



香港中樂團

HONGKONG CHINESE ORCHESTRA

藝術總監：閻惠昌

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR : YAN HUICHANG

Transforming into a World-class Orchestra -

The HKCO's  
**First Ten Years**  
after Corporatization

Written by **Chow Fan-fu**

Translated by **Dr Peter Chung Lung-shan**

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## Preface >>>

Going back for a decade, the Preparatory Committee held its first meeting on 19 April 2000, when I was appointed by the Hong Kong Government to serve as the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee. The appointment was based on my passion for culture and art, in addition to my experience acquired as an Urban Councillor as well as my professionalism in corporate governance. It was surely a pleasant surprise to me.

The surprise arose from the novelty of the case, which was unprecedented corporatization of an art troupe. Without any reference from the past, I had to pave my way as a pioneer leading the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra (HKCO) to move forward, amidst the support of various stakeholders. It was pleasant as I could eventually contribute to this area of art, with my love for it. At the first meeting of the Council of Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra Limited in 2001, I was elected Founding Chairman of the Council. From then onward, I started the journey of HKCO's corporatization cautiously and prudently.

At the press conference to announce HKCO's corporatization, Mr Paul S W Leung, Director of Leisure and Cultural Services of the time, officially handed over the governance of HKCO, which he regarded as "marrying off a daughter of the Hong Kong Government", to the Orchestra's Council. This handover heightened the responsibility of corporate governance entrusted upon the HKCO Council. The ups and downs of HKCO's personnel and events can still be vividly recalled now. Although I was not in the position of Council Chairman throughout all these ten years, I have always accompanied the Orchestra all along.

Among the enthusiastic supporters of HKCO is definitely Mr Chow Fan-fu. He has witnessed many of the Orchestra's personnel and event developments since the founding of HKCO in 1977. His generous suggestions and sincere comments on the Orchestra over all the years have established him as one in the art circle who supports the Orchestra with all his heart and soul. We now have the honour and pleasure to have Mr Chow's written dedication in a Chinese publication to celebrate and witness the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of HKCO after its corporatization. On behalf of all my colleagues of HKCO, I express our heartfelt gratitude to Mr Chow.

I would also like to thank all the Artistic Advisors, Council Advisors, staff and friends of HKCO, the Hong Kong Government, the community at large and the supporting enterprises, as well as every member of the public in Hong Kong who has participated in the activities and concerts organized and delivered by HKCO.

We are the Chinese Orchestra of Hong Kong, the Chinese Orchestra of yours in Hong Kong.

To mark the 10th Anniversary of HKCO's corporatization, I have composed three Chinese poems, in the style of four-liner with seven words per line.

**A wonder groomed in Hong Kong's field of art  
Has grown with synergy in hues from start.  
An oriental culture roots strong pride  
That sends Chinese refrains on glow worldwide.**

**Intoxicating notes of lustrous sound  
Mark ethnic pipes and bows in craft abound.  
Reformed fine strings cum repertoires on board  
Enrich diversity in one accord.**

**In governance, fiducial roles commit  
To chart the course and drive in bearing fit.  
Observing systems properly designed  
All hearts on stage and rear become aligned.**

**Dr Carlye W L Tsui**  
Council Chairman of Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra

## Foreword

### – The Experience of Starting from Scratch >>>

There are advantages and disadvantages for public arts organizations to be wholly-owned, directly operated and managed by the government. From the perspective of corporate governance, this model is good because everything is under direct control. The arts groups can also enjoy sufficient resource input for rapid development under the support of a powerful government organism with amply resources and a comprehensive structure.

A disadvantage, however, will arise from the bureaucratic structure of the government. To ensure proper use of public money, and for open and fair operation, large frameworks and numerous regulations are put in place. All these, together with the bureaucratic practices, contradict the nature of art, in which innovation and breakthroughs are essential. Under this circumstance, the public arts groups face not only developmental constraints but also the risk of becoming the “mouthpieces” or “political tools” of the government, which will change the nature of art itself.

Even in the government’s view, the inherent contradiction between its bureaucratic structure and the nature of arts groups is hard to address. Various conflicts will inevitably arise in the process of operation management when it governs the performing arts groups directly. Not only will such conflicts turn into negative elements that affect their artistic image, the arts groups will also become hot potatoes.

Managing performing arts groups in a “public operation” model should only be adopted during their budding stage. The Government can establish arts groups through the “supporting” model, just like rearing children, and let them develop “independently” once they are mature enough to stand on their own.

On 11 February 2001, the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra (HKCO) organized the opening ceremony of the first Hong Kong Huqin Festival at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre Plaza. ‘Music from a Thousand Strings’ was the first important event after its incorporation. This event was later confirmed to be a *Guinness World Record* with the largest number of people performing the *huqin* at the same time.

After another month, the first Council was formed at the First Council Meeting. Dr Carlye Tsui was selected as the first Council Chairman and Ms Celina Chin was appointed the first Executive Director of HKCO.

The 2001-2002 Council consisted of the following members:

Chairman: Dr Carlye Tsui, JP MBE - Chief Executive Officer of the Hong Kong Institute of Directors, member of various public service committees, former member of the Urban Council and District Council

Vice Chairman:	Ms Barbara Fei, BBS - famous Soprano, Chairman of the Hong Kong Choir Association and Chairman of the Music Subcommittee of the Hong Kong Arts Development Council
Vice Chairman:	Mr John Fan, BBS JP - Principal of a secondary school, former member of the Urban Council and District Council
Hon Treasurer:	Mr Carlson Tong - accountant, Partner of KPMG, member of the Board of Directors of the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants
Hon Secretary:	Prof Chan Wing-wah, JP - famous composer, Head of Music Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Chairman of Hong Kong Composer’s Guild, Chairman of Composers and Authors Society of Hong Kong Limited (CASH)
Members:	Mr Davie Au-yeung- Honorary Council Member and Treasurer of Unicef, Executive Director of Hong Kong Jockey Club
	Ms Susanna Chiu – accountant, Operation Director of DVN (Holdings) Limited, ISACA (Chairman of China Hong Kong Chapter), Deputy Chairman of Information Technology Committee of Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants
	Mr Henry Lai - solicitor, Partner and Co-Chairman of P. C. Woo & Co, Director of Ebenezer School & Home for the Visually Impaired; Chairman of the Incorporated Management Committee of Lock Tao Secondary School
	Mr Kelvin Wong - Deputy Managing Director, COSCO SHIPPING Ports Limited, Council Member of The Hong Kong Institute of Directors, Chinese music lover

It can be seen from the background of the Council Members of the first term that professionals crucial to the operation of a “corporation”, including accountants, solicitors, administrators, financial management and public relations managers, were appointed. Other professionals knowledgeable in the music, culture and education aspects, which are directly related to the activities of a professional orchestra, were also indispensable. The background, abilities and degree of engagement of these Council Members were pivotal to the future development of HKCO after its incorporation as only these members had voting rights in Council meetings.

The Council regularly invited two representatives from the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) to attend its meetings. They were Ms Cynthia Liu, General Manager (Liaison, Arts Festival and Entertainment Programme) and Ms Pan Lo-mei, Senior Manager (Art Liaison), who were especially important during the transition period of HKCO's incorporation. Moreover, Music Director Maestro Yan Huichang, Executive Director Ms Chin Man-wah Celina (now Dr Celina Chin) and other department managers would also be invited to attend the meeting to discuss and report on specific issues when the Council considered it appropriate. Such arrangement was important for strengthening vertical communication during the transition.

The "incorporation" on 1 April 2001 heralded an institutional change to HKCO. Having been an arts group affiliated directly to the government for decades, it was turned into an "independent" performing arts group to be operated as a "corporation" overnight. It was a major institutional change indeed. While the bulk of HKCO's financial resources would still come from the government, the musicians in the orchestra had to "give up" the status of "contract employees of the Government" to become employees of an independent "corporation" and the "iron rice bowl" was gone. The psychological impact of the change on the staff and management of the entire HKCO could be imagined.

At the "Incorporation" Press Conference on 31 March 2001, the issues raised by the journalists were also matters of concern to everyone who cared about the art development in Hong Kong. Their questions focused on the "survival" of the arts groups, such as where their revenues would come from and whether they had to be "commercialized" for survival due to their "incorporation".

Dr Carlye Tsui of HKCO believed that the demands of the "customers" or "patrons", i.e. the audience, had to be considered in a commercialized society. Therefore, more high-quality programmes with creative promotion strategies would be produced. While the contents of the programmes would remain unchanged, the means of promotion would be diversified. More commercial approaches might also be adopted.

The direction of "incorporation" was on the right track and became a turning point for HKCO's development. All the musicians opted in and stayed behind, although most of the administrators, except Ms Celina Chin, who was invited by Council to stay, opted out and went back to LCSD instead of staying in the Orchestra. Hence everyone, no matter whether they were newcomers or cultural officials of LCSD, or even the Council members of the newly formed "Corporation", had to face the new culture brought about by the incorporation. A transition period for adaptation and dovetailing was required. Obviously, a new management model with a new culture, and more importantly, a novel space with novel thinking would emerge. HKCO would have to face new environmental changes that required new attempts and adjustments in various aspects to bring itself into an era of changes and challenges!



All council members came from diverse backgrounds and brought to the Orchestra professional knowledge, unique experience from different sectors and suggestions to ensure a balance of interests among all stakeholders. They played a crucial role in the development of the HKCO after 'incorporation'. This picture was taken in 2003.

*From left:* (standing) Ms Chin Man-wah Celina, Mr Ma Kai-loong Tony, Ms Chiu Lai-kuen Susanna, Mr Wong Tin-yau Kelvin, Mr Davie Au Yeung Tsan-pong, Mr Lai Hin-wing Henry, Mr Yan Huichang; (Sitting) Prof Chan Wing-wah, Mr John K P Fan BBS JP, Ms Carlye W L Tsui BBS MBE JP, Mr Carlson Tong, Dr Chan Kam-biu Joshua.

## HKCO's Global Vision and Hong Kong Mission

The transformation of HKCO started with the implementation of its incorporation and formation of the new management team. It was not a “revolution” but an “evolutionary” process, resembling the gradual return of spring to the world, which is gentle and earth nourishing. The effects did not come overnight. Instead, they emerged progressively and were not obvious until a few years later. Before its incorporation, HKCO experienced a change of its helmsman. Maestro Yan Huichang took up the duty within short notice. Soon afterwards, Hong Kong was returned to China. These are indispensable factors for any discussion on HKCO's transformation.

### **Yan Huichang taking up the challenge of a major change >>>**

The transformation of the incorporated HKCO in the 21st century can date back to June 1997 retrospectively. At that time, Mr Peng Xiuwen, a grandmaster of Chinese music, was unable to take up the appointment as he passed away unexpectedly. Maestro Yan Huichang had to take up the challenge with very short notice and he assumed the post of Music Director. This marked the commencement of a major change since HKCO became a professional orchestra in 1977. The leadership post was retitled Artistic Director and Principal Conductor in 2003. Now Artistic Director and Principal Conductor for Life, Yan Huichang has been the Music Director of HKCO for the longest time, after the former Music Directors Mr Ng Tai-kong (the Founding Director 1977-1985), Mr Kuan Nai-chung (1986-1990) and Mr Henry Shek (1993-1997). More importantly, under Yan's leadership, HKCO experienced internally and externally the inevitable major changes on the basis of the former Music Directors. Faced with such challenges, especially those arising from its incorporation, HKCO had to explore new horizons, make new achievements and reach new heights.

After he took office, Yan Huichang had to face challenges one after another. On the 12th day of his appointment, he had to lead HKCO on the stage to perform in two concerts, namely 'A Journey from the Past to Present' and 'The Charms of Hong Kong' for the Asian Performing Arts Festival held locally at the invitation of the National Arts Council of Singapore. The morale of HKCO was unstable among internal chaos in personnel matters. More significantly, it was the major historical moment of Hong Kong's return to China in 1997. The Orchestra's "mother body" would also be transferred to the newly formed Leisure and Cultural Services Department due to the dissolution of the Urban Council. More changes followed. It was not only the coming of the new century in 2000, which had more psychological effects than physical changes, but also the incorporation of HKCO, which had both psychological and physical impacts on everybody of the Orchestra.

First of all, the entire HKCO had to be "passed over" to the "Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra Limited" (HKCO Ltd). Everyone, including Yan Huichang, had to be re-employed by signing new contracts with the Council of HKCO Ltd. To this end, after HKCO Ltd. was officially registered in February 2001, its first Council was established on 19 March 2001. Dr Carlye Tsui was elected the first Council Chairman, who immediately appointed Mr Yan Huichang as HKCO's first Music Director after its incorporation and Ms Celina Chin as the Executive Director. The two Directors immediately studied the personnel arrangement of the newly incorporated HKCO and made recommendations to the HKCO Council.

On 2 April 2001, the HKCO Council approved the recommendation of the Music Director to create the posts of Deputy Concertmaster and Section Leaders, as well as the relevant employment conditions. On 9 April 2001, the Music Director's proposal was approved and a new post "Assistant Conductor (Research/Education)" would be created. In about three months since 1 July 2001, the Marketing and Development Manager, the Finance and Administration Manager and the Programme Manager were successively appointed. At the same time, Mr Yim Hok-man was appointed as the Deputy Concertmaster (now known as the Associate Concertmaster), as well as the respective Leaders of the Plucked Strings and Wind Sections. By the end of 2001, the administrative management team of HKCO was basically established.

## **Identifying the Vision and Announcing the Mission Statement**

**The commitments of the administrative management team included, on the one hand, assisting the Council in making policy decisions, and on the other hand, implementing such policies. How would the policies be made after HKCO's incorporation and what would they be? At the press conference for 'Incorporation of the Three Major Arts Groups', Dr Carlye Tsui, HKCO's Council Chairman, talked about the future objectives of HKCO. She said that the newly founded HKCO Ltd would be committed to providing balanced and diverse programmes to promote the creation of musical works with local features. In fact, her words had a complex issue simplified. As the leader of HKCO, she knew clearly that a specific direction should be set for the helmsman to guide the Orchestra to achieve its goal.**

It was in this context that the following Mission Statement of HKCO was made: “Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra is united in its commitment to offering excellence in Chinese music. With a contemporary momentum and a professional spirit, we aim to strive for the peak in music and attain the status of a world-class orchestra that is the pride of Hong Kong people.”

The Mission Statement was first published on the concert programme of ‘The Opening Concert of the Silver Anniversary Season – Entering the Music Palace’ (the first season after its incorporation) on 21 September 2001. The Statement was announced after thorough discussion among the newly formed Council, the Music Director Maestro Yan Huichang, who was in charge of the artistic aspects, the Executive Director Ms Celina Chin, who led the administrative work, the consultants, and even the musicians of HKCO, since its incorporation in April 2001. It is the directional guideline for HKCO’s long-term development. The Mission Statement is indeed the vision of HKCO.

After thorough discussion, the Council stipulated a set of Corporate Governance Principles and Guidelines for HKCO, in which the Orchestra’s Vision, Mission and Values (VMV) are set out clearly. The Principles and Guidelines also specify the role and responsibilities of the Council, internal structure of the Council, the relevant roles and responsibilities of the committees under the Council, the management personnel at various levels, duties of the Music Director and the Executive Director, restrictions of delegation of authority and rules about conflicts of interest. This set of principles is intended to provide HKCO with a clear set of guidelines with respect to work objectives, work requirements and authority granted in the execution of duties, etc. In addition to seeking to meet the principles of good corporate governance, the entire design can also achieve the objective of HKCO’s incorporation set by the LCSD: to enable the Orchestra to have more freedom in pursuing artistic ideals and to be more flexible in terms of administration to attract more support and participation from the general public.

To achieve HKCO’s VMV and the objectives, the first Council reached the following consensus in its specific work direction: to lead the orchestra into a market-oriented orchestra, to provide the public with outstanding Chinese music art, and to broaden the source of income, including endeavours to increase ticket sales and sponsorship.

### Launching brand new season subscription under the Mission Statement >>>

To better accomplish the two consensuses of the Council, it was necessary for HKCO to review its “products” - its concerts. In fact, after taking office, Yan Huichang began to review the track of HKCO’s past development, especially the large number of commissioned works accumulated by the Orchestra over a long time. His views were based on his experience and observations gained in the creation of Chinese music and conducting Chinese orchestras. Faced with the challenges of HKCO’s globalization in the new century and its incorporation, all members of the Orchestra came together to tackle the task through different channels. In accordance with the precept that the development trends of art and human social life are complementary with each other, a comprehensive season subscription on concert series was launched in the 2002-03 season towards the realization of the Mission Statement.

The season subscriptions of the year came in a few major series, including ‘Great Music by Great Musicians’, which covered HKCO’s flagship programmes that could best demonstrate the artistic strength and status of HKCO by combining acclaimed musicians and famous classic works. ‘The Music World’ series brought Chinese music to the international music stage and gave surprises overseas to expand the music vision of everyone. The ‘Chinese Music for the Family’ promoted music education through the fun in family and everyday life for those who cared about the growth of the younger generation. The ‘Exceptional’ series comprised a collection of music with extraordinary meaning, format, tactics or ideas that do not conform to ordinary rules, restraints and limitations for general concerts. The ‘Music from the Heart’ series were concerts designed and performed “by heart” of HKCO’s musicians to release their musical talents and provide larger creative space for composers. The four ‘Golden Chinese Classics of the Century’ concerts, which formed the backbone of the ‘Great Music by Great Musicians’ series, were the result of the historic project ‘Golden Chinese Classics of the Century - the Most Popular Chinese Works of the 20th Century’.

These series have become the basis of HKCO’s design so far. The names of some of the series have been revised over time but the design of basic contents and ideas still follow the spirit of “based in Hong Kong with global vision” enshrined in the Mission Statement.



‘The Eight Immortals’ Adventures’ was a multi-media production which transformed the Hong Kong Cultural Centre Concert Hall into a grand theatre installation, combining arts of various genres such as sand painting.



The ‘Grand Song’ (choral singing) of the Dong’s of Guizhou (which is inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*), the *pipa*-accompanied singing of the Dong’s of Rongjiang, the *lusheng* dance of the Miao’s etc., performed with the HKCO on stage. This dialogue between the ethnic and the modern, the vernacular and the orchestral delivered the Orchestra’s mission to perpetuate esoteric cultures by putting them on the world stage.



The concert ‘Poetry, Music and Painting’ attempted to exemplify the bedrock of Chinese culture by bringing together poetry, music and painting, three mainstream refined arts in the Chinese literati tradition.

### Cross-cultural, cross-media, festive and topical activities >>>

While the packaging design of concerts is constantly changing to maximize its functions, HKCO has always adopted the well-established system of commissioned work creation, which plays the role of a “locomotive” in the development of Chinese orchestras and creation of Chinese music. For example, 20 Hong Kong composers have been commissioned to create the ‘Cadenzas of Hong Kong’, a series of 20 works on the individual character and life of the 18 Districts of Hong Kong to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of HKCO. With the return of Hong Kong to China and the continuous opening of the country, talented Mainland composers other than those in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou are also invited to compose new masterpieces for the Orchestra. Moreover, foreign composers who are interested in Chinese music and culture have also been invited proactively. In promoting Chinese music creation, HKCO has demonstrated its spirit: “based in Hong Kong with global vision”.

Another cultural phenomenon of “globalization” is the increase in cross-cultural and cross-media activities. In addition to co-production of the musical *Tales of the Walled City* with the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre and the drama dance *Evacuation Order* with the Hong Kong Dance Company, HKCO’s cross-media production has also been increasing. In the 2010-2011 music season alone, there were *The Mystic Realm* (October 2010) and *The Eight Immortals’ Adventures* (December 2010) in collaboration with the dancing and drama sectors, *Carefree Calligraphy* (April 2011) with the calligraphy sector, *Music for Tranquility of Mind* (rerun) and *Intoxicating Nature* (June 2011) in the form of Chinese musical drama.

Festive activities are “based in Hong Kong with global vision” in their design. In 2001, the Huqin Festival was launched, followed by the Drum Festival in 2003, which was held ahead of schedule in hot summer due to the outbreak of the dreadful pandemic SARS at the time. The Drum Festival has become an annual event since then. Subsequent activities included the Dizi and Xiao Festival (2005), Zheng Festival (2006), Yangqin Festival (2008), The 2nd Huqin Festival of Hong Kong (2009), The Composers’ Festival (2010), The Conductors’ Festival of Hong Kong and the first International Conducting Competition for Chinese Music (2010-2011). These popular events of public concern went in line with other educational and community activities such as the thousand *huqin* performance and *huqin* workshops.

HKCO has seen rapid development in terms of the quality, quantity and forms of its activities since its incorporation. In addition to the regular concerts, public rehearsals, guided tours, pre-concert lectures and master classes, different types of outreach education activities are also arranged. The venues cover community halls, kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools, tertiary institutes, social welfare institutions, youth centers and shopping malls, as well as government departments and charity organizations. Among these outreach activities, the ‘Music for Love’ Scheme has been highly appreciated by all parties. HKCO is also engaged in the Arts Ambassadors-in-School Scheme (AAiSS) of the Hong Kong Arts Development Council and in the Liberal Studies subject in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) under the New Academic Structure (NAS) of the Education Bureau. HKCO has been working hard to develop online promotion channels. In addition to participating in the YouTube Online Symphony Orchestra, it has set up the vcast.tv channel to play clips of the Orchestra’s concerts and distribute the performers’ demonstrations and the composers’ works

through YouTube, Facebook, Tudou and Sina Weibo. All these aim at nurturing more potential audiences and Chinese music lovers.

After establishing partnership with the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, HKCO organizes various educational music activities there. They include ‘Joining the “Chinese Music World Today”’, a lecture series on Chinese music, and the ‘Chinese Music Express’, small group performances held regularly in the lobby. Other activities include the ‘Chinese Music DIY’ and the ‘Hong Kong Huqin Marathon’, which was live-broadcast round the clock although it could not come to a full completion because of a typhoon. These changes in activity modes show that HKCO has unlimited creativity and constantly seeks means to materialize its Mission Statement. This also allows the orchestra to be more diversified in the forms and contents after its incorporation.



Our signature concert series ‘Music for Tranquility of Mind’ was a music soul spa for the audience’s enjoyment.



The first Hong Kong Huqin Festival attracted 1,000 participants from different age groups and nationalities, which showed that music has a universality that breaks boundaries.



HKCO and 556 dizi lovers marked the third Guinness World Record for having the largest number of people playing the dizi together on the Avenue of Stars.



In 2003 during the post-SARS era, HKCO established the Hong Kong Drum Festival, and commissioned Shanxi Jiangzhou Drum Troupe to tailor-make a Chinese drum which was 3.47 m in diameter so as to bolster and consolidate the Hong Kong people. This event was one of the vibrant economic policies of the SARS government and was supported by the district councils of Hong Kong and various sponsors. Over 3000 Hong Kong citizens from 600 organizations played a drum piece which marked another Guinness World Records entry and boosted the morale of the Hong Kong people.

## As Ambassador in Overseas Tours to Reach World Standards

Since HKCO's incorporation in April 2001, it has formulated and implemented a series of measures to achieve its Mission Statement. Apart from the variations in its activity designs, a major change is seen in its strategy for overseas tours.

The former Urban Council, by which the professionalized HKCO was created, was obliged to serve the general public of Hong Kong. Therefore, the Urban Council neither funded nor encouraged overseas tours of the Orchestra at the beginning. It was not until 1982, four years after its establishment, that HKCO left Hong Kong for the first performance abroad. While everyone understood the importance of overseas tours for the Orchestra, its chances of success in applying to perform abroad were small. In the two decades before Hong Kong's return to China, HKCO made 14 overseas tours only.

### Difficulty arising from the change of concept >>>

In the decade between its incorporation in April 2001 and the five-member elite group's visit to Warsaw and Lublin in Poland upon invitation in June 2012, HKCO made 41 outbound tours for performances. The year with the most overseas tours was 2007, in which eight tours were made. Among all the destinations of visits, Macau and Mainland China accounted for 25 of them. These figures show that outbound tour performances have become an important part of the Orchestra's development. To this end, the Annual Report of HKCO for 2004-2005 is entitled *Cultural Ambassador of Hong Kong*. It is reported in HKCO's 2010-2011 Annual Report that more than 63 cities have been visited by the Orchestra. This highlights one of HKCO's achievements in its first decade of incorporation.

The overseas tours of HKCO sometimes comprise eight to ten musicians only. Most of the visits, however, are the lineup of the entire orchestra of some ninety members. It is costly to show HKCO's strengths and features faithfully outside Hong Kong, and rather complicated operation issues are involved.

The biggest problem, however, lies not in the funding, but in the change of concept. As far as the "immediate interests" of the musicians and HKCO itself are concerned, the overseas tours are "negative" only. During the tour performances, the musicians have less time to stay with their family members, the routine of their daily life is upset, the courses they teach have to be suspended and their part-time income is reduced. Those who are not accustomed to time difference may also suffer from insomnia, fatigue and stress. During the trip, they have to adapt to different climates and face greater pressure from different performing venues. Diet change is another problem. In some cases, when faced with such pressure, some musicians would hide themselves in the hotel room to practise throughout the whole trip, even beyond the time for routine performance and practice. Wherever they went, the fun of touring and sightseeing was all lost. At the same time, normal performances had to be maintained despite the increase in overseas tours. That is to say, there was a net increase in "workload". Hence, resistance arose inevitably from the musicians against frequent overseas tours.

For the management team of HKCO, overseas tours are also stressful work. Challenges and pressure, however, are often powerful engines for enhancement and elevation. In a well-planned patient manner, the management of HKCO has led all members to understand the significance, role, and value of the tours directly or indirectly through discussion, sharing and explanation sessions. A common consensus is eventually reached. Overseas tours, which are more frequent and challenging subsequently, have become HKCO's "regular activities" rather than "special performances".

### Impacts and inspiration from peers in Mainland China >>>

Among these overseas tours, the ones visiting China and Europe are especially inspiring.

The vast land of Mainland China is the soil of the deep-rooted Chinese folk music. HKCO finds it especially challenging when performing at cities with cultural heritage and large-scale Chinese orchestras as there is inevitably the feeling of someone who shows craft before a grandmaster!



'Water and Life - An International Concert in Support of 2008 World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought' took place in the headstream of the Yellow River. It was of great significance.

Since its incorporation in 2001, HKCO's visits in Mainland China cover all major cities of the Pearl River Delta, including Shenzhen and Guangzhou, and the large coastal cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou and Nanjing, as well as major inland cities like Chengdu and Xi'an. The Orchestra has even performed on the shore beside the upstream source of the Yellow River in Qinghai Province. Wherever HKCO goes, its high-level performances are appreciated. The mental pressure from the feeling of showing craft before a grandmaster is gone. It has successfully established the image and brand name of a "Super-Chinese orchestra"!

In fact, the greater significance of the tours lies in HKCO's influence on and inspiration to the folk orchestras in Mainland China. These peers often appreciate HKCO's performance during the tours as "stunning". Its strong expressiveness in music has greatly changed the concept of Chinese orchestras. Its professional operation and management have directly affected the development model of its Mainland peers. Mr Wang Yijian, Head of the Shanghai National Orchestra, remarked honestly that since the reform of his orchestra in 2005, he has adopted the operational model of HKCO. This case clearly shows HKCO's influence in Mainland China.

HKCO's music tour in Chengdu before the Mid-Autumn Festival in September 2011 also radiated the Orchestra's energy beyond the development of music and onto academic and social levels. In addition to the Golden Autumn Concert at Chengdu, HKCO also went to the Sanxing Town Hong Kong Youth School located in the northeastern suburb of Chengdu for a demonstration performance in the form of a small ensemble. It also performed with members of the folk music department of Sichuan Conservatory of Music during the signing ceremony of the art cooperation agreement.

These three activities actually allowed the concept of "all-round cooperation between Sichuan and Hong Kong" to become reality. They were lined up by the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Chengdu formally established in 2007 to expand its functions from purely economic and trade activities to areas covering culture, medicine, sports, education and other aspects. The two music-education related activities held at the Hong Kong Youth School have much social significance, and the activities demonstrated the importance of investment and development in cultural education. For professional musicians, another message from these events is that modern-day artists cannot focus on their artistic level only; they must consider the needs of social and life aspects as well. To those in Mainland China, this is a new concept with great impact.

### New realm for folk music emerging from the European Tour >>>

HKCO's European Tour has another significance. In Europe, homeland of Western music culture, it is never easy for China's Chinese music to gain recognition. To Chinese orchestras, the challenge comes more from the "products" of the Chinese orchestra itself. While the "music" played by the Chinese orchestras goes beyond language barriers, it differs greatly from the Western music that westerners, especially those living outside the Chinese world, are accustomed in terms of tonality, style and aesthetic feels. HKCO's success achieved in its European music tours surely help it attain the status of a world-class orchestra that is the pride of Hong Kong people. At the same time, it is conducive to the entrance of large-scale Chinese music to the western music sphere.

Except its first European tour held in November 1998, all other visits paid by HKCO to Europe so far took place after its incorporation. Under the leadership of Maestro Yan Huichang, the Music Director (subsequently retitled Artistic Director) of the time, HKCO's first tour performance in Europe was a success. The orchestra was invited to join the internationally renowned Festival van Contrasten. HKCO was the first Chinese orchestra to give a concert at The Royal Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. The Orchestra also performed in Rotterdam, the second largest city of the Netherlands. Both performances were enthusiastically well responded.

In early February 2002, HKCO made the first overseas visit after its incorporation. It was invited to visit Germany and Austria to give three memorable concerts at Goldenersaal of Vienna, the Municipal Hall of Deggendorf, and the Herkulesaal Residence of Munich. The formally dressed audience were all mature Europeans who appreciated the music with full dedication and concentration. The performers on the stage were obviously infected and became more dedicated and concentrated in return. Finally, the conductor Hubert Yan returned on stage for a total of eight times and the audience still had no intention to leave after

three more encore pieces had been played! The successful European Tours are evidences to show that China's Chinese orchestras have entered the mainstream society in Europe and America!

In early November of the following year, HKCO visited London. The venue was the Natural History Museum in London. The concert given on a temporary stage was attended by guests from various countries. The Orchestra played *Moonlight over Spring River*, the pipe concerto *The Silk Road Fantasy Suite* and *Ink Spirit*, with Peng Xiuwen's *The Terra Cotta Warriors* as the finale. Eventually Yan Huichang conducted four encore pieces additionally to end the performance amidst cheers.



HKCO performed at The Natural History Museum of London 'Dances with the Dragon'. The audience's response was enthusiastic. Four encore pieces were played before loud cheers greeted the conclusion of the concert.

During the 35th Festival de Saint-Denis held between 27 May and 30 June 2004, along with the events for “Chinese Culture in France” and “Year of Chinese-French Culture”, HKCO visited Paris for the first time and gave two concerts. The first one, entitled ‘Tan Dun & Hong Kong’ was staged in the Pavillion de la Legion d’Honneur, and the second at Basilica St. Denis, during which the famous Chinese cellist Wang Jian played Bach’s *Suiten für Violoncello Solo*, and HKCO performed *As the Moon Rises* and Zhao Jiping’s *The Silk Road Fantasy Suite*.

Only four months after its return from Paris, an elite group of HKCO performed in three concerts held at the China Club of Adlon Hotel in Berlin of Germany, Prague Municipal House in Prague of Czech Republic and Iveay House in Dublin of Ireland respectively between late October and early November 2004.

Two years later, the European Tour continued. In late October 2006, the Hong Kong Trade Development Council hosted the “2006 Hong Kong Dinner in London” and the elite group performed at the Four Seasons Hotel in London.

### The breakthrough in Russia and the Four City Tour in Britain >>>

In 2007, HKCO’s Music Tour saw another breakthrough. The elite team comprising 11 musicians performed at the “Hong Kong Week” in Moscow and St. Petersburg under the leadership of Maestro Yan Huichang between 24 and 28 September. The first concert was held at the Russian Cultural Center in Moscow, and the second stop was St. Petersburg. The venue was the prestigious St. Petersburg State Cappella Hall. Both performances were well received. Frederick Ma, the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development of the time, described the performances of the HKCO elite team as “Hong Kong’s breakthrough in Russia”.

In March 2008, HKCO was invited to perform at the China Now Festival 2008 in four cities in the UK. The schedule was not only tight, but also a challenge to the Orchestra’s adaptability. The concerts were held in four different concert halls, including the Royal Festival Hall in London, Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, Birmingham Town Hall in Birmingham and Sage Gateshead in Newcastle, all of which are famous international halls of music art. The four concerts were operated on “commercial” basis. After the three encore pieces in each performance, the lively scene of the audience’s applauding was the common ending. The feedback from all parties and the comments in the media were highly appreciative.

HKCO kicked off its 33rd Season with two concerts held at the Klara Festival in Brussels, Belgium in 28 August to 11 September 2009. The first concert was a cultural collision between the East and the West, and a crash of traditional and modern music. In the first half, the Belgium symphonic orchestra Symfonieorkest van Vlaanderen played the opera aria of Stravinsky and Puccini. In the second half, HKCO played *Dragon-lantern* by Tang Lok-yin, a young composer in Hong Kong, Zhao Jiping’s cello concerto *Zhuang Zhou’s Dream* and Chan Ming-chi’s *Jing-Qi-Shen*, all of which won thunderous applause. In the second concert, Guo Wenjing’s *A Va Mountain*, Zhao Jiping’s *Memories*, the fourth movement of *The Desert Smoke Suite*, Doming Lam’s *Autumn Execution*, and the British composer John Howard’s

*Five Studies*. The finale was Cheng Dazhao’s *The Yellow River Capriccio*. The orchestra finally added the traditional Chinese music *Horse Race*, and then interacted with the audience to perform *Legend of the Condor Heroes*. The entire audience stood up and applauded.

In December of the same year, HKCO arranged an elite group of nine people to join Belgium’s European China Festival, featuring different forms such as solo, ensemble and female vocals. Together with on-the-spot ink painting, the traditional and modern Chinese music performed by the group was moving and highly appreciated.

### Five unique performances starting from the Arctic Circle >>>

In the previous ten European tours, HKCO performed in full orchestra, and the selections were mostly modern and original music. The group performances, however, included both traditional and modern original music. In the European and African Tour of the two continents held in February 2011, it was the first time for HKCO to play in elite groups and full orchestra. Two of the seven concerts were staged by the elite groups. The Orchestra toured Europe during the New Year of the Rabbit and planned to enter Africa and Egypt for the first time. The whole event was to start from Tromsø in the Arctic Circle, and then back to Switzerland, Lucerne, Stuhr of Germany, Prague and Berlin, then do south to Egypt, Cairo and Alexandria, lasting for twenty-one days between 28 January and 19 February 2011. A total of seven performances were scheduled. The whole troupe comprising more than 100 members, including the administrative staff, was the largest over the years. Unfortunately, due to changes in the political situation in Egypt, the concerts to be held there had to be cancelled under security considerations, but it was still a large-scale music exchange event that lasted 18 days. The troupe traversed many cultural cities in Europe and staged a total of five concerts.

The venues of the five concerts each has its own unique and distinctive feature to give the audience a new experience. The first is Tromsø, a northern Norwegian city 350 kilometers away from the Arctic Circle. A group of ten elite musicians of HKCO brought the joyful atmosphere of the Chinese New Year to the music hall which may probably be one closest to the North Pole. This Spring Festival concert was the highlight of 50 concerts, lectures and masterclasses of the 24th Nordlysfestivalen, the polar-light music festival held in the Arctic Circle. HKCO’s performance was arranged at the grand theatre Hovedscenen of the cultural center Kulturhuset, which can accommodate more than four hundred people. While Beijing Opera had been staged there about ten years ago, this concert of large-scale orchestral ensemble of Chinese music was the first one ever held there.

In the evening, the programme manager of HKCO played the role of a music guide to brief the audience about various instruments, especially the Eco-Huqin developed by HKCO itself. As expected, the audience’s emotion was brought to a climax and their passion for Chinese music was ignited when Liu Mingyuan’s *Full of Joy* and the typical Cantonese music *Thunder in a Drought* were played with their distinct rhythm and atmosphere. The finale of the concert was *Morning* of the Edvard Grieg’s *Peer Gynt Suites*, the Norwegians’ treasure. HKCO’s version was rearranged especially for this Polar Light Music Festival by Tang Lok-yin, a Hong Kong composer commissioned for the work. Once the theme melody

was played, applause and laughter began. Whistles and cheers rang all over the concert hall. Under the warm applause of the entire audience, the group played additionally the *Full Moon and Blossoming Flower* to end the concert!

Another concert of the elite team was staged in Prague, Czech Republic. The venue was Suk Hall named after Josef Suk (1874-1935) in the old town Rudolfinum. The classic shoe-box style music hall was decorated elegantly but simply, with more than 200 seats. The atmosphere of this group performance was as enthusiastic as that at Tromsø's, ending in the audience's applause and shouts of "Bravo".

### Five original pieces breaking the cultural barrier >>>

After performing in the Arctic Circle, the elite group of HKCO joined the entire orchestra of 85 people at Dubai to fly to Luzern of Switzerland, where the first concert of the large Chinese orchestra in full establishment started. The next concert in Tahangoff and Berlin of Germany were also a big show of the full-fledged HKCO.

The venue of the Lucerne concert was the KKL Music Hall, which has been built on the shores of Lake Lucerne for only a decade. KKL is the German abbreviation of Kultur-und Kongresszentrum, Luzern, which is one of the most attractive modern buildings in Switzerland. The concert hall can accommodate 2,100 people. It was a full house at the concert of HKCO that evening. Formally dressed members of the audience filled the lobby during halftime break. The warm atmosphere contrasted strongly with the cold weather outside, but the hottest was the enthusiasm that overwhelmed the performance of HKCO inside.

The repertoire of HKCO's concerts placed much emphasis on the artistic expression of a large-scale Chinese orchestra. The opening episode was *Rejoice in Peace* (premiered in 1993), a modern piece of Chinese music by Chan Wing-wah, a contemporary composer of Hong Kong. The next was He Zhanhao's *zheng* concerto *A Peacock Flying to the Southeast* (premiere in 1992). The last piece for the first half of the concert was *A Va Mountain*, the first movement of the *Three Melodies of West Yunnan* (premiered in 1994) by the Beijing composer Guo Wenjing. After the interval break, the Chinese composer Zhao Jiping's pipe concerto *The Silk Road Fantasy Suite* was played. Cheng Dazhao's *The Yellow River Capriccio* came as the finale. The full set of five pieces of music are original works. For European audiences, these works were all new to their ears. More than superficial effects, the music pieces contain much emotional depth. How would Western audiences react? Would they resonate? It was really a suspense. The results were very surprising. Together with the subsequent two performances, the "temperature" in the venue was constantly rising, and the audience's mood was getting hotter and hotter. Obviously, the music of HKCO broke the cultural barrier step by step, leading eventually to a strong resonance among the audience.

HKCO's next concert at Stauffer's was held at the Gut Varrel Concert Hall, which has been transformed from a horse stable into a historical and cultural heritage of the country for five or six hundred years. As many as 250 concerts are staged there every year. The concert hall with 500 seats still maintains its original structure, with many farm tools of the past still kept as decoration to retain the farmhouse ambience. The atmosphere of the concert hall was very unique. It was a full house. Before the opening, the audience

behaved like a grand event of the West, in which everyone was formally dressed. Unexpectedly, everyone had a strong resonance with an orchestra from a foreign land playing unfamiliar musical instruments. The local mayor, Mr Cord Bockhop, took to the stage to congratulate the musicians at the end of the concert, and applauded enthusiastically with the audience on their feet! Standing ovation with cheers and "Bravo" roared after the finale *The Yellow River Capriccio*. The enthusiasm of the scene had never been seen by HKCO since its establishment in Hong Kong more than 30 years ago.

### Composer Jeffrey Ching's professional opinion >>>

The last stop was the Komische Oper in Berlin. The audience was equally dedicated and the orchestra's performance was equally warmly welcomed. Many people also stood up and applauded. Their excited sentiment also stimulated good sale of HKCO's DVD and CD products!

After careful analysis, the surprisingly good results come from the following four aspects. First, a 'tour guide' among the local celebrity in the local music circle is invited to guide the audience in every performance. In particular, Gerhard Schmitt Thiel, the famous German TV star who is familiar with classical music, introduces the Eco-Huqin series successfully developed and produced by HKCO. He has played an important role in guiding the communication between the audience and music.

The second is that after HKCO has fully switched to the Eco-Huqin, the overall tone of the orchestra is more sonorous and harmonious, which greatly changes the audience's feeling of the Chinese orchestra. The five pieces of music fully reflects the strong expressiveness of HKCO after the improvement of the instruments. The third is that each piece of music has a distinct feature and clear content. It is not difficult for foreign audiences to grasp the basic emotions of each piece. Luo Jing's *zheng* solo has a narrative effect, and Guo Yazhi's pipe is unique. The colour and the amazing acoustic changes, and the magical atmosphere of the Western Region created by it, are extremely pleasing. During the last piece *The Yellow River Capriccio*, the conductor Yan Huichang "taught" the audience to play the *bolong* drum (a kind of rattle drum) to interact with the Orchestra. It ignited the audience's enthusiasm to explosion! At the end of the music, most of the audience stood up and applauded, yelling "Bravo". The three encore pieces, *Full Moon and Blossoming Flower*, *Legend of the Condor Heroes*, and *Horse Race*, raised the audience's passion one after another.

The Chinese composer Jeffrey Ching, who has settled in Berlin, talked about his feeling after the concert. His words can best tell the reason why HKCO's performance can win such a strong resonance and response from Europeans. He has made four points. First, he has never thought that a Chinese orchestra can play such a harmonious and expressive piece of music. Second, he has been deeply impressed by both Guo Wenjing's *A Va Mountain* and Zhao Jiping's *The Silk Road Fantasia Suite*, because of not only the unique sound colour of the pieces, but also their profound contents. The third is that there has been interaction between the orchestra and the audience in some tunes of the event so that everyone can be more engaged with stronger resonance. Fourth, the orchestra has shown very good discipline, which can attract the audience from the moment of its appearance on stage.

Jeffrey's view is of course the professional opinion of a musician. It is also the feeling of the average European audience who are accustomed to Western symphony tradition. The music effect and artistic expression of an orchestra can play is obviously one of the most important criteria for the audience. Hence, it is not unexpected that the symphonic HKCO can "conquer" the audience who have grown up on the land of symphony music.



HKCO was invited by the Carnegie Hall, New York to perform at "Ancient Paths, Modern Voices: Celebrating Chinese Culture" Festival Concert'.



During Les Années Chine-France, HKCO was invited to perform in Paris for the first time, the first concert was held at Pavillon de la Legion d'Honneur, while the second was held at the Basilica of Saint-Denis.



The concert at Komische Oper Berlin received a standing ovation, which showed the orchestration of HKCO had "conquered" the audience in Europe.

### Administrative flexibility for more space of development >>>

Beyond the artistic level, however, HKCO is probably the Chinese orchestra with the most visits in Europe and the United States (and also Mainland China). What happened behind the scene may be the more important for its development. After the incorporation of HKCO, its operation and management can be freed from the constraints of the "public art groups" of the past. It has more space to develop itself. In the administrative aspect, it can deal more flexibly with the complicated problems faced by the tours. Among such problems, the biggest are unforeseen issues to be tackled. The executives of the arts groups, especially those of the management, often need to use the "reserve" of their savvy to make flexible responses. Such issues are something that the "public art group" find difficult to address.

In fact, the backgrounds of the overseas visits which have helped HKCO develop its image of "Hong Kong Cultural Ambassador" are varied. The sources of funding and the modes of operation are different. The ten European tours after its incorporation, for example, fall in three main types:

1. Hosted by local institutions or concert halls through intermediary agents overseas. For example, the concerts of the China Now Festival 2008 held in four UK cities in March 2008 were hosted by four concert halls in London, Manchester, Birmingham, and Kieskerd of Newcastle respectively. Askouas Holt, a famous international music manager company acted as the intermediary.
2. Invited by the local art festival, concert hall or manager company. For example, the three Brussel concerts of HKCO held in September 2009, on the other hand, were played upon invitation of the Kalila International Music Festival. The German and Austrian visits in February 2002 and the New Year European Tour for the Year of the Rabbit held in February 2011 were planned and arranged by Wu Promotion, an international music touring agent owned by a Chinese businessman and his son in Austria and Germany.
3. Foreign visits dovetailing with government activities. For example, HKCO was invited by the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office to visit London for the first time in 2003 to coordinate with the Hong Kong SAR Government's efforts to reorganize the economy. To dovetail with the visits of the Secretary for Administration at the time, HKCO staged a tour in three European countries in October 2004. Two years later, in October 2006, HKCO performed in London to fit in the visit of the Secretary for Administration then. The 'Music Tour for Economy and Trade' held in Moscow and St. Petersburg in 2007 was another example.

The first two types of foreign visits must be funded through different channels, including the remuneration paid by the inviting institutions, the HKSAR Government through various forms of funding, and the sponsorship of commercial organizations. Only after successful "fundraising" can the overseas visits come true. In the third type of music tours, which dovetail with the visits of government heads or in conjunction with the promotion of economic activities, HKCO serves the role of "the Cultural Ambassador of Hong Kong". After the return of Hong Kong to China, HKCO's role of an "ambassador" to Mainland China has

also enhanced. However, whether it is going back to Mainland China or going overseas to be a “Cultural ambassador of Hong Kong”, the funds are generally paid by the government.

**The only way to build a world-class orchestra >>>**

When compared with the orchestra itself, the music and image of HKCO can highlight the characteristics of partnership between Chinese and Western cultures in Hong Kong. The significance of HKCO’s overseas visits lies not only in its role as a Cultural Ambassador of Hong Kong, which is obvious to all. What is more important is that the visits have strengthened the internal cohesion of the orchestra and enhanced the orchestra’s performing standard. The effects of the tours in this respect are irreplaceable. During the overseas visits, the time spent by the musicians staying together will surely increase. More often than not, it is necessary for the whole group to face different situations and solve different problems. These visits help nurture the orchestra’s culture that “HKCO is a big family” and its internal cohesion is stronger. On the other hand, the orchestra needs adjustments and adaptations at different performance venues. The more foreign tours HKCO takes, the stronger the adjustability and adaptability of the musicians will be, and the more stable the orchestra will maintain in high level performances.

Moreover, with more exposure in cities of various cultures, the musicians have access to a wider world. Their vision and horizon have been expanded and broadened. This is even more important for enhancement in skills. In other words, overseas tours are the only way for HKCO to pursue its “commitment to offering excellence in Chinese music” and for the dream that HKCO attains “the status of a world-class orchestra that is the pride of Hong Kong people” as declared in the Mission Statement to come true.

Today, all musicians in HKCO, including members of the new generations, must be able to cope with the “global challenges” from overseas tours in order to stay in the Orchestra. HKCO is no doubt the Hong Kong performing arts group with the most visits to foreign countries and Mainland China. More importantly, the level of its performance and its image of a “world-class orchestras” have become increasingly clear.



## Eco-Huqin - New Breakthrough in Musical Instrument Reform

The success in the research and development of the Eco-Huqin Series is an important factor for the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra (HKCO) to become a “Cultural Ambassador of Hong Kong” during its tours around the world and to have established successfully an international reputation. This essential aspect, however, might have been overlooked by many people. The successful implementation of the Eco-Huqin project, on the other hand, is an important result of HKCO’s incorporation.

In 2010, HKCO commissioned the Tainan National University of the Arts in Taiwan to conduct an acoustic analysis of the *eco-huqin*. In November of that year, Professor Zheng Deyuan led the professors of the National Music Institute to test them in HKCO and the anechoic chamber of the Mechanical Department of the University of Hong Kong. In May 2011, the *Eco-Huqin Acoustic Analysis Report* was published. The test data reads, “The *eco-huqin* retains beautifully the timbre of the traditional version. It is comparable to that of traditional ones, but the *eco-huqin* generates better quality sound in the higher hand positions, and better facilitates bow manipulation.” This is a further step of HKCO in instrumental reform over the years and has affirmed its effort from the scientific and musical levels. The success of the *eco-huqin* signifies a major breakthrough in the development of traditional Chinese musical instruments.

### Establishment of the Instrument Research and Development Department in 2004 >>>

The history of musical instrument development denotes a process of improvement and evolution. This process is the same for both European and Chinese musical instruments. The difference between them lies in their respective developmental direction. For European instruments, the needs for orchestral ensemble set their goal of improvement clearly towards “commonness”. Chinese musical instruments, however, emphasize traditionally their “personality” in solo playing. The directions of improvement for the two types of musical instruments, therefore, differ greatly. It can be said that the musical instruments of the Western orchestra today are the result of continuous improvement and perfection of “commonness” after two to three centuries. The history of enhancement for the musical instruments of the Chinese orchestra, on the other hand, has been less than a hundred year even if it is counted from the appearance of the first ensemble of Chinese musical instruments in 1919. In fact, since the beginning of the 20th Century when the idea of organizing a Chinese orchestra sprouted, the focus of Chinese musical instrument reform has been swaying between personality and commonality. The direction has been unclear and indefinite.

Maestro Ng Tai-kong, the Founding Music Director of HKCO, emphasized that the improvement of musical instruments was an important part of the Orchestra. However, restricted by the Orchestra’s structure, management concepts and resource allocation at the time, the efforts in this aspect could not be made well. It was not until the incorporation of HKCO, when it had the conditions of independent operation, that the targets in researching and developing musical instruments regained attention. The plan on instrument improvement, research and development was adopted after repeated discussions by the HKCO Council. As the first move, Mr Yuen Shi-chun, the Principal of Liuqin, was transferred to become the Research Development Officer (Musical Instrument) under the Education and Research Department on 1 September 2003. In the next year, the Research and Development Department was established and the Instrument Reform Project was placed under HKCO’s regular establishment development. Mr Yuen has also become a researcher and Director of Instrument Research and Reform of the department. The Artistic Director Yan Huichang has personally served as the head of the Instrument Study Group, with Yuen Shi-chun, Guo Yazhi and Chew Hee Chiat (who was appointed Assistant Conductor (Concert/I.T.) as deputy heads. At the same time, an instrument trial group was formed by musicians. HKCO’s Instrument Reform Project officially entered its agenda at that point of time. The title of Yuen Shi-chun was also changed to Research Fellow of Research and Development Department on 1 September 2007.

### Instrument reform pursuing commonality of orchestra ensemble >>>

The direction of HKCO’s research and development of musical instruments has been clear and specific from the very start. It is to explore and transform the commonality of the Orchestra. Yan Huichang says, “When I first came to HKCO around 1997 and 1998, I found that the musical tones of the 43 string musicians in the Orchestra were not uniform. Even though huqins of similar quality were bought collectively, the tones were varied and the effect had no guarantee. Moreover, HKCO pays overseas visits frequently for performances but It is often difficult to go through customs checks at borders because of the python skin, which may violate environmental protection regulations of the countries. Such situations

are embarrassing indeed. Therefore, the prerequisite of the *huqin* reform is that snake skin will not be used and the goal is to unify the tone of the string group. At the same time, there are three elements that must be preserved for the *gaohu*, *erhu* and *zhonghu*. First, their appearance must remain the same so that they can be recognized at first sight. Second, the tone is basically the same, and third, the way of playing is unchanged.”

As such, the reforms of *gaohu*, *erhu* and *zhonghu* were carried out under the premise of keeping the appearance, basic tone and way of playing of the original instruments. Mr Yuen Shi-chun, the person in charge of the project, says, “We no longer use the dark brown python skin. Artificial leather made of PET polyester film produced by DuPont Chemical Corporation of the United States is used as the vibrating membrane to be mounted on the sound box of the instrument. The curvature of the interior and the thickness of the wall are redesigned and adjusted. Because of the uniform thickness, high vibration and strong elasticity of the PET film, the basic tone of the original instrument is beautified, and the noises caused by irregularity of the python thickness are gone. While the flavour of the original python leather instrument has been reduced, the integration of ensemble is greatly increased. This has enhanced the melodic thickness of each pitch range for each of the three string instruments in the overall ensemble. The respective volume of the *gaohu*, *erhu* and *zhonghu* has increased. This is obvious, especially in their lower positions for higher pitch ranges.”

The improvement of the *huqin* family’s bass instruments is even more challenging. In order to harmonize the plucked instruments of the Chinese orchestra (*yangqin*, *pipa*, *ruan* and *zheng*) with the membrane-vibrating string instruments, a new exploration based on the “Membrane-Sound Box Dual Resonance 64-Model” *gehu* was started. Yuen Shi-chun says, “The “Membrane-Sound Box Dual Resonance 64-Model” *gehu* is made by Yang Yusen of Shanghai. After we negotiated with his son Yang Hongguang about the copyright, we replaced the python of the resonance box with PET polyester film and made some other major changes to the shape and materials of the bass instruments. The volume of the resonance box and the curvature of the inside have been altered and the tail window is narrowed. The case is changed to spruce for faster sound transmission. The front and back panels of the resonance box are now made of paulownia to keep in line with the resonant panels of the plucked instruments. We made eleven structural changes to the *gehu* in three years. The HKCO *Gehu* used by the Orchestra produces a new sound whose volume is no smaller than that of the cello.”

HKCO1 Bass *Gehu* is a Chinese bass string instrument independently developed by HKCO. Yuen Shi-chun says, “The bass function and performance of the HKCO1 Bass *Gehu* is roughly the same as that of the python skin bass *gehu* and the double bass. The sound quality of HKCO1 Bass *Gehu* is between the two, with both characteristics of the membrane vibrating *gehu* and plate vibrating cello. Its shape and structure also combine the characteristics of both. The resonance box of HKCO1 Bass *Gehu* is composed of a large oval cylinder made of fir and an embedded rectangular resonance box made of pine. The oval cylinder is covered with eco-fibre to become the sound box. When the bridge vibrates on the resonance box, the side-bridge joining to the bridge simultaneously activates the fiber membrane of the sound box to produce a composite plate-membrane resonance. The sound of the HKCO1 bass *gehu* has both the plate-vibrated sound of the pine resonance box and membrane-vibrated sound of the sound box to produce a

new sound with mixed quality. This sound serves as a strong fusion agent that blends the sound of the plucked instruments and that of the string instruments.”

### The miracle to create Eco-Huqin in three to four years >>>

The *eco-huqin* family has maintained the basic tone and playing skills of the original instruments. Therefore, the shifts among different tone parts of the reformed *eco-huqin* instruments are still very clear and will not be mixed up. The bass instruments can blend the plucked and the string instruments. It lasted three and a half years from the birth of the first *eco-gaohu* in December 2005 to the entrance of the first bass *gehu* into HKCO in February 2009. During this period, the funds invested by the Orchestra were all drawn from its recurrent expenses. It is no wonder that the industry experts in the Mainland find it a miracle for HKCO to make these achievements in a few years under such tight funding!

We can say that the Eco-Huqin Series have created an overall sound of novelty for the Chinese orchestra. Its influence on the development of Chinese music is not difficult to imagine. However, to promote these “cultural and creative products”, which are the pride of Hong Kong people, requires significant resource input. To HKCO, this is beyond its capabilities. We don’t know whether the government departments that have been advocating the development of cultural and creative industries will give a helping hand in this regard!

### Major milestones in the development of Chinese orchestras >>>

The success in research and development of the *eco-huqin* is by no means a theoretical product of “paper talk”. It is a conclusion drawn from on-site tests of a series of performances in different venues. We need not go too far back to trace this process. It began at the crucial moment of HKCO’s tour to the UK in February 2008.

The first stop of HKCO’s UK tour was the Royal Festival Hall (RFH), which has a huge space to accommodate 2,900 people. The space is vast, far larger than the Concert Hall of the Hong Kong City Hall, which is a small “reproduction” of the RFH, and the Hong Kong Cultural Centre Concert Hall opened in 1989. Since the space of the RFH is large enough for the sound of the orchestra to diffuse fully, different aspects of the music played can be heard clearly at various locations during the rehearsal. The difference in sound quality between the string instruments on left and right sides of HKCO practicing there could be heard clearly. At that time, products of the Eco-Huqin Series had replaced the “traditional” *gaohu*, *zhonghu*, *gehu* and bass *gehu*, which were placed on the left side of the orchestra (from the audience’s perspective). The *erhu* group on the right side of the orchestra still adopted the “traditional” *erhu*. There was a phenomenon in which the sounds from the left and right parts were obviously different in terms of volume and strength. This situation is not obvious when the sound does not diffuse because of the relatively small space. In the trip to the UK, however, such difference could be heard easily.

The outcome of the trip to the UK made the management of HKCO aware that despite the strong resistance from the *erhu* group, the change to *eco-huqin* is irreversible.

In the second half of 2009, HKCO was touring in Brussels in early September, New York in late October and the National Grand Theatre in Beijing in late November. The tours could be labelled the “Eco-Huqin Verification Tour” for HKCO to win its Global Pass with the achievement of its efforts in the research and development of *eco-huqin* over the previous four years.

The actual reaction of the audiences in these three tours of HKCO shows that the Europeans and Americans were surprised at the pure tones of the Chinese orchestra. HKCO’s overall tone became fuller, more radiant and more pleasant. We can say that the Eco-Huqin Series developed by HKCO has not only greatly changed the harmony of the overall tone of the Chinese orchestra, but most importantly, has maintained the unique tone-colour of the *huqin* family. The problem that the *huqin*’s treble sound will weaken severely is solved. The impediment in performance is reduced while the expressive power is enhanced. This is a major milestone in the development of the Chinese orchestra indeed!

The biggest difference between HKCO’s recent concerts at home or abroad and those in the past is that the *huqin* family of the string instruments in the Orchestra have all been replaced with the Eco-Huqin Series. HKCO’s recent visits abroad have been very popular. Both Chinese and foreign audiences are intoxicated by its performance, not feeling fatigue throughout the entire concert of over two hours. The merits should be attributed to the *eco-huqin*. HKCO’s efforts on the research and development of musical instruments over the years are not merely worthwhile; they are super-worthy. The recent verification of the Eco-Huqin Series has finally granted HKCO a global passport.



‘Eco-Huqin Series’ – (from left) *gaohu*, *zhonghu*, *erhu*, bass *gehu* and *gehu*.

### Perfect results of the Eco-Huqin verification >>>

The last stop of the three tours was the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing. After the last two concerts there, more than 40 musicians from the String Group stayed in Beijing. The Demonstration and Seminar on HKCO Eco-Huqin Series was held at the China Conservatory of Music (CCM) to give a perfect completion to the three-month “Eco-Huqin Verification Tour”!

In addition to the teachers and students of CCM, the attendees came from the Beijing literary and art circles, the music industry and the media. The seminar held after the demonstration was hosted by Po Dong-sang, President of the Chinese National Orchestral Society, with more than 50 attendees. The demonstration lasted about one hour and six tunes were played with different combinations of string instruments. They showed comprehensively different combination effects of the entire Eco-Huqin Series developed by HKCO over the years. The harmonious tone of pure string music was clearly demonstrated.

After its successful concerts in Europe and the United States, HKCO came to Beijing, the cultural and political centre of China, to give reporting performances, demonstrations and seminars. All these efforts aimed at promoting the *eco-huqin*. After all, the largest groups and the main tradition for Chinese music development are still in Mainland China. The demonstrations and seminars tried to bring *eco-huqin* into Beijing’s music industry, academia and the media. To have their affirmation and recognition was an important strategy for gaining concrete support from the Chinese music industry. Ning Weiqun, Deputy Director of the Office of Culture and Technology of the Ministry of Culture, who was present at the meeting, made a public speech at the symposium and expressed his appreciation for the R&D achievements of HKCO. He also said that the Ministry of Culture’s Human Culture and Science Awards in 2004 would include the Music Reform Award. In 2009, more efforts and resource input would be made in this area. He also mentioned that with his close relationship with HKCO all along, he would support the Orchestra’s music reform.

### Encouraging result of the guessing game in Hong Kong >>>

HKCO arranged the Concert on the Improved Huqin during the Second Huqin Festival held in Hong Kong in June 2009. A Post-Concert Seminar was held after two public concerts with the attendance of experts at home and abroad.

In addition to the *huqin* performance featuring Li Huanzi’s *Reflection of the Moon on the Water* and Tan Dun’s *Shadow of Sky* before the seminar, a three-session “guessing game” was held to test the *huqin* played behind the curtain. The musician played the music with the traditional *huqin* and the *eco-huqin* in turn, and the audience were asked to identify the type of sound they preferred. It turned out that traditional *gaohu* was chosen by 20 people while the *eco-gaohu* was the choice of the other 60. It is very encouraging to see that the *eco-huqin* have already surpassed their traditional counterparts as a whole.

This result is not surprising for one who is familiar with the development of the *eco-huqin*!

In the new orchestral season that began in September 2010, a total of more than 40 *eco-huqin* were used in the performance of the large-scale symphony *Genghis Khan*. The sound quality was almost the same as before but the volume was greatly enhanced by one third. The thundering of the Mongolian army and thousands of horses in the battlefield were vividly captured in the performance of HKCO. As the Research & Development Officer in Musical Instrument, the soul of the *eco-huqin* research and development, Yuen Shi-chun thought that the Eco-Huqin Project was just at its start!

### Yuen supported by the entire HKCO >>>

Yuen Shi-chun joined the professional HKCO as a founding member of the music group in 1977 and served as the Principal of Liuqin. In 2003, he took up the newly created position of Instruments Development Researcher. He had participated in more than 2,500 concerts performed by the orchestra over the previous twenty years. In his spare time, he designed, explored and produced musical instruments at his own expense. More than 20 kinds of musical instruments, such as the Tang-style *ruanxian*, *quxiang pipa* (*pipa* with a bent-neck), *wuxian pipa* (five-string *pipa*), Qin-style *pipa* and *qinqin*, have been restored or improved by him so far. He successfully reformed the *liuqin* series with double resonance box and *ruanxian* have successively won “Second Prize for Science and Technology Progress” (1992 and 1996) awarded by the Ministry of Culture. The *ruanxian* series also won the “National Award for Science and Technology Progress” (1998). The Eco-Huqin Series, the research and development of which began in 2005, including *gaohu*, *erhu*, *zhonghu*, *gehu* and bass *gehu*, are being used in HKCO. The use of vintage instruments and improved modern instruments has opened up two new spaces for academic research and performing arts in China and abroad.

The word “huqin” was first seen in the book *Bow String North and South* edited by the Shanghai National Musical Instrument Museum. Since pythons have already been included in the list of protected animals, the *erhu* products of the Shanghai National Musical Instrument Factory made use of fish skin, dog skin, synthetic leather to replace python skin as the vibrating membrane. They were called *eco-erhu*. The term *eco-huqin* was also popular because of its products, but it had not become a trend yet. Looking back at the vibrating membrane of the *huqin* for the past century, pig skin, cowhide etc. have been tried, but they are not as good as python skin or snake skin in term of the resonance effect for *huqin*. Snake skin, however, is very sensitive to changes in the environment. When the humidity changes slightly, the tone of the *huqin* will change. With the development of the environmental conservation concept, HKCO faced troubles during their touring performances in various parts of the world when the instruments with python skin went through the customs. The time required for instruments with python skin to adapt to the weather of the venue also increased. The demand for *huqin* reform became increasingly strong.

All the *huqin* products reformed by HKCO make use of the PET polyester film produced by DuPont Chemical Corporation, which is an environmentally friendly product. These are also known as *eco-huqin*. In an actual sense, the entire Research and Reform Department of HKCO comprises only one person, Yuen Shi-chun, who has been doing all the research and maintenance work for the Orchestra. He said, “Over the past twenty years, it is my interest and a sense of mission that supports me to reform and develop musical instruments. I hope to contribute to the development of Chinese musical instruments.

I didn't think about producing such a *huqin* series at first, but I wanted to reform the bass instruments, which are bulky. When I tried a new type of film, I chose the *gaohu* for experimentation because of its smaller size and easier operation. I had considered *erhu*, whose market is huge. As lots of teachers sell *erhu* to their students, if I had started the experiment with the *erhu*, the *erhu* market might have been affected. There are few students in *gaohu*, and the resistance is comparatively smaller. I didn't expect the sound of the *gaohu* after improvement to be so good. Therefore, I had the idea of improving all the *huqin*."

The success of HKCO's Eco-Huqin Series in their research and development should be attributed not to Yuen Shi-chun alone. It is not a "solitary battle". Despite the outstanding results of the Orchestra's reform, the factors involved go beyond the quality enhancement of the instruments. There are questions of psychology and mentality as well. With strong support of the HKCO Council, the administrative department of the Orchestra and Maestro Yan Huichang, the artistic regulator of HKCO, implemented strategically this major project of musical instrument development. In addition to the initial efforts for members of the Orchestra to understand the importance of musical instrument reform, the project was carried out step by step. The reformed products were mixed with the original instruments in order to minimize the feelings of resistance. The number of reformed instruments was gradually increased under coordination. With the cooperation of the entire orchestra and after many years of trials, the *huqins* of HKCO have been fully replaced by *eco-huqins* and a new overall tone of the Orchestra has been created. It has opened up new space for the development of Chinese music. It can be seen that behind the efforts of Yuen Shi-chun, it requires the entire Orchestra's back up for the research and development of the instruments to achieve full success.

### **Endorsement of the Ministry of Culture with its Innovation Award after strict assessment >>>**

The first stop of HKCO's long tour of Europe and Africa in February 2011 was Tromsø, Norway, which is within 350 km of the Arctic Circle. The Orchestra had to go through a very cold temperature of minus 15°C outside before going into the warm indoor venues with continuous heating. Very often, they had to get through this process for rehearsal and performance within a short time, but the sound effects of the instruments were not affected. This was not what the traditional python skin *huqin* could do. This is another success of the HKCO Eco-Huqin Series in passing tests.

On the eve of the Mid-Autumn Festival on 11 September 2011, HKCO was invited to perform at the goodwill concert 'The HKCO in Chengdu' at the Jiaozi Concert Hall in Chengdu. The Director of the Home Affairs Bureau of the Hong Kong SAR Government, Mr Tsang Tak-shing, listened to the performance featured with HKCO Eco-Huqin Series. He was deeply impressed and proposed that the Home Affairs Bureau nominate the *eco-huqin* of HKCO to participate in the selection of the '4th Ministry of Culture Innovation Award' in 2012. In late May 2012, HKCO's project won the 'Innovation Award' in the competition category named 'Innovation in Science and Technology to Promote and Develop National Music – Research, Development and Application of Eco-Huqin Series' after rigorous assessments in which six-member groups were arranged to play the instruments before a team of assessors for judgement.

HKCO's was the only Hong Kong project among the 16 award-winning ones. It seems that this award is no more than "the icing on the cake". In fact, this is an open "endorsement" and affirmation by the Ministry of Culture to HKCO's efforts in the research and development of the Eco-Huqin Series. It has a significant impact on the subsequent promotion of the Eco-Huqin, especially in Mainland China.

It requires a lot of resource input to promote the *eco-huqin*. That is why Yuen Shi-chun says that the Eco-Huqin Project has just started! In fact, the development of music is promoted by the music itself, the performers and the musical instruments. The continuous innovation of musical instruments is an arduous and lengthy process. In addition to the breakthroughs, the success of the Eco-Huqin Series relies also on the composers to give full play to the instruments' characteristics, the performers to make good use of the improved instruments to produce music of excellent quality. This is a long process indeed! It is important to know that the Chinese orchestra comprises three other major groups, namely the "wind", "plucked" and "percussion" groups, in the ensemble. There are also various problems, big and small, which require research and improvement. Will they be HKCO's tasks of the second decade after incorporation?

## Elites of Successive Generations from Various Regions

The success of the Eco-Huqin Series in their research and development is important for HKCO to complete its overall orchestral tone and establish its unique sound. HKCO has established its signature tone in the first decade since its incorporation and has impressed us with its improved sounds. However, the positive impact of the eco-huqin can be overlooked easily.

In fact, it takes a long time for an orchestra to establish a unique sound with characteristics of its own. HKCO is no exception. Before HKCO's incorporation, not many members would leave the Orchestra halfway, which allowed HKCO to remain stable for a long time. Apart from a few "low tide periods" caused by the change of directorship, fluctuation of the Orchestra's performance level rarely happened. On the other hand, the lack of new blood for a long time would inevitably lead to a lack of vigour and momentum, as well as stagnation in development.

### Progressive establishment of HKCO's signature sound >>>

Such phenomena arose gradually in the days before HKCO's incorporation. Some members suffered from the "civil servants' mindset" and lacked confidence in competition. With the mentality of self-protection, some HKCO members at the time began to form unique "fractional forces" among themselves. Power struggle emerged internally. This was caused partly by the unresolved personnel problems accumulated over the years. HKCO's long-term stability also provided a hotbed for "fraction formation".

The formation of "fractions" within the Orchestra is certainly not conducive to its development. However, long-term stability is undeniably the condition needed for the growth of an orchestra. HKCO was able to establish its unique cultural tradition for over two decades before its incorporation with its signature sound, HKCO's unique tone with its own character. When compared with the tones of other Chinese orchestras, HKCO's is more mellifluous, full-bodied, harmonious and solid. While this unique tone is surely the result of constant adjustment and finetuning brought about by the efforts of the Music Directors, the stability of HKCO's musicians is also an important factor that cannot be ignored.

### Newcomers replacing retired senior members >>>

However, HKCO's mellifluous and harmonious tone might still suffer from a lack of vigour during its low ebb, especially when most members treated the concerts as "routine". Maestro Yan Huichang, who assumed hastily the post of Music Director (which has been retitled Artistic Director) at that time, felt so when he recalled the music of HKCO he heard then. He said, "The music played by the orchestra was very accurate and tacit, but it was cold, without any feelings. I was not touched. Now, HKCO has fully adopted the *eco-huqin*. Not only is the Orchestra better in tone, its music is now more enthusiastic and more tacit." However, it is not an easy task for HKCO to achieve this mellifluous, full-bodied and powerful tone.

HKCO entered its twenty-fourth season when it incorporated in 2001. The founding members were stepping into their retirement age. Over the last decade since HKCO's incorporation, more musicians of the Orchestra have retired or left for other reasons. This signifies the end of the long-term stability enjoyed by HKCO over the past in which the mobility of its musician was extremely low.

Will HKCO's beautiful and enthusiastic tone be changed or even lost when more senior musicians have retired and more new musicians are joining? It is indeed a suspense.

### Newcomers from Different Regions Exceeding Veterans >>>

The lineup of HKCO's European tour in February 2011 has been analysed. Of all the 85 musicians, except for the six invited musicians and three interns, 76 were full-time musicians. Among them, 33 were newcomers (including a few part-timers having become full-time staff) who joined HKCO after its incorporation. They accounted for 40% of the total! According to HKCO's entry statistics, 42 new

members joined the Orchestra between 2001 September (the year of its incorporation) and September 2012, excluding Mr Chew Hee Chiat, the Assistant Conductor (Concerts/I.T.). Only 31 members joined HKCO before its incorporation. In other words, the number of newcomers exceeded that of the old ones.

Almost everyone of the new musicians belong to the new generation of graduates from music academies. They are very different from the senior members of HKCO, whose academic qualifications varied greatly. It was not uncommon to find veteran musicians who were unable to read music scores on the staff. What remains unchanged is that the members come from different regions of China and overseas.

Of the musicians who joined HKCO in its early years, apart from the local ones in Hong Kong, most of them were performers trained in various parts of Mainland China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shantou, Guizhou, Wuhan, Longyan, Xiamen and Nanning. There were also musicians from Taipei, Singapore, Yogyakarta and Bogor in Indonesia. As to their places of birth, in addition to Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, there are also major cities such as Chongqing, Wuxi, Shantou, Shanwei, Tianjin, Nanchang, Wanggang, Wuhan, Yulin, Taishan, Zhuhai, Xiamen and Xi'an. Some were Indonesian and Singaporean. The early members of HKCO came really from regions far and wide apart with big cultural differences. However, these performers of Chinese music with diverse cultural backgrounds come under the banner of HKCO, an orchestra with a sense of musical and cultural mission, to pursue the ensemble of Chinese music since the 1970s. Gradually and progressively, the cultural tradition of HKCO has been formed and the unique tone of the Orchestra established.

The background of the newcomers after HKCO's incorporation is still diverse. Other than the local talents nurtured from the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, the new members come from more extensive parts of Mainland China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xi'an, Nanjing, Jinan, Shenyang, Lanzhou, Shantou, Wuhan, Hangzhou, Chongqing, Wuxi, Changchun spreading over Hunan, Shanxi, Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Harbin and other provinces. Some others come from Taipei, Taichung, Kaohsiung and other places of Taiwan. One of them was even born in Thailand.

### An opportunity to "adjust" tradition through replacement of members >>>

HKCO's consistent policy under which the recruitment of elite musicians is fully open enables the Orchestra to attract fine musicians from all walks of life to establish its tradition with multicultural background. The renowned reputation of HKCO has spread all over the Greater China regions over the first decade since its incorporation. HKCO has already been recognized as one of the best Chinese orchestras. Hence, elite players of Chinese musical instruments in Hong Kong, Macau and Mainland China all list HKCO as their first choice for career development. This is also an important reason why HKCO can attract elite musicians from all walks of life.

However, how can HKCO bring together new forces with wider cultural backgrounds? How can musicians of the old and new generations integrate and handover more harmoniously? How can HKCO's tradition be passed from one generation onto another? Such issues of continuation and replacement become more

urgent in the first decade after HKCO's incorporation. In fact, the precipitated culture contains both desirable and undesirable rudiments. The process of member replacement is an opportunity for HKCO to preserve its good traditions (such as the Orchestra's unique tone) and remove bad ones (such as "fractions among members").

The two concerts held in Tromsø in the Norwegian Arctic Circle and Prague during the European Tour respectively in January and February 2011 were composed of an elite group of ten people. The composition of the group was basically the four parts of the *huqin*, plus plucked-string (*zhongruan*, *pipa*), wind (*sheng* and *di*) and percussion, which is just the prototype of an orchestra. Eight of the ten members were the new blood of HKCO after its incorporation. It was indeed a representation of the new generation with generally the same level of skill. While preparing for the concert in Tromsø, Yan Huichang, the Artistic Director, held a special sharing session for the group members to share their feelings after joining HKCO.

### How members value themselves in HKCO >>>

Finally, Director Yan also shared his views with everyone. He said that the people were the key to the future of HKCO. What the senior members have left for the young members, what they have demonstrated, what the young members (who need to respect their predecessors) can learn from the senior members, and how they can create a new tradition, are the keys. He also pointed out that this actually related to one's values of life and one's attitude towards art. It refers to the question of how they see their own values in the orchestra, and how they want others to see their values.

Obviously, HKCO's management has to address the issue of replacing old members with newcomers. In the first place, it is not easy to keep the long-established professionalism of HKCO, which include valuing the composers' efforts in exploring new works and respecting the guest conductors. It is even more difficult to get rid of undesirable traditions. The diverse background of its members gives HKCO a broader cultural space, but such differences may lead easily to miscommunication, faction division and power struggles, which are inconducive to HKCO's development. To address these problems, it is extremely urgent for new and old members from different backgrounds to increase their understanding among one another in order to achieve greater cohesion. In fact, not only sharing sessions are held, internal friendship activities are organized to enhance the understanding among the members to help maintain HKCO's cultural tradition.

### Training for tours: the key to development of the next five years >>>

During the ten years after HKCO's incorporation, performing in various concerts at home and abroad has become important activities of the Orchestra. The musicians have to train themselves for greater adaptability and expressiveness through playing in venues with different characteristics. The lengthy and frequent tour performances have another role to play in the training of new members during the process of replacement. This has also played a positive role in maintaining HKCO's "unique tone" which has taken a long time to develop.

A "unique tone" cannot be established in a short while. The success of HKCO's Eco-Huqin Series has stimulated attention to other instruments and has led players of other instruments to care more about the sound quality of theirs. Their concern goes beyond the volume and strength of the music they play. In the first couple of years after it has been incorporated for two decades, HKCO's tune quality has become more profound and delicate, forming an increasingly intricate and fine ensemble art. This is where the most precious tradition of HKCO lies. The next five years will be the key to the continuation of this tradition of HKCO!



The HKCO Ensemble travelled to Oslo, the northern city of Norway (350 km from the Arctic Circle) to perform in Northern Lights Festival (Nordlysfestivalen). This was also the first Chinese instrumental ensemble concert in the festival.

# The Hong Kong International Conducting Competition for Chinese Music – a Miraculous Feat

The major theme event Conductors' Festival of Hong Kong was held in the 2010-11 season. Three internationally renowned ethnical Chinese conductors, Zhang Guoyong, Chen Zuohuang and Tang Muhai, were invited to conduct HKCO as guest conductors. More importantly, the first 'International Conducting Competition for Chinese Music' was launched during the Conductors' Festival to identify and nurture outstanding young conductors of Chinese music to promote the development of large-scale Chinese orchestral music.

After four rounds of competition, the top three candidates were selected: Sun Peng, Xiao Chao, and Kwok Kin-ming. For the three winners, the opportunity to go to HKCO for training (one year, half year and three months respectively) is more precious than the trophy and prize-money (HK\$100,000, HK\$60,000 and HK\$30,000 respectively). That is a dream that cannot be realized with money. In fact, this competition, which can be called "unprecedented", is a dream in itself. For the dream to come true, which resembles a miracle, four hurdles have to be cleared.

### Four formidable hurdles for competitors >>>

The first “hurdle” was cleared by the 17 competitors having passed the preliminary round among the 55 entrants who dared to accept the challenge by submitting video clips for participation of the competition. In the second round held between 18 and 21 July 2011, the formidable tests began. Each contestant had to face the 80 veteran and professional musicians of HKCO with whom they were unfamiliar. Within 40 minutes, the competitors had to perform rehearsal and conduct completely two pieces of Chinese music: *As the Moon Rises* - a peaceful ancient melody, and *A Va Mountain* - a vigorous modern work of Guo Wenjing. The two pieces of music required the skills in conducting during rehearsals and understanding of music processing, as well as time management, which is often ignored. After the rehearsal, the judges would ask questions about the development prospects of, expectations from and opinions on the large-scale Chinese orchestra, as well as the competitors’ personal ambition. They had to respond on the spot. In addition, they were asked to write a short essay on “How to Realize the Concept of Environmental Protection and World Harmony with Music” before the second round. The purpose of this round was crystal clear: to ensure that in addition to their professional skills, the conductors are talents with cultural senses who are knowledgeable about Chinese music and large-scale Chinese orchestra.

In the semi-final round held on 22 and 23 July, the competitors had to conduct HKCO to rehearse for two melodies of totally different contents, styles and backgrounds for 40 minutes. One was *Ambush from All Sides*, a traditional melody adapted from the famous *pipa* solo piece, and the other was *Flowing Phantasm*, a contemporary work of Law Wing-fai, a Hong Kong composer. Moreover, they had to take an error correction test during the rehearsal.

The 151-bar score used for the error correction test was not given to the contestants in the semi-final round until the result of the second round was announced. They had only one night to study the score. The HKCO musicians did not see their scores for the testing purpose until they entered the rehearsal venue the next morning. When compared with the authentic scores of the participants in the semi-final round, six errors were set in the scores for the music players. The first error lay in bars 38 to 40, in which the high F note for the yangqin became F sharp, turning the tune from a major into a minor. The second error was in bar 80 to 82, in which the timpani sound was “missing”. For the third error, the “*forte*” strength of the *gehu* and bass *gehu* in bars 96 and 97 were indicated as “*piano*”. The fourth error happened between bars 125 and 127, in which the *gehu* was played an octave lower. Fifthly, the rhythm of the *gaohu*, *erhu*, *zhonghu* and *gehu* in bars 130 and 131 was wrong. The sixth error lay in bar 143. The melody of the *bangdi* was changed, and three notes were a major second higher than they should be, making a “collision” of sounds.

### No one identified all errors in the test >>>

These errors were set mainly to test the auditory ability, which is most important to the conductor. They must be able to identify the pitch, tone, rhythm, tonality and harmony of a piece of music. The melody was selected from *The Tiny Shan Pui River*, the work of Joshua Chan, a Hong Kong composer. It had been played by HKCO just a few days ago. The structure and harmony of the piece are not too complicated. As the members of the Orchestra still had fresh memory of the music, they should have no difficulty in

the impromptu rehearsal. The scores had not been published yet and therefore the participants could not have come across them. They did not know the name of the music, either. This arrangement was made to ensure that there would be no omissions.

In the 15-minute “error correction” test for each competitor, no one could pick out all the mistakes. Only one person identified five of the six errors, who was said to be the Champion winner Sun Peng. Some competitors could not find even one error. Prof Chen Tscheng-hsiung of Taiwan, one of the judges, dismissed such situation very much. He believes that all the six errors should not be overlooked as good audition is the basic requirement of the director of an orchestra. Chen’s words are forcefully to the point! During the intense competition, however, the acuity of one’s hearing would inevitably be discounted. It tested not only one’s hearing but also the ability to deal with stress and tension!

The three contestants who could enter the final round had to prepare immediately for the rehearsal preceding the finalists’ concert to be held the next day. Each of them had forty-five minutes in the afternoon before the concert and another thirty minutes on the day of the concert (24 July) for practice with HKCO. The two melodies for the finalists’ concert were also works of different styles and emotions. One was three selected movements from Hong Kong composer Doming Lam’s *Autumn Execution* and the other was Zhao Jiping’s *Follow the Pagoda Tree to Get to the Root of Our Ancestors*. The champion conductor would then conduct HKCO to perform *The Yellow River Capriccio* immediately after the announcement of the result. Even professional conductors would find a lot of pressure in such tight rehearsal arrangement. These nascent enthusiasts, however, did not recoil in the face of such a big challenge. A tight schedule is always a problem to be faced by professional conductors. It can be seen that the four “challenges” designed for the four-round competition are necessary for nurturing a conductor. It is no wonder that after the event, the contestants repeatedly said that the whole competition was a hard-to-get experience and a good learning process. For the contestants, no matter whether they have won or not, the “challenges” are synonymous to “gains”.

### A difficult task for the judges and particularly hard work for HKCO members >>>

The competition was also a challenge for the judges, especially for Prof Chen Tscheng-hsiung and Maestro Xia Feiyun, who participated in the second, semi-final and final rounds. Other judges included Chew Hee Chiat and Qu Chunquan for the second round, Prof Yu Feng, Tang Muhai and Prof Chan Wing-wah for the semi-final and final, Law Wing-fai for the semi-final and Zhao Jiping for the final round. First of all, the judges had to listen to fifteen rehearsals of HKCO playing *As the Moon Rises* and *A Va Mountain* conducted by the fifteen participants (two of the original seventeen entrants failed to attend) in the four days of the second round stage. Then, in the one-and-a-half days of the semi-final round, the judges had to listen to *Ambush from All Sides* and *Flowing Phantasm* seven times conducted by the semi-finalists respectively. And then, they had to give marks to each of the contestants on their conducting skills, knowledge about Chinese music, interpretation of the works, artistic appeal and stage charm according to the criteria set by the organizer for determining the winners. That was a tough and challenging job indeed.

It was even more difficult for the HKCO musicians. They not only listened but also played the tunes repeatedly during the three rounds of the competition. Moreover, they had to meet the different requirements of different conductors. Just in the second round stage alone, they had to play *As the Moon Rises* and *A Va Mountain* fifteen times. That was a really tough job, which could be regarded as “repulsive” work. In the final concert, they had to play *Autumn Execution* and *Follow the Pagoda Tree to Get to the Root of Our Ancestors* consecutively under various requirements of three different conductors. This was not only a question of professional attitude but also an issue concerning the psychological and humanistic quality of the musicians. The judges and the HKCO musicians must understand and recognize that the competition was a major event and such arrangement and procedures were necessary. Without such understanding, they would not be able to act and coordinate desirably. In other words, the HKCO members could not have coordinated so well and the competition could not have been held if they had not been able to overcome such technical and psychological “challenges”. Therefore, the loudest applause should go to HKCO’s members for their realization of this “miracle”.

### Hosting a master class to enhance the confidence of participants >>>

The last “challenge” for HKCO was that as the organizer, it had to face the inevitable “devil” in real life that emerges from musical contests, in which fairness and impartiality are difficult to achieve, especially when the contestants are of more or less the same level. Music is different from sports in that it is not easy to set completely objective criteria for music competitions. Large-scale Chinese music ensemble works, especially modern Chinese works, are different from those of Mozart and Beethoven, for which some performing criteria have been set. In fact, the scores of the two works selected from two Hong Kong composers for the competition have never been issued publicly.

On the other hand, there are no independent courses for professional Chinese music conducting in the music academies of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China. Training on Chinese music conducting is often attached to the courses on orchestral conducting. This situation makes it even more difficult to attract participants. Nevertheless, these are the challenges to be faced by the organizer of this competition.

When registration of the competition was announced, a Master Class in Chinese Music Conducting organized by HKCO in conjunction with The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts was offered to the potential competitors. It was hope that through training on Chinese music conducting, the confidence of more young conductors could be enhanced so that they would sign up for the competition.

In any case, it is not easy to be totally fair and impartial. Although it is impossible to guarantee 100% fairness and impartiality in the rules of a competition, it is still the primary task of HKCO, the organizer, to avoid negligence and omissions as far as possible. In fact, the relationships among mentors, mentees and institutions in the music industry are inextricably linked. The judges and the contestants may have different relationships directly and indirectly, which is even more difficult to avoid. As such, in addition to the judges’ declaration of “interest” with individual contestants, the “sequential points” method currently used in many international competitions was adopted for deciding the winners while the “total scores” are for reference only.



Winners of International Conducting Competition for Chinese Music:

‘Best Interpretation of Works of Hong Kong’ and First Prize:  
Sun Peng

‘Audience Award for the Most Popular Conductor’ and Second Prize: Xiao Chao

‘Outstanding Young Conductor in Hong Kong’ and Third Prize:  
Kwok Kin-ming

‘Special Award for Conducting of Chinese Music’: Pung Aik Khai  
(second from the left)

‘HKCO Musicians’ Pick’:  
Jing Huan



Sun Peng



Xiao Chao



Kwok Kin-ming



Jing Huan

### Maestro Yan's withdrawal from the last two rounds to allay concerns >>>

“Sequential points” were awarded to the competitors according to the ranking of their scores given by the judges. For example, in the final round, the competitor with the highest score in an aspect was awarded three points, the second two points and the lowest one point. Finally, the “sequential points” of the judges were added together to decide the final positions. This approach can avoid score skewing produced by the discrepancy in the elastic scales of different judges' scores. For example, an individual judge may have a large gap in the scores of the contestants by giving a certain one a particularly high score and rating the others with low scores, while the score range of other judges are smaller. The impact of the larger gap in the scores may result in a case in which the contestant (who should be the champion) with the highest scores given by other judges has his total score greatly reduced because of the exceptionally low score given to him by an individual judge. On the other hand, the contestant being considered the 2nd runner-up by most judges might have his total score greatly increased because of the exceptionally high score awarded by an individual judge. In such case, if the total scores are used, the contestant considered by most judges to be the 2nd runner-up may become the champion and the one generally predicted to be the champion may lose. By adopting the relatively fairer “sequential points” method, unreasonable score skewing can be avoided.

Moreover, Maestro Yan Huichang, the Artistic Director of HKCO, was also the judge of the competition. To relieve the concern about the results being controlled by the organizer, Yan took the initiative to withdraw from the judge panel for the semi-final and final rounds with the agreement of other judges. His scores given in the semi-final were removed and he did not take part in adjudicating the final concert. He changed his seat from that of the judge panel to the audience's.

### Dramatic changes in all three rounds of the competition >>>

Nevertheless, there were dramatic changes in all three rounds of the competition. First, among the fifteen contestants in the second round, the “sequential points” of those in the sixth and seventh positions were the same. The judges agreed to increase the number of semi-finalists from six to seven. Later in the semi-final, all the three young conductors with the highest “sequential points” to enter the final round had been instructed personally by Maestro Yan, leading to an internal competition among apprentices trained by the same master.

At the same time, in the final ranking of the semi-final, Pung Aik Khai, aged 31, a Malaysian living in the United States, ranked fourth with only a small gap. Because of this, he could not enter the final round. Eventually, it was decided that he would be awarded a special prize to encourage young conductors with foreign backgrounds like his to participate more in the Chinese music conducting activities.

In the semi-final, the “Best Interpretation of Works of Hong Kong (Law Wing-fai's *Flowing Phantasm*)” was also won by Sun Peng. Kwok Kin-ming was the only Hong Kong entrant who entered the final round and therefore he became the winner of the “Outstanding Young Conductor in Hong Kong”. That is to say,

among the three finalists, only Xiao Chao had no prize in hand.

The scores given by the six judges of the final concert night, namely Chen Tscheng-hsiung, Xia Feiyun, Yu Feng, Chan Wing-wah, Tang Muhai and Zhao Jiping, were compiled and verified by the representative of Patrick Wong CPA Ltd. The Champion was Sun Peng, aged 29 from Shenyang; the First Runner-Up was Xiao Chao, aged 29 from Chengdu; and the Second Runner-up was Kwok Kin-ming, aged 32 from Hong Kong.

### Views expressed in the Symposium on Conducting >>>

In the afternoon of the day after the Conducting Competition, the Symposium on Conducting was held at the HKCO Recital Hall. It was attended by nearly 100 people from various fields who care about the development of large-scale Chinese orchestras. Suggestions, especially on the training of successors for Chinese music conductors, and comments on this international Chinese music conductor competition were expressed.

Representatives from various ethnic orchestras and music circles attended the symposium. Some of them made formal speeches or public speeches at the forum. After the speech of Zhao Jiping, Chairman of the Chinese Musicians' Association, the first session started with the speech of Liu Bin, Vice President of the Singapore Musicians' Association, entitled *Conditions for Survival for the Conductor of Chinese Music in Schools*. He talked about the fierce competition among the Chinese orchestras in Singapore schools. Christopher Pak, Head of the School of Music of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, gave a speech on *Professional Conducting Programme in Tertiary Music Institutes in Hong Kong: The Current Scene and the Way Forward*, followed by Chung Yiu-kwong, Director of the Taipei Chinese Orchestra. With the title *Who is Going to Take Over?: On the Conductor Training Programme of the Taipei Chinese Orchestra*, he introduced the ten-year nurturing programme of the Taipei Chinese Orchestra. The session was closed with the final response by Prof Bian Zushan, Beijing's maestro conductor.

In the second session after the break, three judges: Xia Feiyun, Chen Tscheng-hsiung, and Tang Muhai gave their personal views and suggestions on this competition. Yu Qingxin (Editor of the *People's Music Magazine*) and Chow Fan-fu also gave their responses.

After the second break, the third session started. First of all, Chen Zhenggang, an assistant researcher of the National Orchestra of Taiwan, made a Power Point presentation of the abstract to his 30,000-word essay *The Conductor vs the Administrator – An Observation on How Performing Arts Survive on the National Awards of Taiwan*, followed by the speech of Chen Xieyang, Artistic Director of the Beijing Central National Orchestra entitled *Chinese Music Conductorship: Expectations and Cultivation*, which was based on his personal experience as a conductor. Lastly, Bian Zushan presented his observations, ideas and thoughts about this competition through his speech, *The Significance of the Inaugural International Conducting Competition of Chinese Music*. After the response given by Prof Qiao Jianzhong, former Director of the Music Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Arts, the symposium entered its final session for discussion. Wang Fujian (Head of the Shanghai National Music Orchestra), Sun Peng (the

Champion), Yau Siu-bun (Artistic Director of the Hong Kong New Tune Chinese Orchestra) and a music lover who had returned from overseas expressed their opinions and thoughts about the event. At last, after the speeches of Maestro Yan and Prof Zhao Jiping, and the conclusion by Prof Qiao Jianzhong, the three-hour Symposium was declared closed.

### **Awards from different perspectives to reduce the colour of competition >>>**

One of the official observers of the competition expressed his overall observation in the second session of the Symposium. In addition to emphasizing his highest respect for the HKCO members and reaffirming the “devil” nature of taking music as a competition, he recommended that the colour of competition for the contest be minimized. For example, the ranking of the three finalists should be cancelled. Instead, they could be awarded with prizes judged from various perspectives, such as “The Most Compelling Award”, “Best Conductor’s Image Award”, “Best Music Interpretation Award”, “Award for Fewest Errors” and “Award for Best Communication with the Orchestra”. In fact, the winner of the “Audience Award for the Most Popular Conductor (Live voting by the audience)” decided by the audience with one-man-one-vote during the interval break was Xiao Chao, who was the First Runner-Up. The “HKCO Musicians’ Pick” voted by the HKCO members after the second round was Jing Huan, who failed to enter the final round. The Hong Kong audience and HKCO members did not cast their votes only for Hong Kong participants because of cronyism. There were also discrepancies between the criteria of the audience and the judges. Such difference was actually caused by different positions and perspectives.

On the night of the final round, for example, the audience could see the facial expressions of the three contestants projected on the big screen. It was obvious that Xiao Chao’s conducting movements were the smoothest, clearest and most confident, and his communication with the musicians was relatively close. Sun Peng, behaving like the rehearsals in the first two rounds, stared at the score on the music stand far more often than looking at the musicians. As for the performance of Hong Kong’s Kwok Kin-ming, his self-confidence was relatively insufficient. His communication with the musicians was not close enough. That was why most audience favoured Xiao Chao. In fact, some judges chose Xiao Chao as the Champion, while Sun Peng was in the third place. An official observer chose Xiao Chao as the Champion and Sun Peng as the First Runner-Up. In the eyes of different people, there would be different choices. This kind of situation is common in music competitions.

### **A historic event in the development of Chinese music >>>**

Nevertheless, the four “challenges” have been overcome for the International Conducting Competition for Chinese Music to be held successfully. Indeed, it has been a “miracle” for HKCO to have gained appreciation, positive evaluation and encouragement from the judges, peers from various local orchestras, guests, winners, losers, and the audience in the Symposium.

Prof Zhao Jiping, one of the judges of this competition and Chairman of the Chinese Musicians’ Association, as well as the host of the Symposium, said in the final concert: “The International

Conducting Competition for Chinese Music is a ground-breaking event in the realm of large-scale, modern Chinese music performance in the last hundred years. The competition itself has attracted a group of outstanding young Chinese music conductors. It will also promote the development of China’s large-scale Chinese orchestra. HKCO has always dedicated itself to the excellence of Chinese music art. It has also made outstanding achievements in music creation, ensemble art, instrument improvement, education inheritance and other fields. It is a role model of the Chinese music industry. I believe that this International Conducting Competition will add splendor to the Chinese music industry and become a milestone in the history of modern Chinese music conducting development.” Zhao’s commendation is no flattery indeed.

To organize such a milestone competition successfully, however, many hard challenges have to be coped with. What many people may not know is that it is clearly stated in the regulations that the Government’s funding allocated to HKCO cannot be spent on organizing competitions. Had it not been for the honour sponsorship of one million Hong Kong Dollars by the Bank of China Hong Kong Charity Fund, this grandeur event in the history of Chinese music for nearly a hundred years could not have been held.

### **Chinese Music Orchestral Academy, Extension of HKCO >>>**

On the night of the final round, the Master of Ceremony suddenly announced that HKCO would organize The Second International Conducting Competition for Chinese Music in 2013 under strong urge of the musical institutions. Obviously, this was a subjective wish only. The source of funding for the event would be the first question to be considered by the HKCO Council when it considered the proposal. This was also a big challenge among the challenges that HKCO had to address, especially when the “audit standards” for professional orchestras had not yet been finalized. It might happen that such activities were criticized as “not doing proper business”!

Undoubtedly, HKCO is a performing arts group whose main business is “performance”. For the continuous development of the Orchestra, however, “successors” with the required professionalism and capability are imperative. To this end, the Orchestra has been cooperating with the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts since 2006 to provide professional training and practical experience for young musicians with potential. The Chinese Music Orchestral Academy was formally established in 2009. It provides professional internship opportunities for undergraduates, young teachers or postgraduates from music institutions. Through special guidance and practices, the students can face the same artistic requirements as HKCO members during the rehearsals. The scope of training covers four areas: orchestral performance, Chinese music conducting, studies on music creation and art management. This is a long-termed and comprehensive course design. The Chinese music conductor competition is only an extension of the plan for the Chinese Music Orchestral Academy. Yet it is a big challenge and a difficult task. Without the exploratory and unremitting spirit of the people concerned and the faithful collaboration of the relevant parties, the miraculous results would not have appeared!

## Promoting New Works of Chinese Music

After its incorporation, HKCO has enhanced professional education and training to nurture new blood for the continued development of the Orchestra directly and indirectly. At the same time, it has become more diversified in the creation and promotion of new works with multifarious contents, forms and styles.

### The orchestra with the most music works in the world >>>

The life of an orchestra lies in its works. The meaning of this sentence is twofold. First, an orchestra's standard cannot be demonstrated without good works. Second, the existence of an orchestra, especially in terms of history, is often evidenced by the historical works it has created and promoted. It is said that the history of music comprises composers and masterpieces. In the same manner, the most valuable part of an orchestra's history is also its composers and works. For HKCO, this is particularly true.

Since its establishment, HKCO understands very well that a large number of works for large-scale Chinese orchestras are required to ensure its regular performances and development. There must be incentives to encourage composers to create such works. Out of authentic needs, the commissioning system for music creation, which is implemented internationally, has been introduced since the second season of HKCO's formation by Mr Ng Tai-kong, the Music Director then. After HKCO's incorporation in 2001, this system is still an essential practice for the Orchestra to engage composers to create masterpieces for HKCO.

So far, HKCO has garnered a treasure trove of more than 2,100 commissioned works of original compositions and arrangements, which is the largest among professional orchestras in the world. Among these works, over 200 were original compositions of Hong Kong composers and about 210 were arranged by them. This is an impressive figure. HKCO has been duly awarded 'The Most Outstanding Achievement in Advancing Contemporary Chinese Music' by the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) in 2002, the 'Golden Needle Award' by Radio Television Hong Kong in 2005, and the 'Most Outstanding Achievement in Advancing Asian Contemporary Music' by the Asian Composers League in 2007.

HKCO can achieve such fruitful results in music creation mainly because it has not only greatly expanded its direction of development and vision, but also become more flexible in thinking and implementation. They are specific achievements resulted from HKCO's positioning set after its incorporation "to have our feet firmly planted on our home base but our eyes are on the world".

### Multifarious activities to promote new works >>>

After its incorporation, HKCO still plays a "locomotive" role in the development and art creation of Chinese orchestras. The commissioning of creation is only a system. To achieve the purpose of promotion, different forms and modes of activities are required. The important ones related to music creation and promotion efforts adopted by HKCO after its incorporation are discussed below.

In 1998, music activities held under 'Music from the Heart II' started to serve as a platform for presentation of new works by young composers in Hong Kong. After HKCO's incorporation, these activities have continued and extended to the universities and tertiary institutes in Mainland China. In HKCO's 'Silver Jubilee Celebration Concert' in 2002, *Moon Over Bounteous Land*, a commissioned work composed by Chan Wing-wah was premiered. In 2004, HKCO collaborated with the rock musician Wang Yong and his ensemble to present the concert 'Yan Huichang and Wang Yong in Dimensional Pursuits - New

Vision Arts Festival' for a large-scale Chinese orchestra to meet pop and rock, with a lot of improvisation between them. In 2006, HKCO's 30th music season, the project 'Cadenzas of Hong Kong' was launched. 20 Hong Kong composers were commissioned to take the 18 Hong Kong districts as the subject to create music for their world premiere concerts across three seasons. Some Hong Kong composers were organized to seek roots and collate local music in Chaozhou and Shantou in eastern Guangdong. Three professional workshops for composition were held for young composers interested in composing music for Chinese orchestras. In order to fully perform the 20 works in 'Cadenzas of Hong Kong', HKCO made a breakthrough by giving large-scale outdoor concerts for three consecutive nights at the plaza of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. Under the stars over the Victoria Harbour, together with exquisite photographs featuring the characteristics of the districts captured by photographers, all 20 commissioned works were performed for the general public and representatives of the District Councils to spend three unforgettable evenings.

At the Hong Kong Arts Festival in 2006, HKCO held a concert to celebrate the 80th birthday of Doming Lam, the father of Hong Kong contemporary music, and published the music scores and a live recording CD of the concert. In the subsequent years, concerts dedicated to Hong Kong composers were held annually, for Chan Wing-wah in 2007, Law Wing-fai in 2008 and Richard Tsang in 2009. The Composers' Festival of Hong Kong was held in 2010. In addition to the concert dedicated to Hong Kong composer Chen Ning-chi's works, other concerts were held specifically for the works of Chinese composers Tan Dun and Liu Wenjin. In 2011, during the first International Conducting Competition for Chinese Music, not only the Hong Kong composers' works such as Law Wing-fai's *Flowing Phantasm*, Joshua Chan's *The Tiny Shan Pui River* and Doming Lam's *Autumn Execution* (the first, second and fifth movements), were designated as melodies to be played for the competition, Law Wing-fai's *Flowing Phantasm* was prescribed as the masterpiece to be conducted for the award "Best Interpretation of Works of Hong Kong".

These activities to promote new works take different forms with different marketing strategies for the new music works to be exposed to a variety of audiences. They differed very much from the relatively monotonous form of dedicated concerts in the past.

### "Global commissioning" to search masters at home and abroad >>>

The "new" works published by HKCO after its incorporation have started to show very different changes, which come mainly from the increase in the works of composers in Mainland China, although they are not necessarily new ones. At the same time, HKCO has become more active in inviting foreign composers interested in Chinese music culture to create new works. In promoting music creation, HKCO has demonstrated the positioning and spirit of "based in Hong Kong with a global vision".

HKCO has previously commissioned composers in Mainland China for creation and arrangement of music, but they were mainly musicians in Shanghai and Beijing. With the return of Hong Kong to China and the continued opening of the Mainland, the commissioned composers being invited are no longer limited to those from the major cities. More provinces and cities are covered. As long as they are talented, the composers will become HKCO's targets of commissioning for creation. This is related to the fact that

since Maestro Yan Huichang becomes the Music Director (retitled Artistic Director subsequently), the areas for HKCO's exchange and contact in Mainland China have expanded. This is also related to Yan's broad network of personal relationship in the Mainland.

In fact, HKCO's actual strategy is to seek cooperation with talented and competent composers at home and abroad. This has been HKCO's practice even before its incorporation. The composers who have been commissioned by the Orchestra are not limited to Hong Kong. They include composers in Mainland China, Taiwan, and even foreign countries. When Ng Tai-kong was the Director, he made a debut in the 1983 Asian Art Festival with the Chinese music written by two foreign composers, John Howard and June Bremner. After HKCO's incorporation this "global commissioning" strategy has gradually become more active and proactive.

In the first five years after HKCO's incorporation, this "global commissioning" strategy was not obvious. Except for the debut in 2004 of the commissioned work *Nan Guan* written by the Philippine composer Jose Maceda, there was only Richard Storry's *The Fiery Phoenix* premiered at 'An East West Cross-over' concert in 2006. However, the performance at this concert inspired the 'Music about China' concert series launched in 2007. Six new works, including Marcel Wengler's *The Magic Boat*, were premiered with an "accidental" success of a full-house! Since then, 'Music about China' has become HKCO's annual event during the Hong Kong Arts Festival as the brand name to demonstrate the latest development of large-scale Chinese music works.

### 'Music about China' to enhance audience interaction >>>

In the 'Music about China' concerts, the composers often give a briefing on their works before the masterpieces are played. This allows the audience to have a deeper understanding of the new work and to enhance interaction with the audience. The new works played in the 'Music about China' concerts are produced not only by Chinese composers in Hong Kong, China, Taiwan and around the world, but also new works of foreign composers commissioned for their creation from time to time. South African composer Bongani Ndodana-Breen's *Zulu Gazing at the Rising Sun* in 2008, and the German composer Robert Zollitsch's *Songs of Love* for soprano and orchestra performed in 2010 are all impressive works.

HKCO performed American composer Howard McCary's *Water is Life*, a jazz piano and vocal music for the Qinghai's International Music Journey in 2008, and premiered the British composer Richard Storry's xylophone concerto *The Rise of the Golden Dragon* in the 'Love in the City' concert in 2009. In 2010, HKCO performed the debut of the German composer Dirk Brosse's *The Hallow-e'en Dances* in 'The Mystic Realm' concert, and in 'An Evening with HKCO Huqin Principals' in 2011, German composer Robert Zollitsch's *huqin* quartet *Ran Shao Xi Wang* was played.

During the period, many overseas Chinese composers and those in Taiwan have been commissioned to create new works. They include Phoon Yew-tien of Singapore, Kong Su-leong, Tan Kah-yong and Yii Kah-hoe of Malaysia, Cindy Kuhn-Chuang of Germany, Zhang Hafu of Belgium, George Gao and Lee Pui-ming of Canada, Wen Deqing in Switzerland, and Li Ying, Lu Lianghai, Hung Chien-Hui, Chen

Chung-sheng, Sun Pei-Li, Tung Chao-Ming and Lu Yun of Taiwan.

In 2012, the 'Music about China' entered its sixth year. During the 40th Anniversary of the Hong Kong Arts Festival, five creative works by Chinese composers with different cultural backgrounds were presented. The repertoire included *Horologia Sinica* for soprano and orchestra by Jeffrey Ching (a Filipina composer living in Germany); *Vein III - A Dialogue on Styles* by Quan Jihao of Beijing; *The Seventh Month* by Ng Cheuk-yin of Hong Kong for *sheng* and orchestra; as well as *Music from the Mountain* for *dizi* and orchestra by Lu Yun of Taiwan. In addition, there was *Orchestra Suite No. 2* by Chew Hee Chiat, HKCO's current Resident Conductor from Malaysia. These works demonstrate clearly HKCO's strategy of "global commissioning" at home and abroad.

### Hong Kong works – the focus of promotion >>>

Under the "global commissioning" strategy, Hong Kong composers' works are still the mainstay of HKCO's promotion efforts and a fixed number of commissioned premieres of Hong Kong works are maintained. In addition to the 20 works with Hong Kong as the themes in his 'Cadenzas of Hong Kong', Chan Wing-wah wrote *Moon Over Bounteous Land* in 2002, *Symphony No. 7: The Great Wall* in 2005, *Symphony No. 8: This Boundless Land* in 2006, *Thunderous Drums Shaking the Earth* and *Eight Steeds* in 2007. Richard Tsang composed *Dai-Lok-Tin* and *Sky Bridge*. There were also Chen Ning-chi's concerto for *gaohu* *Sounds of the South* in 2001; John Chen's *Dragon Wings* in 2001; Chan Hing-yan's *Illusions* for piano and orchestra; Chan Ming-chi's works for Satsuma Biwa including *Song of Wind-scape* and *You You* in 2012, *The Journey to the End of the Earth - An Elegy for the Victims of War* in 2003, *Hong Kong in a Fog – Dedicated to the Brave Fighters of Atypical Pneumonia* in 2003; Joshua Chan's *Distant Thoughts* in 2002; Tam Po-shek's *A Flower But Not, A Fog But Not*; Ip Kim-ho's *While the Script Speaks.....* in 2003; Ng Cheuk-yin's *Morning Light* in 2003 and *The Seventh Month* for *sheng* and orchestra in 2012.

After HKCO's incorporation, works of Hong Kong composers are often arranged in its concert programmes during its tours overseas or in Mainland China. For example, Doming Lam's *The Insect World* was played in the Austria-Germany and Washington tour concerts in February and late April 2002 respectively. Law Wing-fai's *Ink Spirit* was performed by the *pipa* and string ensemble in November 2003 when HKCO visited the Natural History Museum in London for the first time. Hong Kong composer Joseph Koo's *Legend of the Condor Heroes*, the theme song of a popular TV drama series, was played at the New Year Concerts in the six cities of the Pearl River Delta in December 2003. Chan Ming-chi's *Jing•Qi•Shen* was performed at Saint-Denis Arts Festival - The Year of China in France in June 2004. In September of the same year, some of Joseph Koo's *A Medley of Themes from Television Drama Series* were played in the 'HKCO in Shanghai Concert' at the Shanghai Grand Theatre and the 'HKCO in Nanjing Concert'. In the European tour concerts held in Berlin of Germany, Prague of Czech Republic and Dublin of Ireland, they played Richard Tsang's *Ling Kai (Spirit's Domain)*. In the 'Concert of Classical Chinese Music Works' held in Xi'an in April 2005, Richard Tsang's *The Insect World* was also included. This work was also played as an encore while HKCO revisited Washington and New York of the United States. Law Wing-fai's *Ink Spirit*, and Kwan Sheng-yau's *A Nocturnal Rendezvous in the*

*Woods* was included in the programme of the tour concerts in New Zealand and Australia in May 2006.

During the concert held in Hangzhou in July 2007 to celebrate Hong Kong's return to China and the tour concerts in Toronto and Vancouver in Canada in August of the same year, Richard Tsang's *An-Ching (Song of Bliss)* was played. Alfred Wong's *Nocturne to the Victoria Harbour*, which was filled with Hong Kong colour and Kwan Sheng-yau's *A Nocturnal Rendezvous in the Woods* were played at the Elite Concert at Oakland of New Zealand in September of the year. In January 2018, HKCO was invited to perform at the Seasonal Concert held at the Concert Hall, National Centre for the Performing Art in Beijing, and Ng Tai-kong's *Chance Encounter* and Doming Lam's *The Insect World* were played. At the concert held at the Shanghai World Expo in 2010, Law Wing-fai's work for *pipa* and orchestra, *A Thousand Sweeps*, was performed.

Through these tours at home and abroad, the works of Hong Kong composers have been more widely circulated and Hong Kong's colour and image of HKCO have been enhanced. On the other hand, the audio and video recordings published by HKCO also focus on the works of Hong Kong composers, which is essential for the promotion of HKCO's new works.

### Strengthening audio-visual publishing to promote Hong Kong works >>>

After HKCO's incorporation, the restrictions on producing CDs of concerts with live recording have been loosened. HKCO has been cooperating with Hugo Productions, which publishes Chinese music and the works of Hong Kong composers for a long time. In addition to publishing *This Boundless Land: Chan Wing-wah & Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra* in 2008 and *Richard Tsang & Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra* in 2009, the Modern Audio (International) Limited established in 2000 also produced a series of CD, VCD and DVD in conjunction with HKCO on the latter's concerts and music performing activities. Other than *In Search of Chinese New Music – Works by Doming Lam* published in the form of the composer's collection in 2006, other AV products also comprise the masterpieces of composers from Mainland China and Hong Kong, including *The Huqin world of Wong On-yuen – The Huqin Road V* in 2005, *The Silk Road Fantasia Suite* in 2005, *Majestic Drums V* in 2006, *Music for Tranquility of Mind* in 2007, *The Wonderful Winds of Guo Yazhi* in 2008, *Routes of Pipa (2008)*, *Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra at the National Centre for the Performing Arts Vol.1 & Vol.2* in 2009, *Intoxicating Nature* in 2011, *The HKCO Virtuosi – Wong Chi-ching* in 2011 and *Luo Jing's World of Zhengs / The HKCO Virtuosi – Luo Jing* in 2012.

Hong Kong is a market with a population of seven million only. The cost-effectiveness of publishing modern recording and music scores there is really low. Therefore, there are no publishers in Hong Kong which publish albums and scores of traditional music regularly. Few music scores and music books are published. Under such circumstance, HKCO has only issued a small number of AV products and very few score sheets are published. Nevertheless, after HKCO's concert to pay tribute to Doming Lam on his 80th birthday in 2006, his eight Chinese works were collated and published as *Collection of Doming Lam's Chinese Works – Music Scores 2006 Revised Edition* in 2008. It provides a good reference for composing large-scale Chinese music! HKCO has also published *Enjoying Chinese Music: a Guide*

to *Chinese Orchestral Music* and *A Handbook to Appreciating Chinese Orchestral Music* in order to promote Chinese music more effectively.

### A full range of diverse programs to stimulate creation >>>

With the development brought about by technologies of modern stage and computer, the concept of music creation is not limited to the forms serving "traditional concerts". Music combined with other artistic elements and art forms is prevalent and still gaining momentum. Multimedia production has become the trend in the international performing arts arena in the 21st Century. After its incorporation, HKCO has adopted the concept of comprehensive and diversified program design. It has been exploring new space for the development of large-scale Chinese music. At the same time, it has also stimulated the creation activities of Hong Kong composers which have brought diversity to the musical genres composed for HKCO.

Firstly, the production style of large-scale Broadway musicals imported from Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s has been inherited. In 1994, *Tales of the Walled City*, a Hong Kong-style Broadway musical composed by Chen Ning-chi, who was HKCO's music composer then, was performed jointly by the three major arts groups, namely the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, Hong Kong Repertory Theatre and Hong Kong Dance Company, under the former Urban Council. The show attracted wide attention before and after the performance. After incorporation of the three regiments, they joined hands again in 2003 to produce the musical *Sweet and Sour Hong Kong* composed by Joseph Koo. Despite widely different comments after its performance, the musical was later brought to Shanghai for a tour show.

On the other hand, Chen Ning-chi also composed a mini musical *Come and Eat* for HKCO in 2001, *The Panda's Diary* in 2010, a Chinese musical drama *The Legend of Love* in 2001, and the drama and magic show *Do Mi So Musical Comedy* in 2002. With enormous efforts and spirit of exploration, HKCO has joined the production of large-scale ballet, folk dance, and Chinese opera.

In 2004, HKCO cooperated with the Hong Kong Ballet to produce *Legend of The Great Archer* (music composed by Kuan Nai-chung) for the Silver Jubilee Ceremony of Hong Kong Ballet. HKCO served as the live accompanist and was the first Chinese orchestra to accompany the ballet! In June 2012, the Hong Kong Dance Company performed a large-scale epic Chinese dance drama *Evacuation Order* (Director and Choreographer - Leung Kwok-shing; Playwright - Gerard C C Tsang; Music Director - Yan Huichang; Original Music - Tang Lok-yin). HKCO gave live accompaniment under the directorship of Chew Hee Chiat. In cooperation with the Hong Kong Opera House, HKCO produced *Dr Sun Yat-sen* (Producer - Warren Mok; Playwright - Candace Chong Mui-ngam; Director - Chen Xinyi) in October 2011. The three-act original opera, which integrates Chinese stage elements and contemporary music styles, was written by Chinese-American composer Huang Ruo to commemorate the Centennial of the 1911 Revolution. Again, HKCO performed live accompaniment with Yan Huichang as the director.

### Multimedia production coexisting with civil groups >>>

In terms of multimedia production, the most prominent ones are made by the two composers who cooperated with HKCO. Mui Kwong-chiu (born in 1952) and Alfred Wong (born in 1979) have been launching multiple multimedia productions under the support of HKCO. Mui's *Intoxicating Nature* produced in 2010 integrates calligraphy, dance, projection, lighting, and scenery. In September 2012, his work *Ode to Water*, a multimedia production which combines calligraphy, poetry, projection and video techniques, was staged to start the 35th music season of HKCO. Alfred Wong has also created *The Eight Immortals' Adventures* (2010) and *The Eight Immortals' Adventures Prequel* (2012) for HKCO. Wong's works incorporate different theatre elements such as drama, poses, sand painting, lighting, and projection.

These cross-media productions and the introduction of Western instruments for solo playing are breakthroughs deviated from the traditional forms of performance. They bring a new look to the music of the Chinese orchestra, stimulating more musicians and artists to participate in the development of Chinese music.

In addition to the production of these tradition-breaking works for large-scale Chinese music ensemble, HKCO has set up a folk music group to explore and perform traditional Chinese folk music, a chamber music group that pursues refined taste, and even the HKCO Pop that integrates Chinese music with pop. After its incorporation, HKCO has adopted an "all-round" strategy and ideology to seek larger and broader development space for today's Chinese orchestra!



Crossmedia Chinese music theatre 'Ode to Water', composed by Dr Mui Kwong-chiu, included elements such as calligraphy, Chinese poetry, visual images, dance and videos.

### Difficulties in monitoring the standards of artworks from creation to production >>>

HKCO's incorporation has inevitably resulted in the Orchestra having to face the balance between the market and art itself. For HKCO to uphold its idea of "art is the highest", the Artistic Director Yan Huichang has to serve as the gatekeeper. The process in safeguarding the standards of new works from the commissioning of their creation to their final production is particularly essential. Problems arising from the technical, conceptual and practical aspects have to be addressed with the gatekeeper's professionalism, as well as his personality and wisdom, which are not necessarily profession-related.

Let's take a look at two examples. One of them was the work of the South African composer Bongani Ndodana-Breen's *Zulu Gazing at the Rising Sun* composed for 'Music about China' in 2008. The difficulty encountered during the rehearsal was beyond imagination. Maestro Yan Huichang said, "It is a piece of music with very strong Chinese character. There lies a profoundly different Chinese culture behind it. The score cannot accurately record such culture, meaning that it is difficult to play it according to the score. Moreover, HKCO had no African drums. Its Chinese drums simply failed to show the characteristics of the music and express what the music meant to convey. It was because we lacked research on the ethnic music of black Africans, and the composer didn't know Chinese musical instruments very well either. And therefore, it took us a lot of time to communicate before solving the problem. If we had arranged a black African drummer to come on the day, it would have been much simpler. This experience allows us to realize that when non-Chinese composers write music for us, the performance will be much more difficult than we imagine."

Another example is Guo Wenjing's *Melodies of West Yunnan*. The first two movements, *A Va Mountain* and *Jino Dance*, were written in 1993 and premiered by HKCO in March 1994. The third movement, *Sacrifice-Torches-Potent Liquors*, however, was not released until 2008. It was only in February 2009 that it was premiered in 'Music about China', with 15 or 16 years in between. Yan Huichang was deeply impressed by the case. He said, "I have been communicating with the composer and striving persistently throughout the process. I have finally succeeded but it still requires constant communication." That is why Guo Wenjing particularly writes, "I would like to thank Mr Yan Huichang, the Director of HKCO, for his patience, tolerance and persistence" in the introduction to this work when the third movement was premiered.

In Yan Huichang's words, it is most satisfying to see that the composers cooperating with HKCO have mastered very well the features of its instruments, which are almost at their disposal at any time. These composers include Mui Kwong-chiu, Tang Lok-yin, Alfred Wong, Ng Cheuk-yin and Hui Cheung-wai.

### Seminars and composing competitions as supporting events >>>

To succeed in attracting more talented composers who may not be familiar with the Chinese musical instruments to join the realm of Chinese music creation and produce good results, many supporting activities are needed. Organizing high quality music seminars should be an important part of such events.

Only through exploring profoundly the academic and theoretic aspects of the concept, techniques, direction and prospect of music creation can the composers see clearly the current music environment and climate, and then find their own direction in creation.

This kind of music seminars were already held before HKCO's incorporation. For example, HKCO organized the 'Retrospect and Development of Modern Chinese Orchestra' in 1997, and the 'Chinese Orchestra Composition Symposium' in 2000. After its incorporation, it has also held another two international symposia: 'On the Ecology of Chinese music in a Modern Environment and Its Future Development' in 2003 and 'The Fourth International Symposium on Chinese Music - Tradition and Evolution' in 2007 as a major activity to celebrate HKCO's 30th Anniversary. Relevant experts and guests from Hong Kong and overseas were invited to attend the symposia, publish their papers and share their views. The discussions in the seminars were specifically collated and proceeding papers were published for more people to share. Through these activities, the influence of HKCO can go beyond the stage to reach more profound academic and theoretical levels. The actual results show that they are not just an image-building project, but efforts to get more composers for the creation of works for large Chinese orchestras.

Organizing composition competitions is another important supporting event. Before its incorporation, HKCO held the 'International Competition for Chinese Orchestral Composition 2000'. Twelve years later, it organized '10th International Composition Prize for 2013' in conjunction with the Luxembourg Society for Contemporary Music to collate new works created for seven different kinds of Chinese and Western musical instruments. These are continuation of HKCO's long-term development strategies on "global commissioning" to look for creative talents and demonstrate that HKCO's spirit to promote music creation "based in Hong Kong with a global vision".

Is this "global commissioning" strategy "with a global vision" conducive to finding creative talents who can compose successful Chinese music works? Prof Chan Wing-wah, Hong Kong's famous composer, Chairman of the Composers and Authors Society of Hong Kong and the first and current HKCO Council member, points out that today's large-scale Chinese orchestras do not necessarily have to play Chinese-style music because Chinese orchestras, like the piano or Western orchestras, are just a musical tool for anyone to use as an instrument to express feelings. It means that the Chinese orchestra has become international.

## Commitment to the Society and Being Accountable

When HKCO was officially incorporated in 2001, quite a number of the HKCO members felt uneasy, which has left a keep impression on Dr Carlye W L Tsui, the first HKCO Council Chairman after its incorporation. She says, "Many people were afraid that the scale of HKCO would shrink after its incorporation, which would eventually lead to the end of the Orchestra. For this reason, some people even used the term 'eternal sinners' to describe the HKCO Council members after its incorporation."

The term 'eternal sinner' is indeed stunning. At the same time, Dr Tsui feels an even heavier responsibility on her shoulders!

### One year for preparation and three chairmen in ten years >>>

When she was an Urban Councillor, Dr Carlye Tsui was already a member of the committee overseeing HKCO, giving her a deep relationship with the Orchestra. Moreover, she was also the Chief Executive Officer of The Hong Kong Institute of Directors. She was indeed the right person to lead HKCO. Therefore, it was logical and natural for the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) to appoint Dr Tsui the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee on Incorporation of HKCO when LCSD decided to implement the policy to incorporate the three arts groups.

Dr Carlye Tsui said that it took a year to prepare for the incorporation, which was in fact the separation of HKCO from the government structure for the Orchestra to operate in a more flexible and open manner. On the one hand, art development requires room for expansion as well as greater support and sponsorship from the community. On the other hand, it is necessary for incorporated art groups to be supervised and committed to society. Through its incorporation, HKCO is managed by its Council whose membership comprises representatives of the Government and the general public. The process of restructuring was like the acquisition or merger of a commercial institution. The Council would assume leadership of HKCO in structure. The Preparatory Committee had to define clearly the structure, system, corporate culture and details for the Council, which are prescribed clearly in its Articles of Association to replace the set of government regulations on HKCO before its incorporation.

Despite such changes, HKCO's Articles of Association have to comply with the guidelines for the professional arts groups issued by the Government through the Home Affairs Bureau. For example, HKCO Council members' term of office cannot exceed six years. After serving as the Council Chairman for six years, therefore, Dr Carlye Tsui resigned from the position at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in October 2006. Dr Kelvin Wong JP, the original Vice-Chairman, who had been engaged in business management with much success, took over the chairmanship. However, he served only for two years and had to step down at the AGM in October 2008 because he had been in the Council for six years already. Mr Henry H W Lai, the original Vice-Chairman, took office and stayed for one year. At the AGM in October 2009, Dr Carlye Tsui resumed chairmanship.

### A new team for new structure and new culture >>>

In the first decade of HKCO's incorporation, under the leadership of the three chairmen of the Council against the "pressure" from "being eternal sinners", HKCO moved on cautiously and realistically. In fact, the Council members were "labelled" "eternal sinners", showing that the understanding of some people at that time about incorporation stayed at a very superficial level. Few people would bother to explore the difference between an incorporated performing arts group with other corporations. Even fewer people were aware that the most important spirit of incorporation is to effectively introduce the spirit and techniques of corporate governance into the management culture of the art group.

At the same time, little attention was paid to the differences in organizational structure between an incorporated art group and a commercial entity in general. There are no shareholders in the incorporation,

with only Council members working as "volunteers". The Annual General Meeting of the members is the highest authority, and the Council is the highest level of leadership, responsible for formulating policies and implementing strategic management. All Council members are "volunteers" not entitled to profits, if any.

The strategies drawn up by the Council are implemented by the two core figures of HKCO – the Executive Director and the Music (Artistic) Director. The Artistic Director is responsible for the artistic aspect while the Executive Director needs to work closely with the former to lead the administrative staff and the artistic department to accomplish the tasks to fulfil HKCO's mission.

The Music Director at that time, Maestro Yan Huichang, and the HKCO members faced the unknown challenges with an easy mind although they were not clear about the situation after incorporation yet. However, no suitable candidates were identified for the post of Executive Director although open recruitment had been advertised twice on newspapers. Despite HKCO's "independence" on 1 April in 2000 for incorporation, only one staff member of the Administrative Department, Ms Celina Chin as intended to stay behind in HKCO. She was seconded from the LCSD for one year to act as the Executive Director of HKCO. All administrative staff of the departments, such as the Programme Department and the Marketing Department, were newly employed. The full team was not formed until April 26 while the original staff would stay in office till the end of April only. In other words, there were only a few days for handover of some administrative duties between the new and old staff. An even bigger problem faced by the new team of the time was that many archival documents could not be transferred from the original Urban Council and the LCSD to the newly incorporated HKCO; nor could such documents be photocopied. The papers were available for the new team "to read" only. It was said that many staff files had to be destroyed completely, meaning that the incorporated HKCO would be "severed" from its past. This was surely inconducive to HKCO's operation and governance. Under such a helpless situation, an almost brand-new management team of HKCO (including both Council members and administrative staff) led the Orchestra into the new stage of incorporation by working hard to establish a new structure and a novel culture.

### Supervision guidelines stipulated to lay the foundation in the first year >>>

Establishing a novel culture for operation and governance under a new structure means introducing effectively the spirit and techniques of corporate governance into the management culture of HKCO, and at the same time playing an effective role to monitor the Orchestra's development. The Council, therefore, first examined the guiding principles of thirty-seven aspects to formulate the corresponding policy rules. At the same time, the forward-looking Mission Statement was made: "Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra is united in its commitment to offering excellence in Chinese music. With a contemporary momentum and a professional spirit, we aim to strive for the peak in music and attain the status of a world-class orchestra that is the pride of Hong Kong people." In accordance with the Mission Statement, the core beliefs of HKCO are stipulated. They cover four aspects: commitment to social responsibility; promotion of Chinese culture and continuous development of Chinese music; exchanges with foreign countries; and

corporate governance and management concepts. A total of twenty principles have been drawn up.

These guiding principles, policy regulations, mission statement and core beliefs not only clarify the development direction and objectives of HKCO, but also the Council's monitoring standards for the Orchestra, and even for the Council itself. To make these verbal concepts concrete and efficient, three committees have been set up under the Council: Finance and Audit Committee, Human Resources Committee and Marketing Committee (and subsequently Education Committee). The administrative section headed by the Executive Director is divided into three departments, namely the Programme, Education and Touring Department, the Marketing & Development Department and the Finance, Personnel & Administration Department. The current establishment comprises 25 staff members. The incorporated HKCO has simplified many of the provisions for government-run arts groups of the past. Every department works in an orderly manner according to their division of function or duty and various authorization. There are more space and flexibility than the past, especially for public relations, publicity, and marketing strategies.

In the art domain, the Music (Artistic) Director and the Artistic Group comprising four Section Leaders are responsible for making recommendations on art development and teamwork. At the same time, specific forms have been designed. Musicians at Assistant Principal or above levels will give scores to various aspects after each concert for comprehensive evaluation. The assessment is used for monitoring changes and development of HKCO's artistic standard and quality. The musicians may sometimes have group discussion to study art issues or compare recent concerts with the past ones for review.

On 1 April 2002, the Council of HKCO passed a resolution on the establishment of the "Artistic Advisor" system in order to collate ideas and gather more professionals for their insights to promote better development of the Orchestra. On 31 October 2007, the "Council Advisor" system was approved. Willing and capable celebrities in culture, arts, music and related areas are invited to contribute to HKCO.

On these bases, HKCO is monitored by various parties. Under the leadership of the Council and the two Directors, HKCO will continue to advance and bring the spirit of incorporation into play. At the same time, in today's rapidly changing world, an art development direction with a linear thinking mode can no longer meet the requirements of society. HKCO, therefore, adopts a strategy of all-round development, under which promotional activities of the education series are enhanced. Social events such as concerts at schools and community halls are organized as a response to the Orchestra's commitment to social responsibility.

### Strengthening all-round development of social activities >>>

According to the core beliefs set by the Council in accordance with the Mission Statement, the five articles regarding social responsibility are:

1. We aim to enhance the quality of life of our audiences by presenting music programmes that are well-balanced, diversified and contemporary.

2. We advocate a harmonious society and a peaceful world using music as a universal language and a communication facilitator between east and west.
3. We uphold people's right to enjoyment of music and aim to satisfy emotional and spiritual needs.
4. We embrace societal development and interpret metropolitan life with symphonic Chinese music and modern music works.
5. We reciprocate the support and encouragement of the community by offering audiences rich and superbly performed programmes and delivering pleasant and varied surprises.

These five articles not only form the concept of HKCO in programme design, but also open up a huge space for the Orchestra in social activities after its incorporation. The 'Music from a Thousand Strings' in 2001 set a new *Guinness record* with nearly one thousand people playing *erhu* at the same time. At the Hong Kong Drum Festival held in 2003 under the SARS epidemic, three thousand people played *And The Earth Shall Move* with drums in Victoria Park to inspire the public. Two more *Guinness records* (the drum with the largest diameter and the most people drumming) were set at the event. In 2005 a *dizi* marathon was held during the Hong Kong Dizi and Xiao Festival. In 2006, Yan Huichang conducted HKCO and more than 10,000 people on both sides of Victoria Harbour drumming to start the International Festival of Inclusive Arts.

In addition to these large-scale social activities, HKCO also cooperated with TV stations, radio stations and other institutions to produce music education programmes and the educational CD-Rom entitled *The Treasure of Chinese Music: The Huqin*. It also participates actively in educational work. In addition to the explanatory outreach concerts at schools and communities to promote educational Chinese music, voluntary training activities are also held for music teachers of primary and secondary schools to offer them possible solutions for organizing Chinese orchestras. The activities were also promoted to care for the disadvantaged. In September 2005, HKCO launched the "Music for Love" Scheme to bring Chinese music to the homes for the elderly, children's homes and centres for single-parent families to fulfil its social responsibilities. In the same year, HKCO was awarded the "Caring Company" logo by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service.

Moreover, in addition to the "Friends of Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra" set up in 1998, and the establishment of the HKCO Development Fund in 2002 after HKCO's incorporation, the Hong Kong Children Chinese Orchestra and the Hong Kong Junior Chinese Orchestra were formed in 2003. Together with the many musical instrument classes, all these activities have enhanced HKCO's social relations and expanded its contacts with society extensively. Indeed, they can play an active role for HKCO to win resources from the community.

### Openness, fairness and justice for better communication and mutual trust >>>

Obviously, the flexibility of HKCO's operation has been greatly enhanced after its incorporation. The responsibility of the Council has become very important. The Council members come from a variety of professions, including professional talents in the legal, accounting, education, music and administration

sectors. Everyone is willing to work hard to support the development of culture and art, and they even make financial contributions to participate in this “volunteer” work for long-term and far-reaching results.

However, art groups of various disciplines may involve different professions with their own characteristics. The HKCO Council members, who come from all walks of life, are not necessarily familiar with the operation of Chinese music, especially large-scale Chinese orchestras. Quite often, they have to make efforts to take “essence classes on music”, or else they may “cause harm despite a good intention”. Without proper knowledge about music, their subjective good wishes to care for HKCO might hamper the business activities of the Orchestra’s executives and even the artistic development of the musicians inadvertently.

Fortunately, in the process of HKCO’s incorporation, especially in the early days, the Council, together with the administrative and art departments, made much positive effort to implement various measures in an open, fair, just and humane manner with their love for the Orchestra. The Council members, mostly abounding in management experience, trained the HKCO members in their respective areas of expertise to strengthen team spirit. They often communicated directly with the HKCO members and established art groups composed of musicians to strengthen communication. Brainstorming and sharing sessions were held. HKCO Council members, and even members of the public, were invited to speak on specific topics in seminars to enhance the awareness of “being in the same boat” among everyone of HKCO. Yan Huichang also stresses that a new member would be given a five-minute session to display their personal skill to determine their position in the orchestra, not necessarily a relationship between members and their superiors.

Under this system, the fitting-in period between the HKCO Council, the executive management and the HKCO members was greatly shortened. With mutual trust established, HKCO made bigger strides, increased its energy of activities by a large extent and played a prominent role as an ambassador of Hong Kong music culture in social contacts and during the tours in Mainland China and overseas. This system has also enabled HKCO to successfully handle various issues, such as the research and development of the Eco-Huqin to replace the traditional Huqin, retirement of members, training successors for musicians, the Chinese title for “Concert Master” and the “Public Audit Committee” case.

### **The four governance ideas laying the foundation of HKCO’s corporate culture >>>**

In the first ten years of HKCO’s incorporation, it is basically able to carry out various tasks according to the Mission Statement. It has effectively introduced the spirit and techniques of corporate governance into the management culture of the art group by establishing a healthy corporate culture. HKCO’s corporate governance culture is specified in the four core articles regarding corporate governance and management philosophy, which are based on the core beliefs set out in the Mission Statement:

1. In our business objectives, we are dedicated to ensuring financial soundness and to enhancing business results, through the practices of good corporate governance, high-quality management and strong

business ethics. We strategically establish our corporate vision and plans, develop human resources and properly utilize public funds.

2. We are in constant search for excellence and higher individual and group work performance. We encourage all Company members to pursue continuing professional development; we facilitate musicians, administrative staff and technical staff to realize their potential. We work to further strengthen co-operation, in order to serve our audiences with the best professional spirit and artistic qualities.
3. We continually develop a corporate culture for united efforts via open, liberal and mutually respectful communication channels throughout the Company.
4. We promote a good corporate and personal image. We encourage every Company member to assume an ambassadorial role for the Company so as to project the image of high standards, passion for work and liveliness. We aim to attract greater audience support, more renowned guest musicians and larger amounts of community sponsorship in order to enhance the social status of the Orchestra.

With the support of these core beliefs, the HKCO Chairman Dr Carlye Tsui clearly publicizes the meeting culture of the Council in the HKCO Annual Report: “The style of the Council is democratic and participative among attendees, with Council Members fulfilling their fiduciary duties in the deliberation of subjects so as to arrive at a consensus and conclusion in the best interests of the Company. The Chairman sets the meeting agenda with suggestions from Council Members and the two Principal Executives and presides at all Council Meetings. The two Principal Executives make their presentations to the Council for discussion. Council Members participate actively in analyzing the subject under discussion approaching this from various perspectives. The Chairman summarizes the conclusion and seeks consensus, and if necessary, calls for voting on a particular issue. The Chairman ensures that the Council goes through enlightened and considered decision-making processes. While assuming overall and ultimate corporate governance responsibilities, the Council concentrates on strategic directions and policy-making, motivating and allowing the two Principal Executives and their respective teams to plan, implement, manage and operate with maximum room for creativity.”

After its incorporation, HKCO has been on the right track in all aspects. It is believed that no one will accuse the HKCO Council members as “eternal sinners” any more. Nevertheless, Dr Carlye Tsui admits that the responsibility of the HKCO Council is indeed heavy after the Orchestra’s incorporation. She says that HKCO should emphasize its results and make commitments to society. The government, however, generally looks only at the number of audiences, concerts and performances to make “quantity” measurement. For an orchestra, the focuses should lie on its artistic value and art quality. The role for HKCO to play in the development of Chinese music is not something measurable by quantity.

The achievement of HKCO in the first decade after its incorporation has been highly appreciated by all parties and it is the result of teamwork. However, it takes a long time to build up a corporate culture. The HKCO spirit is being established and the Mission Statement proposed after its incorporation has been

fully realized. However, we have to know clearly that the most important assets of the Orchestra are still the HKCO musicians who face the audience on the stage. How to strive for better remuneration and welfare for them to have a better life so that more top-level musicians will come together to ensure that these assets continue to add values to HKCO, is especially essential at the current stage when it is still going through the process of hand-over between old and new members. This will be a more complicated and challenging task placed it front of the HKCO Council!

