people today who aspire to work in the creative industry. Focusing on the Asian representation aspect, creators such as Lilly Singh, Rich Brian and Joji are now successful in the professional front of their respective fields. From making online skits on YouTube, Lilly Singh has become the first queer, woman of color (specifically of Indian ethnicity), to host her own late-night talk show. YouTube as a dynamic platform has provided opportunities for many 'creators' today to be able to showcase their creative projects or personas, and even make a living out of it, regardless of their ethnic identities. It has also made it possible for people who identify with different genders and sexualities to express themselves and their creativity on it. Therefore, YouTube and many other opportunities that the internet has provided, become crucial and impactful regarding culture and representation in the 21st century.

Rich Brian has established himself as a hip-hop artist and has gained attention and appreciation from many bigger names in the industry as well as collaborated with them, only in the span of four years. We must keep in mind that all this has been possible primarily due to the Internet and the social media platform, YouTube. 88rising's founder Miyashiro uses this as an advantage. He clearly understands the importance of new media in the digital age and has therefore successfully established *88rising*. New media has made this paradigm shift possible in the industry. Brian approached the process of earning recognition, a record deal and creating a fan base for support differently than how it used to be before the internet came to be. He grasped the internet culture, as well as the American hip-hop culture, and actively made his presence on it by posting skits and memes on various social media platforms. By establishing

his career successfully, he also becomes a representation and a role model for many other budding artists who are either Asians or immigrants.

Apart from Rich Brian, other artists signed under *88rising* such as Joji, NIKI, Keith Ape and Higher brothers, have all made an impact when it comes to Asian representation in the music industry. Aside from simply being visual representation on behalf of their Asian heritage, these artists have performed and succeeded in making music which has earned recognition, support and appreciation beyond their identity as Asians. 88rising is not successful solely because it represents Asians and immigrants, but rather it is their music, their creativity, their artistic production in itself that has brought them to where they are today. In 2019, 88rising organized an arts and music festival called "Head in the Clouds Festival" named after the collaborative album under the label in Los Angeles, California, which was dubbed by fans as "Asian Coachella". Due to the positive response and turn-out the festival received, 88rising was set on having a "Head in the Clouds II" festival, but this time in Indonesia. They were also set to perform at the Coachella 2020 alongside many other established artists and performers in the industry. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the concerts were cancelled. Nevertheless, 88rising and its artists are yet to push further ahead in their career. With years of under-representation in the music industry, these artists have made a breakthrough performance as Asian artists and beyond being just Asian artists. Culturally, they become living examples of how the identity has become much more complex and yet still ambiguous in this era of new media, where factors such as language and space have been altered in some way or the other.

I would like to conclude by saying that the internet has brought a paradigm shift in many industries, including the creative industries. If diverse and accurate representation is in demand, it is now more than ever possible for anyone regardless of their race, background, gender, sexuality, etc., to be able to cater to that demand. The internet has provided access to a

different kind of public space where people can raise awareness, participate and gain access to the industries.

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