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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, PATRICK LO, WEI-EN HSU,
STEPHANIE H. S. WU, J. TRAVIS AND DICKSON K. W. CHIU (EDS)
(2021)**

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The compendium focuses on practical issues related to cultural administration in Hong Kong. The book examines strategic management and leadership and how these concepts are applied in the art and cultural sector through interviews with 22 high-ranking arts administrators from Hong Kong. The read is worth reading for anyone interested in art administration, and practical insights on art management and cultural leadership outside of the western world.

In the introduction, culture is described as a phenomenon that can reflect the society and can serve to better understand our world (Skulte 2015). The editors also position culture as a potential catalyst for trends on a social level. They name specific aspects of culture and identifying the arts as a useful instrument in increasing population well-being (Ewell 1992; Gard and Kolhoff 1984; Overton 1992), forming collective identity (Berelowritz 1993; Kirchberg and Zembylas 2010; Yuen 1990) and, stimulating economic development (Griffith 1993).

From this understanding of mechanisms, editors jump to the case study of art administration in Hong Kong. In the last 50 years there was a rise of a (more) professional art scene in Hong Kong, which, according to the authors, is linked to the increasing popularity of art management. In the following 22

chapters, together with their interviewees, the authors try to narrate the rich history of the city and strategies the cultural leaders and managers developed since the sovereignty of Hong Kong in 1997. The interviews are presented as raw data, which gives the reader an unbiased insight into the opinions of the art administrators on the questions presented by the editors. However, this strategy also leaves the reader in search of the common themes in the discussion.

The first theme is about arts and cultural leadership in different organizational contexts. The organizations that are discussed in the book are the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC), the Hong Kong Ballet, the Hong Kong Arts Administrators Association (HKAAA), the Chopin Society of Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts (HKAPA), the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra (HKPO), the City Chamber Orchestra of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Arts Festival, the Choi Chang Sau Qin Making Society, the University Museum and Art Gallery (UMAG) of the University of Hong Kong (HKU), the Indra and Harry Banga Gallery of the City University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong University Press, M+, the Hong Kong Maritime Museum, the Po Leung Kuk Museum, the Asia Art Archive, the Hong Kong Arts Centre (HKAC), Hong Kong International Literary Festival (HKILF), the University of the Arts London (UAL), the Xiqu Centre and the Hong Kong Palace Museum (HKPM). The art administrators share their organization's goals, explaining missions and visions, and structure, explaining staffing and funding. In about half the chapters some interviewees dive a bit deeper into their daily work, discussing rewarding and frustrating moments, as well as just the simple day-to-day.

The second theme concerns the evolving roles and responsibilities of arts and cultural administrators in the changing sociocultural and sociopolitical landscapes of Hong Kong. This links closely to the fifth theme of contemporary arts and the local cultural identity. The first main topic that is addressed in these themes is the change in the Hong Kong cultural scene after 1997, the coinciding rise of digital technologies and the speculation of how this trend will continue in the twenty-first century. An interesting topic and the few interviewees who address it have insightful observations about the rising multiculturalism in Hong Kong in the past 50 years. A more recent cultural change that is addressed is the development of the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD). What is nice is that the book gives an open platform for both the organizations that work in the new West Kowloon Cultural District and the organizations that were against this top-down development plan.

The third theme centres around building future audiences and community engagement. Common themes as the democratization of culture, educating the audiences to appreciate art, shortly come up at times, but only about a third of the chapters talk about it at all. Same goes for the fourth theme of branding Hong Kong as a global city through the arts. Some interviewed administrators talk about cultural similarities and differences between them and their international partners, but the conversation usually ends there.

The last theme focuses on the next generation of arts and cultural administrators and their career aspirations. Apart from Chapters 12, 14 and 21, all the interviewed administrators talk about their career path and education, sharing anecdotes, inspirational moments and even personal stories about their youth. Here lies the real strength of the book. The unedited and, paraphrasing Isabelle Frank in Chapter 11, 'not straightforward' career paths make sure that

aspiring administrators can relate. Or as Charlotte Bonham-Carter assures the reader in Chapter 19: 'Well, I think [...] everyone has his or her own path into the sector' (263). One of the editors, Patrick Lo smartly addresses the value of this type of data for art educators and art practitioners in the commentary section. For Lo, case studying Hong Kong gives much-needed insight in the workings of the art and cultural sector outside of Europe, the United States and the British Commonwealth. As someone who studied cultural leadership in Europe, I found the Hong Kong art administrators seem to differ little from their western counterparts. If anything, they seem more knowledgeable about both the business and the ideological side of arts and culture.

In the Conclusion a final leap in topic is made when J. Travis talks about the struggle of arts and culture during the COVID-19 pandemic. He notes that the situation highlighted '[online] communication's function as a connector between people, groups and organisations [...] [is] serving a common goal – come together for the arts' (306). He then explained how Hong Kong applied this solution in two examples, one successful and one not. The book ends there without explicitly addressing its title by explaining the ways a global cultural city can be created through public participation in the arts.

Nonetheless, the editors fulfilled their promise to offer valuable new insights on arts management in Hong Kong.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

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new generation of art professionals acquire technical skills. The other parts of the year she runs her own impact agency, helping current art professionals prove the wonderful effects their projects have on their surrounding social environment.

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