

The political meaning of Hong Kong popular music: a review of sociopolitical relations between Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China since the 1980s

WAI-CHUNG HO

Introduction¹

The aim of this paper is to analyse shifting themes in the meanings of Hong Kong popular songs relating to ideological and political changes in Hong Kong since the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident (TSI).² In particular, the paper examines the relationship between Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China (PRC) concerning the transmission of Hong Kong popular music, and argues that Chinese, Hong Kong and Taiwanese popular musics articulate fluctuating political meanings. Attention will be focused predominantly on the lyrics, but some aspects of the music are also invoked.³ After highlighting the political and cultural relations between Hong Kong and the PRC, I discuss the social transformations and the struggles for democracy delineated in Chinese popular music during the 1989 TSI. This is followed by an examination of the intensification of the conflict between the PRC and Hong Kong over the dissemination of popular songs carrying democratic messages in Hong Kong. Finally, the paper considers the rise of patriotism and/or nationalism through lyrics rooted in the notion of educating Hong Kong Chinese people into accepting the cultural and political identity of mainland China, and the promotion of popular songs in the official language of the PRC, Putonghua, since the late transitional period.⁴

Contrasting political cultures in the PRC and Hong Kong

When Mao Zeodong officially proclaimed the founding of the PRC on 1 October 1949, education and music were claimed as instruments for the transmission of new beliefs and values to build a socialist revolutionary society. Cultural identity was constructed and imposed by a centrally controlled ideology. The PRC, authenticating and defining a socialist system through the dissemination of Marxism, Leninism

and Maoism, recognised itself as being 'in tension with both Chinese traditional cultures and the values of modernisation' (Ogden 1989, p. 307). Ideological and political paths of musical thought were committed along Marxist–Leninist–Maoist lines, and music as well as other cultural forms were viewed as means of propaganda for the prevailing state political ideology (Mackerras 1981; Perris 1983; Wong 1984; Kraus 1989; Mittler 1997). The state tried to maintain its power in the struggle for musical meaning against any potentially opposing force. One thinks of pieces such as the PRC's national song, 'The East is Red' (*Dongfanhung*), or 'Without the Communist Party, There Would Be No New China' (*Meiyou Gongchadang Meiyou Xin Zhongguo*). These types of Maoist songs were used to provoke people's patriotic sentiments and to help them conform to the sociopolitical norms prescribed by the state.⁵

In spite of having its political and cultural roots in the PRC and the majority of its people being Chinese by ethnic origin, Hong Kong differs from the PRC in its political, economic and social systems and ways of life, and has developed a culture and identity separate from those of the PRC. At the time of the setting-up of the 1949 Chinese Communist government, the outbreak of the Korean War in the early 1950s and the intensification of the Cold War, the official political, economic and cultural relationship between the PRC and Hong Kong was suddenly terminated. The alienation of the Hong Kong Chinese from the mainland was widened by anti-Communist propaganda in Hong Kong, supported by Western governments, particularly the United States. The cultural development of Hong Kong and the mainland was split into two main streams, including the radical cutting of Hong Kong cultural and social ties from the PRC after the 1950s (Choi 1990A, B). The cultural life of Hong Kong people was assumed to be 'apolitical' and 'pluralistic', whilst in the PRC cultural life tended to be 'political' and 'centralised thinking' was demanded by the state.

Although standard Western classical music was acceptable in the PRC after the Cultural Revolution in 1976, most twentieth-century music or modern music was condemned as political or cultural counter-revolution against the central government. According to Hamm (1991), the National Programme of the Central People's Broadcasting Company played its role as the voice of the PRC government. This culture was identified as 'party' culture or 'socialist' culture, which attempted to mould the 'accepted' and 'correct' attitudes and behaviour of the populace towards the authorities. Rock music was considered inappropriate in the PRC and little rock or popular music was played on state radio.

Struggles for the expression of democracy in music: the PRC and Hong Kong

The rise of mainland China's rock music

After the announcement of the 'Open-door Policy' by Deng Xiao-ping in 1978, Deng's economic and social reforms encouraged the establishment of private enterprise and opened the doors to foreign trade and investment as well as foreign cultures. The availability of modern electrical appliances, for example radios, cassette players and television sets, paved the way for the rise of mass-mediated popular music in China (Lull 1991; Jones 1994; Lee 1995). In the 1980s, Hong Kong acted as a mediator and filter for mainland and Taiwanese cultural exchanges. This began

with Taiwan's Deng Lijian (also known as Teresa Tang, 1953–95),⁶ Hou Dejian,⁷ Luo Dayou⁸ and Hong Kong's Alan Tam⁹ and Leslie Cheung,¹⁰ who dominated teen culture on the mainland in the 1980s. Thus China became more exposed to foreign cultures, including popular music from Hong Kong and Taiwan (Hamm 1991; Dong 1993). Taiwanese music constituted roughly half of the music played in the discos of Guangzhou (located in South China), the remainder being Hong Kong Cantonese popular music (Hoyland 1992/93, p. 30). Popular music in mainland China was dominated by Hong Kong and Taiwan, and China has found it difficult to censor cultural products originating both in and outside national borders since the late 1970s.

The growth of Chinese 'rock and roll' music can be identified with questions concerning the cultural and political identity of Chinese popular music during the 1980s. It can be seen as a site of symbolic struggle in the political arena between the dynamic interrelationships of the producers, creators, performers, audiences/consumers, as well as the musical styles and lyrics. Chinese rock music has come to be seen as a central agent of popular resistance against the political systems of the PRC since the mid-1980s. When Jones conducted his interviews about Chinese rock music in China, several interviewees defined Chinese rock music 'as a manifestation of a conflict between feudalism and modernity' (Jones 1994, p. 154). Hoyland (1992/93, p. 30) contends that Chinese musicians in general have a common aspiration to in some way 'break the mould' of Chinese popular music, and rock musicians have played a significant role in this. This attitude is different by comparison with the development of rock music in East Germany before 1989. Whereas Wicke and Shepherd (1993) suggest that in Germany, audiences put pressure on the rock musicians to present their interests as being against the state, rock musicians in China seem to have been more active than the public in their development of the political content of rock.

Cui Jian,¹¹ a very well-known popular Chinese rock musician, is a highly significant figure who has confronted contradictions between the Chinese authorities and democratic convictions in mainland China and Hong Kong. He established himself as the first rock performer in China in the mid-1980s. Peters (1991, p. 30) says that 'Cui may be the only figure of real stature in Chinese music' and his songs are different from 'the many "plastic" pop tunes from Hong Kong or Taiwan'. The style of Cui Jian's music shares characteristics with *Xi Bei Feng*,¹² featuring a 'rather rough vocal delivery, decidedly contrasting with the smooth, open vocal sound typical of Hong Kong/Taiwan's style' (Brace 1991, p. 52). On 10 May 1986, Cui Jian revealed this 'underground rock' style when he presented his song 'I Have Nothing' at the annual 'One Hundred Pop Stars' (*Baiming Gexing*) concert at the Beijing Workers' Stadium.

Cui contests the tradition of Chinese autocratic rule and the transformation of China's society under the influence of the West, both through his musical style and his lyrics. The song 'I Have Nothing' blends Chinese folk music and traditional Chinese instruments, including the *suona* (a reed instrument) and the *dizi* (a transverse flute made of bamboo), with guitar, saxophone, drum kit and Western percussion, perhaps symbolising the political contradictions between Communist politics and the Open-Door Policy. The recent album *Balls under the Red Flag*, released in August 1994, has an eclectic sound with a mixture of various rhythmic patterns adopted from punk, jazz, Afro-pop, rap and Western rock, with Oriental flourishes. The lyrics of his songs, which can be interpreted as a sophisticated political chal-

lenge to the rule of the PRC government, involve 'inner feelings that are rarely expressed in China' (Schell 1994, pp. 318–19). For example, 'I Have Nothing' is, on the surface, the monologue of a lover in which the main character is asking his lover to love him in spite of his being poor and having nothing to offer her but the 'freedom' to be with him. Hamm (1991, p. 19) states that the song is regarded as a 'political statement against state policies', whether or not this was intentional. Another example is an event during Cui's concert in Guangzhou, where audiences waved red cloth during his song, 'A Piece of Red Cloth'.¹³ This act was described as reminiscent of 'the tangled possibilities of the red flags at Tiananmen' (Weller 1994, p. 210) and the song was identified as an attack on the PRC government for abusing its power. *Balls under the Red Flag* also focuses on social awareness themes (source: <http://http.cs.berkeley.edu/~zyang/cuijian/#0>).

The rise of local Hong Kong political/democratic songs and their meanings

In connection with the ambiguous identity and general apoliticism of Hong Kong people,¹⁴ the public and musicians were not accustomed to linking musical expression with politics before the 1989 Incident. To the citizens of Hong Kong, 'political freedom' did not mean freedom to participate in decision-making, which might eventually bring trouble (Lau 1987), and Hong Kong musicians did not express any political orientation in their music. In the 1980s, the Hong Kong government had allowed songs carrying nationalistic content. There were a few nationalistic popular songs which marked the beginnings of expressing Chinese national identity, and these songs did not carry any explicit or implicit political opposition to the PRC authorities. Instead, according to Zhou (1990, p. 160), they were popularised as a protest against the Japanese movement. The Japanese Cultural Department was seen to have distorted the historical facts of the Sino–Japanese War (1937–45) in a Japanese history textbook in August 1982. This made the Chinese angry and there was a strong anti-Japanese movement among Chinese communities across the world. Amongst these nationalistic songs, Zhang Ming-miu's songs, 'I Am a Chinese' (*Wo Shi Zhongguo Ren*) and 'My Chinese Heart' (*Wo De Zhongguo Xin*), Hou De-jian's 'The Descendants of the Dragon' (*Long De Chuanren*), and Wang Ming-quan's 'Be a Brave Chinese' (*Zuo Ge Yonggan De Zhongguo Ren*) were the most popular. This marked the first time lyrics explicitly addressed the issue of nationalism in Hong Kong popular music.

Although Hong Kong popular songs rarely commented explicitly on politics, Hong Kong Chinese people interpreted Chinese popular music of the late 1980s as expressing a unity with mainland Chinese people. Although the song 'I Have Nothing' was defined as 'counter-revolutionary' and controlled by the PRC government, unauthorised recordings had reached many cities of China and spread to Hong Kong within weeks (Jones 1992), turning it into a rallying cry and an anthem of the Hong Kong democratic movement.

I will now discuss political songs promoted in Hong Kong before and after the 1989 TSI.

(1) *Self-censorship of mass media and political songs promoted by individual artists before the 1989 TSI.* Although the colonial state granted various degrees of freedom of expression to Hong Kong composers and singers, the mass media, which was ultimately responsible for the

selection of music for broadcasting, exercised self-censorship.¹⁵ For example, although democratic songs were broadcast on radio daily before the 1989 prodemocratic students' movement in Beijing, their frequency declined after the crackdown on the students' movement. Hong Kong radio broadcasters treated these songs as 'low profile' and disc jockeys did not initiate any discussion of the Beijing students' movement with listeners (Zhou 1990). In the programmes of two major broadcasting companies, Television Broadcast Limited (TVB) and Asia Television Limited (ATV), which are commercial enterprises, democratic songs were excluded from the 'Golden Hits'.

Despite self-censorship in the mass media, Hong Kong local artists devoted their time and music to the support of the prodemocratic Beijing students' movement. Regardless of an approaching typhoon, Anita Mui, a popular Hong Kong singer, led a crowd in singing 'Brave Chinese' (Wilson 1990). On 27 May 1989, the twelve-hour 'Concert for Democracy in China', a fund-raising event in support of the students' democratic movement in Beijing, was staged at Happy Valley on Hong Kong Island. However, as there were hardly any Cantonese popular songs available for this event, a Hong Kong Chinese artist, Lowell Lo composed the song 'All For Freedom' (Ci Ziyou) which took only twenty-four hours to record and was adopted as the theme song. The lyrics emphasise love of the pursuit of freedom. They were mainly in Cantonese, but they included two lines in Putonghua, thus producing a sense of belonging to the homeland, a call for harmony between Hong Kong and the PRC, and an attempt to indicate the wish for 'a dialogue with Beijing students' (Lee 1992, p. 134). Hong Kong people also gave their encouragement and support to Beijing students by singing lyrics about treading thorny paths together, hand in hand, despite all difficulty. The musical style of 'All For Freedom', as characterised by Lee, 'belongs to heavier rock, which is rather unusual in the milieu of Cantopop songs' (Lee 1992, p. 134).

Besides 'All For Freedom', other Hong Kong Chinese songwriters also expressed their views of democracy. With the uncertain political future ahead of Hong Kong, this music expressed the idea of 'harmony' in the pursuit of democracy as a political stand between Chinese people in China and Hong Kong, through both the lyrics and the musical style.

(2) *Political songs promoted after the 1989 TSI.* Hong Kong songwriters explicitly and implicitly raised the matters of freedom, democracy and politics in the lyrics, and political songs became common in Hong Kong after the 1989 TSI. Some were explicit. Lowell Lo's album *1989*, with title songs '1989 Prelude' and '1989' was regarded as propagandistic Cantopop against the PRC government, and these two songs were banned by Hong Kong radio stations in order not to annoy the PRC authorities. Lam Man-chung, a Hong Kong songwriter, composed a song named 'China' (Zhongguo) to glorify the 1989 students' movement and the sense of belonging with the Chinese for democracy. This song was dedicated to the public and the money gained from its sale was donated to the HKASPDMC (*Ming Pao Daily News*, 16 June 1989).

Some political songs included implicit confrontation with the PRC authorities. A Hong Kong band, 'Dat Ming Pair', composed two songs named 'Questioning Heaven' (Tian Wen) and 'Ten Firefighter Teenagers' (Shige Jiuhu De Qingnian), which addressed social and political issues. Though the song 'Questioning Heaven' does not directly address the democracy movement, it does remind the state to consider the daily needs of its people. The lyrics of 'Ten Firefighter Teenagers' tell a story about everybody finding an excuse not to save the fire, symbolising the low political participation among Hong Kong people who were less likely to risk their lives for the sake of democracy under the unstable political situation. The lyrics of 'Questioning Heaven' pointed out that not all questions could have answers. The

song 'Talking' (Jingy) questioned the usefulness of the discussion between the UK and the PRC over the future of Hong Kong, and the band also introduced British–Hong Kong relations in 'We Are Both Watching', using the analogy of a bridal pair to describe the political situation in late 1989. The ending of this song adopted the first three phrases of the British national anthem, 'God Save the Queen', played on a synthesizer (Lee 1992, p. 142).

Some Chinese popular songs had an obvious double meaning concerning political struggle. During Christmas 1989, 'Kind-hearted Peng is Spending His Christmas' and 'Deng Xiaoping is Coming to Town' symbolised the loss of confidence in the future ruler, the Chinese Communist Party, which was leading to a drastic rise in the exodus of Hong Kong people. The lyrics of these political songs also implicitly reflect the chaos of Hong Kong over the issue of 1997, by representing future political and social disorder in Hong Kong. For example, 'Kind-hearted Peng is Spending His Christmas' poses questions about what 'Kind-hearted Peng' might give the singer for Christmas. Various possibilities are suggested, including a car, a horse, a gun and a sword, but the singer rejects them all in favour of a passport.

Besides political/democratic popular songs composed by Hong Kong artists, some of their Taiwanese and mainland Chinese counterparts also felt strongly enough to include political comments in their songs. This acted as a move to pursue political freedom and/or to foresee the political reality of the 1997 handover. For example, Luo Dayou and Jiang Zhi-guang released a song, 'Queen's Road East', addressing concerns for the future of Hong Kong. The lyrics they described the feelings of Hong Kong people concerning the end of British colonisation, through references to a 'royal friend' and the cavalier manner in which bosom friends can say 'bye-bye'. The video showed Luo and his collaborator, Lin Hsi, a Hong Kong musician, dressed in Mao suits and dark glasses marching and singing in the streets of Central District in Hong Kong. A crowd of people stood in line waving bouquets of flowers to welcome the red guards marching from the north (source: <http://www.indexcensorship.org/issue197/barme.html>).

Another example is found through a mainland Chinese popular singer Ai Jing, whose song 'My 1997' exhibited the wishes of other mainlanders for Hong Kong, calling for the year 1997 to 'come quick' so that the singer can go to Hong Kong. At the end of one arrangement of this song in Beijing, Ai Jing added in a low voice: 'Don't worry, only six more years to go.' (source: <http://www.indexcensorship.org/issue197/barme.html>) According to Jones (1994), the song combines Ai Jing's personal narrative with a setting of chiming, folksy guitars and the pluck of a three-stringed Chinese lute (*sanxian*), thus symbolising the contradiction between traditional Chinese ideology and Western openness in terms of politics and economics.

Some popular songs promoted in Hong Kong after the 1989 TSI did not relate to these political issues, but rather associated with the differently focused idea of nationalism. Mainland Chinese, Taiwanese and Hong Kong popular artists sought to create a particular national identity, based on what they imagined to be ideal political harmony in Hong Kong. For example, an album *Dreams of Hong Kong*, released by the government-run Radio Television Hong Kong and financed by the International Bank of Asia, was about promoting identity for Hong Kong people in 1990. The album was an attempt to boost morale among the Chinese, including those in Hong Kong, the PRC and Taiwan. The song 'Our Roots' in this album was written by Angus Tung, a Taiwanese pop musician, and recorded in Putonghua by Hong Kong, Taiwanese and mainland Chinese singers. The lyrics reflected Chinese societies that share the same historical heritage, and suggested that all Chinese should work together for a better tomorrow.

In 1996, the cultivation of nationalism in Hong Kong popular music represented a

move to defend the Diaoyutai Islands¹⁶ against Japanese imperialism. Nationalistic songs such as 'I Am A Chinese', 'My Chinese Heart', 'The Descendants of the Dragon' and 'Be a Brave Chinese' were promoted again. A wave of emotional anti-Japanese protests swept Hong Kong, China, Taiwan and even the Chinese communities in the United States, Canada and other Asian countries. A few Hong Kong popular artists and musicians dedicated their love of their motherland in their music as a protest against Japanese aggression. For example, Choi Sown-Le, a Hong Kong Chinese musician, composed and wrote the lyrics for the song, 'A War Song for Defending the Diaoyutai Islands' (*Baowei Diaoyu Lieyu Jinge*). This song was incorporated into a Hong Kong music textbook for the new academic year of 1997–8 (Lam and Ip 1997, p. 160).

The handover of Hong Kong and its popular music

While rapid changes overtook Hong Kong society during the transfer of sovereignty to the PRC in 1997, Hong Kong popular music avoided bringing the conflicts and tensions within society into its musical remit. On one hand, the democracy movement in Hong Kong is certainly constrained under the heavy influence of the PRC and the limits set by the Basic Law.¹⁷ On the other hand, it has been common for Hong Kong popular artists to give performances on the mainland, and it has been feared that Hong Kong singers might feel the need to show their patriotism and love for their motherland by giving free shows in China during the transition celebrations (source: <http://www mailinglist.net/paa.gotell/cditt/chinahk>).

In Hong Kong, one of the organisers of handover events asked the Chinese authorities not to put 'political pressure' on Hong Kong performers, as popular artists were devoting themselves to music celebrating the handover and rejoicing in the peaceful reunion with the PRC. This suggests the recent development of a new political dimension in Hong Kong society. For example, the song 'Homecoming' was belted out at the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's establishment ceremony by the Yip's Children's Choir, accompanied by local popular artists such as Jacky Cheung, Aaron Kwok, Andy Lau, George Lam and Sally Yeh. (Betty Tung Chiu Hung-ping, wife of the Chief Executive of the Special Administrative Region (SAR), also wrote some of the lyrics.) The lyrics are an expression of desire for the reunion of Hong Kong with the homeland, and capture the splendour of the handover (*Hong Kong Standard*, 18 June 1997) with references to a beautiful sun shining on Hong Kong, pride in the homecoming, joy filling every Chinese heart, the unity of the Chinese people, the wisdom of the motherland, a limitless future, and explicitly, the realisation of the concept of 'one country, two systems'.

Songs carrying nationalistic content and the expression of Chinese national identity were also selected for various handover activities. A pyrotechnic and laser display with a 'Pearl of the Orient' floated over Victoria Harbour on the evening of 1 July 1997. Karaoke fans were asked to learn the words to a medley of Chinese popular songs that were sung on the shore, billed as the world's biggest sing-along. Many nationalistic popular songs such as 'China Dream' were included in Hong Kong's largest Karaoke in the programme of the 'Hong Kong 97 Spectacular' to celebrate the handover. The political messages transmitted in the SAR are supposed to be based on principles which foster love for the homeland and loyalty to the PRC authorities. Though there were songs that described Hong Kong and China's relationship, the lyrics did not reflect any political meaning or a fight for democracy or freedom. For example, Faye Wong¹⁸ sang a duet with Na Ying, in the song 'Meet

in 1998' at the Hong Kong handover ceremony, glorifying the return to the motherland. Hong Kong people also consented to such publicly expressed political messages to promote patriotism and/or nationalism.

So, today we find nationalism that fosters a love for the homeland featured in Hong Kong popular music. In particular, Hong Kong popular songs sung in Putonghua are regarded as increasing this sense of national attachment. An example can be found in the very popular Andy Lau song 'I Am Chinese' (Wu zi Zhongguo Ren), composed by Chan Yiu-chuen, which is sung in Putonghua, and expresses Hong Kong people's pride following the handover. A very Chinese atmosphere is created by Chinese drums in the background, with regular 2/4 rhythmic patterns, and the striking of a Chinese gong at the end, whilst the song also employs Western instruments including electric guitar. Lau is regarded as the most popular Hong Kong singer on the mainland, and welcomed by the Chinese authorities (*Ming Pao Daily News*, 21 December 1998, p. C1). 'I Am Chinese' was named as one of the top ten Chinese gold songs, as well as the best Chinese song sung in Putonghua, in the 20th Top Ten Chinese Gold Song Awards held by Radio Television Hong Kong. Lau was also invited to sing the song 'Pearl of the Orient' (Dung Fang Zhi Zhu) in the Beijing People's Hall for the Twentieth Open Door Anniversary celebration in Beijing.

Since the 1997 handover, there has been an undoubted shift in musical output, with more Putonghua releases by local, mainland and Taiwanese singers. According to figures released by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (Asia) (IFPI) at the Midem Asia '97 fare in May, the market share of Putonghua products in Hong Kong and the region had risen from five per cent to seventy per cent over the past few years (*South China Morning Post*, 1 July 1998, p. 57). More Hong Kong singers such as Jacky Cheung, Leon Lai, Andy Lau, Aaron Kwok¹⁹ and Gigi Leung²⁰ are devoting their songs to Putonghua as a way of expanding their audience, and more importance has been placed on their Putonghua albums. For example, Andy Lau's album *You are my Woman* featured songs sung in Putonghua and Cantonese, and only songs sung in Putonghua were presented in Jacky Cheung's album *No Regret*. Patrick Wong Tze-tin, chief secretary of IFPI (Hong Kong), noted that Putonghua songs would not eclipse Cantopop in Hong Kong, but that Hong Kong would probably be using more songwriters from the mainland in the future (*South China Morning Post*, 1 July 1998, p. 57).

Hong Kong songs sung in Putonghua are also seen as an arena in which to portray the greater Chinese community of Hong Kong, Taiwan, the PRC and other East Asian countries – for example, Taiwanese singers such as Zhang Hui-mei (or known as A-Mei) have become famous in Hong Kong²¹ – and as a way to tap into the market of overseas Chinese communities, where Putonghua is the most common dialect in use. Besides the promotion of more songs sung in Putonghua by the Hong Kong music industry, local artists such as Leon Lai and Faye Wong have involved themselves in various charity concerts held in mainland China. One example is the concert, 'Rebuild the Great Wall Together', a fund-raising event jointly organised by the Chinese Cultural Department and the People's Affairs Department for the Changjian flood victims, held at the Beijing City Hall on 21 August 1998.

Songs calling for freedom and democracy continue to be regarded as having a 'negative' political meaning and being against the PRC and SAR. Self-censorship of the mass media run by private commercial enterprises in Hong Kong is a deliber-

ate and calculated act to avoid offending China. This is not only applicable to the political meaning of Hong Kong local popular music, but the practice also affects other arts activities broadcast in Hong Kong. For example, the Provisional Urban Council's cultural committee earlier decided not to screen several documentaries at the 1998 Hong Kong International Film Festival, because one of the films, *Hello, Goodbye*, was shot by prodemocracy party leader Christine Loh Kung-wai (*Ming Pao Daily News*, 3 February 1998; *Hong Kong Standard*, 4 February 1998), a move that has made film directors in Hong Kong concerned about introducing political issues. Sixteen film experts, including consultants of the municipal council and programmers, expressed strong opposition to this move to reschedule the screening. Hong Kong artists are also very concerned about this trend of censoring and are afraid that the principle of cultural pluralism and freedom of expression is under threat. Nevertheless, according to Kenny Lau, managing director of PolyGram's domestic division, Cantopop is not political and there should not be much of a problem with censorship (*South China Morning Post*, 1 July 1998, p. 57).

Despite the decline in the production of democratic songs in the market since the early 1990s, other democratic organisations such as the HKASPDMC have made efforts to promote these types of songs as a protest for freedom and democratic rights. The HKASPDMC organised the annual vigil for Tiananmen and the tenth anniversary of the 1989 TSI. The theme of this vigil was to ask the Beijing authorities 'to reverse their verdict on the June 4th Incident'. More than 80,000 people marked the event, the largest turnout since 1992 (*Hong Kong Standard*, 5 June 1999). Four songs with political messages were included. For example, the lyrics of 'The Flower of Freedom' (*Ziyou Hua*) were filled with longing for political freedom, and 'Mourning for Good Men' (*Ji Hohan*) was an expression of Hong Kong people's sorrow for the deaths in the 1989 Beijing students' movement. Wan Dan, an exiled democracy proponent studying in the United States, and his mother also addressed the gathering via a live telephone link.

Though democratic popular songs have continued to be promoted by pro-democratic organisations since the 1997 handover, they are maintained as a kind of political propaganda and have little market value. With regard to Hong Kong and Chinese songs popularised after the handover, there have hardly been any songs with political content. For the sake of economic interests, self-censorship by the mass media acts as a political compromise and an expression of self-discipline in the avoidance of causing offence to the Chinese authorities. The advocacy of patriotism and/or nationalism in Hong Kong popular songs has been one of the major concerns of social agencies such as market-governed, external music production and consumption.

For the sake of profit, the content of songs is what Lockard describes as 'escapist in orientation' (Lockard 1998, p. 33), mainly concerning 'love-affairs' and romance. Such songs continue to be widely promoted in Hong Kong. Nine out of ten popular songs recognised in the 20th Top Ten Chinese Gold Songs held by Radio Television Hong Kong, were described as love songs.

Conclusion

This paper is intended to present the diversity of political messages delineated in Hong Kong popular songs, and is not a condemnation of the political environments of China and Hong Kong. The evolution of Hong Kong popular music can be

described as a history of political and cultural accommodation between the political ideology of the state and the political meanings expressed in song. The paper has described the relationships between the extreme sociopolitical changes in Hong Kong and their influences on the meaning of popular songs, with reference to political events of the 1989 TSI and the 1997 handover. In particular, the paper has attempted to shed light on the contradictions and tensions between freedom of expression in the concept of 'one-country, two-systems' and the rise of democratic messages in local popular songs through the distribution, production and reception of music in the Hong Kong community. Although Hong Kong was promised the maintenance of its capitalist economic system and lifestyle for fifty years after 1997, the two systems of the mainland and the SAR may have converged to such a degree that remaining differences are largely inconsequential. The political messages of democratic popular songs were originally a symbolic struggle in the political, cultural, economic and national arenas. The handover, however, motivated Hong Kong popular artists to embrace the concept of 'harmony' and use music to spread the political message of joy over reintegration with the PRC. Hong Kong people consent to this publicly expressed message promoting patriotism in their songs, a message which is operational and measurable through the SAR's control of market forces and other public institutions. The centrality of Hong Kong popular songs sung in Putonghua also acts as a construction of Chinese national identity among the Hong Kong, mainland Chinese and Taiwanese popular artists.

Endnotes

1. Parts of this article are drawn from Ho (1996).
2. Hong Kong was ceded to the British by China under the Treaty of Nanjing on 29 August 1842. It entered an era of decolonisation following the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on 19 December 1984 between Premier Zhao Ziyang and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. This formalised arrangements for the transfer of Hong Kong's sovereignty to the PRC in 1997. The Joint Declaration allowed the PRC to realise its long-standing goal of national reunification. Tiananmen Square is situated in Beijing, the capital of mainland China. The 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident was not the first expression of democratic ideas to have occurred in China. Nevertheless, the 1989 June 4th Incident provoked markedly different descriptions and approaches from the Western press and Chinese authorities, respectively; it was regarded as a students' movement by the Western press but as a counter-revolutionary movement against the PRC government by the Chinese state.
3. The theoretical background of the argument derives from Green's theory of musical meaning (Green 1988, 1997). Green argues that intramusical and social aspects of meaning are inseparable in a complex pattern of social, political, economic and historical processes. In this paper, political meaning is taken up through a process of dialogue over the 'text' involving the performer and listener. Popular music in Hong Kong occurs within the political contexts surrounding the interaction of Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China.
4. In order to be consistent, this paper uses the term 'Putonghua' throughout. Putonghua is normally referred to as the official language in mainland China, and Mandarin is adopted as the official language in Taiwan (also named The Republic of China), but the written and oral forms of the two are the same. Despite the fact that the mother tongue of most Hong Kong people is Cantonese, English was the official language in Hong Kong under British rule. Since Hong Kong returned to China in July 1997, both Chinese and English are still widely used. In order to enable students to be biliterate (to master written Chinese and English) and trilingual (to speak fluent Cantonese, Putonghua and English), the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has been encouraging the teaching of Putonghua in schools.
5. After the 1920s, Chinese music was influenced by Soviet Russia and other Eastern European communist countries, to embody political/rev-

- olutionary ideology. After the founding of the PRC on 1 October 1949, music continued to be an instrument for the transmission of beliefs and values to help build a socialist revolutionary society.
6. Deng Lijian died in May 1995. Originally Deng came from Taiwan, but she won her fame in Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China starting in the early 1970s. She was an important figure in the development of mainland Chinese popular music. According to Xu (1995), Deng's most popular music was very simple in arrangement, but her interpretation and her voice caused her songs to gain the status of classics. For Chinese communities all over the world, the death of Deng was regarded as a great loss to Chinese popular music. Nevertheless, the PRC State ordered that the case of Deng's death should be treated as 'low-profile' because Deng was labelled as an 'anti-Communist' figure.
 7. Hou Dejian, a Taiwanese popular composer and singer, led a hunger strike before the TSI and negotiated with the army to allow protestors to leave the square peacefully. Hou was believed to have taken refuge in the Australian embassy until 17 August 1989, and reappeared in public only once the PRC government had promised not to arrest him.
 8. Luo Dayou originated from Taiwan and moved to Hong Kong in 1988. Being a romantic singer, Luo was also famous in mainland China from 1983. Some of his songs were believed to represent a tension between the Kuomintang (KMT) authorities and old-fashioned Confucian values.
 9. Alan Tam was one of the chief singers of the Hong Kong band the Wynners in the 1970s. At first they sang English popular songs, then moved into Cantonese songs when they became more popular. In 1978, the band broke up and Alan went solo. In the 1980s, he dominated the award shows in the Hong Kong popular music industry.
 10. Leslie Cheung began his career as a popular singer but retired in 1990 and concentrated solely on films. However, in July 1995 he released a comeback album featuring songs from his films.
 11. Cui Jian (1961–) is the paramount leader of Chinese popular rock music known to millions of people in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, other East Asian countries, European countries and the USA. He was a trumpeter in the Beijing Symphony Orchestra. In 1985 he formed his own band, *Building Block*, with six colleagues from the orchestra, and recorded Paul McCartney/Michael Jackson hits. Cui Jian is described as a leading rock idol and a Chinese John Lennon or Bob Dylan.
 12. The rise of indigenous Chinese popular music called forth the notion of cultural identity in mainland China after the mid-1980s. Chinese popular musicians began to draw on Chinese nationalism, and a new style of popular music labelled *Xi Bei Feng* (Northwest Wind) emerged. The Xi Bei includes the provinces of Shanxi, Shaanxi and Gansu which are situated in the northwestern part of Mainland China. According to Brace (1991, p. 49), this new music is basically 'adapted folksong melodies, or imitations of folksong melodies to the dominant style of accompaniment as defined by the music from Hong Kong and Taiwan'.
 13. In October 1992, the music video 'A Piece of Red Cloth' won special mention at the Golden Gate Viewers' Awards of the San Francisco Film Festival.
 14. The 1985 survey showed that 59.5% of the respondents identified themselves as Hongkongese, and 36.2% as Chinese (Lau 1992, p. 152). The 1988 survey found that the figures were 63.6% and 28.8%, respectively (Ibid.). In the 1990 survey, 57.2% of the respondents called themselves Hongkongese and Chinese (Lau, Lee, Wan and Wong 1992). Moreover, the political involvement of the Hong Kong Chinese has for a long time been relatively low, and there were no political parties in Hong Kong before 1989.
 15. Internationally, an example of not offending the PRC in the development of music and other arts activities was the suppression of Taiwanese arts activities in Hong Kong by the government in the 1980s. In the early 1980s, a Hong Kong Cantonese popular song, 'Ling Zhi Cao', which is a kind of Chinese herd, composed by Gu Qian Wen, was banned from the government-run Radio Television Hong Kong. It is believed that the lyrics of this song dealt with the anti-PRC feelings of the Taiwanese. Moreover, Hong Kong people had little opportunity to see Taiwanese arts performance because of their political implications against mainland China. Film censorship was also used by the Hong Kong government, not allowing any film criticising Communist China to be shown in public, so as to maintain good relations with the PRC state. In February 1985, the withdrawal of a Taiwanese film, *Ah Fu*, was an example of the censorship of Taiwanese films (Lau and Rosario 1985, p. 31). No Taiwanese arts groups were invited to perform in the Hong Kong Arts Festivals and Asian Festivals until the mid-1980s (*Ming Pao Monthly Journal*, October 1985, p. 25). Although

- Hong Kong was unwilling to invite Taiwanese artists to perform in Hong Kong, there were no official sanctions against Taiwanese artists/entertainers performing in Hong Kong for private business.
16. Diaoyutai refers to a group of small islands located to the northeast of Taiwan. The sovereignty dispute between China (including Taiwan) and Japan over the Diaoyu Islands involves 500-year-old claims and future offshore oil development. The mainland and Taiwanese authorities claim that the Chinese discovered the islands in 1372 and subsequently used them as navigational aids. Japan claims that it discovered the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyutai) and incorporated the islands in 1895. Recent events brought the long dispute to the boil in July 1996 when a group of Japanese rightists sailed to the Diaoyu Islands to set up a lighthouse and placed a Japanese flag over the rocky hills. This action immediately caused waves of furious protest against the Japanese from Chinese communities all over the world. The culmination was the dispatch of the ship, 'Protecting Daiyotai' (*Baodiao Hao*), by Hong Kong Diaoyutai activists on 22 September 1996. This was an entirely civilian movement, without any backing from the two Chinese governments. Originally, the activists planned to land on Diaoyutai, destroy the Japanese lighthouse and take the Japanese flag. When the ship reached the Diaoyutai area, it was surrounded by military vessels of the Japanese government. Ten Hong Kong activists jumped into the sea, one of whom, David Chan, drowned.
 17. The Basic Law is regarded as a 'mini-constitution' for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) after 1997. According to the Basic Law, Hong Kong people should be prohibited from performing any act of treason, sedition or subversion, or the theft of State secrets against the Central People's Government of the PRC. Foreign political organisations or bodies are also banned from conducting political activities in the SAR, and political organisations or bodies in the future SAR are prevented from establishing ties with foreign political organisations or bodies.
 18. Faye Wong started her music career when she participated in Hong Kong's Asian Golden Zither Pop Music Competition in 1989. She achieved fame with the song 'Easily Hurt Lady' in 1992, has been featured several times in TIME magazine, and was given the award of the most popular Asian entertainer of 1997 by Billboard magazine. On 24 February 1999, Faye's new English single 'Eyes On Me' was released by EMI.
 19. Jacky Cheung, Leon Lai, Andy Lau and Aaron Kwok are praised as the 'Four Heavenly Sky Kings' in Hong Kong popular music.
 20. By the end of 1998, Gigi Leung had released six personal albums, including three Cantonese and three Putonghua albums.
 21. Zhang Hui-mei, an outstanding Taiwanese singer of Western-style songs, and a dancer, represents the new musical mainstream in the development of Chinese popular music in Hong Kong and Taiwan. She also performed in mainland China. However, after she sang the Taiwan anthem at President Chen Shui-bian's inauguration on 20 May 2000, she was blacklisted on the mainland

References

- Brace, T. 1991. 'Popular music in contemporary Beijing: modernism and cultural identity', *Asian Music*, XXII(2), Spring/Summer, pp. 43–66
- Choi, P.K. 1990A. 'A search for cultural identity: the students' movement of the early seventies', in *Differences and Identities: Educational Argument in Late Twentieth Century Hong Kong*, ed. A. Sweeting (Hong Kong), pp. 81–107
- 1990B. 'From "slavery culture" and "cultural desert" to the birth of local culture: the connection between the development of Hong Kong culture and its relationship with Chinese revolution' (*Comg Nuhua Jiaoyu Ji Wenhua Shamo Dao Bentu De Taitou: Xianggong De Fazhan Yu Zhongguo Jindai Geming De Zhuanzhe*), in *CUHK Education Journal*, 18(2), pp. 153–64
- Dong, F.S. 1993. 'Hong Kong stars became the Chinese's first generation of idols' (*Xianggong Mingxing Cheng Zhonggou Xin Yidai Ouxiang*), *Guang Jia Jing*, 252, September, pp. 30–3
- Green, L. 1988. *Music on Deaf Ears: Musical Meaning, Ideology and Education* (Manchester) 1997. *Music, Gender, Education* (Cambridge)
- Hamm, C. 1991. 'Music and radio in the People's Republic of China', *Asian Music*, XXII(2), Spring/Summer, pp. 1–42

- Ho, W.C. 1996. 'Hong Kong secondary music education: a sociological enquiry', unpublished PhD thesis (Institute of Education, University of London)
- Hong Kong Standard*, 18 June 1997, 4 February 1998, 5 June 1999 (Hong Kong)
- Hoyland, K. 1992/93. 'Beijing rock', *China Now*, 143, Winter, pp. 30–1
- Jones, A.F. 1992. *Like a Knife: Ideology and Genre in Contemporary Chinese Popular Music* (New York)
1994. 'The politics of popular music in post-Tiananmen China', in *Popular Protest & Political Culture in Modern China*, 2nd edn, ed. J.N. Wasserstorm and E.J. Perry (New York), pp. 148–65
- Kraus, R. 1989. *Pianos and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle over Western Music* (New York and Oxford)
- Lam, T.C., and Ip, S.C. 1997. *The Rhythm of Music: Teacher's Handbook*, 3rd edn (Hong Kong)
- Lau, E. and Rosario, L.D. 1985. 'Making friends on the media and cultural fronts', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 1, pp. 30–1
- Lau, S.K. 1987. *Society and Politics in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong)
1992. 'Political attitudes', in *Indicators of Social Development: Hong Kong 1990*, ed. S.K. Lau, M.K. Lee, P.W. Wan and S.L. Wong (Hong Kong), pp. 129–57
- Lau, S.K., Lee, M.K., Wan, S.S., and Wong, S.L. 1992. 'Preface', in *Indicators of Social Development: Hong Kong 1990*, ed. S.K. Lau, M.K. Lee, S.S. Wan and S.L. Wong (Hong Kong), pp. ix–xi
- Lee, G. 1995. 'The "East is Red" goes pop: commodification, hybridity and nationalism in Chinese popular song and its televisual performance', *Popular Music*, 14(1), pp. 95–110
- Lee, J.C.Y. 1992. 'All for freedom: the rise of patriotic/pro-democratic popular music in Hong Kong in response to the Chinese Student Movement', in *Rockin' the Boat: Mass Music & Mass Movements*, ed. R. Garofalo (Boston), pp. 129–47
- Lockard, C.A. 1998. *Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu)
- Lull, J. 1991. *China Turned on Television, Reform, and Resistance* (London and New York)
- Mackerras, C. 1981. *The Performing Arts in Contemporary China* (London and Boston)
- Ming Pao Daily News*, 16 June 1989, 3 February 1998, 21 December 1998 (Hong Kong)
- Ming Pao Monthly Journal*, October 1985 (Hong Kong)
- Mittler, B. 1997. *Dangerous Tunes: The Politics of Chinese Music in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China since 1949* (Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden)
- Ogden, S. 1989. *China's Unresolved Issues: Politics, Development, and Culture* (New Jersey)
- Perris, A. 1983. 'Music as propaganda: art at the command of doctrine in the People's Republic of China', *Ethnomusicology*, 27(1), pp. 1–28
- Peters, M. 1991. 'Rock 'n' revolt', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 March, pp. 30–1
- Schell, O. 1994. *Mandate of Heaven: a New Generation of Entrepreneurs, Dissidents, Bohemians and Technocrats Lays Claim to China's Future* (London)
- South China Morning Post*, 1 July 1998, 5 June 1998 (Hong Kong)
- Weller, R.P. 1994. *Resistance, Chaos and Control in China: Taiping Rebels. Taiwanese Ghosts and Tiananmen* (London)
- Wicke, P., and Shepherd, J. 1993. "'Cabaret is dead": rock culture as state enterprise – the political organization of rock in East Germany', in *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*, ed. T. Bennett, S. Frith, L. Grossberg, J. Shepherd and G. Turner (London), pp. 25–37
- Wilson, D. 1990. *Hong Kong! Hong Kong!* (London)
- Wong, I. 1984. 'Geming Gequ: songs for the education of the masses', in *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China 1949–1979*, ed. B. McDougall (Berkeley and Los Angeles), pp. 112–43
- Xu, X. 1995. 'Zhongguo Dalu Liuxing Yinyue de Zhuanzhe Yu Xin Dongli (The turn point and new moving force of mainland China music)', *Ming Pao Monthly Journal*, June, pp. 51–8
- Zhou, H.S. 1990. *Xiaofei Wenhua: Yingxiang Wenzi Yinyue (Consuming Culture: Image, Words and Music)* (Hong Kong)
- Other sources: <http://http.cs.berkeley.edu/~zyang/cuijian/#0> <http://www.indexoncensorship.org/issue197/barme.html> <http://www mailinglist.not.paa.gotell.cditt.chinahk>

