



CONTEMPORARY EAST ASIAN  
VISUAL CULTURES, SOCIETIES AND POLITICS



# *It's My Party*

Tat Ming Pair and the Postcolonial Politics of  
Popular Music in Hong Kong

Yiu Fai Chow  
Jeroen de Kloet  
Leonie Schmidt

OPEN ACCESS

palgrave  
macmillan

# Contemporary East Asian Visual Cultures, Societies and Politics

## Series Editors

Paul Gladston, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW, Australia  
Frank Vigneron, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, New  
Territories, Hong Kong  
Yeewan Koon, University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong Island,  
Hong Kong  
Lynne Howarth-Gladston, Sydney, NSW, Australia  
Chunchen Wang, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China

## Editorial Board

Jason Kuo, University of Maryland, Baltimore, College Park, MD, USA  
Christopher Lupke, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada  
Paul Manfredi, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA  
Ted Snell, University of Western Australia, Perth, WA, Australia  
Hongwei Bao, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK  
Ting Chang, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK  
Gerald Cipriani, National University of Ireland, Galway, Galway, Ireland  
Katie Hill, Sotheby's Institute of Art, London, UK  
Birgit Hopfener, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON, Canada  
Takako Itoh, University of Toyama, Toyama, Japan  
Darren Jorgensen, University of Western Australia, Perth, WA, Australia  
Beccy Kennedy, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK  
Franziska Koch, Heidelberg University, Heidelberg, Germany  
Taliesin Thomas, AW Asia, New York, NY, USA  
Wei-Hsiu Tung, National University of Tainan, Tainan, Taiwan  
Ming Turner, National Cheng Kung University, Tainan, Taiwan  
Meiqin Wang, California State University, Northridge, Los Angeles, CA,  
USA  
Yungwen Yao, Tatung University, Taipei City, Taiwan  
Bo Zheng, City University of Hong Kong, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong

This series brings together diverse perspectives on present-day relationships between East Asian visual cultures, societies and politics. Its scope extends to visual cultures produced, disseminated and received/consumed in East Asia – comprising North and South Korea, Mongolia, Japan, mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan – as well as related diasporas world-wide, and to all aspects of culture expressed through visual images, including across perceived boundaries between high and popular culture and the use of traditional and contemporary media. Taken into critical account are cultural, social and political ecologies currently shaped by geopolitical borders across the East Asia region in addition to their varied intersections with an increasingly trans-cultural world. The series emphasizes the importance of visual cultures in the critical investigation of contemporary socio-political issues relating to, for example, identity, social inequality, decoloniality and the environment. The editors welcome contributions from early career and established researchers.

Yiu Fai Chow · Jeroen de Kloet ·  
Leonie Schmidt

# It's My Party

Tat Ming Pair and the Postcolonial Politics of  
Popular Music in Hong Kong

palgrave  
macmillan

Yiu Fai Chow  
Department of Humanities  
and Creative Writing  
Hong Kong Baptist University  
Hong Kong, China

Jeroen de Kloet  
Department of Media Studies  
University of Amsterdam  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Leonie Schmidt  
Department of Media Studies  
University of Amsterdam  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands



ISSN 2662-7701 ISSN 2662-771X (electronic)  
Contemporary East Asian Visual Cultures, Societies and Politics  
ISBN 978-981-99-6709-4 ISBN 978-981-99-6710-0 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-6710-0>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2024. This book is an open access publication.

**Open Access** This book is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this book are included in the book's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the book's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover credit: Wing Shya

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd.  
The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

Paper in this product is recyclable.



This book includes extensively revised excerpts from the following essays:  
Leonie Schmidt, Yiu Fai Chow and Jeroen de Kloet. “From handover to  
leftover – Tatming, Umbrellas, and the postcolonial ruins of Hong  
Kong.” *Situations* 10.1 (2017): 119–145. (chapter 3)

Chow Yiu Fai and Jeroen de Kloet. “Out in the Undercurrents: Queer  
Politics in Hong Kong Popular Music.” In F. Maus & S. Whiteley (eds.)  
*Oxford Handbook on Queerness and Music*. 2019. Oxford: Oxford  
University Press: 584–602. (chapter 4)

Chow Yiu Fai, Jeroen de Kloet and Leonie Schmidt. Performing the  
Political: Reflections on Tatming Meeting George Orwell in 2017. In A.  
Fung & A. Chik (eds.) *Made in Hong Kong: Studies in Popular Music*.  
2020. Routledge Global Popular Music Series, London: Routledge:  
168–180. (chapter 5)

We are grateful to the publishers and the journal for allowing us to use  
these materials.

Funded by the European Union (ERC-2022-Advanced, Resilient Cultures—Music, Art, and Cinema in Mainland China and Hong Kong (RESCUE), ERC grant agreement no 101097553.). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



**Funded by  
the European Union**



**European Research Council**  
Established by the European Commission



# PROLOGUE: HONG KONG AND TAT MING PAIR

<i>Hong Kong</i>		<i>Tat Ming Pair</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First authorised protest in three years' time</li> <li>- Hong Kong hosted the first Gay Games in Asia in November, together with Mexico City</li> <li>- According to <i>Independent Media</i>, 259 people were arrested under National Security Law during the first three years of its implementation</li> </ul>	2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anthony Wong cancelled his scheduled solo concerts after the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre withdrew its lease agreement</li> <li>- Anthony Wong held <i>SONG OF WANDERERS: ANTHONY WONG LIVE</i> 黃耀明邊走邊唱 in Taiwan and Europe</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- John Lee Ka-chiu became the Chief Executive of Hong Kong</li> <li>- Education Bureau announced that a quarter of teaching time for primary education should be spent on patriotism and national security</li> <li>- Queen Elizabeth II passed away</li> <li>- Britain announced that any Hong Kong person born after 1997 is eligible to apply for British National (Overseas) passport on the condition that at least one parent already holds a BNO passport</li> </ul>	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Online event <i>TAT MING PAIR REPLAY 1+2 WATCH PARTY</i> 達明一派 <i>REPLAY 1+2 WATCH PARTY</i> to celebrate Tat Ming's 36th anniversary</li> <li>- Tats Lau published his memoir</li> </ul>

(continued)

(continued)

<i>Hong Kong</i>		<i>Tat Ming Pair</i>
– Tong Ying-kit became the first person convicted under National Security Law	2021	– Anthony Wong arrested for “corrupt conduct”; charges were dropped subsequently
– Education Bureau has announced new guideline about National Flag ceremonies to all Hong Kong schools		– Released the single “My Boyfriend 我的男朋友”
		– Released album <i>TM+M DECADE</i>
		– Held <i>TAT MING PAIR REPLAY LIVE 2021 CONCERT 達明一派 REPLAY LIVE 2021</i> to celebrate their 35 <sup>th</sup> anniversary
– COVID-19 outbreak	2020	– Held <i>TAT MING PAIR REPLAY CONCERT 達明一派 REPLAY LIVE</i> , at Queen Elizabeth Stadium
– National Anthem Ordinance came into effect		– Released the single “All Over the World 今天世上所有地方”
– National Security Law came into effect; Tong Ying-kit became the first person to be charged under the new law		
– Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill protests	2019	– In April, Tat Ming Pair’s music was removed from Apple Music and other music streaming sites in mainland China
		– Released the single “Memory Is a Crime 回憶有罪,” in conjunction with the 30 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the student movement in mainland China. The song topped the iTunes chart in Hong Kong but was banned immediately in mainland China
	2018	– Awarded the Golden Needle Award in Top Ten Chinese Gold Songs Awards sponsored by RTHK as a celebration of their lifetime achievements in music
– Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor became the Chief Executive of Hong Kong	2017	– Held the concert <i>TAT MING PAIR 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY LIVE CONCERT 達明卅一派對</i> , at Hong Kong Coliseum
– Mong Kok civil unrest, also known as Fishball Revolution	2016	
– Pro-democracy protests known as Umbrella Movement to oppose the 31 August Decision made by the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress	2014	

(continued)

(continued)

<i>Hong Kong</i>		<i>Tat Ming Pair</i>
– Leung Chun-ying became the Chief Executive of Hong Kong	2012	– Reunited for the single, “It’s My Party”, to celebrate their 25 <sup>th</sup> anniversary
– Anti-national education protests		– Held <i>ROUND AND ROUND AND ROUND 兜兜轉轉演演唱會</i> , at Hong Kong Coliseum
– Donald Tsang Yam-kuen became the Chief Executive of Hong Kong	2005	– Released the album <i>The Party</i> for their 20 <sup>th</sup> anniversary
	2004	– Reunited for the single, “Blessed Are the Lonely Ones 寂寞的人有福了”
		– Held <i>SERVE FOR THE PEOPLE CONCERT 為人民服務演演唱會</i> , at Hong Kong Coliseum
– SARS outbreak	2003	
– 500,000 citizens marched on 1 July to oppose the legislation of Article 23 of Hong Kong Basic Law		
– The First Interpretation of Hong Kong Basic Law due to the right of abode in Hong Kong	1999	
– Handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China	1997	
– Tung Chee-hwa took up the position as the first Chief Executive of Hong Kong	1996	– Reunion
		– Awarded with Song of the Year in Ultimate Song Chart Awards Presentation with “One Forbidden Fruit a Day 每日一禁果”
		– Release of seventh album, <i>Viva! Viva! Viva! 萬歲!萬歲!萬萬歲!</i>
		– Staging their first large-scale concert, <i>VIVA! VIVA! VIVA! CONCERT 萬歲萬歲萬萬歲演演唱會</i> , at Queen Elizabeth Stadium
– Christopher Francis Patten took up the position of the last Governor of Hong Kong	1992	
	1991	– Suspension of Tat Ming Pair as a musical formation, and the two members continued their solo careers

(continued)

(continued)

<i>Hong Kong</i>		<i>Tat Ming Pair</i>
- The Hong Kong Basic Law was issued by the National People's Congress	1990	- Release of sixth album, <i>Nerves</i> 神經 - Holding their first concert, <i>I LOVE YOU — TAT MING PAIR CONCERT</i> , at Hong Kong Coliseum
- Student movement in mainland China	1989	- Release of fifth album, <i>Fallen Angel</i> 意難平
	1988	- Release of third EP, <i>Tender Is the Night</i> 夜未央 - Release of fourth album, <i>Do You Still Love Me?</i> 你還愛我嗎?
	1987	- Release of second EP, <i>Tat Ming Pair Remix</i> 達明一派 Remix - Release of second album, <i>The Story of the Stone</i> 石頭記 - Release of third album, <i>I'm Waiting for Your Return</i> 我等着你回來
	1986	- Release of first EP, <i>Tat Ming Pair</i> 達明一派 - Release of first album, <i>Tat Ming Pair II</i> 達明一派II
	1985	- Tat Ming Pair was officially formed and signed to PolyGram Records Ltd. (Hong Kong) - Released debut single "Keep Searching 繼續追尋" in September
- Signing of Sino-British Joint Declaration over the future of Hong Kong	1984	- Tats Lau posted an advertisement on to recruit music partner. Anthony Wong responded and sang "Careless Whisper" and "Time (Clock of the Heart)" in the recruitment interview

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is probably dangerous to write about anyone, about anything, that one loves.

In our case: Tat Ming Pair, and the city of Hong Kong. While we indeed dispend any claim to objectivity or critical distance, we do hope to convince you, dear reader, of our reasons to embark on a project that is so very close, and so very challenging, to us. There are so many reasons. It reflects our commitment to Asian music cultures. It underlines our paradoxical eagerness to trouble Eurocentric knowledge production and be part of it. It reiterates our trust in writing and in writing together. It cherishes and nourishes our stubbornness that we can still do something. Ultimately, it attests to our—dare we repeat the cliched word—love, quite simply, for the duo, for Cantopop, for music, for Hong Kong. But there is much more to this book than the band and the city, more than pop and politics, more than love. There is fear, anger, frustration, and also strength, hope, fun. This book is above all the outcome of a complex entanglement between sounds, images, words, places, and people. There are so many people we want to thank, without whom this book would not even have started.

We thank Anthony Wong and Tats Lau, for the music, the joy, and the resilience they have been showing over the past 30 years, and for their support to this book project. The party has not ended. We remember our backstage encounters after their concerts, and we look forward to seeing them on stage again. We are grateful to Wallace Kwok and Duncan Wong

for their willingness to share. People close to the duo have helped us thinking through the impact of Tat Ming; in particular, we want to thank Atom Alicia C (Atom Cheung), Chi Chung (Wong Chi Chung), Eman Lam, Funkie, Gaybird (Keith Leung), Jason Choi, Jan Curious, Lam Ah P (Pang Lam), Number 6 (Mau Hou Cheong), Passer-by, and Serrini (Ka Yan Leung). We want to thank the fans, who impressed us time and again with their commitment to Tat Ming. For all the archival materials, we thank Chan Fai Hung, Dan Tam, Immanuel Kan, Leumas To, Tat Ming Archive, and Wing Shya, who made us realise we are not alone in our fascination.

Without the help of Rui Wang, Kathy Pui Shuen Ng, and Sze Long Chan, we would not have been able to collect all the materials. We want to thank especially Kathy for all the work she did at the final stage of the project, while pursuing her studies in France. We hope it did not distract too much from the cooking course.

Friends and colleagues in Hong Kong and Beijing gave feedback and made life so much more cheerful. For this we want to thank Chester Wai Man Chan, Kiu Kin Chan, Connie Pui Mui Cheng, Gladys Pak Lei Chong, Yiu-wai Chu, John Nguyet Erni, Anthony Fung, Xiao Han, Peter Ho, Lucetta Kam, Travis Kong, Dickson Lam, Isaac Leung, Jian Lin, Pan Lü, Yin Shan Lo, Kwai Cheung Lo and the Department of Humanities and Creative Writing of Hong Kong Baptist University, Sylvie Luk, Kevin May, Laikwan Pang, Lena Scheen, Daisy Tam, Jia Tan, Maggie Wang (better known as Wang Laoshi), and Qian Zhang.

Back in the Netherlands we are grateful to our colleagues and friends, many of whom are at the Department of Media Studies of the University of Amsterdam, for their support. We want to thank, in particular, Ien Ang, the Beijing Dance Group, Pat Crowley, José van Dijck, Elske Gerritsen, Marten Hidma, Misha Kavka, Eloë Kingma, Joke Hermes, Gerdien Kerssies, Jaap Kooijman, Kam Wai Kui, Kam Wing Ling, Andrea Meuzelaar, Esther Peeren, Patricia Pisters, Thomas Poell, Gideon Spanjar, Jan Teurlings, Tommy Tse, Simpson Tse, Olav Velthuis, Marcel Vergunst, Laura Vermeeren, Frank van Vree, Maryn Wilkinson, and Yvette Wong.

In Asia and Europe, we met along the way of writing this book frequently with both Giseline Kuipers and Song Hwee Lim. We thank Giseline for her ongoing support, relentless curiosity about nearly everything, and openness and willingness to share research ideas and

perspectives. We thank Song for his always witty and yet on-the-spot interventions, his infinite commitment to slowness, and our shared fascination for things as trivial and important as fashion.

We want to thank our PhD students that have inspired us along the way.

We thank the European Research Council for so generously funding the open access version of this book under the *Resilient Cultures—Music, Art, and Cinema in Mainland China and Hong Kong* (RESCUE) project.

We want to thank Palgrave, and in particular Jacob Dreyer for his trust, patience, and belief in this project. We thank Arun Kumar Anbalagan for turning a fuzzy manuscript into a book. Finally, we want to thank you, the reader. We are aware that acknowledgements are the most read part of a book, and also the most scary for us, as we have likely forgotten some dear friends and colleagues. Our apologies! But we do hope to tempt you to read on, and, even better, to start listening to the music of Tat Ming—that is, if you have not started yet. As we really need to party on, especially in our current times.

Yiu Fai Chow  
Jeroen de Kloet  
Leonie Schmidt

## NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND ROMANISATION

Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Chinese materials are ours. Chinese names are romanised conforming to customs in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. For consistency with conventions in English-language publications and to avoid confusion among non-Chinese speaking readers, these names are put down with given names first, followed by family names (although it should be the other way round in Chinese naming practices). Exceptions are made when the persons concerned are well-known and their Chinese names will be listed accordingly, such as Wong Kar-wai (family name first, in this case).



# CONTENTS

<b>1 Documenting the Past, Sustaining the Present, Making the Future</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Tat+Ming</i>	5
<i>Documenting the Past</i>	8
<i>Sustaining the Present</i>	12
<i>Making the Future</i>	17
<i>Pop and Politics</i>	20
<i>The Rest</i>	23
<i>References</i>	26
<b>2 Colonial Nostalgia and Postcolonial Longings</b>	<b>35</b>
<i>Post and Pop</i>	36
<i>Method</i>	41
<i>Hong Kong Pop</i>	43
<i>Hong Kong</i>	44
<i>Golden Era</i>	48
<i>Multiple-Media Practices</i>	51
<i>Rise of China</i>	55
<i>Contingency</i>	59
<i>References</i>	63
<b>3 The Worst of Times, The Best of Music</b>	<b>71</b>
<i>The Past: Geopolitics and the Everyday</i>	79
<i>The Present: City of Postcolonial Ruins</i>	87

	<i>The Future: It's My Party</i>	95
	<i>Ruminating on the Ruins</i>	102
	<i>References</i>	104
<b>4</b>	<b>Forbidden Love, Forgetting Gender</b>	109
	<i>On Tongzhi and Ku'er</i>	113
	<i>Queering Tat Ming</i>	116
	<i>On the Year of Coming Out</i>	123
	<i>After the Surprise, Holding Our Breath</i>	129
	<i>References</i>	133
<b>5</b>	<b>"It's My Party"</b>	137
	<i>Tat Ming Pair, Popular Music, and Politics</i>	137
	<i>Production Analysis</i>	139
	<i>Music and Politics</i>	142
	<i>The Contingent</i>	145
	<i>The Personal</i>	150
	<i>The Calibrational</i>	155
	<i>Conclusion</i>	159
	<i>References</i>	161
<b>6</b>	<b>1 + 1 = ?</b>	165
	<i>What to Study?</i>	167
	<i>Whom to Study?</i>	168
	<i>Where to Study?</i>	169
	<i>Introducing Them</i>	170
	<i>Encounters</i>	174
	<i>Caveats</i>	176
	<i>Legacy</i>	178
	<i>Effect</i>	178
	<i>Affect</i>	186
	<i>Together</i>	190
	<i>References</i>	193
<b>7</b>	<b>We Think We Should Stop Now</b>	197
	<b>Appendix: Tat Ming Pair's Music History</b>	211
	<b>Index</b>	219

# LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.1	The Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, October 18, 2014 (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	73
Fig. 3.2	The world as controlled by the British Pound (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	80
Fig. 3.3	Numbers and flowcharts on the rise of China and the movements of Chinese people (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	80
Fig. 3.4	The Chinese flag supplanting the US flag (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	81
Fig. 3.5	The world as controlled by the Chinese Yuan (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	81
Fig. 3.6	Tat Ming in newspaper outfit (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	83
Fig. 3.7	Musician's outfits (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	84
Fig. 3.8	The non-occupied streets of Hong Kong (Screenshot from concert recording)	85
Fig. 3.9	Tat Ming on the street (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	86
Fig. 3.10	A video screen displaying Hong Kong's skyline (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	89
Fig. 3.11	Anthony Wong's pose at the beginning of the performance (Screenshot from concert recording)	90
Fig. 3.12	The Backdrop to the performance (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	90
Fig. 3.13	The fireworks light up the dark sky (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	91

Fig. 3.14	The skyscrapers begin to collapse (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	91
Fig. 3.15	The city is left in ruins (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	91
Fig. 3.16	And the leftovers start to fragment (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	92
Fig. 3.17	The fragments disappear as they are blown towards the spectators (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	92
Fig. 3.18	Display of brands (Screenshot from concert recording)	93
Fig. 3.19	Brands slowly burning down (Screenshot from concert recording)	94
Fig. 3.20	Anthony Wong in costume (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	97
Fig. 3.21	“God loves Hong Kong” (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	98
Fig. 3.22	“Anthony Wong is tongzhi” (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	99
Fig. 3.23	Tat Ming performing “It’s My Party” in 2017 (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	101
Fig. 3.24	The carnivalesque stage (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	101
Fig. 4.1	Rainbow flags at the MAXX music festival, Beijing (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	110
Fig. 4.2	Anthony Wong posing for one of his album cover photos (Courtesy of Wing Shya)	117
Fig. 4.3	Anthony Wong in his “coming out” concert (Courtesy of Dan Ho)	118
Fig. 4.4	Shot from MV of “Forget He Is She”	120
Fig. 5.1	The 2017 Tat Ming concert (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	140
Fig. 5.2	The <i>IQ84</i> moon (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	149
Fig. 5.3	Video image of Tobias Gremmler’s animation during the show (Photo by Jeroen de Kloet)	150



## Documenting the Past, Sustaining the Present, Making the Future

Dear Tats, dear Anthony, how are you?

We've been listening to the new CD of Tat Ming. With intense feelings. Different from the full, conceptual albums of *Viva! Viva! Viva!* released in 1996, and of *The Party* in 2005, the 2021 *Decade* has only five tracks. Also, the styles of the song have changed. From satire in “It’s My Party”,<sup>1</sup> to heaviness in “Memory Is a Crime 回憶有罪”<sup>2</sup> and “All Over the World 今天世上所有地方.”<sup>3</sup> And in Anthony’s solo number “Super-duper 誇啦啦,”<sup>4</sup> you can’t even say anything. What we can do is to chant “lalala”.<sup>5</sup> It’s like, if we follow the timeline of these songs, we can see clearly what has happened to Hong Kong, what has happened to Tat Ming, in the past ten years. On the backside of the lyrics sheet, we see Anthony’s photo, and an emergency stop. Sometimes, we just hope that Hong Kong has such an emergency stop.

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJgMDxVPfbU>.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZaE6jAwOM4>.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twWaDCM9WgU>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGsnerouLM8>.

<sup>5</sup> Instead of words, parts of the lyrics are sung with sounds: “lalala,” suggesting the impossibility of speech.

This CD is titled *Decade*, we feel that it's the best irony Tat Ming could give to this era. Within one decade, they could only release five songs. But we are still willing to call it Tat Ming's decade, a difficult decade. Anthony said he would love to sing till he's eighty. We wish Tat Ming could sing even when they are older than eighty.

Two fans from Guangzhou, mainland China<sup>6</sup>

We begin this book with a remarkable episode, in April 2022. Tat Ming Pair,<sup>7</sup> a Hong Kong electronic duo formed in 1985, was hosting an online screening of their two rounds of *REPLAY* concerts, in 2020 and 2021. After the screening, some fans were invited to join and welcome to chat with the duo's members, Anthony Wong Yiu Ming and Tats Lau Yee Tat. This event, overcoming the stringent entry and quarantine measures on both sides of the borders, attracted many VPN-savvy fans from mainland China, who would have liked to, but could not possibly come to Hong Kong, to attend the concerts in person. In fact, they have been missing Tat Ming not only due to COVID-19 barriers, but, more fundamentally and for a much longer period of time, to political duress. In mainland China, Tat Ming has been effectively banned from performing, their music erased from Chinese online platforms, and any social media posts naming them readily censored. Notwithstanding the potential risk, these two fans from Guangzhou decided to write a letter—via a route as circuitous as it is indicative of the urge to express themselves. They managed to get in touch with someone, in Beijing, whom they learned was among the few fans selected to join the chatting session. They passed the letter to him. There he was, from Beijing, reading out this letter to Tat Ming in Hong Kong, not in the official Chinese language of Putonghua, but in the local tongue of Cantonese.

We find this episode remarkable, and we cited the letter in full, because we believe they are gesturing towards the three striated—distinct and yet intertwined, above all, living—attempts in our writing of this book. First, as the fans note in their letter, to follow what has happened to the music

<sup>6</sup> The letter was written in Chinese and translated by one of the authors, Yiu Fai Chow. Unless otherwise specified, all translations in this book were done likewise. Its full version was obtained from the Beijing fan mentioned later in the text, and the episode was reconstructed via private correspondences.

<sup>7</sup> We will use Tat Ming Pair, the full name of the duo, the first time it appears in the chapter. Thereafter, we will revert to Tat Ming, the name usually and fondly used by fans.

of Tat Ming is to trace “what has happened to Hong Kong” at large. In this book, we attempt not only to document and scrutinise the history of a particular music formation; we attempt to write the history of the city itself, from colonial times, through the Handover from British to Chinese rule in 1997, to the current tension under the National Security Law (NSL) enacted in 2020, when acts of remembering may indeed, to cite the song title “Memory Is a Crime,” be a sinful act, a crime. Indexing the complexity of Hong Kong’s postcoloniality, in September 2022, Hong Kong people were seen as queuing up outside the British Consulate to pay their last respects to Queen Elizabeth II, sparking off “neo-colonial” accusations and defence for anti-establishment sentiments (Magramo 2022). We attempt to write the history of the city through the prism of popular music, focusing on one band. Second, our writing of Tat Ming, given its political sensitivity, is at the same time an attempt to write the present of Hong Kong, or to put it more accurately, to write the present in order to ensure the present remains present, not obfuscated, not obliterated. In their letter, the two fans posit a linear analysis of the changing styles of Tat Ming in the last years, from satire, heaviness to “you can’t even say anything.” We do not need to agree entirely with their analysis; suffice it to note that the need to find ways to write the unspeakable and the unspoken in the present conjuncture has become more urgent than ever.<sup>8</sup> We, academics, are no exception as academic freedom is increasingly under duress (Davis 2022). The “lalala,” that part of the lyrics alluded by the fans, is hardly signifying nothing, definitely full of sound and fury. Third, while the fans have laid out a rather bleak scenario, bleakness alone does not do justice to the very act of writing the letter and the very eventuality that the fans have reached Tat Ming. Despite, or precisely because of, the “difficult decade,” the fans still urge Tat Ming to continue, as if their sadness in what politics has done to music evokes some kind of hope in what music can do to politics. We are reminded to write Tat Ming as an attempt to write the future, of themselves, of the city.

<sup>8</sup> Just a few days before we wrote this part of the text, five speech therapists were sentenced to nineteen months’ imprisonment under the National Security Law. They were charged with publishing a children’s book series, between June 2020 and March 2021, depicting the struggles between a village sheep and a group of intruding wolves. The judge considered the book series a “brainwashing exercise,” indoctrinating children in separatist ideology (Wong 2022). The conviction was but a latest instance of a series of similar cases in Hong Kong.

Writing the past, the present and the future—that will be our remit in writing popular music and politics. We use the word “attempt” precisely for its indecisiveness; we know what we ought to do, but we know much less how. Central to this exploration is the nagging question: Why does popular music matter? Why does Tat Ming matter? Why does a book about Tat Ming matter? What follows in this book will be an elaborate exegesis of our curt reply for now: it matters in/to the past, in/to the present, and in/to the future—it documents the past, it sustains the present, it makes the future. Indeed, the verbs in this sentence can be mingled. We are attempting a way of writing pop, that is tried and safe, as the pop we are writing is embedded in a city whose politics demands increasingly ingenuity, experimentation, and risk-taking. In fact, we consider this book’s relevance and resonance beyond the city; we take it primarily as a project of studying Tat Ming as a case and mobilising Hong Kong as method, to rethink the intricate relationships between politics and popular music in the wider context of the globalised times where collective action and creative practices are increasingly connected and mutually constitutive. In other words, how (far) does music impact on politics, and how (far) does politics impact on music? Given the specific context of Hong Kong politics, we are at the same time probing: How (far) does writing on music impact on politics, and how (far) does politics impact on writing on music?

In the following, we will prepare readers who are not familiar with the pop scene in Hong Kong with a short biographical account of Tat Ming. We will then expand our ideas of writing pop and politics in tandem with writing the past, the present, and the future—interlaced with a colonial and postcolonial account of Hong Kong, a rally to resilience and activism, and a dialogue with hope and future, all very makeshift. We continue with situating the current inquiry in fields of popular music and cultural studies. We align the inquiry to the growing body of scholarship that seeks to de-Westernise popular music studies, a field of knowledge production persistently dominated by Anglo-Saxon experience and publications. Finally, this attempt to tease out the empirical and theoretical potentials of one single popular music formation in a book-length study, covering not only its creative output (music) but also the production and reception aspects, will be put forward as a methodological intervention, a possible alternative approach to study popular music. This introductory chapter ends with presenting the organisation logic of the book and the gist of the subsequent chapters.