

MASTER'S THESIS

Identity politics of the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra

Yu, Ngai Ying

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Identity Politics of the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra

YU Ngai Ying

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ABSTRACT

The Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra (hereafter the HKCO), established in 1977, is not an institution that plays indigenous Chinese music, but a modern Chinese instrumental ensemble modelled on Western symphony orchestras. To meet the challenge of the ensemble's lack of repertoire as a result of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the HKCO commissioned works from a pool of predominantly Hong Kong composers. Contrary to the highly restricted level of musical creativity under the Communist regime in Mainland China, the artistic freedom in colonial Hong Kong allowed the HKCO and composers to develop a unique repertoire, hence an independent-hybrid-Hong Kong-Chinese identity distinct from the Mainland. The HKCO has recently positioned itself as the Cultural Ambassador of Hong Kong and organized the *Cadenzas of Hong Kong* (香江華采) to encourage local composers to write music for the Chinese orchestra. Through this project, the HKCO, as a postcolonial subject, seemingly articulates a local cultural subjectivity.

Nevertheless, the HKCO, in fact, did not affirm the value of local compositions. Assuming Hong Kong composers' lack of cultural roots, the HKCO, also in the name of the *Cadenzas of Hong Kong*, brought local composers to search for roots in Mainland China, in order to recover their cultural identity. At the same time, the HKCO presented another concert project entitled, *Roots of the Chinese* (華夏之根), with six composers from the Western region of China, which was presumed to facilitate Hong Kong citizens' search of their Chinese origins. The activities inspired by the root searching mentality disclose the HKCO's essentialism toward Chinese identity. This thesis is a discourse on the HKCO's identity politics and its struggle for self-representation, as the contradictory objectives of the two projects unfold.

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