



Creating a global cultural city via public participation in the arts: conversations with Hong Kong's leading arts and cultural administrators

, by Patrick Lo, Wen-En Hsu, Stephanie H. S. Wu, J. Travis, and Dickson Chiu, Nova Science Publishers, 2021, 329 pp., US\$230. ISBN 9781536197198

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BOOK REVIEW

Creating a global cultural city via public participation in the arts: conversations with Hong Kong's leading arts and cultural administrators, by Patrick Lo, Wen-En Hsu, Stephanie H. S. Wu, J. Travis, and Dickson Chiu, Nova Science Publishers, 2021, 329 pp., US\$230. ISBN 9781536197198

This book is certainly an intriguing, educational read from cover to cover, consisting of 22 semi-structured interviews featuring conversations with not only key decision makers in the arts and cultural industry including three executive administrators of governmental departments and committees and seven CEOs of major performing arts companies in Hong Kong, but also three academics of related disciplines, five organizers of museums and galleries, three managers from nonprofit local institutes and archives as well as one cultural critic. The educational background and working experiences of those interviewees exhibit a wide spectrum of training in related disciplines, managerial expertise and various skillsets including solving problems while thinking on their feet, business-related abilities such as marketing and lobbying for sponsorships just to name a few, as well as working collaboratively with artists and stakeholders while leading a team of colleagues for arts and cultural projects. Many of the interviewees are local Hong Kongers, whereas some are expatriates from English-speaking countries and European countries such as Germany, Greece and Spain; this suggests a good mixture of global professionals and talents in arts are recruited and working closely with the locals in Hong Kong. The aims of this book intend to document the development of arts and cultures in Hong Kong in view of the everchanging socio-cultural, socio-political and economical landscapes of Hong Kong in the past three decades by decoding these arts and cultural leadership styles in respective organizational contexts, and how the roles, missions, visions and responsibilities of those organizations in the arts and cultural industry have evolved throughout the years to foster Hong Kong's branding and unique identities in arts and culture by involving general public and developing new, young audiences along the way.

Kudos must go to the authors including Dr. Patrick Lo et al. – there are several major accomplishments for which I was pleasantly impressed about this book.

Foremost, the calibers and range of interviewees in the cultural industry that the authors were able to enlist for interviews; it must have taken considerable amount of research, effort and perhaps persuasion to be able to achieve this extensive lineup of professional executives, experts and leaders in the fields. The carefully curated list of interviewees includes not only key players of renowned performing arts groups and governmental officials from a strategic perspective but also local organizations in which reflect the bottom-up development initiated by grassroot level of audience participation over a considerably long period of time. This gesture of inclusiveness, from the authors' point of view, to survey a wide range of stakeholders and examine a variety of organizations with current local arts and cultural scenes in mind is highly appreciated and a contribution itself to foster sustainability and importance of public participation in cultural activities. Secondly, the design and sequence of interview questions were well thought-out to facilitate the semi-structured interviews, together with additional follow-up questions on the spot to enhance the depth and scope of the subject matters.

The candidness and genuine sharing from each interviewee were truly commendable too – their passion, commitment, persistence and the sense of responsibility in arts administration and management, even frustration and challenges, in relation to cultural heritage and the growth of Hong Kong's everchanging cultural identity were vividly conveyed throughout this conversational documentary. Moreover, the overall structure of forewords, introduction, chapters, commentary and conclusion was intentionally laid out to facilitate readers' experiences. That is, whilst the forewords are written by experts in the industry with indispensable information for the subject matters to prepare readers for the upcoming chapters, the commentary and conclusion offer a focused outlook in the challenging yet exciting time ahead in embarking Hong Kong's arts and cultural landscapes onto the

21st century. Throughout the chapters of insightful interviews, which contain in-depth sharing of personal background in education and working experiences, invaluable knowledges in the related fields as well as expertise opinions on the current and forecast of cultural vibes in Hong Kong, were thoroughly showcased to illustrate the multifaceted, complex and interrelated perspectives of local arts and cultural atmosphere and environment. This makes Hong Kong a particularly unique cultural melting pot where traditions meet creativity with the spheres of East and West glide.

This book is a must-read for those who are interested in arts administration, especially those who consider to pursue a potential career in the arts and cultural industry in Hong Kong and nearby regions in Asia. Although I highly recommend this book as a potential textbook material or supplementary reading for arts and cultural related courses and degrees in higher education, I must point out that almost 30 rudimentary editorial issues, predominantly from pages 30 to 141, were spotted; this could be a result of lacking rigorous proofreading before going to print in haste. Despite of this major let-down which could have been prevented easily, the book was an enjoyable and easy read which is suitable for arousing interests and discussion in arts administration and cultural related disciplines. As intended by the authors to add educational purpose and utilize this book as a textbook or supplementary reading for curriculum of arts management, chapters could have been grouped according to the nature of organizations/stakeholders in local arts and cultural landscapes, such as part I for performing arts organizations, part II for governmental departments and committees, part III for local nonprofit organizations, so on and so forth. Moreover, discussion topics could be added in the end of each part to facilitate focus group discussion during lectures.

Given the unique timing of this publication with some interviews took place during the Covid pandemic, this book serves as a stocktaking of pre-pandemic situation in the related fields, and the

conclusion also serves as a brief report of the challenges and anticipatory impact to performing arts industry during this difficult period. Issues such as the importance of digital technology and social media, as well as being innovative in terms of outreach programme and audience development scheme so that cultural exposure remains accessible to the general public during the pandemic are highlighted in some of the interviews. As suggested in the conclusion, further research is very much needed to reflect and document the detrimental impact of this Covid pandemic on the arts and cultural industry in Hong Kong as well as in the global sense. How and when the industry could be recovered is yet to be seen. While this book project is a noble, pioneer attempt to depict the evolution of Hong Kong's arts and cultural identities through public participation in the recent decades, it has evidently shown that Hong Kong's cultural diversity and vibrant energy of development in arts are ever so strong, vivid and continuously flourishing. Hence Hong Kong is a potential contender to become a key cultural hub not only in Asia but also in the global perspective, which further proves that Hong Kong's cultural identity in the 21st century has come a long way and is no longer a cultural desert as commonly portrayed since the 1970s.

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