From ‘no cultural policy’ to ‘centralised market orientation’: The political economy of Hong Kong cultural policy (1997–2015)

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Abstract
This study examines changes in the cultural policy in Hong Kong amid the transformations of political economy in the 1990s, following the handover in 1997, and under the administration of three Chief Executives (and their teams) up to 2015. When reviewing the literature on cultural policies in Hong Kong, this study examines the interaction the policies have with the political-economic development in Hong Kong (within the scope of this study) and subsequently explores changes in the principles of the policies. In other words, this study attempts to understand the conditions under which cultural policies were formulated in Hong Kong (the conditions of the production of local culture). The analytical framework of this study is based on two observations of the political and social changes occurring in Hong Kong (1997–2015): (1) changes in the government’s governance attitude since the handover in 1997, and (2) a series of economic blows Hong Kong has endured since 1998. Differing from the ‘descriptive literature’ defined by Schuster, this study understands that these changes are a result of the influence of a postcolonial state and neo-liberalism on public policy formulation. It is argued that the Hong Kong cultural policy framework has shifted from checks-and-balances towards centralised market orientation.

Keywords
Cultural governance, cultural policy, Hong Kong, public policy

Introduction
Similar to other public policies, cultural policy is more than provisions in legal documents and administrative systems. Instead, cultural policy reflects the sum of various aspects of a society (ranging from cities to countries), including culture, history, politics and economy. Cultural policy
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mirrors the intersection between a particular historical moment and current situation. Echoing with Volkerling (2001) in that research on cultural policy must view cultural policy as a ‘territorial or spatial concept’, developing a comprehensive understanding of the development and context of cultural policy in Hong Kong necessitates a review of the political-economic transformation in which the cultural policy in Hong Kong evolves (p. 400).

This study examines changes in the cultural policy model in Hong Kong amid the transformations of political economy in the 1990s, following the handover in 1997, and under the administration of three Chief Executives (and their teams) up to 2015. Following 1997 (despite the promise of ‘previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years’), people might have expected the ‘reactive cultural policy’ (Chen, 2008; see below), which colonists had formulated in consideration of the limited years of governance to facilitate administrative processing, to be replaced by the ‘engineer’ model adopted in the Mainland, where the government supports arts, or the ‘architect’ model adopted in France (Bordat, 2013). Nevertheless, the classification Bordat (2013) made regarding the models of national cultural policies cannot fully account for the transition undergone by the cultural policy model in Hong Kong before and after the handover.

Since the handover, cultural policies implemented in Hong Kong have been directed towards various directions, for example, disbanding the Urban Council, which comprised members elected by universal suffrage and recommending the corporatisation of museums; formulating policies to govern the cultural and creative industries (following 2000) was once proposed as an idea; and the proposal of establishing a Cultural Affairs Bureau directly under the government was put forward in 2012 and so on. These types of cultural policy developments, if not sufficient to be considered a state of ‘no cultural policy’ as mentioned by Ooi (1995), are as ambiguous as those implemented during the colonial rule. By reviewing the political economy of the cultural policy development in Hong Kong, this article attempts to identify causes of the ambiguity. By analysing the political and social steering in Hong Kong, this article is going to explain how the government shifted from checks-and-balances cultural policy framework, which was associated with cultural policy at ‘arm’s length’ during the colonial period, to the centralised market orientation cultural policy model (Hayrynen, 2013), which marked a transition to an attempt of centralised control, implemented following the handover.

The research materials I employed comprised official documents and reports relating to cultural policies in Hong Kong published between 1997 and 2015. However, cultural policy is not limited to texts but also involve discussions, procedures and implementation. Hence, research on cultural policy–related documents should not focus exclusively on annotating individual documents. Instead, this research should examine the context in which a document acts as a component of the overall public policy system. As emphasised by Mulcahy (2006), public policy exhibits ecological complexity. We, thereby, should not separate cultural policy from the overall policy framework defined by a government and the context in which the policy is formulated. The public policy a government develops often reflects the government’s response to the overall political economy at the time. Cultural policy is a component of public policy and the interaction it has with other policies should not be overlooked. This straightforward and repeated warning (Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Mulcahy, 2006; Bell and Oakley, 2015) is particularly vital for researching the cultural policy in Hong Kong, which often involves more than one department (or bureau) of the government.

When reviewing the literature on cultural policies in Hong Kong, this study examined the interaction the policies have with the political-economic development in Hong Kong (within the scope of this study) and subsequently explored changes in the discourses of the policies. In other words, this cultural policy research attempted to understand the conditions under which cultural policies
were formulated in Hong Kong. The first half of this study presents and analyses the come-into-being of the discourse of ‘ideology-free’ cultural policy, or so-called ‘no cultural policy’ discourse, of Hong Kong under colonial rule and examines the consequent checks-and-balances cultural governance framework. The analytical framework of the second half of this study is based on two observations of the political and social changes occurring in Hong Kong (during the periods examined in this study): (1) changes in the government’s governance attitude since the handover in 1997, and (2) a series of economic blows Hong Kong has endured since 1998. Differing from the ‘descriptive literature’ defined by Mark Schuster (2002), this study understands that these changes are a result of the influence of a postcolonial state and neo-liberalism on public policy formulation. By examining the case of Hong Kong, this study investigates how embedding these influences into the existing public politics and administrative framework of Hong Kong results in cultural policy development characterised by the ideology of laissez-faire, under the guise of the cultural and creative industries, and steered towards centralised cultural governance. It is argued that the Hong Kong cultural policy framework has shifted from checks-and-balances towards, what Hayrynen (2013) called, ‘centralized market orientation’ which refers to an orientation ‘modelled rhetorically after the ideas of cultural pluralism and economic efficiency; in practice, the fight has been a technocratic one between different notions of governmental responsibilities’ (p. 623). Thus, this article argues that the force of centralising cultural governance is stronger than that of marketisation in Hong Kong centralised market orientation cultural policy practice.

The ‘no cultural policy’ discourse deriving from colonial rule

The history of Hong Kong as a former colony and the unique postcolonial experience of the region (decolonisation rather than independence) have presented a special perspective for researching the cultural policy in Hong Kong, which extends beyond the scope of the systematic research (Bell and Oakley, 2015) on national cultural policy (Looseley, 2011; Mulcahy, 2000) and urban cultural policy (Grodach & Silver, 2013). The development and research of the cultural policies in Hong Kong have once been positioned under the subject of ‘no cultural policy’. As stated by Ooi (1995), ‘The notion that the best cultural policy is no cultural policy is a direct offshoot of the general policy of laissez faire established by the British colonial government since it colonised Hong Kong in 1842’ (p. 273). Similar to the laissez faire ideology, the so-called ‘no cultural policy’ claim does not truly reflect the reality. Instead, it is merely a discourse employed to disguise the fact that the cultural policy is a form of cultural governance formulated in response to special political and economic conditions. This disguised discourse was passed down to the early postcolonial period. Since then, the ‘no cultural policy’ statement has involved several contents and policy principles such as arm’s length principle, and reactive and/or descriptive cultural policy (Chen, 2008). This balanced and compartmentalisation policy setting led to the checks-and-balances cultural policy model at the time.

According to Chen (2008), Hong Kong, in the 1950s, was characterised by a series of unique situations. Diplomatically, the British government was among the first countries to recognise the recently established People’s Republic of China while setting up a checkpoint at Luohu. Politically, Hong Kong became the frontline for the Western camp to blockade the Communist regime while serving as the asylum harbouring scholars and writers fleeing from China. The region was also a battlefield for left and right political forces, amid which the British Hong Kong government implemented a balanced policy. In terms of cultural policy, the government adopted a laissez faire attitude. By making no intervention and providing no funding, the government tried ‘not to offend
anybody’ (Chen, 2008, p. 62). The balanced policy approach became the basic idea upon which cultural policies in Hong Kong were formulated, ultimately becoming what is known as cultural governance based on the ‘arm’s length principle’.

The ‘arm’s length principle’ as a tradition was closely tied with the idea of establishing an Arts Council to handle cultural development affairs (Hewison, 1995). The so-called ‘arm’s length principle’ means the government does not directly participate in the decision-making of cultural development affairs. Instead, a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation that operates independently, namely, the Arts Council, provides funding and support for the development of various art forms and art groups. As commented by John Maynard Keynes, the designer of the institution, a reputed economist, and the first chairman of Arts Council England, ‘an important thing has happened. State patronage of the arts has crept in. It has happened in a very English, informal unostentatious way – half-baked, if you like’ (quoted in Hewison, 1995, p. 44; Bell & Oakley, 2015). This cultural governance concept migrated to the colony of Hong Kong. In 1977, the government confirmed, following internal research, that the government’s responsibilities in arts development were limited to ‘acting as the coordinator and catalyst, offering and promoting basic necessary facilities, and providing financial and other support if necessary to cultivate emerging artists or develop new forms of art’ (Chen, 2008). Hence, the government funded arts by entrusting public organisations and the Urban Council with the execution. By employing the arm’s length principle, the government generated an impression that they adopted an indirect management approach by overseeing arts affairs based on laws and regulations. The Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC) has been operating since its foundation in 1995. Although the completion of various large-scale cultural infrastructures highlights cultural governance in Hong Kong in the 1990s, the discussion on cultural policy discourse in Hong Kong dates back to the 1960s.

Differing from cultural policies that were developed and implemented as a stand-alone system, cultural policies in Hong Kong as a form of ‘reactive arts policy’ formulated during the colonial rule were derived from reactions to the political and economic conditions sought after by the society and the public. Specifically, the government set up passive cultural governance mechanisms that reacted to market or social needs. The government offered consultation, support and funding, only when the culture and art circles (or the society) made explicit requests. These are short-term measures that entail no compulsive obligations for either party. In 1977, the government confirmed in its internal guidelines that the government’s role in arts development was ‘acting as the coordinator and catalyst as well as offering and promoting basic necessary facilities’, which was played primarily by the Urban Council (Chen, 2008).

Founded in 1953, the Urban Council is a statutory body, responsible for overseeing urban services entrusted by the government. The government also established an Urban Services Department, which is tasked with executing resolutions passed at the Urban Council. Pao Ping-Wing, the Chairman of Urban Council at the time, contended that the Urban Council formulated its cultural policy by adopting a programme-oriented approach; therefore, the Five-Year Plan was ‘intended as a guideline for the Urban Council to coordinate, at an overall level, the art programmes it holds, rather than an attempt to formulate a cultural policy for Hong Kong’ (Chen, 2008).

In addition to the arm’s length principle and reactive short-term programmes, the cultural policies implemented in Hong Kong during the colonial period exhibited a third characteristic: adopting a balanced policy approach. In 1981, the Hong Kong government announced, for the first time, using governance as the direction for cultural development. The Executive Council formulated seven principles for promoting arts development:
providing necessary venues and infrastructures for performing arts, developing community activities for the general public, offering prevocational training and professional training in performing arts, building professional performing groups, providing the highest level of services given available financial conditions and resources, setting up an advisory panel for performing arts, and providing support and encouragement for performing arts groups.

Specifically, the government was apparently focused on developing performing arts. The result of this policy tradition is that the government emphasised the neutrality of its policy to insist on the so-called laissez faire governance. However, judging from the content, the government was apparently focused on performing arts that were dominated by Western high art. Nevertheless, as stated by Chen (2008), despite a stable source of funding, the Hong Kong government set deadlines for application, conducted strict annual reviews and provided subsidies by programme when subsidising arts development. Consequently, when the official treasury was full, total arts expenditure accounted for less than 1% of public spending and ‘artists were confined and rebels were restricted by finances’ (p. 68). Nevertheless, the laissez faire cultural policy under the guise of the arm’s length principle implied a focus on performing arts (by providing short-term subsidies) without valuing cultural governance oriented towards long-term development. Hence, how was this public policy principle in Hong Kong implemented in practice?

The ‘checks-and-balances’ tradition of cultural policies in Hong Kong

The seemingly ideology-free cultural policy in Hong Kong coupled with the bureaucratic politics and balanced policy approach implemented by the colonial government results in a ‘checks-and-balances’ cultural governance model, in which responsibilities of cultural administration were divided among various departments.

The British Hong Kong government set up the Urban Council in 1953, a body resembling the parliament and overseeing local urban services. In 1976, the government founded a Culture Department under the BCSB, responsible for planning the promotion of culture and art in Hong Kong. Since then, the structure of cultural administration became complex. The government and local councils have been equipped with departments concerning cultural governance. In 1982, the BCSB set up the Council for the Performing Arts, an advisory body that offers advice to the government on aspects of performing arts and sponsors art groups. In 1995, the Council for the Performing Arts was restructured to become HKADC, another statutory body.

This arrangement of cultural governance is a political strategy commonly adopted by the British Hong Kong government, namely, ‘checks and balances’. HKADC as a statutory public organisation and the BCSB (Boardcasting, Culture and Sport Bureau) (1989) within the government framework were used to check and balance the Urban Council, which oversaw public culture at a local level. The first wave of arts groups’ professionalisation that occurred in Hong Kong in the 1970s can be used as an example. In the 1970s, the government built Hong Kong Arts Centre (1977), which was initiated by private entities and was managed independently and assisted in founding the professional Hong Kong Philharmonic (1974), Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra (1977), Hong Kong Repertory Theatre (1977), Hong Kong Ballet (1979), City Contemporary Dance Company (1979) and Chung Ying Theatre Company (1979). The first three arts groups were affiliated to and subsidised by the Urban Council, whereas the latter three arts groups were funded by the Council for the Performing Arts after 1990.
Prior to the handover, the British Hong Kong government handled cultural affairs by employing bureaucratic means, that is, by dividing the tasks between two units, the HKADC and the Urban Council. In the structure of the HKADC, culture is a series of high art activities and their products, whereas in the structure of the Urban Council, culture was understood as lifestyle, an anthropological understanding. In the coexistence of two types of cultural discourses, namely, democratisation of culture and cultural democracy (see Dueland, 2003; Mulcahy, 2006), a government under one political system adopted two definitions of culture through two public organisations. Nevertheless, no explicit direction for the cultural governance in Hong Kong was identified. Compounded by the statement that Hong Kong is a cultural desert, the tradition of implementing a checks-and-balances cultural policy in the name of ‘no cultural policy in Hong Kong’ was fortified. This was the cultural governance framework the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) had to work with when taking over from the British Hong Kong government in 1997.

**Two political and economic key factors in the cultural policy implemented in Hong Kong following the handover**

The transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997 is undoubtedly a significant chapter in the history of Hong Kong. The structural change in political economy certainly affected the development of cultural policy in Hong Kong. Furthermore, from the Asian financial crisis in 1997 to the global financial crisis triggered by the subprime crisis in 2008, we can discover that Hong Kong has an ongoing interactive relationship with the regional and global political economy. Therefore, the analytical framework in the second half of this study is based on two observations of the political, economic and social changes that occurred in Hong Kong, following the handover in 1997: (1) the differing governance attitudes the three Chief Executives of Hong Kong (and their teams) have adopted since the handover in 1997, (2) a series of economic blows Hong Kong has endured since 1998. Hence, I will explain how the current cultural policy in Hong Kong developed towards centralised market orientation model in responding these forces.

**Handover of the power of cultural governance**

On 1 July 1997, the sovereignty of Hong Kong was transferred formally from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the People’s Republic of China, putting an end to the British colonial rule that had lasted for 156 years since 1841. HKSAR was established based on the principles of ‘one country, two systems’, ‘a high degree of autonomy’ and ‘Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong’ stipulated in the Basic Law, and the head of the government was the Chief Executive. In his first Policy Address, Tung Chee-hwa, the first Chief Executive of HKSAR, made the following descriptions of the cultural administration in Hong Kong:

Young and old alike look to our city to be far more than just a place of study and business. We look for art to stimulate and sustain us. Hong Kong has long embraced both eastern and western cultures and in our artistic life we find contemporary diversity with Chinese characteristics … For many years, Hong Kong has been set apart from the Mainland. We have lived in a society and a cultural environment very different from the Mainland. As we face the historic change of being reunited with China, for every individual there is a gradual process of getting to know Chinese history and culture, so as to achieve a sense of belonging. My Administration attaches importance to this process. We will provide resources and will promote
educational, recreational and cultural exchange programmes to involve the community fully in this process. (Government of HKSAR, 1997)

This lengthy quote indicates changes in the HKSAR government’s idea of cultural governance following the handover. First, differing from art policy–related documents published prior to the handover, such as the Five-Year Strategic Plan compiled by the HKADC (Hong Kong Arts Development Council of HKSAR, 1995), the HKSAR government defined Hong Kong culture based on the region’s relationship with Chinese culture and history. Hence, culture was no longer limited to leisure and recreational activities. In other words, culture (in addition to recreation and leisure) became a tool for Hong Kong to connect with its homeland. This marked a change in the functional understanding of culture in public policy, which resulted in changes in the cultural policy in Hong Kong following the handover: the Urban Council (and the Regional Council) was disbanded.

In the Policy Address released in 1998, we can find the following initiative under ‘The Review of District Organizations’:

… the Provisional Municipal Councils also manage arts and culture and sports and recreation programmes and facilities … The consultation exercise provided feedback from the arts and sports communities which revealed concerns about unclear policy, a lack of cost-effectiveness and duplication of functions with other service providers. Some have questioned whether the Provisional Municipal Councils are best placed to continue to provide these services … We will therefore develop a new administrative framework for the delivery of these services … before finalizing the details of the new structure, so that we can put this in place before the end of 1999. (Government of HKSAR, 1998)

On 31 December 1999, the government disbanded the Urban Council and the Regional Council under the pretence of ‘urban services reform’ (the media called it ‘the killing of the Councils’). Hence, the Urban Council and the Regional Council, which comprised members elected by the majority of the voters, were replaced by the newly established departments, which involved no representatives from the public and were not supervised by the public. The HKSAR government directly formulated, oversaw and implemented local administrative plans, including the plans of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. This signals a change in the cultural governance framework, characterised by the idea of cultural democracy, passed down from the colonial government.

The HKSAR government’s interpretation of Hong Kong culture, which was centred on the Chinese culture, was immediately reflected in policy documents. In the Policy Address announced in 1999, an entire clause was contributed to describe ‘Hong Kong’s Culture and Creativity’:

Our reunification with the motherland has enabled us to build on Chinese culture and at the same time draw on Western culture to develop our own distinctive and colourful culture. We will continue to promote public understanding of Chinese culture, history and heritage on the one hand and to enhance our exchanges and communication with the rest of the world on the other … Hong Kong possesses a unique cultural history going back several thousand years. This not only helps us to establish our identity but also serves to attract tourist. (Government of HKSAR, 1999)

The significance of this quote is that it marks the beginning of a new framework for the cultural governance implemented by the Hong Kong government after 1999; using the Chinese culture as a basis for interpreting Hong Kong culture, the government recentralised (administrative and
financial) power within the government system. Nevertheless, if we understand that the government must regain power over cultural governance because redefining culture is necessary for ideological considerations following the handover, how should we understand the government’s policy decisions to establish the Culture and Heritage Commission (CHC) and preserve the HKADC?

In addition to considerations of recentralisation, the HKSAR government’s public policy thinking was also affected by the joint interference of marketisation and new public management (NPM) under the influence of neo-liberalism. According to the definition developed by Eleanore Belfiore (2004), ‘new public management’ is a new ‘style of public administration’ that places emphasis on measurement, data collection, evaluation, target setting, value for money, performance indicators and a whole host of new metrics for assessing ‘success’ (Bell & Oakley, 2015). The NPMisation of cultural policy initiated debates regarding the instrumentalisation of culture in cultural policy studies. In the case of Hong Kong, the issue became an internal contradiction within the cultural policy in Hong Kong. On the one hand, the HKSAR government hoped to regain power over cultural governance; on the other hand, the government was bound by the ‘laissez faire’ policy paradigm under the promise that ‘previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years’ and under the influence of ‘new public management’ (evident from the reform proposal of ‘accountability system’ made by the HKSAR government during the second term of the first Chief Executive12). Since then, the government has been practising cultural governance in a wavering manner torn between ‘political centralisation and market orientation’.

The battle between the two policy ideologies, namely, political centralisation and market orientation, can be observed from the arts funding policy and the conservation policy. A most typical example was the debate over museum corporatisation that lasted a decade. In 1999 (the year when the two Councils were disbanded), the government announced the ‘Consultant’s Report on Culture, the Arts, Recreation and Sports Services’, compiled under the leadership of Mr Lam Chi-chiu, former Director of the Urban Services Department, and accepted the recommendations made in the report: (1) The Leisure and Cultural Services Department was established, (2) the CHC was established, the task of which was to advise the government on amending the overall cultural and art policy and determining funding priorities, and (3) the scope of existing outsourced programmes were expanded to attract more private participation. In 2000, the CHC was established. According to the first consultation paper submitted by the Commission in 2001, the cultural and arts development in Hong Kong must be based on ‘building partnership’ and ‘community-driven’ as the primary principle and strategy. Thus, the Working Group on Museums under the CHC began to examine the possibility of corporatizing 14 museums run by the Home Affairs Department, that is, the possibility of the museums operating independent of the government.

The discussion of museum corporatisation has lasted for more than a decade. Following 3 years of research, the CHC submitted a Policy Recommendation Report in 2003 (prior to disbanding).13 The government established several panels to investigate whether public museums should operate independently from the government structure, and multiple reports yielded affirmative conclusions. Nevertheless, the government disregarded the results obtained from discussions that spanned over a decade, continuing to manage and control museums directly. What is the logic underlying this public policy? In fact, Hong Kong (following the handover, in particular) presents an excellent case for cultural policy research (and public policy research): Under the given framework of laissez faire policy and bureaucratic administration, conscious withdrawal of the power of cultural governance resulted in an ideological conflict with the neoliberal NPM culture. Consequently, the government used ‘pseudo-cultural democracy’ in the forms of ‘constant consultation’ and ‘implying the opening up of cultural governance’ to react to the increasingly loud voices of cultural
workers and consumers. Nevertheless, the government also gradually withdrew financial and administrative power from statutory cultural organisations to execute cultural management. The result is a cultural governance framework that seemed to waver between ‘centralisation and market orientation’. However, in the interaction of these policy discourses, whether culture was considered daily life or high culture, the government had a consistently instrumental understanding of culture, as shown in the guideline-style policy documents. The government used culture as a political ideological tool and employed it as an economic instrument following the Millennium.

**Instrumentalisation and marketisation**

Since the handover of the sovereignty of Hong Kong in 1997, Hong Kong has undergone a series of financial crises: Between the end of 1997 and the beginning of 1998, bubbles in the property and stock markets burst; the Asian financial crisis in 1998 hit Hong Kong, having an impact on the HK-dollar, futures and stock markets; at the end of 1999, the dot-com bubble in Hong Kong burst because of influence from the United States; in mid-March 2003, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak paralysed tourism, the stock market and the property market, resulting in waves of layoffs and closure. To revitalise the economy, the government proposed developing a knowledge-based economy. According to the Policy Address announced in 2003 under the title ‘Capitalising Our Advantages, Revitalising Our Economy’,

> Creative industries are important elements of a knowledge-based economy … In addition to strengthening our pillar industries, we will seek to inject a new dimension and vigour into our economy by actively promoting creative industries. They are the synergy of artistic creativity and product development, involving specialities such as the performing arts, film and television, publishing, art and antique markets, music, architecture, advertising, digital entertainment, computer software development, animation production, fashion and product design. (Government of HKSAR, 2003)

In fact, the HKADC first proposed the idea of ‘creative industries’ as early as 1999. Nevertheless, Hong Kong Trade Development Council did not publish the first report on creative industries in Hong Kong until 2002. The Policy Address announced in 2003 mentioned this report, evidently intended to mix culture with creativity to serve economic purposes. In 2005, the Hong Kong government officially recognised the status of ‘cultural and creative industries’ (Government of HKSAR, 2005) and defined the following 11 components of the cultural and creative industries in 2009: advertising; amusement services; architecture; art, antiques and crafts; cultural education and library as well as archive and museum services; design; film, video and music; performing arts; publishing; software, computer games and interactive media; and television and radio (Government of HKSAR, 2009). In addition, the government proposed,

> setting up a consultative machinery for the cultural and creative industries as soon as possible, including experts in the industries, the cultural circle, and relevant fields from outside of Hong Kong, jointly exploring the development prospect, path, and organisational structure of the cultural and creative industries in Hong Kong, and researching methods for fully utilising the advantages of Hong Kong, integrating resources, and focusing on promoting specific areas.

Consequently, culture and the creative industries, as two separate domains, have often been confused as one in public policy discourses, and policies governing the cultural and creative industries have been confused with cultural and arts policy.
For example, in the 2016–2017 Budget (Government of HKSAR, 2016), the government stated that it would increase its spending on culture and arts by HK$400 million compared with the preceding year, with a budget of approximately HK$4.6 billion. Nevertheless, an examination of the specific items showed that funding from the Home Affairs Bureau to the HKADC decreased by 0.2%, and funding provided for the nine major local arts groups14 was similar to that of the preceding year. In contrast, government funding allocated to the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau and the Communications and Creative Industry Branch under that bureau for handling resources in the broadcasting and creative industries increased by 32.5%, amounting to US$392.3 million. The funding was primarily used for ‘Create Smart Initiative’ and ‘Film Development Fund Scheme’, two programmes managed by the ‘Create Hong Kong’ Office. In other words, what the government claimed sustained growth in the government funding for culture and arts was primarily resources allocated to creative industries.

Policies governing the cultural and creative industries in Hong Kong are essentially economic policies focusing on infrastructure and industrial development. In the ‘Baseline Study on Hong Kong’s Creative Industries’ conducted by the Centre for Cultural Policy Research at the University of Hong Kong in 2003, as per the request of the Central Policy Unit 2002, creative industries were defined as ‘a variegated notion for describing a rising economic sector, the dynamics of industrial collaboration as well as the changing landscape of employment marker’. The study stressed multiple times that research on the creative industries was conducted based on economic considerations concerning transitions in the paradigms of economic production. In 2005, the government redefined ‘creative industries’ as ‘cultural and creative industries’ and announced the following Policy Address in the same year:

Enhancing appreciation of culture is not only a target to be pursued by Hong Kong people, it is also a pre-condition for developing our cultural and creative industries ... We can make good use of our advantage as a confluence of Eastern and Western cultures and leverage on our connections with the Mainland to create an environment conductive to the vibrant development of culture and arts. (Government of HKSAR, 2005)

Since then, the cultural policy implemented in Hong Kong has been based on the thinking (following the handover) that Hong Kong is connected to mainland China through culture, and the government has established the economic instrumental function of culture in the public policy of Hong Kong. In the laissez faire policy tradition, policies governing the cultural and creative industries in Hong Kong were limited to the macro-level: building symbolic platforms (e.g. laws and connections), infrastructure (e.g. financing and architecture) and training and education. Policies governing the cultural and creative industries in Hong Kong exhibit the following problems: First, the policies are oriented towards industries, without addressing the individuality of industry workers; the policies do not fully address the ‘labours’ in the cultural and creative industries in Hong Kong, that is, the individual roles and rights of creative workers. Second, the definition and scope of ‘creativity’ in the policies were extensive, covering a wide spectrum of areas ranging from performing arts to jewellery and theme parks; consequently, the policies cannot effectively reflect the actual needs of various creative activities, not to mention governance. Third, because of the ambiguity mentioned previously, the policies cannot focus on the needs of traditional cultural and arts workers. Hence, although policies governing the cultural and creative industries seemed to have become a unique solution for formulating cultural policy in Hong Kong, judging from the current policy and implementation, these policies cannot and should not be used to replace policies
governing culture and art. As the government decided to use culture as a vital means for boosting economy following the handover, the government has formulated policies governing infrastructure building and urban renewal oriented towards cultural tourism in addition to making proposals for the cultural and creative industries.

As mentioned in previous paragraphs, in the Policy Address announced in 1999 (Government of HKSAR, 1999), the government already mentioned using culture to boost tourism. In the Policy Address titled ‘Capitalising Our Advantages, Revitalising Our Economy’ announced in 2003, the government once again stated, ‘Other efforts include enhancing cultural, recreational, sports and arts activities as well as preserving and promoting our heritage and cultural relics … will consolidate Hong Kong’s position as a premier tourist destination’ (Government of HKSAR, 2003). A review of the Policy Addresses published between 2000 and 2015 showed that the cultural tourism development planned by the Hong Kong government was based primarily on two directions: urban renewal in the name of culture and community and large-scale cultural infrastructure building. For example, in the Policy Address announced in 2007, urban renewal was implemented through ‘Progressive Development’:

Promoting community development through revitalization: In pursuing further development, we must attach importance to environmental protection and heritage conservation … We should also seek to revitalize these buildings in order that they may become an integral and lively part of the local community, which in turn will generate wider social and economic benefits. (Government of HKSAR, 2007)

As for large-scale cultural infrastructure building, the West Kowloon Cultural District project was a landmark, the most significant project in the ‘New Urban Development Areas’ plan:

The West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) represents a major investment in our cultural and arts infrastructure. It is also a strategic plan to promote long-term development of arts and culture, supporting Hong Kong as a creative economy and Asia’s world city. The integrated arts and cultural district will offer a mix of world-class arts and cultural facilities, talented artists, quality programmes and distinctive architecture to attract people in Hong Kong as well as from the Mainland and the rest of the world. (Government of HKSAR, 2007)

The Hong Kong government used cultural and arts districts as landmarks for establishing Hong Kong as a creative city. These strategies were adopted under the influence of theories developed by Richard Florida (2002) and Charles Landry (2000), that is, building ‘creative cities’ to attract the ‘creative class’ to develop a ‘creative economy’. Problems with this school of thought and the crises resulting from the gentrified urban renewal it brings have sparked numerous discussions (see Oakley, 2009; Bell and Oakley, 2015), which are applicable for reviewing the current situation and values of Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the idea of creative city that the Hong Kong government adopted from the creative economy discourse developed by Floridian and the relevant development of policies governing the cultural and creative industries as mentioned previously, both served economic functions as well as other instrumental uses. Examples of governments using cultural policies as instruments (economically, in particular) are numerous globally. Furthermore, the tendency to use policies governing the cultural and creative industries to replace traditional cultural policy does not occur only in Hong Kong. However, Hong Kong as an example presents a special perspective for understanding the instrumentalisation of the cultural and creative industries; the Hong Kong government used policies governing the cultural and creative industries and
a policy orientation that seemed laissez faire to conceal the cultural policy direction it has adopted since the handover, namely, recapturing the power of cultural governance.

In other words, the series of financial crises that took place following the handover motivated the government to adopt the idea of ‘creative economy’ in industrial development and urban renewal to pursue an alternative economic path. In addition, the crises have provided opportunities for the government to use the market-oriented policy model of policies governing the cultural and creative industries as a disguise for the cultural governance it practised, which was characterised by political centralisation (i.e. actual administrative and financial power). With changes in the government’s governance attitude since the handover in 1997, and a series of economic blows Hong Kong has endured since 1998, the Hong Kong cultural policy framework, as such, has shifted from checks-and-balances model towards centralised market orientation. However, are the forces of centralising cultural governance and market orientation balanced?

### Conclusion: centralised cultural governance that is no longer disguised but not yet successful

In 2012, Leung Chun-ying, the current Chief Executive of Hong Kong (2012-2017), announced that he was to run for the Chief Executive for the HKSAR in 2012. In the manifesto Leung (2012) proposed, the first policy related to ‘religion, culture, and arts’ was as follows:

> to establish a Cultural Affairs Bureau, the responsibility of which is to formulate and promote cultural policies, encourage civic engagement, reference the successful experience of other countries and neighbouring regions in cultural development, and mentor and support cultural teams in Hong Kong in a proactive and sincere manner. (p. 56)

As soon as the announcement was published, the manifesto aroused controversies in the local cultural and art circles. In particular, wordings such as ‘proactive’, ‘mentor’ and ‘cultural team’, the third one being a rhetoric characteristic of the official language used in mainland China, raised concerns that the government would further centralise cultural governance. In fact, early in 1998, when numerous people criticised the government’s hasty decision to ‘kill the Councils’ and assign cultural and sports affairs to the Home Affairs Bureau, Lan Hong-Tsung, then Secretary for Home Affairs, indicated that if the affairs were too much for the Home Affairs Bureau to handle, the government might set up a Cultural Affairs Bureau to handle cultural affairs (Chen 2008). However, the cultural and art circles were concerned that ‘a centralised Cultural Affairs Bureau’ might be consistent with the ‘paternalistic governance’ practised by the HKSAR government. After Leung took office in July 2012, the Cultural Affairs Bureau remained a promise unfulfilled despite rumours about who the Secretary for Cultural Affairs would be. At the end of 2012, when a member of the Panel on Home Affairs under the Legislative Council enquired about the progress of the establishment of the Cultural Affairs Bureau at a hearing of government cultural work, a government official finally confirmed that the plan to establish a Cultural Affairs Bureau was suspended.

The plan to establish a Cultural Affairs Bureau in Hong Kong was suspended because of the political climate at the time in Hong Kong and the government’s strategies for prioritising the public policy agenda. Although this article will not provide a detailed analysis of the suspension, this incident is yet another warning that cultural policy research must be placed in a macro public policy framework and overall political and economic situations. I used the incident of the suspended
establishment of the Cultural Affairs Bureau to prove a point; since the handover in 1997, despite the checks-and-balances cultural governance and bureaucracy passed down from the colonial rule, the core of the cultural policy adopted by the government has remained that the government used gradual centralisation to reduce the degree of social and cultural democracy. This type of cultural governance thinking was disguised amid a series of economic crises that occurred following 1997. In other words, the government used policies rhetorically after the ideas of economic efficiency to handle cultural affairs. However, the fight between centralising cultural governance and marketising cultural affairs has not been resolved in practice.

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**Notes**

1. Specifically, this study reviewed policy addresses released since the handover, the cultural policy outlined by the Home Affairs Department, documents submitted to the Legislative Council that are related to culture, arts and the cultural and creative industries, archives held by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC), and consultation papers and reviews written on different areas of cultural development. To provide a picture of the cultural policy framework that the British colonial administration of Hong Kong built in the 1990s (prior to the handover), this study analysed three significant consultation papers on arts policy the Hong Kong government and subordinate organisations published between 1993 and 1997: the ‘Arts Policy Review Report’ (Recreation and Culture Branch of HKSAR, 1993) released by the Recreation and Culture Branch, the ‘Five-Year Strategic Plan’ (Hong Kong Arts Development Council of HKSAR, 1995) compiled by the HKADC, and the ‘Five-Year Plan of the Urban Council’s Culture Select Committee’ (Culture Select Committee, Urban Council of HKSAR, 1996). Additionally, reports acting as guidelines in the history of the cultural policies in Hong Kong were also used as the texts examined in this study. Specifically, this study reviewed the report ‘Arts Policy, Its Implementation and Sustainable Arts Funding’ (Everritt, 1998) that Hong Kong Policy Research Institute compiled at the request of the HKADC and the ‘Baseline Study on Hong Kong’s Creative Industries’ (Centre for Cultural Policy Research of The University of Hong Kong, 2003), a research conducted by the Centre for Cultural Policy Research of the University of Hong Kong at the request of the Central Policy Unit under the Government of Hong Kong.

2. The length of the arm has certainly been a disputed issue (Gray, 2000; Bell and Oakley, 2015). Christopher Frayling, former chairman of Arts Council England, once stated that the arm, following the Millennium, had been reduced to ‘Venus de Milo’s length’ (in Alexander, 2008, p. 1424; Bell and Oakley, 2015). Nevertheless, the ‘Britishness’ of cultural governance as a tradition dating back to 1919 is unquestionable (Bell & Oakley, 2015).

3. In 1995, the government established the HKADC, a statutory body comprising 10 members elected by various arts constituencies and 12 appointed by the government.

4. Before 1973, the head of the Urban Services Department also acted as the chairperson of the Urban Council, overseeing health, resettlement, housing and parks. At a meeting of the Five-Year Plan Drafting Group under the Culture and Heritage Commission (CHC) held on 24 January 1996, Pao Ping-Wing, the Chairman, refuted the criticism that a cultural perspective was lacking in the plans (Chen, 2008).

5. The 1980s marked the beginning of large-scale cultural infrastructure building, including the Queen Elizabeth Stadium (1980), the Tsuen Wan Town Hall (1980), the Hong Kong Coliseum (1983), the Ko Shan Theatre (1983), the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (1983), the Sha Tin Town Hall (1987), the Tuen Mun Town Hall (1987), the Hong Kong Cultural Centre (1989), the Hong Kong
6. Commentators have indicated that government grants and resources were allocated primarily to performing arts in the 1960s and 1970s. This is because performing arts can entertain the public. Citizens must be properly dressed and show up at the venues to watch the shows among other people. This type of gathering can improve the communication among different walks of life and enhance social harmony. Critics have argued that the colonial government avoided subsidising literature, Cantonese operas and visual arts in the early years to prevent being involved in ideological disputes or inspiring free thinking in citizens (Chen, 2008).

7. The ‘Urban Council–HKADC’ checks-and-balances system passed down following the handover can date back to the governance history in the 1970s. In the 1970s, official bureaucratic organisations began to exist in Hong Kong, responsible for managing public culture, in particular, disseminating fine culture of the elite ruling class in a top-down manner (Chen, 2008). During the governance period of Crawford Murray MacLehose, former Governor of Hong Kong during the 1970s, public spending increased drastically (an increase by 50% in the year 1971–1972) and the government organisation expanded. The government transitioned from a minimal government to an accountable government, offering various public services to citizens in an active manner.

8. The ‘Arts Policy Review Report’ published by the BCSB in 1993 described the government as a catalyst, which had built partnerships with the Urban Council, the Regional Council, the public and various arts groups. The actual execution of cultural events was performed by the Urban Council and the Regional Council, while the government acted to remain neutral amid art creation and art expressions. In addition, the government reviewed relevant laws, removing laws that obstructed the freedom of expression (Chen, 2008). Thus, the laws were consistent with Article 16 (Freedom of opinion and expression) of the Bill of Rights Ordinance passed in that period. The final chapter of the Report described ‘Arts Policies in the 1990s’, summarising solutions that had been made in response to problems that occurred during the administration in the past decade (Chen, 2008). The chapter was problem-oriented and restricted by bureaucratic politics; consequently, recommendations were made within the administrative power of the Recreation and Culture Branch.

9. On 1 June 1995, the Legislative Council passed the HKADC Ordinance (Chapter 472 of the laws of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), marking the formal establishment of the HKADC as a statutory body. At the end of the same year, the HKADC published a Five-Year Strategic Plan, the first arts policy document in the history of Hong Kong compiled based on the advice of professionals in the general public. The plan defined four principles for the HKADC, that is, supporting the freedom of expression in arts, diversity and pluralism, overall arts development, and the development of local Hong Kong culture. For the first time ever, the plan recognised and emphasised the overall contribution of arts to the society (Chen, 2008). As a statutory body, the Urban Council, on the other hand, was responsible for hosting various recreational activities in terms of the cultural affairs it oversaw. As mentioned previously, the Urban Council, which was primarily tasked with civil affairs, had numerous responsibilities in addition to cultural and recreational activities. Nevertheless, all of the responsibilities matched what the World Health Organisation defined as ‘national health’, which entails the physical, mental and social well-being of citizens. Therefore, the ritual logic (Royseng, 2008) based on which the Urban Council performed cultural governance was the understanding that culture is daily leisure and recreational activities that ‘restore the mental and physical strength of citizens’.

10. In fact, the ‘Five-Year Strategic Plan’ (Hong Kong Arts Development Council of HKSAR, 1995) compiled by the HKADC mentioned the ‘hydra-headed’ situation of the cultural administration and management in Hong Kong. Therefore, the HKADC recommended establishing coordination with the two Councils and proposed setting up an ‘Art Policy Joint Liaison Group’. Unfortunately, the recommendations were not adopted.

11. Hong Kong has long been considered a cultural desert. The judgement was first made by scholars coming from Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Beijing and Tianjin in mainland China in the 1920s and 1930s. As a term...
inspiring cultural and political conflicts, the claim was more of a result of the cultural conquest mentality of outsiders than a description of reality (Chen, 2008). In the 1970s, when members of the Urban Council that were of British descent tried to promote Western high art in Hong Kong, they also used the ‘cultural desert’ theory to convince the government that it must ‘enlighten’ Chinese people in Hong Kong, invest more resources, build cultural venues, cultivate arts groups and train performing artists to change the situation. In this case, Council members used the ‘cultural desert’ theory as an instrumental strategy to seek resources, although the approach might imply contempt for local culture (Chen, 2008). Nevertheless, the ‘cultural desert’ theory as an instrumental policy later became a powerful policy and public discourse. For example, in 2005, when Ho Chi-ping, Secretary for Home Affairs, explained why West Kowloon Cultural District should be built in Hong Kong, he said, ‘Hong Kong is a cultural desert, and West Kowloon Cultural District will transform the desert to fertile soil’.

12. In his second term of office, Tung Chee-hwa, the first Chief Executive of the HKSAR, proposed the ‘Principal Officials Accountability System’ as a reform measure. The main feature of this system was that the Secretaries of Department and the Directors of Bureau were withdrawn from the civil service and would be employed on contract. In addition, the system emphasised that the principal government officials should take political responsibilities for mistakes made during their term of office.

13. The government responded in 2004 (Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs of HKSAR, 2004), saying it accepted 90% of the recommendations except for the recommendation for restructuring the cultural administrative structure. For the latter recommendation, the government considered establishing three additional advisory panels to collect opinions. Interestingly, the ‘Committee on Museums: Recommendation Report’, submitted in 2007 by the Museum Advisory Panel established by the government in 2005, still mentioned ‘corporatizing public museums and assigning a single administration bureau established by law to manage the museums is a recommended practice’. Furthermore, the report recommended establishing a provisional museum management commission to prepare for the transition from government-run public museums to management by a museum management commission in the long-term. In 2010, the HAB hosted a media briefing to announce that it had rejected the recommendation of museum corporatisation and that it would establish three advisory panels relating to museums, that is, Art Museum Advisory Panel, History Museum Advisory Panel and Science Museum Advisory Panel, to ‘ensure that the management and operations of museums satisfy social needs’.

14. The ‘nine major arts groups’ are nine major performing arts groups in Hong Kong, namely, Hong Kong Philharmonic, Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, Hong Kong Sinfonietta, Hong Kong Dance Company, Hong Kong Ballet, City Contemporary Dance Company, Hong Kong Repertory Theatre, Chung Ying Theatre Company and Zuni Icosahedron.

15. In fact, the second policy pertaining to ‘religion, culture, and arts’ was
decentralisation, enabling the District Councils to play a more vital and active role in promoting culture and arts, to be more effective in expanding and managing cultural venues, to provide cultural and arts services of a higher quality to citizens, to celebrate the cultural characteristics of each districts, and to encourage arts groups that are at a certain scale and level to tour around various districts.

However, controversies over the plan to establish a Cultural Affairs Bureau attracted so much attention that this policy was overlooked.

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