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**Between Globalisation and Localisation:  
A Study of Hong Kong Popular Music**

Ho Wai Chung  
Hong Kong Baptist University

The author welcome comments from readers.  
Contact details:

Ho Wai Chung, Department of Music & Fine Arts, Hong kong Baptist University  
Email: [tediwch@yahoo.com](mailto:tediwch@yahoo.com)

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# **Between Globalisation and Localisation: A Study of Hong Kong Popular Music<sup>1</sup>**

Ho, Wai Chung

## **Abstract**

Popular music in Hong Kong is the production of a multi-faceted dynamic of international and local factors. Although there has been much attention to its growth from different perspectives, there has been no single study that systematically addresses the complicated interplay of the two interrelated processes of globalisation and localisation that lie behind its development. The main aim of this paper is to explore how social circumstances mediate musical communication among Hong Kong popular artists and audiences, and contribute to its growing sense of cultural identity - how locality emerges in the context of a global culture and how global facts take local form. Firstly, I attempt to propose a conceptual framework for understanding the cultural dynamics of popular music in terms of the discourse of globalisation and localisation. Secondly, I will consider local practices of musical consumption and production. Thirdly, this paper will discuss the impact of the global entertainment business on local popular music. I conclude with a summary of the effects of the interaction between globalisation and localisation on Hong Kong popular music.

## **A Framework of Analysis: Globalisation and Localisation**

In this paper, globalisation, which generally implies westernisation and the Asianisation of Asia, is often posited to be a culturally, economically, technologically and socially homogenising force in the distribution of music; whilst localisation refers to the empowerment of local forces and the (re)emergence of local music cultures. These two notions of globalisation and localisation seem

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to be mutually contradictory to each other, posing a fundamental dilemma for the understanding of the transformation of popular cultures into global forms. The debate between globality and locality, or between homogeneity and heterogeneity in globalisation discourse, could be regarded as a product of similar antagonisms in the literature of development concerning theories of modernisation, dependency and world systems. Although there is no clear definition or model of globalisation (Hirst & Thompson 1996), its discourse attempts to theorise the phenomenon in terms of the temporal and spatial compression of human activities on the globe, to recognise, explore, and explain the interaction and interdependence of economics, politics and cultures beyond local, regional and national boundaries, and to predict possible influences on human activities (e.g. see Featherstone 1995; Comeliau 1997; Poisson 1998; Jones 1999; Crawford 2000; Croteau & Hoynes 2000). Cohen (1995) suggests that locality could be most usefully used in popular music studies 'to discuss networks of social relationships, practices, and processes extending across particular places', and to draw attention to interconnections and interdependencies between, for example, space and time, the contextual and the conceptual, the individual and the collective, the self and the other (p.65). In this respect the local is defined by reference not only to a community, but also to a shared sense of place within global culture. Globalisation promotes the meeting of musical cultures, whilst simultaneously encouraging regional differences.

Local popular industries perceive their potential audience in international terms, and 'local' pop markets are now awash with global sounds, since, as Wallis & Malm (1984) maintain, globalisation encourages popular musical practices to look towards global styles for possible inspiration, whilst also looking inwards to (re)create national music styles and forms. For decades, critics have depicted the international circulation of American and British pop as

cultural imperialism. Yet US-American and British youth have increasingly been shaped by Asian cultural imports, such as 'Sweet and Sour Chicken', 'Spring rolls', 'Ginger Beef', and 'Peking Duck' in their local Chinese restaurants, to the point at which 'Chicken Marsala' has now replaced fish and chips as the most popular take-away meal in the UK. On the other hand, variations also exist in the interpretation of East-West food and the fusion of flavours and cooking styles may make the dishes more exciting, such as East-west combinations like 'Peking Duck and Chips' and 'Chicken Tikka Masala'. These dishes are not only the creation of Asian-Western food combinations, but are also symptomatic of processes of cultural assimilation. Similarly, there is widespread recognition of the willingness amongst popular musicians 'to create novel forms that express a widespread experience of dislocation' (Jenkins 2001, p.89). For example, contemporary Afro-pop sometimes combines the 'electric guitars of Western rock and roll with melodies and rhythms of traditional African music', whilst western rock drummers have long adopted 'a tradition from Africa whereby the sounds of different drums are combined' (Croteau & Hoynes 2000, p.333). Jenkins (2001) describes such musical eclecticism as the product of 'third-culture' youths, who fuse elements from mixed racial, national or linguistic backgrounds. Although the big international music companies affect local production, their markets are also influenced by particular local cultures. So, globalisation signifies more than environmental interconnectedness, and the meaning of musical products with global features strike at the heart of the major social and political issues of our time. This is how Bennett (1999) represents the attempts to rework hip hop as a localised mode of expression by Turkish and Moroccan youth in Frankfurt.

Economic globalisation is often considered to undermine the local foundations of the popular culture industry. The flow of capital through transnational monetary systems and

multinational companies means that words, ideas, images and sounds of different cultures are made available to vast networks of people through the transmission of electronic media. Among the most prominent multinational electronic media companies are two internet partnerships - MusicNet, involving AOL, RealNetworks, EMI, BMG and Warner; and Duet, incorporating Yahoo!, Universal and Sony. The two most recognised online music providers so far, Napster and MP3.com, have also linked up with record companies (Source: <http://www.grayzone.com/ifpi61201.htm>). Furthermore, the international division of labour and the global circulation of commodities have ensured that processes of production and consumption are no longer confined to a geographically bounded territory. Consequently, economic globalisation has been characterised as the 'deterritorialization' (Appadurai 1996) or 'denationalization' (Sassen 1996) of nation-states. Global economic forces 'reside in global networks that link different nations and cultures in profit-maximising webs of production', leading to the transformation of all sectors of all state economies and their mutual accommodation in the global context (Crawford 2000). Negus (1999) maintains that the 'global market' is a concept that has to be constructed in a particular way to target 'the most profitable categories of music within the recording industry' (p. 156). However as we have seen, the (re)emergence of local cultures competes with global factors in a process that Morley and Robins (1995) refer to as the 'new dynamics of re-localisation' in the attempt to achieve 'a new global-local nexus, about new and intricate relations between global space and local space' (p.116). Levitt (1983) explains that localisation is practiced by multinational companies insofar as they must have a committed operating presence in the markets of other nations. For example, when Chang Hwei-mei (also named as A-mei) sang the Taiwanese national anthem at President Chen Shui-bian's inauguration party on 20 May 2000, it was seen as a major political *faux pas* for the

mainland Chinese authorities, since China regards Taiwan as a rebel province that must be reunited with the mainland. Following China's consequent ban on a national radio and television advertisement for Sprite, along with other video and audio products involving Chang Hui-mei, Coca-Cola, who produce the drink, dropped Chang from its multi-million dollar advertising campaign (see *Taipei Times*, 3 June 2000; *Communications Law in Transition Newsletter*, Vol.1, No.6, 10 June, 2000; Guy 2002), thereby revealing the political determinants on economic globalisation.

However, electronic communications have also enabled the global broadcasting of messages of universal peace and love, and, in the case of [www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org), have even served as anti-capitalist noticeboards. Anderson (1983) suggested that the nation depends for its existence upon a sense of social-psychological affiliation to an 'imagined community', which was facilitated by the emergence of the mechanical printing press and consequent capital investment (Negus & Roman-Velazquez, 2000, p.330). Similarly nowadays, global electronic communications can evoke a sense of a trans-national 'imagined community'. In music, an example can be well-illustrated by the September 11 2001 tragedies in New York and Washington D.C. The US-American national anthem was thundered not only all over the States but also in other countries, such as at St Paul's Cathedral in London. Whitney Houston's record company intends to re-release her version of the US-American national anthem that was produced ten years ago during the Gulf War. International popular artists, such as U2, Britney Spears, Limp Bizkit, and Destiny's Child, worked together for the album *What's Going On*, the market profits from which will be donated to funds for the relief of the families of victims of the tragedies of September 11. John Lennon's 'Imagine', which evokes a world free from all state boundaries, has now become popular even in some non-English speaking regions, and was sung

by all the artists involved in the Carlsberg's Rock Music Concert held in Hong Kong on 24 September 2001, who also prayed for those who died in the disaster two weeks earlier.

Globalisation and localisation are in a dynamic dialectic. Globalisation is a process of local hybridization that determines a great number of processes that change and even transcend the regional and national characteristics of popular music. Current debates about globalisation in popular music show that local actors become increasingly involved in global flows of meanings, images, sounds, capital, people etc. Through the technology of global networks new affinity group formations emerge, centering on particular musical styles and ways of expression. Economic globalisation always has cultural effects on the localisation of popular music.

The author will describe Hong Kong popular music within the framework of globalisation and localisation. Whilst I intend 'Hong Kong singers' to imply those that sing in Cantonese and/or Mandarin, most of their albums are produced only in Cantonese; I intend 'Canto-pop singers' to imply those who sing entirely in Cantonese.

### **Localisation and Hong Kong Popular Music**

The localisation of Hong Kong popular music involves a struggle for Cantopop to build a sense of its own authenticity in order to supercede English pop and Mandarin pop. The music referred to by 'Cantopop' needs to be heard as not merely commercial, but driven by some shared creative urge on the part of the people who produce and consume it: it needs to be heard as both *deriving from and contributing to* the cultures that listen to it. As early as the end of the 1960s, Taiwanese pop songs, sung in Mandarin, became the mainstream of local pop music. Taiwanese 'campus folk songs', such as 'Olive Tree' (Ganlan Shu), were particularly popular in Hong Kong during the late 1960s and 1970s (for details, see Huang 1990). During the 1960s and 1970s,



Western popular songs dominated the local music market and the Beatles, the Bee Gees, Olivia Newton John, the Rolling Stones and Simon and Garfunkel were the idols of Hong Kong youth (for details, see Cui 1984; Liu 1984). Western pop began to fade in Hong Kong disco was eclipsed by punk in the West in the late 1970s.

Cantopop has developed since the early 1970s with a demand from Hong Kong audiences for popular music in their own dialect, Cantonese. Cantonese is the one of the most widely known and influential forms of Chinese, and is spoken in the southern provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi and throughout South-East Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. Furthermore, owing to the migration of Cantonese speakers from the Guangdong area and Hong Kong, Cantonese is one of the major dialects of Chinese communities in the United States, Canada, England and elsewhere. The influence of Cantonese and its culture on China as well as other Chinese populated areas has increased in recent years due to the popularity of films, television programmes and popular songs from Hong Kong. Cantonese became the most influential popular music in Hong Kong and is regarded as an authentic part of its culture. This section traces the significance of locality as a mark of cultural identity in Hong Kong Canto-pop, which has set the scene for Hong Kong youth since the 1970s, with assistance from the mass media in at least five respects: (1) the promotion of Canto-pop by local musicians; (2) the allocation of time slots for Canto-pop in music programmes; (3) the recognition of Canto-pop by various music awards; (4) the good concert management for local popular musicians; and (5) the flourishing music record business (also see Ho 1996).

Britain and United States have, in particular, dominated the production and distribution of popular music in Hong Kong for a few decades, when, to use Wallis and Malm's term (1990), Hong Kong was experiencing a period of 'cultural imperialism'. But since the 1970s, popular musicians have gradually relinquished their repertoire of English and Taiwanese songs in Mandarin, as Hong Kong became conscious of its own 'non-Chinese consumer culture', embracing films, TV dramas and popular songs (see Chan 1994; Choi 1990A, 1990B). Sam Hui is viewed as one of the most important pioneers to promote Canto-pop when he started to promote it on his TV programme for Television Broadcast Limited's (TVB) 'Two Stars Reporting Good News' (Shuang-xing Bao-xi). Chan (1990) asserts that the monopoly of Cantonese television by TVB has played a vital role 'in the birth and consolidation of Hong Kong's indigenous culture' (p.510). Owing to the popularity of TV drama songs, Canto-pop came to be 'an independent cultural product in its own right' (Choi 1990B, p.543). Sandra's 'A Marriage of Laughters and Tears' was the first popular Cantonese drama theme song in Hong Kong in the early 1970s, since which time local songwriters such as Joseph Koo and Martin Lai wrote many TV drama theme songs that all served to promote the localisation of Hong Kong popular music.

Many Canto-pop singers such as Paula Tsui, Roman Tam, Alan Tam, Leslie Cheung and Kenny Bee changed from singing Mandarin or English songs to Cantonese ones. Although George Lam draws from western influences, he has written songs in the local dialect, which he delivers with style and charisma. Other 1980s songwriters such as Lam Man-yee, Anthony Lun, James Wong and Lowell Lo began to compose popular music for local singers, demonstrating that Canto-pop no longer depended on copying foreign tunes. Three local bands – Beyond, Taiji

and Tat Ming Pair – led the Cantopop scene in the late 1980s, and in the 1990s singers as well as song writers, such as Eason Chan, Nicholas Tse and Faye Wong, have been promoted as cult idols.

Radio broadcasts of Cantopop and the presentation of Cantopop music awards have made a major contribution to the recognition of local popular music. The government sponsored Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) first began promoting broadcasting Cantopop in 1974 on RTHK2, the popular music channel, during a programme called ‘New World Sun’ (Sun Tin Dei). RTHK later instigated a weekly chart of top Cantopop songs, and the annual ‘Top Ten Chinese Gold Songs Awards’ from 1978, which is for composers and text writers as well as singers, and has played an important role in stimulating standards of local music production. At the turn of the 1980s, a similar trend of localisation was furthered by Commercial Radio (CR). Its popular music channel, CR2, was once described as the English song channel, but when Winnie Yu was appointed General Manager in the mid-1980s she implemented a policy of promoting local Cantopop for twenty-four hours a day, as a result of which it accounted for about 90 percent of the music programmes by December 1988 (see Choi 1990B, pp. 537-564; Chao 1995, p.12). Metro Broadcast Hong Kong, which is another commercial radio station, has also been broadcasting Canto-pop since 1991. Like RTHK, these two commercial stations present annual awards for home produced songs, as does the Composers and Authors Society of Hong Kong Ltd. (CASH), which since the 1980s has awarded ‘Winners of the CASH Song Writers Quest’, ‘Best Chinese (Pop) Melody and Lyrics Awards’ and ‘Most Performed Cantonese Pop Work on Radio and TV’.

Since the 1980s the local popular music concert business in Hong Kong has blossomed. The Hong Kong Coliseum, which has a seating capacity of 12,500, opened in 1983 and has been an important popular venue for Canto-pop artists such as Sam Hui, who was the first such performer there on 7 May 1983 (Huang 1990). During 1989, Leslie Cheung gave 33 concert performances, Anita Mui gave 28, Paula Tsui gave 32, whilst Alan Tam was recorded as giving the highest number of performances at 38. In 1989 the Hong Kong Coliseum sold 1,350,271 tickets, to the value of HK\$168 million, which was about half the value of the total record sales for local songs (Choi 1990B, p. 543). These concerts provide good business for local artists. For example, each of Leslie Cheung's 2001 concerts was estimated to earn about US\$103,800 (*Next Magazine*, 18 October 2001). Though the concert attendances for each individual singer at the Coliseum can never compete with the 1980s, the overall number seems to be increasing. According to Carmen Choi, editor of new indie-music monthly 15-Tracks, there were one to three alternative concerts a year in 1999, and about four a month in 2001 (Mok 2001).

Other venues for Canto-pop include the Queen Elizabeth Stadium, the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, and the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. These local concerts are characterised as 'show business', rather than as 'concert performances', since 'music becomes a mere pretext, and singers, instead of performing with the voice, must excel more in their inventiveness with costumes, dancing and acrobatics' (Chow 1993, p.392). The emphasis of this type of 'show business' is on 'buying' the visual enjoyment of the entertainers' stage performance. This, and the way that fans uphold the notion of local sounds and scenes, indicates the growth of popular music as a presentation of image. During her 1996 concert, Sammi Cheng, with the help of eight dressers, changed into thirteen different outfits, one with a cone-bra top, in a matter of

minutes. In his recent Passion tour, Leslie Cheung, whose skirts and translucent stage costumes have brought storms of criticism, wore eight Jean-Paul Gaultier outfits, showing off shaved legs and undergarments and wearing a long wig. Nicholas Tse, on the other hand, who regards his concerts to be more explosive and unusual than other Canto-pop ones, declares that he does not need pretty clothes for his performances, for which just jeans and pants suffice (Drake 2001).

Cantonese popular music has flourished as a consumer product promoted by international and local music companies. Following the success in promoting local songs and artists enjoyed by Capital Artists (TVB's music recording arm), various record companies, especially the international ones, changed to marketing foreign repertoires (Choi 1990B). In the early 1990s, the five major international record companies - Germany's Bertelsmann and Polydor, Japan's Sony, Warner of the US and Britain's EMI - explored Asian markets and established offices in most Asian cities (Balfour 1993, p. 52). The local record company Emperor Entertainment Group (EEG) Limited (symbolising 'Energy', 'Exhilaration' and 'Globalisation'), has since January 1999 committed itself to focusing on four themes of the entertainment business: music production and distribution, film production, shows management and artist management (source: information obtained from EEG's official website). During recent years, the EEG has successfully promoted a few young popular singers such as Eason Chan, Edison Chen, Nicholas Tse, Joey Yung, who have become idols among Hong Kong youth. Edison Chen and Nicholas Tse, in particular, are described as 'character Canto-pop', meaning musicians working in an atypical style (Mok 2001). Recently the EEG has been successfully promoting two local girls, called Twins, and they recently scored a platinum disk by selling 50,000 copies in three weeks (Chow 2001B). Twins' Canto-pop 'The Boy in the Girls' School' scored high on the RTHK's

Chinese pop chart, Commercial Radio's Top 20 and the Metro Radio Pop Chart. Adults as well as young people welcome the Twin's songs, since, according to Metro's DJ Wayne Kwok, who is in charge of the station's Hong Kong Hit Chart, Twin's school songs remind adults of their teenage years – the sweetest and happiest days with the least pressure (Chow 2001B). The high sales of Twins' albums seem to be the story of the Hong Kong music business, which has not responded to the worsening economy of the city, even after September 11.

Nonetheless, Cantopop is not known for originality or innovation; rather its songs have subsumed a range of influences from the USA, Britain, Japan and Taiwan, whilst continually readjusting to shifting local markets and socio-cultural climates. Many well-known songs in Hong Kong are Cantonese-language 'cover versions' of Japanese or Western songs. The struggle for authenticity is manifest in the use of Cantonese rather than English lyrics or Japanese lyrics in popular songs. For example, five cover versions of Wham's 'Careless Whisper' were released simultaneously, each with different Cantonese lyrics (Zhou 1990, p.156). Hacken Lee sang the Television Broadcasts Limited's 2002 World Cup theme song 'Victory', which was based on the song of the same title by the London string quartet, Bond. There have also been many Cantonese cover versions of Japanese songs by Anita Mui, Faye Wong (also known in an earlier incarnation as 'Shirley'), and other top Hong Kong artists. For example, Faye Wong's cover of Nakajima Miyuki's 'Easily Hurt Woman' (1994) went gold in Hong Kong, mainland China and Taiwan simultaneously. As will be explained further in the next section, any readily identifiable local popular music is a manifestation of multiculturalism.

## **Globalisation and Hong Kong Popular Music**

Hong Kong, as a multi-cultural metropolis that combines Chinese with Western cultures, has been called the crossroads between East and West. Global culture in Hong Kong can be seen in every walk of life including eating, clothing, the entertainment business and music. The Pacific Coffee Company entered the Hong Kong market in 1993, followed by the Seattle-based Starbucks, and more recently McDonald's has also joined the caffeine war (Schwartz 2001). Besides watching local TV dramas, US dramas such as 'The X-Files', 'ER' and 'Friends' have drawn Hong Kong people's attention. If you take a walk through Madame Tussaud's Hong Kong located at Level 2, the Peak Tower, you will find the musical legends of Michael Hutchence (lead singer of the Australian Band 'INXS'), Madonna, Michael Jackson, Elvis Presley, Jimi Hendrix, Kylie Minogue, Tina Turner, Mick Jagger, Jon Bon Jovi, and Freddie Mercury (lead singer of 'Queen'). Hong Kong is not only 'the world capital of Canto-pop', but has also been a stage for international pop and rock artists, such as Air Supply, Boyzone, Celine Dion, Oasis, Suede, Westlife, Ricky Martin, Kinki Kids (Japan), Dragon Ash (Japan), Primal Scream, B'z, Corrs, Robbie Williams, and Elton John, who have all played there in recent years. However, owing to not having a suitable large concert venue, major stars like Michael Jackson, the Rolling Stones, and Bruce Springsteen have bypassed Hong Kong on their Asian tours.

Furthermore, Cantopop stars are mobbed in Beijing and Taipei, and also in London, Singapore, Melbourne, Toronto and Las Vegas, where Jacky Cheung sang in the Rod Laver Arena in March 2002 and Sammi Cheng had a sell-out show at the Crown Palladium. There are five key features of globalisation influencing Hong Kong popular music today: (1) the establishment of Hong Kong popular artists as international stars; (2) Canto-pop superstars

experimenting with different sounds; (3) the presentation of music awards for Chinese popular music in the wider Chinese community; (4) the exchange of musical culture between Hong Kong and Japan; and (5) advances in technology speeding the consumption and reception of Hong Kong popular music.

Hong Kong culture has been exposed to large audiences in Southeast Asia and other Western countries through its movies and record albums, and popular artists now perceive their potential audience in international terms. Hong Kong's popular music and film industry provide a significant part of the dynamic of 'globalisation' in the Chinese and Hong Kong worlds. Like MacDonald's and Coca-Cola, Disney movie soundtracks spotted a yawning demand. This demand was quickly satisfied by soundtracks from *Beauty & the Beast* and *Aladdin*, which reached at least gold-record status in every Asian market, pushing music sales there up by 660% between 1990 and 1994 (*Billboard*, 27 August, 1994, Vol. 106, Issue 35). Since *Beauty and the Beast*, Disney has released soundtracks in seven languages, using Hong Kong artists like Jacky Chan and Sara Chan to cover songs so that Cantonese children can understand them (*Billboard*, 27 August 1994, Vol. 106, Issue 35). Coco Lee, born in Hong Kong but raised in San Francisco, provided not only the voice for the main character in the Mandarin-language version of Disney's animated adventure *Mulan* but also sang the film's theme song as well. She was the first Asian to ever win the Best International Female Award for MTV Music in 2000. Coco Lee sings the closing song, 'A Love Before Time', in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, which she performed for the Academy Awards on 25 March 2001. In April 2001 Lee was named Chinese cultural ambassador by a group called the Global Foundation of Distinguished Chinese. Other Hong Kong popular artists such as Jacky Cheung, Andy Lau, Faye Wong have also gained



international fame. Faye Wong, a singer from Beijing who is now based in Hong Kong, was featured as a Cantonese pop princess by *Time* in October 1996.

In order to increase business, most Hong Kong popular artists produce their albums in both Cantonese and Mandarin, and during the past few years there have been more Putonghua releases by local singers (see Ho 2000; Witzleben 1999), thereby widening markets to include mainland China, Taiwan and other Chinese communities of Asia, America and Europe. For example, Faye Wong started out singing Cantonese pop in Hong Kong, and in 1994 her first Mandarin album *Mi* (Riddles; Enigma) shot up to number one on Taiwan's top-ten chart and remained there for months. According to Tam (2000), Mandarin pop has made 'a big splash in the U.S. music scene' (p.B1), with Andy Lau and Jacky Cheung becoming the Chinese equivalent of Latin heart-throb Ricky Martin, whilst Coco Lee is viewed as the Chinese Mariah Carey (Tam 2000). According to figures released by the International Federation of Phonographic Industries (Asia) (IFPI) at the Midem Asia '97 fair, the market share for Putonghua products in Hong Kong and the region rose by 5 per cent to 70 per cent over the five years from 1992 to 1997 (Chung 1997). According to Sandy Yang, YesAsia's (a San Francisco-based site) marketing manager, U.S. sales of Mandarin pop and other Asian music accounted for 85 per cent of the company's total sales in 1999 (Tam 2000).

Music awards have been set up to bring Chinese popular music to a greater level of popularity in the greater Chinese communities. Since 1995 the prestigious World Music Awards and the Billboard Music Awards have included categories for Chinese singers. The former named Jacky Cheung as the world's best selling Chinese artist between 1995-97, whilst

Billboard honoured Andy Lau for similar achievement. The first Asia Chinese Music Awards, held at the Arena of Stars, Genting – City of Entertainment – on 11 November 2000, provided greater communications between Chinese artists from Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. The top fifteen hits included songs by Wang Lee-Hom, Sammi Cheng, Daniel Chan, Kelly Chan, Faye Wong, Sandy Lam, Michael & Victor, China Doll, Ah Liang and Chang Yu (Source: [http://www.genting.com.my/en/live\\_ent/2000/acma/](http://www.genting.com.my/en/live_ent/2000/acma/)). The RTHK's 2001 'Top Ten Chinese Gold Songs Awards', held at the Hong Kong Coliseum on 19 January, leapt beyond customary geographic boundaries by extending the selection of nominated songs to mainland China. Apart from presenting the 14 local awards, the Concert added new categories including the 'Most Popular Singer Award (Mainland)' and 'Song of the Year (Mainland)'. The public voted by means of forms or on the Internet, and professional adjudication was conducted by the Research and Survey Programme of Hong Kong Lingnan University, and overseas by Chinese radio stations and the mainland China radio stations (source: the official website for Hong Kong Radio Television). The '12th International Pop Poll' Award Presentation, which was also organised by RTHK, pooled together local and overseas showbiz mega-stars on 30 March 2001. Among a total of 18 awards, 14 went to English and Japanese songs.

Hong Kong popular artists have needed to cross conventional style and genre boundaries, and to become all-round artists. During the 1980s, Canto-pop attracted a wide audience throughout Asia, with famous pop stars like Leslie Cheung selling 200,000 copies of an album, but today he sells no more than 50,000 (Mok 2001). Overall Canto-pop sales plunged from 9.2 million albums in 1996 to 4.9 million in 1998 (Mok 2001). In response to criticisms of Canto-pop's formulaic romantic ballads and brain-dead dance tunes, Hong Kong popular singers are

changing their acts. Though the idol market still prevails in Hong Kong, there is room for Cantopop to expand into other music genres. In 1996, the Hong Kong Philharmonic Society invited Jacky Cheung to perform two concerts with them in Hong Kong, and in the following year he performed in a fully-fledged Canto-pop stage musical - *Shuet Long Wu* ('Snow Wolf Lake') – which ran for 43 nights. Cheung produced *Shuet Long Wu* with the Taiwan-based Singaporean artist Kit Chan and six composers, though most of the songs were by Dick Lee. All the songs were arranged by Iskanda Ismail, who is a renowned composer, arranger, music producer and music director in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Cheung and Chen sang some 30 new tunes in the show and ten were issued as an album by Poly-gram. Roman Law, who has been popular in Hong Kong since the 1980s, invited the Russian Voronezh State Symphony Orchestra to run his concerts at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre in March 1999. Eason Chan has experimented with different genres, ranging from folk-pop to synth-dance and even stadium rock, and his 1997 release on a rock taster album, which is an uncommon form in Hong Kong, broke into the circle of major singers. Two local stage performances, namely *The Labyrinth of Mirror and Flower* and *A Brave New World of Suzie Wong*, were the highlight of the 2001 Hong Kong Arts Festival. They starred the leading popular singers Candy Lo and Eason Chan, and 'broke new frontiers in the realm of art' (*CASH*, No.34, May, 2001, p. 13). *The Labyrinth of Mirror and Flower* was a multimedia stage performance headlined by Candy Lo and combined dance, music, video, 2D graphics and lighting. Sammi Cheng, once known as the queen of ballads, recently included techno tracks and new-wave rock in her albums (Mok 2001). Alan Tam gave a rave-style concert at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre in June 2001. LMF (i.e. Lazy Muthafucka) have established themselves as the spokespersons of Hong Kong Hip-hop, and are viewed as a local cultural expression. LMF released their self-financed

debut record 'Housing Estate Boys' in February 1999. Seven months later, the band joined Warner Music's alternative DNA label. When their second album *Lazy Clan* was released in 2000, it sold more than 80,000 copies in Hong Kong (Bennett 2001). Even in Malaysia and Singapore, where LMF's explicit lyrics provoked government bans, they are also popular among youths and street vendors, who reportedly sold some 70,000 illicit discs (see Chung 2001). Their music expresses anti-social feelings and sub-cultural differentiation. MC Yan, who is a member of LMF, distinguishes Canto-rap from the hardcore U.S. brand in terms of their lyrics, which focus not on racial oppression but on the division between rich and poor that concerns so many Hong Kong people (Chung 2001).

Besides Western influences on its popular culture, Hong Kong has been inclined towards Japanese youth culture, setting up Japanese music sections, as in Taiwan and elsewhere. Japanese popular culture including comics, in particular those for young girls, has been attracting Hong Kong young people since the 1990s, and since then several publishing companies have imported more, such as *Tokyo Love Story*, *Black Jack*, and Tezuka Osamu's comic series. Japanese animation songs are very popular in Hong Kong, such as: Eason Chan's Cantonese version of the title song of the Japanese comic *Ultraman Tiga*; *Chibimaruko's* ending theme, 'Let's Dance'; *Miyuki's* ending theme, 'Full of Memories'; *Cat's Eye's* opening song, 'Cat's Eye'; *Candy's* opening theme 'Candy Candy'; and *Heidi's* opening theme song, 'Please tell me!'. Other Japanese TV drama theme songs such as *Love Generation*, *With Love* and *Long Vacation* are also popular among Hong Kong youths. Performers like Yumi Matsutoya, a pop music pioneer in Japan, were also extremely influential on the development of the extravagant stage shows with multiple costume changes that characterise contemporary Hong Kong performances.

The Hong Kong popular music industry also employs musical elements of Japanese songs, such as adaptations of Japanese language and other cultural elements. For example Kwok's recent popular song 'Para Para Sukura' uses a mixture of three languages – Cantonese, Japanese and English – and includes lyrics like 'Ah Come Come Come Come Nan Desuka Sakura, Ah Come Come Come Come Nan Desuka Sakura', sung against MTV's backdrop of ParaPara dancing and Sakura flowers. Lee (2000) argued that the overall style and production of Hong Kong popular music is highly derivative of Japanese pop. Singing and film megastars like Andy Lau, Leon Lai, Aaron Kwok, and Jacky Cheung - the four 'heavenly kings' of Chinese pop - contribute to the success of Pacific Asia's own version of Hollywood and Bollywood. Andy Lau's recent hit film *A Fighter's Blues* co-starred Japanese actress Takka Tokiwa, and Aaron Kwok starred with Norika Fujiwara in *China Strike Force*, which obtained a good box office rating during the New Year of 2001. Canto-stars such as Kelly Chan who have recorded in Mandarin and English, more recently have begun to sing in Japanese in order to woo a huge additional music market. Faye Wong recorded a new series of commercials for the Japanese cellular phone company J-Phone, and was also the lead actor in a prime time Japanese television drama series on Fuji TV, for which she sang the theme song. EMI has released a Japanese version of her album *Fable* with two bonus tracks, 'Eyes on Me' and Faye's first Japanese song, a cover of 'Chanel'.

Besides its interaction with Japanese popular culture, Hong Kong has also been influenced, along with Taiwan and China, by Korean popular culture, particularly TV dramas in the late 1990s. Korean popular music has also been sweeping Hong Kong, as Korean stars expanded their markets throughout Asia, by means of concert tours and albums translated into various languages. For instance, Korea's platinum dance group H.O.T. have become teenage

idols in China, and others such as Shinhwa and Baby Vox, are attracting teenagers in Hong Kong. Although the Korean International Superstars Show, which was held at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre in August 2001, was in celebration of the ninth anniversary of Korea's establishment of diplomatic relations with China, it seemed more like a celebration of newly found Korean pop culture on the part of Chinese youth.

Hong Kong has entered a fully computerised era in terms of its emerging potential to use karaoke, satellite broadcasting and cable television to spread popular music. Karaoke technology was developed in Japan, and the 'culture' of karaoke clubs emerged in Hong Kong in the 1990s. Star-TV is one of the most prominent regional satellite and cable television operations in the world, reaching from the Arab world to Asian countries. In December 1990, a license was granted to Hutchison Whampoa's satellite broadcasting company, HutchVision, to begin a Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS) service via Asia Sat (Source: <http://www.mbcnet.org/ETV/S/htmlS/startvhong/starvhong.htm>). By this means, and by Cable TV networks, songs of Hong Kong singers have been transmitted over a wide area of the globe. Several Chinese record labels have used the internet to attract overseas audiences. The Rock Entertainment Group, one of the largest Chinese-language music labels in Taiwan, together with the Hong Kong-based division of Sony Corp's music arm, has established several sites for Asian music (Tam 2000). RTHK on Internet - The Cyber Station started to provide synchronous Webcast versions of prime time RTHK programmes since April 2000. Hong Kong is among the fastest growing markets in the world in terms of the number of households connected to the Internet. According to Pastore (2001), NetValue's examination of 10 Internet markets in the first half of 2001 found that Hong Kong leads the list with 27.9 percent growth from January to June 2001. The other nine countries are

Spain, Korea, France, Singapore, U.K., Germany, Denmark, Taiwan and the U.S.A. in the percentage growth of 25.3%, 15.0%, 14.1%, 12.9%, 9.3%, 5.6%, 3.5%, 1.7%, and -0.2% respectively. The growth of online households may also be an indicator of more e-audiences for local radio broadcasts as well as other music programmes.

Changes in economics and technology resulting from globalisation have reformed the patterns of production and reception of Hong Kong popular music. Hong Kong has become a leading centre of high-technology in Asia, with its employment of synthesizers, sampling, MIDI sequencing, digital recording, digital sound effect processing, audio-visual synchronization, and digital mixing/mastering for music production, and new technological tools for the transmission and reception of Hong Kong popular music. Mobile phone companies adopt popular tunes to promote their business. Ringtone King is the first company to trade solely in tunes for ringtone downloading onto mobile phones (Chow 2001A). Users only have to dial a computer-operated IDD hotline and enter a code to receive Canto-pop hits by Sammi Cheng, Kelly Chen and Aaron Kwok. Chan Fai-hung, managing director of I-Content Technology, which launched Ringtone King, has been trying to expand Ringtone King's repertoire with foreign music, but so far as only been able to offer The Beatles (ibid). Hutchison Telecommunications (Hong Kong) Limited also allows their users to personalise their phone ringing tones with unique 3-chord compact MIDI format music clips from popular Canto-pop, versions of Japanese popular drama theme songs, festive music and traditional folk songs (Source: [http://www.openwave.com/newsroom/2001/20010503\\_huchison\\_0503.html](http://www.openwave.com/newsroom/2001/20010503_huchison_0503.html)). PlanetMG.com, the first music portal in Asia Pacific to offer song downloads from international chart-topping artists, opened in Hong Kong in October 2000 (Source: [http://www.sony.com.hk/Electronics/pr\\_t/pr/planetmg\\_eng.htm](http://www.sony.com.hk/Electronics/pr_t/pr/planetmg_eng.htm)). However, a global

attack on music piracy has been launched against individuals and companies uploading illegal MP3 files, and Internet service providers hosting illegal MP3 sites. Threatened by the ease of digital duplication, the music industry has paired with electronics companies to develop technologies that put digital locks on songs and limit how often they can be played or copied and on which devices (*South China Morning Post*, 5 September 2001).

To sum up, the economic and cultural dimensions of globalisation have become determining factors on developments in Hong Kong popular music, especially the establishment of international Hong Kong popular artists, the internationalisation of musical styles, and the instantaneous communication and interaction by means of electronic media. The globalisation of Hong Kong popular music has now extended its original dominance by the West to embrace other Asian domains, as is exemplified by local popular artists widening their interests to include Mandarin pop. Currently technological developments, driven by a liberal, free market ideology work together to create a global economic culture.

## **Conclusion**

This article has reflected on the changes wrought on Hong Kong popular music by the dialectic between media globalisation and resurgent localism. This article has explored the complexities of global-local dynamics involved in the process of cultural globalisation and localisation in the industry of Hong Kong popular music. The story of Hong Kong pop in its global-local interaction is not only simply a case of cultural (Western) imperialism and the Asianisation of Asia, but also involves a process of negotiated cultural identities, as expressed in the language of Cantonese and other representational means. Hong Kong popular music is an expression of the



locality but in line with a productive framework, which ensures that the global is already in the local as a global discourse. An overview of key popular artists, the growth of the mass media and the music business spanning the period between the 1970s and the twenty-first century has demonstrated that the cultural dynamics of globalisation include developments of information technology and the integration of Western and Eastern music businesses. One major characteristic of local popular music is the high degree of cross-fertilisation between various musical cultures and idioms and the consequent emergence of hybrid styles. Nowadays the global sounds of Hong Kong popular music, in terms of the inclusion of various genres, technologies and multi-media expressions, are already serving as local means towards new creative fusions.

Despite movements of popular artists, capital, and technologies across national boundaries, nation-states still constitute the nexus of global-local exchange. Global localisation involves the adaptation of global products to suit the local Hong Kong conditions. Whilst the development of Hong Kong pop has been enabled by the development of multinational media industries such as EMI, Warner and Sony, the growth of the local Emperor Entertainment group (EEG) Limited has injected new energy to the Hong Kong music business. Nonetheless the ‘international success’ of Hong Kong artists is still almost exclusively within the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia, Canada and the USA, and the UK, with more modest success in Japan, and very little inroad into mainstream English-speaking markets in the West (although top local popular artists have performed there). Owing to the lack of a large concert venue, some famous international pop artists will not perform in Hong Kong. If there was such a venue it

would also provide a platform of equal significance for local, and other Asian artists, which in turn would stimulate local songwriters.

The implication of globalisation for the future of international capitalism is that economic prosperity will come to reside in global networks that link local popular and international artists, or even local and multi-national music businesses, in profit-maximising webs of production and distribution. During a dynamic process of change, it is the interaction of global and local factors that brings about endless possibilities for the development of pop music and other popular forms such as fashion. So far, neither the mainstream discourses of cultural studies nor the social sciences have sufficiently addressed the key problems of the present era: globalisation and localisation. Discussions of local and international repertoires, global locality in music production and reception, and commercial interests in constructing local pop for the global music market would all help to understand the formation of local music industries in the era of globalisation, and thereby to identify appropriate measures for regulating and promoting the future cultural, economic and political development of the popular music industry. It is problematic to draw sweeping generalisations from any single case, and further research into the tensions of localisation and globalisation is obviously needed to substantiate an inclusive analysis of popular music in Hong Kong and other Asian countries.

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The official websites for the Hong Kong Radio Television (RTHK) and local Emperor Entertainment group (EEG) Limited

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