



## Creating a Global Cultural City via Public Participation in the Arts: Conversations with Hong Kong's Leading Arts and Cultural Administrators

by Patrick Lo, Wei-En Hsu, Stephanie H. S. Wu, J. Travis, and Dickson K. W. Chiu. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2021, 369 pp., \$230 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-1-53619-719-8

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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, Wei-En Hsu, Stephanie H. S. Wu, J. Travis, and Dickson K. W. Chiu. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2021, 369 pp., \$230 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-1-53619-719-8

*Creating a Global Cultural City* contains 22 interviews with arts administrators, art-related publishers, reporters and educators from leading art organizations in Hong Kong. These interviews provide a unique opportunity to learn more about the landscape of arts development in Hong Kong from the perspective of those engaging in professional practice. *Creating a Global Cultural City via Public Participation in the Arts* by Patrick Lo, Professor of Library, Information & Media Science at the University of Tsukuba, and editing peers from Hong Kong, is, therefore, a much-needed book. Indeed, the book addresses a broad arts administration spectrum in Hong Kong, aiming to establish its reputation as a global cultural hub.

Before discussing the merits and limitations of the book, it is essential to look at the title. The main title highlights the new government's ambition to put the city on the top of the global cultural city hierarchy. The subtitle gives a glimpse of how some of the many leading organizations grow in such a context. The book covers a wide area of arts professionals, starting from the leader of the Arts Development Council (Chapter 1). The following interviewees are from the performance and festival sectors (Chapter 2 –9, 18, and 20) and the museum and arts center sector (Chapter 10, 11, 13–15, 17 and 21). Additionally, the book contains arts professionals from a publisher (Chapter 12), archivist (Chapter 16), programme director (Chapter 19) and journalist (Chapter 22).

One of the book's main contributions is that it sketches the arts and cultural scene from the arts manager's eye. Though the 'cultural desert' (Karvelyte 2018) description of Hong Kong seems outdated, there is still a need for more in-depth research examining the government's abrupt cultural investment and the rising of local culture awareness in recent years. Many interviewees show an optimistic attitude toward the overall arts and cultural scene, a few descriptions such as 'improved and extended', 'Waterland' and 'diversified' appear, and there is an agreement that the 'place' and 'time' 'make this city vibrant in its own way (Chapter 5, 48)'. Moreover, as the book was completed during the peak of the Covid-19, it includes reflections on the global pandemic, which serves as a springboard to further discussion and analysis on policy discourses.

A second strength of the book is it reveals each arts professionals' career path. This includes their family background, academic training and steps into the field. For example, readers could find that the arts administrators hail from diverse disciplines. Students who majored in arts, literature, business, or computer science embarked on careers in the arts administration sector. Meanwhile, the interviewees also indicate that, along with their interests, internship experiences are equally important, which helps young administrators learn a new set of language in arts. In addition, the managers help to portray their role of responsibility and typical workday. Though the daily routine depends on their roles, handling multiple tasks that heavily rely on their skills and experiences in finding solutions are mentioned frequently.

The other impressive strength is the book shows the interviewees perspectives on the variety of factors that come into play when running an arts organization that they perceive to be successful. For instance, trusting colleagues and setting clear rules and guidelines are, among the most, equally important. Moreover, as a veteran who worked both for the official and private sectors, the interview with Louis Yu (Chapter 20) emphasizes the importance of communication skills with artists, funders or officials are essential. Lastly, within the context that the government has invested many resources in branding Hong Kong as a cultural hub, many arts professionals have sensed the change and engaged themselves in this future.

The book is presented in a conversational and thought-provoking style. Firstly, many interviewees mentioned there were few opportunities to develop local talent in arts administration twenty years ago in Hong Kong. There has been an increasing professionalization of arts management practice through the growing offer of training in arts management and available funding streams for projects as well as exchange programmes abroad. Another change implied in the interviews is that many longer established organizations were set up during the British colonial era, yet more—though still limited greater representation of local tastes and leadership is reflected after the transfer of sovereignty to PR China in 1997. However, this triggers a question regarding how arts managers interpret and approach local cultural richness in their programming when they manage local organizations. This critical perspective, which the book provides, is sorely needed as the rapid growth of cultural and creative industries has led responses in echoing the cultural experience of the local community (Ku and Tsui 2009). And this consideration encourages readers, maybe emerging arts managers, to think about how they could think reflexively upon the era they live in, pondering the relationship and role of the arts in potentially reconciling split communities within our current political-social and post-pandemic context.

As the book deals with many issues on running arts organizations and working across different roles in arts management, it is relevant to readers who would like to work or who are studying to work as arts administrators. While the book covers many arts sectors, from performance, museum to arts publisher, it only includes interviewees from elite organizations. Those small, artist-led or community-oriented organizations are left out of the book. These arts organizations, which usually survive with extremely limited resources, are important forces shaping the territory's cultural development (Ho 2014). Though some of these small organizations only survived one or two years, they had left remarked marks on local artistic sense. So the insights of their managers could also be a rich resource to learn from the 'failure'.

Yet perhaps it is not fair to rely upon one book to cover a comprehensive description of Hong Kong's arts and cultural administration. But the book highlights the arts and cultural ecology, at least from a high-end administration level to the public. This book brings together 22 professionals sharing their knowledge on career trajectories, governing style, and the broader arts environment in Hong Kong, making it unique compared to counterparts from other local, national and regional contexts or the western world.

The book thus fills a gap in current research: first, illustrating a recent image of Hong Kong arts and cultural landscape; and second, giving a glance at how to run arts organizations from a particular Asian context for future managers. For the theme-related books, there are a few books concerned with artists or cultural policy aspects, but, unfortunately, they are written in traditional Chinese, so English-language writing in this field is a much-needed one to building further dialogue.

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