

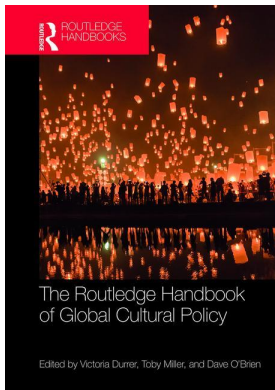
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 30 Mar 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



## The Routledge Handbook of Global Cultural Policy

Victoria Durrer, Toby Miller, Dave O'Brien

### Too-explicit cultural policy

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315718408.ch23>

Louis Ho

**Published online on: 26 Sep 2017**

**How to cite :-** Louis Ho. 26 Sep 2017, *Too-explicit cultural policy from: The Routledge Handbook of Global Cultural Policy* Routledge

Accessed on: 30 Mar 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315718408.ch23>

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# Too-explicit cultural policy

## Rethinking cultural and creative industry policies in Hong Kong

*Louis Ho*

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### Introduction

This chapter presents a study of the articulation and implementation of Hong Kong's cultural and creative industries policies. The observations are as follows: First, against the backdrop of economic transformation, cultural and creative industry policies in Hong Kong are biased towards macroeconomic, industrial and hardware infrastructure and structural formation, neglecting the individual "units" of Hong Kong's cultural and industrial industries, i.e. creative labour, both artistic and craft labour (Banks 2010). Second, under the global discourse of "creativity", especially that of Richard Florida (2002) and Charles Landry (2000), cultural and creative industry policies in Hong Kong are based on the vague concept of "creativity" as a panacea. It is also assumed that "creativity" is a singular concept, as if there is an absence of any diversity and complexity concerning the concept. This results in such policies neglecting the different requirements, usage and expression of "creativity" by different cultural and creative sectors. Therefore, such cultural and creative industry policies neglect the status and needs of cultural and artistic workers, such as writers or visual artists. The chapter takes each of these observations in turn, following a brief discussion of the historical context for the development of cultural and creative industry policies in Hong Kong.

### Background

Since the 1990s, the development of Hong Kong's economy has been dictated by the goal of becoming an international financial hub. The government claimed that it would take a *laissez-faire* approach and uphold a capitalistic free market.<sup>1</sup> In 2014's Global Financial Centres Index, Hong Kong was ranked fifth, with only New York, London, Tokyo and Singapore ranking higher. From the economic boom in the 1960s until it was known as one of the "Four Asian Tigers" in the 1980s, Hong Kong became a player on the international stage due to its economic prowess with finance, trade and the service industries as its pillars. However, as an international metropolis, Hong Kong's cultural development has always been subject to criticism, even gaining the title of being a "cultural desert". Although the validity of this title remains debatable (Chen 2008), it is apparent that Hong Kong's cultural policy lacks an all-encompassing design.

After WWII, the colonial government enjoyed the long-term benefits of economic growth while facing the looming expiry of Hong Kong's lease. According to Chen's (2008) historical account of cultural policy development in Hong Kong, the government chose to implement "cultural policies" that were bureaucratically viable and met the short-term needs of the residents. This resulted in a disparate set of cultural policies for the region. Different departments implemented cultural, art and leisure-related policies with different methods and conceptualizations of "culture". Needless to say, the concept of cultural governance was virtually non-existent. After the handover in 1997, however, it seemed that "cultural and creative industries" became a prominent lead for Hong Kong's public policy concerning art and culture.

In Hong Kong, the "creative industry" concept was first raised by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council in 1999. Although it generated media interest at that time, it was not until 2002 that the Hong Kong Trade Development Council released its first report on Hong Kong's creative industries. In 2005, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government recognised the importance of "cultural and creative industries", defining the 11 sectors of "Hong Kong's cultural and creative industries" as advertising; amusement services; architecture; art, antiques and crafts; cultural education and library, archive and museum services; design; film, video and music; performing arts; publishing; software, computer games and interactive media; television and radio. This definition developed the "creative industry" framework established in 2003 in accordance with the *Baseline Study on Hong Kong's Creative Industries* (2003) commissioned by the Central Policy Unit. In the same year, the government established CreateHK, a dedicated agency set up under the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau. The agency is responsible for "nurturing of local talent; supporting the development of start-up companies; developing local market; expanding overseas and Mainland China market; developing creative clusters; enhancing the atmosphere to promote creative industries in the community; and supporting the organization of mega events to promote Hong Kong's development as the creative capital in Asia" (Commerce and Economic Development Bureau 2009).

Currently, policies regarding the cultural and creative industries can mainly be classified into two development categories: The first is according to the "current growth model", which emphasises the possible economic development resulting from cultural and creative industries; the second is recognising "culture" as the core of cultural and creative policies and accepting the (inherent) restrictions of policy (Bell and Oakley 2015:34). Hong Kong's cultural and creative industries (as one of the six major industries selected by the government for intensive development) belong to the first category. Examining the overall implementation of Hong Kong's cultural and creative industry policies, however, raises doubt as to whether the policies are able to achieve results under the "current growth model", i.e. growth in the cultural sector (production and consumption) driving overall economic growth.

### **Overly macroscopic cultural and creative industry policies in Hong Kong**

In recent years, various governments and academic institutes have grown increasingly concerned about the development of creative industries. This was mainly attributable to the decline of traditional economic industries, while the economic value of "culture and creativity" gained recognition – giving rise to the idea that symbolic value is more profitable than physical value. Since 2000, creative industries have developed at a quicker pace than traditional economic industries in most western economies (Murray and Gollmitzer 2012). The creative industries, however, were inevitably affected by the 2008 economic crisis.

Some critics also pointed out that creative industries are especially vulnerable to the impact of fluctuations in the external economy (Murray and Gollmitzer 2012). Despite this, governments all over the world seem to remain fixated on the idea of enhancing economic vitality and making cities more vibrant through the development of creative industries.

In Hong Kong, according to the *Baseline Study on Hong Kong's Creative Industries* (2003) commissioned by the Central Policy Unit and undertaken by the Centre for Cultural Policy Research of the University of Hong Kong, “creative industries” refer to “a group of economic activities that exploit and deploy creativity, skill and intellectual property to produce and distribute products and services of social and cultural meaning, which can become a system for creating wealth and employment”.<sup>2</sup> From this definition, we can acknowledge that in the concept of “creative industry”, “industry” is the main component of an economic production system, while “creative” describes the nature of the series of economic activities. The scope of “cultural and creative industries” subsequently listed by the SAR government mostly covered a range of private cultural and creative production activities, while leaving out public cultural and creative activities provided by the government such as public libraries and museums.<sup>3</sup>

In 2005, the SAR government renamed “creative industries” as “cultural and creative industries”. In the policy address (The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2005), the government proposed to “establish, as soon as possible, a consultative framework for cultural and creative industries, so that relevant representatives from these industries including outstanding personalities from outside Hong Kong can participate. Working together to study the vision for development, direction, and organizational structure to see how we may deploy our advantages, consolidate resources and pursue key areas” (Ho 2005).<sup>4</sup> The 11 sectors of Hong Kong’s “cultural and creative industries” was generated from the “creative industry” framework. In 2009, the government proposed the idea of the “six priority industries of Hong Kong” and listed “cultural and creative industries” as one of them.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the overall policies of Hong Kong’s cultural and creative industries are implemented by different government departments, namely Home Affairs Bureau, Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau (CITB), Education Bureau, and CreateHK. The question is: why have cultural and creative industries been given such an important role in the overall economy of Hong Kong?

This question was also asked by Hesmondhalgh and Pratt (2005), who explore how and why the cultural industries became such a vital idea in cultural policy when those industries were largely absent in “traditional (arts-and heritage-based) policy” (2005:2). Hesmondhalgh and Pratt note that “the 1990s and early 2000s have been a boom time in cultural policy under the sign of the cultural and creative industries as a result of industrial and cultural changes that have themselves been influenced by broader “cultural” policy decisions” and “a great attraction of cultural industries policy, at the urban, regional and national levels, for many politicians and advisors, was that cultural policy, previously on the margins in many areas of government, could be seen to be economically relevant in an era when policy was judged primarily in terms of its fiscal rewards” (2005:5). Based on these inquiries and observations, we may further ask: in what ways does the idea of cultural and creative industries, as a marginal policy agenda, embed and integrate itself into different policy models and frameworks?

Since the handover in 1997, Hong Kong has faced a series of economic crises: the burst of the property and stock market bubbles at the end of 1997 and in early 1998; the Asian financial crisis that impacted the Hong Kong dollar, the futures market and stock market; the burst of Hong Kong’s dot-com bubbles, which was caused by the tech fever in the US in 1999; the outbreak of SARS in March 2003, which devastated the tourism industry; and the financial crisis in 2008, which affected the world and ended the five-year economic recovery

of Hong Kong. The end of the economic recovery that began in July 2003 caused the stock and property market to plummet and caused a series of layoffs and business closures. Since then, “economic transformation”, “moving towards a knowledge-based economy”, and “development of high value-added, high-tech emerging industries” became buzzwords of the SAR government’s economic policies. Cultural and creative industry policies thereafter became part of the policy structure of the knowledge-based economic transformation.

In Hong Kong, cultural and creative industry policies are mainly industry policies, and the implementation of such policies leans towards production and industry structure. The government promotes cultural and creative industry measures mainly in three areas. The first area is the legal framework. The SAR government promulgated the Intellectual Property Copyright Agreement in 1998 (which aimed to modernise Hong Kong’s copyright law and provide greater protection for copyright owners). The government also stated that it recognised major international intellectual property regulations, including the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property; the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works; the Universal Copyright Convention; the Nice Agreement Concerning the International Classification of Goods and Services for the Purposes of the Registration of Marks; the Geneva Convention, which protects producers of recorded works from their products being recorded without authorisation; the Patent Cooperation Treaty; the Convention Establishing the World Intellectual Property Organization; the World Intellectual Property Organization Treaty; and the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty.

The second area is the establishment of platforms for financing. The government supports the development of cultural and creative industries through different funds and subsidy programmes. For example, the Trade and Industry Department has subsidy plans (e.g. the SME Loan Guarantee Scheme, the SME Export Marketing Fund, the SME Training Fund and the SME Development Fund<sup>6</sup>), while the Innovation and Technology Fund also has subsidy programmes (e.g. the Innovation and Technology Support Programme, the General Support Programme, the University-Industry Collaboration Programme and the Small Entrepreneur Research Assistance Programme<sup>7</sup>). In addition, the government provides credit guarantees that allow financiers to obtain funding through traditional channels. For instance, the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation provides export credit insurance and film loan guarantees. Using film as an example, the aforementioned policies are primarily handled by the CITB. The CITB assists the Hong Kong film industry in penetrating the Mainland China market through the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) to develop the possibility of making films jointly produced by Hong Kong and Mainland China. Besides, a Film Loan Insurance Fund was established to support mid- to low-budget film productions. In 2001, the Film Development Fund financed ten movies, allowing four directors and one producer to make their first attempts at producing drama films. According to the 2015 Policy Address (The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2015), the government will continue to inject capital into the Film Development Fund with a recommended amount of HKD 200 million.

The third area is large-scale construction projects. This is the area, within the cultural and creative industries, in which the government has invested the largest amount of money, albeit via the construction industry. This area generates controversy in wondering if “Hong Kong culture” is used as spectacle for cultural tourism and urban rejuvenation. This approach of using “culture and creative” in policymaking is “significantly” influenced by the work of Charles Landry (2000) and Richard Florida (2002). Landry and Bianchini’s (1995) model of the “creative city” introduces a discussion on the role of culture in dealing with social problems of a city and boosting economic growth. Charles Landry (2000) further

promotes the idea of “creative city” by asserting the importance of creativity as a more reflexive process of thinking about the city in cultural planning. Landry (2000) thereby proposes the need to integrate cultural and creative thinking into all aspects of the urban policymaking process, namely, from public health to traditional arts-related policy. Since then, the idea of “creative city” has been widely used in discussions of urban policy that it has become a “shorthand term” in policy discourse for contemporary ideas about culture and the city. As Bell and Oakley (2015:88) remark, though this discourse may always refer to one “conventional creative city script” (Gibson 2013), there have been different versions of interpreting and implementing the creative city idea (Pratt 2012). What then is the exact version of the creative city idea for Hong Kong? It is a version related to a pseudo-Floridian approach of working in culture and creativity.

If we examine the details of the *Baseline Study on Hong Kong's Creative Industries* (2003) that signifies as the start of developing cultural and creative industry policies in Hong Kong, the influence of Florida's ideas can hardly be overlooked. Drawing upon the insights of urbanists and “new growth theorists” about the value of skilled labour, who he terms the “creative class”, in urban and economic development (Bell and Oakley 2015:91), Florida (2002) argues that the mobility of the creative class is highly related to the qualities of the city's (or region's) culture and lifestyle options, which are referred to by his well-known ideas of “Bohemian index” and “Gay index”. With the idea of the “creative class”, Florida has become associated with the discourse of creative cities more generally. But his strategy for economic development is built around talent attraction, not the growth of the cultural industries.

One of the heaviest criticisms for Floridian urban strategy is its potential implication of legitimising urban gentrification and its lack of significant attention to various social inequalities (Bell and Oakley 2015:92). Despite these criticisms, Florida's (2002) work can be viewed as an example of the approach in working on the “street level” for cultural attractions in cultural urban planning (Bell and Oakley 2015:91). As we have seen, in Hong Kong the strategy for using culture for economic development is built around large-scale construction projects. It seems that Hong Kong has adopted a pseudo-Floridian approach in developing the “creative city”, which absorbs the potential problems of the approach without developing the “good side” of developing the liveability of the city at the micro level.

The large-scale construction projects related to cultural and creative industries include the Digital Media Center (2003), Cyberport Information Center (2003–2004), Science and Technology Parks (2001), Disneyland (2005) and the West Kowloon Cultural Development Program (2005).<sup>8</sup> These large-scale construction projects typically start off as “creative” projects, but ultimately become large-scale real estate (luxury housing) projects or theme parks. In addition, CreateHK has assisted with two restoration projects of historical buildings, namely Comix Home Base<sup>9</sup> and PMQ.<sup>10</sup> Both projects have been criticised for being overly commercialised (especially the latter). This has given rise to the “cultural bulldozer” theory, in which old urban areas are being gentrified in the name of culture and creativity when in fact the land is utilised as high-priced real estate. As a matter of fact, such reasonable scepticism and criticism can be traced back to the vague definition and framework of “creativity” situated in Hong Kong's cultural and creative industry policies.

### In the name of culture and creativity

It is generally agreed that the concept of “creative industry” began to have an impact on government policy and academic research after 1997 when the “New Labour Party” won the general election in the UK and implemented creative industry policies (Banks and



Hesmondhalgh 2009; Banks and O'Connor 2009). The Department of Culture, Media and Sport in the UK advocated the idea of creative industries with the definition “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (Creative Industries Task Force 2001). This broad definition of the creative industries includes cultural and art-related industries such as television, film and music and involves industries such as software design, construction and design. This unspecific but surprisingly influential definition attempted to avoid the criticism of the concept of “culture industry” from the Frankfurt school by focusing on the importance of “creativity”. The “diversified” definition was also a continuation of the heydays of “Cool Britannia”, which began in 1997 (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009) and indirectly spread the idea of “creative industry” to other parts of the world, including Hong Kong.

When the Hong Kong Trade Development Council released the first report regarding Hong Kong’s creative industries in 2002, there were an estimated 90,000 (approx.) people working in creative industries, and the output of creative industries accounted for approximately 2% of the local GDP. In 2003, the government defined the 11 sectors of creative industries and estimated that the output of Hong Kong’s creative industries accounted for 4% of the local GDP between 2001 and 2002, with 170,011 persons involved in the industries. How did Hong Kong’s cultural and creative industries achieve such a substantial and sustained amount of growth? It is probably the result of the expansion of the components of Hong Kong’s cultural and creative industries under the general meaning of “culture and creativity”. In 2013, 207,490 persons were employed within cultural and creative industries, of which, the category employing the most persons was “software, computer games and interactive media”. Job functions include “publication and distribution of software and computer games; information technology services (i.e. computer games, software, design and development of websites and network systems); Internet and other telecommunications activities; entry-level website management; data processing, filing and related activities”. There were 52,600 persons in this category, and they accounted for 25.4% of the total workforce within cultural and creative industries. The category in the second place was “publication”. Job functions include “printing, publishing, wholesale and retail of books, newspapers and periodicals” and “news agency and other information service activities”. There were 43,900 persons in this category, and they accounted for 21.2% of the total workforce within cultural and creative industries. This was followed by the “advertising” category. Job functions include “advertising and market research; conference and goods services; and manufacturing of commercial billboards”. There were 18,510 persons in this category, and they accounted for 8.9% of the total workforce within cultural and creative industries (see Census and Statistics Department of HKSAR 2015).

The reason for stating the above statistics is to demonstrate that the most active component of Hong Kong’s “cultural and creative industries” differs from the public perception of “conventional” cultural and artistic workers such as writers and artists who only account for a small proportion of the “performing arts” sector (the smallest sector among the 11 sectors). Another point worth noting is that the increasing number of people working within cultural and creative industries is related to the vague definition of creativity spreading to the educational sector.

According to official sources,<sup>11</sup> the “first” task of CreateHK (created in 2009) was to “cultivate local creative talent”. CreateHK has started numerous “training” programmes, such as subsidising Hong Kong artists in international competitions and arranging paid internships in cultural and creative industry enterprises.<sup>12</sup> CreateHK has also established the CreateSmart

Initiative (CSI) and the graduate intern support programme, which is further divided into the “Hong Kong Digital Entertainment Industry New Graduate Support Scheme”, which focuses on the training of talent in animation, comics, digital games, post production and visual effects, and the “Hong Kong Digital Advertising Industry Fresh Graduate Support Scheme”.<sup>13</sup> CSI also provides subsidies for young designers to participate in exchange programmes overseas. Since 2009, CreateHK has granted subsidies totalling HKD 55 million under the “Hong Kong Digital Entertainment Industry New Graduate Support Scheme”. In 2013, the government injected HKD 300 million into CSI (from HKD 300 million in 2009 to HKD 600 million in 2013) to support the development of young creative artists.

In terms of the number of Hong Kong’s cultural and creative artists nourished and cultivated, universities and higher education institutes also play significant roles.<sup>14</sup> Different universities and higher education institutes have offered various culture- and creativity-related courses, such as the course of “Creative Media” in City University of Hong Kong, the course of “Design” in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and the design, multimedia and innovative technology courses offered by the Vocational Training Council. There are currently over 500 product- and digital design-related courses in Hong Kong, and over 200 are related to creative industries (Figures 23.1 and 23.2).

Here, it is insightful to juxtapose two sets of data: On the one hand, during the decade from 2003 to 2013, the number of participants of cultural and entertainment activities organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department increased at a rate of approximately 10%, and the number of participants in 2013 grew by 17% when compared with 2003. On the other hand, students enrolled in humanities, art, design and performing arts rose from 3,816 in 2003 to 6,238 in 2013, representing a growth rate of 63%. These two sets of statistics are compared side by side to raise the question: when comparing the proportion of cultural and creative industry producers trained in Hong Kong (number of students) to the consumption market (number of participants in cultural and entertainment

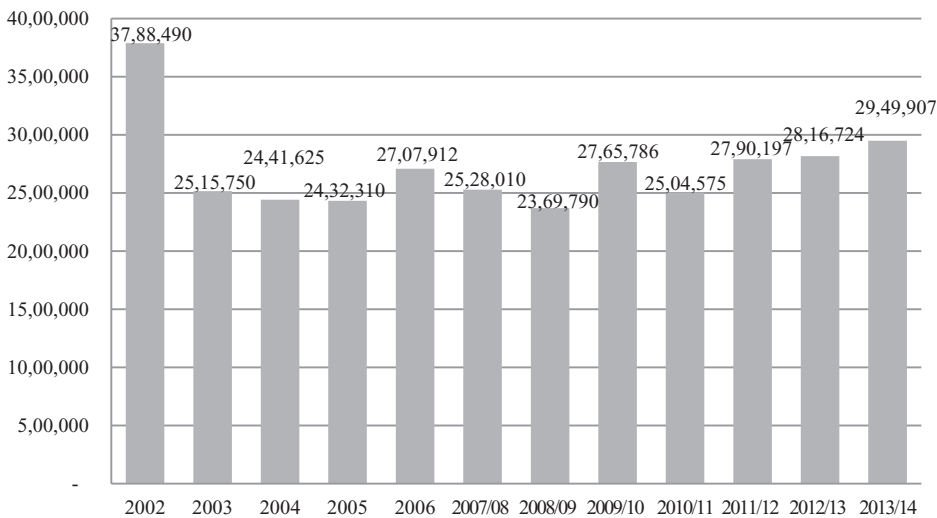


Figure 23.1 Number of participants of cultural and entertainment activities organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (2002–2014)



Louis Ho

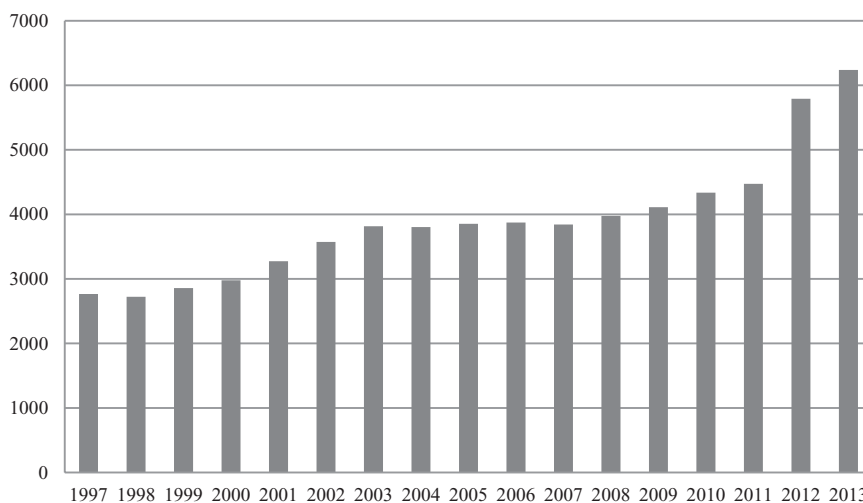


Figure 23.2 Number of students enrolled in humanities, art, design and performing arts (1997–2013)

activities), are Hong Kong’s cultural and creative industries neglecting *de facto* demand of the creative labour market and “nurturing” too many cultural and creative artists? The answer to this question may need further empirical analysis, but this issue is brought up herein to reveal the overemphasis of public policies on “creativity” as a panacea and the excessive focus on the macro, production and supply aspects of cultural and creative industries, oblivious to the individuals that underpin the industry and the specific conditions and needs of creative labour.

### Cultural and creative industry policies cannot replace cultural and art policies

Conventionally, and practically, cultural policy is considered the sum of a government’s activities with respect to the arts, humanities and heritage. Thus, cultural policy encompasses a much broader range of activities than what is traditionally associated with an arts policy. In cultural policy studies, Jeremy Ahearne (2009) and David Throsby (2009) argue that there is a distinction between “explicit” cultural policies that are manifestly labelled as “cultural” and “implicit” cultural policies that are not nominally labelled as “cultural” but that work to shape cultural experiences. Indeed, the framework of “explicit” and “implicit” cultural policy is useful to recognise different kinds of policy aims and impacts in the complex networks of public policies. However, how does such a framework address practically the fluidity of various policies between the implicit and explicit boundary. Also, how does the framework understand the more theoretical problem of the boundary between the cultural and the non-cultural?

In Hong Kong, due to its history of (and the myth of) “laissez-faire” policies, cultural and creative industry policies, as shown above, remain on certain macroscopic levels: establishing symbolic platforms (law, connection), infrastructure construction (financing, construction),

and training and education. This has caused numerous issues for Hong Kong's cultural and creative industry policies. First, policies are biased towards the "industries" and neglect the needs of individual workers. The policies have failed to address the needs of the "labour force" of Hong Kong's cultural and creative industries, i.e. the role and rights of creative labour. Needless to say, the possibility and implementation of a "cultural and creative labour policy" is nowhere near fruition. Second, the definition and scope of "creativity" in policies is too broad, ranging from performing arts to jewellery and theme parks, which cannot effectively reflect the true requirements of different creative activities; this made managing such activities even more difficult. Third, due to the vague definitions mentioned above, the policies are unable to pinpoint the needs of creative labour, especially the traditional cultural and art workers. As such, Hong Kong cultural and creative industry policies have to define "creativity" more precisely, so that creative labour in various cultural and creative jobs have access to cultural and creative industrial policies that can better suit their needs and expectations.

## Notes

- 1 Milton Friedman, a Nobel Prize winner in Economics, therefore described Hong Kong as "a prime example of a laissez-faire" economy. However, the government announced in September 2006 that the "positive non-interventionism" system pioneered by Hong Kong was no longer applicable.
- 2 Commission on Strategic Development, Committee on Economic Development and Economic Cooperation with the Mainland: Promoting the Development of Creative Industries, 2006.
- 3 Feature Article in *Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics: The Cultural and Creative Industries in Hong Kong*, March 2014.
- 4 Jin Yuanpu, The Rise of Modern Cultural and Creative Industries, [www.cnci.net.cn/](http://www.cnci.net.cn/), 2008.
- 5 The six priority industries include testing and certification, medical services, innovation and technology, cultural and creative industries, environmental industry and educational services.
- 6 From 2001 to 30 April 2007, 132,405 items have been approved for a total subsidy of approximately HKD 10 billion, benefitting 48,300 SMEs. LegCo document no. CB(1)1849/06-07(03), SME Subsidy Program of the Panel on Commerce and Industry of LegCo, Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau, Trade and Industry Department, June 2007.
- 7 As of 31 January 2015, the Fund has approved 1,356 items, granting a total subsidy of HKD 88.941 million. Innovation and Technology Fund – Statistics of Approved Projects, [www.itf.gov.hk/1-tc/StatView101.asp](http://www.itf.gov.hk/1-tc/StatView101.asp).
- 8 According to the government, the West Kowloon Cultural Development Programme aims to amass a series of world-class cultural, art, trends, consumption and mass entertainment events in a comprehensive cultural venue that includes opera houses, museums, performance areas, theatres and plazas. This would enhance Hong Kong's cultural standards and global reputation, which would propel the development of Hong Kong's cultural and creative industries.
- 9 Located between Burrows Street and Mallory Street in Wan Chai, Comix Home Base was a pre-war building that was revitalised to become a "creative community based on animation and comics". The venue hosts regular workshops, exhibitions, seminars and also houses archives.
- 10 PMQ was formerly the Hollywood Road Police Married Quarters. It has now been developed into a "creative industry landmark focused on design, providing approximately 130 workshops for designers and members of the creative community to create and display their creative works".
- 11 Website of CreateHK. [www.createhk.gov.hk/en/service\\_createsmart.htm](http://www.createhk.gov.hk/en/service_createsmart.htm) Assessed on 29 January 2016.
- 12 From 2009 to 2011, CreateHK provided aid and support for approximately 140 events held by the industries, attracting over 2.7 million participants in Hong Kong and over 50 countries.
- 13 A full year of full-time work and on-the-job training is provided to up to 120 graduates each year.
- 14 The Education Bureau also plays a role in cultural and creative educational activities. Since 2001, the government has listed "creativity" as one of the three main common abilities after the reforms of secondary and primary school curriculums.

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