

MASTER'S THESIS

Selling out the indie music?: re-examining the independence of Hong Kong indie music in the early 21st century

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Abstract

The rebellious spirit generated by the 1970s punk movement in the UK and the US influenced many local Hong Kong indie bands. However, in the early part of the 21st century, local indie music has created different kinds of relationship with the mainstream and commercial fields, which seem to have the potential to destroy the original meaning of indie music. The aims of this research were therefore to re-examine the independence of indie music in the early 21st century; to understand the role played by indie music and artists within the local music scene; to describe the “authenticity” of indie music, and to suggest how to bring about a better and more sustainable development for these kinds of “independent” and grassroots organizations. In response to these research aims, a case study was conducted of four local indie labels: 89268, Redline Music, Harbour Records and Music is Free Foundation (M.I.F.F.), by applying a marketing mix of the 4 “P”s—promotion, place, price and product—in order to investigate the business practices of these indie labels and to present a more comprehensive picture of Hong Kong indie music. Although indie music has become no longer purely “indie/independent”, it is also believed that the core values of indie music are being repackaged. Moreover, an interdependent relationship between indie music and commerce and/or the mainstream has been created. This interdependence is not necessarily leading to the end of indie, but has the potential to create more opportunities and spaces for the development of indie music.

Acknowledgement

“Don’t lose hope. When it gets darkest the stars come out.”—Author Unknown

In the summer of 2012, nine months after the end of my studentship, I met Prof Stephen Chu, who had been my previous Principal Supervisor. At that time, he encouraged me to continue my research according to my own ideas. While we were talking, Dr Amy Lee, my current Principal Supervisor, walked between us. She showed me her support by putting her hand on my shoulder. I could feel the positive energy they were giving to me. Becoming a Humanities student was one of the best opportunities of my life. Because of the many amazing people I have met there, I always feel I am going home every time I go back to the Humanities Department. Thank you Prof Chu, Dr Amy Lee, our secretary Ms Floria Ng, all teachers and classmates, for your guidance, tolerance and support.

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- Mr Yuen Chi Chung (Renowned Indie Music Critic and Music Curator)

- Dr Wong Chi Chung (Renowned DJ, Scholar of Cultural Studies and Music Curator)
- Mr Hon Ka Chun (Founder of Local Indie Label 89268)
- InLove (Local Indie Band with 89268)
- Mr Adrian Tsing, Ms Gloria Tang and Ms Jennifer Chiang (Members of M.I.F.F.)
- Mr Jesper Chan (Director of Redline Music) and Peri M (Indie Band with Redline Music)
- Mr Lenny Guo (Core Member of Blackbird)
- Mr Terry Wong (Director of Black Market Music Production and a Former A&R Manager of 89268)

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of Michel de Certeau

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