

## Department of Languages & Cultures

2018 Research Seminar Series

Presents

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### Cantonese Pop Songs as the Postcolonial Avant-Pop



This paper examines the experimental forms of Cantonese pop songs and their socio-political identities in postcolonial Hong Kong. In the run-up to and since 1997, the year when the sovereignty over Hong Kong was returned to the People's Republic of China by the British government, there has been an outburst of Cantonese pop songs that push the envelope of the genre of Cantopop in articulating a wider range of critical issues. Focusing on the case of *When Heaven Burns* (2011), a TV drama series that allegorizes the post-1997 anxiety of Hong Kongers, this paper discusses the diegetic and extra-diegetic uses of Cantopop music in this drama series and the estranged experience that a specific version of Cantopop music can bring to the audience within and outside the TV screen. Aside from analyzing how *When Heaven Burns* estranges the censor of the Mainland Chinese government and the mainstream audience in Hong Kong, this paper explores the critical acclaim this drama series has earned and its uncharted relation to the participatory mode of politics articulated in the Umbrella Movement. Ultimately, this paper goes beyond the idea of Cantopop, coined by Billboard correspondent Hans Ebert in 1978, and seeks to articulate the idea of the Postcolonial Avant-Pop.