

Book Review: *Creating a Global Cultural City via Public Participation in the Arts: Conversations with Hong Kong's Leading Arts and Cultural Administrators*, by Dr. Patrick Lo, Wei-En Hsu, Stephanie H.S. Wu, Dr. J. Travis and Dr. Dickson K.W. Chiu

By AJAM Co-Editor Diane Claussen, DePaul University

In "*Creating a Global Cultural City via Public Participation in the Arts*," a purposely-curated collection of 22 interviews with arts and cultural leaders from Hong Kong, the authors have captured in first-hand accounts the relatively recent history of the development of the city's cultural sector through the voices of many of its most prominent founders and leaders. The interview subjects are from a broad range of artistic and cultural disciplines including classic and contemporary music, literary arts, museums and galleries, dance, and arts festivals. The leaders are representative of arts and cultural nonprofit and academic organizations including The Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts, Hong Kong Ballet, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, Hong Kong Arts Festival, Hong Kong Maritime Museum, Hong Kong International Literary Festival and Asia Art Archive, among others.

As Tseng Sun Man, a globally prominent arts manager and arts administration educator emphasizes in the foreword—the dedication, risk-taking and entrepreneurial spirit of the interviewees have been a major driving force behind the development of the creative economy in Hong Kong. The personal, candid and philosophical responses to both common as well as unique individual questions posed in each interview offer the reader, particularly arts management students, an insight into possible careers and opportunities in the field. The book highlights many of the characteristics required to succeed in the profession and reveals a range of diverse artistic backgrounds.

Written at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors have framed the current moment while providing a deep reflection on the last few decades as Hong Kong has transitioned from a cultural desert to an artistic hub, with one of the best collections of arts organizations and facilities in East Asia. Revelations in the book include the localized development of the arts administrator role, the creation and development of academic programs in the field, the limitations of teaching resources (primarily articles, papers, and reports), and the dependence on textbooks from the west. The global pandemic forced the closure of theatres and museums in Hong Kong as elsewhere, and had a significant impact on the lives of everyone employed in arts and culture in the region. The authors clearly hope their book will offer insights and inspiration for the government and local communities to come together to support arts organizations as they continue to maneuver through the obstacles of COVID-19.

The book features 22 brief personal and professional biographies of prominent leaders that help the reader to understand each career path to the current arts management position. Through open-ended questions and a conversational style, the interviews illuminate personal leadership styles, arts and culture sponsors and funding sources, staff sizes and organizational structures, the biggest challenges and rewards facing the arts in Hong Kong today, and leaders' hopes and plans for the future. Interwoven in the interviews are the current goals and strategies of many of the city's professional, academic and community-based arts organizations. Through the interview subjects, the reader learns about many of the well-established arts organizations in the region, and the uniqueness and similarities of the arts administration profession in Hong Kong today compared to in the past, as well as with other regions in Asia, Europe and the United States. The book also makes a compelling argument for why Hong Kong is a global cultural city.

As professional practices and management trends at some of the leading arts organizations are described by their leaders, several themes emerge, including leadership styles in different organizational contexts; evolving roles of cultural administrators in a changing socio-political landscape; and community engagement and audience development. Answers to interview questions reveal the leaders' various education backgrounds, current positions and responsibilities, professional skills and competencies. Their views on arts administrators' training programs, career trajectories and the arts administration work environment in Hong Kong is also captured.

Interview subjects have generously shared their personal perspectives and they are not shy to state their opinions. For example, Leanne Nicholls, Founder, Executive and Artistic Director, City Chamber Orchestra of Hong Kong shares her views on formal arts administration training vs. work life experience:

"All the best arts administration courses and degrees in the world cannot breed a tenacious spirit and nothing compares with the real-life experience of creating something from nothing."

Hong Kong is very much at the center of the book. The career arts administrator emerges, in part, as the warrior of social change –helping to build Hong Kong into a global destination in the last two plus decades by attracting international artists and tourists to their organizations and venues. Collectively, the interviews make a compelling organic argument that arts and cultural programming contribute to the recognition of Hong Kong as a global city. The Hong Kong government touted the creative industries value at \$118 Billion HKD in 2018. The city has become the gateway linking expatriates with Asian communities and culture management has become increasingly international and transcultural.

Arts administrators in Hong Kong are tracking new forms of creative expression, and engaging local talents and emerging artists from the city and the surrounding region. There is an increased interest in offering commissions to new artists, supporting their developmental work, and introducing new forms and genres, especially to younger audiences. More independent artists and new local arts organizations are emerging as well as new sources of funding. There is greater variety and a more diverse arts and cultural field. There is increasing use of new technologies and management theories in the industry, and a focus on expanding audience tastes to becoming more knowledgeable and sophisticated.

Juxtaposing the industry growth and global expansion is the story of one of the book's smaller and younger organizations, Choi Chang Sau Qin Making Society (CCSQMS), founded in 2011, and its Vice President and Founder, Kelwin Kwan – a self-described "pragmatic fanatic." The Qin is a plucked seven-string musical instrument of the zither family with a 3000 years history. The world's oldest musical score is a piece of Qin music (502 – 557 A.D.). Kelwin describes the Qin as the "most revered form of art among Chinese intellectuals." Uniquely designed and shaped, and individually signed and dated by its maker, the Qin is an introverted musical instrument meant to assist the player in "listening to their own soul." In mainland China, Qin music was banned during the Cultural Revolution (1965-76) and Hong Kong became a refuge for the instrument in the 1970s. Kelwin founded the organization a decade ago to institutionalize Qin Master Choi's teaching methods for future generations and to conserve the Qin instrument at no cost to the owner or public. Compared to many of the western influenced and larger organizations profiled through their leaders, the passion and commitment of CCSQMS's founding leader and the importance of its historical and Asian culture mission stands out.

Beyond the current global pandemic, cultural leaders name other challenges and goals in the industry. There is a lack of dedicated space for at least some of the arts. Many leaders are prioritizing the need to reach new and expanding audiences –especially the youth. There is constant work to secure new partners and funding sources.

The book promotes a vibrant hope that these passionate and experienced cultural leaders can help their city, local communities and the region to recover from the effects of the global pandemic and continue to build on the cultural expansion and significant progress made prior to 2020. It is clear these arts administrators and their colleagues can help artists and communities to heal, and to bring together people in a global city where a multiplicity of cultures thrive for all to enjoy. Michael MacLeod, Ex- Chief Executive of the HK Philharmonic Orchestra, emphasizes the valuable work of arts administrators in his response to the interview question – what would you like to be remembered for when you retire?

“I don’t want to be remembered. I want the organizations for which I have worked to be remembered as being artistically enterprising and financially viable – with all employees fulfilled at every level.”

In 2022, we need the arts to help us collectively listen to our soul and to heal. I am sure CCSQMS’s Founder Kelwin Kwan would agree with me.