

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS25/H06/20 <hr/> (please insert ref. above)
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**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><b><u>Submission Deadlines:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within <b><u>six</u></b> months of the approved project completion date.</li> <li>2. Completion report: within <b><u>12</u></b> months of the approved project completion date.</li> </ol>
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**Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)**

**1. Project Title**

Mapping the Development of Recording Studios in Postwar Hong Kong

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

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	Dr LI Ka Leung Emil / Assistant Professor	School of General Education and Languages / Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong
Co-Investigator(s)	Dr TSANG Edmond / Associate Professor of Practice	Academy of Music / Hong Kong Baptist University
Others	N/A	N/A

**3. Project Duration**

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval (must be quoted)
Project Start Date	January 1, 2021	N/A	N/A
Project Completion Date	December 31, 2022	June 30, 2023	March 10, 2022
Duration (in month)	24	30	March 10, 2022
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	December 31, 2023	June 30, 2024	March 10, 2022

4.4 Please attach photo(s) of acknowledgement of RGC-funded facilities / equipment.

N/A

## **Part B: The Final Report**

### **5. Project Objectives**

#### 5.1 Objectives as per original application

1. To examine the impact of recording studios on Cantopop production since the 1960s through in-depth interviews with composers, arrangers, singers, producers, and sound engineers;
2. To explore how the evolution of technological change has shaped the development of recording studios in Hong Kong;
3. To scrutinize how the interaction between songwriters, arrangers, recording and mixing engineers, and producers in studios have contributed to Cantopop creativity;
4. To evaluate how the development of digital audio workstations (DAW) and the growth of small-scale or home studios have influenced Cantopop; and
5. To examine the unique fractures of recording studios in Hong Kong.

#### 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)*

##### **Objective 1 (100% achieved):**

The impact of recording studios on Cantopop production since the 1960s was examined by the perspectives of a total of 40 interviewees including composers, arrangers, singers, producers, and sound engineers. Questions related to the impact of recording studios by technology, the role and the development of recording studios, and the development of Cantopop music production since 1960s were asked in the interviews. According to the findings, interviewees expressed the importance of recording studios in shaping the music scene of Cantopop music and stated that the important role of recording studios should not be neglected.

**Objective 2 (100% achieved):**

The evolution of technological change took up an important role in shaping the development of recording studios in Hong Kong. Questions related to studio design and technology development were raised in the interviews. According to the literature and interviews, it showed that technological changes such as installation of software and hardware had contributed greatly to studio design and quality of recording, and even the development of recording studios.

**Objective 3 (100% achieved):**

Questions about creativity progress and recording chemistry between songwriters, arrangers, recording and mixing engineers, and producers were addressed in the interviews. In order to gain a more in-depth view on the significance and uniqueness of the Cantopop creativity process, differences between the local and overseas production processes were compared.

**Objective 4 (100% achieved):**

According to the interviews, most of the interviewees mentioned that the evolution of technological change had accelerated the development of digital audio workstations (DAW), and the growth of small-scale and home studios. Follow-up questions such as how these studios influenced different aspects of Cantopop music were discussed in the interviews.

**Objective 5 (100% achieved):**

Photos and sources about the features of different kinds of recording studios, such as large studios, digital audio workstations (DAW), and small-scale or home studios were collected, evaluated and compared carefully. The general features of recording studios in Hong Kong and the features of the self-owned studios or the studios where they had worked/had been working were shared in the interviews.

## 5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

<b>Objectives</b> (as per 5.1/5.2 above)	<b>Addressed</b> (please tick)	<b>Percentage Achieved</b> (please estimate)
1. To examine the impact of recording studios on Cantopop production since the 1960s through in-depth interviews with composers, arrangers, singers, producers, and sound engineers;	√	100%
2. To explore how the evolution of technological change has shaped the development of recording studios in Hong Kong;	√	100%
3. To scrutinize how the interaction between songwriters, arrangers, recording and mixing engineers, and producers in studios have contributed to Cantopop creativity;	√	100%
4. To evaluate how the development of digital audio workstations (DAW) and the growth of small-scale or home studios have influenced Cantopop;	√	100%
5. To examine the unique fractures of recording studios in Hong Kong	√	100%

## 6. Research Outcome

### 6.1 Major findings and research outcome

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

#### 1. **The impact of recording studios on Cantopop production since the 1960s and how technological advancement has shaped the re-development of recording studios in Hong Kong**

From the 1960s-2000s, Cantopop music songs were produced and dominated by large studios such as PolyGram, S&R, D&M, and Avon Recording Studio. The cooperation between composers, arrangers, singers, producers, and sound engineers facilitated the production of Cantopop. However, due to the decline of the Cantopop music business after the millennium and technological advancement, many large recording studios were closed, resulting in the emergence of small-scale or home studios. Many music producers started to set up their own studios to produce music because of the advancement of music technology. Moreover, recording studios in the city have had to adapt to ensure their survival. Consequently, many recording studios in Hong Kong have strategically relocated to industrial premises to reduce rental costs. These studios are predominantly owned by producers, with some opting for shared ownership arrangements to further reduce costs. Additionally, many studios in the region have evolved to become multifunctional spaces, catering to a diverse range of production needs. The development of recording studios in Hong Kong is intricately tied to the economic climate, especially the fluctuating rental prices in the city. As evidenced by the shifts in studio ownership and size following economic downturns like the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the recent impact of the 2020 pandemic, the adaptability of the recording studio industry in Hong Kong underscores its resilience and responsiveness to changing economic conditions.

The above-mentioned major findings and research outcome were presented in an article which has been submitted to the *Popular Music and Society Journal*.

Financial support from RGC was acknowledged.

#### 2. **The role and the most important part of recording studios**

Recording studios played an important role in contributing to the music production of Cantopop songs before the 2010s. Most of the interviewees indicated that the role of the studio was not as important as in the past due to the evolution of music technology. The majority of the audience could accept this level of sound quality because they could hardly distinguish the difference in sound quality if they listened to songs on a smart phone or other portable devices. Due to technological advancement, producers were not necessarily to do the recording in a large, well-equipped studio to obtain high quality of acoustics but rather to do the recording at their self-owned studios or home studios because they opined that the difference in the sound quality was not obvious and trivial. Although the role of recording studios was getting less important, the interviewees claimed that large studios still held significant and essential values for the music industry. In addition, most of the interviewees pointed out that the most important thing of the studio was not the place and the gears/equipment but the 'people', which included composers, arrangers, singers, producers, and sound engineers. They actively engaged in the creativity process and contributed to music production through their pursuit of sound, techniques, and professionalism.

The above-mentioned major findings and research outcome were presented in the following two conferences:

1. “International Symposium on Business and Social Sciences” held in Taipei, Taiwan in June 2023.
2. “International Conference on Social Science and Business” held in Okinawa, Japan in July 2023.

Financial support from RGC was acknowledged.

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

The initial findings of the research on Hong Kong's recording studios provide a foundation for several potential avenues for further development:

1. **Technological Advancements**  
Investigate how the adoption of new technologies, such as virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI), and advanced sound engineering software, affects the operations and services of recording studios in Hong Kong.
2. **Cultural Impact Analysis**  
Explore the role of recording studios in shaping local music culture and the dissemination of Cantonese and other regional music styles both domestically and internationally.
3. **Education and Skill Development**  
Look into the relationship between recording studios and educational institutions, and how this relationship contributes to skill development and professional training within the industry.
4. **In-depth Case Studies**  
Compile detailed case studies of successful and unsuccessful recording studios to identify key factors that contribute to their respective outcomes.
5. **Policy Recommendation**  
Based on the findings, suggest policy recommendations that could support the growth and development of recording studios in the region.

Each of these potential areas for further research could help to build a more comprehensive understanding of the recording studio landscape in Hong Kong and contribute to the strategic development of the industry.

## 7. Layman's Summary

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

When we talk about Cantopop, only lyricists, singers and composers are always recognized, but music producers and arrangers are seldom mentioned, and sound and recording engineers are even left out. There is much literature about the Cantopop development in Hong Kong of which many studies in this area focus only on the development of lyrics. Therefore, the technical parts such as recording studios, how Cantopop songs are produced by music producers, and what sound engineers have to do in the studios are neglected in the society and in the academia.

This research project engages with composers, arrangers, singers, producers, and sound engineers to delve into the “unseen” role of recording studios that contribute the development of Cantopop industry. Primary and secondary sources are collected and summarized in the research project, these findings should be preserved as it would facilitate future research on this topic and could guide the readers to have an all-round understanding of the Cantopop development in Hong Kong.

**Part C: Research Output****8. 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)						
		√		TSANG Edmond / LI Ka Leung Emil	Recording Studios in Hong Kong: Struggling for Survival After the Decline of Cantopop / Popular Music and Society	No	Yes	Yes	NA

**9. 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 (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)
June/2023/ Minnesota	The Transformation of Recording Studios in Hong Kong after the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997	XXII Biennial IASPM International Conference 2023	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

June/ 2023/ Taipei	Voices from the field: what role does music technology training play in the curriculum design of music undergraduate degree programmes in Hong Kong?	International Symposium on Business and Social Sciences	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
July/ 2023/ Okinawa	Sustainable development of recording studios in Hong Kong after the millennium	International Conference on Social Science and Business	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

### 10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning

*(Please elaborate)*

The research experience and results have been incorporated into the teaching areas of 1) a General Education Elective Module entitled “GEE5421 Music Technology, Creativity & Production” in THEi; and 2) a General Education Elective Course entitled “GTCU2026 Hearing Hong Kong's Past and Present through Cantopop” in HKBU.

### 11. 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	N/A	N/A	N/A

### 12. Other Impact

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

This research project is a collaborative work between the Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong and The Hong Kong Baptist University.

**13. Statistics on Research Outputs**

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

**14. Public Access Of Completion Report**

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

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