

Comments and suggestions on WKCD by Oscar Ho Hing-kay

In general, the new WKCD proposal is a significant improvement from the 2004 proposal presented by the government. The latest proposal, however, also brought out issues that deserve attention. These issues, which are rightfully pointed out by the community, are mainly about:

- a) The lack of a holistic cultural policy to establish a nurturing ecology for the arts;
- b) Fear of imbalance in development: huge resources are given to projects such as WKCD, while marginal cultural activities (such as community arts) receive little support;
- c) Lack of 'software' (particularly professionals in cultural management) and audience;
- d) Possible failure in establishing a professional, effective and independent organization to implement an ambitious project that requires high level of professionalism.

It is important not to regard WKCD as the 'only' way out for our cultural development. A cultural policy with clear visions based on in-depth assessment of our own cultural potential is essential. Cultural policy papers produced by the government in the past have clearly failed to undertake such task.

In cultural management, there are two commonly two approaches to cultural development: 1) the top down approach which generates and stimulates community actions through grand scale project, and 2) the bottom up approach which nurtures the organic growth from grassroots level. The two are not contradictory to each other. In fact, they complement each other. While the government should immediately start implementing the WKCD project, it should, during the implementation period, actively engage in the nurturing of the understanding of and participation in arts and culture at a boarder, community level.

At the same time, an effective mechanism to train professionals in cultural management and nurture audience is essential. In addition, it is necessary to undertake an in-depth research on the success and failure of the operation of the existing public cultural facilities. Such research can provide better understanding of local cultural ecology, and can contribute to the strategic planning for future coordination between LCSD facilities and the WKCD.

The nature of arts is an unceasing process of self-reflection, self-challenges and changes.

Consequently the perception and practice of arts is always changing, especially in our age of rapid information flow. It is important that at this stage that, while we provide the visions and directions, we must be enough rooms for the future professionals who respond to the specific cultural needs at that particular time.

I want to talk a bit about the M+ proposal, as there are some misunderstandings that need to be clarified:

- a) First of all, M+ is only a temporary working title, an official name is still to be made;
- b) M+ is a very people oriented institution. While not denying the values of traditional fine arts, it is important to have a major cultural space that accommodates and responds to the everyday cultural experience of the general public. Art should be for the people.
- c) At a professional level, a lot of confusion comes from a lack of understanding of the concept of 'visual cultures', which is the focus of M+. 'Visual culture studies' is a new discipline developed in the late 1980s that has tremendous influence over the understanding of arts and culture. It is more than expanding the definition of visual arts to include non-traditional art from such as popular culture. Most significantly, it is about a broad, multi-layers interpretation that accommodates approaches from anthropology, sociology, cultural studies and other disciplines. The fact that even some of practitioners in the field do not understand the concept suggests that there is a necessary for the government to further explain the concept of M+.

M+ needs to be dismantle the esoteric image of museum and make arts approachable to the public. At the same time it should be forerunning, professional and distinctive, and capable of standing proudly among its international competitors with outstanding visions and directions.

The fact that much discussion has been focused on the possible problems involved with the implementation of the WKCD plan suggests the community has already moved onto the second stage (the implementation) of the WKCD project. Having been actively engaged with the local arts scene for decades, I am convinced that we have the capability to make the WKCD and outstanding cultural achievement, if we have the will.

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