An artistic director as an auteur in contexts: the case study of Dr. Joanna Chan of Hong Kong repertory theatre (1986-1990)

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An Artistic Director as An *Auteur* in Contexts --

The Case Study of Dr. Joanna Chan of Hong Kong Repertory Theatre

(1986 – 1990)

TAO Siu Tip

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Prof. MAN Eva KW

Hong Kong Baptist University

December 2014
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation represents my own work which has been done after registration for the degree of PhD at Hong Kong Baptist University, and has not been previously included in a thesis or dissertation submitted to this or any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

Signature:_______________________

Date: December 2014
Abstract

The main objectives of this dissertation are: to research the theatrical term “artistic director”; and to investigate how an artistic director of a theatre troupe performs as an “auteur in contexts”. Through the case study of Dr. Joanna Chan (Chan), the second-ever artistic director of the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre (“the Rep / HKRep” / the Theatre), this dissertation examines the execution of her artistic directorship while she worked for a theatre company established and operated by the British colonial government. *Auteur* theories, Andrew Sarris’ in particular, are applied to investigate Chan’s creative works.

“Artistic director” is a relatively new term in drama history. No serious or special studies have been conducted on the position, despite the fact that the job-holder is the creative force of a theatre company – by no means a meagre role. This dissertation closely studies the artistic directorship of Chan as an “auteur in contexts” when she took up the position at HKRep during Hong Kong’s final decade under British rule, particularly after the Sino-British Joint Declaration had been signed. Taking advantage of special political and social contexts, and as a Catholic nun with a broadly exposed, overseas educational background and an established career in theatre, Chan created local discourses in Hong Kong as an “auteur in contexts” by writing original plays and setting up the Rep’s first-ever theme for its drama season – *Facing Deadlines*. The bold and unique offerings of the drama season she designed, along with her other artistic works, all explored individuals’ dilemmas, social anxieties, and the Hong Kong people’s conflicting identity, induced by “the 1997 deadline”. Her emphasis on writing and promoting original plays had greatly contributed to the shift in the Rep’s programming from purely artistic offerings to productions tinted with social agendas. Through first-hand information obtained by interviewing Chan, other industry insiders and drama critics; through close study of Chan’s plays for textual analyses; and through research carried out particularly in the Rep’s news clippings library, this case study investigates how Chan as an artistic director managed to carve out a space for herself, to display her own style as an “auteur in contexts” of the text of HKRep, and to influence the local drama scene while working under a system replete with governmental constraints as well as facing larger political, social and cultural changes in society.
This dissertation is dedicated to my family and Oliver.
Heartfelt thanks to all these wonderful people who have offered me assistance, encouragement and support in completing this dissertation.

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Introduction:

In Search of Artistic Directorship

It is interesting that none of the many theatre practitioners and artistic directors of local theatre companies I interviewed throughout the years I have worked on this dissertation could tell where or when the system of artistic directorship originated. Nor could anyone tell who the world’s first artistic director of a theatre company was. Throughout the research process, I have also noticed another interesting phenomenon: libraries and bookstores display thousands of books on various creative roles in the theatre discipline: actors, directors, playwrights, designers of different aspects of the stage such as sets, lighting, costumes, make-up, and so forth… Even theory books and textbooks on stage management and theatre administration can be found, but there is not a single book exclusively on the position of artistic director.

In *Theatre – an Introduction*, a comprehensive, “must-read” introductory book for theatre students written by Oscar G. Brockett (Brockett, 1982), the writer covers all of the most commonly found positions in a theatre production, and even includes a chapter on theatre practice as a profession. However, he does not touch on “artistic director”. When I checked old drama dictionaries published in the last

This aroused my curiosity. Artistic director is a key position in a theatre company. I knew that the position was a relatively new one compared with other roles in a traditional drama troupe. However, it was still surprising to me that the term hardly appeared in theatre literature, even in recent decades. The limited existing information on the role is therefore a serious lack, in the study of both drama and arts culture.

It must be admitted that such dearth, on the one hand, hinders research for this dissertation to some extent, because it makes it difficult to establish an authoritative, theoretical basis for its subject, i.e., the position of artistic director, as “artistic director” is a key word of this dissertation. On the other hand, the lack of previous studies increases the meaningfulness of this dissertation as it represents a pioneering effort into the investigation of this important subject.

Due to my past work experience, I am particularly interested in the roles, the functions, the contributions, the performances, and even the constraints of artistic directors of drama troupes. I worked for the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre (HKRep / the Rep / the Theatre), the largest and the oldest theatre organisation in Hong Kong, from to 2002 to 2007, as a “literary researcher”, a brand new position in Hong Kong
drama history. If one day a comprehensive Hong Kong drama history is written, I will thus have the honour of being cited as “the first-ever full-time literary researcher in Hong Kong theatre history”. My immediate supervisor, Fredric Mao (Mao), was artistic director of the Rep during my tenure. I also wore the hat of “assistant to the artistic director” for four years until I left the company in 2007. Following my departure, I was commissioned, as an external contractor, to be editor of the Rep, supervising production of its four publications from 2007 to 2008.

My theatre job in those years was filled with many interactions with artistic directors. Through my daily work, I became acquainted with the Rep’s previous artistic directors, Dr. Daniel S. P. Yang (Yang hereafter) and Dr. Joanna Chan (Chan hereafter); the company’s current artistic director, Anthony Chan Kam Kuen (Anthony Chan hereafter), and the artistic directors of other theatre companies from both the local and overseas drama scenes. As for my association with Mao, I provided him research and communications assistance; I listened to him talk about his ideas and aspirations; I witnessed the ups and downs he encountered in his position… and I observed and scrutinised his job functions in those few years.

An interesting image comes to mind: If we view the the endeavour of running a theatre company as similar to producing a book, then the artistic director of a troupe is the author who writes the text. He / she is responsible for the idea and the theme, the content, the layout and design, the style, the targeted readers, the length and the thickness… of the book, perhaps even the choice of colour for the book cover! He /
she is the author, or the *auteur*, of the theatre. Yang, the two Chans and Mao are hence the respective authors of various chapters of a book titled HKRep.

Although a study on the position of artistic director has never been written, that role is something I have become very familiar with, through my time with the HKRep. I did not learn about artistic directorship by reading books but through daily work, close observation and comments from the staff of the Theatre and insiders in the field. The learning process did not derive from theories but from actual practice; not from distant looking but from close observation; not from an ad hoc research project but from years of continuous study of the subject -- though I have to admit it was not done consciously or systematically. The vignettes of artistic directors in action were nevertheless always on my mind.

Dr. Pun Ngai (Pun hereafter), associate professor of the Social Sciences Department of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and Dr. Yee Lai Man (Yee hereafter), assistant professor in Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong, in their essay “Write before Writing” (my own translation)\(^1\) (Pun & Yee, 2003), an introduction to their edited work *Narrating Hong Kong Culture and Identity*, write:

Writing culture and identity is consequential. Not because history is the inheritance of experience or a contrast of the present time, but this

---

\(^1\) In this dissertation, many titles of publications were originally in Chinese and I translated them into English. I will mark them with “my own translation” after the translated titles for the rest of the dissertation.
era has changed speedily, so as space. We may not be able to stand firmly, neither is our mind clear enough. Writing, endows people a possibility of (having) comfort, a creation and a little me (my own translation\(^2\), p. xiii).

My work background mentioned earlier and some other factors have driven me to do something for the Hong Kong drama sector. One such factor is my response to Ackbar Abbas' (Abbas hereafter) remarks on his concept of "dis-appearance". To him, dis-appearance is "a consequence of speed". He writes, "We need something like Paul Virilio's argument about the relation of disappearance to speed, the kind of speed that comes in the wake of electronic technology and the mediatisation of the real, and the spatial distortions produced by this kind of speed" (Abbas, 1998, p. 9). My response to his argument is a feeling of strong agreement regarding the change of speed in the contemporary world as we are indeed now living in the era of electronic technology and mediatisation of the real as he suggests. I am afraid of losing the actual appearance of something that is important to Hong Kong drama. The other factor is the temptation to create "a little me", as Pun and Yee put it; to take up the mission of writing about and recording the development of local drama.

When I became a Ph. D student of the Humanities Programme (now Humanities and Creative Writing Department) at the Hong Kong Baptist University in 2008, I thought it would be valuable to study the position of artistic director, which

\(^2\) In this dissertation, many texts of publications were originally written in Chinese and I translated them in English. I will put “my own translation” after the translated texts for the rest of the dissertation.
is a subject that has always interested me, and I am quite familiar with. I also wanted to seize the chance to create a discourse on the subject because of my personal qualifications and to have the honour of starting very new research on this important topic.

As far as I know, no one else has deliberately and diligently done any substantial research on the subject. This study on the position of artistic director is therefore akin to uncovering a new treasure or exploring virgin land. The scope of my research is widely explorative. Since it is impossible to cover in one dissertation all the areas relevant to the study of artistic directorship, I have decided to concentrate on researching specific areas only, and a particular subject-person who interests me the most.

As I wrote earlier, no one could provide me with an answer to the question: “Who was the world’s first artistic director?” I therefore include a chapter in this dissertation asking “What is an artistic director?”, and discussing how this job title and position started and evolved. Although I have not been able to pinpoint the first person in the world to be called “artistic director”, tracing the history of the development of the position is already a meaningful research project, I believe.

My “artistic director” research does not only concentrate on historical facts but also covers other areas of the subject, including the definition, the role, the responsibilities as well as the ideal qualities of the job-holder in general. As the
dissertation focuses on the artistic directorship of HKRep, I have also researched the birth of the position at the HKRep, the Theatre’s requirements for it, and its uniqueness, especially in its colonial era when the subject of the case study of this dissertation, Chan, served the Rep. Chapter One therefore becomes the chapter answering the question – “What is an Artistic Director - Findings?”

As indicated earlier, this dissertation focuses on the artistic directorship of HKRep, in particular. HKRep is therefore another key word of this dissertation. The reasons for, and the objectives of, the Rep’s establishment by the colonial government naturally provide an essential background for the company’s artistic directors to understand how they should perform and execute their artistic directorships. Hence, “The Birth of HKRep” is the title of Chapter Two, illustrating the rationales and the objectives behind the founding of the first-ever professional theatre in Hong Kong history.

The reasons, the objectives, the vision, the planning and the calculations of a theatre established by the colonial government and operated by its executive staff are all important factors influencing how its artistic directors executed their artistic directorships. Therefore what I would like to investigate in this dissertation is: What are the roles, and the significance of those roles, of artistic directors as auteurs in the development of HKRep under the auspices of the colonial government? To be more specific, in terms of using Chan as the subject of the case study, the dissertation’s objective is to investigate how an artistic director, while facing political, social and
cultural changes in the society, managed to play a role as an “auteur in contexts” and to display her own style while working under a system constrained by the government as well as political, social and cultural influences.

There have been four artistic directors employed by HKRep since it was established in 1977, namely, Yang, Chan, Mao and Anthony Chan (the current artistic director since 2008). They have all contributed much to the development of the Rep and helped shape the Theatre in the past 31 years (the position was only set up in 1983) as well as making important artistic contributions to the theatre and the local drama scene. Their contributions are all worthy of academic study. I wish I could write about all four of them. However, because of the word-count limit for this dissertation, I can only choose one out of the four. After serious consideration, I chose Chan as the subject of the case study in my dissertation.

The main reason I chose Chan is that she is unique among all the artistic directors of the Rep. From the gender perspective, she is so far the only female artistic director in the Rep’s history. In terms of creativity, she was the only playwright artistic director in the first thirty years of the Rep’s history until Anthony Chan came along in 2008. As for her personal background, she is a Catholic nun, the only artistic director with such a strong religious background. In fact, she is the only such artistic director in all of Hong Kong’s theatre history. Yet it is worthwhile to note that she did not preach in any of her artistic works. In terms of strengthening
the troupe’s programming, Chan is the first HKRep artistic director to have put forth a theme for each drama season…

Still, these are not the reasons Chan attracted my attention. What makes her so special to me is that her tenure as artistic director occurred during one of the most, if not the most, significant periods in Hong Kong’s history as a whole. She took over the position from Yang in 1986, two years after the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed. But rather than only delivering on what she was supposed to do according to her job description – for example, to produce quality dramas written by international playwrights – she wrote her own plays for the Theatre and zealously promoted original playwriting in Hong Kong. Equally important, she did not simply write or direct plays for purely aesthetic reasons, but rather, all her plays responded to the political and social atmosphere of her time, voicing the feelings and thoughts of the Hong Kong people as well as commenting on and criticising the doings of the two governments and the people. She even set up the Rep’s first-ever – and very compelling – theme for its drama season the year after she became artistic director of the Rep: Facing Deadlines. 1997, as all Hongkongers – and history buffs – know, was the year (or “deadline”) that Hong Kong would be returned to the Mainland in a legitimate political context. Chan’s practice might not be worth special study if it happened today. However, it was indeed a very new, and provocative, action for her to line up the whole year’s drama programmes under one particular theme or concept, which also happened to be a sensitive issue for the Theatre she was serving – HKRep,
the Theatre established, funded and operated by the colonial government (before it was incorporated in 2001).

Dr. Lo Wai Luk (Lo hereafter), associate professor of Cinema School of Hong Kong Baptist University, drama theorist and critic, in his essay “The Cultural Politics and Aesthetic Practice of the Contemporary Hong Kong Theatre – with a Discussion on Several Local Postmodernist Paradigms” (my own translation) (2012) points out that one must understand its cultural politics when researching Hong Kong theatre. He writes,

The cultural politics of the Hong Kong theatre is to take theatre as a field for cultural discourse for viewing how the basic cultural issues, including cultural identity recognition and various issues concerning cultural substances (for instance, motif, language, discourse, classes, sex, body, history and Chineseness, etc.) are put into discourses, and to explore how the representation of the artistic means and aesthetics (for instance, theatrical action, theatre space, ensemble, multimedia, Hong Kong style, etc.) interact with Hong Kong culture. Above all, how Hong Kong theatre is culturally and aesthetically influenced by the respective cultures of Hong Kong and the Mainland, which connect with each other but with heterogeneities, is the most important (issue) for discussion (my own translation, p. 56).
According to Lo’s argument, all artistic directors of the Rep are responsible for “exploring the representation of the artistic means and aesthetics interacting with Hong Kong culture”. However, among all the artistic directors of the Rep, Chan is the only one who intentionally, visibly, zealously and continuously “(took) theatre as a field for cultural discourse”, proactively interacting with Hong Kong culture and exploring cultural identity recognition and cultural substances.

Chan was the first, and I am afraid is still the only, artistic director of the Rep who dared produce dramas that directly faced the political situation of the era, especially while she was working for the government. I am always impressed and attracted by her uniqueness. The first production she collaborated on with the Rep as guest director, *The Dowager Empress*, was staged in 1983 – exactly 30 years before this dissertation came into being. I think an appropriate amount of time has elapsed to allow us to scrutinise and to begin a thorough discourse on this special artistic director and her works. Hence, while discussing artistic authorship, I would like to use this unusual artistic director as the subject of the case study of this dissertation.

Pun and Yee in their essay “Write before Writing” (my own translation) write, “Writing history and identity is a searching process. At a time of information explosion, unlimited imagination and flooding theories, people of this generation have the urge to position themselves in both the territory of the old memory and the new virtual reality, in order not to lose themselves in the torrent of globalisation” (my

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3 This dissertation was completed and submitted in 2013 while revision was made in 2014.
own translation, Pun & Yee, 2003; p. xiii). Given the peculiarity of the context of HKRep, and despite the fact that her period of service to the Rep has been the shortest among all the artistic directors of the Theatre, Chan clearly tried her best to be the “author” of the Rep’s text and the centre of power and creative fountainhead of the Theatre. Yet, because of the various contexts she was situated in and the constraints she encountered, her artistic directorship in turn was affected by various forces as well. To map the history and the identity of Chan and to capture the mutual influences between her and the Theatre and the other forces hence make this research project interesting and meaningful. Through this dissertation, I hope to fulfill the following objectives:

1. to define the position of artistic director by researching its origin, roles, functions and significance in general and in particular to HKRep;
2. to research the rationale, objectives, functions, and significance of the birth of HKRep and its relation to its artistic directors;
3. to investigate how Chan as artistic director displayed her own style as an “auteur in contexts” writing the text of HKRep and influencing the local drama scene while working under contexts or situations with constraints by the government as well as facing political, social and cultural changes and influences in society;
4. to document an important page in Hong Kong drama history through the case study of Chan

As I mentioned at the beginning of my “Introduction” section, I worked for the Rep for almost seven years. I am also currently, a drama critic, a performing arts columnist, and an adjudicator of the Hong Kong Drama Award. My work experience has helped me build up a strong network in the Hong Kong drama circle. Therefore one of the main methods I am using for this dissertation is interviews. Because of the relationship I have established with many drama practitioners, I can take advantage of interviews to obtain first-hand information. The people whom I have interviewed are not limited to the Rep’s existing staff or actors, but also include seasoned drama practitioners who used to work with Chan and the Rep in the 1980s. I also interviewed the government executives who used to work for the Rep, other artistic directors of the Rep and other theatre companies, critics, and so forth.

A unique point worth mentioning is that because the people I have interviewed know me well, I managed to secure their total cooperation. They were all willing to provide me with solid and detailed facts with honest comments, so that the dissertation could be written in depth. There are some areas Chan had never touched on in her previous interviews that she was willing to reveal the facts about, for this academic project.
As the subject of the case study of this dissertation is a playwright herself, I examine her two masterpieces, *Before the Dawn Wind Rises* and *Crown Ourselves with Roses*. Through analysis of the plays in Chapter Four, I discuss her creative works. Besides reading the plays, I also watched the DVD version of the productions staged over a quarter of a century ago.

Books, essays and articles I have obtained from libraries also provide me with some representative theories as a tool for discussion in this dissertation. I will discuss those theories later in this “Introduction”.

As a matter of fact, research for this study covers not only books from regular libraries but also news clippings from HKRep’s own library. The materials include the Rep’s stage production advertisements and press releases; announcements; drama reviews; house programmes; interviews of artistic directors, playwrights, directors, actors, and other talents involved in drama production; writings of artistic directors; and press coverage… I am grateful to my contacts at the Rep for allowing me access to the company’s rich media library. The contents of the clippings have enriched this dissertation by way of strong support through documented facts and, by the same token, greater credibility.

Internet research was another method of information-gathering for this dissertation. As the roles and functions of an artistic director are not always discussed exhaustively in dedicated books but only touched upon on a piecemeal
basis in different places, the Internet has helped me greatly in acquiring more information and deeper insight.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this introduction, there are no books specially written on the position of artistic director that could be obtained from libraries or the Internet. Whenever and wherever I traveled in the past few years, I went to bookshops to look for books on the subject but my efforts were always in vain. I could only pick up one or two paragraphs from the very few theatre books in which the position is briefly mentioned, when I worked on Chapter One, “What is an Artistic Director – Findings?” Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfarb’s drama history book *Living Theatre - An Introduction to Theatre History* (Wilson & Goldfarb, 2008, p. 144), for example, has but a short paragraph defining the role of artistic director.

Therefore I could only start on this project in earnest by researching scattered articles on the position of artistic director, or pieces written by artistic directors themselves, or coverage of interviews with artistic directors, or meeting records among artistic directors, through searching the Internet and news clippings. Among all the materials I encountered through this means, the article “The Main Responsibilities of an Artistic Director” (my own translation, Yang, 1998) written by Yang, the first artistic director of HKRep, stood out and thus serves as a foundation piece for this discourse on artistic directorship. Not to be overlooked, local and overseas theatres’ job advertisements for artistic directors were another resource informing my discussion of the requirements and job duties of the position in general.
They could be just hard facts but I analyse the theatres’ rationales behind those requirements. Mainland China veteran dramaturge Lin Kehuan (Lin hereafter)’s article, “I being a Dramaturge” (my own translation, Lin, 2002), published in the *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, and an article “The Responsibilities of an Artistic Director” (my own translation, CPPCC, Shanghai Committee, 2002) penned by an anonymous from Shanghai also provide some insight into the role of artistic director. Taiwan-based chairperson of the National Theatre Concert Hall Ju Tzong-ching (Ju hereafter)’s article “Artistic Director: in Search of Directives and Presents Professionalism” (my own translation, 2011) and executive director of Taipei Arts Festival Wang Wen-yi (Wang hereafter)’s article “Focal Fun-seeking” (my own translation, 2002) have also been useful sources for writing that chapter. However, I consider the criteria suggested in these articles too broad for them to have any meaningful application to the discussion on the role of artistic director. I therefore build on some of their points to focus on the ideal qualities of artistic directors for HKRep.

For Chapter Two, “The Birth of HKRep”, I obtained historical facts about the Theatre mainly through its several anniversary commemoration books. Among these, I closely followed “When it all Began …” (Tao, 2007), written by me and published in the Rep’s 30th anniversary commemorative book, *HKRep 30*, in which I encapsulated the history of the theater troupe’s first 30 years in one essay. However, as the sole purpose of that piece was to record the essence of the history of the Rep, and also because the article was to appear in an official publication of the Theatre for
its anniversary event, even though my essay covered lots of historical facts and characteristics of each era of the Theatre, it admittedly lacked a critical perspective since criticism was not the reason for writing the essay. My dissertation therefore adds the value of critiquing the Rep’s operations and Chan’s performance as an artistic leader and her aesthetic works as a playwright and a director. Politics and culture critic Chin Wan (Chin hereafter)’s book *Hong Kong has Culture* (my own translation, Chin, 2008) provides information on cultural policy in the 1970s and 1980s. I used that information to create a cultural background for this dissertation. Some records from the book *Interview Records on Hong Kong Drama* (my own translation, Fong, 2000) written by Dr. Fong Chee Fun (Fong hereafter), acting president and provost of Hang Seng Management College, also gives information on the history of the local drama scene and reasons for the government’s establishment of the first-ever professional theatre in Hong Kong in the 1970s. These exist only as hard facts and so again I use these for building up the cultural background for this dissertation.

When I write the case study, the important literature sources for Chapters Three to Five are: articles written by Chan herself, published in newspapers, and the article “A Vision Far and Near” (Chan, 2013a) in the Rep’s 35th anniversary souvenir book *Legacy 35* (Ed. Poon, 2013); numerous printed and Internet interviews on Chan by the press; interview records on her by Fong’s work “Joanna Chan”, published in *Interview Records on Hong Kong Drama* (my own translation, Fong, 2000) and “a Legendary Playwright -- Joanna Chan” (my own translation, Tien, 2009) published in
As this research project is on the position of artistic director of a theatre, books and essays on theatre, especially the Hong Kong drama scene, are naturally used as references. For instance, Dr. Thomas Y. T. Luk (Luk hereafter), dean of the Humanities Department of Hang Seng Management College, in his book *Translation and Adaptation of Western Drama in Hong Kong: From Script to Stage* (Luk, 2007) and essay “Hong Kong Contemporary Drama of Post-colonialism” (my own translation) (Luk, 1988), provides very useful sources for, respectively, helping research the works and the arrangements of the Rep’s artistic directors and discussing how post-colonialism has affected the local theatre. Luk’s book mainly discusses translated plays and adapted plays staged in Hong Kong and talks very little about original plays produced and presented locally. But for the purpose of my study, his listing of five points explaining why the Rep focused on staging translated plays in its early days effectively suggests the reasons Chan could intensively promote original plays during her time. Lo’s three essays, namely “The Cultural Politics and Aesthetic Practice of the Contemporary Hong Kong Theatre – with a Discussion on Several
Local Postmodernist Paradigms” (my own translation, Lo, 2012), “A Wave-breaking Stage – Hong Kong Theatre in the 1980s” (my own translation, Lo, 2012b) and “The Exploration of Localism in Hong Kong Theatre” (my own translation, Lo, 2004), are all academic pieces researching how the local drama scene ran in the post-colonial era, and have provided additional insight for my writing of this dissertation. His essays, however, mainly present a macro view of the local drama scene in the 1980s and do not focus on HKRep’s peculiar situation. My dissertation will use the background supplied by Lo but narrow it down to concentrate on the Rep under Chan’s artistic leadership.

For more in-depth discussion, I use mainly two theories for setting up the theoretical framework of the dissertation: post-colonialism and auteur. The former is used for setting up a macro view of the political, social and cultural contexts in which Chan was situated when she was artistic director of HKRep. The latter is for exploring a micro area investigating how Chan displayed her own style as an “auteur in contexts” writing the text of HKRep during the colonial era.

For the former, as the dissertation focuses on Hong Kong’s post-colonialism, I studied Dr. Rey Chow (Chow hereafter)’s masterpiece “Between Colonizers: Hong Kong’s Post-colonial Self-writing in the 1990s” (Chow, 1998) and Abbas’s two essays “Writing Hong Kong” and “Culture in a Space of Disappearance” published in his book Hong Kong – Culture and the Politics of Disappearance (Abbas, 1998). I chose these two scholars’ works because they both lived in Hong Kong previously,
know the uniqueness of Hong Kong post-colonialism well and have done much research on various aspects of Hong Kong culture. However, their research studies are mainly on writing, architecture, music and cinema, with next to nothing on the local drama scene. So I hope to use my dissertation – and some of the ideas put forth by the abovementioned two scholars – to investigate the ‘missing’ performing art form in Hong Kong. Many other essays and books on post-colonialism, including the book series *Hong Kong Reading*[^4], were also read for this dissertation.

Regarding *auteur* theories, I take reference from the two masterpieces written respectively by the French and the American film critics: André Bazin (Bazin hereafter)’s “*De la Politique des Auteurs*” (Bazin, 2008) and Andrew Sarris (Sarris hereafter)’s “Notes on the *Auteur* Theory in 1962” (Sarris, 2008). Bazin’s essay points out that “individual transcends society, but society is also and above all within him”, so we need to “take into consideration the social determinism, the historical combination of circumstances and the technical background which to a large extent determine it” (Bazin, 2008, p.22). Sarris further sets up the three premises, namely “technical competence of a director, the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value, and his / her concerns with interior meaning, the ultimate glory of the cinema, theatre in this case as an art” (Sarris, 2008, p. 43) for “the *Auteur* Theory” to measure if a director is qualified to be considered an *auteur* in the pantheon of cultural greats. These two critics’ ideas are important *auteur* theories for film

[^4]: *Hong Kong Reading* is a series of books organized and edited by the Hong Kong Culture and Society Programme, Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong and published by Oxford University Press
directors. I used their works to extend the application of auteur theories to the position of drama artistic director and to explore the concept as it applies to theatre.

Besides Bazin and Sarris’ essays, I also read and applied to Chan’s case study additional auteur theories by other film critics. Ian Cameron, founding editor of Movie, writes in his essay “Films Directors and Critics” (Cameron, 2008) that “the director is the author of a film, the person who gives it any distinctive quality” (Cameron, 2008, p. 31). French film director Francois Truffaut writes in his essay “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema” (Truffaut, 2008), stressing film directors “are auteurs who often write their dialogue and some of them themselves invent the stories they direct.” (Truffaut, 2008, p. 16) Applying these statements to the artistic director of the Rep, I argue that the artistic director and author of HKRep, Chan in this case, is indeed an auteur, a person who gives his / her works a distinctive quality, as she often wrote her own dialogues and literally invented the stories she directed with the drama troupe. She alone wrote the text of the Rep during her time with the Theatre and in keeping with her own aspirations, talents, character and world view.

Here I would like to describe the special arrangements for the translation into English of the Chinese names mentioned in this dissertation. These names include titles of articles, essays, books and all sorts of written materials; writers and editors, theatre practitioners, theatre companies and art organizations, names of characters in plays, and so forth.
As Chan wrote plays, staged productions and led a theatre troupe in the local drama scene, most of the articles, essays, reviews, books, publications, press interviews and materials about her, her works, about HKRep and the local drama scene, were written in Chinese. As I was asked to write this dissertation in English, I have therefore had to play the role of translator as well. The interviews I did with Chan and the local drama practitioners were all conducted in Cantonese. I thus translate the parts of the cited transcript into English but bracket the original Chinese transcript thereafter. Other than some of the books that have been given formal English titles by the publishers or the writers themselves, most of the books written in Chinese have only Chinese titles. Thus I also translated the titles into English for the matter of fulfilling the language requirements and consistency of style of this dissertation. However, I have listed out both the translated English titles and the original Chinese titles in the References section, so that readers can help themselves to the exact sources or references I have used for this study. I have also inserted the remark “my own translation” at the end of translated titles, text citations and transcripts.

As for the names of the Chinese theatre practitioners, scholars and reporters mentioned in this dissertation, since most of them are established names, out of sheer respect for them, and to provide readers with added convenience in referring them, I have kept the English names they themselves formally use or are generally known by, but not in *Hanyu Pinyin*. This is applicable to both the Hong Kong and Taiwan theatre practitioners, scholars and writers mentioned. In regard to local reporters who
use pseudonyms, for purposes of consistency I have translated their names according to their Cantonese pronunciation, with hyphens between the words of their names. For people from Mainland China, I have followed their way of translating names, i.e. in Hanyu Pinyin format. I have also listed all the names of the theatre practitioners and scholars I have quoted in the course of this dissertation, in both Chinese and English, in Appendix 1, for cross-reference.

There are many names of drama companies, art organisations and other entities I mention throughout this dissertation. As their names are better known in Chinese, I also include a cross-reference list of their names in both Chinese and English in Appendix 2. Titles of drama productions and cultural events with both Chinese and English titles are listed in Appendix 3. The cross-reference list of the Chinese and English names of characters in plays and novels written in Chinese and mentioned in this dissertation is found in Appendix 4.

Now, let us begin the journey to explore a new subject – a discourse on artistic directorship and Chan’s artistic directorship as an “auteur in contexts”.

23
Chapter One

What is an Artistic Director? -- Findings

The Origin of the Artistic Director in Drama History

As I mentioned in the Introduction, since the “world’s first artistic director” cannot be identified, I can only trace the position back to its prototype, i.e. the origin of the function, although it did not appear under the title of “artistic director”.

Drama activities were fully controlled by the church in the medieval era. “Artistic director”, or a similar position, hence did not occur during the Middle Ages. Nor were theatre troupes allowed to independently perform at that time. Paradoxically enough, according to the chapter titled “Contributions by Spanish” in the book History of Theatre written by Neil Grant, during the Spanish Golden Age (1550 - 1650), the church was the main force that helped promote secular dramas and the development of professional drama (Grant, 2002/2005), including the rebuilding of professional theatres. In 1538, a professional Italian drama troupe was set up in Spain. Evidence shows that Spain’s professional theatre developed earlier than that of the Italy’s, and of course sooner than other areas in Europe (Grant, 2002/2005, p. 50). Lope de Rueda (1505 / 10 – 1565), a dramatist, actor and producer, is credited with the establishment of professional theatre in Spain.
… Lope de Rueda is commonly recognised as Spain’s first great theatre manager. People generally consider theatre work was able to evolve into a profession mainly because of Rueda. He established his own theatre and did tour performances. Besides writing plays, he also took up main roles as actor (Grant, 2002/2005, p. 51).

The first playwright who wrote directly for the popular stage was Lope de Rueda. He was the leading figure among the playwrights who were also actor-managers, toured from town to town, and dominated the Spanish stage until 1575 (Macgowan, Melnitz & Armstrong, 1979, p.81).

That means Rueda was founder and owner of a theatre, theatre manager, playwright and actor as “autores de comedias”. He was the “superstar” of the Spanish stage in the 16th century and at the same time took on many of the roles or functions necessary in making a theatre production viable. He was actually doing something quite similar to what artistic directors of small drama companies do in the Modern era.

Another brilliant page of the drama history of the Western world was written during the English Renaissance. William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616), world-renowned playwright and one of the leading lights in drama history, exhibited his stellar talents during the English Renaissance and the Elizabethan era, slightly after
Rueda’s time in the 16th century. He could also be viewed as one of the earliest theatre creatives who practised, more or less, what an artistic director in the modern theatre does.

Little is known about Shakespeare’s early life in theatre. Drama historians could only find that he had already left his hometown Stratford and had become a famed actor and playwright in 1590 in London. The record of his theatre career began in 1595:

Shakespeare was a working member of a London theatrical company. From 1595 until his retirement, he was associated with the Lord Chamberlain’s Company, London’s leading troupe… Besides writing plays, he was also expected to help stage them. As a shareholder of the company and a part-owner of the theatre, he was also involved in the management of the troupe (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1983, p. 136).

He was later a householder in the Globe Theatre building. As householder, actor, director and playwright, he was a versatile man of the theatre (Brockett, 1964, p. 125).

Shakespeare was one of the first theatre practitioners recorded in history as being involved in such important roles as shareholder, owner, actor, playwright and manager of a theatre company. Many artistic directors today don similar roles in the
theatre companies they have established. In the local drama scene, Yu Hon Ting (Yu hereafter) of Drama Gallery, Chan Lai Chu of Theatre du pif, Chan Chu Hei of Theatre Horizon and Lo Ching Man of Cinematic Theatre are all good examples approximating Shakespeare’s multifaceted involvement in the theatre – despite the fact that the title “artistic director” did not exist in Shakespeare’s time.

It is worth noting that, although Brockett considers Shakespeare a director of the Globe Theatre, drama historians only concentrate on his playwriting works. He is therefore more commonly regarded a playwright rather than a director. His directing works are hardly recorded. Brockett’s conclusion on Shakespeare as director may echo to Dr. Wilson Edwin and Dr. Goldfarb’s remarks in their theatre history book Living Theatre: “he was also expected to help stage them (the plays he wrote)” (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1983, p. 136). A commonly recognised fact in drama history is that the position of the modern director emerged only in the 18th century.

Prior to this century, as we have noted, playwrights and / or leading actors normally doubled as the directors of stage business … Two eighteenth-century figures are often cited as being the “fathers” of Modern stage direction because they assumed all of these responsibilities: the English actor David Garrick and the German playwright, poet, and novelist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1983, p. 229).
As an actor, director, manager, playwright, adaptor, and patent holder of the Drury Lane Theatre, David Garrick (1717 - 1779) is considered “the first ‘star actor’ and one of the most outstanding theatre practitioners after Shakespeare” (Grant, 2002/2005, p. 89).

Between 1747 and 1776 David Garrick was a partner in the management of the Drury Lane Theatre and therefore responsible for artistic decisions … Thus, Garrick was a complete theatre artist, undertaking many of the responsibilities assigned today to the (artistic) director (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1983).

This shows Garrick played the role that many of today’s artistic directors of independent drama companies perform. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, one of the most renowned German dramatists, “was responsible for a number of important innovations in the German theatre, comparable to those of David Garrick in England … being a theatrical producer, playwright, critic, and philosopher.” (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1983, p. 230)

Mao made an assertion about Wihelm Richard Wagner, one of the greatest musicians and composers in world history, when asked if he knew who the first artistic director in drama history was. Though he has not done any concrete research on Wagner, his knowledge of what the musician had contributed in both the fields of music and opera provided him with substantial reasons to consider Wagner, if not the
first, then one of the first artists, to play the role of artistic director, even though his official work title was different. Mao comments:

Wagner led and oversaw the whole team. He was able to compose as well as to direct. He was a pioneer in terms of directing. Before him, theatre only had producers and star actors leading the acting company. Not until Wagner was the system completed in German theatre (my own translation, personal communication, 19 May 2010. Original transcript: 華格納帶領和管理整個樂團。他既能作曲，亦能導演。以導演來說，他是先鋒人物。在他之前，劇院只有製作人和明星演員，直至華格納出現德國劇場才算圓滿).

Mao’s comment may refer to Wagner’s theory on opera or drama production – Gesamtkunstwerk, meaning a masterwork of “total theatre” in which all elements, including music, words, action, scenery, lighting are integrated under the orchestration of a single controlling force who serves as writer, composer, and director (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1983, p. 260). This man of totality may be the origin of the concept of artistic director.

The previous discussion is intended to name some of the important contributors who were prototypes of artistic director of theatre troupes in Western drama history before the modern era. Although they all owned their own theatres or
drama troupes and played roles similar to what artistic directors do today, the title of artistic director was not adopted.

According to Wilson and Goldfarb’s *Living Theatre*, additional important figures played the role in the modern era, but without sporting the title artistic director. These figures include American actor Edwin Booth (1833 – 1893), who built his own theatre and staged series of Shakespearean productions in New York; English actor and director William Charles Macready (1793 – 1873) who directed and managed companies at the Covent Garden and Drury Lane; and Henry Irving, who was manager of the Lyceum Theatre and one of the last great actor-managers in the English theatre as well as one of the first Modern directors. It is worth mentioning that a “troika management” of artistic management was practised by Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen (1826 – 1914) of Germany and his partners:

… supervised the activities of the court theatre, planning and directing the productions…. Ludwig Chronegk, the regisseur, was responsible for the daily operations of the theatre. The third person involved in the company’s artistic management was the duke’s third wife, Ellen Franz, baroness von Heldburg … who was responsible for the selection of plays and for the stage diction of the actors (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1983, p. 256).
These three dramatists’ collaboration was viewed as a “troika”, despite the fact that they did not have concrete individual titles. According to Beijing dramaturge Lin’s article “I being a Dramaturge” published in Economic Journal (2002), “troika” is now a common current management practice term used for “the main persons-in-charge of theatres in Europe, especially Germany, Russia and most of the East European countries”.

It comprises artistic director, general manager and literary manager, responsible for artistic production, administration, sales and support, planning, promotion and theoretical issues, to coordinate and to carry out all the tasks of the theatre under the leadership of the artistic director (my own translation).

This indicates that the contemporary concept of the division of artistic director and executive staff or executive director / general manager, just like what HKRep has been doing since its inauguration / incorporation, was already in practice over 100 years ago, though the title of artistic director was not used at that time.

Because Saxe-Meiningen’s contribution was not only to his court theatre but also to his productions, it is sometimes argued that the title and the function of Theatre Director originated with him in 1874 rather than with Garrick or Goethe in the 18th century.
He supervised every element, paid great attention to details, and strove for historical accuracy in order to create an integrated whole. It is true that beginning with Saxe-Mainingen, the director emerged as a full-fledged, indispensable member of the theatrical team, taking a place alongside the playwright, the performers, and the designers. Though the title may have been new, however, the function of the director has always been present in one way or another (Wilson & Goldfarb, 2008, p. 132).

If the term “director” was new in the 19th century, then the term “artistic director” was equally new in the early 20th century. As many owners of theatre companies assumed various roles before the position of artistic director was created, there was a lot of overlap between the roles of artistic director and director at that time, although the differences between the two positions are so obvious now.

According to Wilson and Goldfarb’s *Living Theatre*, the word “artistic director” first appears in the biography of Henrik Ibsen, who is known as “the father of modern realism”.

… he took a study tour of the German and Danish theatres. He moved to Christiania in 1857 to become artistic director of the Norwegian Theatre (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1983, p. 276).
However, the text does not conclude that Ibsen is the first artistic director in drama history. In other words, some drama practitioners might have been artistic directors before the Norwegian playwright, but are simply not mentioned in the history book. Nevertheless, one thing we can be sure of is that the title of artistic director was recorded in or before 1857 in Europe.

Despite the fact that the title “artistic director” was mentioned in mid-19th century, it was not that commonly used by prominent people in theatre in the following years. I checked official websites and Wikipedia discussions of various well-known theatre companies in the world and found the title has only been widely used in recent decades. Konstantin Stanislavski (1863 – 1938, Stanislavski hereafter) and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (1858 – 1943, Danchenko hereafter) of the Moscow Art Theatre are recognized as the founders of Russian theatre. However, only when the theatre was divided into the Chekhov Moscow Art Theatre and the Gorky Art Theatre in 1987 were their two respective leaders, Oleg Yefremov and Tatiana Doronina, addressed as artistic directors. Yefremov, though he took over the Moscow Art Theatre in 1970, was not addressed as artistic director in his early directorship with the company (Wikipedia, 2012). Another prominent dramatist, Bertolt Brecht (1898 – 1956), who established the Berliner Ensemble in 1949 in Germany, is regarded as founder of the theatre but not artistic director (Wikipedia, 2012), although his actual roles were also of the latter. The official website of the English Royal Shakespeare Company clearly lists the names of the artistic directors it has had throughout its history. Though it was created as the Shakespeare Memorial
Theatre Ltd. incorporated in 1875, its first recorded artistic director was Anthony Quayle in 1948, and the famous director Sir Peter Hall succeeded him in 1958 (Official website of Royal Shakespeare Company, 2012). Founded in 1818, the Old Vic, another historic English-drama company, did not have the title of artistic director. But “in 1963, the Old Vic Company was dissolved and the new National Theatre Company, under the artistic direction of Lord Olivier (Lawrence Olivier), was based at the Old Vic …” (Wikipedia, 2012). The American Conservatory Theatre already had its artistic director William Ball when it was established in 1965 (Wikipedia, 2012).

Other than in the Western world, China did not have the title artistic director 30 years ago. Chan Kin Bun (K. B. Chan hereafter) recalls that “the leaders of the Beijing People’s Art Theatre only learnt about the title of artistic director from HKRep when they visited Hong Kong in 1982” (my own translation, personal communication, 23 November 2011. Original Transcript: 北京人藝是在一九八二年來訪香港時才知道有藝術總監這種職位的). The Beijing People’s Art Theatre, the national theatre of China, was established in 1952. The head of the theatre was the most renowned contemporary Chinese playwright Cao Yu (Cao hereafter), but his title was president. President and vice presidents of the theatre are tasked with taking care of executive issues. Jiao Juyin, (Jiao hereafter), first vice president of the theatre, also wore the hat of chief director, a position equivalent to artistic director of other theatre companies like HKRep, and carried out the roles and responsibilities of artistic director as well.
When He Jiping, ex-resident playwright of the Beijing People’s Art Theatre and one of the most renowned playwrights on the Mainland and in Hong Kong, heard about my dissertation theme, she said,

The study of artistic director is indeed a very important research topic. Since the death of Jiao, the first chief director of our theatre (the Beijing People’s Art Theatre), the position has been vacant. About 10 years ago, they wanted to hire a professional director to be the artistic director focusing on the artistic works of the theatre. However, the theatre could not find anyone convincing enough to take up the position. Therefore it did not fill the vacancy. The artistic aspects are directed by the Artistic Committee composed of senior dramatists. The Committee is led by collective consultation to replace the position of chief director or artistic director. Basically, the president takes care of the artistic supervision and matters. For example, Zhang Heping, last president of the theatre, decided the programming of the theatre, especially new or important productions... The Committee only provides collective and supplementary advice. The advice, however, is only for reference. The senior dramatists are ageing and most are no longer keeping well. As many of them are not able to attend meetings, the Committee cannot offer too much assistance. Therefore the position of the president is very important. I think the theatre should have a chief director to oversee the artistic aspects. However,
the position of artistic director has never existed and the job is actually managed by the troupe’s president (My own translation, personal communication, 19 August 2014. Original transcript is written by He:)

這是一個非常重要的研究題目。原來焦菊隱是總導演，後來他去世，此職位一直空缺。大約十年前，曾經想設藝術總監，但沒有眾人都可以信服的人選，就沒有設，但藝術委員會一直有，由老藝術家等人組成，即以集體的方式替代總導演，藝術總監。人藝的藝術方面基本是由院長主導，比如上一屆的張和平，上演什麼戲，尤其是新戲或者大的項目……都是由他最終決定。藝委會是起輔助作用，集體意見，只作參考。近年老藝術家年齡都大了，身體也不好，也來不了多少人，起不了太多作用了。所以人藝的院長一職，十分重要。人藝應該設有藝術總監，統理整體有關事宜，但一直沒有，而是由院長替代).

Her comment hints at two possibilities: the setting up of the position of artistic director of the Beijing People’s Art Theatre might involve some politics deriving from the “competition” for the position; and, unlike in the case of drama companies in Hong Kong, on the Mainland the job-holder is not the de facto leader of the theatre. Thus, an artistic director, had the position ever existed in the Beijing People’s Art Theatre, would have been responsible only for the artistic aspects of the theatre’s programming, and work under the direction of the president.
From the above we can safely infer that “artistic director” was not a popular title in drama companies until the 20th century. Having incorporated practices of theatre companies in the Western world before it was founded as the first professional theatre group in Hong Kong, even the HKRep had its first full-time artistic director only six years after it was established in 1977.

Definition, Duties and Responsibilities of an Artistic Director

Since the position of artistic director was established by HKRep in 1983, the term is no longer a fresh concept in drama circles. In fact, it is a term much misused and abused nowadays.

Under Hong Kong’s Company Law, whoever wants to own his / her theatre company in the city can simply register the company at the Business Registration Department. He / she can then name himself / herself artistic director. According to the figure of the Hong Kong Federation of the Drama Societies, as of 4 December 2013, 128 theatre companies have become members of the Federation, not to mention those not registered with the Federation (Hong Kong Federation of the Drama Societies Official Website, 2013). This means there are over a hundred artistic directors in Hong Kong’s small drama circle. Many of these artistic directors have come about only in are themselves products of the past three decades. As a matter of fact, some of these so-called “artistic directors” are only fresh graduates from university or drama academies. Even though there is only one staff member, i.e. the
artistic director himself / herself in the theatre company, as long as the young founder uses his / her theatre company to produce only one small amateur show in every several years, he / she can still address himself / herself as the “artistic director” of the company.

As mentioned, it is very difficult to find any studies on artistic directorship in academic books. Anyhow, I finally found a definition of artistic director in *Theatre – the Lively Art*, written by Wilson and Goldfarb and published in 2008 (the first edition was printed in 1991). In fact, these two writers also wrote theatre books in the 1980s as quoted above but, curiously, those books did not remark on the term ‘artistic director’. This again shows that the position of artistic director is in fact something quite new in drama history, or at least something that was not brought to the academic field until the past three decades. In the book, Wilson and Goldfarb write:

The artistic director is responsible for all creative and artistic activities. He / she selects the plays that will constitute the season and chooses directors, designers, and other creative personnel. Frequently the artistic director also directs one or more plays during the season (Wilson & Goldfarb, 2008, p. 144).

These few lines about the position of artistic director are included in the chapter on the study of the position of director. While there is almost no study found on artistic directorship, the position of director is well studied. A strange
arrangement has therefore arisen: the writers spend a whole chapter introducing the definition and functions of a director while artistic director gets only cursory mention. Quite a few small webpages, however, describing the definition, duties and responsibilities of an artistic director were found when I searched through the Internet. The position is defined variously as follows:

An artistic director … handles the organisation's artistic direction … is the individual with the over-arching artistic control of the theatre’s production choices, directorial choices, and overall artistic vision … The artistic director of a theatre is similar to the music director of a symphony, the primary person responsible for planning a theatre's season (Wikipedia, 2013).

An artistic director is the head of a theatre or theatre company who has overall say on the artistic direction of the company, the work it does, the actors and artists that it employs and how they proceed throughout their engagements … is seen as the figurehead of the organisation … An artistic director’s perspective on the type of work that the company should do will tend to guide the entire organisation and all aspects of the company will serve the creation of that vision (Westbrook, 2012).

The artistic director is responsible for conceiving, developing, and implementing the artistic vision and focus of the organisation, and for
major decisions about the ongoing development of the aesthetic values and activities … (AACT, 2012)

To summarise, an artistic director is the leader of, and the artistic soul, of a theatre company. He / she is the head of a troupe; who is in control of the theatre’s production choices, directorial choices, conceiving, developing, and implementing the overall artistic vision.

In many small theatre companies, the artistic director is also the founder and the main director of the group. There are numerous examples of this phenomenon in Hong Kong: Ho’s Whole Theatre, Lam Yik Wah’s Edward Lam Workshop, Chan Ping Chiu’s On and On Theatre Workshop and Tang Shu Wing’s Tang Shu Wing Theatre Workshop. In large non-profit theatres, however, artistic directors are always appointed by boards of directors subvented by the government. Examples are the HKRep and the Chung Ying Theatre Company.

Although different theatre companies have different job duties for their artistic directors, there are some common areas all artistic directors are expected to fulfill. To summarise the duties of an artistic director: his / her basic responsibilities include choosing materials and planning programmes for forthcoming drama seasons; directing productions; hiring creative / production personnel and recruiting performers; contributing artistic evaluation of projects and productions to be included in promotional, funding and press materials; providing support, counsel, and / or
artistic input; speaking about their theatre to the press; and, perhaps less commonly, overseeing fundraising for his / her theatre company (Wikipedia, 2013).

An “Artistic Director Recruitment” advertisement posted on the Internet by the American Association of Community Theatre lists “some typical responsibilities” of an artistic director:

… hires, supervises and evaluates artistic personnel and key technical personnel … develops, implements and evaluates programmes for the year … develops annual programme budget … acts as a spokesperson for the organisation’s artistic purpose … fosters and development of good relations with other cultural organisations … directs at least one production per season. (AACT, 2012)

In summary, the artistic director is the figurehead of the theatre company; he / she is responsible for giving artistic direction and vision to the group, and leading the company to fulfill its mission.

Different people or organisations have different perceptions of the role of artistic director and the arrangement of the priorities for the position. Yang, the first full-time artistic director of HKRep in Hong Kong drama history, writes an article titled “The Main Responsibilities of an Artistic Director” on the job duties of an artistic director in which he explicitly describes the role, duties and responsibilities of
an artistic director based on his own experience. For him, the artistic director is the very life force of a theatre company.

The artistic director is the soul of a theatre company. He is also the person in charge of the artistic affairs of a theatre company… Artistic director is always ranked above executive director because he is always an acclaimed artist in the performing arts field. Whenever people think of the theatre company, they will think of the artistic director. The success or failure of a theatre company always relies on the artistic director’s possession of outstanding creativity and distinguished artistic vision (my own translation).

Yang’s stress on the artistic director’s rank as being superior to the executive director’s insinuates the long-term power struggle between these two positions in arts organisations. As an artistic director himself, Yang quite naturally asserts that an artistic director is and should be more powerful than an executive director. However, some executive directors would argue that it should be the other way around. The case of the Beijing People’s Art Theatre as discussed earlier is a clear example. Indeed, a power struggle between the two types of director is not an uncommon phenomenon in performing arts circles and has always been a thorn in the side of many arts organisations.
Yang considers that “the most important duty for an artistic director is to direct (two to three) productions in every drama season” (Yang, 1998). In small-scale drama troupes in Hong Kong, artistic directors are often expected to direct not just a couple or a few but all of the productions presented by their companies. For example, Ho Wai Lung (Ho hereafter), the late artistic / executive director of Whole Theatre, did not rely on any guest director, but himself directed every single production for his company, from tragedies to farces, even cabaret shows. This may be due to both limited financial resources and the artistic director’s own ambition. As an artistic director has to direct several productions within one drama season, Yang stresses that the job-holder therefore “has to be talented in directing all kinds of productions, from ancient classics to contemporary blockbusters… because of various tastes of various audiences” (my own translation, Yang, 1998).

What Yang is saying is that the artistic director, unless the drama company is solely of a unique style that only presents a particular kind of productions, has to be an artist who has good understanding of different kinds of drama and possesses the knowledge to stage all sorts of plays, of different genres and styles. However, this is only an ideal, as it is next to impossible to find such a multitalented person in real life. As a matter of fact, although Yang himself claims that an ideal artistic director should be talented enough to direct all kinds of productions, he himself also had constraints - - he seldom touched on experimental productions or original plays on political and social issues, for example, the 1997 question. He also directed very few original plays compared with the number of translation plays he produced.
In point of fact, artistic directors of small-scale local theatre companies mostly specialised in specific production styles – the exact opposite of what is suggested by Yang. For example, the Alice Theatre Laboratory focuses on producing experimental shows based on existentialism and the theatre of the absurd, staging mainly works by Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett and Jean-Paul Sartre, while Theatre Space concentrates on staging quality translation plays from the Western world. This can be partially explained by the fact that those companies are publicly funded. The HKSAR Government, in this context represented by the Leisure and Culture Services Department, the Home Affairs Department and the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, is not likely to sponsor companies presenting similar works. In order to successfully compete for limited funding, small theatre companies try to position themselves as practitioners of a unique dramatic style, different from that of their peers. In this connection, Yu, artistic director of the Drama Gallery, complains about the Government’s reasoning when interviewed by a reporter of *Sharp Daily* for the article “Depicting Hundreds of Faces in the Society and Directing Stories of Human’s Tragedies” (2012).

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department once wanted to divide funded drama companies into different categories: some only do musicals while some just stage translation plays. I was once lost because of being fixed in one particular position as creativity cannot be limited in such a way (my own translation).
Because of resource limitations, these artistic directors are therefore confined to a specific type of production. The other reason is that these small groups are usually formed by several artists who share common artistic interests and goals. Hence, it is natural that their companies always focus on presenting a certain kind of production.

Yang points out that “the second major duty of an artistic director is to design drama seasons for the theatre company” (Yang, 1998). In his opinion, most of the European theatre companies in the contemporary world choose to practise the Balanced Programme System, where programmes in a drama season are like a palette from which the audience can find all sorts of theatre productions, ranging from classics, including tragedies, comedies and farces as well as translation and adaption plays, to original plays and experimental pieces. The most important reason artistic directors follow this practice, according to Yang, is not because of their own wish or interest, but “to match various tastes of different audiences” (my own translation, Yang, 1998). In his analysis he hints that the practice of an artistic director is not determined solely by his / her intellectual curiosities or personal interests, but by many other factors as well. To elaborate on the above point, Yang uses “an executive chef’s job” to describe how an artistic director plans programmes:

An artistic director is just like an executive chef who, when designing the menu for a feast ordered by his / her customers, always needs to know about the appetites of those customers as well as the ingredients
available. Usually the menu is composed of chicken, duck, fish, seafood and vegetables in addition to appetiser, dessert and fruits. Both the dishes and the prices have to be attractive. Moreover, the executive chef has to constantly renew his / her menu to attract repeat visits by customers. Running a theatre company is, therefore, to a large extent, not unlike operating a restaurant (my own translation, Yang, 1998).

Yang’s analogy between an artistic director and an executive chef explains not only one of the main duties of the former but also touches upon the considerations, constraints and concessions that affect the decisions related to his / her theatre companies’ programming, despite the fact that he / she is the “executive chef” of the “restaurant”. He points to audiences’ tastes and ticket sales as two important factors that an artistic director needs to consider from the practical standpoint of staging a particular production. These and other considerations, constraints and concessions an artistic director faces are precisely the main concern and subject of this dissertation.

Yang goes on to say that “the other duties of an artistic director are to invite guest directors, actors and designers… to recruit staff of high quality for the acting company and the backstage.” As most theatre companies do not have their own dedicated, contract-bound actors or designers, the artistic director therefore needs to invite appropriate talents to perform / design for the shows. Yang elaborates:
In principle, he/she should invite the most acclaimed performers, actors and directors to perform for his/her theatre if manpower, financial and other resources allow. This demonstrates the networking abilities and the stature of the artistic director… (my own translation, Yang, 1998)

In making that remark, Yang implies that an artistic director is required to have good networking skills in the drama field so as to have the “face” to invite highly acclaimed artists to work for the theatre company. However, the condition “if manpower, financial and resources allow” further underscores the limitations of an artistic director as he/she practises his/her craft.

In addition to Yang’s discussions about the duties of an artistic director from the perspectives of the Western world and Hong Kong, where he practised his artistic directorship, two other articles, written in Taiwan and Shanghai, deal with the same subject.

Ju, founder and artistic director of Taipei Percussion, and the first artistic director of the National Theatre Concert Hall (NTCH) (aka the National Chiang Kai Shek Cultural Centre, the original name of NTCH) after it became an executive corporation (similar to the incorporation of HKRep) in 2004, as well as the current chairperson of the board of NTCH, expresses his views on the roles and the duties of artistic director in his article “Artistic Director: in Search of Directives and Presents
“Professionalism” (my own translation, 2008) by briefly categorising the position of artistic director into three types:

The first type is where he / she is the gatekeeper and quality guarantor of art activities as well as the developer of creative and artistic directives. In a cultural institution or organisation of which art is the core subject, he / she is the person in charge. He / she employs directors (managers) of administration, sales and finance to assist him / her to achieve his / her artistic goals. The second type only deals with artistic aspects and is not involved in administrative businesses. The operation of the institution is managed by its supervisor. The third type only works for a particular large event or programme as and when he / she is hired by the organiser. He / she is responsible for guiding a series of activities or creative ideas for the event, calling the artistic tune of the directive, executing the content of the programme, gatekeeping its quality and providing assistance in all artistic aspects (my own translation).

According to Ju’s categorisations, the artistic director of HKRep is positioned between the first two types. On the one hand, he / she is the gatekeeper and the quality guarantor of art activities; as well as the developer of creative and artistic directives, i.e. the person in charge of the whole theatre company; on the other hand, he / she is also involved in certain administrative matters, e.g. employment,
promotion and marketing. As a matter of fact, these aspects would actually have been managed by the managers of the Urban Services Department before the Rep's incorporation and by the executive director after; these people were not then and are not now the artistic director's supervisors. In the same article, Ju introduces some well-known artistic directors in different performing arts fields in Taiwan and overseas, and illustrates the similarities and differences between their roles, functions and duties. He summarises the duties of Lin Hwai-min (H. M. Lin hereafter), the acclaimed Taiwanese choreographer as well as founder and artistic director of Taiwan’s Cloud Gate Dance, as expounded in the book by H. M. Lin on the duties of the dance company’s artistic director.

His job is to find the direction for the dancers and to present them …

He is to be responsible for the artistic and creative works such as choreography, rehearsal supervision, and quality maintenance, while the administrative works are fully overseen by the executive director (my own translation, Ju, 2008a).

Ju states in the article that H. M. Lin stresses his main duty is to “find a direction for presenting the dancers” (Ju, 2008a), i.e. “to stand up high at a point where he can be soberly self-assured to determine the development direction of the dance company so as to set up a set of clear goals and targets for the specialisation and the full development of each member of the organization.” (Ju, 2008a). However, what H. M. Lin told a reporter of Wen Wei Po about his duties as artistic director of
the dance company in a recent interview was quite different from Ju’s description. Rather than only concentrating on the artistic direction and performances of the company, H. M. Lin said he also was required to take care of executive matters. The reporter writes:

Lin Hwai-min is always busy… and worries about performances and executive issues because he is the artistic director (of Cloud Gate Dance) … Artistic directors of arts organisations in overseas cities need to be responsible only for stage performances and thus concentrate on creative work. But other than creative work, Lin Hwai-min is much involved in operational work as well, such as looking for funding, collaboration negotiations, teaching, performing, and new site planning. Sometimes he even needs to be responsible for buying plants for the new premises of the company… Every day (he) works hard on raising funds and selling tickets… (my own translation, Ng, 2013)

No wonder the reporter used “Lin Hwai-min. – a Handyman who does Odds and Ends” (my own translation) as the title of his piece, which described how mixed, tedious and endless the duties of H. M. Lin were in his role as artistic director of the dance company.
It is worth noting, however, that the scope of the duties of H. M. Lin changed during his three-year tenure. But was that because H. M. Lin shifted from being responsible for only artistic and creative work to overseeing the administrative work of an executive director as well? Was it because the scope of duties of an artistic director who founds and owns his / her own art organisation are never strictly defined and always vary from time to time, from one arts organization to another, and even within the same arts organization itself? Or was it because of reasons relating to changes in personnel, in the needs of the organisation, in capital and budget, maybe even in the ecology of the art scene?

In any case, this situation does not apply to HKRep. Although the responsibilities of its several artistic directors may have changed over time, they were definitely not, and never, responsible for any executive jobs, because those responsibilities were outside their job descriptions. The Rep has always had its executive team taking care of executive matters of the Rep since the company’s birth. For an artistic director to “encroach” on “executive territory” would inevitably bring about conflicts between the artistic director and the executive director (or “senior manager”, as the position was called during the Rep’s operation under the government).

In his article “The Positioning of the Chairperson of the Board and Artistic Director of the National Theatre Concert Hall” (my own translation, 2008), Ju explicitly lists the responsibilities of the artistic director of the NTCH: 1. to set up the
From the above list of duties, we can conclude that no matter how many additional duties the artistic director of the Centre was required to handle, the setting up of the programmes of drama seasons for the Centre was the first priority of the artistic director at NTCH. The same is true of HKRep.

With regard to the roles and the duties of artistic directors of arts organisations, Ju includes a description of the responsibilities of Ariane Mnouchkine, artistic director of Theatre du Soleil, an internationally acclaimed French theatre company, in his article.

… (she is) artistic director, director and the soul of the theatre company who masters and controls the company’s artistic directions as well as the members’ life and work pace. She is the creator and leader of the works collaborated on by all of the team members, driving them towards the same artistic direction throughout every single rehearsal piece (my own translation, Ju, 2011).

Through his comments on Mnouchkine, Ju tries to emphasise the importance of the artistic director as the soul and driving force of a theatre company as well as to
underscore the significance of his / her power of artistic mastery and spiritual influence over the company and its members. His assertion regarding the artistic director’s being the soul of the theatre is the same as Yang’s.

Ju points out that the National Theatre (as well as the Concert Hall) of Taiwan, in order to ensure its professional artistic directives and development, adopts the practice of establishing an executive agency, the National Chiang Kai Shek Cultural Centre, as its operational arm. It also makes the artistic director the organisation’s legal representative. To achieve the benefits of division of labour and checks-and-balances, a council is formed and an artistic director is appointed. The role of the latter is to help form a professional artistic team and to manage the related operational affairs. The former consists of prominent persons or professionals from various industries responsible for advisement, checking and ratification of the artistic director’s directives and work (Ju, 2011). Ju concludes his article with a quote from Kuo Wei-fan, chairman of the Council of the National Chiang Kai Shek Cultural Centre, and considers it the best explanation of the role of artistic director.

The authority to shape the professional artistic development of a company should be fully entrusted to its artistic director. The most important function of the Council, on the other hand, is to perform well on the deliberations, ratification and monitoring in order to guarantee the Centre’s quality of work (my own translation, Ju, 2011).
Besides articles written in Hong Kong and Taiwan, a piece titled “The Responsibilities of an Artistic Director” (my own translation) was written by an anonymous author and posted on the webpage of Shanghai Committee of Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in 2002 (CPPCC, Shanghai Committee, 2002). The writer points out that the first artistic director assigned by the Shanghai Government was the veteran film director Wu Yigong, who became artistic director of the Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture, Radio, Film and TV in 1997 (Baidu’s record is 1989). However, both the writer of the article and Baidu\(^5\), a Chinese-language search engine and online encyclopedia, claim the first person who assumed the actual responsibilities of an artistic director of an arts organisation in China was in fact musician Chen Xieyang, who was appointed music director of the Shanghai Symphony in 1986. Baidu describes him as “the first director of an arts and cultural organisation in the cultural development history of China”. In the article, the writer quoted the remarks of Shu Qiao (Shu hereafter), ex-artistic director of Hong Kong Dance Company (1986 – 1994) and veteran choreographer, on the responsibilities of artistic director:

According to the international practice, the leader of a dance company is usually the artistic director. He / she must possess management ability and experience in leading dance companies or dance performances, or choreographic creativity. Externally, the artistic director represents the image of the dance company which is constituted only by the artistic standard and style of his / her creative

\(^5\)百度
works and nothing else. Internally, the artistic director is required to enact and execute the planning of the company. If the society or the audience does not approve of him / her or his / her works, the first thing the company must do is change its artistic director (my translation, CPPCC, Shanghai Committee, 2002).

What Shu refers to is the international general practice. The writer, however, stresses that the definition of artistic director in Shanghai is still unclear. To him / her, there are mainly two types of artistic director: artistic director of accountability and artistic director of non-accountability. Chen Xieyang and Chang Guoyung, president and artistic director of Shanghai Opera House, belong to the first type as they are also accountable for executive decisions. This kind of artistic director is privileged with smooth operations while the second type, when the artistic director does not have executive authority, brings about a “sound of confusion” (SCCPPCC, 2002).

The writer had also interviewed several artistic directors of Shanghai performing arts organisations and the feedback was the same. Therefore he / she draws the conclusion that “an artistic director who also wears the executive hat works more smoothly” (my translation, SCCPPCC, 2002). Having said that, the writer, nevertheless, asserts that:

… the person who is accountable for the whole organization’s artistic planning is the artistic director. The concept of the “accountability
person” is very important. Whether the artistic plan is correctly made or not and how it is implemented are the responsibilities of artistic director. He / she must be accountable for this responsibility and only the artistic director is accountable for this responsibility (my own translation).

In the case of local small-scale drama companies whose artistic directors are also owners of the companies, several practices generally prevail. The first is that the artistic director wears the executive director’s hat as well, like Ho, who played both the roles of artistic director and executive director in the company he founded, Whole Theatre. Chim Shui Man and Yan Wing Pui were similarly both artistic directors and executive directors of the now-defunct Theatre Ensemble. Another common practice is that the executive director is the artistic director’s wife or girlfriend, as in the case of Nonsense Theatre (Chan Man Kong and his wife Ngai Yee Shan), Drama Gallery (Yu and his wife Liu Shuk Fan), Theatre Dojo (Au Kam Tong and his wife Man Sze Man), Pop Theatre (Chan Wing Chuen and his wife Kwong Sau Han) and Alice Theatre Laboratory (Chan Hang Fai and his girlfriend Chan Shui Yu). The third practice involves the hiring of some young and relatively inexperienced theatre lover to take care of administrative matters for the artistic director while he / she is still in full control of executive decisions as is done at institutions such as Theatre Space and Cinematic Theatre. Although the above practices differ in appearance, in essence they all fulfill the same purpose: to prevent conflict between the artistic director and the executive director when the status and
aspirations of the two directors are not the same. Artistic directors of the HKRep, however, because of the company’s government-operated or government-subvented nature, have had to surrender their executive authority to executive staff members who were civil servants representing the Government and to the executive director who was appointed by the Council before and after the Theatre’s incorporation. The provision of executive support and even the hurdles and the checks-and-balances given by the executive staff of the Rep are important factors influencing the writing of the text of HKRep by the artistic directors.

**Ideal Qualities of an Artistic Director from a General Perspective and Specifically HKRep’s**

In his article “Artistic Director: in Search of Directives and Presents Professionalism” (2011), Ju proposes the qualities of a good artistic director.

First of all, he / she must have a creative mind with clear-cut belief, sharp artistic vision and solid artistic experience. He / she has to have a thorough understanding of the characteristics of the art form in terms of its different eras, streams and schools of thought. As an artistic director is also responsible for leading the troupe to push its boundaries, strong leadership and the power of assigning staff jobs that match their abilities are essential, so as to help recruit and gather
talents to form a great team and bring the organisation’s operation into full play (my own translation).

Ju’s listing of the ideal qualities of an artistic director is actually applicable to all forms of performing arts organisations. In fact, when we come down to their fundamental concept, I would say artistic skills and managerial skills are simply the two key requirements for a good artistic director. One should not consider this statement too simplistic for such a coveted position, because many artists are only good at creating art pieces and do not possess leadership or artistic management skills at the same time. A gifted artist can just as well turn out to be a failed artistic director.

Mao, one of the ex-artistic directors of HKRep, agrees with Ju’s comment, thinking it is very important for an artistic director to possess excellent artistic talent and managerial skills at the same time. He regarded an artistic director, especially one who has established a company by himself / herself, as the soul of the theatre who leads the whole troupe in striving for greater development.

He / she has to give artistic directives to the company and the productions must be of his / her signature. These kinds of artistic directors were either famous actors or directors before they became artistic directors. They are also always gifted with strong charisma and drawing power (my own translation, personal communication, 19 May 2010. Original transcript: 他/她一定要給劇團藝術方向，製作
必須具其風格。這類藝術總監在成為藝術總監前若不是著名演員，就是導演。他們都天生有很強烈的魅力和吸引力。


According to Yang’s article “The Main Responsibilities of an Artistic Director”, besides personal charisma, artistic talents and directorship, an artistic director is also supposed to be “a production director who has ability and experience in management and creativity in the performing arts” (my own translation, Yang, 1998)

Wang, ex-executive director of the Taiwan Arts Festival, describes her ideal artistic director in her essay “A Discussion on Arts Festival’s ‘Art’ and ‘Technique’ - - Focal Fun-seeking” (my own translation, 2004). Although the subject of her essay is an arts festival and not a theatre company, still, there are many ideal qualities of an artistic director held in common by the two different arts organisations. Like Yang,

\(^6\) Cate Blanchett and her husband Andrew Upton are co-artistic directors of the Sydney Theatre Company
Wang also termed the artistic director as “the soul” of an arts organisation. She writes:

No matter how flat the organisational structure is, a successful arts festival (theatre) always has an outstanding person: the artistic director. The vision of the artistic director represents the vision of the arts festival (theatre). The programmes selected by him / her represent the taste of the arts festival (theatre); the taste of the arts festival (theatre) decides the life of the arts festival (theatre) (my own translation, p. 58).

Wang lists some criteria she feels a “distinguished artistic director” should possess:

… to have extreme passion in the performing arts; to endure jet lag from non-stop travels to overseas cities to watch performances of different cultures and styles; to be willing to master the market trend and lifestyle fashion, speedily absorb large amounts of information and grab the key points; to enjoy exchanging viewpoints with the media; to believe that money is not the best medium for measuring the arts, while admitting that sponsors are always right; to enjoy working with artists; to be bold when facing financial figures; to take criticism positively; to possess personal charisma and strong leadership; to be both sensational and rational; to enjoy getting along with the young; to
think highly of audience education; to be a popular person in his / her social circles; to be humble yet to believe he / she is first-class … (my own translation, p. 59)

Despite the fact that it is a long list, Wang considers the above criteria not comprehensive, as she does not include “the professional qualities” an artistic director should possess. Nevertheless, she concludes that there are two common qualities that all arts organisations look for: their artistic directors “must be eternally looking for artists of excellence, with distinguished artistic works from everywhere in the world… and they are confident yet humble” (my own translation, p.59).

The listing by Wang may seem a bit long-winded, but there is no denying it succeeds in outlining the general expectations of an artistic director across many arts organisations. Of course, different arts organisations have their own special requirements for the position of artistic director, and these are determined by the arts organisations themselves.

Now let’s zero in on the ideal qualities of an HKRep artistic director. Having served HKRep as an assistant to the artistic director for over four years, I was able to closely observe how Mao, then artistic director of the Theatre, performed. I also had various opportunities to listen to two former artistic directors and the current artistic director of the Rep regarding how they led / he leads the Theatre. In addition, I engaged in extensive talks with former and current staff of the Rep with regard to
their expectations, comments and criticisms in relation to the position. These people included artistic, executive and technical members. After consolidating years of comments from these people and my own observations, I think an ideal artistic director for theatre companies like the HKRep fulfills two scopes of duties: an artistic one and a directorial one. Below is a brief summary of how I define the ideal qualities that an HKRep’s artistic director should possess.

In terms of being artistic, he / she must be a creative person of excellent aesthetic sense, with great knowledge, a strong passion for theatre, and solid experience in the field. He / she should have read many good plays which are always ready for the theatre to stage. This means a good artistic director must have a well-equipped “script library” for him/herself. In this case, his / her problem in selecting plays for his / her theatre should only be that of having too many options to choose from and never not having enough plays to stage. The plays in the “script library” should be of various genres and written by local and foreign playwrights, so that he / she can create a balanced drama season out of the ready stock. And, of course, the plays must be of good artistic value to benefit the Rep’s image.

It would be great if the artistic director of a theatre company were a distinguished director, playwright or actor him/herself. Taking HKRep as an example, all of its four artistic directors to date have been seasoned stage directors. On top of that, Yang is a trained translator, the two Chans are accomplished playwrights and Mao is an experienced actor. Thus, he / she can have a deep
understanding of the intricacies of acting and production work, and be able to relate to those teams inside the rehearsal hall, instead of just barking artistic directives from a distant, detached office. Furthermore, he / she must have good artistic taste because the productions he / she stages in effect represent the taste of the theatre company as a whole.

As the artistic leader of the largest theatre company in Hong Kong, HKRep’s artistic director naturally serves as a role model for other theatre companies in the city. Strong leadership in supervising the artistic members of staff, mainly actors, resident playwrights and resident directors, is therefore a requirement for an ideal artistic director of the Rep. Internally, he / she should be articulate, with good presentation and language skills and communication ability so that he / she is able to give precise instructions and enable all of his / her artistic staff to understand his / her ideas. This way, they can implement the artistic director’s ideas, planning and instructions accurately and effectively. The artistic director must also know his / her actors and artistic members well enough to assign them with appropriate roles and jobs, to help them develop their artistic careers and to demonstrate their best talents to the audience. Hence, the artistic director has to have a broad mind and be fair to all actors and artistic members, even though he / she might not like some of them personally. As the artistic leader of the organisation, instead of promoting him/herself, he / she should promote the Theatre and the actors, who are the frontline personnel of the group and based on whose performance the audience forms opinions about the Theatre. These artists generate attention from the audience, resulting in
ticket sales for the Rep, which in turn keeps the bar high for all members of the troupe. In this manner he/she should make his/her staff proud of being a member of HKRep.

Externally, he/she needs to have very good networking with the local and overseas drama scenes. That way, he/she can always have many different kinds of experts in theatre arts ready to fulfill his/her creative ideas on stage. He/she is then able to bring the best theatre talents and the most updated productions from outside to the Rep’s stage. As the artistic leader of the largest theatre company in Hong Kong, the artistic director of the Rep is also responsible for strengthening the Rep’s flagship status and serving as the de facto leader of the local drama scene. Last but not least, he/she has to help nurture theatre talents, give advice and comments for the future development of the drama scene, and in every way fight for the best possible benefits for the performing arts scene.

HKRep’s Requirements for the Position of Artistic Director when Hiring Chan

The above description of an ideal artistic director for HKRep is a general summary of the basic qualities that the Theatre’s artistic leader should possess, according to my observations and comments made by Rep insiders. It is also my echo to Wang’s listing of ideal qualities of an artistic director. I hope to have it serve as a starting point for consolidating and paving the way for a discourse on “an ideal artistic director for a theatre” for further studies. Because the case study of this
dissertation is on Chan who worked for the Rep during the era it operated under the colonial government, I therefore, for a more focused study, chose to learn about the requirements of a qualified artistic director for a colonial-operated theatre. From the recruitment advertisement the Rep placed in newspapers for hiring its second artistic director after Yang’s departure in 1985, it indicated the requirements of an artistic director the Rep as:

1. good education, preferably a degree holder, and fluency in spoken Chinese (preferably Cantonese) and English;

2. professional theatre training and excellent knowledge of Chinese, Western, modern and classic dramas;

3. 10 years or above theatre experience of which five years were in key positions related to artistic supervision and executive management in professional theatre companies;

4. excellent directing experience and the ability to direct productions of different genres; and

5. excellent knowledge and experience in staging productions, including lighting, setting, costumes and sound effects, etc. (my own translation, HKRep, 1985).
The above requirements for applicants for the position of artistic director are quite common to most of the drama companies in the world, though not all of them are necessarily applicable. Since HKRep was a drama troupe established and developed in an East-meets-West city and managed under a colonial government of the U.K., its requirements of fluency in both spoken Cantonese and English as well as knowledge of Chinese drama are unique. This is an interesting phenomenon because the Rep had never produced any dramas in English during the colonial days. The only English-speaking production was in fact one segment of the triple-bill show, *From Sunset to Sunrise – the Quintessential Cao Yu*, staged in 2007 after its incorporation. Yet, the requirement “fluency in spoken English” did not only reflect the Rep’s colonial flavour but also was a hurdle for those who could not manage the Western language. For example, no matter how experienced they were, theatre practitioners from the Mainland who could speak only Mandarin were not able to fulfill the language requirement. However, it could nevertheless be considered a reasonable requirement, even an essential one, according to Yang’s article “Reflecting on the Past, hoping for the Future – on the 15th Anniversary of the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre” written for *Hong Kong Repertory Theatre 15th Anniversary* souvenir book, in which he set out his vision for the future development of the Rep:

… to invite first-rate directors and designers from mainland China, Taiwan, and major Western countries to stage major productions which are closer to the highest international standard… the Rep will
soon establish an international reputation, hopefully before the end of this century (20th) (Yang, 1992, p. 9).

The language requirement therefore can be understood, in this context, as not resulting from the Rep’s colonial government-operated nature but from its ambition to be among the top international drama companies of the future. Therefore, the artistic director of the troupe had to be able to master both Chinese and English languages.

More interesting, however, is that the language requirement was bracketed with “preferably Cantonese”. Since the advertisement was placed in a bid to find a successor to Yang, the requirement might have been made because of the Rep’s experience with Yang. Yang was born in Shanghai, grew up in Taiwan and studied and worked in the U.S., and he was not able to speak a single word of Cantonese when he came to Hong Kong to be the Rep’s first artistic director in 1983. He admits this fact in his article published in *Gems of Theatre Arts*, the Rep’s silver jubilee commemorative book.

How on earth could a Shanghainese who barely spoke any Cantonese have the guts to direct Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* in the Cantonese dialect? (Yang, 2002, p. 26)
The Rep is a local theatre troupe that produces dramas for the Hong Kong people, the majority of whom in turn are of Cantonese stock, and the troupe does this through an ensemble of actors whose mother tongue is also Cantonese. If the artistic director were only required to take care of the Rep’s artistic management, his / her inability to speak Cantonese would not have been a big obstacle. However, as Yang was also a stage director who had to precisely understand the delivery of lines by the actors, his handicap in mastering the Cantonese dialect was a hindrance – or at least a challenge – for both him and the actors. It was therefore natural for the Rep to hope to employ an artistic director who would be able to communicate with, supervise and direct all the actors through a mutually understood medium, especially during the time when actors from the Mainland were not able to understand English and local actors were not able to speak Mandarin. On the larger scale, the Rep wanted to have an artistic director who could speak the dialect that the actors, the staff and the Hong Kong audience spoke.

Some of the above requirements, such as academic background and years of service in other theatre companies or in the drama scene, are quantitative and factual, while others, such as the applicants’ drama knowledge, actual capability or quality of work experience, simply cannot be described in terms of facts or numbers. Nevertheless, all these terms relate to the candidates’ knowledge and experience and have little to do with their personal background, for example, family, hobbies, world views, values, personal experiences, beliefs, religion, aspirations, ambitions, etc. These are actually factors that contribute to the shaping of an artistic director. These
factors, moreover, sway an artistic director’s tastes, preferences, choices and decisions which further affect the direction, style, status, development and reputation of the troupe, leading directly or indirectly to its success or failure. Hence, one of the important objectives of the case study in this dissertation is to investigate how the aforementioned factors affected Chan as she exercised her post as artistic director of the HKRep, and how she, as the artistic leader the Theatre, carved and moulded the Rep during her period of service.

**Two Model Artistic Directors for Reference**

Having analysed the role and the ideal qualities of an artistic director, let us now take Brecht and Stanislavski, the two best-known artistic leaders of two acclaimed European theatres, as examples to illustrate how they performed as artistic visionaries, especially when they were facing political persecution. We take these two masters as references because Chan also faced political challenges when she served the Rep, although perhaps in not as severe a manner as did the two European masters. After he was exiled from Hitler’s Germany, Brecht went back to East Germany and was welcomed by the Cultural League in East Berlin in 1947. The ministry of Popular Education authorised him and his wife, Helene Weigel (Weigel hereafter), to found the well-known theatre Berliner Ensemble, which he headed until his death in 1956. His first job was to “rebuild the physical as well as the cultural life of the country, in both respects an overwhelming prospect” (Ewen, 1967, p. 444). It was a joy for Brecht to have his own theatre, and he worked with a number of great
theatre talents, including his actress wife Weigel, his schoolmate and seasoned stage
designer Casper Neher, and composer and conductor Paul Dessau (Dessau hereafter)
etc. Brecht did not keep the theatre as his own private kingdom but opened it to the
public.

The door of the rehearsal hall was always open and anyone could enter.
Visitor after visitor has testified to Brecht’s unconventionality. You
came in, Brecht nodded recognition, and then went on with his work

Both Brecht and Weigel knew that there were two missions they had to
achieve through the theatre.

... to reconstitute a repertory that had been perverted and corrupted by
the Nazi regime; and to build a new repertory that would correspond to
the needs of a new society. Yet both efforts were meant to illuminate
the work of the past… to free them as Brecht put it, “from the dross of
a class society” (Ewen, 1967, p. 445).

To address the needs of a new society, Brecht discussed in his plays the
problems that occurred in society. The themes of his plays therefore always
revolved around conflicts, with particular emphasis on class conflicts. Fredric Ewen
in his book *Bertolt Brecht: his Life, his Art, and his Times* (Ewen, 1967) quotes Brecht’s statement:

> Everywhere we must uncover the elements of crisis, of that which is problematical, rich in conflicts within this new life, else how can we ever show that which is creative in it? (Ewen, 1967, p. 446)

Although the East German economy was weak, the government “had placed at his disposal extensive manpower and capital, to enable him to develop his theatre” (Ewen, 1967, p. 446). But then as many artistic directors do, Brecht suffered from a bureaucratic officialdom which pressured and criticised him. While he claimed himself a “realist”, the Socialist Unity Party questioned his stance. As a tough artistic leader, however, he was able to stand his own ground and “forged the Berliner Ensemble and its repertory in the light of his own purposes and goals” (Ewen, 1967, p. 447).

Brecht was never averse to discussion, criticism, or open opposition. When convinced, he changed his mind or his work; when unconvinced, he did not. When in doubt, he published the old and the new version. But whatever form his opposition might take, it was always within the context and framework of the Socialist objective, and in the firm belief in change and in the self-corrective nature of Socialism (Ewen, 1967, p. 447).
Still, the opera *The Trial of Lucullus*, a collaboration of Brecht and Dessau, invited both political and aesthetic attack and at the request of the authorities was removed from the repertory of the Berlin State Opera after its premiere. After meetings between the theatre’s creative team and the Council of Ministers, the two collaborators agreed to make minor revisions, including to the title of the production, which was changed to *The Condemnation of Lucullus*, when the new version was staged seven months later.

Under the leadership of Brecht, the Berliner Ensemble won fame aboard. The Théâtre Nationale Populaire of Paris produced Brecht’s *Mère Courage*. When the theatre toured Warsaw, its performances were lauded as “completely revolutionising and liberating the theatrical life of Poland”. Brecht’s plays became part of the standard repertory in West Germany as well, “occupying a high place after Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller” (Ewen, 1967, p. 450).

In 1954, the theatre moved to the dam Schiffbauerdamm, which was equipped with the most modern machinery and stage devices at the time. It became “the theatrical centre to which the world looked” (Ewen, 1967, p. 456). The dam was in fact a theatrical city. There the Brechts worked with many established as well as emerging practitioners of different areas of theatre. Subventions from the government were generous. Audience sizes kept increasing because people believed that “the kind of thing Brecht gives us you can’t get anywhere else in the theatre” (Ewen, 1967, p. 457). Brecht used the theatre to train actors throughout the country.
and designed special programmes for workers to “fulfill Brecht’s intentions of creating a responsive audience and to raise the cultural level as well as the political understanding” (Ewen, 1967, p. 457). The presupposition on which the theatre was built was of course political. Trainings included the study of Marxist-Leninist classics and dialectical materialism. Members approached both new and old plays with a socio-historical analysis. They engaged in long periods of rehearsals and staged only one production annually. Brecht always asked for his actors’ comments and altered the plays during rehearsals. He took it as a process of production. He also believed in the creative impulse of “surprise”, so actors were to make discoveries in the process of reading a script (Ewen, 1967, p. 460-461).

Determined to destroy what he considered theatrical illusions, Brecht made his dreams into realities when he took over the Berliner Ensemble. In one of his early productions, he famously put up signs which said, "Glotzt nicht so romantisch!" ("Don't stare so romantically!") (GraveSaver, 2014)

Through probing, asking, testing and altering, the “dialectic process” was created. To resist Stanislavski’s realistic staging, Brecht’s famous theatrical devices, such as Verfremdungs effekt (alienation effect) and Epic Theatre, were practised when he was the artistic leader of the German theatre. These techniques are still used on stages all over the world and his philosophy of using theatre as a field for political discourse still influences many of his followers.
Stanislavski is another celebrated artistic leader. His well-known “Stanislavski System”, which theorises acting into a set of systematic techniques, has become the Bible to numerous actors around the world. Moreover, his style of artistic management also serves as a good model for artistic leaders in theatre. He and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (Danchenko hereafter) established the Moscow Art Theatre in 1897. Although they were both named co-founders of the theatre, Stanislavski played the role of an artistic director since he handled the staging and production. Danchenko was the executive director (or general manager) and a dramaturge responsible for the administrative and literary duties in today’s practice.

Responsibility was to be shared between them on the basis of their individual strengths, with Stanislavski overseeing production and Nemirovich in charge of the repertoire and literary decisions (Wikipedia, 2013).

Before the setting up of the Moscow Art Theatre, theatres in Russia and Europe were “highly stylised, exaggerated and melodramatic” (EHd Ltd, 2011, p. 1). Stanislavski was discontented with the acting styles and reacted to the shortcomings of the Russian drama scene.

Both men wanted to create a theatre that would challenge the theatre of their day. Their ideas were visionary and different and were responsible for revolutionising the Russian stage … to prove that
theatre could resemble real life and would make sure that every detail in a production was painstakingly correct and accurate, which would often involve meticulous research and preparation (EHd Ltd, 2011, p. 2).

The Moscow Art Theatre differed from the other independent theatres in being a fully professional organisation from the beginning and in emphasising theatrical production rather than neglected plays (Brockett, 1982, p. 558).

He also wanted to use the theatre to “raise the status of acting and theatre” (EHd Ltd, 2011, p. 2). In order to perfect their productions, he spent very lengthy periods on rehearsals.

Stanislavski worked very intensively with his actors, spending extensive amounts of time on rehearsals. The Russian actor-director focused on developing methods of internally based psychological realism. According to Stanislavski, the actor must do a great deal of script analysis (Wilson and Goldfarb, 1983, pp. 286).

Stanislavski always undertook a long study of each play before rehearsals began. He insisted upon careful attention to detail from each actor, and he sought to recreate the milieu only after visiting the
site of the play’s action, or after extensive research (Brockett, 1982, p. 559).

He thus created a working method or system, the internationally acclaimed Stanislavski System, for actors to follow and practise so as to create truthful and realistic theatre. “He is considered to be one of the most pioneering thinkers in modern theatre and has even been called the ‘father of modern acting’.” (EHd Ltd, 2011, pp. 1)

Actors were not considered the most important element of a production but as one of the aspects of theatrical elements. Stanislavski changed the way people viewed actors.

He made acting actor-centred and placed the actor at the centre of everything … the actor maintains an important, central role. Stanislavski elevated an actor’s position and showed how central an actor was to a theatrical production; it is an actor’s main role to convey the meanings of the play (EHd Ltd, 2011, pp. 31).

The Russian theatre was also intended “to create a theatre with an ensemble ethos” (EHd Ltd., 2011, p. 2). Stanislavski wanted to nurture good actors for the Russian stage with realistic acting which has greatly influenced actors of today around the world. He viewed the whole acting troupe as an ensemble and insisted
that “there were no stars within a performance and everyone had equal importance” (EHd Ltd, 2011, p. 2).

The first concern was to create a genuine ensemble, with no star players – “Today Hamlet, tomorrow an extra”. Self-centred, false, histrionic actors were rigorously excluded (Benedetti, 2000, p. 24).

Alexei Tolstoy’s *Tsar Feodor Ivanovich* (produced by the theatre) created a sensation because of its painstaking recreation of the Russia of 1600, its ensemble acting, and its absence of stars (Brockett, 1982, p. 558).

Stanislavski sternly stressed on discipline. He emphasised that theatre is an art that requires discipline and ethics. He also emphasised the self-cultivation of actors in order to help develop them into good actors. One of his famous sayings is, “There are no small parts, there are only small actors” (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1983, p. 287).

Discipline was to be strict, both for the cast – no talking in the corridors during a performance – and for the audience. No one was to be allowed backstage during the performance … (Benedetti, 2004, p. 24)
Under the leadership of Stanislavski, the theatre increased the members of its acting company from 39 to 100 and staged from three to five new plays each year, while keeping successful works in the repertory (Brockett, 1982, p. 559).

The Moscow Art Theatre is certainly renowned for Stanislavski’s techniques and its school for training actors. The artistic leader also greatly contributed to nurturing great drama talents. His forging of theatre talents such as Vsevolod Meyerhold (Meyerhold hereafter) and Anton Chekhov (Chekhov hereafter) is acclaimed. Meyerhold, a student of Stanislavski and one of the big names in modern drama history, turned out to be an antirealist practising theatricalism. That practice was different from his teacher’s. Stanislavski, however, was not offended by his leaving and participation in another stream of theatrical practice. Rather, “on his deathbed Stanislavski was to declare Meyerhold "my sole heir in the theatre—here or anywhere else” (Wikipedia, 2014).

The success of Chekhov as the most famous playwright in Russia should be attributed to Stanislavski’s insight and support. The initial production of Chekhov’s *The Seagull* was considered a failure. When Stanislavski understood Chekhov’s complex dramatic form and produced it in 1898, the production was so successful that it was praised as “one of the greatest events in the history of Russian theatre and one of the greatest new developments in the history of world drama" (Wikipedia, 2014). Chekhov wrote three additional realistic plays, *Uncle Vanya, The Three
Sisters, and The Cherry Orchard, for the Moscow Art Theatre. “Chekhovian drama, with Stanislavski’s carefully realised realistic productions, established the company’s reputation” (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1983, p. 283). Meanwhile, Stanislavski helped elevate the playwright to the pantheon of both Russian and world drama.

Aside from Meyerhold, leaders of avant-garde theatre Vakhtangov and Tairov also started their careers in the Moscow Art Theatre.

Stanislavski had an unusual experience when he was in charge of the theatre. The incident involved Meyerhold. Being an anti-realist, instead of following his teacher’s path of developing realism in acting, he practised theatricalism. His work was thus heavily criticised by the Soviet government.

The Soviets officially supported “socialist realism” as the only appropriate theatrical form, arguing that the theatre should present realistic portrayals of the socialist struggle. Meyerhold’s antirealistic work was attacked for being obscure and, therefore, anti-Soviet. When the government closed his theatre in 1938, Stanislavski invited Meyerhold to work at his Opera Theatre (it is named Opera Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre on p. 296 of the same book). In 1939, almost a year after Stanislavski’s death, Meyerhold was arrested; he died in prison in 1940 (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1983, p. 295 & 297).
Lo writes about this incident in the preface of director Tang Shu Wing’s book *Meyerhold’s Performing Theory: Research and Introspection* (my own translation).

After the October Revolution, Meyerhold was the first dramatist to join the Communist Party… This artist was brave in exploring and persistent in his opinion, (but) was severely attacked by the Soviet government, which dismissed his theatre in the 1930s. In 1940, he was shot to death. Two persons stood up to protect Meyerhold in his last days: his teacher Stanislavski and his student (Sergei) Eisenstein (my own translation, Lo, 2001, p. x).

Stanislavski did not withdraw but directly confronted the political intervention. What he guarded was not only the life of his student. As the artistic leader of a theater, he also defended the freedom of creativity and choice of theatrical pursuit when one of the members of his theater was under political persecution.

Besides acting as the main persons who gave artistic directions to their respective troupes, Brecht and Stanislavski also demonstrated how to be a leader when faced with political challenges. I shall discuss this more thoroughly in the Conclusion.

**The Birth of the Artistic Director at HKRep**
Having briefly studied the two drama gurus as references for the role of artistic director, we now shift the spotlight to HKRep. The Theatre was founded in 1977. The position of artistic director, however, was not established until 1983, six years after the Theatre’s inauguration. In the interim, the executive tasks and daily operations of the Rep were managed by the staff of the Urban Services Department, the executive arm of the Government’s now-defunct Urban Council.

A team of consultants addressed as honorary advisors was formed for providing artistic advice to the Rep. The first three consultants who formed the team in 1977 were Dr. Chung King Fai (Chung hereafter), Dr. Vicki Ooi (Ooi hereafter) and Dr. Leo Yam. Eight other seasoned drama practitioners were invited to be honorary advisors in 1978; they included Lee Woon Wah (Lee hereafter), Ouk Fung, Liu Tsun Yan, Chan Yau Hau, Wong Man Lee, Yang, Lau Fong Kwong and Pao Hon Lum, while Ko Leung joined in 1979. Chung became principal artistic consultant in 1979. A company profile published as part of the promotional pamphlet for the Rep’s third drama season reveals the duties of the then-consultants:

The responsibilities of Mr. Chung King Fai, appointed as the Company’s principal artistic consultant since this January, are to help make plans for the development of the Company, to select programmes for the annual drama season and to organise training courses for actors etc., so as to unify the artistic style of the Rep and to

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7 The last honorary adviser of the artistic consultant team is Dr. Chan Choi Lan who joined in 1983
improve the Company’s accomplishments on stage (my own translation, HKRep, 1979, p.8).

The above description quite clearly states what Chung was required to do as principal artistic consultant of the newly established theatre. Strangely enough, however, when I, in the process of researching for this dissertation, asked Chung on two separate occasions what his actual duties as principal artistic consultant of the Rep were, he explicitly denies any involvement in the Theatre’s programming.

Being principal artistic consultant, my job was to introduce various sorts of plays, including ancient, contemporary, classic, Chinese and foreign dramas, to Hong Kong people. No matter whether they were Chinese or Western plays, as long as they were distinguished pieces, I was obligated to present them to the Hong Kong audience … My responsibility, however, was to give opinions and to discuss executive issues, but not to design programmes for the Rep (my own translation, personal communication, K. F. Chung, 18 April 2008. Original transcript: 我身為藝術總顧問，責任是為香港觀眾介紹不同的劇本，包括古代、當代、經典、中國、外國戲劇。只要它們是好劇本，無論是中是西，我也有責任將它們推介給香港觀眾 … 不過，我的責任只限於給予意見和研究行政議題，而不會為話劇團設計劇目).
As I started working for Redifussion Television (the former name of Asia Television) in 1976, I could work for the Rep only on a part-time basis. A lot of times I was required to rush to the Rep for meetings, handling affairs and directing productions after ending the day on my full-time job. My responsibilities were to give artistic directives and to provide executive advice to the Theatre but I did not do any planning in terms of the programming (my own translation, Tao, 2010, p. 42).

Chung’s denial of his involvement in the design of the Rep’s programmes in the Theatre’s first few years is quite interesting. The discrepancy in his title is also suspicious. What Yang writes in the Rep’s 15th Anniversary souvenir book (1992) confirms Chung was a part-time artistic director before Yang became full-time artistic director of the Rep.

Mr. Chung has directed regularly for the Repertory Theatre and has served as its part-time artistic director and principal artistic consultant (p.8).

K. B. Chan, in an interview for this dissertation, confirmed Chung’s title as part-time artistic director in the Rep’s early stage.
He was part-time artistic director for the first few years. Only when Yang arrived on the scene did Chung’s title change to principal artistic consultant. He was paid while other consultants were not because he was required to report for duty for certain hours in a week, take care of executive matters and play the role of artistic director, overseeing such tasks as designing programmes, planning drama seasons, giving executive instructions and advice for solving problems. The only difference with a full-time artistic director was that he came to work in some evenings for several hours only. I remember there were many evenings in those years I needed to stay behind after working hours to wait for Chung, who rushed from Redifussion TV or later Asia TV, to work with him (my own translation, personal communication, 23 November 2011. Original transcript: 他有數年時間是兼職藝術總監，只是在楊世彭上任後他的職銜才改為藝術總顧問。其他顧問是義務性質，他則是受薪的，因為他每個星期總要來到話劇團處理行政工作和扮演藝術總監的角色，如設計劇劇目、安排劇季、給予行政指引和意見，解決問題。他與全職藝術總監的唯一分別是他只需要在一些晚間中工作數小時。我記得有很多個晚上我都要在下班後等待他從麗的映聲或後來的亞洲電視趕來，與他一起工作).

However, Chung, too, in an interview for this study denied his title as part-time artistic director (personal communication, 18 April 2008. Original transcript: 我
不是兼職藝術總監) in the early days of the Rep, and admitted only his title of principal artistic consultant through the 22 years before the Rep was incorporated. When I searched the early house programmes of the Rep to locate Chung’s biography, I found he was listed as principal artistic consultant in the house programme of the 1979 production, *The Miracle Maker*.

Mr. Chung has become principal artistic consultant of Hong Kong Repertory Theatre since January of this year (HKRep, 1979, p. 5).

Two dated news clippings based on interviews with Chung made Chung’s position in the first six years of the Rep’s history even more complicated as the publications acknowledged him as artistic director. The first interview “Repertory Company Director Aims High” was done for promoting musical *West Side Story* Chung directed in 1979.

A story about young love and fierce triad gang fights involving the use of cleavers is a subject the newly appointed artistic director of the Hong Kong Repertory Company (Hong Kong Repertory Theatre), Mr. Chung King Fai, has in mind. (SLL., 1979)

Another news clipping, titled “An Interview with the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre”, is based on an interview with Chung as to how he perceived the Rep in 1981.
I directed *Eqqus* for Hong Kong Repertory Theatre at the end of 1978 and became its artistic director in 1979 (my own translation, Chan Y., 1981).

It is clear that Chung was never the full-time artistic director of the Rep. However, I cannot confirm if the two reporters in their respective articles were referring to Chung’s position as part-time artistic director, or whether they simply did not know the difference between principal artistic consultant and artistic director, and therefore addressed him as artistic director in the articles.

Ultimately, it is a mystery whether a part-time artistic director really existed before Yang. The matter is not verifiable as the two sets of ‘proofs’ contradict each other. Nevertheless, for practical purposes, we can look to the Rep’s silver jubilee commemorative book, Gems of Theatre Arts, for Chung’s official title/s in the history of the theatre company.

Chung King Fai was appointed consulting artistic director (the title was changed to principal artistic consultant in 1983). (Tao, 2002, p. 36)

There is no doubt, on the other hand, that Yang was the first full-time artistic director of HKRep… and the local drama scene.
The reason the Rep finally decided to hire a full-time artistic director is mainly that the Theatre needed to have a full-time professional expert to plan for its future development. Chung, who was head of the artistic consultants at the time, felt that the establishment of the position would bring greater opportunities to the Theatre and its actors.

By hiring a full-time artistic director, the Rep could be in touch with directors from foreign countries as there were only a few stage directors in Hong Kong at that time. Actors would therefore also be able to perform in different kinds of productions. That would be helpful to their growth and encourage good learning experiences for them (my own translation, personal communication, 18 April 2008. Original transcript: 香港當時只有很少舞台劇導演。話劇團聘請全職藝術總監後，便可以通過藝術總監與外國導演接觸，演員亦因此可以參演不同類型的製作。這對於他們的成長是很有幫助，亦可以為他們帶來美好的學習經驗).

Choi Suk Kuen (Choi hereafter), then senior manager (Cultural Services) of the Urban Services Department who oversaw the three government-run art organisations under the Urban Council and retired from her position of Deputy Director (Cultural Services) in 2005, stated that all professional theatre troupes must have artistic directors because they are very important to the development of the troupes.
At that time, we all believed it would not be favourable to the Rep if it continued to have no artistic director. All professional theatres had to have artistic directors leading the companies for better development. The other two performing arts organisations managed by the Urban Council also had their artistic directors at that time (my own translation, personal communication, 18 May 2012. Original transcript: 那時大家都覺得若話劇團繼續沒有全職藝術總監將會對全團將來的發展沒有益處。所有職業團體要發展得好，便必須要 有藝術總監。那時候，市政局轄下的其他兩個藝團已經有藝術總監).

“The other two performing arts organisations” Choi was referring to are the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra and the Hong Kong Dance Company. The former was established in 1977, the same year that the Rep was born, and had already had Wu Dajiang as its first artistic director the position was initially named music director) since its inauguration. The latter was established in 1981, but immediately recruited Jiang Qing as its artistic director in 1982, a year before the Rep had its own artistic director. It is therefore understandable why the HKRep finally took the action to recruit a full-time artistic director – because even the Hong Kong Dance Company, which was founded four years later than the drama troupe, had hired an artistic director before the Theatre did.
K. B. Chan gives a more comprehensive analysis as to the reasons for setting up the position of artistic director in 1983. For him, the birth of the position of artistic director of HKRep and the first artistic director in Hong Kong drama scene was a “product of the times”.

It was a need of the times. By 1983 HKRep had already been established for seven years, and was soon approaching the end of its first decade of existence. We claimed we were a professional theatre company, but how could we prove we were professional when we even did not have a full-time artistic director? That was a call for professionalism. We needed an artistic director to lead the company to move forward, to set up the structure and to make choices.

Externally, the drama scene of the Mainland was developing fast and some prominent plays emerged in the early 1980s. The development of Hong Kong’s original plays, however, was only in its infancy. The changes in the local drama scene and the competition from the Mainland were hence crucial challenges to the Rep in the 1980s. Under these situations, the Rep needed to have a full time artistic director to play the role of a helmsman to steer the Theatre to strive for greater development when encountering challenges (my own translation, personal communication, 23 November 2011. Original transcript: 那是時代的需要。一九八三年時，話劇團已經成立七年，
Thus, the birth of its artistic director was a product of the times. Drama was indeed growing rapidly in the 1980s. Lo in his article “A Wave-breaking Stage – Hong Kong Theatre in the 1980s” describes the Hong Kong drama scene as “a wave-breaking drama stage” when Hong Kong theatre entered the 1980s with a strong proactive force.” (My own translation, Lo, 2012, p. 40) Facing many challenges, it was essential for the Rep to employ a full-time artistic director to lead the Theatre to deal with the “wave-breaking” situation induced by the various forces on the local drama scene. That was also a way to demonstrate its “flagship” status among all the local drama troupes, even though there were not too many at the time.

Hence, the artistic director wanted by the Rep was not only simply for handling artistic issues or playing the role of resident director for the Rep; the talent
was also required to guide the Theatre to fight for and achieve greater developments in the aesthetic, social and cultural senses. K. B. Chan clarified that while the job duties listed in the contracts for HKRep artistic directors during the government-run era was confidential information, the scope and nature of those duties were in fact nothing special, but general. As the company’s first artistic director did not come to the Rep through open recruitment, I could not check from the available documents. However, the main responsibilities of artistic director were clearly listed out in the recruitment advertisement in the newspapers (HKRep, 1985), when the Rep hired its second artistic director, Chan, in 1985. Those duties were:

1. to participate in formulating the enactment of HKRep’s artistic policies so as to upgrade the professional standard of the Theatre’s development;

2. to engineer the annual programmes of the Rep, including to recommend playwrights, guest directors, guest actors and designers;

3. to direct a certain number of productions annually and to oversee the whole season’s productions;

4. to attend auditions for both full-time actors’ recruitment and freelance actors for individual productions;
5. to organise professional training courses for the Rep’s actors; and

6. to provide suggestions and advise on the planning and improvement
   of the facilities of the Urban Council’s performing venues (my own
   translation).

Besides the job duties of an artistic director, it is interesting to know from the
advertisement that remuneration for the job also includes a housing allowance. This
offer of a housing allowance might have two implications. Firstly, it could indicate
that the Urban Council had already expected they might not be able to hire their ideal
candidate locally but from overseas; therefore they had to offer a housing allowance
to attract candidates from foreign countries. This in turn implied that there was a
very limited choice of talents who could meet the Urban Council’s standard to
oversee the Theatre run by the government in the mid-1980s. Coincidentally, Yang
and his successor Chan were both American-Chinese recruited by the Urban Council
from the U.S. Secondly, senior civil servants of the colonial government were offered
a housing allowance. Although the artistic director was not civil servant, the
executive staff of the Rep were, so they were granted attractive benefits as senior
officers in the government.

The first five listed duties were quite general. One could even say they were so
non-specific that they could be applicable to artistic directors of most theatre
companies in the world. Yet, the duty list for the Rep’s artistic director revealed its
stage of development, the defining of the role of artistic director and the vision of the Rep in its first decade of existence.

We can tell what stage of development the Theatre was in from items one, four and five, i.e. to upgrade the professional standard of the Company’s development, to attend auditions and to organise professional training courses. I would consider the Rep to be at “a developing stage”. This is because, as I mentioned above, these duties were so general and quite tedious (like attending auditions and organising training courses), that they would not have been something worth mentioning in the duty list of an artistic director had the Rep been a more mature theatre company. As a matter of fact, the terms of reference (or the list of duties and obligations) for the Rep’s artistic director after its incorporation no longer include these elementary duties. These items hence revealed the developing and nascent stage of the Rep in 1985.

Indeed, it could be said that the role of artistic director at the Rep was still loosely defined in 1985. The terms of reference did not precisely define the actual role of its artistic director or the actual responsibilities he/she should fulfill. Rather, it just listed that the artistic director should “direct a certain amount of productions” and “provide suggestions and advice”… which were not described more specifically. The terms of reference for the artistic director after the Rep’s incorporation, however, explicitly request its artistic director “to assist the Council of the Company in conjunction with the executive director of the Company, in the preparation and execution of the overall development plan for the Company” and “to produce and
direct no less than two full-scale major theatrical productions for the Company each year, plus writing or translating one full-length play a year if circumstance warrants” (HKRep, 2000). The conditions are described in very detailed, definite terms.

From the items like “to engineer the annual programmes of the Rep” and “to direct a certain amount of productions annually and to oversee the whole season’s productions”, the terms of reference for the Rep’s artistic director recruited in 1985 were much production-focused. This could be explained by the fact that there were not many theatre companies or drama troupes in Hong Kong in the mid-1980s. The drama scene was far from being as vibrant as it today. Stage drama production was something still unfamiliar to the Hong Kong audience at that time. Therefore, producing quality stage-dramas was the key function of the Rep and the main responsibility of its artistic director.

From the listing of the main duties of artistic director published in the advertisement, I also noticed that items one to five were all about the Rep’s internal operation while only item six was associated with the drama scene outside the Rep. This implied that the core duty and the focus of the artistic director at that stage were mainly on the internal artistic direction and production, i.e. to produce good productions for the colony.

When we look at the terms of reference for Mao, the first artistic director after the Rep’s incorporation in 2001, it was explicitly written that the job holder had
to “represent the Company to attend and take part in the theatre-related activities, meetings and conferences held locally and overseas” (HKRep, 2000). We can tell that the Rep’s artistic director, in the company’s second quarter of a century, was required to play a role as a representative of the Rep, taking active part in both the local and the overseas drama scenes. He was asked to step out of the Theatre and to connect with other drama practitioners both in Hong Kong and in other countries. This is because HKRep was no longer a theatre built on an isolated island but had positioned itself a flagship theatre company, inspiring other troupes in Hong Kong to work towards being the best in the field.

Among the items on the list, only the sixth gave the artistic director a way to step out of the Rep to play a larger role than as an internal artistic leader of the Theatre. This item, however, is likely applicable only in the case of HKRep’s artistic directors. That’s because the Rep was founded and managed by the Urban Council before its incorporation in 2001. The supervisory body of artistic directors, to whom artistic directors he / she reported, was the Sub-committee of Performing Companies of the Urban Council. Therefore, he / she was required to provide professional comments and advice to the Council when needed. No wonder during my interview with him, Yang mentioned that after he had reviewed the floor plan of the Studio Theatre of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, he suggested to Chen, then assistant director of the Urban Services Department, to alter the theatre into a stage with unlimited flexibility, instead of keeping a proscenium stage (my own translation, personal communication, 20 June 2008. Original transcript: 我曾參加 Studio Theatre
The planning, the first floor plan I also saw. I told the Purse Office's Chan Tat-Wan that that was not good, it must become flexible, because it can take different forms. I first thought Yang had been invited to serve as a consultant or advisor on the construction of the theatre, but in fact he was only fulfilling his duty as an artistic director working under the Urban Council.

The above analysis indicates that the role, duties and functions of the Rep’s artistic directors have varied at different stages of the Theatre’s development, despite the fact that the job-holders were all considered the artistic heads of the Theatre. Each of them, for numerous reasons, wrote different contents of the text for the Rep in the past 37 years. The case study of this dissertation focuses particularly on Chan’s artistic directorship – how she led and shaped the Rep when it was run by the colonial government.

**The Uniqueness of HKRep’s Artistic Director**

The employment status of HKRep’s artistic director is different from that of most of the artistic directors of other theatre companies in Hong Kong. In the case of the latter, the artistic director is always the person with ultimate authority over the whole company. That’s because they are the ones who established, and run, those theatre companies, per their own aspirations, beliefs and talents, and at their own expense (a lot of them are partially subvented by the government, though). Therefore, they enjoy more authority and freedom to carry out their plans, to fulfill their wishes and to produce shows based on their own interests. And most of their audiences
attend because of their interest in the artistic directors who own those theatre companies.

To attract their targeted audiences, these artistic directors usually stage a particular genre of productions that caters to their supporters. For example, Alice Laboratory Theatre always stages plays of existentialism and theatre of the absurd, like the works of Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett. The constraints on these artistic directors, on the other hand, may be derived from many other factors such as limited financial support or resources, but rarely from people in other positions or from committees, because the artistic directors themselves are the bosses and owners of the companies. Even if they have set up a council, it is merely for the sake of formality and to be recognised as professional companies. The council in fact has no actual authority over the artistic director. The best example of this case is Whole Theatre. Its late founder Ho not only assumed both the roles of artistic director and executive director, but also he never invited the theatre’s council members to any meetings since its establishment in 2008, nor did he ever inform them of any matters regarding the theatre during his era. This extreme case demonstrates the absolute authority artistic directors can enjoy when they are the owners of the companies.

Artistic directorship of the Rep is of quite the opposite nature. Although in practice the head of the theatre troupe, artistic directors are in fact employees earning a fixed monthly income paid by the government and under protection of the Labour

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8 The writer of this dissertation has been vice chairman of Whole Theatre since its establishment in 2008.
In terms of employment status, the artistic director of the Rep is pretty much the same as his / her subordinates. An artistic director is given a set of job duties which are to serve the implementation of the mission statement of the Rep. Before the Rep’s incorporation, he / she was answerable to the Hong Kong Government as represented by the Urban Council under the checks and balances of the Council’s executive arm, the Urban Services Department, as to the company’s daily operations; and after its incorporation in 2001 (the Rep is now being subvented by Home Affairs Bureau), he / she became answerable to the Government’s Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the Council and executive director. Being an ‘employed’ leader, the artistic director is required to submit proposals, papers and reports and be evaluated by a higher authority. He / she even needs to submit leave applications for vacations and certificates from registered doctors after taking sick leave, to the Councils or executive staff. Most importantly, he / she is required to carry out his / her ideas and plans according to the job duties prescribed by the two Councils.

During the colonial era, although the artistic director of the Rep only needed to serve the Rep, he / she was officially employed by the Urban Council, had signed a contract with the Urban Services Department, and was required to report to the Sub-committee of Performing Companies of the Urban Council. Approval for the plays staged every drama season had to come through the senior manager and the assistant director, both of the Urban Services Department, and the Sub-committee of Performing Companies of the Urban Council. The reporting and endorsement structure could be explained by the nature of the theatre company itself – it belonged
to a part of the government system administered by civil servants working under the colonial government. Therefore its artistic director, who was supposed to be the head of the Theatre, was only regarded as a contracted artist employee, required to work side by side with the senior manager of Urban Services Department, who was a permanent civil servant, for executive matters and daily operations, and be advised by an artistic consultants’ team formed of local drama experts. In a nutshell, he/she had to work in the executive-led, civil-servant system of the colonial government.

As leaders of a troupe working in a government structure, on the one hand, they are well endorsed with strong financial and executive support as well as many other resources provided by the government in addition to the freedom to practise their artistic directorship. The statement is supported by Choi’s emphasis in the interview: “Under the government, financial support and resources had never been a problem for the Rep.” (My own translation, personal communication, 18 May 2012. Original transcript: 話劇團由政府管理，金錢和資源不是問題). On the other hand, the so-called “freedom” they could enjoy was not unlimited or absolute. To a certain extent, their freedom might even be less than that of artistic directors whose theatre companies are self-funded or subvented by the government on a one-to-three-year basis. This is because the artistic ideas, choices and decisions of the latter are not restricted by the terms of reference given by their employers or supervisory authority… as they do not have any terms of reference, in the first place. When asked who had compiled the job duties for the Rep’s artistic director during the colonial era, K. B. Chan replied, “We, the executives, were the ones who determined
the artistic directors’ job specifications.” (My own translation, personal communication, 23 November 2011. Original transcript: 藝術總監的 job specifications 是由我們行政人員決定的). He was insinuating that the Rep was run under an executive-led administration. It is quite ironic that, even today, though the Rep is a full-fledged arts organisation, its artistic director is only a contracted artist offered a two-to-four-year term of service with each renewal of his / her contract. The executive staff, however, enjoys permanent employment privilege. This shows the government had no intention of leaving the Rep in any of the artistic directors’ hands as long as the Theatre was using government funding, both when the government itself ran the Theatre, or when it subvented the Theatre after its incorporation. For the latter scenario, the government appointed K. B. Chan to be its executive director, with permanent employment status since the company’s incorporation. For the government and the Council, K. B. Chan is the best choice, in whose hands they feel secure enough to leave the Theatre. A retired civil servant, K. B. Chan is a theatre lover and a veteran arts administrator who possesses decades of arts administration experience. He served the Rep as its manager and senior manager for over a decade, so he knows everything about the Rep. Thus he has been handed the mission of checking and balancing the authority of, and the execution of directives by, artistic directors.

Under these circumstances, I would assert that the artistic directors of HKRep practise their artistic directorship only within a given “framework”. This framework is neither explicit nor exact, but it is collectively suggested by the Rep’s mission
statements, a list of job duties, the Council’s directives and the government’s cultural policies. The artistic directors are also evaluated by the Urban Council / the Council, though they adopt the self-appraisal system. Since they are employed on a contract basis, they can be terminated or declined renewal of their contract if their work or attitudes are found to be not satisfactory. Choi elaborates the unseen boundaries for HKRep artistic directors when asked during an interview if she agreed with my “frame” assertion.

There was definitely a frame for the Rep’s artistic directors in the Urban Council era. The frame was very firm. Nobody could escape from or break the frame because the Rep was a statutory body and we all needed to follow the procedures. We would not put aside the rules just because you were a unique artistic entity. That’s the political reality we had to face at. However, artistic directors were given the “freedom” to exercise their artistic directorship within the frame. They could modify the frame into a round, rectangular or irregular shape, as it were, or simply make it a bit larger or a smaller frame. Nevertheless, boundaries are boundaries and they did exist (my own translation, personal communication, 18 May 2012. Original transcript: 在市政局的年代，話劇團的藝術總監當然是有一個框框。以前市政局的框架很強，無人能打破或避開，因為話劇團是一個 statutory body。它一定要有程序，我們不會因為你是獨特的 artistic entity 而移除規條。這個框是脫離不到，這是政治上的現實，
Choi also comments that artistic directors have been able to enjoy more freedom since the Rep’s incorporation. However, she stresses that “the artistic directors have now merely become confined to another frame, because it is not easy to break many of the conventions” (my own translation, personal communication, 18 May 2012. Original transcript: 公司化後，藝術總監可以享有較多的自由，不過他們卻要面對另一個框框，因為有很多 convention，並不容易打破).

Choi’s confirmation of the “frame” for the artistic directors of the Rep makes the choice of Chan as a case study for this dissertation all the more compelling. Rather than simply listing the achievements and conditions of Chan, however, my discourse focuses on how this lady struggled as an “auteur in contexts” of the Theatre, as she encountered many obstacles owing to the “frame”, besides political, social and cultural changes while she wrote the text of the Rep from 1986 to 1990.

To further develop my “frame” assertion, I borrow an analogy from The Journey to the West⁹ to describe the situation of artistic directors of the HKRep: although the Monkey King is so talented that he can create 72 alterations or avatars of

⁹《西遊記》
himself, he is able to do so only within the palm of the Buddha – similarly, artistic directors of the Rep have the “freedom” to present their ideas, talents and creative works, but only within the perimeter set the government and the Council. Their bond, like the band on the Monkey King’s head which helps tame its wearer, is the offer of renewal of their contract. Hence, the artistic director of HKRep is not the absolute master of the Theatre; rather, he / she is a key supervisor whose presence may only affect the performances of the troupe, but not the existence of it… because the artistic director doesn’t own the company, he only serves it. The Chinese saying, “The government bureau is hard as iron, while the turnover of its officers is like flowing water”10, is another good description of this case. For that matter, a veteran HKRep actor’s sarcastic remark, further illustrates the paradox associated with the artistic directorship of the Rep:

None of the artistic directors ever liked me and they always wanted to get rid of me. And yet, they are all gone now. But I am still here!11

(My own translation. Original transcript: 所有藝術總監都不喜歡我，很想辭退我。不過，他們都離開了，最後留下來的是我).

The three former artistic directors of the Rep left the Theatre for different reasons. Choi says it was “natural for artistic directors to come and go; nobody in the world is irreplaceable” (my own translation, personal communication, 18 May 2012. Original transcript: People come and go，這個世界是沒人不可以不替代的).

10 鐵一般的衙門，流水一樣的官
11 This remark is a known comment by one of the seasoned actors of the Rep
The development of an art organisation relies on doing things at the right time with the right people. In terms of the right time, the Urban Council was empowered with financial independence and was willing to spend on developing arts and culture through these few arts organisations. The support was guaranteed. With regard to the right people, it also had a department focusing on managing these arts organisations. In terms of artistic talents, we had artists from the Mainland and graduates from the Academy for Performing Arts. The development of the Rep was therefore the result of all these factors combined. Artistic directors played merely one of the roles in the whole operation. Of course, they were important because they were in the frontline. We hoped they had very strong profiles so that they would be recognised by audiences, society, the drama scene and the cultural field at large. Only if they had captured all these sectors could they substantively help promote HKRep. But we could not rely on only him/her (my own translation, Choi, personal communication, 18 May 2012. Original transcript: 當時話劇團發展的環境是很重要的，所有團的發展都有天時之利：市政局有條件，財政獨立自主，肯花在文化藝術和這幾個藝團之上，保證有支持。人和方面，話劇團有一個部門的同事專做這些管理事情。至於人才，那時候很多大陸演員來港，後來有演藝學院的畢業生注入新力量。因此，話劇團的發展其實是結合三個因素的總和，藝術總監只是扮演整個運作中的其中一個角色。當然，他們是很重要的，因為他們站在
Choi’s statement explicitly states that, though an important position at the Rep, artistic directorship is just one of the many factors that contribute to the success of the group. The subject of the arts organisation was never the artistic director but the colonial government itself. Even though the Rep is now incorporated and no longer run by the government, as Choi says above, its artistic directors are still inhibited by another kind of “frame”, as the Theatre is still hugely subvented by the Government.

Given these advantages and constraints, the “texts” written by artistic directors of the Rep as auteurs are worth studying. To my mind, they were playing as auteurs when they directed their artistic works, because they were allowed to fully exercise their directorship and to demonstrate their artistic styles once their productions were approved to be staged. However, when talking about how they wrote the “texts” of the Rep as a whole, I would describe them as “auteurs in contexts” who were locating in the situations formed and challenged by political, social, and cultural forces, by hindrances from the government (from the Urban Council / Council to the executive staff), and by the peers, the drama scene, the competitors and the audiences of different time periods. Each “text” written by its artistic director, Yang, Chan, Mao and Anthony Chan, is therefore an important individual discourse on the HKRep’s own history and Hong Kong’s cultural history.
This is because the “texts’ not only show the Rep’s development in the past 37 years but also reflect the development of the Hong Kong drama scene from the late 1970s to the present.

In this dissertation, I choose Chan as the subject of the case study. The reasons have been explained in the Introduction.
Chapter Two

The Birth of HKRep -- Its Background and Objectives

One of the key words of this dissertation is “HKRep”. It is the drama troupe in which the subject of the case study of this dissertation, Chan, practised as an “auteur in contexts”. Therefore I did a thorough investigation on the birth of HKRep, the reasons behind the founding of the Theatre, its objectives and how it was operated in its first few years before the position of artistic director was established. I believe the provision of the background of the Rep can help us understand why and how its artistic director, Chan in this case, demonstrated her authorship as an “auteur in contexts” when she became the second artistic director of the Theatre in the 1980s.

Background

Dr. Cheung Ping Kuen (Cheung hereafter), head of Liberal Studies at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and chairman of the International Association of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong), describes the birth of HKRep as “a milestone in Hong Kong drama history” (my own translation, Cheung, 2001. p. xiv). The birth of the then-colony’s first professional theatre troupe was mainly attributed to the change in the Hong Kong government’s cultural policy (if there was any at that time), which was a result of the rise of cultural identity and native consciousness of Hong Kong people in the late 1960s.
After the Cultural Revolution in Mainland China and the two riots that took place in Hong Kong in the 1960s, native consciousness, or localism, began to sprout in the minds of Hong Kong’s people. Realising the forthcoming cultural change in the colony, the government swiftly changed the Hong Kong cultural policy to a new direction. A text from Hong Kong Youth and Tertiary Students Association written by Ting Kai Luen (2003) summarises the cause and the result of the transformation of cultural policy in that era:

(Hong Kong) history made a drastic change in 1967. Influenced by the thought currents driving the Cultural Revolution in the Mainland, Hong Kong began to carry out anti-Britain movements. Whether those thoughts (from the Mainland) were biased or not, it was the first time that a strong sense of patriotism had agglomerated (in Hong Kong). People shouted loudly, “I am Chinese”. They even asked (the British government) to return Hong Kong to China. Meanwhile, they consciously fought for their basic rights under the colonial government. That was the time “localism” was formed, and it caused the emergence of civic consciousness…

After the riots in 1967, the Hong Kong government began to realise that the only way it could continue controlling the colony and fight against the Mainland’s ideological influence was to build up a sense of belonging among the Hong Kong people. Hence, the government
organised activities such as the “Youth Festival” and “Hong Kong Festival”, and established a body similar to today’s Leisure and Cultural Services Department, to promote leisure activities aimed at nurturing a sense of belonging among the Hong Kong people (my own translation, An Introduction to Native Consciousness, para. 4).

A Hong Kong Arts Development Council research paper on the devolvement of Hong Kong cultural policy also states:

1967: A riot took place in Hong Kong. The colonial government utilised the entertainment and educational function of cultural performances. For example, the Urban Council organised an “Outdoor Dance Ball” at the Blake Pier (1969) to provide an outlet to help release depression and exhaust the extra energy of the youth (my own translation, HKADC, 2001, p.2).

Cheung in an interview comments that “the British government was getting smart enough to draw the people into the theatres instead of giving them a chance to wantonly expend their energy in the streets.” (My own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 94) Thus there was a saying about the government’s approach to solving the problem: “When there’s activity, there’s no riot”.12

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12 有活動，冇暴動
Referring to this historical era, Dr. Darwin Chen (Chen hereafter), then assistant director of the Urban Services Department, points out that the direction of cultural policy in Hong Kong had changed from “descriptive” and “responsive” or “reactive”, to “prescriptive”.

We knew we needed to win support from the people and to make use of the Chinese and local culture to balance the dominating Western culture at that time. A. de. O. Sales, then chairman of the Urban Council and a performing arts lover, recognised the importance of cultural development in Hong Kong. Since the Urban Council began to obtain independent funding from the rates in the 1970s, Sales therefore put forth effort to invest resources in cultural activities promotion (my own translation, personal communication, 28 April, 2008. Original transcript: 我們知道需要贏取市民的支持和利用中國和本土文化去抗衡當時西方文化的支配。當時市政局主席沙理士是一名表演藝術愛好者，知道在香港發展文化的重要。七十年代時，市政局開始從差餉中獲得獨立的經費，沙理士便將資源投放放在推動建設文化活動之上).

According to Chen, the differences among “descriptive”, “responsive / reactive” and “prescriptive” are as follows: “Descriptive” means the government lets the situation develop naturally without intentionally making any alterations, interferences or additions to it. “Responsive / reactive” means the government
responds to requests from concerned parties under pressure. “Prescriptive” means the
government does something towards a definite goal and expects speedy results (my
own translation, D. Chen, 2008, personal communication. Original transcript:
Descriptive 是指政府沒有刻意改變或干預處境，或加添任何東西，而是讓它自然發展。Responsive / reactive 是政府在面對有關團體的訴求的壓力下作出反應。
Prescriptive 則是政府有方向地做一些東西，並且希望迅即獲得成果).

In order to implement the prescriptive policy on promoting local performances and cultural activities, Cultural Services, a division accountable for administering and promoting local cultural matters, was soon set up.

The Setting up of the Cultural Services Division

Cultural Services was set up as a division under the Urban Services Department in 1976. Chen, who was appointed director of the Division, recruited staff from other departments of the colonial government. For example, Choi was transferred from the Labour Department and Chung Ling Hoi was from the Housing Department. These two administrative staff members became deputy director and assistant director (Culture) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, respectively, in later years. The Division can therefore be called “the cradle of the Hong Kong government’s first generation of arts administrators”. However, because all the executive staff of the Rep were government officials, its establishment can also be considered a formation of bureaucracy in an arts administration.
According to Chen, the Cultural Services Division was responsible for carrying out three missions. The first was to nurture five local professional performing arts institutions. This means the Division was required to upgrade the Hong Kong Ballet and the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra to a professional level and to found three new performing arts institutions, namely, HKRep, the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra and the Hong Kong Dance Company. The second mission was to increase the number of venues for performances. Since insufficient venue support has always been a main hindrance to the growth of local performing arts, the birth of HKRep and the other two performing arts troupes was therefore partly attributed to the construction of a series of city halls and civic centres. The Division’s third mission was to increase the accessibility of performing arts to local audiences (my own translation, D. Chen, personal communication, 2008. Original transcript: 文化事務科負責三項任務。第一項是培育五個本土職業表演藝術團體。換句話說，署方需要將香港芭蕾舞蹈團和香港管弦樂團升格至職業層面，同時再成立三個新的藝團：香港話劇團、香港中樂團和香港舞蹈團。第二項任務是增加表演場地。由於表演場地缺乏，阻礙本土表演藝術發展。香港話劇團和其餘兩個藝團能夠誕生，部份原因是因為當時興建一系列大會堂所致。第三項任務是令到市民有機會接觸表演藝術). For example, the promotional ticket price for the drama performance “Peace Drama Drive” was only one Hong Kong dollar. This inexpensive rate could therefore attract more audiences to see the shows.

Cheung in an interview by Fong gives a brief picture of the cultural background in the early 1980s:
From then on, Hong Kong (government) began to build theatres and sponsor performing arts activities. Besides the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, government departments responsible for granting funds also included the Urban Council (for managing the urban areas in the city) and the Regional Council (for managing the rural areas in the New Territories). They also managed theatres and gave more funding to theatre arts. That was considered the “cultural policy” of Hong Kong which was, however, not officially called “cultural policy” (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p.94).

It is not only important to understand the reason the government set up the Cultural Services Division in the mid-1970s. It is also important to know the rationale behind the establishment of a drama troupe, a Chinese orchestra and a dance company in that era. Lo sheds some light in one of his drama publications:

Several professional performing arts institutions were formed in succession in the late 1970s, evincing further development of the local performing arts culture. The colonial government was thus forced to alter the old concept of colonialism as Hong Kong’s local culture was taking shape. The governance of Hong Kong was thereafter designed with the furtherance of the economy and the people’s livelihood in mind. Viewed from a historical perspective, the emergence of many
Hong Kong professional performing arts institutions can be considered the first wave of localism (my own translation, Lo, 2004, p. 6).

The rise of localism, or native consciousness, and the change in administrative direction by the colonial government, are the two main factors that brought about the birth of HKRep and other professional performing arts groups.

Another noteworthy fact is the performing medium of the Rep – it is not Mandarin, the national language of China, but Cantonese, a provincial dialect spoken by Guangdongese, who constitute the overwhelming majority of Hong Kong’s populace. Having a drama institution of which the performing medium was Cantonese, although in a British colony, was clear manifestation of the growth of cultural identity in Hong Kong. By the same token, the establishment of the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra in 1977 and the Hong Kong Dance Company in 1981 was not coincidental. The former is an orchestra playing Chinese music with traditional Chinese musical instruments while the latter principally presents Chinese folk dances. Extending Lo’s position, I would say the aforementioned three performing arts institutions together constituted the “first wave of cultural products” prescribed by the government when challenged by the rise of native consciousness among Hong Kong people.

Cultural Situations before the Rep was Born and Definition of “Repertory Theatre”
Chung has been one of the leading drama practitioners in Hong Kong since the 1960s. Chen therefore consulted him on the feasibility of setting up a professional Cantonese drama troupe in 1976. Chung’s reply was:

The population of Hong Kong is now over four million people. However, we cannot find anybody whose profession is theatre. Therefore it is time we set up a professional theatre troupe. Being a drama practitioner, I certainly support drama development in Hong Kong and the idea of establishing a professional theatre troupe supported by the government (my own translation, K. F. Chung, personal communication, 17 April 2008. Original transcript: 香港的人口已經有四百萬人了，但是我們仍然找不到任何人是以戲劇為生的。因此，我認為是時候成立一個專業劇團。我熱愛戲劇，當然支持香港的戲劇發展和由政府興建一個職業劇團).

Chen recalled during my interview with him that he also consulted other drama veterans such as Lee and Pao for their comments. The consensus was that the Cultural Services Division would provide resources and venues while those who were interested in theatre would contribute their ideas, talents and experience to HKRep (my own translation, personal communication, 28 April 2008. Original transcript: 我們亦曾諮詢李援華和鮑漢琳的意見。大家都同意由文化事務科提供資源和場地，有興趣者則負責提供意見、才能和經驗予話劇團).
The cultivation of administrative staff for management of the Rep was evident in the well-planned study and investigation tour of Yuen Lup Fun (Yuen hereafter), first manager of HKRep, in 1975. Then an official of the colonial government and assistant manager of the Hong Kong City Hall, Yuen obtained a scholarship and was granted a paid study leave by the government to study drama at the East West Centre in Hawaii. According to K. B. Chan, the paid leave offered by the government was because of Chen’s idea.

Chen encouraged all managers working in cultural services to learn and experience more about theatre and cultural knowledge. He also sent another young arts administrator, Chow Yung Ping (Y. P. Chow hereafter), abroad to study music. Yuen said that before the trip he did not know anything about theatre. That was in fact the first time he had studied drama theories (my own translation, personal communication, K. B. Chan, 21 August 2014. Original transcript: 陳達文鼓勵所有文化經理學習和體驗戲劇和文化知識。他亦保送另一位年輕的藝術行政員周勇平到外國學習音樂。袁立勳說他在此行之前並不認識戲劇，所以這是他首次學習戲劇理論).

Yuen spent three semesters studying with the centre and took a two-month course in the Film Department of New York University during the summer. That season, to learn more about the operation and practice of Western theatres and drama
companies for his future mission, he also traveled to over 10 cities across the U.S. for research.

I traveled from Hawaii to the East Coast, visiting leading theatre companies and groups, including the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the American Conservatory Theatre (my own translation, L. F. Yuen, personal communication, 25 April 2008. Original transcript: 我由夏威夷去到東岸，參觀了超過十間著名劇院，包括 San Francisco Mime Troupe 和 American Conservatory Theatre).

Although his study trip was not solely for the purpose of preparing for the establishment of the Rep but also for Yuen’s own interest, his academic achievement and his visits to all those theatre companies ultimately redounded to the HKRep, as he became its first manager after its establishment. The study trip Yuen undertook is evidence that the government made special efforts to plan such things, to train managerial personnel, and to investigate the common practices of Western theatre companies, two years before Hong Kong’s first professional theatre troupe was formed. This amply demonstrates that what the government intended to form was a theatre troupe operated by its own administrative officials, rather than by natural-born, professional art practitioners.

Besides sending staff members to the U.S. for studies and investigations, the Cultural Services Division also took the British National Theatre’s operation and
practice as references for the setting up of HKRep (D. Chen, personal communication, 28 April 2008. Original transcript: 文化事務科成立話劇團時, 亦參考英國皇家劇院的運作和做法). Although HKRep was a theatre troupe made up of, and for, Hong Kong people, a population of which the overwhelming majority is Chinese, the government did not take reference from any theatre companies or drama groups in the Mainland. This decision may be explained by two reasons. Firstly, HKRep would be a theatre troupe set up and operated by the colonial government; therefore it took reference from its colonizer and the Western world. Secondly, China was still suffering from the Cultural Revolution, which came to an end only in 1976. Therefore the government sought models of practices from the U.K. and the U.S. to reproduce Western authoritativeness on the colony’s cultural development.

With regard to the definition of repertory theatre, the *Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre* says that “the essential of a repertory company, strictly speaking, is that it should have several productions – a repertory of productions, in fact – ready at the same time, so that the play presented can change from night to night” (Taylor, 1966, p. 226). *Wikipedia* (2013) gives a similar definition: “A repertory theatre can be a Western theatre and opera production in which a resident company presents works from a specified repertoire, usually in alternation or rotation” (Repertory theatre). Online *Oxford Dictionaries* (2013) likewise offers: “the performance of various plays, operas, or ballets by a company at regular short intervals” (Definition of repertory in English).
This appears to have been the original concept and desire of the government when the HKRep was formed. However, this defining character of a repertory has rarely been put into practice. Chen explained the reasons in the interview:

First, although the government intended to set up an authentic “repertory theatre”, it could not put the idea into practice. HKRep has many new plays for staging, but not enough room for storing the sets from productions already staged. Therefore it does not produce many revival performances, but keeps staging new productions instead (my own translation, personal communication, 28 April 2008. Original transcript: 雖然政府很想成立一個真正的 repertory theatre，但卻難實踐。因為話劇團有太多新劇在手，卻沒有足夠的地方安置已經上演的劇目的佈景。因此，它沒有重演太多舊劇目，而是繼續排演新劇).

To me, “parallelism” is the main culprit that has hindered the Rep from being literally a “repertory theatre” since its birth. I will discuss this idea later in this chapter.

**Objectives for Establishing HKRep**

Both the mission statements in the Rep’s two company profiles published in the troupe’s 15th and 20th anniversary commemorative books explicitly say that the
objectives of establishing Hong Kong’s first professional theatre troupe were for the purposes of “promoting local theatre arts”, “promoting dramatic arts” and “developing a wide audience in the local community” (Ma, 1992, p. 6). Yang, ex-artistic director of HKRep, writes more elaborately in his article “Reflecting on the Past, Hoping for the Future”, published in the first commemorative book:

The primary purpose of the Urban Council’s establishing the HKRep was to counter the ill effects of the local film and TV industries which, at that time, used to produce a great number of low-quality products damaging to young student audiences. Through the establishment of a professional theatre company which showcased masterpieces of world theatre, Hong Kong audiences would be able to appreciate high-quality dramatic offerings at a surprisingly low cost. As the ticket price was so low, a great number of student audiences started to attend the Repertory Theatre’s performances. Year after year, the student audiences have cultivated the good habit of attending theatre and other performing arts on a regular basis (Yang, 1992, p.8).

Chen adds another important point during the interview. “There were lots of theatre talents in Hong Kong, but we had no platform for those people to collaborate, to create or to grow. Through the establishment of HKRep, we provided a platform for different sorts of theatre talents to practise and to receive professional training” (personal communication, 28 April 2008. Original transcript: 香港有很多戲劇人才，
From these texts and explanations, we can conclude that the objectives for founding HKRep included: to showcase masterpieces of world theatre; to promote theatre arts and, in particular, local theatre arts; to guide audiences to appreciate high-quality dramatic offerings; to develop a wide audience in the local community; to cultivate a good habit of attending theatre among Hong Kong people; and to provide a platform for theatre practitioners to hone their skills, to work together and to learn professionally in a more productive manner.

Indeed, all the objectives behind the birth of the HKRep reflected the booming of performing culture in Hong Kong. Today local performing culture continues to prosper, not only in drama development but also among other local performing art forms and institutions. Yang wrote as early as 1992:

Fifteen years ago, the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre was established in this territory – a land that had been slighted as a “cultural desert”. Fifteen years later, cultural activities in Hong Kong flourish as much as in any other country in Asia. The “desert” criticism has long been a thing of the past (Yang, 1992, p. 8).
Lo echoes Yang’s statement in his essay “The Exploration of Localism in Hong Kong Theatre”:

Before the 1970s, there were not many professional local drama performances found in Hong Kong. Most of the drama productions were Western translation plays. The Hong Kong government did not consider cultural activities important in its colony. In terms of cultural and entertainment infrastructure, we could only find the Hong Kong City Hall built in 1962. Hong Kong was therefore labeled a “cultural desert” (my own translation, Lo, 2004, p.5).

Seasoned HKRep actor Chow Chi Fai (C. F. Chow hereafter) also makes the same comment:

Twenty-five years ago, Hong Kong was regarded as a “cultural desert”. Dramatic productions often had no more than five performances in a run, stage artists were few and far between, and theatre was no more than a game for a handful. It was against this background that the HKRep was set up (C. F. Chow, 2002, p. 80).

Their comments are based on the fact that professional and long-run drama productions and organisations in Hong Kong were lacking before the 1970s. Only a few well-known stage productions were found in the mid-1970s. For instance, The
72 Tenants, staged by the Hong Kong Movie & TV Theatrical Society, had 123 showings in 1973 (Fong, G, 2000, p. 8) and Sorrow of the Gentry, starring up-and-coming TVB actors, had 23 showings in 1974 (Tao, 2010, p. 39). However, those stage productions were only ad hoc events with no continuity for further development. Besides those shows and other amateur productions, there were not many stage performances produced in those days. When the Urban Council was granted its financial independence in 1973, it started investing resources in promoting performing arts. The Hong Kong Festival of Arts was launched in the same year (HKADC, 2001, p. 2).

From the above research, one should not wonder why director Yang, scholar Lo and actor Chow all address Hong Kong as a “cultural desert”. Regarding the theory of “cultural desert”, Chin in his book Hong Kong Has Culture has his opinions.

The “living away from the motherland” sentiment, the apologetic feeling among the Chinese living in a colony and the insufficient confidence of the local society towards Hong Kong culture generated a lot of self-degrading and self-lashing comments (among the Hong Kong people). (Under these circumstances,) when people from the north of China or Westerners attacked Hong Kong (and called it) “a cultural desert”, (local people) could only silently acquiesce without making any defence… According to Hong Kong scholar Yeung Wing
Yu, the term was derived from the culture-conquering manner of newcomers to Hong Kong. It was used more for power struggles in cultural politics than for stating any fact (my own translation, Chin: 2008, p. 66).

Therefore, the birth of HKRep was a rupture from the colony’s status as a “cultural desert”. It was a farewell call to the era in which cultural events and development were almost absent. By the same token, the birth of HKRep was also a rupture from the period when Hong Kong only had amateur theatre practitioners and organisations. In the 1960s, especially after the riot in 1967, a number of amateur drama groups emerged, including the Federation of Inter-school Drama Clubs, the Hong Kong Federation of Students, the Amity Drama Club and the Bestreben Drama Association. Cheung in his essay “Introduction” published in An Oral History of Hong Kong Drama -- 1930s - 1960s (my own translation) quotes stage director Yung Yee Yin’s remarks on the house programme of In Praise of Parents (my own translation) produced on 4 September 1966:

At present, the mainstream of Hong Kong drama movement is still advocating amateur performances. Amateur performance does not aim at profit-making but is viewed as an artistic activity. (All we need to do is) to do our best to create the artistic work so that (we can)
transform theatre into an art piece and let people appreciate it together  
(my own translation, Yung, 1966).

Cheung agrees with Yung’s comment:

The term “amateur” is indeed an objective fact. Back in the 1950s and  
the 1960s, it was very hard (for people) to earn a living by performing  
on stage. Before the 1970s, drama was only an amateur activity.  
Many capable drama practitioners hence went into the film industry  
(my own translation, Cheung, 2001, p. xii).

Although the local drama scene was prosperous and many drama groups had  
been set up, they were merely amateur organisations through which their members  
only shared their personal interest in the art form. They were not able to earn a living  
by performing for those groups. The Chinese translation “after-work”14 gives a clear  
depiction of the nature of the word “amateur”. Chung’s recollection regarding  
how theatre advisors contributed to amateur productions shows the non-professional  
nature of amateur drama in the 1960s and the 1970s.

When amateur drama groups had no budget for staging shows, we  
sought “Bleeding Advisors” for financial sponsorship. Of course, we  
adressed them as “Production Advisors” on house programmes, but  

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14 業餘
in fact we called them “Bleeding Advisors”\textsuperscript{15}. This practice lasted from the 1960s to the 1970s because the government did not give us any financial support (personal communication, 28 April 2008.Original transcript: 業餘劇團沒有足夠的金錢搬演節目時，便會找「出血顧問」贊助經費。當然，我們在場刊上稱呼他們為「製作顧問」，但實際上我們叫他們做「出血顧問」。這種做法由六十年代維持至七十年代，因為政府沒有給我們金錢上的支持).

The establishment of HKRep was therefore again a farewell to the non-professional era of Hong Kong drama scene. Its actors and staff were expected to be treated professionally by the Theatre, both in terms of their career development and livelihood.

The setting up of HKRep also announced a rupture from traditional theatre. Drama was an “imported art” to Chinese people because it was originally from the Western world. The first Western drama in China was staged in 1907. It was named “spoken drama”. The “imported art” was also called “modernised drama” and “enlightening drama”\textsuperscript{16} (Eds. Tian, Au-yang, Xia, Yang, A, Zhang, Li & Chen, 1985, p. 50) when it was freshly introduced to China. Although “spoken drama” had a history of over a century in the Mainland, it was still a relatively new performing art form to the Hong Kong people in the 1970s. At that time, Hong Kong’s traditional

\textsuperscript{15}出血顧問

\textsuperscript{16}話劇、文明戲、啟明戲
theatre performance for the majority of people was Cantonese opera. The performing mode, style and practice of the traditional operatic art form is completely different from that of “spoken drama” from the West. The setting up of a professional Western-style drama troupe, which was identified as new, Western, modernised and progressive, symbolised a departure from the old, Chinese, traditional and conservative performing art.

The purpose of the founding of HKRep as stated by Yang in the Rep’s 15th anniversary commemorative book and the mission statements published in the two commemorative books are indicators of the expanding enlightenment when the Rep began to take part in the Hong Kong drama industry. Although there were many performing activities going on in the 1970s, the standard of those productions remained non-professional. Beijing dramatist Tian makes a comment in Fong’s *Interview Records on Hong Kong Drama*.

Most (of the Hong Kong drama groups) are amateur. There are many amateur drama groups playing the leading role in Hong Kong … (I) would not say there is no way (we can) improve their (production) standard. However, the participants are non-experts. No matter how passionate they are, they only work for shows on a “come and go” basis. Drama troupes do not have permanent members … (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p.70)
The establishment of HKRep hence served as enlightenment for Hong Kong theatre, drama practitioners and audience. A way to comprehend enlightenment is: “enlightenment is not to subvert all the authoritativeness but to establish a new one so as to replace the old one. And the new authoritativeness is reasoning” (Ling, 2007, p. 235). This statement is most certainly applicable to HKRep. The Rep was born not to subvert all the establishments or achievements of the existing amateur drama groups and the groups’ participants. Rather, it was to mark a new milestone in the advancement of local drama advancement through new concepts, institutions and practices.

As mentioned previously, drama was a new art form for the majority of Hong Kong people in the 1970s. HKRep therefore undertook the mission of introducing the Western performing art form to Hong Kong residents. Through the Theatre’s unceasing productions and promotions, “spoken drama” became a familiar stage art form to the people of Hong Kong. The “full house effect” and the immediate re-runs of all of the Rep’s productions in its first three years indicated that it had successfully carried out its missions of “developing a wide audience in the local community” and “cultivating a good habit of attending theatre among Hong Kong people”.

When commenting on the Rep’s enlightenment of the local drama scene, Chung said, “As the first ever professional theatre troupe in Hong Kong, HKRep set up an example and a norm for the other professional theatre troupes that came after it” (my own translation, personal communication, 28 April 2008. Original transcript: 話
This statement, substantiated by the setting up and the operation of the subsequent professional theatre troupes further justified the subjectivity of HKRep as a leading model among other local theatre troupes.


Chung explains the reason for staging 15 Western translation plays during the Rep’s first three years. “Not many people could afford going to Europe or the U.S. to watch shows back in those days. Therefore it was our mission to introduce different classics of various eras in drama history to Hong Kong audiences” (my own translation, personal communication, 28 April 2008. Original transcript: 以前並沒有太多人可以負擔得起到歐洲或美國看劇，所以我們的使命是要為香港觀眾推介戲劇史上不同年代的各種經典劇). Luk in his *Translation and Adaptation of Western Drama in Hong Kong: From Script to Stage* (2007) states that “the

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17 The number includes the three Western translation plays staged on a small scale in the first two years of the Rep’s life.
adaptation and translation of plays is probably a shift from a ‘source culture’ to another ‘target culture’” (my own translation, p. 4). The Rep hence played the role of an “eye-opener”, presenting Western theatre performances and culture (source culture) to the people of Hong Kong and the local stage (target culture). Luk in the same book further explains the reasons that translation plays constituted the majority of productions in the first years of the HKRep.

Fong Chee Fun points out that “being a fully government-funded” organisation, HKRep “had its own mission”. Undoubtedly, because of the clear premise of “popularising dramatic arts and nurturing local audiences”, HKRep was required to introduce Western plays of high quality to the Hong Kong people (my own translation, p. 24).

Another reason that most of the productions staged in those years were translation plays was that all plays had to be submitted to the Special Branch under the Crime Wing of the Hong Kong Police Force for censorship before they were shown. To avoid political complications, the Rep produced mostly translation plays and old Chinese plays.

Still another reason for the production of translation plays was that the drama scene lacked local playwrights who were capable of writing original plays, especially plays about society. Luk also makes the same point when he writes: “The development of original plays was not mature at that time. Because of the lack of
‘supply’, translation plays therefore became the mainstream choice” (my translation, Luk, 2007, p. 24). The change of the situation, i.e. to produce more original plays, took place when Chan, the subject of the case study of this dissertation, became the artistic director of the Rep in the later years of its first decade. More on her efforts in writing and promoting original playwriting will be discussed in Chapter Four.

As Chen states, one of the objectives of establishing HKRep was to provide a platform for different kinds of theatre talents to practise and to receive professional training. The objective was met when the Rep was born. Since its inauguration, the Rep has served as a platform for talents of various theatre specialties to collaborate, to practise and to create. For example, as it did not have full-time actors in its first year, actors from different amateur drama groups came to perform while the directors of their groups were commissioned by the Rep. Chung Kam Wing, ex-wardrobe assistant and one of the Rep’s first three full-time backstage crew members, remarks in an interview:

Because the Company (HKRep) did not have any full-time actors or technicians, different directors were called in to put up their own show, with their own choice of cast… In a way, the Rep provided a platform for different amateur groups to showcase their talents (Tao, 2002, p. 70).
To serve as directors, veteran theatre practitioners (Chung, James Mark, Chu Hak), scholars (Ho Man Wui, OOi), arts administrators (Yuen, Y. P. Chow), stage actors (Mok Yan Lan, Joseph Yu) were granted opportunities to stage plays. Young playwrights (Leung Lup Yan, To Kwok Wai (To hereafter) and Anthony Chan, current artistic director of HKRep), adaptors (Lee, Mak Sai Man and Ho Man Wui) and translators (Jane Lai, Chung) were also given a platform to stage their scripts or translated scripts in a professional way. The practice of opening up the Theatre for local theatre practitioners to present their artistic talents was followed by Chan when she became artistic director of the Rep.

Through working for the Rep, many theatre apprentices have gained solid and practical theatrical experiences. Since its birth in 1977, the Rep has nurtured and trained numerous professional talents in the local theatre industry, including playwrights, directors, actors, stage managers, backstage experts, art administrators, and so forth. It became what Ho Man Wai, one of the Rep’s first 10 full-time actors, describes as the “Shaolin Temple” for drama training” (M. W. Ho, 2002, p.109).

Structure and Operations

There were two dedicated committees overseeing the Rep’s operations and artistic direction in its first six years when it had no artistic director.
The HKRep had no artistic director at this stage. The Culture Select Committee of the Urban Council was therefore responsible for monitoring and deciding on all the theatre’s operations. The Committee also sought the advice of artistic consultants on the artistic direction and development of the Rep. Among the first such advisors were Chung King Fai, Vicki Ooi, Leo Yam, Lee Woon Wah, Chan Yau Hau, Lau Fong Kwong, Daniel Yang, Mary Wong, Pao Hon Lum, Liu Tsun Yan and Ouk Fung. (Tao, 2007, p. 19)

Daily administration and operations were undertaken by government officials and managers Paul Yeung and Yuen.

As this was an important cultural investment for the government, the Urban Council assigned civil servants Paul Yeung and Yuen Lup Fun to manage the drama troupe… Besides overseeing daily administrative operations, Yeung and Yuen were also to be responsible for its programming. (Tao, 2007, p. 18-19)

As mentioned in the previous section, Yuen was a manager of Hong Kong City Hall and was sent to the U.S. to learn more about theatre before the Rep was founded. Being a theatre-lover, on top of his administrative duties, he was also commissioned to direct at least one production for the Rep during his three-year service. Yuen recalls in an interview:
When the Rep was freshly established, it had no artistic director. I was the first manager of the Rep… In the 1970s, I directed *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Antigone, The Injustice Done to Tou Ngo* and *The Rickshaw-puller Camel Cheung* (for the Rep) (my own translation, Fong. 2000, p. 105).

His active participation in artistic practice while also being an administrator demonstrates an unclear division of labour in the Rep’s early days. Also, as the Rep did not have any full-time actors in its inaugural year, different directors were commissioned to put on their own shows with their own choice of cast. This is also a non-professional practice found in the Rep’s early years.

When asked how to decide the readiness of the birth of the Rep, Yuen replied that they had a system to help decide the feasibility of implementing a cultural project:

We had papers (prepared by government officials), a budget (government fund), an ecological environment (rising of local culture, amateur drama boom), harmonious support and public participation (by audiences and the media), box-office sales (predicted by the popularity of the previous cultural shows staged by the Urban Council), professional talents (artistic consultants, freelance directors, actors and backstage hands) and a venue (the City Hall). Therefore the proposal (of setting up a professional theatre troupe) was approved by the

The preparation for the birth of HKRep marked the theatre troupe as a product of rationality -- it was not created because of fortuity, nor was it an ad hoc event. It was a well-designed and calculated project, involving great efforts from many groups of participants and a long lead time for making it the first professional theatre troupe of Hong Kong. Though everything seemed so well-planned, the absence of an artistic director lasted for six years after the Rep’s establishment. Yuen’s great involvement in the Rep’s programming and productions in those years indicates the Theatre was executive-led at that time, even though it was an art organisation. And although the position of artistic director was created later, the influence of the executive staff and the government’s Sub-committee of Performing Companies of the Urban Council still existed. This would become one of the contexts in which Chan found herself, and needed to deal with, while she was artistic director of the Rep.
**Programming**

The idea of “diverse yet balanced” was introduced to the Rep’s programming. The word “diverse” mainly refers to the Rep’s presentation of three categories of plays, namely, Chinese, Western and local original work.

Under the Chinese category, the Rep staged four traditional plays in its first three years. The absence of original Chinese plays was due to the need to avoid political censorship by the Special Branch of the Hong Kong Police Force. This was because relations between Hong Kong, the Mainland and the U.K. were still quite sensitive in the late 1970s. The Western category included Western classics, contemporary works, adaptations of Broadway shows and adaptations of Shakespeare’s masterpieces. This was the category that the Rep staged the most in its early years because one of the main objectives of founding the Theatre was to introduce Western dramas to Hong Kong audience. It was also because, as explained above, all plays had to be submitted to the Special Branch for censorship before they were shown. To avoid political complications, the Rep produced mainly translation plays and old Chinese plays. The local original work category was the least produced, indicating that this kind of genre was not well-developed in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the Rep adapted a TV drama from Radio Television Hong Kong into a stage production in 1978. *The Value of Youth*, a story about Hong Kong’s delinquency problem, is recognised as the first original play of the Rep which was derived from a

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19 The four plays included a traditional play (*The Rural Trilogy*) and three adaptions, one from Chinese folklore (*The Great Trial*), the other from a Yuan opera (*The Injustice Done to Tou Ngo*) and the third from a Chinese novel (*Rickshaw-puller Camel Cheung*).
TV drama. The first commissioned original play of the Rep, *Side Door*, was not staged until 1982, when localism began to flourish. The situation changed more significantly in particular when Chan, a playwright herself, came to the position as the Rep’s artistic director and enthusiastically promoted original plays.

The presentation of a mix of Chinese and Western plays at the Rep, on the one hand, reflected the city’s cultural identity -- a British colony of which the main population was Chinese – a hybrid of East-meets-West. On the other hand, the mixed programming also displayed “parallelism”. “Parallelism”, when considered in a positive sense, provides equal opportunity to most collaborators and various choices for entertaining different audience groups. This can be understood as one of the factors explaining why the Rep could not be run in a literal way -- as a real repertory theatre -- because it could not stage only a few selected programmes; otherwise it would benefit few people in the field. But one can also argue that “parallelism” is a practice of bureaucracy designed to ensure the greatest satisfaction among most involved parties and to avoid criticism of being partial to a particular kind of genre, work group, or collaborator. As a matter of fact, the Rep calls the paralleled arrangement “Balanced Programming” which has been the fundamental programming concept for almost all its drama seasons over the past three decades. Even under Chan, when she was able to line up a bold-themed drama season, the programming of that particular season still followed the practice of “Balanced Programming”.

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20 平衡劇目
Actors and the Acting Company

Profitable ticket sales, the enthusiastic response from audiences and media, and many favorable reviews and press write-ups for each show (my own translation, L. F. Yuen, personal communication, 25 April 2008. Original transcript: 每場戲票房收益成功，觀眾和傳媒熱烈的反應和很多給予我們很好評價的劇評和傳媒的報導) led the Urban Council to consider the Rep’s first-year performance a success. Hence, the employment of the first batch of full-time actors was approved in the Theatre’s second year. Through open recruitment, 10 actors, comprising five male and five female theatre-lovers, were selected out of 800 applicants (HKRep, 1978, p. 2). They became the first-ever professional full-time stage actors in the history of Hong Kong drama. Among them, Lam Sheung Mo (Lam hereafter), who always played leading roles on the Rep’s stage and later became a TV actor, and Chan Lai Hing (L. H. Chan hereafter) served the Theatre under the supervision of three artistic directors across four distinct periods\(^\text{21}\) until the 2000s.

According to Rep 30, the souvenir book commemorating the Rep’s 30\(^{\text{th}}\) anniversary, the Rep offered training workshops for honing its first batch of actors.

Most of them (full-time actors) were still amateurs, so the Rep organised various training courses and workshops to accelerate their development in stage thinking, imagination and expression, and acting

\(^{21}\) Yang was both the predecessor and successor of Chan, therefore he owned two eras in the Rep’s history.
techniques. Apart from its regular large-scale productions, the Rep also mounted up to four small-scale productions each year at the City Hall Recital Hall in its first decade. Actors participated in “small theatre” productions so as to develop their other related skills such as playwriting, directing and acting (Tao, 2007, p. 20).

However, Lam saw the Rep’s arrangements differently. He gives a detailed description of the actors’ life in their first year of service:

The working hours of the actors were supposed to be from 10:00am to 5:00pm. There were no offices or resting space for the actors. We were only asked to stay in the small recital room in the Hong Kong City Hall. Since most guest directors and freelance contributors to the Rep’s early productions were occupied with their full-time jobs, rehearsals always took place in the evenings. Some of us who participated in the productions were hence required to rehearse in the evenings as well. The workshops and experimental productions were in fact generated primarily to occupy the idle hours of the actors during the daytime. That way, the management, with no intention of adopting a “flexi-hour” system, could rest assured that the actors were “at work” and not wandering about doing nothing during the day. This also explained a certain number of the drama talks, small shows and experimental productions that were produced in the first few years.
The Rep was producing unnecessary experimental productions while actors were exhausted by the intense working hours and heavy workload (my own translation, personal communication, 9 April 2008. Part of the original transcript is written by Lam: 演員應該是每天由上午十時工作至下午五時。由於話劇團沒有預留任何辦公室空間給演員，每天上班時間只讓演員停留在細小的大會堂高座八樓Recital room（不是正式的rehearsal room）中。由於話劇團早期的製作的大多數客席導演和自由身工作人員都有全職工作，所以演員往往在晚間綵排。若有份演出者，便在晚間也要綵排了。管理層沒有打算讓實施「彈性上下班時間」，卻要求我們自己找理由證明自己在日間「在工作中」，而非「遊手好閒」，那些戲劇講座、小演出、實驗演出就是這樣磨出來以填塞日間的空閒時間。所以，我們在開始的數年時製作了很多戲劇講座、小型演出和實驗演出，但演員們面對過量的工作和長時間的工作時間都則疲於奔命).

On the one hand, the collaboration with freelance contributors could be considered good support when the Rep was still in its infant stage, both in terms of manpower and diversity of artistic presentations. Lam comments that the situation could be described as “using tens of amateur drama societies to support one professional theatre” (my own translation, personal communication, 9 April 2008. Original transcript: 利用數十個業餘劇團來支援一個職業劇團). On the other hand,
the Rep’s actors who were involved in the productions had to work in the evenings for the rehearsals. Because of the rigid “official” office hours, they also had to report for duty at daytime. Lam adds that at one point he was rehearsing for three different shows, each of a different genre, in the morning, afternoon and evening – all in one day (my own translation, personal communication, 9 April 2008. The original transcript is written by Lam: 我早、午、晚排不同劇種，高速磨練).

Unsurprisingly, conflicts occurred. From the actors’ point of view, those who took part in the evening rehearsals were spending over 12 hours a day in the recital room without compensation in terms of either time off or overtime payment. From the employer’s point of view, actors were left idle because they had nothing to do during “office hours”. Thus the official solution to this problem was to have the actors taking or facilitating training courses and workshops as well as preparing experimental or small productions during the day.

Two of the 10 actors were not given contract renewal in the following year. They were replaced by Ho and Au Ga Man who later became renowned drama practitioners in the local drama scene. After realising they were working more than the agreed-upon number of hours, actors requested for overtime compensation in the second year. But the administrative department did not have a proper system in place. The actors therefore proposed to set up an actors’ union to protect themselves. However, in breach of the
existing two-year contract between the Rep and the actors, the manager proposed giving the actors a one-year contract instead, before any discussion on the setting up of the union was finalised. As it turned out, the actors did not implement their idea because, despite the fact that they had unanimously agreed to set up a union, one of the actresses went ahead and signed the contract with the Rep behind their backs (my own translation, Lam, personal communication, 19 November 2013. The original transcript is written by Lam: 十名演員中有兩名在第二年不獲續約，由何偉龍和區嘉雯取代，二人後來成為劇壇的中堅份子。當演員們發覺自己甚麼都有份參與（小演出、講座、閒角等），弄至工作超時，卻發覺行政部完全沒有「補水」的制度，於是大家開始商討如何籌組「工會」等「組織」，跟行政部談判。但談判還未開始，經理部已經要求大家再簽一份合約覆蓋以前那份兩年合約。雖然大家一致贊成成立工會，但在相約拖延簽約時，一名女演員首先「出賣」了我們，隨後集體行動搞不成了).

This problem was noticed by the first artistic director of the Rep, Yang, when he came to the position. During the interview, Yang pointed out that civil servants worked only 40 hours a week and could enjoy some free time with their families on weekends. He wanted his actors to enjoy the same benefits, by having regular working hours and no overtime work. He furthermore criticised the fact that the Rep
had only guest directors at the time. Therefore the actors had to align their schedules
timings for rehearsals in the evenings or on weekends. He comments,

Rehearsing in the evenings exhausted the actors. Working during
weekends exploited their private time. I wanted them to have time to
watch films and to listen to music during their leisure hours (my own
translation, personal communication, June 20 2008. Original
transcript: 在晚間排戲令演員勞累，在周末排戲會剝削他們的私人
時間。我希望他們可以有空閒看電影、聽音樂).

But the problem was not resolved even after Yang left in 1985. And so his
successor Chan was required to tackle the issue when she became artistic
director.

Another source of grievance was that the main roles were all taken by amateur
actors cast by freelance directors who brought them to the Rep as part of their service
package. Thus a lot of the Rep’s full-time actors ended up playing minor roles in
their first year with the company. When amateur actors were no longer invited to act
for the professional theatre, some main roles were taken over by TV stars because of
the directors’ preference or connections. Realising that this matter could be a vital
hindrance to the development of stage actors and the building up of morale among
them, Chan paid special attention to the problem when demonstrating her artistic
management style. These two issues will be discussed in Chapter Five.
To justify its productivity and the value of being Hong Kong’s first professional theatre troupe, the Rep staged four to six main productions and one to four small shows every year. In this manner, the actors, who were supposed to be given enough lead time to study, to prepare and to rehearse so as to deliver quality artistic performances, ended up being less like artists and more like assembly-line staff.

Former actress L. H. Chan, a peer of Lam, describes the life of Rep actors as that of “factory workers”. The best illustration of her comment, no doubt, is the fact that the actors were (still are) required to practise the “time clock system” to show their presence and punctuality – a system commonly used in literal factories. L. H. Chan said, “This practice shows no trust in or respect for us who are artists but not factory workers” (my own translation, personal communication, 10 April 2008.

Original transcript: 這種種做法毫不信任或尊重我們。我們是藝術家，不是工廠工人).

Lam further comments:

During my first seven years of service to the Rep, I played over 30 roles, including leading roles. Yu Shizhi, a veteran director and a former chief director of the Beijing People’s Art Theatre, was so envious of my acting opportunities. This is because he played only about 30 roles in all his 30 years of acting life. On top of acting, I
was also required to participate in creative work. For example, as I was considered “useful”, in addition to playing leading roles, I was involved in scriptwriting and directing small productions. The intensive performance schedules gave no time or chance to the actors to study their characters, not to mention the spare time or energy we should have used for equipping ourselves as artists. I would not address myself as an artist but a highly skilled craftsman, because we performed more mechanically than artistically. Also, there were no training or development plans for us. We were just actors and that was that; no future development (my own translation, personal communication, 9 April 2008. Part of the original transcript is written by Lam: 我在話劇團的首七年已累積了三十幾個「有頭有面」的角色，包括領銜主角。所以北京人藝的國寶老前輩于是之來港相聚時，一聽到我這樣說簡直羨慕得不得了。這是由於他幾十年來演演停停，也只能演到三十來個角色。我也因為表現得較「好使好用」，有機會擔當主角同時又編導小演出。這些密集的表演時間表令到演員無時間或機會研究角色，更加沒法像藝術家般抽出時間或精力裝備自己。我不會說我是藝術家，我只是「熟手技工」，因為我們只是機械式地而非藝術性地表演。還有，沒有人給予我們訓練或發展計劃。我們只是演員而已，沒有未來的發展).
The low self-esteem of the actors, the star system and the heavy workload therefore became important concerns for Chan when she realised her predecessor was not able to solve those problems.

According to the actors, the Rep then could be seen as a “cultural factory” or a “drama factory” in that sense. Like real factories, it also embodied the practice of modernisation -- being managed in a rational, mechanical and institutional way to commodify its performing art works and performing artists. Actor as “acting presenter” became part of the manufacturing process and an outcome of specialisation. Consequently, it made the actors’ subjectivity devolved into an alien object. They were dissatisfied with the absence of individuality, creativity and freedom. Of course, it could be argued that the Rep actually greatly encouraged actors’ creativity and individuality by offering them lots of opportunities to create their art pieces. However, the bureaucratic practice of the Rep did not satisfy the actors’ expectations in terms of individuality, creativity and artistic freedom. Dr. Chu Yiu Wai (Chu hereafter), director of Hong Kong Studies of the University of Hong Kong, in his book Donaldization of Hong Kong (2007) writes,

In his controversial publication, The McDonaldization of Society, sociologist George Ritzer … points out that the success of McDonaldization relies on four main characteristics, namely, “efficiency”, “calculability”, “predictability” and “control”. Some reviewers criticise that McDonaldization of a society brings about
cultural homogenisation and causes problems like exploitation. However, some argue it is simply an expression of modernisation. In this context, it is said that McDonaldization embodies the procurement of Max Weber’s formal rationality through the bureaucracy of Western societies (my own translation, p. 19).

We could also consider the above observation applicable to the mode of HKRep’s operation, which was indeed an organisation administered by government officials who practised bureaucracy. Interestingly, the four characteristics stated by Ritzer were also the criteria used by the government and its staff for measuring the theatre troupe’s operation and performances. Modernity of performing culture is expressed by means of instrumental rationality that focuses on the most efficient or cost-effective means to achieve a specific end. But since the theatre troupe was in fact run under a government department and its resources were derived from public funds, its accountability to the government and to the Hong Kong people inevitably determined the practice of bureaucracy, purposive or instrumental rationality and “McDonaldization”.

The above discussion is designed to provide a background on the birth of HKRep, the objectives for its establishment, and its operations before the position of artistic director was established. In 1983, the Rep hired its first ever full-time artistic director, Yang, who took a sabbatical from his position as a professor of Theatre at the Department of Theatre and Dance of the University of Colorado in the U.S. He
signed a three-year contract with the Rep, but left some months before the contract ended. The reasons for his departure are vague, as many versions have been told by different parties. In any case, the official reason given is that he needed to return to the American university to continue his tenure. Thereafter, Chan was hired in 1986 to be the second artistic director of the HKRep.
Chapter Three

Case Study: An Artistic Director in (Post)-Colonial Hong Kong

The subject of the case study in this dissertation is Joanna Chan, the second artistic director of HKRep (1986 - 1990). This and the following two chapters are an investigation into how this artistic director fulfilled her beliefs and missions, achieved her dreams and goals as well as showcased her character, creativity and personal style as an auteur in contexts. This chapter in particular describes in depth the contexts in which Chan operated. Chapter Four and Chapter Five respectively study Chan’s artistic expression and artistic management during the last decade before Hong Kong’s status changed from being a British colony to a special administrative region of China.

A Brief Picture of the Political, Social, Economic and Cultural Contexts of Hong Kong in the 1980s

Although a seasoned playwright and director before joining HKRep, Chan did not direct her first production on the Hong Kong stage until 1983. Upon invitation by

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the Urban Council, she directed *The Empress Dowager*, which she wrote in 1980 for HKRep as a guest director. It was a year after Mrs. Margaret Thatcher\(^{23}\), the late prime minister of the U.K., visited Beijing for the purpose of settling disputes on the sovereignty of Hong Kong and negotiating the future of the then U.K.’s colony. It was also a year before the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed by both governments, agreeing that Hong Kong would be returned to China on 1 July 1997. After the handover, Hong Kong, a British colony since 1841, would be administered under the “One Country, Two Systems” policy for 50 years until 2047. The main essence of the Joint Declaration is:

According to the Joint Declaration, the two governments agreed to have Hong Kong return to China on 1 July 1997 and become a Special Administrative Region of China. The Chinese government assured [Britain] that Hong Kong’s existing economy, society, legal system, administration and jurisdiction would be carried over through the year 1997 and be maintained for 50 years thereafter (my own translation, Lau & Yu, 1996, p.2).

Despite the signing of the Joint Declaration by both governments, the invention of the “One Country, Two Systems” policy made Hong Kong people doubtful. During the transitional period, Hong Kongers were increasingly anxious about the city’s obscure future and their indistinct identity. They were also puzzled

\(^{23}\)戴卓爾夫人
because they did not know how they should reestablish their relation with the Mainland and sustain themselves after the handover of sovereignty. This uncertainty resulted in their loss of confidence in the future. An unprecedented emigration wave occurred. Although the city had not yet officially been returned to the Mainland, people’s mindset had already leapfrogged into the post-colonial era. That’s why I bracketed the word “post” in the title of this chapter.

Choi Yuk Ping, associate professor with the Sociology Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, remarks in her research booklet *Who am I? Hong Kong Identity and its Transformation* (2010).

The 1997 handover issue should be the largest challenge to the identity of the people of Hong Kong since the WWII. The large-scale introspection on identity in the Hong Kong society began in the 1980s when the negotiation started. The identity crisis originated with Hong Kong people’s unwillingness to be ruled by the Communist Party. They hoped to maintain the capitalistic way of living in Hong Kong style, i.e. continuing to enjoy “horse-racing, dancing and money-earning”²⁴ (my own translation, 2010, p.37).

In terms of social and economic backgrounds, the economy of Hong Kong began to take off in the 1970s, continuing to prosper even more greatly in the 1980s.

²⁴ 馬照跑，舞照跳，錢照搵
A middle class began to emerge because the society had accumulated great wealth since the end of the WWII. In addition, since over half a million of mainland Chinese refugees flowed into Hong Kong from 1977 to 1981, the working force rapidly increased, contributing to economic booms in the following years. As the middle class were able to earn more, they began to pursue high-end entertainments and cultural activities. Successful stage performances, such as concerts held at the Hong Kong Stadium for huge audiences and the HKRep’s stage production *Rashomon* with its record-making staging of three shows in one day (Tao, 2007, p. 40), demonstrate how the masses’ demand for entertainment and cultural activities was affected as the economy prospered in the 1980s.

Dr. Tse Kwan Choi of the Department of Education Administration and Policy of the University of Hong Kong considered the 1970s to be “the budding stage of ‘Localism’ and ‘local identity recognition’” (my own translation, Tse, 2002, p.16).

“Hong Kong consciousness” gradually grew along with the changes in the government’s ruling mechanism and the rise of the new generation of Hong Kongers. For most of people born or settled in the city, the thought of “regarding Hong Kong as home was already deeply rooted”… This kind of local culture gained further ground with the boom in mass media and the cultural industry upon the arrival of the 1980s (my own translation, Tse, 2002, p.16).
As for the cultural background of those times, Chin explains in his book *Hong Kong Has Culture* the reasons why the cultural policy of Hong Kong in the 1980s so greatly and quickly changed.

After meeting Deng Xiaoping in Beijing, British governor Crawford MacLehose²⁵ realised that 1997 would be the deadline for handing over sovereignty (to China). He began preparing Hong Kong. (His aim was to) transform Hong Kong from a British colony into a self-sustained city, so as to ensure that people would cherish the memory of the glorious era under the British regime (my own translation, Chin, 2008, p. 90).

Chin also includes the original notice sent by MacLehose to the Legislative Council regarding the speedy buildup of Hong Kong’s local culture.

In 1979, MacLehose informed the Legislative Council: “The encouragement of culture and leisure activity is now accepted by your government as a major obligation in the circumstances of Hong Kong… the extraordinary speed and breadth and popularity of this development” (Chin, 2008, p.91).

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²⁵ 鄧小平，麥理浩

… Intending to construct a “Hong Kong Identity” based on nostalgia and local sentiments, the government established the District Council and the Regional Council to actively help promote the idea of “Hong Kong is my Home”\(^{26}\). It also generously sponsored arts organisations, hired overseas cultural management experts for investigation and trained cultural staff in the Urban Services Department … and built cultural venues in major districts … (my own translation, Chin, 2008, p. 90)

Though the city was prospering and many cultural establishments were founded, the stability of the city was challenged. Hong Kong people’s concerns about their obscure future became the main theme of local culture and arts. Their anxiety influenced artistic works and mass cultural activities and further resulted in the creation of discourses on the local consciousness of the people of Hong Kong.

\(^{26}\) 香港是我家
Take film production, for example: a group of so-called “New Wave Directors” produced a series of original films, such as *Boat People, Homecoming, Waiting for Dawn, A Night in Shanghai* and *Peking Opera Blues*. By telling fictional stories taking place in different times and cities, the filmmakers made use of metaphors and images to express Hong Kong people’s anxiety and fear about the future of the land in which they grew up and prospered.

In fact, to a certain extent, both *A Night in Shanghai* and *Peking Opera Blues* conceal Hong Kong people’s doubts on the “1997 issue”. *A Night in Shanghai* was released in 1984, the time when the Chinese and the British governments began to negotiate on the handover issue. The theme of the film, i.e. changing one’s residence during troubled times, corresponds the “1997 emigration flux”. *Peking Opera Blues* is intended to demonstrate the changes in people’s lives after a new government takes over their city (my own translation, Arion, 2009).

Many TV drama series and pop songs were also produced in line with this theme. They described the daily lives of Hong Kong people and their conflicts with the new immigrants as the political situation began to change. TV dramas such as *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, Conflict, The Passengers, the Hong Kong 1981 to Hong Kong 1986 series*, and Canto-pop songs like *Bauhinia, The Pearl of the*[

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27 新浪潮導演  
28 The writer made a mistake: the negotiation began in 1982 but not 1984. 1984 was the year when the Joint Declaration was signed.
Orient and Below the Lion Rock, for instance, expressed people’s sentiments about the city and their appreciation of Hong Kong’s characteristic can-do spirit.

Wong Chi Chung considers the song Below the Lion Rock as almost the “anthem of Hong Kong”. Theme songs of TV drama series Conflict, The Giant, The Passenger, The Good, the Bad and the Ugly also echo the identity growth of the people of Hong Kong, i.e. the transformation from “the mentality of temporary residents, refugees, passers-by” to the recognition of “Hong Kong is my home” and “proud of being Hong Kong citizens” (my own translation, M. H. Chan, 2007).

A phenomenon of “de-colonisation” was therefore found in the local performing arts and mass culture. Chan Kai Cheung, then assistant general manager of Jade International Group Company Limited, reports in his essay “The Establishment and the Characters in TV of Hong Kong Local Culture” (my own translation, K. C. Chan, 1995), about the change in ratings in local performing arts and mass media when they were considered “de-colonized”. According to his survey, rating points of foreign TV productions broadcast during peak hours dropped from 70% to 0%; market share of foreign movies dropped from 70% to 30%, as many films were replaced by locally produced ones; market share of Canto-pop rose from almost 0% to 80% (my own translation, K. C. Chan, 1995, p. 85).
Dr. Choi Po King (P. K. Choi after) therefore points out that the concept of “Hongkongese” in fact emerged fairly quickly in the beginning of the 1980s. She defines “Hong Kong” as the “hometown for uniting all local Chinese in Hong Kong, reflecting that a clear recognition of local identity has occurred” (my own translation, P. K. Choi, 1995, p. 51). What she means by “hometown” is that the local people no longer care about which provinces, cities, towns or villages of the Mainland they were originally from as the older generations used to do. They now all address themselves “Hongkongese”. The term does not only refer to the geographical area where Hong Kong people are located. It refers to their culture and their identity as well. P. K. Choi considers that “the development of the relation between the identification of Hongkongese and the local mass culture, film and drama is built on the common ground they share, which is a newborn and abstract cultural system in Hong Kong” (my own translation, P. K. Choi, 1995, p. 51). “Hongkongese” thus became the subject that many artists from various cultural fields studied and identified with in their works.

Chan was one of them.
The Situation of the Local Drama Scene

The drama scene of Hong Kong in the 1980s was no exception to the changes described earlier. Rather than a sustained momentum of translation plays being staged as was the case in the 1970s, a great number of original plays emerged, mainly mirroring the life, the voice and the feelings of the local people after the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed.

Luk in his essay “The Contemporary Hong Kong Drama of Post-Colonialism” (1998) points out that “the Hong Kong postcolonial characteristics” did influence cultural productions of that time. He sums up “the Hong Kong postcolonial characteristics” and their status in three points:

1. the noise of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism was not very strong;
2. the separation of Hong Kong from the British government did not mean that Hong Kong had achieved its independence but that it was simply going to be ruled by another government, Mainland China; and
3. the concerns (of the people) generated various kinds of reactions to the Handover, including “euphoric / celebratory”, “ambivalent” and “resistant” (my own translation, p. 154).
To him, these characteristics were reflected in local large-scale theatre performances for more than 10 years after the Sino-British Declaration had been signed.

The materials and the production of these kinds of performances reflect the state of postcolonial thoughts on various levels. The so-called theatre of postcolonial discourse does not necessarily refer to the theatre productions staged after the colony’s departure from British rule. Theatre of post-colonialism discourse is intended to refer to the material, cultural, political and historical influences generated from all sorts of intention that pinpoint or resist colonialism. It expresses a reaction to colonialism through texts and culture (my own translation, Luk, 1998, p.154).

Lo in his essay “The Exploration of Localism in Hong Kong Theatre” (2004) also depicts the circumstances of the local drama scene around the time the Joint Declaration was signed. He gives some examples of productions with “Hong Kong postcolonial characteristics” as discussed by Luk’s above.

1984 and 1989 are the two important years to Hong Kong people’s collective memory. After the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration … theatre practitioners with a keen sensitivity to the epoch immediately expressed the perplexed and alarmed feelings of
Hong Kong people through their work. In 1985, Hong Kong Repertory Theatre’s staged Anthony Chan’s *1841*; Yuen Lup Fun directed *Boundary* for Life Theatre and Chung Ying Theatre produced *I am a Hong Kong Person*. These productions were mingled with the theatre practitioners’ own life history and the cultural development of the city in which they grew up. Hong Kong itself suddenly became the source of creative materials because Hong Kong people were undergoing a change in their identity (my own translation, p. 17).

Fong and Dr. Chan Ka Yan, assistant professor with the Translation Department of Hang Seng Management College, together address the “97 drama” series “of passionate self-pursuit and root-seeking” (my own translation, Fong & Chan, 2009).

These plays, on the one hand, resist British rule but are full of doubt and love / hatred for the Mainland, so as to underscore the significance of “I am Hongkongese”. On the other hand, the establishment of the self-image is embodied through seeking their history and the past. They therefore write plays about farmers and fishermen who are the indigenes of Hong Kong, exhibiting their traditions, rituals, songs and customs on stage (my own translation, p. 142).
The focus on indigenes in that era shows that local stage playwrights and directors were no longer satisfied with the “borrowed sentiments” of translation plays. They were impelled by an immense urge to search for their cultural identity, to establish their native consciousness as well as to express their feelings and sentiments towards Hong Kong, the city in which they grew up, and China, their motherland. Driven by the “consciousness of Localism”, they were not content with only displaying a general social picture or the family life of ordinary people. Instead, they created a unique type of people shaped by special historical, social and political forces – the “Hongkongese” – on stage.

Lo comments in his another essay, “The Cultural Politics and Aesthetic Practice of the Contemporary Hong Kong Theatre – with a Discussion on Several Local Postmodernist Paradigms” (2012a), that ‘the inter-influence between Hong Kong’s political environment and (the epoch of) the 1980s was embodied in the exploration of cultural identity in stage plays” (my own translation, p.55). Thus theatre was no longer a platform for staging purely artistic performances, but had turned into a space integrated with society and politics. It was especially intended for expressing people’s concerns about Localism and subjectivity when they were transitioning from being a British colony to an integral part of China. In other words, Hong Kong was to become another “colony” of a new “coloniser”. Lo considers “the exploration of Localism in Hong Kong theatre, on the one hand, refers to the situation of Hong Kong de-colonialisation; on the other hand, it represents the subjectivity of Hong Kong theatre practitioners” (my own translation, Lo, 2012a, p. 161).
Hong Kong theatre practitioners have therefore changed the paradigm from staging translation plays to writing their own plays about their own people, their own stories and the history of their own city.

In another of Lo’s essays, “The Wave-breaking Stage – Hong Kong Theatre in the 1980s” (2012b), he further states that the emergence of Hong Kong people’s quest for identity in the 1980s was “a collective psychological product” and “a releasing of the sub-consciousness of the colony’s citizens who had for so long been suppressed” (my own translation, p. 48). “De-colonialisation” and regaining subjectivity in the performing arts was the result when Hong Kong people no longer wanted to be suppressed, and instead wanted to be the subject of their own city. He sees post-colonialism a “cultural resistance to the colonial reality” (p. 48), and that is what the local drama practitioners demonstrated through their works.

… to use critical attitudes and discourses to wrangle against all sorts of colonial discourses, power structure and social hierarchy. (Those who make the post-colonial discourse either) make discourse discussing the order of the post-colonial era while they are situated in the colonial era, or (they) consistently undertake de-colonised practice in a cultural sense after they have left their coloniser and obtained political independence. They are fighting against their reality with their ideals and future. In many places, post-colonialism is a cultural resistance to the colonial reality (my own translation, Lo, 2012b, p. 48).
In addition to the shows mentioned by Lo, productions reflecting a similar keynote include Zuni Icosahedron’s *Opium War – Four Letters to Deng Xiaoping* (collective collaboration) and HKRep’s *Before the Dawn Wind Rises*, one of Chan’s masterpieces on the “97 issue”. Quoted in the “Introduction” of the book *Xianggan Huaju Shigao* (Tian & Fong, 2009) he co-edits with Fong, Tian writes,

The handing over of Hong Kong to its motherland was a historical turning point. It would certainly bring profound influences to Hong Kong drama – (it would be) the turning point in Hong Kong playwriting. Cheung Ping Kuen points out: “the change was certainly embodied in (presenting) the ‘97 issue’. Throughout Hong Kong’s drama history, nothing has ever aroused so much concern as this issue (‘97 issue’) has” (my own translation, p. 10).

Hence, the emergence of the “97 Drama” series is a turning point that marks the localization of Hong Kong drama development in the drama history of Hong Kong..

Besides productions aligned with the major themes of the handover issue, such as the people of Hong Kong searching for their identity and expressing their concerns, doubts and fears in regard to the future, other prominent events occurred in the local drama scene in the mid-1980s: The Hong Kong Institute for Promotion of Chinese Culture was founded in 1984. The Beijing People’s Art Theatre was for the
first time invited to present *The Death of a Salesman* in Hong Kong. Then, the HKRep’s production *The Importance of Being Earnest* was staged for the first time in Guangzhou the following year. These activities prove that Hong Kong and the Mainland theatre practitioners were beginning to establish connections and undertake cultural exchanges with each other in the mid-1980s. Paradoxically, on the one hand, some Hong Kong drama practitioners showed the concerns and anxiety of the people of Hong Kong in regard to the uncertain future; on the other hand, knowing that the return of Hong Kong was inevitable, some responded quickly to reposition their identity and to establish a connection with its motherland.

Returning from the U.S. to Hong Kong, the city in which she had attended high school and university, in these political, social and cultural contexts, Chan became the second artistic director of Hong Kong Repertory Theatre in 1986.

**State of Affairs of Hong Kong Repertory Theatre when Chan Joined**

Chan joined the Rep nine years after it was founded and three years after it had established the position of artistic director. She succeeded the first artistic director, Yang, in 1986. As with Yang, although she needed to serve only the Rep, she was employed by the Urban Council, had signed a contract with the Urban
Services Department and was required to report to the Sub-committee of Performing Companies of the Urban Council.

The objective conditions, including the organisational structures of the Urban Council and the Rep; the artistic director’s roles, responsibilities and reporting line; the management pattern, working style as well as staff from the executive team Chan was given, were quite the same as those of Yang’s. However, Chan’s personality, aspiration and way of viewing and using drama were totally different from Yang’s. Yang had put his attention on staging translation plays to serve the primary purpose of establishing the Rep under the Urban Council.

… was to counter the ill effects of local film and television industries which, at that time, used to produce a great number of low-quality products damaging to young student audiences. Through the establishment of a professional theatre company, which was to present masterpieces in the world theatre, the Hong Kong audiences were able to appreciate high-quality dramatic offerings at very low cost. (Yang, 1992, p. 7)

Echoing Yang’s comment, Fong further confirms Yang’s assertion that the Company also “has the duty to produce the best world-class dramas and theatre works of the highest artistic value for local audiences” (my own translation, Fong, 1997, p. 18).
Following this direction, out of the 18 main productions presented within his 27 months of service to the Rep, Yang produced 10 translation plays from the West. The purpose of the establishment of HKRep gave him a reason to focus on the genre in which he was most interested – translation plays. However, he did very little to present plays about the society and culture of Hong Kong and the feelings and thoughts of its people. As a matter of fact, after Mrs. Margaret Thatcher’s visit to Deng Xiaoping in Beijing in 1982, the negotiations on Hong Kong’s future began and lasted for over two years. That was exactly the time when Yang was the artistic director of the Rep. The city was engaged in tremendous discussions on the ongoing negotiations and the future of Hong Kong. Also, the original play typology had already been budding in the Rep before Yang came along. In other words, the Rep, being the largest professional theatre troupe in Hong Kong, should be responsible for staging original plays depicting or reflecting the social and political situations of Hong Kong. The social issue was there, in terms of a society that needed to have its own stories written in the early 1980s; the political issue was there, in terms of the negotiations between the Mainland government and the British government on the handover; and the cultural need was there because Hong Kong needed to cultivate its own playwrights to write their own stories. However, it seems Yang did not “see” the need for developing original plays for the Rep. Rather, he continued to stage his favourite genre – translation plays. This is what Abbas calls “Reverse Hallucination” (1998, p. 6). Hallucination means ‘to see something that is not there. Reverse or negative hallucination is just the opposite -- to refuse to see the thing that is there or simply not seeing thing that is there.
Abbas compares the work of Sir Cecil Clementi, the late governor of the colonial Hong Kong government, with Lu Xun\textsuperscript{29}, one of the fathers of modern Chinese literature, in his essay “Writing Hong Kong” (Abbas, 1998). To him, the works of the two writers belong to “two notions of culture” (p.115). He considers that the work of the former “presents culture whose function is to establish continuities and stability and to promote ‘East-West’ understanding … Nowhere in Clementi’s translation nor in his speech is there any hint as to the problematic space in which these texts are held” (p. 115). I think this is a good description for Yang’s work as well. Of course, there were many reasons to make translation plays the major genre of the Rep when Yang worked for the troupe under his first contract. However, his own choice was definitely a major factor as to why translation plays were so heavily emphasised (in fact, he continued to stage translation plays which constituted the bulk of his directing pieces after he came back to the Rep to take up Chan’s position, despite the fact that the political, social and cultural contexts had already changed). His promotion of “East-West” understanding had “no hint as to the problematic space in which his texts were held”. Rather, his translation plays further reinforced the subjectivity of the West and the British colonial government, especially as he has always been regarded as “expert in Shakespeare production”.

When Chan succeeded Yang, the political environment she was situated in was much more dramatic than Yang’s. How she ran the drama troupe, what she wanted to do and what she actually achieved therefore had nothing in common with Yang. Such special contexts intermingled with her unique background, character, 

\textsuperscript{29} 金文泰・魯迅
faith and aspiration, led Chan to write an important and unusual chapter in the Rep’s history.

Chan was an artistic leader who served the Theatre in its early stage. In my essay “When it all Began…”, I position this period as “a Stage for Planting the Seeds” (Tao, 2007, p. 18) and for “Cultivating for a Secure Future” (p. 23). In keeping with these analogies, Chan recalls the Rep’s poor conditions when she had freshly joined the Rep.

By 1986 when I became HKRep’s artistic director, rehearsals were still taking place in the rectangular room of Kowloon Park. Since our offices were located on top of Hung Hom Railway Station, there was no convenient route to go back and forth between the two locations. It never occurred to me that HKRep had by then been in business for less than 10 years. Truly it was still in its founding stage. And while I did not think of myself as a pioneer, I did want to give serious consideration to how I might be of some help in making this special theatre company uniquely Hong Kong’s very own (Chan, 2013a, p. 38).

The rehearsal room located in a little tin house at the then Kowloon Railway Station certainly cannot compare with the Rep’s facilities or equipment in its current
site. Indeed, the lack of a professional rehearsal hall resulted in a fair deal of inconvenience for directors and actors at that time.

As for the acting company, Chan inherited a group of actors from Yang’s era. They were mainly drama lovers without any official or professional training before they joined the Theatre. They only obtained drama knowledge and acting techniques through their past practices in amateur theatre. On top of the 10 actors from the Rep’s first batch, Yang later hired more actors from the Mainland. Those actors had received professional training in Guangdong province before they came to HKRep. The mixed backgrounds, training and acting styles of the actors created further challenges for Chan’s artistic directorship. The restructuring of actors therefore became one of the main tasks she had to undertake. This subject will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Translation plays were still the main genre the Rep produced most frequently before Chan succeeded Yang’. Original plays were neither a popular choice for the Rep nor for the local drama scene at that time. Being a playwright herself, Chan placed the development of original plays as one of the top priorities of her mission list.

Under the leadership of Yang, the Rep had already established some connections with the Mainland drama scene. For instance, he included a new original play *Xiaojing Hutong*, written by the Mainland Chinese playwright Li Longyun. He
also invited director Ying Ruocheng from the Mainland to direct Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* and led the Rep tour to Guangzhou to stage his directing piece *The Importance of Being Earnest* in the drama seasons between 1983 and 1986. It therefore seemed natural that for Chan, situated in the period just after the Joint Declaration had been signed, leading the Rep to connect and to collaborate with the Mainland drama scene became one of her main tasks. However, instead of building on Yang’s efforts by further developing the Rep’s relationship with the Mainland through collaborations of stage works or cultural exchanges, Chan chose another way to “connect” with the Mainland. She reflected the situation of Hong Kong and expressed how the people felt and thought when facing the deadline of the handover by presenting her own artistic stage works and the productions she marshaled in the drama seasons. To promote original plays and to stage productions showing Hong Kong people’s state and mindset were Chan’s two chief missions in her four years of service to the Rep. These issues will also be the core discussion of this case study.

Yang left the Rep in July 1986 after he had toured his translation play *The Importance of Being Earnest* in Guangzhou and before he finished his three-year contract. He breached the contract with the Rep and went back to the U.S., leaving the Theatre without an artistic director for nine months. The Rep began its next chapter, written by its second “author”, Chan, on 1 April 1986.

Joanna Chan’s Background and her Beliefs about Drama
Chan has a very broad, international academic and work background. Born in Hong Kong, she spent her childhood in Guangzhou and came to Hong Kong as part of the “refugee influx” in the early 1950s (my own translation, Chan, 2001, p.121). She grew up in the then British colony, which she regards as “a refugee society” (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 119) and studied in Hong Kong, the U.S. and the Philippines. Chan worked in the U.S. for some years, so she had experienced both the Chinese and the Western cultures before she became artistic director of HKRep.

After she graduated from the Mathematics Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1960, Chan obtained a diploma in Education from Northcote College of Education. Later, she studied Theology in the Philippines. In 1970, she studied Theatre Arts and Communications at Columbia University in New York City and received a Master of Arts degree, a Master of Education degree and a Ph. D degree in Theatre Education, all within a span of seven years (my own translation, Tian, 2009, p. 214). Throughout her years of study, she acquired a wide spectrum of degrees: in mathematics, theology, art and design, literature, education, theatre, and communications, shaping her as a multi-talented artist.

Her career path is diversified as well. Before joining the Rep, she had co-founded and owned the Four Seas Players in New York since 1970. The theatre, established much earlier than HKRep, was once the largest Chinese drama company in the U.S. She had also been a professor, an administrator, a community service...
worker, and a project researcher before becoming part of HKRep. Thereafter, she continued to be a playwright, a director, an artistic director, and the most special among all, a Catholic nun of the Maryknoll Convent. Therefore, she is also known as Sister Joanna.

One is curious why a Catholic nun would choose theatre for her career. Chan explains in various interviews with the press that she does not find her religious identity in any way conflicting with her multifarious interests or career:

Through my position, I hope I can share the work of God’s creation. If I can provide a good environment for everybody to make use of it and to display their talents, I have helped the growth of life and shared the work of God’s creation (my own translation, Y. S. Chan, 1987).

Many Catholic nuns serve society through different roles, while I have chosen drama … In my daily prayer, I ask God to give me the wisdom to make use of my position to discover and to support each performer’s distinct potential, so as to nurture talents for the Rep (my own translation, Fung-sun-tsz, 1986).

She also considers that being a nun enables her to wholeheartedly devote her time and energy to theatre.
Maryknoll sisters are working women. Stage directing happens to be my chosen profession. For me, being a director and a nun is a good mix. The field of performing arts is a very dedicated and time-consuming profession and, unlike many other people, I don’t have a husband or children to worry about (Yau, 1987, p. 31).

Chan’s comment is inspiring. Since the establishment of the Rep, she has been, and still is, the only female – and the only clergy – artistic director in the theatre company’s 37 years of history. What Chan says seems to suggest that the phenomenon of a female artistic director might not have materialised had she not been a Catholic nun, but had had a family with a husband and children to take care of, even though she had obtained solid academic qualifications and rich work experience in the profession. She points out that while there were already many working mothers in Hong Kong in the 1980s, the heavy responsibilities of the role of HKRep’s artistic director did not seem conducive or convenient for a wife or mother. Whether it is a coincidence or a proof of Chan’s statement, the fact remains there has been no other female artistic director in the Rep after Chan till the present day.

In an interview with Hong Kong Weekly (Hung, 1988, p. 48), Chan lists precisely the four reasons she chose drama for her career. To summarise them, she considers that drama, rather than bring solely an art form showcasing creativity and aesthetics, is also an industry of discipline that emphasises collaboration and teamwork. It demands unceasing study and learning so as to broaden one’s vision. For
Chan, nobody in theatre can be self-centered; instead, everyone needs to work for the best of the whole team. Being the artistic director of a drama troupe, she can make use of her position to provide every member with the opportunity to grow.

Chan had already built up a relationship with HKRep long before she joined the troupe as its artistic director. She applied for the job from New York and made a special trip to Hong Kong for the interview. She had been stage manager of the Rep’s 1978 production *Equus*, which was staged only one year after the Theatre’s inauguration. She writes in the Rep’s 35th anniversary souvenir book about her first collaboration with the then-brand-new theatre.

My own association with HKRep actually began much earlier. Back in 1978, I had returned from New York to Hong Kong to set up the Diocesan Audio Visual Centre for the Catholic Diocese. A small advertisement in *Sing Tao Daily* caught my eye: HKRep was looking for a stage manager for its production of *Equus*. I had left behind my own theatre company after caring for it for seven years, and I was missing theatre work a good deal more than I was willing to admit even to myself. I took an album of my work and went for an interview. (Chan, 2013a, p. 37)

She directed her two plays for the Rep, *The Empress Dowager* and *Before the Dawn Wind Rises*, in 1983 and 1985, respectively. Impressing the Rep with her work
and the considerable ticket sales it generated, she was invited to be the artistic

The main reason Chan was willing to leave her career in the U.S. and come
back to Hong Kong was the fulfilment of her dream. She revealed that dream to the
media when she staged *The Empress Dowager* in Hong Kong in 1983.

I went alone to the U.S. over 10 years ago. Living in a foreign society
for a long period of time, I gradually found myself neither Chinese nor
Westerner. I always convince myself that being a Chinese scholar in
the Modern era, I need to learn the period of history during which
China struggled for her self-strength and esteem and strived for a place
in the Modern world … What it (*The Empress Dowager*) actually
depicts is the struggling processes of the self-sustained, proud and
dignified nation of China attempting for a seat in the Modern world.
Comprising countless conflicts, burying endless helplessness and
undertaking inexplicable insults, envy and curiosity, this struggling
journey still lasts today. Therefore, *The Empress Dowager* is not only
a story about the nation of China, but also a self-portrait of every
single Chinese who seeks his / her identity in the Modern world (my
own translation, W. Choi, 1983).
Chu points out in his essay “The Other Territories: On the Meaning of the Other Discourse in the Cultural Periphery” (1998) that “more and more intellectuals coming from the third-world countries stay behind in the Western countries after they have received a Western education. Their voices have hence become ‘the voices of the Other’” (my own translation, p. 26). Chan, a Hong Kong person who studied in the U.S. and, after graduating, also worked there, felt at that time that no matter how loud or how hard she tried to deliver her voice, it was nevertheless one of “the voices of the Other”. That was one of the main driving forces that brought her back to the city where she grew up, to develop her career in drama.

Chan’s confusion about her identity can be explained by Professor Leung Ping Kwan (Leung hereafter)’s view on the hybridity of Hong Kong Chinese in his essay “City Culture and Hong Kong Literature”. (Leung, 2003)

The identity of Hong Kong is more complex than that of other places … Vis-à-vis foreigners, Hong Kong people are of course Chinese; but vis-à-vis Chinese from the Mainland or Taiwan, they seem to have the imprints of the West. A Hong Kong person who came from China after 1949 is obviously an “outsider” or “someone coming south”; but to those who “came south” during the 1970s and 1980s, such a person is already a “local” (Chow, 1998, p. 153).
As she herself had been born and grew up under such circumstances, the question of Hong Kong identity has therefore always been a primary concern of Chan’s artistic works.

The success of *The Empress Dowager* paved the way for her second collaboration with the Rep. As a matter of fact, when Chan was directing, she already planted the seed for staging her second production for the Rep.

During the premiere of *The Empress Dowager*, the person-in-charge of the Urban Council sat on my left. He asked if I was interested in coming back to Hong Kong to write a play on Hong Kong. I always write original plays. Original plays using Hong Kong as the subject were not commonly found at that time. Without thinking deeply, I took the offer (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 124 - 125).

That play, *Before the Dawn Wind Rises*, turned out to be one of Chan’s masterpieces, presenting the political situation and the fear and anxiety of Hong Kong before the handover. I will analyse this play in Chapter Four which focuses on Chan’s artistic works.

*The Empress Dowager*, although not as renowned as *Before the Dawn Wind Rises* on the Hong Kong drama scene, has always been Chan’s obsession. When Yangtze River Theatre of America, a New York-based theatre company founded by
Chan who is its current emeritus artistic director, marked its 20th anniversary in 2013, Chan reprised the play as part of the celebrations. She also gave the play a subtitle – “The Story of China in Search of its Identity in the Modern World” (Chan, 2013b, p. 1). This demonstrates that her concern about China and the Chinese has never abated in the past 30 years.

The mission of being a Modern Chinese scholar; the reminiscences of a diasporic traveller; and the continued concern for her motherland and hometown, despite her being an ethnic Chinese with an American passport… these elements all helped goad Chan to revisit Hong Kong after years of staying in the U.S., and to make use of her expertise in drama to express her complex thoughts and feelings. To her, she was fulfilling her dream.

Since 1969, when I began working in New York, I had always dreamed of going back to Hong Kong to work. Now, my dream has come true (my own translation, Si-kei, 1983).

Her willingness to work for the Rep aside, the Theatre also considered her the most appropriate candidate for the position at that time. According to K. B. Chan, current executive director of the Rep and manager of the Rep during Chan’s tenure, “Chan’s substantial academic background, theatrical achievements in the U.S., previous successful productions in terms of tickets sales and reviews, good collaborations with the Rep, capability in playwriting and directing and experience in
managing a theatre company were all very attractive to the Sub-committee of Performing Companies of the Urban Council. She was also recommended by Yang to be his successor” (my own translation, K. B. Chan, personal communication, 8 July 2009. Original transcript: 陳修女的高學歷，在美國的戲劇成就，之前與話劇團合作愉快，其製作無論是票房和劇評都是成功，具備編劇和導戲的才能，以及管理一個劇團的工作經驗，都能吸引市政局的藝團小組委員會。同時，她亦是由楊世彭推薦的). K. B. Chan’s then immediate supervisor Choi further comments that Chan, who was hired under open recruitment and offered an official interview, had a strong resume that made her the best among all the candidates. She stresses that “Chan’s religious background as a Catholic nun was not at all considered by the Urban Council because nobody had ever seen her in a nun’s habit” (my own translation, personal communication, 18 May 2012. Original transcript: 我們是公開招聘的，並且有正式的面試，在眾多申請者中以她的履歷表最強。市政局沒有特別考慮她是神職人員，因為從未有人見過她穿上修女袍).

Under these circumstances, Chan returned to Hong Kong and joined HKRep as its second artistic director. Meanwhile, she oversaw the Four Seas Players remotely from Hong Kong and went back to the New York drama company’s office in summer for on-the-spot supervision every year.

Qualities of Chan as an Ideal Artistic Director
Chan’s strong academic achievements and solid work experience could be reflected in her resume, naturally. But some of her own qualities, impossible to show on paper, should also be considered if she would be an ideal artistic director for the Rep. In Chapter One, I mention the ideal qualities of “a distinguished artistic director” of a theatre company suggested by Wang, executive director of the Taiwan Arts Festival, in her essay “Focal Fun-seeking” (2004). Here I repeat the criteria she suggests:

… has extreme passion for the performing arts, able to bear jet lag from non-stop travels to overseas cities to watch performances of different cultures and styles, willing to master the market trend and lifestyle, speedily absorbs large amounts of information and grab the key points, enjoys exchanging views with the media, believes money is not the sole medium for ‘measuring’ the arts but admits that sponsors are always right, enjoys working with artists, is bold when facing financial figures, takes criticisms constructively, possesses charisma and strong leadership qualities, is both sentimental and rational, enjoys getting along with the young, thinks highly of audience education, is popular in social circles, humble even while believing himself / herself to be first-class … (my own translation, p. 59)
Before investigating more thoroughly Chan’s artistic directorship in the following chapters, I would like to do a character sketch of Chan by reviewing her other major experiences before joining the Rep. In this way, we can tell if she would be considered “a distinguished artistic director” for the Rep in the 1980s.

If I use the criteria suggested by Wang to evaluate Chan, I would say she was an ideal artistic director for the Rep. To begin with, she had extreme passion for performing arts. When she was studying in primary school in Guangzhou, she already “had passion in acting and always played the leading roles of the productions” (my own translation, Tian, 2009, p. 214). She obtained her Ph. D degree in Theatre Education from Columbia University, established her theatre company, the Four Seas Players, in New York in 1970 and began to write plays in 1975 (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 118). Yet, when she knew HKRep was hiring a stage manager for an ad hoc production, she immediately applied for the job.

In 1978, she knew from a newspaper advertisement that HKRep was hiring talent. She applied for the post with her blind love for theatre. She already had a full-time job at the time. If she was not offered any job that was in the frontline, she would still be willing to undertake any jobs backstage. She became the stage manager of the production *Equus*, directed by Chung King Fai (my own translation, Tian, 2009, p. 215).
Before Chan joined the Rep, she had accumulated solid and diverse experience in running a theatre company, directing and playwriting. The most important experience was the fact that she had been an artistic director of a theatre company for over 15 years. She had written nine plays and directed 27 productions before she became the Theatre’s artistic director. Her credentials in theatre practice were very strong.

Chan was moreover very willing to master the market trend and absorb a large amount of information from society. She said she “was trained in the most innovative, outstanding and pioneering era of the U.S.” (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 120). Original plays she wrote before she joined HKRep prove she paid close attention to the happenings and changes in the political and social situations of society. She had a strong ability to grab key points. For example, she knew Hong Kong people were in need of original plays to voice their feelings in the 1980s, so she greatly promoted such plays during that decade.

As for her enjoying exchanging views with the media, Chan began to write for a newspaper as a novella writer when she was only 15. She continued writing until she became a nun (Fong, 2000, p. 120). Her contribution to the New Evening Post as a columnist covering mainly news of the overseas drama scene from 1986 to 1997, (Tian, 2009, p. 215) and her being a popular interviewee among the media after she became the Rep’s artistic director, prove her eagerness to engage the media. Of course, those qualities were verified only after she was appointed to the position.
Chan has a degree in Mathematics and was also required to take care of the budgeting of her own drama company in New York. Although I cannot tell whether she was bold when facing financial figures, we can at least be sure she was unafraid of managing figures or doing budgeting. Though a Catholic nun, she always dresses in secular fashion (in fact throughout these 30-odd years, nobody in the Rep or in the field has ever seen her in a nun’s habit, as Choi states). Her gentle and soft manner in addition to her sophisticated flair and determination in leading her own theatre company show her personal charisma and strong leadership. Having a wide spectrum of studies in various academic aspects; working as both an artistic director and an art administrator for her own drama company; being able to achieve two master degrees and one Ph. D degree in seven years while being a playwright; emphasising disciplines yet being an artist for almost her whole life … she proves herself to be both sentimental and rational.

Chan certainly also enjoyed getting along with the young. Four Seas Players was a theatre company composed of young drama lovers. Moreover, one of the social services she performed for the church was to teach young people to act (Tian, 2009, p. 214).

I did social services in New York’s Chinatown … I was responsible for guiding and assisting young people and new immigrants … Those jobs were all carried out under one single church. There were many
activities for the young. I always traveled and listened to pop music with them (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 18).

The above citation also shows she was a popular person socially and she maintained an active social life after work, despite the fact that she lived in a nunnery.

I also include Ju’s version of qualities for evaluating an artistic director in Chapter One. His suggestions of having “a creative mind with precise belief, sharp artistic vision and solid artistic experience” and “strong leadership” are also the requirements suggested by Wang. However, some of the criteria suggested by the two Taiwanese theatre practitioners could only be proved after Chan became the Rep’s artistic director. To cite a few examples, after interviewing Chan several times in recent years, I can tell she is an experienced yet humble artist. Though she believes in her decisions and works, she never brags about her achievements. Rupert Chan Kwan Yun (Rupert Chan hereafter) comments that “Chan used to be the only artistic director of the Rep who did not promote herself as the star of the Theatre before Anthony Chan came to the position” (my own translation, personal communication, 18 November 2011. Original transcript: 在陳敢權未成為話劇團藝術總監之前的陳氏修女是唯一一位沒有將自己 promote 為話劇團明星的藝術總監). In terms of accepting the compromise that “sponsors are always right”, though an artist of strong character, she was willing to make concessions to the sponsor when she arranged a tour to North America. Ju’s suggestion of possessing “a thorough understanding of the characteristics of the art form in terms of its different eras,
streams and thoughts” can also be gleaned from the successful productions staging stories of different eras and genres she directed for the Rep. Also, she satisfied Mao’s requirement by being able to “give artistic directives to the company” and to “stage productions that were of her signature” after she became the Rep’s artistic director.

The above are only criteria proposed by some theatre practitioners for assessing whether a particular individual generally possesses the ideal qualities to be considered “a distinguished artistic director”. For a more accurate picture of the person, it is vital to examine him / her in a real-life context. How Chan became an “auteur in contexts” when writing the text for the Rep – rather than whether she was “a distinguished artistic director” for the Rep – is nevertheless the main study and concern of this dissertation.

What was the Frame for Chan? - HKRep’s Missions in the Mid-1980s

In 1968, Chan succeeded Yang, a Taiwanese American born in Shanghai, to the position of artistic director. Working in a government-administered theatre group, Chan inevitably faced similar constraints as her predecessor did. The main constraint, as mentioned in Chapter One, was to lead a performing art organisation within a confined framework designed by the government as represented by the Sub-committee of Performing Companies of the Urban Council and the executives of the Urban Services Department. The executives were responsible for executing
instructions and decisions given by the council, providing executive support and checks and balances to the Theatre. Meanwhile, Chan was to be “advised” by a group of artistic consultants led by Chung, the principal artistic consultant.

To further elaborate the power structure of the Rep during Chan’s time, I checked with K. B. Chan who was responsible for assisting Choi in overseeing the Rep’s operations. For illustrative purposes, we took the approval of the programming of a drama season. As artistic director, Chan would first discuss with the Rep’s manager (i.e. K.B. Chan, in this case) the selection of performing venues reserved by the Rep for the following year. She would then develop the programme for that season, in accordance with the capacities and conditions of those venues. Her proposal would also clearly state her programming concept and artistic rationale. The Rep's manager then drew up a detailed budget covering the drama season as a whole, as well as each programme therein, and presented it to the government’s Cultural Services Department. Generally, as an expression of faith in the talent and professionalism of the artistic director, the programme approval process did not include vetting of the actual scripts for the proposed productions. The proposal would simply be submitted to the chief manager and assistant director of the Department for approval. The Cultural Services Department would then write a Council Paper comprising Chan’s proposal and its manager’s assessment, which was subsequently handed to the Performing Companies Sub-committee for discussion and final approval. Chan would be invited to an annual meeting with the Sub-committee to introduce her concept and programme lineup for the next drama season, in addition
to discussing her views on the Rep’s development and answering pertinent questions from the Sub-committee members (my own translation, personal communication, 27 October 2014. Original transcript is written by K. B. Chan: 陳修女為話劇團擬定劇季製作前，會先與劇團經理 Manager 研究及了解來年已預留給劇團使用的表演場地，然後配合場地大小及其他條件而擺放節目，並擬備新劇季的節目計劃書，內含編排意念、劇目選擇等藝術性資料，交予部門 (Urban Services Department) 考慮。劇團經理會就陳修女提供的資料為個別製作估算收支及做全年的財政預算，再把製作計劃及預算建議給總經理 Chief Manager 及助理署長 Assistant Director 批准。一般情況下，部門的內部審核過程 (internal vetting process)，是不需要審閱劇本的，以示尊重和信任藝術總監的藝術判斷。最後部門會撰寫一份會議文件給市政局 (Council paper)。文件內附陳修女的節目計劃書及部門的分析和建議，方便市政局藝團小組 (Performing Companies Subcommittee) 委員在會議上討論和通過。藝術總監每年一次被邀請列席藝團小組委員會會議與委員溝通，介紹她的劇季設計和構思，表述她對話劇團發展的意見，或回答相關的提問)。To summarise the checking procedures, the plan for every drama season had to be reviewed by the senior manager, the assistant director of the Department and the Sub-committee of the Performing Companies of the Urban Council.

In terms of job-performance evaluation, the Rep used the self-appraisal system for its artistic directors. Hence Chan was required to do her own appraisal and discuss her performance with the chairman of the Sub-committee of Performing Companies of the Urban Council.
As discussed in Chapter Two, the reporting line, consisting of multiple checks and balances, gatekeeping, discussions, investigations and endorsements, could be explained by the nature of the Theatre itself – it belonged to a part of the government system administered by civil servants employed by a colonial government. Therefore Chan, a contracted artist employee, was required to work side by side with the senior manager of the Urban Services Department and her staff who were permanent civil servants for executive matters in daily operations, and to be advised by an artistic consultants’ team formed by local drama experts. In a nutshell, she had to work in a frame formed by the civil service system of an executive-led colonial government.

Unlike other theatre companies whose artistic directors are the organisations’ founders and therefore run the companies in accordance with their own wishes, tastes and choices, artistic directors of the Rep during the era of government supervision were able to enjoy their creative freedom only within the given framework.

The company profile of the Rep serves not only to publicise its aims, missions and brief history but also as a public announcement of its artistic director’s duties. The Chinese version of the Rep’s company profiles between the eras of Yang and Chan were actually quite similar, except for minor changes in wording. The English version of the company profile of Chan’s era, however, was not a direct translation of the Chinese text but quite a different write-up. Given these facts, I am using the Chinese texts of the two eras to make a comparison here.
Equal to Yang’s missions, Chan’s objectives were “to formulate an artistic policy for the development of the Theatre, to plan an annual programme, and to organise the actors’ training course, in an effort to unceasingly improve the Rep’s production standard … to organise the Urban Council’s Drama Festival and to make tours and drama seminars to schools and district centres for the purpose of promoting local drama” (my own translation, HKRep, 1989, p. 5).

The company profiles state that Yang and Chan were both required, internally, to formulate various aspects of the developing theatre group in its early stage and to be responsible for the production of drama programmes. Externally, they needed to make use of the Theatre as their main platform to promote drama knowledge and practices to the audience and the masses. The only main difference between the requirements for the two artistic directors is that Chan’s requirements had additional missions: “to nurture the spirit of creativity and to encourage various kinds of experimental theatre, to enhance the playwriting and directing experiences of the actors and to expand the connection with the audience” (my own translation, HKRep, 1989, p. 5).

The requirements for Chan, i.e. to nurture the actors’ spirit of creativity and diversified talents and to help the growth of the experimental theatre had two implications. Firstly, Chan became the Rep’s artistic director nine years after it had been founded. In an interview Yang gave before he left, he stresses that per his standard, “the scale of the Theatre had grown from a ‘community theatre’ to ‘a
second-class regional theatre’ when he resigned” (my own translation, Bin-chau, 1985). Thereafter, when Chan succeeded Yang, the Rep was becoming relatively more mature and taking up the responsibility to nurture various kinds of talents and building other local theatrical developments. Therefore the company profile during Chan’s era, which also indicates the main responsibilities of the Rep’s artistic director, was supplemented with new missions for both the Theatre and its new artistic director.

The second implication refers to Chan’s own strength and uniqueness. Yang comments in the same interview that “the weakest link of the local drama development is (was) the supply shortage of developed original plays” (my own translation, Bin-chau, 1985). Therefore it seems it was natural to include the emphasis on creativity and playwriting in the Rep’s company profile during Chan’s stay at the Rep as she was the only playwright artistic director in the Rep’s first 30 years of history (Yang wrote only one play, and therefore has never been recognised as a playwright). However, an interesting question arises: Was the company profile rewritten with the addition of new missions because the Theatre was taking advantage of Chan’s expertise in playwriting? Or, can we argue that emphasising these nurturing aspects was in fact part of the strategy of the Urban Council in the run-up to the Rep’s second decade, because fostering local talents and enhancing playwriting were essential for the Hong Kong drama scene in the mid-1980s? Therefore, was Chan the right candidate with the right profile that the council was looking for? This smacks of a question of “chicken and egg– which came first?”
Nevertheless, the above happenings were the Rep’s situations when Chan joined in April 1986.

Chan clearly set up her targets before she officially became artistic director of the Rep. She revealed them publicly to the media at the press conference announcing the programmes of the first drama season she prepared for the Rep in 1986. The five targets were:

1. to present distinguished Chinese and Western plays and original plays to the Hong Kong audience;

2. to improve the Rep’s internal disciplines and to nurture the spirit of professionalism among actors so as to develop acting as a respectable career;

3. to continue improving actors’ self-cultivation and quality in order to raise the Rep’s performance standard;

4. to gear up the spirit of creativity by staging small-scale, experimental and avant-garde productions and to tour schools and communities for the purpose of introducing drama to the masses so as to arouse their interest in the performing art; and
5. to establish a relationship between the Rep and other performing arts organisations and the cultural circle (my own translation, Ta Kung Pao, 1986)

Those targets had always been “golden laws” to Chan and she assiduously worked towards those targets in her four years with the Rep. Besides playing the role as head of the troupe, she also wrote and directed plays in those years. In Chapter Four and Chapter Five, I will discuss Chan’s work from two main perspectives: her artistic expression as a playwright and a stage director as well as her artistic management as the leader of the Theatre.
Chapter Four

Case Study: Joanna Chan’s Work in Artistic Expression\footnote{Some of the ideas in this chapter are adopted from my essay (陳尹瑩在香港戲劇舞台上的本土風格) published in the Journal of Local Discourse 2010 in Chinese. Taiwan: Azoth Books Co. Ltd. 2011. 255-272 and was presented by Dr. Anita Lee under the title of “The Work of an Artistic Director of a Colonial Governmental Drama Organization in Transitional Period” at “Expanding the Frontiers of Comparative Literature”, the XIXth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association, held at Chung-Ang University in Seoul, on 20 August 2010.}

Despite the fact that the theatre troupe she worked for was administered by the British colonial government and she was paid through public funds, Chan is the only artistic director of HKRep who dared to respond to the political changes of a unique epoch in Hong Kong history through her creative works. Luk points out in his book Translation and Adaptation of Western Drama in Hong Kong: From Script to Stage the need of the Rep to respond to the political changes at that time.

After the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, Hong Kong society began to explore its own cultural identity and recognition. The performing stage was one of the important spaces that enabled (Hongkongers) to present (their) emotions and feelings at that time... the duration of the identity-exploring journey was very long. The Rep, being the flagship of professional theatre troupes in Hong Kong, was especially necessary for responding to the special situation by providing a space for its audience for deliberation (my own translation, Luk, 2007, p. 29).
Chan came to the Rep under those political circumstances. As an artistic director of a theatre run by the colonial government with the objectives of “promoting dramatic arts”, “showcasing masterpieces of the world theatre so that Hong Kong audience would be able to appreciate high-quality dramatic offerings”, and “providing a platform for theatre practitioners to practise and to receive professional training”, Chan fulfilled those objectives by staging internationally renowned translation plays such as *The Matchmaker*, *Beckett* and *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. With regard to her providing platforms for theatre practitioners’ practice and training, we shall discuss this later in the dissertation. However, instead of focusing on producing translation plays and avoiding sensitive political issues as her predecessor Yang did, because of her situation, Chan initatively linked herself up with the epoch, leading the Rep “to respond to the special situation”, as Luk suggests. As I write in the Introduction, Chan played the role as an “auteur in contexts.” Her works are therefore not only products of historical, political, social or cultural contexts, but also serve as a point of access to the historical, cultural and colonial contexts. In other words, through studying her works, we are to understand the society and its culture and history, especially during the time when the handover was the talk of the town in the mid-1980s.

Below is a study of the concept and the programmes of Chan’s *Facing Deadlines* Drama Season.
Facing Deadlines – Setting up the First-ever Drama Season with a Theme

Chan’s most distinctive achievement as an artistic director was her effort to set the first-ever theme for the Rep’s drama season, in 1987 - 1988. For that matter, what was out of the ordinary was not only the setting of the first theme for the Rep, but the theme itself – Facing Deadlines. The reason she used “facing the ultimate deadlines”, which is the literal meaning, as the title and the theme of the drama season is explained in my essay “When it all Began …” written on Rep 30, the Rep’s 30th anniversary commemorative Book:

To the Rep, 1987 was a critical juncture as it would celebrate its 10th anniversary. It also meant a lot to Hong Kong people because it marked the last 10 years before the reunification of the territory with the Mainland in 1997 (Tao, 2007, p. 33).

The change of sovereignty therefore became a boiling issue at that time. It also affected the political, social and cultural situations of Hong Kong. Finding herself amid such unique circumstances, Chan, as the head of the largest drama organisation in Hong Kong, immediately made use of her position to launch a drama season with a bold motif – plays selected for that season all discussed how an individual, a city, a country or a nation debates human values when facing deadlines and seismic changes. She was depicting a Hong Kong which was “experiencing a

33 面臨大限
kind of last-minute collective search for a more definite identity”, as Abbas suggests. (Abbas, 1998, p. 4)

The Chinese way and the English way of naming the handover of Hong Kong make a difference in terms of the subjectivity. When we refer to the event in Chinese, we say “to return to China”\textsuperscript{34}. The word “return” sounds more neutral in terms of its subjectivity than the word “handover” in English, which has the connotation that Hong Kong was an object to be handed over to the Mainland by the British government. As a matter of fact, Hong Kong had been an object and “the Other” throughout the whole long process starting from the initial discussions to the handover ceremony. The subjectivity of the people of Hong Kong was robbed.

In order to defend our subjectivity, Chan set up the themed drama season to produce her own discourse on behalf of the people of Hong Kong. Chow’s\textsuperscript{35} use of Michel de Certeau’s “theory of tactics” in Chu’s essay “The Other Territories: On the Meaning of the Other Discourse in the Cultural Periphery” can help explain Chan’s action.

\begin{center}
\textit{Certeau differentiates “strategy” and “tactics”. In a nutshell, the former is a maneuver that involves seizing the position while the latter}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{34} 返回
\textsuperscript{35} Rey Chow’s original text is “Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies”, (Indianapolis and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 16
is a confrontational manner without taking over the position (my own translation, Chu, 1998, p. 23).

Chan’s setting up of the drama season was therefore a “tactic” – a confrontational way without taking over the position as a “strategy” does. The lining up of the themed programmes was to serve as her “tactic” to confront the gigantic “handover machine” and to take back the subjectivity to voice her opinions and concerns. She directly and boldly addressed the theme *Facing Deadlines* – an alarming title for Hong Kong and its people in 1987.

Artistic director Joanna Chan took the occasion to set up the first-ever theme for the Rep’s drama season – *Facing Deadlines*. Through various programmes, the Rep sought to explore the changes in personal values, particularly with regard to one’s city, country and nation, in the face of all sorts of anxieties and pressures, represented by “deadlines” (Tao, 2007, p. 33).

Bazin in his significant essay “*De la Politique des Auteurs*” says that “the individual transcends society, but society is also and above all within him” (Bazin, 2008, p. 22). Though the handover took place in 1997, the works of Chan, an *auteur*, transcend society because the arguments and the significances of her plays are still valid in Hong Kong, which has been internalized in her artistic works.
The implementation of Chan’s bold plan was the first time that the Rep’s dramas tied in with the city, the society, the current political discourse and the people. Although a few “97 dramas” were produced previously, they were piecemeal productions staged by different drama organisations. No performing arts organisation in Hong Kong had ever systematically branded its whole season’s programmes under one single theme. Equally important, it was very unusual of a government-run drama troupe to discuss hot and sensitive issues on stage. Chan not only staged one production but she lined up the whole year’s programmes under the same theme. I further comment on the significance of Chan’s act in the souvenir book:

This initiative indicated a shift in the position of the HKRep, from its being concerned mainly with introducing well-known foreign plays to local audiences, to delving into burning issues of the day and giving a voice to the hearts and minds of Hongkongers. The Rep’s works were no longer purely artistic offerings, but offerings tinted with social agendas, thus making them unique specimens for sociological and cultural study. Given this season’s deliberately equivocal theme in the context of the prevailing social atmosphere, most of the plays were, unsurprisingly, about the society and its people and politics (Tao, 2007, p. 33).

Chan was deliberately doing something. As Chow writes, “The restoration of what we might thus call a colonised culture’s agency for self-writing remains a
primary and ineluctable task in the postcolonial aftermath” (1998, p. 152); Chan herself also confirms her intention to apply her signature motif to the Rep’s productions in that drama season during my talk with her.

All of my productions are to use the past to disparage the present. I always talk about the position of a nation. It is also about how modernisation affects an individual, a city and a nation (my own translation, Chan, personal communication, 19 November 2012. Original transcript: 我的所有戲劇都是借古諷今的。我時常談論一個國家的位置，那亦是關於現代化怎樣影響個人、一個城市和一個民族).

Deriving from her own personality and beliefs, Chan’s continuous practice of promoting a singular motif fulfills the second premise of the Auteur Theory that Sarris sets up in his classic essay “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962”, i.e. “the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value … exhibit certain recurring characteristics of style, which serve as his signature …should have some relationship to the way a director thinks and feels” (Sarris, 2008, p. 43). As an auteur, Chan always presents her works in a signature style, to show what she thinks and feels.

Besides two repeat shows, namely, the farce Noises Off, which reran the year immediately after its successful debut in 1986, and the original play Where Loves
Abides, one of Chan’s much-lauded directing pieces, written by renowned playwright To, there were six new productions staged during this themed drama season, the second season after Chan joined the Rep. Lo in his essay “The Wave-breaking Stage - Hong Kong Drama as Cultural Discourses” comments on the original plays written or directed by Chan during her service to the Rep in the 1980s:

Driven by the consciousness of a newly formed historical subject, a series of significant works have emerged in the Hong Kong drama scene since the middle of the 1980s. Those productions include Before the Dawn Wind Rises (written and directed by Joanna Chan), Where Loves Abides (written by To Kwok Wai and directed by Joanna Chan), Love in a Fallen City (written by Chan Koon Chung and directed by Joanna Chan), The Shape of the Moon (written by Tue Liang Tee and directed by Joanna Chan), and Crown Ourselves with Roses (written and directed by Joanna Chan). Those productions, more or less, provoked the Hong Kong audience’s thoughts and emotions regarding Hong Kong’s past and the distinctive role the people of Hong Kong played in that particular period of their history. All of them were productions of the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre (my own translation, Lo, 2004, p. 96).

Lo states that “all those productions were ‘productions of HKRep’”. To be more exact, I would say “all of those productions were productions of Chan’s era”.

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And to be even more specific, “all of them were productions of Chan herself”. Besides taking advantage of her unique situation in a distinctive political epoch that provided her with a solid reason and a platform to create a series of stage works concerning country and family, Chan is the only artistic director in the history of the Rep who has been so devoted and has produced the greatest number of productions with such aspects. Till today, almost a quarter of a century after she left the Theatre, she is assiduously working on these subjects to express her beliefs and aspirations,

The productions arranged by Chan and staged during this special drama season all revolved around the same motif: how people make decisions and change their values when they are on the cusp of change. Besides featuring original plays, she also included translation plays serving the same motif during the season, although they were not written for serving the motif of the Rep’s drama season.

The first production of the Facing Deadlines drama season was The Shape of the Moon, an original black comedy which “explores the change of human values of individuals when they are facing deadlines… Operations have taken something from the brains of two patients who suffer from cancer and have changed their lives. However, their beliefs have never been shattered” (my own translation, Ching Po Daily, 1987a).

Patients fidget before they undergo operations because they are not sure about their future. The experience is more horrible than death.
As if the deadline of a patient’s life, an operation forces the patient to introspect and take deep consideration of his / her daily life and human relationships before and after he / she undergoes / has undergone it (my own translation, HKEJ, 1987).

Directed by Chan, *The Shape of the Moon* was a production discussing individuals’ changes when confronting deadlines.

*Sai Jinhua*, an adaptation of a novel, was the second original play staged during the themed drama season. Both the novel and the play are written by Jin Dongfang. It is a historical story about how the courtesan heroine Sai Jinhua made her choice and saved Beijing when the city was about to be attacked by eight foreign powers in 1900. Director Li Ming Sum (Li hereafter) in an interview describes the production:

The name of such an influential woman is not found in official history. Because of destiny, she was involved in the swirl of history. We know about her life and stories only through unofficial history. Therefore, HKRep is playing the role of a “museum of unofficial history” and revealing the essence of Jin’s life on the “museum’s stage” (my own translation, Kit-ling, 1987).
The reason that Chan selected that play for that drama season is explained precisely by Li’s comment. Unlike *The Shape of the Moon*, *Sai Jinhua* is a play that not only discusses the choice-making process of an individual, but also investigates how a city changes when it faces its ‘deadlines’.

The production *Love in a Fallen City* was an adaptation of a romance written by one of the most renowned Chinese contemporary novelists, Eileen Chang\(^{36}\). The two protagonists, Fan Liuyuan and Bai Liusu, are one of the best-known fictional couples in the world of modern Chinese novels. The production was a performance in commemoration of the silver jubilee of the Hong Kong City Hall. Chan adapted the novel into a stage play and included it in her uniquely arranged drama season. This is because the story and the choice of the female protagonist, Bai, when encountering the “falling” of the city, Hong Kong, in 1941, recalls the subjects that Chan has always felt so strongly about. Chan explains to the media why she selected the play:

Like any member of the masses in any important epoch, Bai herself is insignificant. During the war, she knows only that the world she is familiar with does not want to accept her anymore. But she does not realise that in fact the world has been gradually transforming. Having said that, like everybody in the world, she inevitably shoulders the tension produced by the change of the epoch. She can therefore only

\(^{36}\) 張愛玲
strive to seek the restricted harmony and balance for her individual life within certain boundaries. Both Shanghai and Hong Kong were bustling in the 1940s but that appearance in fact was only on the surface. Internally, the old laws and orders were getting rotten. Externally, there was an irretrievable decaying force soon to devastate the fragile and strained peace of the two cities. Hong Kong today is facing an unpredictable future. Hundreds of thousands of people are struggling to live in it (my own translation, Express News, 1987).

Chan elaborates her idea of using Bai as a medium for her own thoughts, in an article she writes for Baixing Bi-weekly:

Before Bai has taken action to pursue (her life), the passion (she has possessed) during the struggle and the sensation of loss after she has won over, her story is full of anxiety … Nevertheless, it happened during a time when old rules were replaced by new orders … Hong Kong today is also facing an unpredictable future. Hundreds of thousands of people are working hard for survival (my own translation, Chan, 1987, p. 35).

The climax of the novel takes place in 1941, when Hong Kong was invaded. Worrying about the future of Hong Kong, Chan made use of the romance to create a parallel imagery between 1941, when Hong Kong was attacked by the Japanese, and
1997, when the city was to be returned to China, so as to express her anxiety over the “bombardment” of Hong Kong. Serving the same purpose as other shows did during the same season, the production was aligned with the theme formulated by Chan.

The re-run Where Love Abides is one of Chan’s directing masterpieces and was staged during the first drama season after she became the Rep’s artistic director. She generated the idea of producing the play, did the research and conducted interviews with the playwright To in Guangzhou. The three-act play unfolds across three different time zones and places: Guangzhou 1937 in Act 1, Macau 1950 in Act 2 and Hong Kong 1966 in Act 3. Through the various changes and the gain and loss of a traditional-style family in three different settings, Chan displays the misery and the sufferings of the people when encountering the change of times and the political and social instability. Premiered in 1986, the production seemed to be playing the role of a prologue, unveiling the political and social changes in Hong Kong in the 60 years following the handover, until 2046, the last year that the Mainland Chinese government promises to maintain Hong Kong’s status quo according to the Joint Declaration.
*Cabaret*, directed by Chan, is Hong Kong’s first-ever musical staged with a live band. Chan therefore has the honour of being considered the first person in Hong Kong to stage a musical with a live band.37

That is the first time we had a live band on stage. I invited Daniel Maloney, principal dancer of Martha Graham Modern Dance Company, one of America’s world-class dance companies, to be the choreographer of the musical. He spent three months giving dance training to our actors (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 122).

The successful invitation of the choreographer was due to Chan’s connections in New York. She also deserves credit for staging a live musical in Hong Kong because she lived in New York for years and was influenced by the unique product of the Big Apple’s theatre. Other people, even though they became artistic directors of the Rep, might not have been able to produce a musical accompanied by a live band in the 1980s in Hong Kong, but a Catholic nun did it.

Chan’s staging of *Cabaret* on the Hong Kong stage was not only because she wanted to bring a new theatrical genre or entertaining elements to the Rep or to the local drama scene. The main theme of *Cabaret* is how a city confronts drastic changes. Chan saw the similarities between Berlin and Hong Kong on the eve of

37 The first musical ever staged in Hong Kong was *West Side Story*, directed by Chung King Fai, in 1980. The music was pre-recorded and there was no live band.
facing deadlines. In fact, she hoped to reinforce her concept of the themed drama season by producing the Broadway show.

The background of the story is the eve of Berlin’s capture by the Nazis in the 1930s -- a city soon to face its deadline. The tension here is the same as that in other cities which are encountering dramatic changes. Characters in the musical react differently … To the Hong Kong audience, the musical has special significance. We can see the audience respond differently to different characters’ situations, reactions and behaviours (my own translation, R. Chan, 1988, p. 47).

Usually the title of the musical is literally translated as “the Singing and Dancing Hall”\(^{38}\) in Chinese. However, being the director of the show, Chan gave the musical a special title – *Get Drunk Today When Having Wine*\(^ {39}\), a Cantonese expression meaning “to have fun now as if there were no tomorrow”. This is because Chan wanted to use this musical to challenge people’s attitude of “getting drunk today while having wine when they are meeting the change of the epoch. She feels a life of luxury and dissipation at this crucial moment might eventually lead to people’s downfall” (my own translation, *Ching Po Daily*, 1988).

\(^{38}\) 《歌廳》或《歌舞廳》

\(^{39}\) 《有酒今朝醉》
*Cabaret* is an American musical about a period of European history which occurred more than half a century ago. When Chan became artistic director of the Rep, she included the translation play in her specially planned drama season. This was because she wanted to reinforce the universality of human beings when facing deadlines of any sort. She also hoped to reflect the social situations and the mindset of the people of Hong Kong by staging the American musical.

The last production of the drama season was an Italian classic – Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. The story reflects the constraints of the people of Sicily when suffering from feudalism and conservatism in the 1920s. Directed by Chung, the production adapted the background to China in the same era because “Chung believes the persecution of the Chinese in the 1920s matches the moral constraints and the sufferance from feudalism of the people in Sicily at the same time” (my own translation, S. M. Chung, 1988). Although the play was not directed by Chan, her concern about China and its people was further enhanced by the choice of the adaption and her inclusion of the play in the themed season. In Pirandello’s play, the six characters which have been deleted by “the playwright” in his play appear on the stage to fight for their existences. This also echoes Chan’s theme of the drama season – how do people think and react when they are facing their deadlines?

It is noticeable that the stagings of *The Shape of the Moon, Where Love Abides, Love in a Fallen City* and *Cabaret* by Chan were not randomly arranged.
Besides their being centred on the grand motif of the season, Chan intentionally chose those four productions for demonstrating, respectively, the worries and the fear of an individual, a family, a local city and an international city when they were on the eve of a drastic change, facing their deadlines.

It is amazing that a Catholic nun, when leading a British colony’s theatre troupe, had the courage to put on stage many sensitive issues that might otherwise have brought embarrassment to the government. That was a very extraordinary deed. Chan responds to this matter in this way:

When I write, I never worry what I should not write. I am already a nun who pursues nothing in the secular world. If I am still bound, what is the point to write? (My own translation, personal communication, 19 November 2012. Original transcript: 當我寫作時，我從沒擔心有什麼是不可以寫的。我已經是一名修女，對俗世沒有什麼追求。如果我仍然被「綁手綁腳」，what is the point to write?).

It is equally amazing that throughout her four years of service to the Rep, Chan, a Catholic nun, never produced any shows on religion. Neither did she preach in any of her productions at all. Instead, she never ceased to exhibit her concerns about political and social issues as well as her feelings for her motherland with her utmost effort. Ko Hon Man (Ko hereafter), a seasoned actor of the Rep hired by
Chan in the 1980s, hit the nail on the head by commenting that “Chan, although she has produced many plays in all those years, has actually done only one thing – writing and directing plays about country and family but nothing else” (my own translation, Ko, personal communication, 17 December 2012. Original transcript: 她其實來來去去也只是編導同一樣事情——除了寫家國之外並無其他). Chan also admits her own style:

I have written over 20 plays. Most of them are about country and family. From Tai Ping Tian Guo and The Empress Dowager in the 1970s, The Soongs: by Dreams Betrayed in the early 1990s; The Story of Yu-huan in the late 1990s; to One Family One Child One Door which I am writing, my plays are all repetitively thinking over the hardship of an ancient culture when it is in search of its position in the Modern world (my own translation, Chan, 2001, p. 126).

“The Auteur Theory”, an essay written by Peter Wollen (Wollen hereafter), a British film critic and a filmmaker, can help defend Chan from Ko’s criticism by citing Jean Renoir:

Renoir once remarked that a director spends his whole life making one film; this film, which it is the task of the critic to construct, consists not only of the typical features of its variants, which are merely its
redundancies, but of the principle of variation which governs it …

“through the repetition process” (Wollen, 2008, p. 63).

To Wollen, Chan’s repetitive process of writing the same grand motif through variants helps define her as an *auteur*. Meanwhile, she was also an *auteur* in contexts. While situated in particular contexts of society, she was able to make use of the situations she was in to create art works that, in turn, reflected and influenced the society.

As an *auteur* in contexts in that special era, Chan did not only write her “text” on the subjects that have always concerned her in one particular drama season. After her first year, she continued to produce “97 dramas”, such as *Crown Ourselves with Roses*, one of her masterpieces, and *Laughing in the Wind*. Both of the plays were written and directed by her in 1988, followed by a series of “97 dramas” produced by other local theatre organisations. As for *Laughing in the Wind*, the renowned translator Rupert Chan appreciated her adaptation of Jin Yong’s *Wu Xia* novel into a play that fit the political situation that was in existence when the production was staged. He says,

The original novel itself is a political satire. Chan adapted it into a political play that matched the political situation of Hong Kong at that

40 金庸

41 武俠小說
time. The unification of the five “Kung Fu” streams in the novel hence became “One Country, Five Systems” in the play, hinting at the Joint Declaration’s “One Country, Two Systems” (my own translation, R. Chan, personal communication, 18 November 2011. Original transcript: 我欣賞她將《笑》改為政治劇，原著也是政治諷刺。她將劇本套入當時中英草簽之中，將「五派合一」改為「一派五制」，一聽便知是「一國兩制」).

There is one interesting remark Rupert Chan makes on the extensive part that Chan gave to the little Buddhist nun Yilin who was only a supporting character in the production. Rupert Chan said, “It was because both Chan and Yilin are nuns. Therefore she used the latter to express her points of view” (my own translation, personal communication, 18 November 2011. Original transcript: 儀琳不是主要角色，卻特別多戲份，因為她是尼姑。陳是修女，能代入儀琳表達其觀點和深入感情). This shows how an author’s work is shaped by his / her own background, beliefs and experiences.

Not only were the motifs of the productions she staged for the Rep the same, many protagonists in her plays or her productions are also of the same character: persistent in pursuing their own beliefs, aspirations and missions as long as they believe they are right. Kong Tzu Lau in Crown Ourselves with Roses, Ling Huchong.

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42 功夫
one of the most respectable and successful characters of Jin Yong’s “Wu Xia” novels, in Laughing in the Wind, Leung Tin Chi, the gatekeeper of the second generation of the umbrella shop in When Love Abides all reflect Chan’s personality and beliefs. Though Sai Jinhua and Boundless Movement were not directed by her, the two respective protagonists, Sai Jinhua, a courtesan, and Lam Kwok Man, a revolutionist, further confirmed Chan’s signature as these two productions were chosen to be staged in Chan’s designed drama season. In Bazin’s essay “De la Politique des auteurs”, the film critic suggests that “choosing the personal factor in artistic creation as a standard of reference, and then assuming that it continues and even progresses from one film to the next” (Bazin, 2008, p. 25) can help explain Chan’s choice.

As a matter of fact, Chan’s Before the Dawn Wind Rises, a production written and staged by her in 1986 before she became artistic director of HKRep, pioneered the so-called “97 dramas”. Below is the analysis of Before the Dawn Wind Rises and Crown Ourselves with Roses, Chan’s two best-known productions that reveal her views and thoughts on the “97 issue”. Chan, as an “auteur in contexts”, while creating her work under those particular political and social contexts, also reflected the life of the people and the happenings in society in that particular era through her original plays.

Textual Analysis of Before the Dawn Wind Rises and Crown Ourselves with Roses
**Before the Dawn Wind Rises.** As mentioned above, Chan was invited to write and direct *The Empress Dowager* for the Rep as a guest playwright and director in 1983. The success of the show paved the path for Chan to further connect with the Rep. She reveals the story behind her directing *Before the Dawn Wind Rises* in 1985 in a newspaper interview after the show was staged.

While we were chatting during the time that *The Empress Dowager* was staged, a leader of the Urban Council asked if I would like to write a play about Hong Kong. I grew up in Guangzhou, finished my secondary school and university study in Hong Kong. Being a Chinese, (I have) studied and worked in three different regions for almost 20 years. The mixed and complex feelings that had accumulated deep inside my heart for 20 to 30 years were evoked just by that request (my own translation, Chan, 1985a, p. 85).

Having accepted the invitation, Chan had no clue what the story or the content of the play she was going to write would be. The Sino-British Joint Declaration was the direct cause that helped push Chan to come to Hong Kong to direct her second production for the Rep.

China and Britain had finally signed their agreement and announced the Joint Declaration in 1984, marking the turning point in Hong Kong history. The fact that I took the offer without carefully considering it
(last year) suddenly seemed to add more significance to my decision. That made me further treasure the opportunity. Through a simple story of several common people, (I wanted to use the play to) explore our feelings about Hong Kong, about the Mainland, and even about our being Chinese, blended by extreme contradictions in the past 30 years (my own translation, Chan, 1985a, p. 85).

Chan was no longer satisfied by using the technique of satirising the present through an ancient story. Neither was she content with choosing an indirect way to comment on the politics and other matters of ancient China by depicting the problems or struggles of royal families whose backgrounds, environments and concerns were very distant from the common people of nowadays.

Beijing dramaturge and veteran drama critic Lin comments that “the reformation of Hong Kong theatre was caused by historical conditions”. He writes,

Under the inevitable situation of the handover and the change of sovereignty, the mystery of history and the missing of the motherland … have triggered suspicions towards Hong Kong people’s identity and cultural positioning. Hence, the stories told in the theatre, especially the manner in which they are told, have induced a series of significant and enormous changes (my own translation, 2007, p. 687).
Lin considers the historical factor to have been the most important reason for the shift of paradigm in Hong Kong theatre since the mid-1980s. Chan, being “a theatre practitioner driven by cultural sentiments, naturally encountered various theses associated with ‘changes’ in Hong Kong history, and therefore used Hong Kong as the subject with which to take action in her artistic imagination” (my own translation Lo, 2012, p. 63). In this case, Chan simply wrote Before the Dawn Wind Rises, an original play concerning the most pressing issue in Hong Kong at that time. By writing about the changes and the conflicts experienced by an ordinary family in Hong Kong, she directly probed into the issues of family and country, which have always interested her.

Chan had lived in the U.S. for over a decade before she wrote the play. She had diaspora grief over the years she lived in a foreign country. Thus, she made use of her observations, feelings and grief to warn, through the play, those who “worshipped” the West.

Silly boy, what do you think living overseas means? It means you are living in a place that totally belongs to foreigners. You are excluded from everything important to them … When a foreigner stands in front of you, you need to lower your voice and feel inferior to him. When you suffer wrong and want to talk back to foreigners, you cannot enjoy the bitter pleasure when you speak in their language. However, when you use your own language, they don’t understand what you want to
say. … Even though foreigners respect you, give you chances and compliments, advise you, it is only for the sake of having you to help build up their education, economy and technical constructions. The world that you help establish has never been yours … Even if you live in a district meant for the middle or upper class, people around you are all foreigners, with blue eyes and blonde hair. Once you are used to their look, you will have forgotten your original Chinese look. Until one day when you look at the mirror and shock yourself – how come there is a Chinese person looking back at you in the mirror? (My own translation, Chan, 1985b, p.1-20-21)

Chan felt that the people of Hong Kong did not live in their own country, but in a colony that was being deserted by its “mother”. Considering she held an American passport, however, the taste of living overseas was not any better.

In fact we are just like people who have been abandoned at birth by our parents. Now we have grown up and want to go back to our parents. Although we are excited by the thought of reuniting with them, there is an unfamiliar feeling between us. I am not sure if my parents are taking me back because they think it would be good for me. Anyway, it will take us a while to establish a relationship. But I worry about the hardship, deep in my heart. It seems I need to shoulder a heavy burden. If we want to live nicely, we have to make the whole of
China live well first. Worrying that we need to contribute so much, I sometimes really want to leave the place. It seems that when I am given an overseas passport, it would be easier for me to be patriotic (my own translation, Chan, 1985b, p. 1-22-23)

It was while she was in this dilemma that Chan wrote the play which has turned out to be one of her most important creative works.

When Chan returned to Hong Kong from Guangzhou in the 1950s, she and her family shared an apartment with a widow and her two sons. The relationship and interactions of these three persons formed the prototype of her original play, Before the Dawn Wind Rises.

With regard to borrowing a story to trigger a discussion on (the issues between) Hong Kong and the Mainland, the most appropriate way is to write a story of two brothers. The two used to love each other when they were young. However, due to long-term separation while they were growing up, they have a lot of conflicts and discrepancies. Regarding the solicitude to the Mainland and the mixed feelings of love and hatred toward the motherland, I used the sentiments of the two brothers toward their mother as a metaphor… The two characters, who grew up separately in the Mainland and in Hong Kong, and their encounters in foreign countries, reflect the frustrations and regrets the
Chinese have when we want to stick out our chest to live in the
Modern world … How can we mend our dignity and confidence,
which have been damaged? How can we rebuild the respect and trust
between us? (My own translation, Chan, 1985a, p. 85)

Chan explicitly announced that what she wanted to tell was a story about
Hong Kong and the Mainland. She grew up in these two places; therefore, she had
feelings for, and expectations about, them. Having lived in the U.S. for over a decade,
she came back to Hong Kong as an American Chinese when the “97 issue” was
boiling hot. The alienated identity of an American Chinese provided her a channel to
express her mixed and complicated sentiments regarding both the past China and the
future China. It also stoked her concerns about both the current Hong Kong and the
future Hong Kong. She complains in the play, about how overseas Chinese are
looked down upon in foreign countries.

In Chan’s eyes, the discrepancies, estrangements and conflicts between the
two brothers who are of the same root are caused by long-term separation. The
phenomenon of “two peoples separated by a common ethnicity” Abbas calls an
example of “disappearance” (Abbas, 1998, p.2) in his book Hong Kong – Culture and
the Politics of Disappearance. He points out that although 98 percent of the Hong
Kong populace is ethnic Chinese, “the Hong Kong Chinese are now culturally and
politically quite distant from mainlanders” (Abbas, 1998, p. 2). He describes Hong
Kong people as now being “a bird of a different feather” (Abbas, 1998, p. 2), despite
the fact that they or their ancestors were originally from the Mainland and of the same ethnicity as them.

Being “a bird of a different feather”, Chan, on the one hand, admitted that Mainland China was like a mother and was attentive to her; on the other hand, she had resentment and conflict with “the older brother”. She therefore hoped to make use of the production “to explore the extremely clashing feelings we have had between Hong Kong and the Mainland, and even with simply being Chinese in the past three decades” (my own translation, Wong & Lai, 1985). She also wanted to search for a way to reconstruct “the mutual respect and trust” instead of “demonising the other”, as Abbas critiques.

In the play, Chan expresses the misunderstanding, the discrepancies and the “different features” of the two brothers through the angry complaint of Ho Kei Cheung, the character representing Hongkongese, to his elder brother, representing Mainlanders. As well, the complaint is intended to symbolise the Localism of the people of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong is going to change soon. I used to think I could undertake everything by myself for a long time. But the returning of Hong Kong to the Mainland is a holistic matter. The whole place needs to undertake it while individuals are also required to look for their own ways to deal with it. Therefore some people who have the chance
would go to foreign countries, wait there for passports and come back to Hong Kong. When they are clear about their identity, they have a strong reason to show their love for their city. Maybe they really cannot forget their roots. Wanderers always miss their hometowns. It may also look cool and feel safe when you show your love for your country while you have a foreign passport in hand. Among those Chinese who have to stay because they do not have any nationality, more and more will become patriotic before handover Day. We will frequently visit the Mainland and raise our heads up in front of our relatives on the Mainland. However, we are scared to death of the Communist Party. In Hong Kong, we queue up for horserace betting while we shout to support the Four Modernisations. This is our Patriotism! Don’t you feel weird? I have been a Chinese of no nationality my whole life but in the end, my fate is still inseparable from our motherland! Who says autonomy? I don’t know how to be autonomic. I have never been autonomic in my whole life! (My own translation, Chan, 1985b, p. 14-4)

Instead of showing only the grievances, worries or fear about their reunion, Chan also wanted to settle the conflict between the “two brothers” in the play. In an interview given by Professor Man Kit Wah, professor of Humanities and Creative Writing Department of Hong Kong Baptist University, she says,
There must be a breakthrough for the two brothers so as to express the relationship among the Chinese of this generation. No matter where we are, in Hong Kong, overseas or in the Mainland, we have wasted too much effort on being the enemy of the opposite side. What this production wants to say is that we are not enemies. Only in this way can we stand on the same side and review our conflicts and discrepancies (my own translation, Man, 1985, p. 55).

Chan is a playwright who writes and cares a lot about Hong Kong and its people. What she wanted to project in the play are not the differences or conflicts between the Mainland and Hong Kong. Neither did she aim at advocating “Localism”, a discourse that stresses that “the Other” is different from “we” the subject. Dr. Kuk Suk Mei (Kuk hereafter), assistant professor of Social Science Department of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, in her essay “Culture, Identity and Politics” gives a brief definition of Localism and Colonialism. The differences between the two can help provide an understanding of the points that Chan wanted to express in the play.

An ideology of having ourselves as the centre is hidden in the discourse of Localism. Colonialism means “an exterior force of control coming from another district out of Hong Kong to overrule and to twist the local city and to maintain the binary opposition between the exterior colonizer and the interior colonized”. According to the
logic of this discourse, the Communist Chinese authority hence turns out to be the incarnation of the colonizer against which “HongKongneses” need to defend themselves against. The Chinese society symbolises an underdeveloped region waiting for exploitation, and that’s what “HongKongneses” are able to make a conquest of (my own translation, Kuk, 2002, p. 355).

In the play, Chan creates eight characters representing different types of Chinese. These characters are used by the writer to express the encounters and experiences of the Chinese over the three decades from the 1950s to the 1980s. The eight characters include the older brother Ho Kei Woon and his wife Cheung Heung Mui, who went to the Mainland to help ‘build up’ the motherland in the 1950s; the younger brother, Ho Kei Cheung, who was sent by his mother, Li, to study in the U.K. and who came back to Hong Kong to start a business after his graduation; Sze Ka Man, Ho Kei Cheung’s wife, a working woman who had grown up in a rich Hong Kong family and received a Western education; Cheung Sing Yee, Ho Kei Woon’s daughter who dreams of living in Hong Kong for a better future; Cheung Sing Kwong, Ho Kei Woon’s son, a member of the new generation who still insists on contributing to the motherland despite the fact that he has undergone various political persecutions there; and the brothers’ uncle, Li Chi Chung, Mother Li’s younger brother, a newspaper seller who has also experienced numerous social and political changes in both Hong Kong and Guangzhou. These characters of a family are eight typical characters found in Hong Kong in the 1980s.
One of the eight characters in the play is like me who has studied abroad in the early days; some of the others were born in the 1950s, graduated from Hong Kong and went to the Mainland to ‘build up’ the motherland; some of them are China-born (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 125).

These eight characters have their own beliefs, attitudes and ways of living. Underneath, they have different kinds of struggles, dreams and regrets. No matter how different they are, they all have unbreakable links, entanglements and a love / hate relationship with their motherland. What they need to face, to bear and to solve is what was arranged by “Mother Li” 30 years ago. The imagery of “Mother Li” representing the old China and Mainland China in the 1980s is shown through the old lady’s thoughts and behaviours. Cheung Heung Mui and Ho Kei Cheung respectively comment on “Mother Li” in the play:

We ought not to repeat the mistakes your mother has made. I remember your mother loved you and your brother a lot before … She thought she knew what would be best for all of us. Her stubborn attitude, however, inadvertently changed the lives of all three of us. You and your brother Kei Cheung used to love each other a lot but, in return, you did not see each other for 30 years … How could she imagine our current world at that time? How could she control the
way we lived and behaved when we had grown up? (My own translation, Chan, 1985b, p. 13-6)

It is because I resent her. I resent her from the bottom of my heart. Mother thought she loved me a lot, so she forced me to follow her wishes. In order to fulfill her dream, I have struggled for most of my life and I am now breathless. I blame her more now because she has made me lose … (my own translation, Chan, 1985b, p. 12-2)

Chan uses Ho Kei Cheung’s condemnation of his mother to express the hatred of the people of Hong Kong towards the Mainland. However, she also uses Cheung Heung Mui’s lines to express her love / hate feelings towards the Mainland. In reality, she knew the “Mother” loved them, but had made them suffer for three decades. Two critics comment on the “Mother” imagery:

The playwright, whether intentionally or not, uses Mother Li as a symbol of a totalitarian government. (Even though) the intention of the government is to try to be nice, it is, after all, only like Mother Li because its / her people / family do / does not have freedom to make their own choices (my own translation, Wong & Lai, 1985)

Chan points out that “the old mother” (the old China) overlooked the right of her children to possess freedom of choice … and did not know to love in fact means
to give them the freedom to choose” (my own translation, Man, 1985, p. 55). Therefore, she had the image of an ideal mother (the new China) in her mind: one who loves her children and respects their free will. Chan projects this image onto the character of Cheung Heung Mui, Mother Li’s daughter-in-law. That is Chan’s wish for the future of China and Hong Kong. Kuk in her essay further writes:

While stressing the differences between the Mainland and Hong Kong, the discourse of “Localism” respectively homogenises “we” and “the Other”, and undoubtedly regards “the Other” as inferior, barbarian and backwards, so that the heterogeneity of “the Other” is not being properly observed or respected (my own translation, Kuk, 2002, p. 355).

As mentioned above, what Chan hoped to demonstrate in her play was not solely to depict how “we” and “the Other” / “Hongkongse” and “the Mainland and the Mainland Chinese” opposed and confronted with each other or how “inferior, barbarian and backwards” the Mainland Chinese were. Rather, she used the eight characters to display the heterogeneity of different kinds of Chinese coming from different historical and social backgrounds. Professor Hung Ho Fung (Hung hereafter), assistant professor of Sociology Department of John Hopkins University in the U.S., writes about “Discourse of In-between-ness” in his essay on a discourse of 1967:
In a nutshell, the “imagination from the in-between-ness” constructs or strengthens the ego of “Hong Kong”, composed of capitalism, hybridity of East meets West, accommodation, prosperity and stability, democracy, freedom, jurisdiction and human rights. Meanwhile, it also constructs a narrow-minded, arrogant and conceited “the Other” of the socialist “Culture of the Central Plains”\(^\text{43}\). The relationship between “I” and “him / her” is imagined as the relationship between a threatened latter and a suppressing former. Due to the fear, to intensify “myself” is then interpreted as an essential resistance (my own translation, H. F. Hung, 1997, p. 97).

What Hung calls “the in-between-ness” in his “Discourse of the In-between-ness” is the main theme of those so-called “97 Dramas”. Chan’s attitude, however, was not negative but positive, not critical but lenient, not defensive but approachable – to both the “we” and “the Other”. She uses the uncle’s teaching to Ho Kei Cheung to demonstrate her reconciliatory attitude to the disputes between the two brothers.

You two brothers have a lot of love and hatred between you. It is impossible to measure who has owed whom now. The 30-year separation has been too long. Do you both want to continue entangling with each other? If yes, you should be ashamed to call yourself a Hongkonger. Look, even the conflict between the Mainland

\(^{43}\)中原文化
and the U.K., which has lasted over a hundred years, has been resolved … Isn’t the relationship between the Mainland and the U.K. more complicated than yours? As long as both parties are sincere enough to settle the disputes in a peaceful way, they are able to solve the problems of Hong Kong without bloodshed or sending troops into each other’s territory … When both parties are willing to work for the prosperity and stability (of Hong Kong), whether the “One Country, Two Systems” is feasible and whatever we need in the future, at least we are willing to try and to look for a “win-win” solution to avoid bringing suffering to the people … You have already turned into a half-Chinese, half-British person; you should understand the thought better (my own translation, Chan, 1985b, p. 10-1).

She was trying to elicit mutual understanding and respect between the people of Hong Kong and the Mainlanders, as well as to set up a positive vision among all Chinese from different backgrounds. Although she was not sure about the future of Hong Kong after its return to the Mainland, she believed in mutual trust and respect. That makes her play stand out from other “97 dramas”.

Regarding the Chinese title of the play, which literally translates as “Whose heart is hinging on the old house?”, Chan did not consider “the old house” as specially referring to a particular region or political concept, that is, the Mainland or Hong Kong, but “it simply means ‘the old land’” (my own translation, Man, 1985, p. 228).
The Chinese title of the play is from one of the verses of Du Fu\textsuperscript{44}, an acclaimed ancient Chinese poet who is famous for his patriotism. Though an overseas Chinese, Chan expresses her solicitude for her “old land”. Using Chinese verses from poems for the titles of her most well-known plays has always been Chan’s signature style as an \textit{auteur}.

\textbf{Crown Ourselves with Roses.} Situated in the time when 1997 was just around the corner, Chan was not satisfied by producing dramas of the handover discourse only in one drama season. In the following season, 1987 / 1988, she wrote and staged her best-known masterpiece, \textit{Crown Ourselves with Roses}, staged in 1988.

Lo points out that the aesthetic practices of Hong Kong theatre practitioners during the political transitional period in the mid-1980s were mainly of three aspects: to distinguish themselves from the Mainland’s practice; to free themselves from the subordinate relationship with the British coloniser and to present Hong Kong cultural sentiments \textit{(my own translation, Lo, 2012, p. 60)}. Chan’s \textit{Crown Ourselves with Roses} is of the third category.

The story of the play is of an epic scale that spans five decades and three generations. The strong sense of the 1950s nostalgia in the play can be explained by Chan’s sentimental attachment to the period when she came to Hong Kong from Guangzhou. Adhering to the main motif of her work, the play is again about making

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\item \textsuperscript{44} 杜甫, 《秋興八首之六》, 「叢菊兩開他日淚，孤舟一繫故園心」
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choices and searching for the moral compass of an individual, a nation or a country in an age of seismic changes.

*Crown Ourselves with Roses* is the production of Chan that possesses the strongest sense of local discourse after *Before the Dawn Wind Rises*. The three-act play covers three different eras: the refugee era of the mid-1950s, the economic boom of the 1970s and the pre-handover period when everybody was anticipating the coming of 1997. The three acts take place in the same location – a seafront residential area in Hong Kong. Chan “only allow(s) myself (herself) to write the past five decades of Hong Kong history by using the same location and the happenings across three Mid-Autumn festivals” (my own translation, Chan, 2001, p. 127). She explained at the press conference announcing the production that she “wanted to, through writing about the changes experienced by two good friends in 50 years, explore the gain and the loss of the people of Hong Kong when they were enjoying the booming economy after they had overcome all sorts of hardships and challenges, as well as how people should maintain their dignity and build up their own selves when facing their future” (my own translation, *Sing Tao Jih Pao*, 1988).

The dramatic technique of the play is reminiscent of Lao She’s classic narrative *Teahouse*. It tells a story of a Chinese teahouse over several decades with the same background. *Crown Ourselves with Roses* is also a play which tells a story across three different eras in the same space. Lo points out that the difference between the two plays is their themes. “*Teahouse* is about the exploitation of
Chinese people; *Crown Ourselves with Roses* is about the choice of human value: how an individual should be and how to keep his / her mind conscious when situated in a society with changing values” (my own translation Lo, 2004, p. 98).

Chow in her essay “Between the Colonisers” writes:

Hong Kong confronts us with a question that is yet unheard of in colonial history: how do we talk about a post-colonialism that is a forced return (without the consent of the colony’s residents) to a “motherland”, itself as imperialistic as the previous coloniser? (Chow, 1988, p. 151)

As a playwright, Chan chose her own way to establish a discussion about Hong Kong’s being forced to return to its motherland. Through writing a play about two good friends, she tells the story of the colonised city’s past 50 years and discusses how its people worry and react on the eve of the handover.

The two friends are Ting Fung, a materialistic man, and Kong Tze Lau, a pursuer of his beliefs for decades. They were both born in the 1930s and had lived in the little stone house at the seafront of Hong Kong until the 1980s. Through the dialogues, retrospections, happenings and prospections among the twenty-odd characters that appear on stage, Chan hoped to indirectly portray the bitterness and suffering of this small island and to chronologically albeit sketchily summarise Hong
Kong’s history of the past five decades. Almost all the major political, social and
economic events that had happened in those 50 years are referenced in the lines of the
characters and are even employed to somehow be direct causes of twists and turns in
the play. The play is therefore regarded as “a product of history” (Yuen, 1988, p. 52).
Chan reviews her aim in writing the play, in two interviews:

She (Chan) is able to depict the dark side of the people of Hong Kong
about how they forget their integrity when facing the temptation of
personal gain. When society is prospering, human values are also
altering … In those five decades, the people of Hong Kong have
nurtured many local talents. We have built up a sense of belonging
and love towards our society. We have overcome the refugee stage
but the immigration era is beginning … her attachment to the land on
which, and the people with whom, she grew up is integrated into the
text of the play. Through the events, she writes about the grievances
of the people of Hong Kong… We are always forced to make
choices … what is the authentic trait of the people of Hong Kong?
(My own translation, Pik-shan, 1988)

She (Chan) says she has injected much of her personal sensibilities
into the play. The production also serves as her own introspection on
things such as her life in the colony, her feelings about the Mainland
and her thoughts on Hong Kong’s future. She considers that Hong
Kong has both lost and gained a lot in the past 50 years. Some of those things, however, cannot be replaced by time or money. Kong Tze Lau is a symbolic character reflecting the beliefs and values Chan has been pursuing. The keynote of the play is freedom of choice. Hong Kong’s future should be determined by different people’s views and choices. She strongly opposes those who do not respect other people’s choices. In the play, she criticises totalitarian governments because they do not respect individual subjectivity. She also criticises capitalistic societies in which people’s values are measured by the amount of money they possess. Therefore Chan uses “heartbreaking” to describe her feeling when she was writing the play (my own translation, C. Y. Chow, 1988).

In the play, the differences between the personalities, encounters and attitudes of Ting Fung and Kong Tze Lau are used by Chan to discuss the challenges, choices, loss and gain of the people of Hong Kong. The former takes advantage of Hong Kong’s booming economy and earns lots of money from speculating in shares and the property market with his wife. His ups and downs are determined by the rise and fall of the economy. He becomes a loser in the end, not only in terms of money but as a whole person.

I am not qualified to be a good husband, a father or a friend, not even a good man (my own translation, Chan, 1988, p. 3-23).
His “progressive and winning” image when profiting from speculation represents a certain type of people in Hong Kong. To Abbas, that is, however, a kind of “decadence”.

There is something about Hong Kong’s famous “energy and vitality” that could be related to decadence … The energy here is an energy that gets largely channeled into one direction: that is what I understand by decadence. One of the effects of a very efficient colonial administration is that it provides almost no outlet for political idealism (until perhaps quite recently). As a result, most of the energy is directed toward the economic sphere … it is decadent not in the sense of decline (because we see what looks like progress everywhere) but in the sense of a one-dimensional development in a closed field. It is such decadence that has made it difficult to recognise the existence of a Hong Kong culture. (Abbas, 1998, p. 4)

To Chan, this “progressing yet decadent” paradoxical personality does not only apply to the character of Ting Fung. It is also an image of Hong Kong as a colony that Abbas addresses as a “port city” while the people of the city have a “port mentality” (Abbas, 1998, p. 4). What Abbas means is that “everything is provisional, ad hoc, everything floats – currencies, values, human relations.” (Abbas, 1998, p. 4)
Although Kong Tzu Lau guards his old house and his own principles, he is pessimistic about the future of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong has changed since that time. We used to think Hong Kong was a paradise in which we could seek temporary peace. Not until something had happened did we realise that neither China nor the U.K., or even the world, would speak for us. Then we began to know there will be no hope tomorrow. That is what makes us only care about today and ignore tomorrow. We only care about ourselves and not the others because if we don’t think for ourselves, who will think for us? Thus, Hong Kong begins to boom within just a few years. However, we are always afraid of being looked down upon by other people. To a certain extent, that might be caused by the fact that we are also looking down upon ourselves (my own translation, Chan, 1988, p. 2-26).

… perhaps it is Hong Kong that does not allow us to enjoy the privilege of taking it easy or having a stable life. It is because we are nobody to any person or any government in the world. We know if we want to enjoy temporary stability, we must be useful to somebody – before, it was the U.K. and soon, it will be the Mainland. Therefore we try our best to be useful. The most important thing to us is to be more useful than the others. There is nobody else in the world who
can be more shameless than us who hope to be useful to somebody so that we can continue to be used. In this way, we are given the chance to continue to survive (my own translation, Chan, 1988, 3-24).

Kong Tsz Lau wholeheartedly guards his old house and the legacy inherited from his ancestors. However, he is disappointed to realise that “everything that I (he) thought just, honest and helpful and what I (he) did for the neighbours, has turned out to be meaningless” (my own translation, Chan, 1988, p. 3-32). He eventually has nothing in hand because he sold even his house to settle Ting Fung’s debts. Nevertheless, he insists that “I have (he has) done what I think (he thinks) is right and what I want (he wants) to do. Perhaps this is all we can do for ourselves” (my own translation, Chan, 1988, p. 3-32).

Through Kong Tsz Lau’s monologue, Chan expresses the “in-between-ness” discussed by Chow in her essay “Between Colonisers”, which refers to Hong Kong’s situation during the colonial era.

What is unique to Hong Kong, however, is precisely an in-between-ness and an awareness of impure origins, of origins as impure. A post-coloniality that marks at once the untenability of nativism and post-modernism distinguishes Hong Kong’s “Chinese” self-consciousness and differentiates it from other “Chinese” cities. Because a colonised city is, in the politics of its daily formation, “corrupted”, it does not
offer the illusion of a cultural virginity or thus the excitement of its possible rehabilitation. The postcolonial city knows itself as a bastard and orphan who, as Luo Dayou\textsuperscript{45} wrote, “grew up in the state of being abandoned, struggling for a compromised survival in the gap between East and West” (Chow, 1998, p. 157).

The complaint of Kong Tsz Lau’s neighbour, Uncle Choi, further reinforces Hong Kong people’s “in-between-ness”.

1997? Even though we don’t say it out loud, we all understand what is going on. Who won’t think of it? Who won’t be scared by it? … But we are not even qualified to think or to be afraid of it. It is not our job to take care of national matters. But when you ask me to sign up, I don’t know what for. People talk about election, but I have no clue what it is about. After 1997, I have no place to go, no matter who is going to take us. I, of course, will die in Hong Kong but not the Mainland. Anyway, the Mainland won’t take me. Going to other places? I don’t have money or qualification. What I can do is only see how the situation goes and react accordingly. I have decided not to think of it anymore. I have always been so carefree. Back in the time when the Japanese invaded us, we were not able to go (anywhere) either. Therefore I stood up straight here and looked at the planes,
comforting myself not to be afraid, by patting my heart. I was full of the “ostrich spirit” (my own translation, Chan, 1988, p. 3-10).

Chu in his book Otherness Machine? Essays on Postcolonial Hong Kong Culture points out that “Rey Chow uses ‘in-between-ness’ to describe Hong Kong’s characteristic and brings out the embarrassing situation that Hong Kong is in -- ‘between coloniser and colonised’” (Chu, 1998, p. xi). He also quotes Professor Chan Ching Kiu’s similar concept of “between colonial and postcolonial” (Chu, 1998, p. xi) to depict the distinctive position of Hong Kong, which is the situation that Kong Tsz Lau and Ting Po Hang (Ting Fung’s son) feel they are in.

Kong Tsz Lau’s late friend, Sung Suk Man, who died 30 years ago, gave him a rabbit lantern which was a symbol of his own beliefs – “trustworthiness, morality and justice, honesty, generosity and poise; (it) also (represents) a heart of understanding and consideration; (we don’t) need to live well but have to live right” (my own translation, Chan, 1988, p.3-28). When Kong Tsz Lau holds the lantern, he says,

No matter how Hong Kong develops, something will never change. Otherwise, besides those estates, which keep repeating the “built and demolished” cycle and can be cashed in at any time, we will have nothing left for our next generation (my own translation, Chan, 1988, p. 2-28).
Therefore, he wants to pass on “something that will never change” to Ting Po Hang. In the eyes of the playwright, Ting Po Hang is a projection of the younger generation of Hong Kong. The junior Ting grew up during Hong Kong’s economic boom. Unlike his parents, he is not a “money slave” but has a character comparable to Kong Tze Lau’s. He gave up his career in the business field and became a reporter. He loves Hong Kong but worries about its future. He had thought of emigrating, because he suspected the colonial education system. He also felt democracy, freedom, and law and order would be “impossible to exist after 1997” (my own translation, Chan, 1988, p. 3-34). Though he is a reporter, he regards himself as a person “who only knows how to write” (my own translation, Chan, 1988, p. 3-33), “whose voice is not heard and whose effort is in vain” (my own translation, Chan, 1988, p. 3-35) as well as one “whose leaving or staying does not make any difference” (my own translation Chan, 1988, p. 3-33). He says,

From now on, even if 50,000 people apply for emigration annually, we will only lose about 500,000 people in the next 10 years. Still, there are over five million people living here. Therefore I don’t see the difference between leaving and staying. Of course, those who leave may leave discontentedly because they used to have not only their country, but also their own land. However, the Chinese have been in exile for generations the past several centuries. The best skills they have are: ironing in laundry shops or chopping food in restaurants. It
seems suffering is made only for us … (my own translation, Chan, 1988, p. 3-33)

However, he finally decides to stay because of the words of his respectable uncle, Kong Tze Lau.

No matter how Hong Kong has changed, one day at least you can tell yourself, your ancestors and your children, that you did try your best for Hong Kong during the important moment (my own translation, Chan, 1988, p. 3-35).

Situated in such a unique political milieu and always showing her concern for her country, city and people, the playwright is clearly putting words into the mouths of Kong Tze Lau and Ting Po Hang. In that scene, they sigh with emotion while commenting on the political and social situations in the mid-1980s and worrying about the future of Hong Kong. In order to express her views, concerns and worries about Hong Kong and its future, Chan writes over 10 pages of conversation between the two characters. It’s as if she wanted to pour out all of her emotions and criticisms of the colonial city into that single scene. To describe the scene in a rather dramatic way, the two characters like mediums, whose bodies do not belong to themselves anymore but who channel and speak for a spirit, i.e. the playwright, in this case. Bazin in his essay “De la Politique des Auteurs” writes that “Jacques Riverette has said that an auteur is someone who speaks in the first person. It’s a good definition”
The scene shows how Chan is able to match the definition of Bazin’s *auteur*.

The two characters were created to symbolise the playwright’s own character as well as her worldview, beliefs, aspiration, discontentment and grievances, especially in such an unusual situation. Chan further uses some words Kong Tze Lau gives Ting Po Hang for encouragement, to express her wish for the future of Hong Kong:

You have to speak and you have to write. It is not because we are still hopeful, thinking that we will eventually achieve it, but because Hong Kong is a good place … It takes only one generation to nurture talents like you and your younger sister. The reason is that we have freedom and law and order. How many governments and citizens in the world can do so many things for their cities in such a short period? We should not waste it … We might not have had the need before. However, maybe we can survive only when we put ourselves in the worst situation. 1997 is approaching. It makes us begin to appreciate the merits of Hong Kong and remember how Hong Kong has been good to us. That’s right, we are not discouraged yet … Therefore we should voice our opinions now when we still have time … (my own translation, Chan, 1988, p. 3-35)
To reinforce her message, Chan arranged for all actors to stand on stage and sing Danny Summer’s *Unable to Express My Feelings for the Future* (my own translation) at the end of the production. Part of the lyrics were particularly used by Chan to show the worries of the people of Hong Kong, and hers as well.

(Somebody) has said that the horse race would not be forbidden and we would still have the freedom to dance;

(Somebody) has said that I would stay if there were no change here;

You ask why I am not able to express my feelings for the future (my own translation).

As Kong Tze Lau and Ting Po Hang were intentionally created to represent the playwright herself, the conversation between the two characters therefore voices the playwright’s own views and thoughts on the country, the city and the people of Hong Kong. As the conversation is quite lengthy, there is no doubt the messages she wanted to convey were all clearly and directly expressed on stage without being mistaken. However, if we judge the production on its aesthetic merits, that particular scene would be a bit boring as both actors were just standing on the stage, delivering their lines for one single purpose – to speak on behalf of Chan – without any dramatic gestures or movements. The presence of the playwright, though physically invisible, was palpable – and powerful – on stage. When Kong Tze Lau says “You have to
write”, that is actually fulfilment of Chan’s own identity as a writer who dares to
write for the truth, similar to what Ting Po Hang does. She chooses to use her pen
and the stage to comment and to criticise.

Chan’s mise-en-scene technique involves the first premise of Sarris’ *auteur*
theory, that is, the technical competence of a director as a criterion of value. Sarris
says, “A good auteur can make interesting conversation about the subject, the script,
the acting, the colour, the photography, the editing, the music, the costumes, the
décor, and so forth” (Sarris, 2008, p. 43). Although she is an extraordinary theatre
practitioner, Chan’s technical competence has never been highly appraised. Per my
interviews with three veteran actors who used to or still work for the Rep, the
aesthetic standard of her productions was generally “ordinary”.

Her plays emphasise words and language. She only pursued the
beauty of the play’s language which might not work on stage. Her
language is too subtle and feminine, not always applicable to male
characters. The use of words is very literary but not colloquial. She
was more like a literary writer than a playwright (my own translation,
Lam, personal communication, 7 July 2009. Original transcript: 她的
劇本注重文字和語言。她只追求劇本語言美，但那些語言可能在
台上是不行的。她的語言含蓄且女性化，不是常常適用在男角色
之上。她選擇的字彙很文學性，而非口語化。她比較像一名文學
作家多於一名劇作家).
People outside the Theatre comment that Chan’s plays reveal a strong social sense. However, her works are not theatrically rich (my own translation, Poon, personal communication, 15 July 2009. Original transcript: 外邊的人說修女的劇本有很強的社會性。不過，她的劇本卻不夠豐富的戲劇性).

Her hindrance is her inadequate artistic standard; therefore she is not considered a dramatist (my own translation, Ko, personal communication, 17 December 2012. Original transcript: 她的障礙是藝術水平不夠，所以她不算是戲劇家).

These are interesting comments. To Sarris, “if a director has no technical competence, no elementary flair for the cinema (drama in this sense), he (she) is automatically cast out from the pantheon of directors” (Sarris, 2008, p. 43). To Sarris, “technical competence is ‘the nature of the medium’” (Sarris, 2008, p. 43). He would cast Chan out from the pantheon of directors.

In my point of view, despite the fact that Chan might not have shown a very high standard of technical talent in her productions, she did have enough technical competence to direct and to stage professional plays. Different directors have different strengths to make themselves special. He / she does not have to be a technical genius because this is not the only criterion to judge if he / she is an auteur. What impressed us the most about Chan when she was artistic director of the Rep
might not be the fulfilment of the first premise of Sarris’ theory. However, she
definitely performed well enough to fulfil the second and the third premises, i.e. “the
distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value”. Her “élan of the
soul”’’ is especially undeniable. “Élan of the soul” is the third premise of Sarris’
theory which “is concerned with interior meaning, the ultimate glory of the cinema
(theatre) as art … extrapolated from the tension between a director’s personality and
his (her) material” (Sarris, 2008, p. 43). Her “élan of the soul” in relation to the
theatre, or as François Truffaut calls “the temperature of the director on the set”
(Sarris, 2008, p. 43) made her a distinctive auteur of a colonial government theatre.

Therefore, according to Sarris’ “three concentric circles”, Chan is still
considered an auteur as she performed so well in the “inner circle, interior meaning”.

The three premises of the auteur theory may be visualised as three
concentric circles: the outer circle as technique; the middle circle,
personal style; and the inner circle, interior meaning. The
corresponding roles of the director may be designated as those of a
technician, a stylist, and an auteur (Sarris, 2008, p. 43).

She may not be a distinguished technician, but she is definitely a special
stylist and an extraordinary auteur.
Besides its three main roles, all the other characters of the play serve the same purpose: voicing various people’s points of view regarding the situation that the residents of the then colony were in. On the first page of the script, Chan marks the source of both the Chinese and the English titles of the play. The former is the first four words from the poem *From an Upper Story* (its literal translation is *Climbing up the Gate Tower*), again written by Du Fu. The first two verses of the poem “Flowers, as high as my window, hurt the heart of a wanderer; For I see, from this high vantage, sadness everywhere”⁴⁶ (Xiamen University’s translation) explains why Chan chose the poet’s verse for the play’s Chinese title. The playwright shared the same feelings and worries of Du Fu. The ancient poet had resentment towards his country’s unstable political status when he was not put in an important position by the imperial court to help solve the problems of the country. The English title *Crown Ourselves with Roses* is from the *Book of Wisdom* 2:8 of the Bible: “Take our fill of the dearest wines and perfumes, let not one flower of springtime pass us by, before they wither crown ourselves with roses” (Chan, 1988, p. 1-1). Being a Catholic nun, Chan used the Biblical imagery of “crowning ourselves with roses” during the springtime before the flowers wither away, to advise the people of Hong Kong to enjoy what we had in hand, like freedom, law and order and other precious human rights, in the colonial era.

After *Before the Dawn Rises*, Chan once again projected her love for her country and the people of Hong Kong by using the patriotic poet’s poem title to strengthen her distinctive signature style in *Crowning Ourselves with Roses*.

⁴⁶杜甫,《登樓》, 「花近高樓傷客心,萬方多難此登臨」. Website of Xiamen University, http://www.mlyxmu2009.org/upper_storey.htm
Chan’s religious background made her particularly distinctive when she was the artistic director of a government-operated drama troupe. Regarding Chan’s nun image, Choi, who administered the Rep’s daily operations during Chan’s era, commented in the interview as mentioned in Chapter Three:

I have never considered her clerical identity because I have never seen her in her nun gown. She put on make-up and her manner did not reveal the halo on her head that Catholic nuns always possess. Therefore I did not think her religious background was a hindrance to her being an artistic director for the Rep (my own translation, personal communication, 18 May 2012. Original transcript: 我沒有特別考慮過她是神職人員，因為我從未見過她穿上修女袍。她衣著整齊，會化妝外出，言行舉止均沒有一般的「修女光環」，所以我覺得她的宗教背景不會是她擔任藝術總監的障礙).

Addressing herself as “an undercover nun” (Cawthorne, 1986) and in spite of her actual identity as a Catholic nun, Chan never preaches through her works. Her religious beliefs, nevertheless, permeate her plays. Crown Ourselves with Roses is a good example.

My ultimate aim is to explain. No matter how much we are in lack of mutual communications and understanding and how serious our conflicts are, we are not enemies. Therefore the theme of the play
(Crown Ourselves with Roses) is about forgiveness and love (my own translation, Tian, 2009, p. 223).

Forgiveness and love are cardinal virtues in Catholicism and Christianity. Being a playwright from the Catholic Church, Chan did not bang on the religious drum by producing moral plays to preach as the medieval church did. Rather, she subtly incorporated the Biblical principles into her plays. As she says,

… this relates to my belief in Christian tradition and my identity as a Catholic nun. My plays are all about the most fundamental values of every person. No matter what their education, social position or properties are, they are all the same in the eyes of God … This is the belief a nun wants to share with other people. The one I follow is Jesus Christ who sacrificed His life by crucifixion … I can only share the most fundamental values with my limited ability by socialising and touching others through my works and plays (my own translation, Chan, personal communication, 9 November 2012. Original transcript: 這與我信基督的傳統和做天主教修女有關係。我的劇本講的都是每一個人最基本的價值，不論其教育、社會位置、貧富如何，他在上主眼中是完全一樣。我是一名修女，修女所希望與人分享的就是那點信念。而我所跟隨的，是釘在十字架上為人獻出生命的耶穌，我可以仿傚到的只是很小部份。即是說，我在我有限的能
I think preaching is not necessary when talking about God or Jesus. It is just like the Maryknoll Convent, which never compulsorily asks its monks or nuns to wear the church’s gowns. After all, the important thing is to change and to influence people imperceptibly (my own translation, Lee, 1986, p. 30).

Poon Pik Wan (Poon hereafter), one of the two actors who was hired by Chan and is to date still working for the theatre company as a Literary Manager, also agrees on the point about Chan’s subtle preaching in her plays:

Today when I think of her plays, I find she has revealed a lot of her values in relation to life and society in her plays. She did not explicitly tell us about her values, but subtly infused her plays with her beliefs, bring us positive messages about truth, love and doing good deeds for the country and society. For example, the heroes in her *Crown Ourselves with Roses*, *Before the Dawn Rises* and *Laughing in the Wind* are never affected or seduced by secular objects or fame (my own translation, personal communication, 15 July 2009. Original transcript: 今天當我回想她的劇作時，我發覺她在她的劇本中流露很多她對生命和社會的價值觀。她從來沒有明明白白地告訴我們
Her values, but conveyed subtly in her scripts, giving us positive messages: truth, love, for the country and society. For example, in *Flowers on a High Building*, *Who is the Sorrow of the Garden*, and *The Scalp of the Peaceful Lake*, the protagonists are not swayed by material or fame.

The objective of “preaching subtly through writing plays” may therefore help explain why Chan was the only artistic director who also wore the playwright hat in the first three decades of the Rep’s history. She in fact had a special “mission” to write. She recently told me about her “theory” of theatre. She said, “My theory is to serve.” (My own translation, personal communication, 31 October 2013. Original transcript: 我的理論就是「為人服務」) “To serve” is the main belief of this Catholic nun in her practice of theatre.

Given that she was a playwright with clear beliefs and standpoints, Chan’s role as an artistic director of HKRep therefore served more than just the artistic aspect. She is still the only artistic director who was able to imprint her own strong character and style, along with a consistent theme, onto her productions and the general programming during her term of service. The Rep needed a “balanced drama season”, and while Chan’s arrangement with regard to the programming could be considered “balanced”, it obviously revealed her personal style and beliefs simultaneously. She is also, so far, the only leader of the Rep, among the four artistic directors and the

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Dr. Daniel S. P. wrote only one play in his 14 years of service before his retirement in 2001. Fredric Mao did not write any plays. A playwright himself, current artistic director Anthony Chan came to the position in 2008, after the Rep had celebrated its 30th anniversary.
principal artistic consultant to have helmed the troupe to date, who dared to directly comment on and judge both the Mainland Chinese and the British governments, when the Rep was run by the government as well as after its incorporation. I would therefore say she is able to fulfil the requirements of being an *auteur* similar to French New Wave film directors, because her style was consistent, giving rise to her own signature. To Lo, she is also “a Hong Kong theatre practitioner with the consciousness of ‘Localism’ because she sought her own way to express her study of significant issues concerning Hong Kong during her time (my own translation, Lo, 2004, p. 90).

**A Pioneer in Promoting Original Plays**

Another outstanding achievement of Chan lies in her unflagging effort to promote original plays. Tian praises Chan as “the leading character of the creative wave of local original playwriting” (my own translation, 2009, p. 221).

When Chan succeeded Yang in the mid-1980s, the Hong Kong drama field was still producing mainly translation plays. Per the list of productions I prepared for the Rep’s 25th anniversary commemorative book, *Gems of Theatre Arts*, four out of the seven productions staged in the 1983/1984 drama season, when Yang became the artistic director of the Rep, were translation plays. The two original plays include *The Empress Dowager*, written by Chan, and *Pu Yi*, written by two local amateur playwrights. The season also included a play from the Mainland, *The Story of Ah Q*,

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written by a modern Mainland playwright, Chen Baichen (Tao, 2002, p. 166-167). The following drama season (1984 /1985), out of seven productions, five were translation plays. Of the other two productions, one was the Mainland China classic *Teahouse* and the second an original play, *1841* (Tao, 2002, p. 197-168). Luk in his book *Translation and Adaptation of Western Drama in Hong Kong: From Script to Stage* suggests five reasons to help explain why the Rep staged many more translation plays than original plays in its early developmental stage. Chan’s stress on promoting original plays can be explained by Luk’s comment on the personal taste of the artistic director -- Chan herself.

The position of an artistic director is the soul of the Rep. His / her vision and insight should be the top priority among all his / her abilities so as to set the distinct development direction for the Rep (my own translation, Luk, 2007, p. 23).

Chan’s personal choice to develop local original plays is one of the remarkable contributions she made to the Rep and to the Hong Kong drama scene. She explicitly stressed her strong intention of promoting original plays in the local drama field in various interviews.

I like plays of creativity … My ideal plan is to stage local original plays (my own translation, Lee, 1986, p. 39).
The Hong Kong drama scene does not have many original play productions. When I came back to Hong Kong, I was shocked to see the large number of translation productions … (my own translation, Chan, 1979, p. 47-48)

I remember when I assumed the position, I told myself that I wanted our local drama scene to have its own original plays … From the very first drama season, I intentionally selected original plays for productions. That was what I pushed myself to make happen. I wanted to establish a trend of writing original plays in Hong Kong (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 121).

Taking advantage of being an artistic director of the largest theatre group in Hong Kong, as well as the slow progress of the development of original plays in the 1980s and the historical situation looming with the 1997 issue, Chan zealously used the Rep as a platform to promote original plays.

Chan used herself as the model to promote original plays in Hong Kong. According to the record published in Gems of Theatre Arts, she altogether wrote / adapted seven original plays for the theatre troupe, including the two original plays she wrote before joining the Rep, i.e. The Empress Dowager and Before the Dawn
Rises. Five of them were written in only three years when she was the artistic director of the Rep. Validating her status as an auteur whose works show her strong signature style, Chan’s three main original plays written for the Rep, *Before the Dawn Wind Rises*, *Crown Ourselves with Roses* and *Laughing in the Wind*, all directly probe into the issues of native consciousness, local identity and change of sovereignty.

Besides local original plays, three contemporary plays (including one rerun) echoing the political, social and economic changes in the Mainland, written by contemporary young Mainland Chinese playwrights, were also produced during Chan’s service to the Theatre. This demonstrates that Chan was not only concerned about the local issues but also about the motherland of the people of Hong Kong. A more amazing figure is found in the total number of original plays staged in Chan’s era. Besides the three original plays written by the contemporary Mainland Chinese playwrights (including the rerun of *Xiaojin Hutong*), there were 10 full-length plays and two individual short plays written by local playwrights staged during Chan’s four years of service. The two short plays were To’s *A Gleam of Colour* and Lam’s *The Name*, which shared the double-bill show time with David Henry Hwang’s *The Sound of a Voice* and Minoru Betsuyaku’s *The Hour of the Stars*, respectively. To be exact, 15 original plays, including full-length and short plays as well as a rerun production, were staged during Chan’s first three years of service (*A Gleam of Colour*...)

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48 The five original/adaption plays were: Othello (adaptation), *Journey of the Stone*, *Love in a Fallen City*, *Crown Ourselves with Roses* and *Laughing in the Wind*.

49 *The Comedy of Betrothal*, *Xiaojing Hutong*, and *Li Shimin, King of Qin*
is not included among these 15 plays because it was staged in the fourth year of Chan’s service).

During Yang’s three years of service, there were only four local original plays and two original plays written by two contemporary Mainland Chinese playwrights that were produced on the Rep’s stage. Interestingly enough, two of them were written by Chan. The number of local original plays produced thus made a great leap from four to 12 (including the two short plays), in the brief period of only four years. The progress was remarkable, considering, especially, that local original plays were not the mainstay of the Hong Kong drama scene at that time.

The development of local original plays was not mature at that time. Due to the lack of “supply”, translating Western plays had become the choice for the mainstream (of the local drama scene) (my own translation, Luk, 2007, p. 24).

However, as Charles Dickens writes in The Tale of Two Cities: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times”; the speedy development of local original plays pushed forward by Chan for the Rep in fact took the advantage of the “lack of supply” of such plays during that era. That being the case, Chan was in the advantageous position of being able to “supply” the market when the competition was so weak.
When someone has an aspiration and is in the right position, it does not mean he/she can definitely make his/her dream come true. The reason why Chan could easily drive the writing of original plays can also be attributed to the political background of her time. Lo remarks on the serendipitous timing that Chan enjoyed.

The taking root of local identity in Hong Kong drama during the late 1970s and early 1980s could be found in the beginning of cultural activities and the cultural participation of the masses … it was non-colonization of culture (my own translation, Lo, 2004, p. 7).

Lo also comments on the development of little theatre in Hong Kong in the 1980s in the same book. The reason he suggests is in fact also applicable to the rapid development of original plays during this time.

The emergence of original plays (professional little theatre) symbolised the formation of subjectivity among local theatre practitioners. They passionately involved themselves and participated in the development of Hong Kong theatre. Throughout the decolonisation process, they made use of concrete artistic activities to give discourses on Hong Kong drama (my own translation, Lo, 2004, p.17)
Hong Kong itself suddenly became the material for original plays because the people of Hong Kong were facing a change of identity (my own translation, Lo, 2004, p. 17).

The consciousness of subjectivity of Hong Kong theatre practitioners was formed under the specific historical track and background which had condensed to give birth to localism (my own translation, Lo, 2004, p. 23).

The speedy development of original plays in Hong Kong during Chan’s era can therefore be interpreted as a by-product of de-colonisation. As Hong Kong would soon be returned to the Mainland, people wanted to write about their own stories – not only in history but also in drama. Translation plays, which were regarded as “the borrowed sentiment”, could no longer satisfy the diverse discourses the people wanted to initiate after the Joint Declaration was announced. Rather, they wanted to have their own stories and history, written about and by, their own people. This echoes Abbas’ argument in his essay “Writing Hong Kong”.

Those who are more deeply involved in the city write necessarily in a different way… In many of these stories, the main and most powerful character is often the city of Hong Kong itself (Abbas, 1998, p.119).
As the nature of original plays enables its playwrights to write about the city of Hong Kong, it is therefore not surprising that this approach began to prevail in the 1980s. The political, social and cultural backgrounds also provided good soil for original plays to grow. Chan’s own personal aspiration was a main cause that brought forth the development of original plays in the 1980s. When the artistic directorship of the Hong Kong’s largest theatre troupe was in her hand, original plays were in the best position to start growing rapidly, both at the HKRep and in the local drama scene.

Besides being the main source of the Rep’s production of original plays, Chan also gave chances to budding talents to write original plays for the Theatre. When Yuen, then chief executive (cultural services) of the Urban Services Department, announced Chan’s succession of Yang at the press conference held in 1985, he simultaneously pointed out Chan’s plan of cultivating talents in writing original plays.

… Dr. Chan can help advance another function of the Rep – she has prepared a comprehensive plan to promote original plays and nurture talents in playwriting (my own translation, S. F. Choi, 1985).

Chan additionally stressed that she would like to have “HKRep strengthen the work in nurturing talents in the drama circle” at the press conference (my own translation, Express News, 1985). Lo defines Hong Kong playwriting in the 1980s as “the inheritance of talents” (my own translation, Lo: 2012, p. 42). That is because
budding playwrights in the 1970s had accumulated experience and began to prosper in the 1980s. Chan was one of the key contributors who helped fulfil Lo’s remark by giving opportunities to novice playwrights to practise with the Rep during her era. To, who began to write plays in the 1970s, wrote the first of his masterpieces, Where Love Abides, for the Rep upon Chan’s invitation. To recalls at the interview:

The first plays I wrote for HKRep were the double-bill show Yesterday Child and Ball, commissioned by Yang in 1983. After Chan read an article in a newspaper reporting the closure of Leung So Kee50 in 1986, she invited me to write a play on the story of the old umbrella factory. But she asked me to write a scene for her approval first … The production turned out to be a classic and a blockbuster. The scene I gave her as a trial piece is now a chapter of a Chinese Language textbook used by local secondary schools (my own translation, personal communication, 19 November 2012. Original transcript: 我第一次為話劇團寫劇是應楊世彭之邀寫的 double-bill 《球》和《昨天孩子》。一九八六年，當陳尹瑩看到報章上「梁蘇記」的結業廣告後，便邀請我寫一個關於這間老傘店的劇本。不過，她叫我先寫一場戲給她看 …… 演出後，此劇成為一個經典，賣座甚佳。我寫給她的那一場戲現時已成為中學中國語文教科書的教材了).

50 梁蘇記
In 1988, Chan again invited To to write what is now his other well-known play, *Boundless Movement*, which was reprised by the Rep 23 years later to mark the 100th anniversary of the 1911 Revolution. The play tells how the revolutionists made their choices when they were facing their ‘deadlines’ in history. Although Chan did not write or direct the play herself, the commission happened because of her, and is further evidence of her principles as regards writing and directing drama.

Since the success of *Where Love Abides*, To became one of the leading playwrights in Hong Kong; to date he remains on the list of the most acclaimed local playwrights. In fact, he has now written over 60 stage plays for the Hong Kong theatre. Discovered by Yang, To was given further chance by Chan to collaborate with the Rep and create one more of his classics, which led to his greater success in the decades that followed.

Chan also provided a platform for other local playwrights, besides To. Paul Poon Wai Sum (Paul Poon hereafter), who in recent decades has four times won Best Playwright in the annual Hong Kong Drama Awards competition, was invited by Chan to write his first play, *In the Shade of the Woods*, for the small-scale / experimental productions of the Rep in 1986. His debut work earned him the championship title at the Awards for Creative Writing in Chinese (Playwriting)\(^{51}\), presented by the Hong Kong Public Libraries in the following year. He was again commissioned by Chan to write his second play, *Central Deconstructed*, on the Rep’s

\(^{51}\) 中文文學創作獎（劇本組）
main stage in 1989. Since then, Paul Poon’s works have become popular in the drama scene. In 1993, he founded The Prospects Theatre and has written over 50 plays which have been produced on stage in the Mainland, in Taiwan, Korea and Germany (Mstheatre, 2012). Paul Poon has also actively nurtured young local playwrights in recent years. Providing a platform for new or young playwrights to present their developing plays to the public, his “Playwright Scheme” has attracted and nurtured many local playwriting enthusiasts at its five past workshops. The discovery of Paul Poon by Chan resulted in not only a new playwright for the Rep but also somebody who has had a great influence on local theatre the past 30 years.

TV playwright Tue Liang Tee (Tue hereafter) was invited to write The Shape of the Moon, the opening show of Chan’s Facing Deadlines drama season. Years later, Chan invited Tue to join the Four Seas Players, the largest Chinese theatre company in New York, co-founded by her in 1970. Tue in 1993 became the artistic director of the theatre company and has written many original plays for it. It can be safely said that her talent in writing stage plays was discovered by Chan.

Besides searching for potential playwrights outside the Rep, Chan also encouraged the Rep’s own actors to write plays. Lam, a leading actor with the troupe, wrote and directed his original play, The Name, while actor Ho Man Wai directed The Hour of the Stars, written by Minoru Betsuyaku for a double-bill show in 1988.
Why Chan so enthusiastically supported young playwrights is clearly explained in various interviews:

… Despite the fact that the Rep does not organise any playwriting contests with awards, Chan says “the field of HKRep is open to the public” … Any interested parties are welcome to contact the Rep if they want to write plays (my own translation, Yip, 1986).

Commercial shows on Broadway rely on Off Broadway to train talents and to foster plays … I have lived in New York for over 20 years and have learnt this view. Therefore I considered HKRep a public field. My opinion was: the Rep should not be confined to only its resident playwrights’ works. We should try our best to open it to the public (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 123).

Chan is also notable for her other artistic achievements, besides encouraging the development of playwriting. Today, the Black Box Theatre of the Rep thrives alongside the main stage theatre and has become an important means for the Rep to nurture young or potential theatre talents by staging their works and transforming experimental pieces into mature productions. The Rep can also fulfil its aim of setting up the Black Box Theatre by collaborating with or even renting out its venue to other theatre companies.

52 黑盒劇場
Black Box shows are staged in the Rep’s rehearsal hall where directors and actors rehearse for the Rep’s main stage theatre. As the venue is a typical and basic rehearsal hall, its empty space provides optimum flexibility for all kinds of small-scale shows. The idea was in fact initiated and implemented by Chan back in 1989 when the double-bill show of David Henry Hwang’s *The Voice* and To’s *A Gleam of Colour* was staged (Fong, 2000, p. 123).

There were not many venues for drama at that time and I wanted to diversify performing forms… I wanted to do something like Off Broadway: different performing styles and three- or four-sided audience. In 1989, after we moved to the Sheung Wan Municipal Complex, we altered the rehearsal hall into a Black Box stage (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 123).

The double-bill show is significant in two ways. Besides being the first Black Box Show of the Rep, it was also the first collaboration between Mao, director of the two small productions, and HKRep. Chan probably did not foresee that Mao, the young director whom she gave the chance to work with the Rep, would become the artistic director of the Rep in 2001. However, she did help with the growth of this important artist.

Reviewing the historical facts of the Rep, we see that Chan’s vision of launching the Black Box Theatre was able to come true primarily because she was
situated in that time frame when the Rep finally had its own permanent office, with a well-equipped and sizeable rehearsal hall (which the Rep is currently still using).

In October 1988, the Rep moved to its new home in the just-inaugurated Sheung Wan Civic Centre. Here, the Rep finally – and conveniently – had its office, rehearsal halls and costumes and props storerooms all under the same roof (Tao, 2007, p. 34).

Had the Rep’s rehearsal hall still been the “tin roof” over at the Kowloon Railway Station, as it was back in the older days, the Rep’s first Black Box production might not have happened during Chan’s era. Her idea was achievable because of the advantage of locale.

Apart from Mao, Li, a retired instructor with the Directing Department of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and a seasoned director from the Mainland, was also able to direct his first production for the Rep, *A Comedy of Betrothal*, thanks to Chan.53 That was Li’s first directing production for the Hong Kong stage.

I am fortunate to have started my theatre work with the Rep upon my arrival in Hong Kong (Tao, 2002, p. 108).

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53 Li Ming Sum’s first collaboration with the Rep was as Chung King Fai’s assistant director in the latter’s directing work *Xiaojing Hutung* in 1985. He became guest director of the Rep only when Chan invited him to direct *The Comedy of Betrothal* in 1986.
Through the years, Li not only became a veteran director but also trained hundreds of theatre students who in turn have become an invaluable source of strength for the Hong Kong drama scene today.

Rupert Chan is yet another of Chan’s proteges. A veteran translator and adaptor, he was also invited by Chan to let his first collaboration be with the Rep. He says,

My first collaboration with the Rep owed to Sister Joanna’s invitation to me to translate her directing piece *Cabaret* in 1987 (staged in 1988). She gave me a completely free hand and did not alter a single word of my work. She also let me translate the play into Cantonese (my own translation, personal communication, 18 November 2011. Original transcript: 我與陳修女合作的第一個戲是她在一九八七年邀請我翻譯的《有酒今朝醉》。她很放心由我翻譯，完全沒有刪改我的東西，並且讓我用廣東話和地道口語翻譯).

Rupert Chan is now a popular and prolific translator, adaptor and lyricist for the Hong Kong stage. He was also the ex-treasurer of HKRep’s Council and is now the chairman of the Council of Chung Ying Theatre Company. His various positions are important enough to influence the local drama scene. The seed of his continuous

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54 Stage plays were mainly written in, or translated into, Mandarin in the 1980s.
contribution to the local drama scene over the past 30 years was in fact sown by Chan, who consciously paved the path for different theatre talents.

Invitations widely offered by Chan to potential theatre talents were not circumstantial. They were deliberate; designed to fulfil her plan. She tells reporters about her intention of positioning HKRep as a public domain for the people of Hong Kong.

Dr. Chan’s top wish is to develop HKRep into an open field for the public. People who are interested in theatre work are welcome to participate. The Rep will try its best to help nurture them and to provide opportunities for them to demonstrate their talent (my own translation, Ming Pao, 1986).

Compared with other drama companies, HKRep should belong to the people of Hong Kong because it is directly funded by local taxpayers. I think it should be a public field responsible for cultivating local playwrights, actors and drama teachers (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 121).

Chan did not make empty promises. She kept her word throughout her four years of service. The facts mentioned in the above paragraphs are the best evidence. Tian and Fong’s comment – “(She) has made an enormous contribution towards
localising and professionalising Hong Kong theatre” (my own translation, Tian, 2009, p. 217) – is a very fair remark. But the title of the interview article shows their greater assessment of her – “A Legendary Chinese Playwright -- Joanna Chan”\(^\text{55}\) (my own translation, Tian & Fong, 2009, p. 217). To my mind, Chan is indeed legendary and deserves the credit. Her legendary status is the main reason I chose her, among the four artistic directors of the Rep to date, to be the subject of this case study.

The above discussion is on Chan’s artistic expression as a playwright, a director and a pioneer in developing original plays and nurturing drama talents in Hong Kong. The next chapter will cover her artistic management as HKRep’s artistic leader in a government-operated theatre during the colonial era.

\(^{55}\)〈具有傳奇色彩的劇作家——陳尹瑩〉
Chapter Five

Case Study: Joanna Chan’s Work in Artistic Management

For the artistic directors of HKRep, the most important tasks are not to write, translate or direct for the Rep, but to lead the acting company and to give artistic vision and direction to the Theatre. By undertaking artistic executions, he / she demonstrates his / her unique leadership as an artist to shape the style and image of the Rep. He / she is also an auteur of the “book” named HKRep; responsible for writing the text of the book. As an artistic director of the developing theatre in its first decade of existence, Chan did much to mould the Theatre into her ideal form.

According to HKRep records, the theatre troupe’s development advanced steadily in 1987 / 1988, during Chan’s tenure.

The records show that in the period 1987 / 1988, the Rep had an audience size of 52,416, 24 actors, one technical manager, one stage manager, six assistant stage managers and seven administrative staff members, altogether approaching the proportions of a medium-sized theatre troupe (Tao, 2007, p. 24).

There are 19 full-time actors and four trainee actors … The Rep always attracts a queue at computerised ticket booths whenever it
announces the launch of new productions. Many of these always end up having additional shows or reruns because of popular demand. People who hesitate stand no chance of getting a ticket (my own translation, Lau, 1989).

Taking advantage of the fact that every HKRep production staged in the late 1980s enjoyed immense popularity, Chan was able to carry out her series of artistic management strategies without worrying too much about affecting ticket sales.

As an artistic leader, Chan emphasised discipline a lot. Her emphasis might have been a bit contradictory to the general image of artists as carefree personalities. However, Chan’s Catholic nun identity and theatre training, both derived from the Western world, had greatly influenced her practice as an artistic director of a theatre organisation. She imposed on the troupe strict internal discipline, to help the Rep project a professional and respectable image and to develop drama as an esteemed industry.

Theatre is an industry that pays particular attention to discipline … I am a person who likes following rigorous discipline and bringing discipline into life (my own translation, Hung, 1988).

She stressed that in order to develop theatre arts into a prestigious profession, the most important condition is that the Rep’s members
must have self-discipline and self-respect, so as to maintain the decent image of the Rep (my own translation, *Express News*, 1985).

The reason Chan stressed discipline and improvement of the actors’ public image was in fact not only because of her religious training. She had initially found the work conditions of the actors, as well as their everyday behaviour, to be not up to her standard. She explained her observations and the reasons she needed to institute reforms, in an interview by Fong at the end of the 1990s:

… I wanted to reform the internal discipline of the Rep. When I was a guest writer or a guest director of the Rep before I became its artistic director, I had the impression that the actors had to stand by for rehearsals or performances all the time. They were always on call and had to report for duty at once no matter if it was day, night, a weekend or a Sunday …What I wanted to achieve was that actors would only need to work from ten o’clock in the morning to six o’clock in the evening during rehearsal weeks, so that they could go home and have dinner with their families. When they were performing, I hoped they could take days off on weekends (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 122).

On the one hand, Chan’s modification of actors’ work schedules showed she was a caring leader. On the other hand, her wish might have been too idealistic
because it would be impossible for actors to take off on a weekend, which is the prime show time for audiences to go to the theatre. In fact, drama practitioners are always busy when the audience is at leisure. This is because performances are mainly staged when the masses are off from work.

As for the need to establish a prestigious image for the actors, Chan elaborates in the interview:

Nobody seriously took acting as a formal career 20 years ago. When I began my career in 1970, people considered actors as “players”\textsuperscript{56}. It was not a respectable career. After I returned to Hong Kong, I strove to establish a positive image for the performing arts industry. I think that was very important. I hoped my actors were professional artists and not traveling entertainers\textsuperscript{57}. Moreover, I wanted everybody to have the feeling that they were important members of the Rep and would not be considered idle … I created two acting stages (for the Rep) … those who played minor roles on the main stage could be in the main cast of the productions staged in small productions or school tour productions (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 122).

When Chan assumed the position, she explicitly described to us her style: as an artistic director, her mission was to serve people. What

\:\textsuperscript{56} 戲子
\:\textsuperscript{57} 跑碼頭娛樂的人
she meant was that she did not come to the Rep to ride roughshod over us but to assist us to be professional. In that way, we would be respected and praised by people in the industry and society. Therefore all the jobs she arranged for us were for achieving the aim of upgrading our professional image (my own translation, Lam, personal communication, 1 August 2009. Original transcript is written by Lam:

陳修女上任時跟我們表明態度：她身為藝術總監的任務是「非以役人，乃役於人」，意思是她不是來作威作福，而是要協助我們發揮專業精神以得到業界及社會人士的尊重及讚賞。因此她為我們安排及訂下的工作提示都是以為我們演員專業地位著想的角度去作出決定云云).

Chan did take internal discipline as a serious matter. After working with the Rep’s actors as a guest director for two productions, she was not satisfied with some of their attitudes. It is said that no sooner than she had arrived to take up the mantle of artistic director with the Rep, she refused to renew three actors’ contracts due to their previous misconduct. The dismissal of the three actors was reported by Hong Kong Standard, and K. B. Chan, then the manager of Rep, admitted to the reporter that “the turnover rate is (was) the highest in the company’s history” (M. Luk, 1986).

Chan’s strict-disciplined manner also applied to her artistic directorship. Actors Ko and Lam both criticise her for her wanting absolute control over the way actors delivered their lines. Lam says,
Chan told us to respect the playwrights; therefore we were not allowed to “kill” or to make any changes to the lines, not even one single word. Professional actors did not appreciate the rule because we, as artists, should also give our own artistic input when we deliver lines. Performance is a creative collaboration. To request actors to strictly stick to the lines is only vocational but not professional. This rule in fact contradicted the building up of actors’ professional image (my own translation, personal communication, 17 July 2009. Part of the original transcript is written by Lam: 陳修女要我們尊重編劇，所以我們唸台詞時要一字不改地「忠於編劇原著」，不得「謀殺台詞」。專業演員當然不欣賞她這種做法，因為我們是藝術家，唸台詞時亦應該加入自己的藝術 input。表演是一個群體創作。要演員一字不漏地唸台詞只是職業化而非專業化。這個規條亦與建立演員的專業形象相違).

For Lam, adding their input to the lines was not intended to kill the play or to disrespect the playwrights, but to help create the production. He complains that actors were only doing a job, but not being professional, if they were not allowed to modify any wording in the script.

Ko agrees with Lam’s comment.
Chan gave very limited space for acting in the first year. We were not allowed to change any word or tone in the plays, not even the suffix. Her reason was that playwrights spent a lot of effort on writing and we had to respect them by faithfully presenting their works on stage without making any alternations. Neither did she allow us to change her stage instructions. If she said we needed to walk five steps, we could only walk five steps but not four or six. At first we were not used to it because we had no freedom to create. The older actors were particularly not happy about her rules. They thought she had placed so many constraints on them that they were just like robots performing in a fixed mode (my own translation, personal communication, 17 December 2012. Original transcript: 第一年給演員的空間很有限，一個字也不可以改，即使是語尾。她認為劇作家用了很多心血，要尊重他們，所以不可以改。開始時大家都很不習慣，因為語氣不同，台位不可以改，沒有「自由行」。她為你設定好了，五步就五步，不可以多一步。老一輩演員很多意見，因為太多規限，太模式、太機械人).

The reason Chan disapproved of her actors making changes to the lines of plays she directed, even though those actors were experienced stage artists, could be explained another way: it was because Chan respected her playwrights.
I am a playwright, so I understand playwrights want actors to respect them, by not changing their lines (my own translation, Chan, personal communication, 31 October 2013. Original transcript: 我是一名編劇，我很明白編劇很想演員尊重他們，不刪改他們的台詞).

Ko, however, admits that the above comments were only applicable to Chan’s first year of service. After she got used to the work milieu and had built up a rapport with the actors, she was eager to give them more creative freedom (my own translation, personal communication, 17 December 2012. Original transcript: 這只是她上任第一年的事情。她後來適應了環境，對演員熟悉後，慢慢溝通，有信心給演員多些創作空間).

To enhance her relationship with the actors and to understand their needs and grievances, Chan every month met each of them in her office for 30 minutes, to let them voice their opinions and suggest any roles they would like to act in.

When I freshly joined the Rep, I told my actors: “Artistic directors come and go, but you are the people who stay. Therefore I want to listen to your opinions.” (My own translation, Chan, personal communication, 8 December 2008. Original transcript: 我初來時跟大家說：「藝術總監come and go，你們才是會留下的人，所以我想聽你們的意見。」).
Then again, her willingness to listen to her staff was viewed with suspicion by some people, who felt she was “using the meetings as a medium to master the state of affairs of the Rep in order to consolidate her position” (my own translation, K. B. Chan, personal communication, 23 November 2011. Original transcript: 當時有些人卻說她是利用開會為手段，以收取話劇團內的消息來鞏固自己的地位).

One of the main responsibilities of artistic directors at the Rep in both Yang’s and Chan’s eras was to provide training courses and workshops for the actors. This is no longer an expectation at the HKRep today, as all its actors are either graduates of drama schools such as The Academy for Performing Arts (APA hereafter) or from overseas and with solid theatre training, or established actors with years of acting experience. However, as the Rep was only in its developing stage when Chan was the artistic director, most actors at that time were amateurs or drama lovers who did not receive any formal training before they joined the Theatre. Thus Chan was required to provide them with training in various kinds of relevant performing arts, including “Li’s Acting Theory, Tsui Wing Sheun’s Western Drama, Li Siu Wah’s Chinese opera and Arts History (courtesy of another instructor). All young and inexperienced actors were obligated to attend those courses” (my own translation, Ko, personal communication, 2012. Original transcript: 聘請李銘森教演戲理論、徐詠璇教西方戲劇、李少華教戲曲，還有一位導師教藝術史。年輕和沒經驗的學員一定要上課).
Organising training courses and workshops for the actors was common practice in the early days of the Rep because it wanted to help nurture drama talents for the local stage. But since the establishment of the APA, the Rep’s ‘responsibility’ to train young or inexperienced actors, ceased. The duties of the artistic director of the Theatre were therefore affected not only by the organisation’s internal changes but also by the changes outside the Theatre.

In 1988, the first batch of the APA students graduated. From those graduates, Chan selected five to become full-time actors with the Rep (Tao, 2007, p. 34). Before that, the Rep’s acting company was composed mainly of actors from the Mainland and local drama lovers trained by the Rep itself. As the first batch of APA drama students coincidentally graduated during Chan’s tenure at the Rep, however, Chan hence became the first artistic director to hire graduates of the APA, which has now become the main source of actors for all local theatre companies.

The beginning of employment of APA students resulted in a complete stop to the hiring of local amateur drama lovers. Upon Chan’s arrival, she hired five young and green drama lovers as new blood for the Rep. Those five saplings included the Rep’s now-veteran actor Ko and actress Poon (whose main duty is now in arts administration). The locally trained actors could be classified as a distinct category in the composition of the Rep’s acting company. The other two categories were theatre talents from the Mainland and graduates of the APA. As a matter of fact, the hiring of inexperienced young actors, who were offered on-the-job training, acting
workshops and courses by the Rep, began in year after the Rep was established. Most members of the first batch of full-time actors belonged to this category. The Rep was hence also be responsible for training young actors before the APA took over the training responsibility for the local drama scene. Being one of the last batches of locally hired actors nurtured by the Rep, Poon remarks in the interview:

The tradition of hiring inexperienced actors did not happen anymore after 1988, because the APA began to nurture actors. The hiring of young local drama lovers for on-job training by the Rep only happened during that particular time (my own translation, personal communication, 15 July 2009. Original transcript: 一九八八年之後，話劇團聘請沒有經驗的演員自行培訓的傳統已經消失，因為演藝學院開始培訓演員。話劇團聘請年輕的戲劇愛好者在職訓練的做法只有在該段特定的時候才發生).

However, Chan’s hiring of the first batch of APA graduates might not have been entirely her decision. Rather, situated in a time when there was no other avenue for graduates of the Academy, the Rep became one of the only two theatre companies that could accommodate the young actors, especially as the troupe was operated by the government. The attribution to Chan of her having hired the first batch of APA graduates was thus fortuitous, caused more by the timing of her full-time association with the Rep than by her own wish. As an “auteur in contexts”, she reacted according to the change in her contexts.
But Chan was genuinely concerned about her actors’ development. In addition to imposing strict discipline in terms of actors’ work schedule, she believed actors should undergo continued training, studies and self-cultivation so as to raise the Rep’s and their own performing standards. She felt the Rep’s actors were used as mere craftsmen in the old days.

The actors of the Rep are not craftsmen. Each of them is an artist with independent thinking. They need to develop their individual potential (my own translation, Fung-sun-tsz, 1986)

Besides promoting theatre, I also need to help the actors to recognise the value of being human. Therefore I will hire the best coaches to instruct them and train them to be true artists, not just stage craftsmen (my own translation, Lee, 1986)

To help the actors, she provided a series of drama courses for them to sharpen their acting. She also initiated the Overseas Study Scheme, which was implemented only during her time; nominated actors were sent overseas for further studies.

Chan recalls in an interview that the Asian Cultural Council began to fund local artists to study overseas shortly after she joined the Rep. She then made a proposal on that aspect to the Urban Council. The annual expenditure of the Rep was about six to seven million Hong Kong dollars, but no budget was reserved for
training. Therefore she hoped to save one dollar out of every one hundred dollars from the fund. In that way, the Rep every year could spare HKD60,000 to HKD70,000, enough to send two actors abroad for training (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 122).

The idea was to nominate two actors each time and offer them the opportunity to observe shows for two to three months in the U.K. or the U.S. in the hope that they would bring back new knowledge and inspiration from their encounter with theatre in the Western world and apply the same to their acting career thereafter. (Tao, 2007, p. 34)

Chan’s action further proved her a caring leader who fought for the best benefits for her actors. She also wanted to make use of the chance to let her actors learn from productions in the Western world, so that they could bring their knowledge back to the Rep and the Hong Kong stage. But the scheme was short-lived. Only Lam and Lo Koon Lan were sent to New York City and London, respectively, in 1989 (Tao, 2007, p. 34). Lam’s comment on the scheme might help explain its short lifespan.

Lo Koon Lan and I were sent to New York City and London, respectively, for two months to “study the development of the local theatres”. We were asked to report to our actors what we had seen there when we came back. However, neither of us was grateful (for
Chan’s arrangement). On the surface, we went there for a business trip. In fact, we were just given a two-month paid leave, awarded with tickets for watching shows for reimbursement. Some of those who were not given the opportunity were jealous of us. That rapidly weakened the ensemble’s morale (my own translation, personal communication, 2 August 2009. Original transcript is written by Lam: 我跟羅冠蘭分別被派往英國倫敦及美國紐約兩個月「視察當地劇團發展情況」，回來向劇團同事匯報。結果被派的兩個演員沒有心存感激。名義上是公事，實際上是放我們兩個月有薪假期，加上請我們實報實銷地看當地舞台演出。沒被派的個別演員又心存妒忌，攪得「團隊精神」驟跌).

Since the result of the scheme was not that promising, Chan did not continue it in later years. But I think it would have been a good practice had the scheme been able to continue. Even today, there are still not too many theatre practitioners who can enjoy the privilege of studying drama overseas under a theatre company’s sponsorship.

Another noteworthy achievement of Chan was the abolition of “the Star System”. This system can be interpreted in two aspects. The first refers to the word “star” in the context of TV actors. Back in the first six years when the Rep was in its infant stage, its principal artistic director Chung, by using his connections in the television industry, invited quite a few actors from the two local TV stations to
perform for the Rep. Over 10 TV actors were invited to play leading roles in the Rep’s productions from 1977 to 1982. Among them, Leung Tin and Man Tsz Leung (Man hereafter) acted in four and three productions, respectively. Man was invited again, along with international movie actress Lu Yan, during Yang’s two-and-a-half years of artistic directorship. Chances for the HKRep’s actors to take on leading roles were therefore limited. Being an artistic director who stressed the fostering of the Rep’s own talents, Chan invited only Fung Bo Bo, a movie and TV actress, to play the leading role in her *Crown Ourselves with Roses*; she enrolled no other small-screen or silver-screen personality throughout her four-year collaboration with the Rep. Even in the case of Fung, that was because “it was requested by Sing Tao Jih Tao Co. Ltd. which was the sponsor of the Rep’s tour to the North America” (my own translation, Chan, personal communication, 8 December 2008. Original transcript: 那是因為星島日報是我們北美巡迴演出的贊助商，是他們提出的要求). Chan’s statement shows that even though she was determined not to use stars (so as to retain the best acting opportunities for the Rep’s own talents), her artistic directorship had nevertheless been influenced by commercial sponsorship, or else her masterpiece would not have been able to tour three cities in North America. Neither would she have become the first artistic director of the Rep to take the Rep out of Asia.

Another way of perceiving the word “star” refers to the Rep’s fostering of its own actors to become stage stars. This is a very popular phenomenon in today’s drama scene because the “stars” of a theatre company can help attract a certain
number of their fans and thereby guarantee stable ticket sales. However, taking advantage of the prosperity of the good old days when “people who hesitated stood no chance of getting a ticket”, Chan chose to balance the use of actors and to train new actors to develop their talents. She considered it a right decision not to adopt the “Star System” but to follow what Stanislavski’s practised: “The first concern was to create a genuine ensemble, with no star players -- ‘Today Hamlet, tomorrow an extra’” (Benedetti, 2004, p. 24). She elaborates the thought in two interviews.

A “Star System” would only limit actors’ diversification of roles. Once they succeed in playing certain roles, they will naturally continue to act in similar roles and will not experience additional development. That is the largest possible sorrow for performers (my own translation, Express News, 1986).

During my term of service, 90 percent of the actors were able to take on leading roles. That is what I am proud of. That means I seriously observed my actors and arranged for each of them to be a main character … I hoped I could provide opportunities to actors who only played supporting roles to also be able to take on protagonists’ roles. We could even produce dramas because of them (my own translation, Fong, 2000, p. 122).
As just mentioned, Chan’s determination not to invite any TV or movie actors to perform for the Rep was viable only when the Rep was enjoying its golden time. Chan could take advantage of the good ticket sales to offer all the leading or major roles to the Theatre’s resident actors. Ticket sales, however, has become one of the most important concerns of its artistic directors since the Rep was incorporated in 2001. Many TV and film actors were thus invited in the past decade. Even the leading role of Soong Meiling in Chan’s production, *The Soongs: by Dreams Betrayed*, staged in 2013 for the Rep, was played by TV actress Ye Xuan, with the arrangement made by HKRep.

Regarding Chan’s provision of opportunities for nurturing and training the Rep’s actors, Tian and Fong concluded:

> Joanna Chan’s contribution in terms of valuing and paying close attention to drama talents in the early stage of the Rep has had far-reaching consequences for the Theatre’s future development (my own translation, 2009, p. 219).

Their remark makes good sense, as we find many important figures on today’s drama scene, all of whom were given chances to take on leading roles on the Rep’s stage during Chan’s time. These theatre practitioners include Ko Tin Lung (the current artistic director of Chung Ying Theatre), Lo (a veteran stage actress and a current APA drama instructor), Chiu Oi Wan (aka Chiu Chun Yu, the only male actor
playing female roles in Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong), Tse Kwan Ho (the recipient of the Best Actor of Golden Horse Award and one of the best-known stage actors in Hong Kong) as well as Ko (one of the leading actors of the Rep for over two decades). They have all had a far-reaching influence, not only on the Rep but also on the future of the local drama scene.

With regard to promoting the international status of the Rep, the North American Tour, the Theatre’s first foray out of Asia, was another feat of Chan. Although Yang is the first artistic director who led the Rep to perform outside Hong Kong on the Guangzhou stage, Chan was also able to take the drama group to the southern Chinese city in 1986 to stage her directing piece *Where Love Abides*. Besides staging a drama outside Hong Kong, the significance of staging the production in Guangzhou is that the background of Act One of the play is an umbrella shop in Guangzhou. Chan had transcended Yang, however, when she led the Rep to out of Asia to stage her masterpiece, *Crown Ourselves with Roses*, in three North American cities in 1989.

Since the essence of local discourse in *Crown Ourselves with Roses* is particularly strong and the play covers the development of Hong Kong from the 1930s through the 1980s, it won the sponsorship for its premiere and overseas tours from the Sing Tao Jih Pao Company Limited to commemorate the newspaper company’s jubilee anniversary. The patronage was significant to the Rep’s development in two ways: it was the first time the drama troupe obtained a
sponsorship from a commercial enterprise, and it was the first time it toured outside Asia, to North America. Through her own connections in the U.S., Chan took the production to San Francisco, Toronto and New York City to introduce the views and sentiments of the people of Hong Kong to those cities and to arouse the awareness of the people in another continent, particularly among the Chinese in North America. As the visit was quite an event for those Western cities, both the governments of San Francisco and New York City christened 2 June 1988 and 16 June 1988, respectively, as “Hong Kong Repertory Theatre Day” (Tao, 2007, p. 35). In this sense, Chan’s contribution writes one of the most resplendent pages in the Theatre’s history.

The more interesting thing is that *Crown Ourselves with Roses* is a play about how the people of Hong Kong worried and feared when facing political change. Instead of showing the good side of a nation and a city to other countries by exhibiting its strength, Chan brought a production that demonstrated the weakness, the puzzles and the anxiety of Hong Kong, a Western colony which would soon be handed back to its ancient master. This further made her an unusual artistic director of HKRep, one who never shied away from political and social issues and revealed the situation of the anxious colony to its people and other countries.

After studying Chan’s artistic management style and devices, I felt she might have been influenced by Stanislavski because there are strong similarities between their styles. As discussed in Chapter One, when Stanislavski ran the Moscow Art Theatre, he was a very strict disciplinarian and cared deeply about the image of his
actors as artistic practitioners. This is because he wanted to use his theatre to raise the status of acting and theatre. He also wanted to elevate the actor’s position and showed how central an actor was to a theatrical production. He was very concerned about creating a genuine ensemble and did not approve of star players. Nor did he allow actors to change any lines in the plays, as he wished to show respect to the playwrights. He contributed much towards nurturing great drama talents like Meyerhold and Chekhov, as mentioned before. Many of the practices Stanislavski followed can also be found in Chan’s artistic management style. For instance, she was very strict about discipline and did not allow her actors altering lines. She considered everyone as performing in an ensemble and did not approve of the “star system”. This may be explained by the fact that the Russian drama guru was her learning model when she was in the position of an artistic director of a theatre which was still in its developing stage. The success of the Russian theatre might therefore have inspired her artistic directorship. Or, at least the two dramatists have somehow shown similar practices in their artistic management styles.

Although she was an extraordinary artistic director of the largest theatre in Hong Kong, Chan faced many constraints and challenges in the unusual contexts in which she worked.

In the article Chan writes for the Rep’s Legacy 35, she boldly admits that there were two main conflicts she encountered. The first one was from the actors.
Another potential conflict came from the members of HKRep itself. The Academy for the Performing Arts had not yet been founded; China was not as open as it is today. Resident actors had come from different sources, many of whom had not received formal theatre training. For working together, a common professional language was seriously lacking. While all aimed at “doing a good show”, each had a different idea of what was meant by “good”. Attempts to move the company forward often met with wariness and distrust. Again, I took the situation as a matter of course, and worked within the many limitations, to set about establishing some policies to help lay down a clear and firm foundation for the future. (Chan, 2013a, p. 38)

As mentioned earlier, before the first batch of the APA graduates came, actors of HKRep were recruited from either the Mainland or were local amateur drama lovers who received on-the-job training. All these people came from various backgrounds and had received different styles of drama training. Their acting styles were different from each other and the ways they viewed drama were not the same either. To an acting troupe, these disparities might be a hindrance to both its artistic directors who led them and to its directors who directed their acting. The exhibition of a variety of acting styles on stage would naturally result in a poor ensemble performance.
What Chan writes in her article about “what good meant” was a subtle way to express the conflict between the actors and herself in terms of principles, ideas, beliefs, aesthetic senses, acting methods, ways of rehearsing a production … and even the importance of being a good actor.

To Chan, discipline was very important and applied even to artists. She also wanted all her actors to have the same view as hers on drama. At the interview, K. B. Chan makes a comment about Chan’s strong attitude, requiring the actors to follow her own way.

Chan was especially serious and strict about the work attitude of the actors. She would be upset if the actors’ points of view did not synchronise with hers because she considered them not performing as a team. Her strict manner aroused many conflicts and fights between the actors and herself. She wanted to shape the acting company into her ideal mode for better control. There were some “fierce guys” among the actors and she took action to dismiss Chow Chi Fai and Ho Wai Lung, both of whom were accused of not showing her any respect (my own translation, personal communication, 8 July 2009. Original transcript: 修女對演員的工作態度非常認真和嚴厲。若演員不能與她同步，她會覺得他們不是一個團隊。她的嚴厲態度令她和演員之間產生很多矛盾和爭辯。她很想將話劇團模塑成她的心目中的
Ko assents to K. B. Chan’s comment. He uses “iron fist” to describe Chan’s style in managing the actors.

Before Chan came, the Rep did not have formal discipline. Many actors were always late for work and had bad work attitudes. She therefore rectified the actors’ bad attitudes and enforced discipline upon her arrival. We would be punished when we did things wrong. She fired two actors because of their bad manners. Later when she hired some new actors, she fired some old ones. But I think she was only playing the “executioner” role for the Rep. Nevertheless, nobody dared to be late for her stipulated appointment time (my own translation, Ko, personal communication, 17 December 2012.

Original transcript: 她上任之前話劇團的紀律很鬆散，很多演員常常遲到，工作態度不好。於是她整頓紀律，一開始便行鐵腕政策，每當我們犯錯便處分。她出任後立即辭退兩名演員，認為他們態度有問題。之後，她聘請一些新人，又再次辭退一些演員。不過，我認為她只是話劇團的一把刀而已。無論如何，在她的任內不會有人遲到，出席率很高)
The term “executioner” Ko used is worth our pondering. Was the termination of the service of the two actors to the Rep actually initiated by Chan because she wanted to demonstrate and execute her artistic directorship when feeling it was being challenged when she was a guest director of her two collaborations with the Rep? (This is one story I was told) Or, was she, as Ko stated, only the scapegoat used for executing the decision made by a higher executive authority instead? (This is another story I was told) If the latter was the case, could we say the artistic directorship of Chan was overridden by the executive authority or even by the higher level of authority? As both parties ended up blaming each other and different theories have been circulating since then, the true reason/s behind these events will probably never be uncovered.

In point of fact, Chan told me firmly, two months before this dissertation was first submitted, that she was not the one who initiated the termination of the two actors. Her reason: that she “was new to the Rep at that time and did not have any supporters behind (her) back” (my own translation, Chan, personal communication, 31 October 2013. Original transcript: 我那時是新來的，又沒有後台). When I tried to make reference to a newspaper article that reported the termination of the two actors, she immediately responded, “I remember the title of the article reporting the incident was ‘Heads Roll’.”58 Her spontaneous reaction, especially the fact that after all these years she was still able to recall the title of the article (published in the Hong

58 The full title of the article reporting the change of Hong Kong Repertory Theatre’s actors upon Chan’s takeover of the position was “Heads Roll – HKRep goes for New Blood”.

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(Kong Standard) without much thinking, suggested to me that the incident has been unforgettable for her even till this day.

Nevertheless, it is a hard and undeniable fact that the two actors did lose their contracts upon Chan’s succession to the role of artistic director. Because of the petition submitted by all the actors, Chow was reinstated by Chan half a year later. To demonstrate her fairness towards the actor, Chan stresses that she “was the one who gave the re-hired actor his first opportunity playing a major role since he joined the Theatre” (my own translation, personal communication, 9 November 2012. Original transcript: 是我重新聘用他，並且讓他重返話劇團時首次擔演重要角色). She was referring to her directing piece Where Love Abides, one of the classics of the Rep in which Chow played the owner of the umbrella shop Leung So.

From the management perspective, Chan was viewed differently. Having worked with both Yang and Chan, Choi comments:

From the management perspective, I had a better work relationship with Chan because of her mild-mannered style. She was gentle and graceful, and more communicative (my own translation, personal communication, 18 May 2012. Original transcript: 若將二人比較，from the management perspective，陳較易溝通，因為她溫文爾雅，较少棱角，與她的合作關係較融洽).
Although Choi confirms the existence of a good relationship between Chan and her, she admits she was not close to Chan. However, she is still a good friend of Yang. She stresses that she only became a friend of Yang after she left the Rep and worked in the Regional Services Department, because it was not appropriate for the management to get too close to the artistic staff” (my own translation, personal communication, 18 May 2012. Original transcript: 與楊熟絡是離開話劇團，到了新界 Regional Services Department 後才做私人朋友，因為做 management 時不適當與藝術人員太熟稔).

Working in a huge governmental setup also brought some discomfort to Chan. In the same article, she further expresses her dissatisfaction working with the Theatre.

HKRep was a government operation at that time, having been established by the Urban Council. The Council was a gigantic structure. Its policies directly affected the daily lives of the citizens of Hong Kong. There were many built-in contradictions for such a small organisation as HKRep which was composed of only a handful of independent-thinking artists, trying to function within the complex network of a huge government agency. To initiate a working dialogue between the government policymakers and the members of the small arts organisation was barely possible. Since there were few other theatre companies operating in the city, competition among them was
relatively low. As a result, every HKRep stage production in the late 1980s enjoyed immense popularity (2013a, p. 38).

Chan’s article was written in a relatively subdued, matter-of-fact tone, yet it unequivocally points out three main conflicts she had with the government: lack of independent-thinking artists working in the government operation, the gigantic structure of the government and the lack of communication between the decision-makers and the members at the base level.

As regards the second point, although Chan had been co-founder and artistic director of the Four Seas Players, once the largest Chinese theatre company in the U.S., the scale and the structure of the theatre company was beyond comparison with HKRep, in that the latter was only a very small part of the gigantic structure of the Hong Kong government. Instead of enjoying freedom and authority to run her own theatre company as before, Chan was required to enter a bureaucratic work environment after she joined the Rep. Being answerable to the government and overseen by the Performing Companies Sub-committee of Urban Council with checks and balances by the executive staff from the Cultural Services Department while managing a team of about 20 actors of different artistic characters … Chan finally had the taste of being the head of a theatre group that was confined by bureaucratic limitations under a colonial government.
“To initiate a working dialogue between the government policymakers and the members of the small arts organisation was barely possible” was the last conflict Chan points out in her article. Chan writes the article in Chinese and this English statement is a translation. In fact the translation has slightly altered her original statement. Chan in her original Chinese text sarcastically describes the distance between the decision-makers and the staff at the base level as being like that of “the heavens and the human world”.59 She was revealing her grievance about the lack of communication she experienced with the policymakers and the superiority and unapproachability of the top management. The absence of a working dialogue between the two parties could be attributed to the result of the gigantic and bureaucratic governmental structure.

As regards the first problem, Chan is telling people that her independent thinking was controlled by the government and the civil servants who managed the Rep through executive means. Some of her ideas and plans thus could not be put into practice.

The most extreme case referred to the cancellation of her original play *The Years of the Hungry Tiger* which was supposed to be staged in August 1989. The play is an adaptation of John Gordon Davis’ novel.
… Although I had written *Crown Ourselves with Roses*, I felt I had not yet written enough to express the pain in my heart. I suddenly remembered that I had read a popular fiction over 10 years ago, so I rushed to a bookstore to get a copy. Last year, I adapted it into a stage play, *The Years of the Hungry Tiger*, which was scheduled to be one of the HKRep’s main productions last year (my own translation, Chan, 1990, p. 7).

In the Prologue of the published play in 1990, Chan expresses the reason she chose the fiction as her creative work for the Rep’s 1990 production.

I did not expect that I would not want the book to leave from my hands in the next day and two nights once I began to read it. Neither could I forget the emotions it aroused in my heart even after over a decade had passed.

Ordinary and insignificant people could only innocently and helplessly witness their families and future being destroyed because a minor group of people who have no association with them dream of changing the world. In this case, they can make their wishes of being leaders of the people and bringing benefits to the society come true. These unfortunate stories have continuously been recurring through many generations in many places … Full of sentiments of clinging to Hong
Kong, he (Davis) writes about the unfortunate experience of the people of Hong Kong in the 1960s through the tragic encounters of two fictional characters (my own translation, 1990, p.7).

The above reason given by Chan explains why she selected the play for the drama season of 1988 / 1989…it matched her playwriting style. Yet, the play brought her an unhappy experience with the Rep.

Chan points out that in a talk with her, the Rep admitted it worried about the character of a corrupt policeman in the play that could bring embarrassment to the British government. That’s why the Council members suddenly summoned her for explanation. She told the Council that the play was adapted from a novel and had no idea they would find the character offensive. The Council requested that she delete the character but she refused because “the deletion of the character would be just like staging the story of the Soong family without letting Meiling Soong appear on stage” (my own translation, Chan, personal communication, 31 October 2013. Original transcript: 他們問我能否將此角色刪去，那是等於要將宋家的宋美齡刪去).

I was told that character was based on a real-life officer, whose corruption proved to be a great embarrassment to the Hong Kong government. I was ignorant of that fact because in 1967, I was in the Philippines novitiate training to be a nun. It was a cloistered life for

60 宋美齡
two-and-a-half years, with no contact with any outside news. When I was questioned in Hong Kong at the high-level meeting, I was basically muddled and confused (Chan’s original writing, personal communication, 20 August 2014).

However, she was shocked to find out that the Rep had halted the production before she returned from the North American tour. Although tickets had been sold, the show was replaced by the second rerun of her *Crown Ourselves with Roses*, which just had its rerun in May and touring performances in June. The Rep announced the change of the production through the press. The official reason for staging *Crown Ourselves with Roses* instead was that “it received great popularity when it was staged in Hong Kong in May and in North America in June” (my own translation, HKRep, 1989)

In 1990, Chan published the script through Breakthrough Ltd. in Hong Kong. She writes on the back cover of the play:

*The Years of the Hungry Tiger* is a two-act play originally scheduled as a main production of the HKRep’s drama season (in 1989 /1990) composed of eight shows. The programme was publicly announced, the tickets were sold and the stage design was completed. All the preparation work was done. But why couldn’t it be staged? Perhaps staging plays about the suffering of ordinary people is always like
walking on rocky paths. *The Years of the Hungry Tiger* was considered an innuendo and aroused argument. As a matter of fact, the characters in the play are only fictitious. It is just so happens the story seems so real and is so touching. It reflects the lives of hundreds of thousands of ordinary people living under the White Terror (my own translation, Chan, 1990, back cover).

As if to express her “sacrifice” while working under a gigantic governmental structure, she adds in the Prologue:

John Gordon Davis, author of *The Years of the Hungry Tiger*, had been a barrister in Hong Kong. He was very familiar with the operations of big plans in a huge organisational structure. He also understood how ordinary people could be sacrificed at someone’s pleasure under the White Terror (my own translation, Chan, 1990, p.7).

According to Chan’s statement, her artistic directorship was intruded upon by executive powers. As the artistic director of the Rep who was supposed to be the final person who gave ultimate instructions on the artistic direction of the Rep and designed the programmes for the Theatre, she found her artistic directorship upended and her authority was undermined. In the article she writes for *The New Evening Post*, to which she contributed a column covering drama scenes, she insinuates her authority as the artistic director of the Rep had been seized.
In order to survive, a non-profit making drama company has to be nationally known. However, when it has succeeded, the problem generated from the taking over of power by the board will appear. This is because when an organisation has expanded and become better known, it will hire some celebrities or well-known people to take some seats in the board. They (board members) will help bring resources to the theatre company by their own connections. But at the same time, they will be exchanged for the privileges of influencing the artistic direction. An artistic director of a Shakespearean drama company in the south of the U.S. angrily resigned the post he had been in for 15 years because his authority was taken over by executive means… I will be returning to my drama company in New York in spring next year. This troupe has experienced numerous challenges but has been able to keep to its principles … and to maintain high freedom in creating artistic works. But I wonder how much longer it can maintain its present status.” (My own translation, Chan, 1989)

Chan is insinuating the overriding of her power by the executive staff of the Rep, by comparing her very limited freedom here with the “high creative freedom” her own drama troupe in the US had enjoyed. What Chan complained about would not have happened if the organisation were owned by the artistic director himself / herself. Yu in the interview expresses that he has the autonomy to design the programmes of his theatre company Drama Gallery while the council members, who
are invited by him, only meet him once or twice a year to listen to his reports on the 
previous year’s performance and to give advice on his plan about the coming drama 
season. As he comments, “Whether I follow their advice or not is solely of my 
autonomy. The council members do not interfere with my artistic decision. After all, 
the game is that the council members are invited by me to hire me as the artistic 
director” (my own translation, personal communication, 1 September 2013. Original 
transcript: 我是否跟隨他們的意見純粹是由我決定，董事會是不會干涉我的藝術 
方向的。這個遊戲實際是：董事會成員是由我邀請，然後由他們聘請我當我的 
劇團的藝術總監).

However, HKRep was a government-operated theatre troupe when Chan was 
in it. The game was played the other way around, in contrast to Yu’s case. Artistic 
directors of the Rep were hired by the Sub-committee of Performing Companies of 
the Urban Council representing the government before its incorporation. The Council 
was therefore responsible for overseeing the artistic director’s works including, in this 
case, censoring her choices on selecting and writing plays. I checked this case out 
with Choi but she did not comment. She only diplomatically said she “vaguely 
remembered some disparities had occurred, but did not remember the case” (my own 
translation, personal communication, 18 May 2012. Original transcript: 我隱約記 
得好像發生了一些事故，但記不起是什麼事情).

This is the best example for illustrating the limitations and constraints of an 
artistic director of HKRep during the time it was operated by the colonial government.
The job holder, Chan in this case, was not able to enjoy the same freedom as an artist that artistic directors of other individual theatre companies are able to enjoy. Whenever the Council and the executive staff considered anything that would bring embarrassment or harm to the government, artistic directorship would be challenged, and even seized. As I make remarks on one of the characteristics of the artistic directorship of HKRep in Chapter One, the artistic director of the Theatre was only able to enjoy the freedom inside a certain frame. He/she could make it a rectangular or circular frame but, after all, it was still a frame. It was still the palm of the Buddha that bound the freedom of the Monkey King. No matter how far the Monkey King wanted to go, he could only run or jump within the palm. If ever he ran beyond the boundary, his master Monk Tang Xuanzang\textsuperscript{61} would chant something and the golden band on the Monkey King’s head would become so tight it gave him a terrible headache.

Similarly, the chanting of the Urban Council, i.e. the self-censorship and the veto, constituted severe headaches for Chan. As a result, Chan left the Rep after she finished her four-year contract. Chan admitted she was not offered a new contract after the incident. However, she wondered “why nobody mentioned the fact that I (she) was the one who told the Council that I (she) did not want to renew the contract before the incident happened” (my own translation, personal communication, 19 November 2012. Original transcript: 那些人是沒有再給我第三個合約，但為何現時沒有人再記起是我一早已經告訴他們我不要再做第三個合約的呢？).

\textsuperscript{61} 唐玄奘
There were two “official” reasons Chan had decided to leave. The first, as she tells a reporter from *Hong Kong Economic Times*, was the completion of her dreams as an artistic director of the Rep.

All her dreams have come true, it is time to go … She believes the power of an individual is very limited. After collaborating (with the Rep) for a certain time, she should leave the space for other people to participate. This is a beneficial and constructive way of acting both for the Rep and for herself … She believes in the principle of “do the right thing at the right time”. And she considers this is the time to leave (my own translation, *Hong Kong Economic Times*, 1990).

When Chan announced at a press conference her plans for her first drama season with the Rep, she said there were five targets she wanted to meet. As we have discussed, no matter how people judge her artistic standard, Chan has nevertheless fulfilled all the targets she committed to when she joined the Rep.

The other reason she turned down a contract renewal was that she was exhausted by writing and producing so many plays and productions in four years.

She did not renew the contract due to her exhausted creativity. She said as an art creator, she was required to direct three to four productions a year. It was natural that her creativity would dry up.
That would not happen in foreign countries. After living in such a state for four years, she thought, no matter whether it was for herself or for the Rep, she should leave before she repeated her work (my own translation, *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 1989).

In the past three years, I worked 14 hours a day and seven days a week for the HKRep. It’s time I should leave and allow myself to have more time to learn to write plays of higher quality (my own translation, Wong, 1989).

The reason Chan gave Wong was also the reason she gave me during our talk. Besides producing plays and productions for the Rep, she also wrote plays for her own drama company in New York in those four years and provided hands-on supervision to it every summer when she stayed in the city. Her productivity was extremely high: she directed nine productions and two rerun shows which toured Guangzhou and North America. She also wrote five original plays for the Rep within a span of only four years. The huge workload in turn might have been due to two factors: a requirement from the Urban Council and the lack of talents in writing original plays in the mid-1980s.

Artistic directors of the Rep are required to direct one to two productions every year. Hardworking artistic directors like Chan and Yang in the government-run era were therefore prolific in terms of the amount of productions they had directed.
Different from Yang, Chan herself is a playwright as well and was therefore required to write plays. The aspiration to promote the writing of original plays could only have further increased her workload. Since there were not many local playwrights she could find in those years, as long as she wanted the Rep to lead the trend of staging original plays, she had to take up the responsibility and keep writing plays for the Rep. This did not apply to Yang because he only wrote one play, *Yan Xijiao*, in his 14 years of service covering two eras (he was both Chan’s predecessor and successor). That was indeed the result, or the sum, of the unique cultural situation Chan was in and the special aspiration she had during the 1980s.

The unhappy incident resulted in Chan’s 20 years of absence from the stage of both the Rep and Hong Kong. She intentionally remarks in her article for the Rep’s 35th anniversary souvenir book that she knew nothing about the Rep in those two decades, hinting at her indifference to the Theatre she once worked for.

In the twenty intervening years since I returned to New York in 1990, while I met regularly with HKRep colleagues once a year in Hong Kong, I lost touch with the company’s ongoing progress and development (Chan, 2013a, p. 38).

Nevertheless, her connection with the Rep was again rekindled in 2011 when her production *The Empress of China* was staged by the Theatre; more so by her new production, *The Soongs: by Dreams Betrayed*, staged in early 2014.
Conclusion

The title of this dissertation is “An Artistic Director as an Auteur in Contexts – the Case Study of Dr. Joanna Chan of Hong Kong Repertory Theatre (1986 – 1990)”. Besides breaking ground in the study of artistic directorship, my research is designed to investigate how Chan played a role as an “auteur in contexts”, displaying her own style while working under a system that was constrained by the government and influenced by political and cultural forces.

After researching what Chan did for the Rep, I can see she was trying her very best to play the role of an auteur in terms of the work she did for the Rep as its artistic leader in the second half of the 1980s. The best evidence is her playwriting. Through the three time periods of her association with HKRep – when she collaborated with the troupe as a guest playwright and director before she became artistic director; during the time she was the artistic director of the Rep.; and when she wrote for the Rep again as a guest playwright and director 20 years after she had left her position with the Theatre – all the plays she has written are of the same motif and with her same signature. She reviews the grand motif of her plays in the Foreword to the house programme of The Empress Dowager.⁶²

⁶² The Foreword was originally published in the house programme of the Empress Dowager staged by the Four Seas Players in New York in 1980. Chan published the same Foreword again in the house programme of the production The Empress Dowager she directed for the Yangtze Repertory Theatre of America in 2013. This dissertation takes the reference from the house programme of the latter.
… (the plays are) more the story of a proud and self-sufficient people in search of their place in the contemporary world. It is a struggle mixed with curiosity, admiration, humiliation, shock and indignation, which continues until the present day (my own translation, Chan, 2013b, p. 4).

Throughout the past four decades, she has written over 40 plays. But her plays all serve the same grand motif as she described in 1980 when she wrote *The Empress Dowager*. She has always been doing what Bazin says in his essay “*De la Politique des Auteurs*”: “the *auteur* is subject to himself (herself), whatever the scenario, he (she) always tells the same story … has the same attitude and passes the same moral judgments on the action and on the characters” (Bazin, 2008, p. 25).

Her works also fulfil the three premises of the *auteur* theory the American film critic Sarris asserts: the technical competence, the distinguishable personality of the director and an *élán* of the soul which can be extrapolated from the tension between a director’s personality and his material. Despite the fact that most people I have interviewed consider her works not of particularly high aesthetic value, there is no doubt she is technically competent. Nobody can deny her distinguishable personality and the strong *élán* of the soul in her artistic works. Lin views Chan’s works thus:
Relative to the other artistic directors of the Rep, her works are of religious piety, romanticism and Chinese culture, but a bit shallow, without profound thoughts underneath. However, she is a pure and honest artist who believes in good deeds. Therefore she does not do anything pretentious or fake but only does things that she truly believes in. Her love and sense of belonging to Hong Kong and the country are true. She is an author of realism (my own translation, personal communication, 2011. Original transcript: 與其他話劇團的藝術總監相比，她的作品有宗教的虔誠情感、人的浪漫性和中國文化，但都是比較顯淺，思想性並不深刻的作品。不過，她是一名純樸誠實的藝術家，相信美好的東西。所以，她不要偽裝或做假的東西，而只會做她是真的相信的東西。她對香港、國家、民族的歸屬感和愛是真的。她是一名現實主義的作者).

She was especially an auteur whose plays strongly tied in with “Localism” during her four years of service to the Rep when the burning issue of the day was the handing back of Hong Kong to its motherland. She is the first artistic director who connected the Theatre with the society and its changes. She is also one of the very few local playwrights whose works had a strong sense of “Localism” at that time. Lo in his essay “The Exploration of Hong Kong Theatre’s Localism” stresses that while situated in a special historical context, the contemporary drama practitioners of Hong Kong did not only confine themselves to the aesthetic framework of drama as a
performing art but were also involved in the cultural history of Hong Kong through their works on “Localism”.

On the one hand, the exploration of Localism of Hong Kong drama reflected the state of de-colonialisation; on the other hand, it embodied the subjectivity of the Hong Kong drama practitioners … In the process of establishing their own identity, Hong Kong theatre practitioners were as well referring to time and space when they were writing the texts on drama development and provoking discourses on cultural identity. In terms of space, (they were referring to) the macro construction and destruction on the Chinese drama system; in terms of time, (they were referring to) the contemporary gaze and writing of Hong Kong drama history. The discourse on the culture of Hong Kong drama therefore gave birth to theories relating to cultural history: the consciousness of the subjectivity formed by the specific historical track in which Hong Kong drama practitioners were situated had condensed into a discourse of Localism at a specific historical background. Through unifying the dialectic process between Localism and drama practitioners’ subjectivity and cultural practices from various aspects, Hong Kong drama began to take part in Hong Kong culture. The aesthetic practice of Localism constructed the contemporary Hong Kong drama art (my own translation, Lo, 2004, p. 22-24).
Unlike her predecessor Yang whose emphasis was to stage translation plays from foreign countries on the Hong Kong stage, Chan, while situated in a unique historical time, wrote a distinguished chapter for HKRep. To follow what Lo remarks, I would say the consciousness of Chan’s subjectivity formed by the specific historical track in which she was situated had condensed into a discourse of “Localism” in a specific historical background. Under this specific historical background, the most unique and precious values of Chan as the artistic director of HKRep are found. Through her contribution in unifying the dialectic process between “Localism” and HKRep, the Theatre and its drama began to take part in Hong Kong culture. Her own original plays and even adaptations written in those years were of the same motif. The drama season with the theme of *Facing Deadlines* and the original plays written by guest playwrights all embodied the same motif as well: how an individual, a city and a nation faces and manages the changes in their lives, society and world. She was, and still is, as Bazin’s statement I quote above, “the auteur subjects to herself, whatever the scenario, she always tells the same story”.

British film critic and filmmaker Wollen in his essay “The Auteur Theory” also supports Bazin’s argument by saying “Renoir once remarked that a director spends his whole life making one film.” (Wollen, 2008, p. 63) In his essay, he uses the American filmmaker Howard Hawks and his works to make his test case for the auteur theory. He writes,
Why Hawks? … all of these films exhibit the same thematic preoccupations, the same recurring motifs and incidents, the same visual style and tempo: a homo hawksianus: the protagonist of Hawksian values in the problematic Hawksian world (Wollen, 2008, p. 57).

After reviewing Chan’s aspiration and her artistic works, my conclusion regarding her artistic expression can be summarised by applying Wollen’s comment on Hawks and calling her a “homo Chanisanus, the protagonist of Chanisanus values in the problematic Chanisanus world”. This is because she has proved herself an auteur.

Moreover, she is always credited for her immense contribution towards promoting original play in Hong Kong. That was what she intended to do. And she did it well. She says in a newspaper interview in 1989, “I have been the HKRep’s artistic director for more than three years and my most obvious achievement has been to allow room for local playwrights to write their original plays.” (My own translation, Wong, 1989) On top of the values mentioned above, to allow room for local playwrights to write their original plays is the contribution Chan is most proud of. That is also the priceless value she has added to the Theatre and the Hong Kong local drama scene.
Besides producing a body of artistic work, she also tried her best to be an *auteur* by executing her artistic directorship with the artistic management aspects as discussed in the previous chapter. In my column in *Wen Wei Po* covering the drama scene and the performing arts field in Hong Kong, I have described Chan in this way:

I have always considered Dr. Joanna Chan a pioneer. The theatre paths she has walked are all of “the spirit of Genesis”… In the 1980s, she came to Hong Kong to take over the position of artistic director of a government-run theatre company. She strengthened the internal substance of the actors and elevated their image. She wrote many original plays that dared to face the then political and social environments, tying up the Theatre with society and promoting the writing of original plays. She is an important figure settling and cultivating the Hong Kong drama scene (my own translation, Tao, 2012).

When I interviewed Chan on an internet TV programme, *Theatre Chit-chat*, she told me how she felt about the essay “When it all Began …” which I wrote for the Rep’s 30th anniversary commemorative book. In the essay, I position her as a pioneer and a developer in the Rep’s periods of “Planting the Seeds” (Tao, 2007, p.18) and “Cultivating a Secure Future” (Tao, 2007, p. 32) when she joined the Rep in its first decade.
The essay has helped me realise the reasons that made me so toil and brought me to face so many challenges when I was with the Rep. Your description of me as a pioneer and a developer had never occurred to me before. I was very pleased to be viewed from that perspective (my own translation, personal communication, 19 November 2012. Original transcript: 你寫的那篇文章將我當藝術總監的年代放在「開墾期」，幫助我領悟到一個道理：難怪當年我在話劇團時是那樣辛苦和面對這麼多困難。你形容我是先鋒和開墾者，我卻從沒有這樣想過，我非常高興你以這個角度來看我).

In another interview in 2012, she expresses:

I am happy to be inspired by your observation and remarks. You have offered me great insight. Not until now did I realise my position at that time. Therefore when I was writing my article “A Vision Far and Near” for the Rep’s 35th anniversary commemorative book, your opinion endowed me with a clear structure to explain my cultivating works, relationship and conflicts with the Rep in the old days. I was writing from the perspective of a developer. I also wrote about the obstacles I encountered at that time (my own translation, Chan, personal communication, 19 November 2012. Original transcript: 你的觀察和評語影響了我，我很高興。你給了我很大的幫助，因為我現在才知道我當時的位置。所以，當我為話劇團「35 周年特刊」
As a pioneer in Hong Kong theatre, Chan has won high praise from Kuh Fei (Kuh hereafter), a drama critic and the founder of Hong Kong Theatre Libre Awards, who honours the five targets Chan proclaimed at the press conference in 1986 as “the Ten Commandments of the Hong Kong drama scene” (my own translation, Kuh, personal communication, 10 July 2009. Original transcript: 她的五項目標簡直就是香港劇壇的十誡). He makes the comment because he thinks nobody had previously ever set up such clear, precise and solid requirements for a theatre company to follow and to achieve. Although appreciating Chan’s spirit of genesis, Kuh makes the comment below:

I can imagine Chan must have experienced much hardship working under the then society and the colonial government. The colonial government only wanted to give entertainment, recreation and pastimes to its people. When the provision of pleasure was being challenged by the pursuit of consciousness from Chan, the government felt it was threatened. When the situation was not compromising to either party, she then chose to leave and it was a loss to the Rep (my own translation, Kuh, personal communication, 10 July 2009. Original transcript: 我可以想像得到在當時的社會和殖民地政府之
Kuh’s insight was spot-on. On the one hand, as discussed in the previous chapters, the time and space that Chan was situated in provided her with great opportunities to exercise her artistic directorship and to fulfill her dreams and aspirations. Taking advantage of being in those special situations, she was therefore able to do much for the Rep and the development of the local drama scene. On the other hand, some of the situations resulted in obstacles that hindered the execution of her artistic directorship. Conflicts among the actors and the lack of unified acting styles discussed in the previous chapters are examples.

Paradoxically, the most obvious hindrance to her was the colonial government, represented by the Urban Council that hired her. Being the artistic director of a theatre operated by a government, despite the fact that she was supposed to be the head of the whole art organisation playing the most important role in the drama field of Hong Kong at that time, she was treated only as one of the contracted staff members of the gigantic structure of the government. Although she was an artist herself and the head of the Theatre, she was required to follow bureaucratic procedures, including writing proposals for the drama seasons for the approval of the Council, being monitored by the executive staff from the government and discussing
artistic directions with the artistic consultants. She frankly reveals her feelings in her essay “A Vision Far and Near”. I directly quote the English translation from the essay in the previous chapter but would like to translate it myself here as the text is not accurately translated from Chan’s original version.

The Council was a gigantic structure. Its policies directly affected people’s lives. When a small organisation which is mainly composed of performing arts practitioners hopes to operate within the broad and wide official network, problems inevitably follow. The distance between the government policy makers and the members at the base level was like that “between the heaven and the human world”, let alone being able to initiate a direct dialogue between the two parties (my own translation, Chan, 2012, p. 35).

She tells us how lost and hopeless she felt when she was the artistic leader of a performing troupe that belonged to a gigantic structure – the government. She could only find a space to play her role in the development of the Theatre and wrote her text for the Rep as an “auteur in contexts” under a system with constraints made by the government and the Council as well as from the political, social and cultural influences. Her artistic directorship was particularly stifled when her original play *The Year of the Hungry Tiger* was suddenly cancelled while tickets to the show were being sold. Her artistic directorship was overridden by the power of executive means.
Under these circumstances, Chan was further proved to be an “auteur in contexts” because she was able to influence the Theatre and the local drama field despite the contexts she was in. However, what she had / had not done and what could be / could not be done at the same time were also influenced or shaped by the contexts she was in.

When I asked her in my internet TV programme about anything she should have done or would have done in those years but, because of some reason, was not able to proceed, she says,

In terms of production rate, mine was already too prolific and inappropriate. I had tried my best in those four years. What else should I have done but did not do? Those tasks would be something to be done after those four years … I don’t think what I did were the core tasks to me. Neither were they what I wanted to do the most. They were implemented just because of the situations at that time … because it was in the cultivating period of a developing theatre (my own translation, Chan, personal communication, 9 November 2012.

Original transcript: 若以 production rate 來看，我的工作已是很產，很不適當的。四年內能夠用的時間和心力是已經盡了，還有什麼應該要的是四年以外的事情。我不認為我那時所做的，對我來說是最核心的事情，我亦不是最想做到它們。它們在當時做了，
From her answer, we can tell Chan was aware how situations had shaped her works in those four years. She also showed her recognition of her limitations as an “auteur in contexts” at a time when the Theatre was in its developing stage and operated by the government. To my mind, as an “auteur in contexts” she had already done a lot for the Rep, both in terms of quantity of productions and quality of artistic works. She had also greatly contributed to the local drama field, especially with regard to connecting the performing arts with society and culture. The writing of original plays she had enthusiastically promoted has resulted in original plays becoming the most popular genre on the current Hong Kong stage. Although her term of service was the shortest among all the four artistic directors the Rep has ever had, her contribution and uniqueness wrote a beautiful and unusual chapter in the Rep’s text. Poon comments: “Chan is a passer-by of Hong Kong. What she has left us with is nothing but the theatre talents she has nurtured, the plays she has written and the touring records she has made for the Rep” (my own translation, Poon, personal communication, 15 July 2009. Original transcript: 陳修女只是香港一名過客。她留給我們的只是她培育的戲劇人才、她寫的劇本和她為話劇團安排的巡迴紀錄).

Although Chan is technically not considered a Hong Kong person as she holds an American passport, to Abbas, she is one of those who “is not a Hong Kong writer
but raises some of the finer issues involved in writing in and about the problematic cultural space of Hong Kong” (Abbas, 1998, p. 112) because “the main and most powerful character is often the city of Hong Kong itself” (Abbas, 1998, p. 119). I would like to apply Abbas’ remarks to the late poet Leung to conclude what Chan has done for the local theatre:

Leung’s work registers much more forcefully the fractures and sutures of a society in the process of mutation. In not claiming to speak for Hong Kong, he is able to show how problematic the issues of citizenship, community, and the identity still are and how far we are from a consensus about these things. (Abbas, 1998, p. 130)

Chan has done the same.

The study on artistic directorship is a very new subject yet an important one. I sincerely hope the dissertation will arouse the interest of many more scholars and theatre practitioners so that additional studies will be conducted on this important position in theatre in the future.

I am particularly glad that I choose Chan as the subject of the case study. The study of such an artistic director helps me understand how an artistic director working under a governmental institution of bureaucratic culture explores the performing art through her artistic expression and management. When people talk about Hong
Kong drama, they may not immediately name her. However, she is a very special artistic director in Hong Kong drama history.

Chan’s case is unique in Hong Kong. There was only one theatre operated by the government of Hong Kong. No other artistic directors in Hong Kong would be in the same situation as the HKRep’s artistic directors. Furthermore, the contexts in which she operated make her unique compared with the other three artistic directors of the Rep. By investigating how she exercised her artistic directorship, I have learnt how an artistic director performs as an “auteur in contexts”.

I would conclude that there are three premises for an “auteur in contexts”. As an “auteur in contexts”, he / she is, to a certain extent, limited by the contexts he / she is in. We have discussed this through Chan’s case study. An “auteur in contexts” is influenced by the contexts he / she is in. He / she intermingles his / her work or makes compromise with certain contexts when he / she exercises his / her authorship. Hence, in the first premise, the work of an “auteur in contexts” is a product of contexts, locality or time because the work is influenced and shaped by the various contexts the auteur is in.

Since the work of an “auteur in contexts” is shaped by the contexts, through reading his / her work, we are able to know about the people, the environment, the thought, the fashion, the beliefs, the values … of the society in which the auteur lives or writes about. His / her work is a miniature reflection of a society of a certain time.
Though it may only reflect a very tiny part of a society or a group of particular people, it helps readers understand certain features of the society. Chan’s work is a good example. The puzzle created by the Joint Declaration was particularly fresh and strong in the years immediately following the signing of the Declaration by the two countries. We can understand how the people of Hong Kong thought in the 1980s by reading or watching Chan’s works. Therefore the second premise of an “auteur in contexts” is that the work that he / she produces is a reflection of a society.

An “auteur in contexts” does not mean he / she is a passive figure who can only exercise his / her authorship confined by the contexts. Rather, he / she can make use of the special contexts he / she is in to write texts that transcend those of other authors. Chan fully made use of the contexts she was in and produced some masterpieces closely tied in with the times. She also took advantage of the underdeveloped period of original playwriting in Hong Kong. In that sense, she was able to write many plays to voice her beliefs and thoughts. She also took the initiative to help promote original playwriting in Hong Kong. Now, when we ask which artistic director of HKRep promoted original playwriting the most, credit has to be given to her. Therefore, with regard to the third premise of an “auteur in contexts”, the auteur is not only influenced by the various contexts, he / she also uses his / her authorship and position in the theatre to influence society, and even to change the contexts through his / her own aspirations and exertions. For instance, original plays began to boom in the 1990s after Chan left HK Rep and have now become the most popular genre in the local drama scene. This proves that an “auteur
in contexts” is able to change the contexts. Chan’s case refers to the cultural context of Hong Kong. She transcended the contexts and her situations.

As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon that artistic directors or artistic leaders face limitations and challenges. Some of them even face political intervention. What makes Chan a special artistic director is the way she reacted to the political intervention.

Encountering political intervention is nothing particularly special to artistic leaders. However, some artistic directors stand out by demonstrating their strength when being challenged by political intervention. Per my preliminary observation, I would classify artistic directors or artistic leaders of a theatre troupe in the performing arts history into four categories in terms of how they face political interventions.

The first category of artistic director involves the notion of compromise. When facing political or social challenges, some artistic directors may choose to compromise. There are many different reasons for an artistic director to compromise. I have no intention of guessing the reasons why they compromise. However, some of them choose to remain in the existing situation. According to Christopher Chung Shu Kun (Christopher Chung hereafter), ex-vice chairman of the HKRep’s Council which was formed since the incorporation of the Theatre in 2001, Mao, the then artistic director, also met a similar challenge as Chan’s. In 2006, Mao initiated a
staging of British playwright David Hare’s play *Fanshen* in the following drama season. Tsang Tak Sing, now Secretary of the HKSAR Government’s Home Affairs Bureau, writes a brief introductory text to the plot of the play in his column posted on the Bureau’s webpage.

*Fanshen* is a play adapted from the publication of an American agriculture expert and reporter William Hinton. What Hinton records is the experience of the Land Reformation of a village named Zhang Zhuan in Shanxi in 1947-1948. Hinton was teaching at the “emancipation zone” at that time. He followed the working team to Zhang Zhuang to eat, to live and to work with the farmers in poverty. He writes 500,000 words to describe what had happened there (my own translation, Tsang, 2012).

However, the proposed idea of staging the play was questioned by some of the Council members. Christopher Chung explains their worries.

The play is written about the Land Reformation through the perspective of a Westerner who went to Mainland China in the 1940s. Some of the Council members were members of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Committees. One of them asked why we still talked about the Reformation. I was the chairman of the Artistic Team

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63 張莊
(a sub-team of the Council). I did not think it was problematic to stage the play because nowadays many people are “singing the Red Songs”\(^{64}\). However, Mao did not insist and agreed to drop the idea when asked (my owner translation, personal communication, 7 August 2014. Original transcript: 劇本是以當時一名去了中國的西方人的角度講述關於四十年代的土地改革。理事會中有些理事是政協，有人問為何現時仍在講土地改革。我是理事會藝術小組的主席，並不覺得有什麼大問題，因為現時很多人都在「唱紅歌」。不過，當被質問時，毛俊輝並沒有堅持，最後更打消上演此劇的念頭).

K. B. Chan echoes the incident.

The story reveals how officials tyrannised the farmers in the 1940s, despite the fact that they were supposed to be there in the name of providing assistance to the poor. The play shows the dark side of the officials … As there were some happenings in the political field of the Mainland around that time, we did not want people to think we were making political innuendos, therefore we suggested staging the play later (my own translation, personal communication, 7 August 2012. Original transcript: 故事發生在四十年代，當時的官員名義上為人民服務，過程中卻欺詐百姓，講述幹部的黑暗面……當時中國官

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\(^{64}\) 唱紅歌. A Communist propaganda device.
I remember Mao explaining the incident to me after he had made up his mind to cancel the production when I was still his assistant in 2006.

The members of the Artistic Team, Christopher (Chung), Rupert (Chan) and Thomas (Luk), respected me very much. They left it to my discretion. It was I who decided not to stage the production (my own translation, personal communication, exact date unverified, 2006. Original transcript: Chris, Rupert 和 Thomas 都很尊重我，他們讓我自已選擇，是我自己決定不上演).

As he was the artistic leader of the Rep, I felt sure Mao must have had many considerations and even ineffable difficulties that made him decide to compromise at that time. This incident, however, puts him in the category of artistic directors who choose to compromise when facing political challenges, although we don’t know the actual reasons behind his decision. Nevertheless, Mao staged the play on Macau stage in 2012 four years after he left the Rep.

Cao Yu is another example of this category. Being the best known playwright of contemporary China, he is still praised as the “Shakespeare of China”. He produced a series of masterpieces in his youth, including his trilogy Thunderstorm,
Sunrise and Wilderness as well as Peking Man. However, since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, his life in creativity rapidly withered away. He could only write two plays which, unfortunately, were not of high artistic standard. He even altered his choice of the tragic traditional Chinese operatic heroine concubine Wang Zhaojun to serve a political purpose in his play Wang Zhaojun. Tian, an expert in the study of Cao Yu, makes very thorough comments in his essay “An Exploration of the Tragediennes of a Tragic Artist” (my own translation, Tian, 2007). The essay explains why the late playwright’s creativity vanished even though he became the president of the Beijing People’s Art Theatre after the New China was set up.

Wu Zuguang criticised him for being too obedient. I think this can only explain part of the problems. To me, the series of (political) movements he participated in did not only bring harm to other people, but also hurt Cao Yu’s heart, making his soul tremble … On the one hand, he condemned people; on the other hand, his heart shook. He said to me, “(Political) movements have always continued since the emancipation … Although I am not a rightist, they make my heart dare not move anymore.” … Whenever he talked about the friends whom he had persecuted, he blamed himself and felt extremely guilty. He said, “My writings have hurt the hearts of some of my old friends. I am very sorry to them. Although I had no choice at that time, I cannot shift the responsibility away.” … Nevertheless, he was a person of high rank in the government. When the core essence of a (political)
institution is the government official, human nature is easily changed

(my own translation, Tian, 2007, p. 59-60)

The Cultural Revolution buried the nature and the creativity of the talented playwright. His playwright daughter Wan Fang (Wan hereafter) writes in her essay “A Transparent Life” (my own translation, Wan, 2007) about the status of her father during the Revolution:

I tried to write (a play) about a vigorous person who produces distinguished works. His creativity later disappears but the shining hat is still on his head. During the Cultural Revolution, the hat is taken off from his head. Both his hat and his brain are thrown into the loo (my own translation, Wan, 2007, p. 34)

Wan was sad to see the fall of her father. He was the artistic and executive leader of the largest and the most important theatre of China, but he compromised. So, metaphorically, his brain was thrown into the loo. He is a compromising artistic leader.

The second category of artistic director is made up of artistic directors who leave their positions and stop performing or doing anything in the performing arts field. A good example to illustrate this category is the experience of Mei Lanfang, the most highly acclaimed contemporary Beijing Opera guru.
In 1941, Mei returned to Shanghai for financial reasons. Traitors working for the Japanese government invited him to perform. He not only turned the offers down, but also kept his beard so as to demonstrate his determination in drawing the line from the Japanese power. As he did not perform, he did not have any source of income. He therefore sold Chinese paintings, calligraphy works and trophies to earn a living for his family and the theatre. In 1945, he returned to the stage after Japan surrendered (my own translation, *Wikipedia*, 4 August, 2014).

Mei did not compromise. He chose to leave the field and did nothing related to performing arts when the political condition was not favourable to him. But his determination is appreciated. When the political problem was solved, he returned to the field. He is a gentleman artistic director of noble character and integrity.

Chan is of the third category. She chose to leave the theatre she was not happy with, as soon as possible when facing political confrontation. While Christopher Chung appraises her “a person of sterling character” (my own translation, personal communication, 7 August 2014. Original transcript: 她是一名有風骨的人), Lo says she “emancipated” herself (my own translation, personal communication, 5 August 2014. Original transcript: 陳尹瑩解放了自己). But she did not leave the field. Rather, she went back to her own theatre company in New York and

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65 Mei Lanfang played female roles on stage. Keeping a beard meant he would not want to perform on stage.
immediately staged the play *The Years of the Hungry Tiger* on the American stage the following year. She used the field in another space to defend her play which was not merely a piece of artistic work but also a symbol of her self-esteem and dignity. She is a fighter artistic director.

The fourth category is the artistic director who remains to fight in the same field when being politically stifled. Stanislavski is the most remarkable figure exemplifying this kind of artistic director. His story about guarding his student Meyerhold mentioned in Chapter One explains why he is the best example of this category. His uncompromising act further makes him a giant in theatre. He is an artistic director of righteousness and courage.

The above classification of artistic directors and their reactions to political intervention is only an initial idea. In the future, I would like to research the incidents and the reactions of more significant artistic directors in drama history or in the current global drama scene to substantiate my preliminary theory on how artistic directors exercise their artistic directorship when they face political interventions as discussed above. Also, reaction to political intervention is not the only issue I am interested in as regards the study of artistic directorship. There are many other artistic directors of drama troupes in Hong Kong facing various kinds of problems. For example, Chung Ying Theatre Company, the second largest theatre in Hong Kong, once faced an almost lethal attack when its funding from the government was cut down to 50% of the original amount. How the artistic director reacted and solved
the unprecedented problem should be a meaningful case study. I would like to investigate how artistic directors of small-scale local drama companies struggle to survive when they are not largely funded by the government. There were many amateur drama societies in the local drama scene before the establishment of HK Rep. Each drama society had an artistic leader / several artistic leaders, although they were not addressed as artistic director at that time, to guide and to give artistic direction and instruction to the troupe and its members. An area of worthwhile investigation would be to study how those artistic leaders steered their drama societies when “Western drama” was only a budding performing art form in Hong Kong and their members were all amateurs or students in the 1940s to 1970s.

In addition to her work in Hong Kong, Chan founded two theatre companies, the Four Seas Players and the Yangtze River Theatre of America, in New York in 1970 and 1990, respectively. She stepped down from the position of the artistic director of the latter theatre only in July 2014. As she is the subject of the case study of my dissertation, I would also like to examine how she exercised her artistic directorship in the two North American theatre companies. I believe the study will be quite different from my study of her work with the HKRep, although it will be equally meaningful.
In January 2011, Chan, emeritus artistic director and founder of the Yangtze River Repertory Theatre of America, directed her original play *The Empress of China* for the Hong Kong stage. The Rep promoted that piece as “a production of Chan’s Revisit” (HKRep, 2010, p. 15). The word “revisit” was intended to refer to the first stage work of Chan, as a guest director of the Rep and the playwright of the show, after her absence from the Rep’s stage and the Hong Kong drama scene for 20 years since the ending of her contract with the Rep in 1990.

According to the introduction to the Rep’s subscription booklet 2010 / 2011, the play is a story of an American merchant vessel, *The Empress of China*, which sailed all the way from the U.S. to Guangzhou in 1784, marking the first-ever trading activity between China and the U.S. (HKRep, 2010, p. 15). Inspired by this historical incident, Chan dramatises East-West cultural clashes, the changes that occurred before and during the coming of a new epoch, and the choices people must make when confronting historical currents. In the introduction to the production, published in the Rep’s subscription booklet (HKRep, 2010, p. 15), *Farewell my Friend*, one of the popular poems of the well-known Chinese poet Li Bai, is quoted as it depicts the imagery and the sentiments of the play. According to Anthony Chan (A. Chan,

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67 Chan was still artistic director of Yangtze River Repertory Theatre of America when she directed *The Empress of China* in Hong Kong in 2011 and when this dissertation was submitted in December 2013 before revision was done. She only handed over the leadership to two co-artistic directors on July 1, 2014.
personal communication, 12 April 2010), the current artistic director of the Rep who designs the drama season, the original Chinese title of the production was *A Boat Sailing Thousand Miles Away Alone*, one of the verses from Li’s poem68 (Original transcript: 《中》劇的本名是《孤篷萬里征》).

Three years later, in January 2014, a few days after the submission of this dissertation for an oral defense, Chan again staged her other epic play, *The Soongs: by Dreams Betrayed*, for the Theatre. The promotional text on the Rep’s webpage states:

The running Yangtze River witnesses how the nationality of an ancient nation was shaped by the burden accumulated through thousands of years. Its nationality is now being challenged when facing the modern world … HKRep’s former artistic director Joanna Chan depicts a silhouette of the historical storms between the birth of the Republic of China and the Japanese Occupation, expressing the national sentiments of contemporary China on the stage (my own translation, HKRep, 2013, p. 23)

The literal Chinese title of the play is “Such a Yangtze River”, which is again derived from one of the verses of a poem written by Chinese poet Wang Jun of the

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68 李白，《送友人》，「孤篷萬里征」
Qing Dynasty\textsuperscript{69}. Even though the story and the historical background are not the same as her previous plays, these two plays show Chan’s consistency in writing her same grand motif.

Telling stories about the sentiments of Chinese and Hong Kong people, demonstrating the struggles and choice-making process of characters during times of change, showing cultural clashes and conflicts, using Chinese poems as titles of her plays … these are all characteristics of Chan’s unique playwriting style. Having been away from Hong Kong and living in the U.S. for several decades, Chan is still much concerned about the history, culture, society, and sentiments of the Chinese and Hong Kong people.

In her article \textit{A Vision Far and Near}, Chan clearly indicates that she paid no attention to the Rep’s business for 20 years but only met a few ex-colleagues yearly since her return to New York in 1990 (Chan, 2013, p. 38). This is understandable given the unhappy ending of her collaboration with the Theatre when her original play, \textit{The Years of the Hungry Tiger}, came to an abrupt halt when the show had already been arranged to be staged in 1989. I believe the staging of \textit{The Empress of China} can be perceived as a form of reconciliation between Chan and the Theatre. In any case, she is again collaborating with the Rep on which she has already left a huge imprint. The two productions seem to subtly object to what Poon remarks in the Conclusion -- she is no passer-by of the Rep.

\textsuperscript{69} 汪鈞，《滿江紅》，「如此長江，歎滾滾」
A final thought before I end this dissertation -- one thing has recently aroused my curiosity: the scandal about the intervention and self-censorship of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* by the chairman of the Hong Kong Ballet was spreading hot in town while Chan rehearsed *The Soongs: by Dreams Betrayed*. Coverage by the media, investigation by the panel of the Home Affairs of the Legislative Council, discussions among the various arts fields on the intervention and self-censorship of the chairman were still continuing when I was writing the epilogue. The “vanished 12 minutes” of the ballet performance attracted much attention of the public, the field and even the politicians. My question is: what would have happened had the cancellation of Chan’s *The Years of a Hungry Tiger* taken place in 2013 and not in 1989? Would the production disappear so quietly? Or, would it still have the chance to be “reincarnated” on stage when the colonial government faced such tremendous pressure from the public, the media and the arts practitioners and critics as it is facing in the present time? Would Chan need to leave, even though the cancellation of her production might not be the only factor that caused her departure?

Situations have changed. That explains how Chan, “an auteur in contexts”, was shaped in and by her own time. Her artistic directorship would have been totally different had she become the Rep’s artistic director today and faced different, equally challenging situations.

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70 This dissertation was submitted in December 2013 while the revision was finished in the last quarter of 2014
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Stage Performances

The Empress of China, January 2011
The Soongs: by Dreams Betrayed, January 2014
Appendix 1

Cross-reference Lists: English and Chinese Names of Theatre Practitioners and Scholars and Writers

**Theatre & Culture Practitioners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Name</th>
<th>Chinese Name</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Au Ga Man</td>
<td>區嘉雯</td>
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<td>Au Kam Tong</td>
<td>歐錦棠</td>
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<tr>
<td>Betsuyaku, Minoru</td>
<td>別役實（日本）</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cao Yu</td>
<td>曹禺</td>
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<td>Chan, Anthony Kam Kuen</td>
<td>陳敏權</td>
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<td>Chan Choi Lai</td>
<td>陳載澧</td>
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<td>Chan Chu Hei</td>
<td>陳曙曦</td>
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<td>Chan Hang Fai</td>
<td>陳恆輝</td>
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<td>Chan, Joanna</td>
<td>陳尹瑩</td>
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<td>陳健彬</td>
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<td>陳冠中</td>
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<td>陳麗珠</td>
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<td>陳麗卿</td>
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<td>陳文剛</td>
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<td>Chan Ping Chiu</td>
<td>陳炳釗</td>
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<td>Chan, Rupert Kwan Yun</td>
<td>陳鈞潤</td>
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<td>Chan Shui Yu</td>
<td>陳瑞如</td>
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<td>Chan Yau Hau</td>
<td>陳有后</td>
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<td>Chang Guoyung</td>
<td>張國勇</td>
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<td>Chen Baichen</td>
<td>陳白塵</td>
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Chen, Darwin
Chen Xieyang
Chim Shui Man
Chiu Oi Wan aka Chiu Chun Yu
Choi Suk Kuen
Chow Chi Fai
Chow Yung Ping
Chu Hak
Chung Kam Wing
Chung King Fai
Chung Ling Hoi
Chung Shu Kun, Christopher
Fung Bo Bo
He Jiping
Ho Man Wai
Ho Man Wui
Ho Wai Lung
Hwang, David Henry
Jiang Qing
Jiao Juyin
Jin Dongfang
Ju Tzong-ching
Ko Hon Man
Ko Leung
Kuh Fei
Kuo Wei-fan
Lai, Jane
Lam Sheung Mo
Lam Yik Wah
Lao She
Lau Fong Kwong
Lee Woon Wah
Leung Lup Yan
Leung Tin
Li Longyun
Li Ming Sum
Li Siu Wah
Lin Hwai-min
Lin Kehuan
Liu Shuk Fan
Liu Tsun Yan
Lo Ching Man
Lo Koon Lan
Lu Yan
Mak Sai Man
Man Sze Man
Man Tsz Leung
Mei Lanfang
Mao, Fredric
Mark, James
Mok Yan Lan
Ngai Yee Shan
Ooi, Vicki
Ouk Fung
Pao Hon Lum
Poon, Paul Wai Sum
Poon Pik Wan
Sales, A. de O.
Shu Qiao
Tang Shu Wing
Tian Benxiang
To Kwok Wai
Tsang Tak Sing
Tse Kwan Ho
Tsui Wing Shuen
Tue Liang Tee
Wan Fang
Wang Wen-yi
Wong Man Lee (aka Mary Wong)
Wu Dajiang
Wu Yigong
Wu Zuguang
Yam, Leo
Yan Wing Pui
Yang, Daniel S. P.
Ye Xuan
Yeung, Paul
Ying Ruocheng
Yu Hon Ting
Yu, Joseph
Yung Yee Yin
Yuen Lup Fun
Yu, Joseph
Zhang Heping

Scholars and Writers (some of the names are also involved in theatre)

Chan Ching Kiu
Chan Ka Yan
Chan Kai Cheung
Chin Wan
Choi Yuk Ping
Choi Po King
Chow, Rey
Chu Yiu Wai
Cheung Ping Kuen
Fong Chee Fun
Hung Ho Fung
Kuk Suk Mei
Leung Ping Kwan
Lo Wai Luk
Luk, Thomas Y. T. 陸潤棠
Man Kit Wah 文潔華
Poon Ngai 潘毅
Tao Siu Tip 涂小蝶
Ting Kai Luen 丁繼聯
Tse Kwan Choi 謝均才
Wong Chi Chung 黃志淙
Yee Lai Man 余麗文
Appendix 2

Cross-reference Lists: English and Chinese Names of Theatre Companies, Cultural & Arts Organizations and other Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theatre Companies and Cultural &amp; Arts Organizations</th>
<th>English Name</th>
<th>Chinese Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice Theatre Laboratory</td>
<td>愛麗絲劇場工作室</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amity Drama Club</td>
<td>致群劇社</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Cultural Council</td>
<td>亞洲文化協會</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing People’s Art Theatre</td>
<td>北京人民藝術劇院</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bestreben Drama Association</td>
<td>力行劇社</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chung Ying Theatre</td>
<td>中英劇團</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinematic Theatre</td>
<td>影話戲</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloud Gate Dance</td>
<td>雲門舞集</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Select Committee</td>
<td>文化委員會</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Services Division</td>
<td>文化事務科</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Lam Workshop</td>
<td>林奕華工作室</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federation of Inter-school Drama Clubs</td>
<td>校協戲劇社</td>
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<tr>
<td>Four Seas Players</td>
<td>四海劇團</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home Affairs Bureau</td>
<td>民政事務局</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts</td>
<td>香港演藝學院</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong Arts Development Council</td>
<td>香港藝術發展局</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong Ballet</td>
<td>香港芭蕾舞蹈團</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra</td>
<td>香港中樂團</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong Dance Company</td>
<td>香港舞蹈團</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong Federation of the Drama Societies</td>
<td>香港戲劇協會</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong Institute for Promotion of Chinese Culture</td>
<td>香港中華文化促進中心</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong Movie &amp; TV Theatrical Society</td>
<td>香港影視劇團</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong Performing Arts Development Council</td>
<td>香港演藝發展局</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong Repertory Theatre</td>
<td>香港話劇團</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong Theatre Libre Awards</td>
<td>香港小劇場獎</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong Theatre Works</td>
<td>香港戲劇工程</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong Youth and Tertiary Students Association</td>
<td>香港青年大專學生協會</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>International Association of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong)</td>
<td>國際演藝評論家協會（香港分會）</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure and Cultural Services Department</td>
<td>康樂文化事務署</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Theatre</td>
<td>生命劇團</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Chiang Kai Shek Cultural Centre</td>
<td>國立中正文化中心</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Theatre Concert Hall</td>
<td>國家兩廳院</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsense Theatre</td>
<td>糊塗戲班</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On and On Theatre Workshop
Performing Companies Sub-committee of the Urban Council
Prospects Theatre
Radifussion Television
Regional Council
Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture, Radio, Film and TV
Shanghai Opera House
Shanghai Symphony
Taipei Arts Festival
Taipei Percussion
Tang Shu Wing Theatre Workshop
The Prospects Theatre
Theatre Dojo
Theatre du pif
Theatre Ensemble
Theatre Horizon
Theatre Space
Urban Council
Urban Services Department
World Drama Society
Yangtze River Theatre of America
Zuni Icosahedron

Other Organizations

Breakthrough Ltd.
Crime Wing of Hong Kong Police Force
Diocesan Audio Visual Centre for Catholic Diocese
District Board
Hong Kong Federation of Students
Shanghai Committee of Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference
Special Branch
Appendix 3

Cross-reference Lists: English and Chinese Names of Titles of Drama Productions, Theatre Events, TV and Film Productions and Songs

Stage Productions

A Comedy of Betrothal
A Gleam of Colour
Antigone
Ball
Beckett
Before the Dawn Wind Rises
Boundary
Boundless Movement
Cabaret
Central Deconstructed
Crown ourselves with Roses
Death of a Salesman
1841
Equus
Fanshen
From Sunset to Sunrise — the Quintessential Cao Yu
I am a Hong Kong Person
In Praise of Parents
In the Shade of the Woods
Journey of the Stone
Laughing in the Wind
Li Shimin, King of Qin
Long Day’s Journey into Night
Love in a Fallen City
Macbeth
Measure for Measure
Noises off
One Family One Child One Door
Opium War – Four Letters to Deng Xiaoping
Othello (adaptation)
Peking Man
Pu Yi
Rashomon
Sai Jinhua
Saint Joan
72 Tenants
Side Door
Six Characters in Search of an Author
Sorrow of the Gentry
Sunrise
Tai Ping Tian Guo
Teahouse
The Caucasian Chalk Circle
The Dream of the Red Chamber
The Empress Dowager
The Empress of China
The Hour of the Stars
The Importance of Being Earnest
The Injustice Done to Tou Ngo
The Matchmaker
The Name
The Rickshaw-puller Camel Cheung
The Shape of the Moon
The Soongs: by Dreams Betrayed
The Sound of a Voice
The Story of Ah Q
The Story of Yu-huan
The Tragedy of Dr. Faustus
The Value of Youth
The Would-be Gentleman
Thunderstorm
Uncle Tom’s Cabin
Wang Zhaojun
West Side Story
Where Love Abides
Wilderness
Xiaojing Hutong
Yan Xijiao
Yesterday Child

《賽金花》
《聖女貞德》
《七十二家房客》
《側門》
《六個尋找作者的角色》
《朱門怨》
《日出》
《太平天國》
《茶館》
《紅鸞記》
《紅樓夢》
《西太后》
《中國皇后號》
《星星的時間》
《竇娥冤》
《俏紅娘》
《名份》
《駱駝祥子》
《月有圓缺》
《如此長江》
《聲》
《阿 Q 正傳》
《長恨歌》
《浮士德博士的悲劇》
《青春的價值》
《醉心貴族的小市民》
《雷雨》
《黑奴》
《王昭君》
《夢斷情天》
《人間有情》
《原野》
《小井胡同》
《閻惜姣》
《昨天孩子》
Theatre Events

Black Box Theatre
Drama Festival
Hong Kong Drama Award
Hong Kong Festival of the Arts
Outdoor Dance Ball
Peace Drama Drive
Playwright Scheme
Youth Festival

TV & Film Productions

*Hong Kong 1981 to Hong Kong 1986* 《香港八一至香港八六系列》
*Peking Opera Blues* 《刀馬旦》
*The Giant* 《強人》
*The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* 《網中人》
*The Passengers* 《抉擇》
*Waiting for Dawn* 《等待黎明》

Songs

*Bauhinia* 〈洋紫荊〉
*Below the Lion Rock* 〈獅子山下〉
*Unable to Express My Feelings for the Future* 〈說不出對未來的感覺〉
*The Pearl of the Orient* 〈東方之珠〉
Appendix 4

Cross-reference List: English and Chinese Names of Characters in Plays and Novels

Bai Liusu
Cheung Heung Mui
Cheung Sing Kwong
Cheung Sing Yee
Fan Liuyuan
Ho Kei Cheung
Ho Kei Woon
Kong Tzu Lau
Lam Kwok Man
Leung So
Leung Tin Chi
Li Chi Chung
Ling Huchong
Mother Li
Sai Jinhua
Sung Suk Man
Sze Ka Man
Ting Fung
Ting Po Hang
Uncle Choi
Wang Zhaojun
Yilin

白流蘇
張向梅
張承光
張承儀
范柳原
何其昌
何其煥
江子留
林覺民
梁蘇
梁天賜
李志忠
令狐沖
李母
賽金花
宋淑雯
施嘉雯
丁豐
丁寶恆
蔡伯
王昭君
儀琳
CURRICULUM VITAE

Academic qualifications of the thesis author, Ms. TAO Siu Tip:

- Received the degree of Master of Arts in Drama from San Francisco State University, January 1989.
- Received the Honours Diploma in Communications from Hong Kong Baptist College, November 1985.

December 2014