

Money Happily Spent: A Case Study of Social Resilience, Cultural Sustainability and Political Economy in the Hong Kong Indie Scene

Jonathan CHAN, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the ways individuals and groups in the Hong Kong indie music scene display a nuanced resilience based on an alternative form of capitalism to the changing political, economic and cultural environment in Hong Kong during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The Hong Kong indie scene has always existed precariously, constantly faces harsh economic conditions, marginalised by the dominant culture, constricted spatially by government regulations and at times targeted by law enforcement, prompting the scene to adopt self-reliance as a method of survival. Through an ethnographic examination of the political economy surrounding a recent music festival, I explore the ways that alternative capitalist modes of economy are mobilised in the scene to achieve cultural sustainability in the scene through forms of social resilience. These methods constitute a collective-oriented rather than individual-oriented form of capitalism where the scene's collective well-being is prioritised as displayed in the economic behaviour of individuals at this festival. I argue that the scene's social resilience allows the community to cope with and adapt to the governmentality at play in wider Hong Kong society by carving out a space for the precarious scene to survive by orienting consumption behaviour towards notions of cultural sustainability.

Keywords: Hong Kong indie music, resilience, capitalism, cultural sustainability.

Jonathan Chan is a Ph.D student of music at the Chinese University of Hong Kong specialising in research on the indie music scene in Hong Kong and primarily exploring issues of identity. He has been a member of the indie scene since 2015 and gradually has acquired more and more hats throughout his research including but not limited to: researcher, photographer, musician, gig organiser and podcaster.