

Creative Industry, Creative Hong Kong Forum

Central Policy Unit

24 September 2003

Good morning. Welcome you all to this Creative Industry, Creative Hong Kong Forum.

We are honoured to have the presence here six world renowned creative industry experts who are going to share their experience with us. We are also extremely pleased to have four friends from Hong Kong, who have been showing great concern about the development of the creative industry in the territory, to act as our commentator.

As chairman of this forum, I have the highest hope that this forum will provide a driving force for all of us, as well as provide an important reference and insights for what direction the development of the creative industry in Hong Kong and neighbouring countries/districts should take and also for Hong Kong's formulation of policies in developing the creative industry.

Being a practicing cultural worker and a director of stage performances, I have, for the past few years, apart from engaging in artistic creation, devoted most of my time to building an international cultural network and in the research and planning of international exchange policies. I have also made attempts to promote cross-disciplinary creative education.

In the last two years, under invitation by the Ford Foundation, and with support from the fund, I have taken part in the organization of the World Culture Forum. This is a cultural infrastructural development initiative on a global level spanning thirty years. As part of the programme, I have served as initiator for six research projects on global cultural development. These projects are all cross-disciplinary research projects focusing on culture, half of which are directly related to the creative industry and cultural enterprises. Another significant mission of the World Culture Forum is to build cross-disciplinary, cross-region and cross-culture exchange platforms on a global basis, just like this one today.

As a director of stage performances, when I am doing creative work, each piece of new work represents a summing-up and critique of my past works. Such summing-up and critique provide the ground for finding a new direction for creation. I sincerely hope that today's forum will play the same role, a summing-up and critique of similar forums in the past. And with this summing-up and critique exercise, we will come up with a new direction for future exchange platforms.

The same concept could be applied to the theme of this forum. The emergence of this new term “Creative Industry” of course has its own background. The emergence of new terms, new trades often denotes a kind of criticism of and response to old terms and old trades. It also reflects criticism of and response to existing institution, policies and operation of old trades.

The creative industry can be deemed the conclusion and criticism made on the lack of creativity of the institution, policies and operation of existing industries; at the same time, it also represents the conclusion and criticism made on the lack of support for existing creative activities in terms of institution, policies and operation.

The same concept could be applied to the term “cultural enterprises”. Cultural enterprises remind us of the evidence that our current cultural institution, policies and operations lack enterprising concepts. Similarly, the existing segregated institution and policies for enterprises, the disarray in concepts and operations; that economic considerations always comes first and the deficiency in intense cultural visions can no longer meet the needs of modern society.

If we want to promote visionary and bold policy research on the creative industry, on the formulation of related strategies and on development planning for the industry, this will inevitably put the institution of the Hong Kong government and its administrative culture to a tough test. The reason is simple; it is because such research and development planning will for certain expose the many issues which face the interactive relationship between the government and the professional community. It will also serve as a verification process for the ministerial system which has been in place for over a year now. Take for instance, should the government decide to separate the administrative power from the responsibilities over the creative industry, then both the Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau and the Home Affairs Bureau will have to get involved. But with two governing organs in command, it would have a kind of “Siamese Twins” effect on the development of the creative industry, inducing some extremely complex issues with implications to the fundamentals and integrative nature of the industry.

Government’s recent invitation for proposals on the development of the West Kowloon Cultural District is a good case in point. If Hong Kong does not have any long-term cultural blueprint and creative industry policies to complement this exercise, it would be just another estate development project, no different to those previous fiascoes.

The fundamental concept of the creative industry is to foster collaboration by “crossing boundaries”. By crossing boundaries, it would be possible to promote cultural development,

economic development and by promoting creativity across the whole community, ultimately furthering creativity in reforming the social institution. On these premises, it is clear that discussions about the creative industry can not help but lead to criticism by the business and cultural sectors on the anachronism of the existing government institution and operation which fall short of cross-disciplinary features.

Indeed after the July 1st rally when half-a-million people took to the street in protest of the government, this is something we really ought to reflect on. How our government, our society should make rational self-criticism; to review how the administration and civil society should cooperate to research on, develop and promote future policies to open up a whole new era for Hong Kong. In particular, our government needs to contemplate how to step up effort in removing the fetters imposed by various policies, to foster civilian-led strategic policy research, whilst at the same time avoid wasting public money on PR stunts which are short on substance.

Perhaps more importantly, we should be more conscious of the trend among our policy makers and private sector opinion leaders towards alienating themselves from the following concept: “cultural development is the foundation of a civil society, and cultural policies are fundamentally policies for a civil society.” There is a misconception about culture, a negligence of a civil society. Because of all this, the cultural sector, business sector and the government need to engage in comprehensive dialectic of their own responsibilities for the overall development of the society, as well as their relationship with the entire society.

Here, we should also review how our society and government apply the following two important tools to explore various issues. The first tool is policy research and review; the second is an unbiased exchange platform. The premises for healthy functioning of these two important tools is “the critical culture”. Organic and rational criticism is a precondition for sustained social development. Only in a knowledge-based and civil society can a healthy critical culture actualize. Without a sound critical culture, no matter how well developed, and inevitably lop-sided, the economy of this society is, it could only be a society suffering seriously from deficiencies of intelligence and vision.

Most establishments do not welcome criticism. They do not understand the need for developing the public space. An important concept of the public space is to establish an exchange platform which shows respect for dissent, and which can promote rational discussion. That is why it is imperative for us to promote the concept of a knowledge-based society and a civil society. That is why today’s forum will undoubtedly carry the hope of creating a truly public space through

collaboration between the cultural sector and the industry sector, apart from being just a rational response to these two sectors.

For four years now, I have participated in a series of exchange activities related to the creative industry and practical work too. Last winter, as part of the exchange programme: “The Creative City”, of which I am the organizer, several British cultural enterprises and creative industry practitioners went on a study tour to four Chinese cities. The activity was supported by the Lee Ka Shing Foundation and the four cities included Beijing, Shantou, Hong Kong and Taipei. In spring this year, I hosted another exchange activity between Taiwanese and European cultural enterprises and the respective creative industries, again in the capacity of organizer for “The Creative City” project.

The objective of “The Creative City” project is to build an exchange platform for substantive, proactive and adaptable cross-cultural activities between cities, to promote in a systematic way the development of the creative industry in both Europe and Asia, and to promote exchange between these two geographical regions. To strengthen dialogue and collaboration between the political, industrial, financial, academic and cultural sectors in these two regions.

Through continuous exchange, we would come to understand that the creative industry will be an important driving force for cultural, economic and social development in this century. We will also come to recognize that the creative industry will serve as motivation and trend-setting force for our next generation, our youngsters, our SMEs in their instinctive development of a cultural economy. For that reason, we have also to recognize that if we really want to promote the creative industry, it is imperative for us to change our conception about creation and production systems and processes, it is also imperative for us to change our conception about social organizational structures.

If a young creative worker aspires to pursue a career in the creative industry, he or she must gain knowledge and experience of the various processes, including research, development, exchange, technical support, financing, packaging, branding, marketing and sales, and consumer relationship to gradually progress along the career path. And without a conducive environment and comprehensive policy support, there is no way to start such a process. To really promote development in the creative industry, the private sector, the business sector and the political sector must engage in strategic cooperation to analyze, formulate, facilitate and support these processes one by one.

This does not only involve strategic planning with respect to the cultural and economic sectors, but also touches on strategies policies in education, vocational training, technology transfer, development of science and technology, population control, taxation, land usage, urban planning, intellectual property collaborative and international exchange. Without a high level and primary platform for collaboration between the public and private sectors, to research on and promote cross-disciplinary strategies for developing Hong Kong's creative industry, our government will remain just full of purely PR rhetoric, our creative industry has no way to start, and a drain of creative talent from the private sector will be irrevocable. This will have an immensely negative and heavy impact on Hong Kong's cultural development and economic transformation.

Finally, I must highlight the increasing importance of conducting strategic research on the development of the third sector (i.e. non-government, non-profit organizations including foundations) in Asian societies. For instance, Taiwan is currently setting up the Cultural Industry Think Tank Foundation which sees the participation of three sectors, i.e. the government, the industry sector and private sector. It will assume an independent operation and will be administered by the private sector. The principal work of this foundation is to support a think tank formed by the private cultural industry, and to make comprehensive planning for deliberation on the short-term, medium-term and long-term development strategies in Taiwan and neighbouring districts. The Central Policy Unit under the Hong Kong Government has just completed the "Baseline Study on Hong Kong's Creative Industries". This is good start in that direction. However, in terms of timing and initiation of the process, Hong Kong has a lot to catch up, in particular in setting up a private-led think tank with collaboration among the government, cultural and private sectors.

Thank you.

Danny Yung