

MASTER'S THESIS

A study of the undergraduate students' professional identity at the Central Conservatory of Music

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**A Study of the undergraduate Students' Professional Identity at the
Central Conservatory of Music**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Philosophy**

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Hong Kong Baptist University

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ABSTRACT

A successful education should not only develop the students' professional skills, but also shape their professional identity. It is believed that a strong professional identity is associated with greater professional success. Most research in music education has focused on teaching methods and the training of music skills and knowledge. Whereas the acquisition of music knowledge and skills undoubtedly form an important and essential part of any professional education, other factors may contribute to musicians' and music teachers' success. One such factor may be the development of an occupational identity (L'Roy, 1983). Some music education researchers have examined music students' professional identity (L'Roy, 1983; Prescesky, 1997; Dolloff, 1999; Roberts, 1999; Brand and Doloff, 1997). However, none of these studies focused exclusively on music students' identity within the content of both music education and performance professional identities. Moreover, none of these studies were conducted within the culture of Chinese conservatories.

The purpose of this study was to explore issues of professional identity for students at the Central Conservatory of Music (CCOM). Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

1. What are the perceived professional identities held by CCOM students?
2. Are these professional identities clearly identified and a source of direction for CCOM students?
3. To what extent do CCOM students feel comfortable with their perceived professional identities?
4. To what extent do CCOM students struggle in forming their professional identities?
5. What cultural or organizational factors associated with CCOM influence the formation of the professional identity of CCOM students?
6. What experiences associated with CCOM influence the formation of the CCOM students' professional identities?
7. What is the role of teachers, administrators, parents, or peers in influencing CCOM students' professional identities?
8. What other factors are cited by CCOM students as influencing their professional identity?

To fulfill the purpose of this study, focused group interviews and individual interviews were used in the collection of data. The research protocol used two focus groups: one consisted of music education majors, and the other consisted of performance majors. In addition, individual interviews also were used in this study which included both music education students and performance students who are willing to participate in this study. Each focus group interview lasted 90 minutes, and each individual interview use 45 minutes in length.

Based on these focus group interviews and individual interviews, all music education majors held professional identities as music teachers. Of the seventeen performance students, eight perceived their professional identities as teachers, and the

remaining nine students held professional identities as performers. The music education students expressed an eagerness to be music teachers while also confessing some worry about their future career, particularly in terms of income and the status of school music teachers. In contrast, the performance students expressed more ambivalence about their professional identity. The source of this ambivalence flows from performance students' strong desire to perform and an awareness of the limited job opportunities, the music profession's high expectations of performing achievement, and students' self-perceived limitations of their talents. Indeed, performance students struggle with who they will become.

The teachers and classmates in CCOM are very important factors in influencing the formation of CCOM students' professional identity. These CCOM teachers and classmates offered models for who they want to become. Moreover, this study found that CCOM offer its own unique profession climate which shapes CCOM students' professional identity.

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