

In response to the German Experience
On Arts and Cultural Policy

I read the speech of Dr. Van Weringh with great interest and admiration. I must congratulate her on her wonderful presentation.

What is happening in Germany today on Cultural Activities is most enlightening to us. Everything appears so natural and smooth. The 16 German States and the cities just plan and organise and enjoy their own cultural activities. They take care of their own resources and make very little attempts to co-ordinate among each other. Indeed the belief and practice are that the states and cities compete with one another so as to acquire each individual state's own identity and through these competitions people of that state achieve a sense of belonging. The general feeling appears to be: there is no need for any central ministry, nor is there the need for Unity.

The only united feeling is that there must be freedom of artistic expression and all groups—conventional and avant-garde, should be allowed to co-exist and co-flourish.

We cannot help thinking: how is Hong Kong doing? Strangely, one finds some sort of similarity. Isn't it true that Hong Kong does not have any definite policy on arts and cultural development? Isn't it true that local artists are concerned mostly with freedom of expression and diversities of presentation? Similar, Hong Kong and Germany may appear, but one thing that our distinguished speaker mentioned, is definitely lacking in Hong Kong. This is the deep rooted need in the people of Germany, for active and passive cultural participation.

The people of Hong Kong, the Chinese people, do not possess this deep rooted need for active and passive cultural participation. The society did not and does not yet provide the atmosphere, the soil and fertilizers for the growth of the roots. May be, leisure is the atmosphere, artists form the soil and resources and promotion are the fertilizers.

On the other hand, popular cultural activities flourish so well, may be better than any other cities in the world. Just count the number of daily newspapers, weekly and monthly magazines, and pop music singers. Popular art and culture in Hong Kong, unlike popular art and culture in the west, do not follow any social movement like anti war or green promotion. It just follows its own order (at the moment, it is cynicism against local polities, and glorifying the essential human feelings) and flourish.

Popular arts and culture do not demand high skills of cultivation. For the Hong Kong people who do not yet develop roots for culture and arts, high skills of cultivation are required for the growth of deep roots for fine arts and culture.

This may mean Policy.

This may mean that Hong Kong is different from Germany.

When one looks at the five years' plans of the Arts Development Council and that of the cultural committee of the Urban Council one understands the basic outlook of development. The emphases were put on the relationship between the individual and arts and culture: freedom of expression and diversities of presentation. Education and promotion were discussed, but never deeply. To bring arts and culture closer to people is certainly not a priority. To allow arts and culture to act as media for cultural inter change, promotion of better understanding, mutual trust and harmony among all fellow citizens, visitors and neighboring citizens, has not been a goal.

Now that the local concerned groups and people are thinking hard to bring about ways to improve on arts and cultural activities, many proposals are made on the administrative side. The assumption is: with the proper administration and better way of resource allocation, things will go better. Perhaps the German experience could help here: administrative need could be limited and resources could best be left to the local authorities. The deep rooted need for arts and cultural activities are the best assurance to develop arts and culture.

Perhaps in Hong Kong, while endorsing freedom of expression and diversity of presentation, we do need a policy to promote the development of the need, to educate the students and youth and above all, to rely more on arts and culture to sail Hong Kong to the esteem of social harmony.

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