

West Kowloon and the related Cultural Policy --- First Thoughts

It is really unthinkable that a modern city like Hong Kong has not got any concrete cultural policy up to the moment of writing. Personally I think that it is due to the following two reasons:

1. The former British regime did not actively promote culture because it would touch the domain of ideology which no colonial government would like to face.
2. The local officials do not know much about culture because they are only trained to do administration works.

When talking about cultural policy, we need to examine briefly what culture is. Culture is something at the same time intangible and tangible. It is intangible because it addresses to our mental, our spirit and the most important of all, our values of life. We can feel it but it is really difficult to explain it in words. As Goethe said, "A genuine work of art, no less than a work of nature, will always remain infinite to our reason: it can be contemplated and felt, it affects us, but it cannot be fully comprehended, even less than it is possible to express its essence and its merits in words." Yet it is also tangible if we view it from the angle of operation and statistics: the number of theatres, museums, cultural programmes, the amount of revenue generated from performances, the number of audience entries, etc.

Up to the present moment, the cultural activities are still heavily subsidised by the government. Now the government wants to spend less money in all public sectors, including culture. West Kowloon is born out of such a policy adjustment.

The formulation of a cultural policy in any country evolves around a peculiar phenomenon: how to promote something which is basically intangible by something that needs to be tangible in monetary terms. It should undeniably be the ideal of any government to see that its citizens are financially sound, healthy, critical minded, creative and socially concerned so that everyone can contribute to the community according to his/her expertise. The question is how to realize this goal. The former communist regime tried to do it by central planning. The present capitalistic regime leaves it completely to the market.

West Kowloon

It could be a good thing if we know what we are doing. It is basically a commercial-entertainment complex, somewhat like Broadway and West End. It is no harm to HK if the revenue obtained therefrom could be spent in promoting the diversified arts scene in

HK, bearing in mind that not all artistic creations and activities can be measured in monetary rewards. The Board of Supervision of West Kowloon, no matter what you call it, should oversee this matter cautiously. Any city has to balance between profit making and non-profit making artistic activities, as well as local and foreign cultures.

Parallel Cultural Policy

West Kowloon is not all. A healthy cultural diversity should be the final goal. Today we often say, Unity in Diversity. While this concept has been developed for a long time in the major cultural capitals of the world, HK has still somewhat a long way to go.

This concept of diversity is very important and very common in the West because all aspects of creativity should be respected in a modernized and civilized society. Creativity comes from the mind. The mind should have no limit in its thoughts. Our citizens should be encouraged to value the power of the mind. Valid infrastructures should be established to provide a training mechanism of the mind. For commercial arts, markets take the lead. For activities more of an artistic and international nature, other things have to be done.

I have three ideas about HK being an international cultural city serving both the internal and external markets, if it really can become so:

- (1) We can let our citizens experience the best artists coming from all over the world.
- (2) We produce our own artists of international standing.
- (3) We really promote arts and culture among the local population, not just to fill up the requirements of statistics.

The second and third ideas should be our ultimate aim in the future while the first one has been carried on since a long time through regular arts festivals and exhibitions and should continue unless we face a very severe budget cut.

No matter what direction we adopt, any cultural policy must involve concrete administrative works like funding, programming, education and audience building.

It is a large issue. I think that I would stop here for the time being.

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September 2005