

RGC Ref. No.: <u>UGC/FDS16/H13/18</u> (please insert ref. above)
--

**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report
(for completed projects only)

<p><u>Submission Deadlines:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within <u>six</u> months of the approved project completion date. 2. Completion report: within <u>12</u> months of the approved project completion date.
--

Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)

1. Project Title

Creativity in popular music: A study of music-making practices in the busking scene and the YouTube scene

2. Investigator(s) and Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	Dr HO Vicky Wing-ki Assistant Professor	Department of Creative Arts, School of Arts and Social Sciences, The Open University of Hong Kong
Co-Investigator(s)	N/A	-
Others	N/A	-

3. Project Duration

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval (must be quoted)
Project Start Date	1 January 2019	-	-
Project Completion Date	31 August 2020	28 February 2021	24 April 2020
Duration (in month)	20 months	26 months	24 April 2020
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	31 August 2021	28 February 2022	24 April 2020

Part B: The Final Report

5. Project Objectives

5.1 Objectives as per original application

- 1) To describe the features of the music-making practices of the musicians in the local busking scene and the YouTube scene
 - a. What repertoires, aesthetics, cultural sensibilities, creative practices and techniques (e.g. songwriting, arranging, jamming, etc.) can their music-making be characterized by?
 - b. In what ways do their social interactions and relationships with the audiences and other musicians shape their music-making?
- 2) To assess the relationship between music-making experiences and creative identities
 - a. How would these musicians describe their own creative identity based on their music-making and performing experiences?
 - b. How do their music-making and performing experiences affect their perception of Hong Kong on the benchmark of a creative city?
- 3) To analyze the connections and contradictions in the music-making practices in the online and offline spaces
 - a. In what ways are the musicians in the online and offline scenes similar, different, and/or connected in their music-making practices?
- 4) To explore the possibilities of collaboration between these amateur or Pro-Am musicians and the professional corporate organizations in developing the local music culture
 - a. What are the needs of these musicians in the Pro/Am collaboration?
 - b. What roles can they play in the Pro/Am collaboration for the development of the local music culture?

5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: N/A

Reasons for the change: N/A

5.3 Realisation of the objectives

(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)

Fieldwork (both online and offline) were conducted between March 2019 and November 2020 for participant observation at the busking scene and the YouTube scene. In-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 34 musicians across the scenes.

Objective 1 has been achieved through fieldwork and interviews with musicians. Local busking musicians express an aesthetic preference of Cantopop. Cover singing is the norm while instrumental music and original songs are less common. YouTube musicians in this study demonstrate a range of creative practices, such as songwriting, rearranging music accompaniment, rewriting lyrics, arranging and performing songs as medley, creating music videos with visual images, and musical experiments with digital technology. Music-making practices are significantly shaped by interactions with the audiences and other musicians, including spontaneous encounters in the busking scene and online interactions in the YouTube scene.

Objective 2 has been achieved through interviews with musicians. The PI discussed different identity labels with the musicians and assessed the different interpretations by the musicians. Based on their first-hand performing experiences, musicians in both scenes commented that creative professions do not receive the recognition they deserve in Hong Kong. They also described Hong Kong as a very stressful city and not a conducive environment for nurturing creativity.

Objective 3 has been achieved through fieldwork and interviews with musicians. Musicians in the two scenes are both similar and different. For buskers who do not or seldom manage the online space, they prefer the liveness and spontaneity in busking. For YouTube musicians who do not or seldom go busking, they describe stage fright or a perceived lack of control of live performance situations. For musicians who do both, they still tend to enjoy live performances more than recorded performances.

Objective 4 has been achieved through interviews with musicians. While a small number of the musicians aim at gaining exposure for eventually entering the professional music industry, others are content with music-making in their respective scenes citing creative freedom as their major concern in Pro-Am collaboration. For the future development of local music culture, more performance venues and less restrictions against an open cultural environment are on the wish list of the musicians.

5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

Objectives <i>(as per 5.1/5.2 above)</i>	Addressed <i>(please tick)</i>	Percentage Achieved <i>(please estimate)</i>
1. To describe the features of the music-making practices of the musicians in the local busking scene and the YouTube scene	✓	100%
2. To assess the relationship between music-making experiences and creative identities	✓	100%
3. To analyze the connections and contradictions in the music-making practices in the online and offline spaces	✓	100%
4. To explore the possibilities of collaboration between these amateur or Pro-Am musicians and the professional corporate organizations in developing the local music culture	✓	100%

5 Research Outcome

6.1 Major findings and research outcome

(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)

Finding 1: Music-making practices in the local busking scene

Busking musicians demonstrate strong cultural sensibilities in their performances. They express an aesthetic preference of Cantopop and the motives to share certain messages and hope to ring resonance in the audience. Song selection is mostly an on-site spontaneous decision. While performances of original pieces are not common, creative practices in the busking scene mainly include new musical or vocal arrangements of published music. Instrumental accompanists play a stronger role than singers in this regard.

Responses and support from the audience are highly valued by buskers. While the typical local audience is relatively reserved, busking musicians are easily encouraged by the audience's gestures of appreciation such as staying to watch, singing along, clapping and cheering, gifting, and tipping. Musicians value the spontaneous encounters in busking.

Finding 2: Music-making practices in the YouTube scene

Creative practices by musicians in the YouTube scene range from songwriting, rearranging music accompaniment, rewriting lyrics, arranging and performing songs as medley, creating music videos with visual images, to musical experiments with digital technology. While songwriting is a way for musicians to record or express their own thoughts, derivative works and appropriation recast existing or familiar songs in new interpretative frames.

YouTube musicians receive audience's feedback from YouTube metrics and users' comments. They attach different levels of importance to the number of views, likes, and subscribers at different stages. They value users' comments but the topic of "haters" is always brought up by interviewees, whether they have personally experienced it or not.

Finding 3: Connections and comparisons across the two scenes

Musicians in both scenes experience similar struggles in weighing between popular demand and personal taste. Their relative involvement in the busking scene and the YouTube scene can be explained by their perception of the two scenes. For buskers who do not or seldom manage the online space, they prefer the liveness and spontaneity in busking rather than creating "near-perfect" but less authentic music on YouTube. On the other hand, YouTube musicians who do not or seldom go busking tend to have stage fright or a perceived lack of control of live performance situations. For musicians who do both, they still tend to enjoy live performances more than recorded performances. However, when live performances were significantly limited during 2020, the online space became the only alternative from 'no performance'.

Finding 4: Musicians' perception of self and of Hong Kong on the benchmark of creativity

Musicians in both scenes comment that creative professions do not receive the recognition they deserve in Hong Kong. Most musicians perceive that playing music as a hobby is perhaps viable but building a musical career is very difficult in Hong Kong. They attach different interpretations to the labels "musicians", "singers", "busker", "YouTubers", etc. and develop mixed positions to their creative identities. They may experience a high level of personal satisfaction through music-making, but the external realities and societal discourses may make their musical identities problematic.

Musicians describe Hong Kong as a very stressful city and not a conducive environment for nurturing creativity. Some comment that Hong Kong people are indeed creative, but structurally the system does not foster creativity. Overall, musicians do not credit Hong Kong highly as a creative city.

6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action (Maximum half a page)

During the course of the study, it is found that the musicians' musical engagements often stretch further than the two scenes no matter in the online or offline setting. For instance, busking musicians also perform in other organized live performance settings while YouTube musicians increasingly utilize other social media platforms as online performance outlets. There is potential to further develop research to investigate and compare the musicians' other scene-crossing strategies and practices beyond the busking scene and YouTube.

6 Layman's Summary

(Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words)

The rise and fall of Hong Kong's popular music from the 1970s till today is now a familiar narrative. As the Cantopop industry developed in the 1970s, climbed to its most glorious days in the 1980s, then experienced its decline since the mid-1990s, today many might doubt whether the industry still has a sustainable future. Diverting from the more commercialized and industrialized aspect of Hong Kong's popular music, this study looks into the more bottom-up and organic music-making practices, namely those in the busking scene and the YouTube scene. The study explores the music-making practices of these everyday talents across the online and offline settings and assess their creative potential. It discusses the musicians' repertoires, aesthetics, cultural sensibilities, and social interactions with the audiences and other musicians in the two scenes. The study also assesses the relationship between music-making and creative identity. By referring to these music-makers' experiences and self-perceived creative identities, it sheds light on the needs of these musicians and their roles in the development of local popular music.

Part C: Research Output**7 Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project**

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
	2021			Vicky Ho	Negotiating musician identities: Busking musicians and YouTube musicians in Hong Kong. / <i>Asia's Sonic (under)Currents and Currencies: Proceedings of the 7th Inter-Asia Popular Music Studies Conference</i>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
		Yes		Vicky Ho	Music-making practices and creative identities of musicians in the Hong Kong busking scene and YouTube scene / <i>Cultural Trends</i>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

8 Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered

(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

Month / Year / Place	Title	Conference Name	Submitted to RGC <i>(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)</i>	Attached to this Report <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Acknowledged the Support of RGC <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Accessible from the Institutional Repository <i>(Yes or No)</i>
June/ 2019/ Venice, Italy	How the lack of cultural management fails the potentials of street music: Observations from the busking scene in Hong Kong	The 15 th International Conference on Arts and Cultural Management	2019	Yes	Yes	Yes
February/ 2020/ Luneberg, Germany	Street music and urban experiences: Field study of the busking scene of Hong Kong	Groove the City Conference 2020	2020	Yes	Yes	Yes
December/2020 / Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	Negotiating musician identities: Busking musicians and YouTube musicians in Hong Kong	The 7 th Inter-Asia Popular Music Studies Conference	2021	Yes	Yes	Yes

9 Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning

(Please elaborate)

N/A

10 Student(s) Trained

(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)

Name	Degree Registered for	Date of Registration	Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation
N/A			

11 Other Impact

(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)

N/A

12 Statistics on Research Outputs

	Peer-reviewed Journal Publications	Conference Papers	Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters	Patents Awarded	Other Research Outputs (please specify)	
No. of outputs arising directly from this research project	1 (submitted)	3	1	0	Type	No.
					N/A	0

13 Public Access Of Completion Report

(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)

Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access	Reasons
N/A	