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Sociology Department

The University of Hong Kong

July 2015

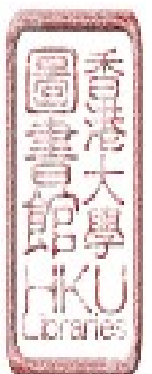
CAPSTONE PROJECT

Can Hong Kong do without a Cultural Bureau?

By

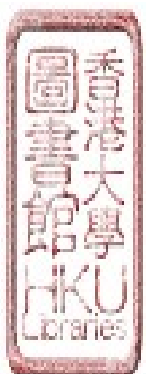
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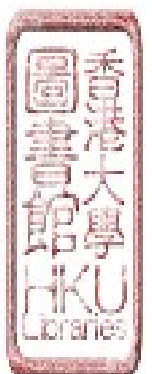


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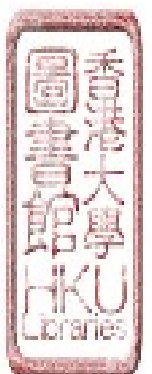
Declaration

I hereby declare that this Master's Project represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this university or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

Signed _____

Jason Karl Forster

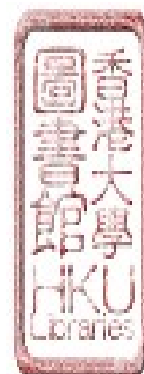
July 30th, 2015



Abstract

I commenced this study with a single question: Can Hong Kong do without a Cultural Bureau? As the respondents fed back over a four-month period, thematic various strands converged. It seems that, by and large, there is a consensus amongst the cultural sector that a Cultural Bureau would be a good idea, though this is highly contingent on a clear and transparent mandate, and a Chief who the cultural sector will support. A Cultural Bureau might solve various issues, such as; fragmentation, centralization, issues concerning perceived value of culture, metrics for measuring success – and other inhibiting factors. Perhaps a more realistic, outcome, however, was the shared view that a unified vision is needed ahead of a Cultural Bureau. The term Cultural Bureau is so politically charged at this moment in Hong Kong's history, that its chances of survival are slim.

Rather late in the study, I chanced upon the Culture and Heritage Commission's Policy Recommendation Report from 2003 – here was the vision, and the blueprint – though it was incredulously shelved! The discussion has turned back to that report – as many respondents were either not aware of its existence or had forgotten about it. I hope my contribution here, will shine a light on that report and will go some way towards encouraging further debate around the matter.

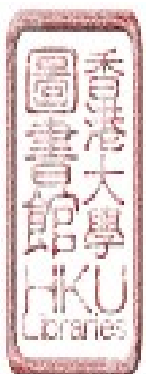


Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank Dr. CH Ng. His expertise and encouragement have proved invaluable throughout the development of this Capstone Project. A close second, would be the wonderful respondents, who gave their precious time and shared their depth of knowledge – always in a convivial yet serious manner. Of course a special mention to all those at the WKCDA, in particular Louis Yu and Jonas Chu who assisted me with framing and expansion of the study. Also, thanks to Wander Meijer and Mike Hill for advice throughout.

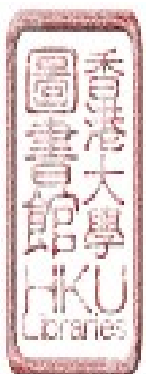
Here's to my fellow, and no doubt exhausted, MCCC students at Hong Kong University. The communal spirit in which we shared last two years is greatly appreciated. And of course my partner, family and friends who have forgone but not forsaken my excellent humour and hospitality in a bid to support my quest to become more intelligent than what I was!

And to Hong Kong, my home.



Abbreviations

Culture and Heritage Commission	CHC
Energizing Kowloon East Office	EKEO
Home Affairs Bureau	HAB
Leisure and Cultural Services Department	LCSD
Legislative Council of Hong Kong	LegCo
West Kowloon Cultural District Authority	WKCDA
West Kowloon Cultural District	WKCD



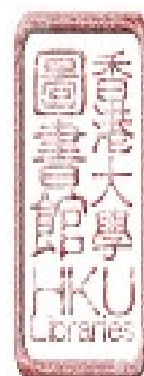
Can Hong Kong do without a Cultural Bureau?

By

Jason Karl Forster

1. Introduction

As Michael Lynch, the former CEO of the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority prepares his departure from Hong Kong, he leaves in his wake a tumultuous cultural sector. This is the legacy he inherited and by and large and it's a legacy which is handed back. The West Kowloon Cultural District, has put Hong Kong on a new global map – even before completion, yet the project has been fraught with problems since inception. Lynch attributes at least some of the cynicism surrounding the project to the ongoing delays. “The biggest challenge is that it's been talked about since 1998-1999 and up until 6 months ago when we started to see concrete and steel coming up out of the ground, I don't think that anyone ever believed that it was going to happen.” (Lynch) Politics are another factor that have “bedevilled” the future cultural district, though Lynch's iron clad resolve has enabled him ward off at least some of the debilitating effects. Identifying the need for cultural software and audience building, these strategies have finally been put into motion – via FreeSpace, a WKCDA event, and Clockenflap Music & Arts Festival which has found fertile soil at the reclaimed peninsular.

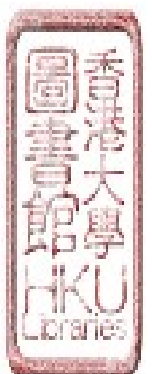


Yet still, despite certain positive additions to Hong Kong's expanding cultural ecology, Art Basel being another notable example, there is the prevailing sentiment, amongst the cultural sector (at least from those I interviewed) that something is gravely amiss. There is an overwhelming sense of fragmentation, yet our public arts and culture bodies are highly centralized. This seemingly counterintuitive statement emerged from the initial interviews and I have been wrestling to make sense of the concept ever since!

Another theme which emerged time and time again, was the notion of a Cultural Bureau, or rather the absence of one. Could a Cultural Bureau solve issues of fragmentation or would it rather add yet another level of bureaucracy? Worse still, might it function as a mechanism of ideological control.

These are questions which have been asked before and I am the first to admit that I am far from breaking new ground by asking them again. That said, whilst the questions may be the same, the answers – in 2015 – may be very different.

Hong Kong has undergone such seismic shifts in its relatively short history. From barren rock to a British Colony, pre-handover to post-handover, and today a Special Administrative region of China. Culture too has in many ways mirrored the politics of the time. This is certainly true today – a time of mass distrust of the Hong Kong Government and in particular its Chief Executive. There is a high chance, as Lynch puts it, that culture has been "infected with political debates". What was once a cultural desert might now be described as a troubled water. Culture



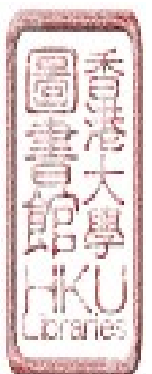
that hitched a ride on the back of economic prosperity has to face 'going about' and as Louis Yu, imagines "sailing into the wind". For my taste, Vivienne Chow, best captures Hong Kong's cultural narrative, when she describes it as "haunted" (Chow, P. 9, 2012)

At a time when the culture industries are recognized as a global growth economy, supported by Florida's the notion of the creative class – and with emerging regional city competition – can Hong Kong afford to have a fragmented cultural policy? Rather still, can Hong Kong afford to have no cultural policy at all? Is there is a chance that the cultural baby has been thrown out with the political bath water?

As Lynch departs – it is perhaps a good time to take stock.

2. Research Methodology

What follows is an unravelling of various thematic strands and a somewhat clumsy attempt to make sense of them. My initial interest, in festivals in particular, led me to the notion of festivalization – whereby a place is transformed to some degree by the emergence or arrival of a festival. Further enquiry, via the literature review revealed various tensions - binary opposites, such as; top down versus grass roots, global versus local, spectacle versus local, and so on. With much gusto, and delighted to have secured WKCDA as my community partner, I set forth with a handful of questions – yet without an actual thesis, I might add.



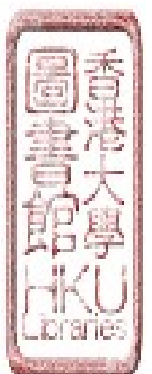
It was fairly obvious from the project inception that I would opt for the qualitative approach – for the simple reason that I require the face-to-face interactions that semi-structured in depth interviews enable, in order to keep myself engaged. With the exception of John Batten, and only due in this case to geographical distance (8,000 km at the time of writing) all fifteen interviews were conducted in person and averaged an hour.

The fantastically candid and knowledgeable Dr. Isaac Leung, somewhat by chance, or pure luck – was my first respondent – who effectively changed the course of my study. It became immediately apparent that behind the binary tensions I had identified, there was a far bigger question to ask: Can Hong Kong do without a Cultural Bureau?

Fortunately, and with great support from Dr. CH Ng and Jonas Chu, this about turn was reframed and my interview questions reconsidered. And so, with renewed vigor I set forth once again.

3. Limitations

As I near the completion of this project, the painfully obvious limitation is simply the scope of the study and the scale of the question. What I had initially imagined to be a manageable stone - to be turned over and examined, has in fact manifested as a huge rock - heaved on it's side to reveal a vast wriggling network of interwoven strands. Fortunately, I discovered - more or less - a consensus amongst my respondents, which made the unraveling that much simpler. There are perhaps just two respondents in conflict, or rather expressing opposing views – Winnie Ho



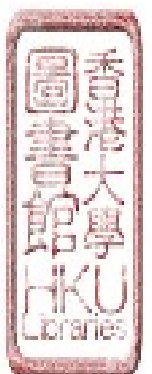
from Energizing Kowloon East Office and Phil Kan at Exterminating East Kowloon, which comes with little surprise, given the circumstances.

Another obvious limitation would be the sample of respondents. I have managed to talk with diverse range of participants, however I can immediately think of twice the number of people I would like to engage in the future.

And lastly, perhaps less a limitation and more a failing – was the discovery – very late in the day, of Vivienne Chow's paper; *Chinese Elitism and Neoliberalism - Post-colonial Hong Kong Cultural Policy Development: A Case Study* (The University of Hong Kong. 2012). This came as a real blow, and for all the wrong reasons! I had imagined, incredibly naively, that I was trailblazing with this question of the Cultural Bureau, and low and behold Chow had beaten me to it. And by a good three years! After a moment to take stock, I realized that my efforts still had potential merit. For one, it is now 2015 – thus, there are three uncharted years since her paper was published. Secondly, I have access to some fairly influential cultural players with highly developed insights. And, thirdly, I have a unique perspective, as a cultural worker and artist myself.

4. Clockenflap Music & Arts Festival

My role as co-founder and Artistic Director of Clockenflap Music & Arts Festival may be considered in both a positive and negative light. On the plus side, I have eight years' first-hand experience at the cultural coalface,



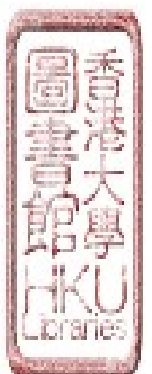
during which time I have encountered and worked with many government departments, NGO's, artists, arts organizations and corporate sponsors. I have also witnessed the organic growth of a cultural industry, (for want of a better term) from an audience of 1,500 in 2008 to 45,000 in 2014.

Another asset is my Clockenflap-network, which has allowed me to access respondents, who might have otherwise been unavailable. And of course, partnering with West Kowloon Cultural District was surely a consideration of our long-standing professional cooperation.

Whilst I have tried my utmost to maintain objectivity throughout, I must confess that there have been moments when my mind simply strayed into Clockenflap territory.

5. 2015

Initially, I had envisaged a chronological journey beginning with the Hong Kong riots of 1967, a significant factor in Hong Kong's cultural development – to present day. This tour de force was set to wow readers, until I realized that Chow was a good three years ahead of me, and more significantly – had provided an excellent mapping and analyses of Hong Kong's cultural ecology. And so, I have opted for a reverse chronology! The current mood in Hong Kong is so heated, and with the Umbrella Movement still fresh in people's minds, the summer of 2015 feels like a good place to launch from. Whether or not this backwards approach will qualify as a tour de force remains to be seen.

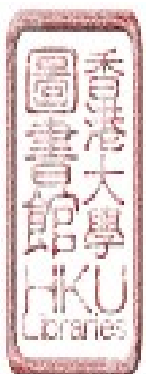


The frequency of significant events appears to be increasing. Whether or not this is a global phenomenon or specific to Hong Kong I can't be sure. To set the scene, I choose to highlight a handful of such events, which I feel are particularly poignant to the question of whether or not Hong Kong can do without a Cultural Bureau (in no particular order). It was reported in the South China Morning Post, on 31st July 2015 that Michael Lynch, CEO of the "West Kowloon arts hub, resigns citing personal reasons." (SCMP, 2015) The Innovation and Technology Bureau is being considered by the Legislative Council of Hong Kong and is a hot topic in the media - parallels between this bureau and Leung Chun-ying's proposed and rejected Cultural Bureau have been made. "M+ has now announced that it is putting back its opening date until the latter part of 2019, two years later than originally planned." (SCMP, 2015). Due to the imminent construction phase at WCDA, Clockenflap Music & Arts Festival is homeless and seeking policy support from EKEO and HAB in order to facilitate a temporary tenancy agreement at the former Kai Tak runway.

These events, or threads - in a complex cultural tapestry, and the reactions they catalyse are symptomatic of much deeper and long ranging issues.

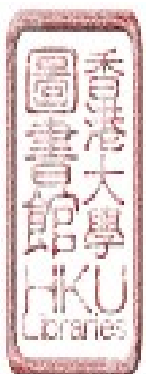
6. Democracy

The democracy issue is ever prevalent and whilst it is not the intention of this study to stray into politics – it is impossible to ignore. *Culture*, in the context of a Cultural Bureau, may have profound political and ideological



functions, and as such may be a cause for considerable concern. In 2012, Leung Chun-ying presented the notion of the Cultural Bureau – however lacking any detail – a single page of A4 only, and with vague rumors of the Chief, and with no concrete provision for who would run the bureau – it was swiftly and mercilessly vetoed – via an unprecedented filibuster. The White Paper issued by Beijing stated in no uncertain terms that Hong Kong would not have the planned democracy that had been drafted in basic law. Clearly, with a prevailing sentiment of disappointment (to put it lightly) any move towards establishing a Cultural Bureau of unknown dimensions would be met with resistance. Even the Innovation and Technology Bureau - an unlikely ideological vehicle, has been met with considerable resistance from the pro-democratic forces. “For the I.T. Bureau, it's talking about Smart City, information technology for economic development, which should have a stronger community support and more people should see the need for that, but still - even that is problematic.” (Winnie Ho, EKEO) Whether or not this is for legitimate concerns, or rather a tactic to block Leung Chun-ying legislation in a bid to remove him from the Chief Executive office, is hard to say. “I think it got shot down because it became too much a proxy argument for all of the democracy and universal suffrage stuff.” (Lynch)

Louis Yu, offering commentary on recent events, explained the significance of the White Paper – dashing the hopes that Hong Kong would have full democracy. A brief saunter through history informs me that towards the end of the colonial governance of Hong Kong, the British shifted policy by “introducing the elections for the District Council first and then LegCo, Chris Patten expanded a lot in the democracy system - with

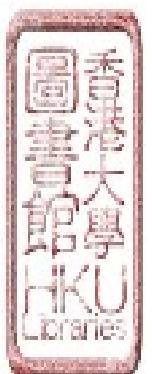


the fear for the communist regime." "People's minds and expectations were changed from 1984 to 1997, when you got closer to 1997 - people want more." (Yu)

It might have been that the British were trying to establish democracy in Hong Kong, in order to create some kind of buffer with China. Or perhaps to maintain a commercial entry point within the region – however, whichever may be true it is painfully obvious to many, that China will not concede on this issue. "The reality is China is never going to let you go under the circumstances, and there is never going to be the capacity for Hong Kong to unilaterally determine what it's going to do." (Lynch)

7. Schizophrenic Prism

Liberated perhaps by his departure from the CEO office at WKCD, Lynch offers me a highly charged and candid response to my question aimed roughly at the notion of Hong Kong identity. "I think in many ways, part of the problem for Hong Kong at the moment is that everything is being viewed through this schizophrenic prism - that we're part of China but we're not part of China. We don't want to be part of China, and we do want to be part of China - so I suppose I take the pragmatic view that decision was made 18 years ago - that you're going to be part of China. What you've got to do is get on with that and not allow it to become an inhibitor - to be able to make it work." (Lynch) This view may irk certain sectors of Hong Kong society – the notion of 'getting on with it', and not offering any form of resistance. However, if we look at Hong Kong purely

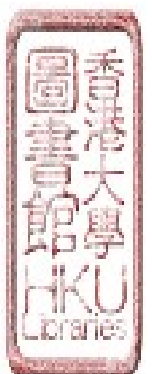


from the arts and culture perspective (surely a narrow definition of culture – but the focus of this study) it is evident that politics have, as Lynch puts it – “infected” debates. The cultural baby may well have been thrown out with the political bath water.

8. Trust

The word ‘culture’, as observed across the boarder, is synonymous with ideological control (and worse), and many Hong Kong people are alert to top down manipulation from Beijing. Therefore, the rejection of the proposed Cultural Bureau was largely inevitable. As Louis points out, “I am a cultural worker - I see the merits of a Cultural Bureau, so we can be more professional at looking at cultural matters, but if I put myself in the position of a Hong Kong citizen, I would be suspicious too towards the Cultural Bureau.” (Yu) So, it’s really a question of trust. Despite the cultural sector being largely in favor of the Cultural Bureau - in principle, the matter of who will be chief is another matter altogether. “The LegCo member - was suspicious about putting in a lot of communist representative to become the chief of the Cultural Bureau, and to start doing censorship, brainwashing!” (Yu)

There were rumors that Ada Wong, Director of the Hong Kong Institute of Contemporary Culture Centre, was one of the candidates, “she told me that she was approached – initially, but in the middle of the process, found that she was not accepted.” (Yu) “It was believed that the rejection was due to Wong’s affinity with the Pan-Democrats and the Central

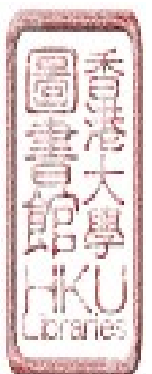


Government was uncomfortable with her taking the rein of Hong Kong's cultural policy." (Hong Kong Visual Arts Year Book, 2012). This was perhaps the deathblow to the Cultural Bureau, as "people would have no confidence in Leung Chun-ying appointing some people trust." (Yu)

This would prove correct, when on the 14th May 2012 the Apple Daily reported that Florence Hui, Deputy Secretary of the Home Affairs Bureau had been put forward by Leung Chun-ying for the role of Secretary for Culture. Mathias Woo et al strongly opposed this appointment – due to her lack of relevant experience (Hong Kong Visual Arts Year Book, 2012). The prevailing sentiment was that Hui was just another bureaucrat – and lacking any cultural sector experience, may simply become an instrument to assert Central Government agenda.

The Umbrella Movement was in part a manifestation of this lack of trust – far worsened by the events, which unfolded over those fateful two months. "In my view some of the anger against the government, Occupying Central incident is triggered by very small things - like they are not free to do what they like in the park - so they occupy the street to, at least get a feel of the freedom." (Winnie Ho). She has a point, though clearly much of the tension expressed during the Umbrella Movement was caused by greater concerns than not being allowed to play ball games in LCSD managed parks!

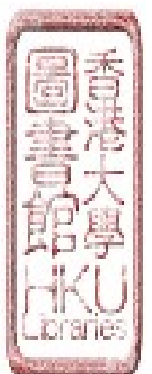
9. Culture is the thread



Can Hong Kong do without a Cultural Bureau? What is really being asked is whether or not we need a unified cultural vision (be it forged and implemented by a Cultural Bureau or by some other means). "If we look at any other city in the world, Culture is the line that links all these different areas to make the city special - and different from other cities." (Yu) Yu continues, with a passionate delivery, on the merits of culture, and the need for an overreaching vision, or thread – that can provide linkages to the numerous facets of society, creativity and commerce. "You know with the globalization, say - we have Zara everywhere, every shopping mall in all the city in the world are the same. So the culture of the place is the most important line to sew every fragmented part together. Make it a fashion, make it a clothes, and make it an outfit." (Yu) China, Taiwan, and Macau – just three cities in close proximity to Hong Kong which all have Cultural Bureaus, "There's nothing controversial about having a Cultural Bureau on the outset" (Yu) but not so in Hong Kong. Lynch, reminds me of our colonial heritage: "The very fact that the British had done almost nothing on cultural infrastructure." (Lynch), "I think the level of comparative facilities in Hong Kong, compared to the level of Universities, hospitals, hotels, leisure facilities, restaurants, shopping centers, is appalling." (Lynch)

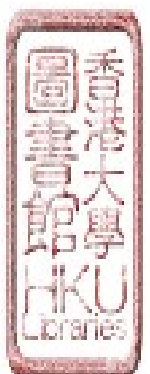
10. Sailing into the wind

There are numerous grounds to consider a Cultural Bureau, however Hong Kong's transformation from a manufacturing powerhouse to a post-



industrial city, and the subsequent implications for economic and spiritual growth are motivating. As Louis points out "Shenzhen is becoming a real competitor and Shanghai is becoming a real competitor. There are so many new competitors, within 3 hours, of flight, or two hours of trains. So, I think Hong Kong is... how do you say - the wind is against us now. I think some kind of good coordination or a good coordinated vision will be much helpful." (Yu) My earlier comment about Hong Kong culture hitching a ride on the back of economic prosperity was, in my mind, a neat way of summarizing Louis' view. Of course, the reality is far more nuanced than that. Perhaps cultural growth correlates with economic growth, yet culture in the past has not been widely considered as an economic driver, but rather a public pre-requisite or even service. The fact is, the culture industries have the potential to contribute significantly to a region's GDP, and thus should not be allowed to drift. Moreover, as previously highlighted by YU, culture is the thread that links various disparate areas of the economy and can act as a lubricant towards innovation.

I cease dancing around and ask Louis straight up: Do we need a Cultural Bureau? "I do think so. A lot of cultural related activity and elements, lies with many different areas, some of them under the tourism industry, some of them under the trading, fashion and other things, and the food and cultural heritage - they are under many different area and aspects. The good thing about it is these different areas can have their own autonomy to develop. But it was in the last 30-40 years, since the 70's since the Hong Kong whole economy was booming, was growing, so every different area, can autonomously grow their own area, they do not need help from other area. They do not need structural linkage to other areas.



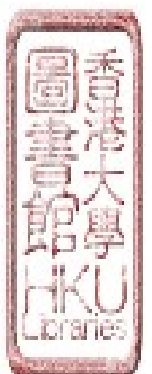
Because Hong Kong, the overall economic situation was rising. They do not need this. But after 1997, with the change in the economic competitiveness of Hong Kong and the regional cities, for example before 80's Shenzhen was only a village, now Shenzhen is a design capital - it is so big and so strong. For example - the fashion industry cannot just rely on the garment industry." (Yu)

Thus surely, a unified cultural vision - at the very least would be prudent, if not essential for Hong Kong?

I huge frustration felt time and time again at Clockenflap headquarters is the lack of an obvious door to knock on - to make some sense of it all. The festival - organically grown in Hong Kong, has an annual turnover (not profit!) of over HK\$35 million and employs over 20 full-time staff. Moreover, we have pioneered the outdoor festival format in Hong Kong, which has enabled other organizations to launch their own local festivals. Efforts to secure government funding, have so far failed and even the Hong Kong Dragon motif remains elusive to us! Collectively, we have always been disappointed by the lack of a unified cultural vision in Hong Kong.

11. Autonomous Organic Growth

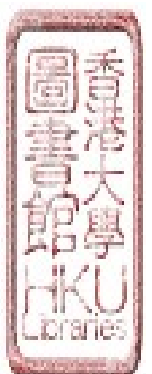
However, fragmentation isn't always a bad thing. The lack of control filtering from the top down, means that independent organizations actually grow organically and autonomously – if they can survive! Leung is



an advocate of this independent organic growth, “Hong Kong has a lot of bottom up, or strange things going on, that is not necessarily aligned with what the government wants us to do. Together with the funding system of ADC, I think this further disperses the power to individuals.” (Leung). With a wry smile, he expands further, “If they don’t know what you’re doing and don’t know what they want to do – they will give you freedom. They do their thing We do our thing. You see the whole art scene, Parasite, Videotage, Suuni – all these kinds of things are from artist collectives – and they are becoming something bigger and influential in the art scene.” (Leung) Clockenflap is certainly the product of organic growth, with complete creative and commercial autonomy – as Yu states “The LCSD could not produce Clockenfap.” (Yu)

12. Fragmented yet Centralized.

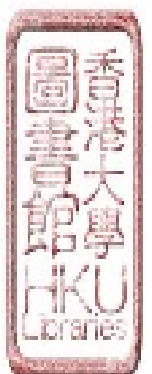
The only government department with the word culture in its title – is the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. Yet, culture – as imagined by the LCSD – performs a service. This rather narrow perspective can be traced back to the colonial era whereby culture was designated the role of entertainment for the masses: “The policy of culture, is, which is still now, is cultural services, like recreational services, because culture was, until now principle taken care by the LCSD - the full name is Leisure and Cultural Services Department, so it sees arts and culture as services, meaning that the government will pay the artists a sum of money to produce a work, the basic aim is to attract, entertain or accommodate audience.” (Tang) This is not to say that the LCSD has been ineffective,



quite the opposite is true. Not only does the LCSD receive the lion's share of the annual arts and culture budget and they also control 80% of Hong Kong's performing arts venues. They are well placed to present performances, which have attracted large audiences, however here in lies the crux of the issue. They measure the success of their cultural programs in quantitative terms only – audience numbers being their single metric. "The only number that we have for the moment in terms of arts and culture, and visual arts - is the ADC annual survey, and again, that's just number of productions. Where they come from and how many people went to them." (Chu) There is no provision, to measure qualitative success. Thus culture, as it exists within this rather one-dimensional plane, is unlikely to be innovative. One might even suggest that it has become stale.

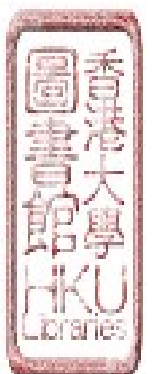
Moreover, due to the huge sums that the LCSD receive, performances are highly subsidized. In real terms, this means that the average ticket price is considerably lower than the market value. "Every show in Hong Kong is probably subsidized. It's a \$200 ticket, but actually it's about \$400." (Chu) This is significant for independent cultural producers - who operate outside of this paradigm - as they make efforts to operate in a market, which is effectively rigged.

This is certainly true for Clockenflap – a commercial entity (though yet to make profit) that is entirely dependent on ticket revenue and sponsorship. From the onset, we were highly sensitive to ticket price and perceived value – due in part to our burgeoning audience who may not be familiar with the festival format. Clockenflap as an entity is by no means alone.



Freespace, WKCDA's signature event, which was free in both name and entry for the first two iterations, had envisaged a HK\$50 registration fee in 2014. The rationale behind this subtle shift was to attach a token monetary value to the event – which would pave the way for future events and in pure logistical terms, allow greater management of audience numbers. As the event grew closer, and with 3,000 tickets sold, the higher powers at WKCDA grew timid – believing that the event would be a wash out – due to low attendance. Finally, after some deliberation and internal divergence of opinion it was agreed that the registration fee would be dropped - refunding existing ticket holders. With one swift blow the future of Freespace was decided: it will always be free. As Low Kee Hong remarked: “Last year, at one point when we attempted to charge, then it was very clear - we told everybody - ok, once you do that (make it free again), that's it. Look, if that's the decision these are the consequences.” (Low). Meaning, there's no way to go back to charging a fee. The net result was that attendance was high - 43,000 people attending the two-day event, considered a success on paper, however the infrastructure was close to breaking point and the content was insufficient to cater to such a large audience. Whilst parts of the program were well received, many audience members were left somewhat bewildered.

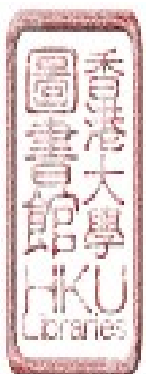
The significance of these cases to the question of a unified cultural vision is simply this: how is it possible to attach true value to culture when a) the playing field is not level due to massive subvention of specific and centralized organizations b) there is a monopoly over performance venues, and c) there exist conflicting views regarding free versus ticketed.



Tang Shu Wing – a veteran of Hong Kong’s independent performing arts scene, has suffered similar anxieties. “If you perform in government venues then you will follow in the queue - providing service for the government and then you can never really develop your work in a reasonable and diligent manner.” (Tang)

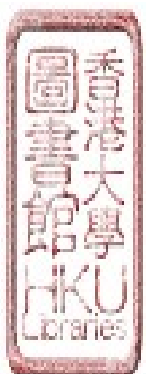
On several occasions, Clockenflap has been criticized for being expensive, a criticism always leveled from various government arts administrators. Their view is that culture should be free, or at least cheap! The fact is that Clockenflap tickets are approximately 50% of their true market value, based on the sheer depth and quality of the content (and compared with similar festivals overseas). This makes it very difficult for the event to break even, thus a long-range vision has been adopted, with provisions for ongoing investment to counter the losses. “The basic government policy is cultural services, in a sense that they take your work as products of service, that should not attract commercial value. If you want to be commercial then you have to operate on your own.” (Tang) This brittle mind-set does not leave much room for innovation – especially where funding or sub venting may be necessary for a commercial entity to get off the ground. Assuming that Hong Kong’s future economic and spiritual well being is tied, in part at least, to the cultural industries, then these stifling effects of centralization need to be addressed.

13. Energizing or exterminating?



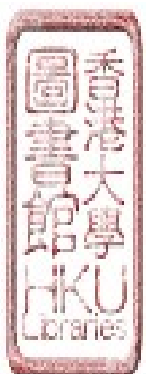
Whilst Hong Kong's economic competitiveness may be compromised by a lack of cultural innovation, there are also examples where the economy clashes directly with culture. One such example is the ongoing conflict within the Kwun Tong area. A former industrial area, Kwun Tong is popular amongst artists and musicians, who have flocked to the district in recent years – motivated by cheap rent in industrial units. However, "in the 2011-12 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced the adoption of a visionary, coordinated and integrated approach to transform Kowloon East into an attractive CBD to sustain Hong Kong's economic development." (<http://www.ekeo.gov.hk/>) And in June 2012 the Energizing Kowloon East Office was inaugurated "to steer, supervise, oversee and monitor the development of Kowloon East with a view to facilitating its transformation into another premier CBD of Hong Kong to support our economic growth and strengthen our global competitiveness." (<http://www.ekeo.gov.hk/>)

The ongoing tension between the Kwun Tong artists and the EKEO is far too complex and nuanced to elaborate in great detail here, however there are many obvious instances where a unified cultural vision, and dare I suggest - a Cultural Bureau, might have proved useful. Amongst the artists I spoke with, there is a strong conviction that EKEO is simply a Trojan horse – using arts and culture as a tool to soften the impact, or cajole the community before imminent redevelopment. So incensed were they, that they created 'Exterminating Kowloon East' to counter the public relations efforts of EKEO, some of which are widely viewed as PR blunders. Phil Kan, a Kwun Tong based artist and activist does not mix his words:



“We just went there and told them to f**k off!” (Kan) Which may seem a little harsh, however as Phil explained in great depth – rents are increasing as a result of the CBD2, and the efforts of the EKEO are seen nothing more than a smokescreen. Michelle Rocha, WKCDA, declared that, “EKEO have committed original sin”, meaning that – their creation under the Development Bureau will always be at odds with the artist community.

In stark contrast, Ms. Winnie Ho, Deputy Head of the EKEO – does present a compelling case for the EKEO’s mandate and efforts. She views the organization as a tool to assist the local artists. “I can provide the space - I can try and find the space, with the coming developer and reserve some of the space for these art things.” (Ho) However, as she remarks, it is not as simple as identifying suitable space for artists – “We can find space in those new sites. But I need a partner bureau to take up the space and let out to suitable tenants fairly.” (Ho) So the reality of providing subsidized space to artists in the Kwun Tong district by the EKEO, is contingent on a partner bureau coming on board to manage the process. “The closest two bureaus that I can think of is HAB and the Economic Development Bureau. If they see these as part of the economic development - their stakeholders, they maybe be a suitable bureau - but there are different views and different priorities - and so of course - another big opportunity - of course if there is a Cultural Bureau.” (Ho) When I pitch the question of the EKEO solving the artist space problem, Raymond Fung, a former colleague, states: “Winnie knows all this very well, but whether she has the power to change all this land use - that's a different thing.” (Fung)

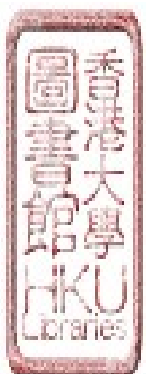


I must admit, as I walked away from Kwun Tong I found myself in a state of confusion - unable to make sense of these opposing views. My natural instinct was to jump emphatically from camp to camp – yet this was not getting me any closer to understanding the whole picture.

14. Engineering Creativity

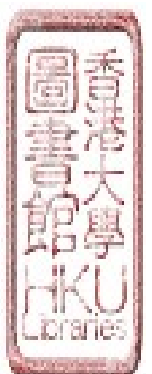
One thing is sure – the government likes to imagine that creativity can be engineered. In lieu of the sensitivities and patience required to negotiate with artists on a case-by-case basis, the government has implemented various subsidized arts spaces, in a rather ad hoc manner across the city. These include the Cattle Depot in To Kwa Wan, JCCAC in Shep Kip Mei, Genesis in Wan Chuk Hang and PMQ in Central (though this last example is highly contentious*). The common feature and complaint of these artist spaces (with perhaps the exception of PMQ) is the third party organizations that oversee their day-to-day management. “The people running the spaces are not art people, just property management.” (Kan Mimi Chun understands the situation all too well: “They (the government) tend to think that art community can be engineered. For example - like the space at JCCAC - they do let the space out to artists at a subsidized rate, on the other hand - they expect the artists to open the studios at all times and expect them to open the space to public and organize things like open days. That's not how artists work, right?”

*It was initially proposed that PMQ would include artist studios, however the focus has shifted to locally designed goods. “It’s a giant souvenir shop!” (Whiffin)



15. Our Government's mindset

This topic has been raised and surely scrutinized many times before, however it is still a favorite, if bitter topic often discussed within the arts community. Why is it that the government and artists are always at odds? Well, the word *bureaucracy* crops up every second sentence, yet is bureaucracy the root cause, or rather the manifestation of this fracture? Chun suggests, "I think the government still has a habit of seeing art and culture, as assets of a city, but it's not just for that. They tend to inject lots of resources in promoting Hong Kong now as a cultural city - but I think the fundamental mind-set is a bit problematic." (Chun) Raymond Fung is well placed, as a former civil servant, to expand further, "I would say very very few government officials understand art. Since they are so remote from this circle - so they don't know how it works. They don't know how people think, how people work." (Fung) Low, explores the wider implications of this disconnect, "It's clear that obviously the current politicians, their entire world view is coloured by their own childhood - and their childhood, whose parents are well to do – they are chauffeured to whatever - it's like they have not taken public transport - and they have no clue - the consequences for the everyday citizen." (Low) Chun, having worked with many local artists, observes "because of the bureaucracy, rules and limitations – these are just not positive and constructive for them to make works - to be creative." (Chun) Oscar Ho, Program Director of MA Programs in Cultural Management, CUHK, is highly critical of the current situation: "Most Administrative Officers tend to be conservative

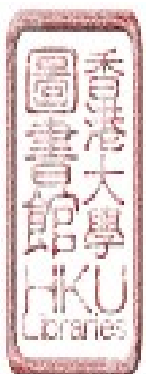


during the posting (3 years). The best achievement is to have no achievement." (Hong Kong Visual Arts Year Book, 2012)

I find it hard to comprehend this quagmire - it is simply too horrific. '*The best achievement is to have no achievement*' rattles my mind. Hong Kong is such a vibrant city – the energy here is like none other I have experienced, yet for cultural innovation to be bogged down by this risk-adverse, self-preserving mindset is hard to fathom. But is all lost? Chun, with cheerful demeanor offers the following solution: "They just have to change their mentality, by understanding a bit better about how artists are programmed. by seeking more advice from the art community and listening to their voices. I think they are not doing that." (Chun) They really should do that!

16. Historical context

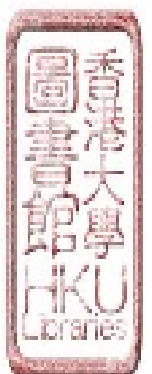
It was my initial intention to give an overview of Hong Kong's cultural history – however; this would simply be a poor copy of Chow's excellent work. Rather, I offer some words from Dr. CH Ng as he captures the historical context perfectly, "I would say the ecology of art and culture in HK has been a tantalizingly mixed one from the beginning." (Dr. CH Ng) And herein lies the complexity, the question we need to ask now, according to Dr. CH Ng is "Does the Hong Kong Government of the SAR have the will, mandate and capacity to do something different? And to settle and adjudicate the conflicting interests involved in putting forth a cultural policy? (Dr. CH Ng) Bonny Wong, also questions the mind-set of



various government organizations. "The role of LCSD, the role of HAB. What are their roles? I know HAB is supposed to set policies which then will be implemented, carried out by LCSD. And ADC has a specific role, it says Arts Development Council, what have they done to develop the arts in Hong Kong? Ok, what they are doing - dividing up a pie to please as many people as they can - and that's the mentality and I think that's so wrong. How can a cities' cultural ecology improve and expand if all you're trying to do is please?" (Wong)

17. Tung Chee Wah.

A seemingly unlikely cultural visionary, Tung Chee Wah was actually very willing to take risks and shake things up a bit. I can only guess that he felt compelled to make some changes for benefit of Hong Kong society, as the first Chief Executive of Hong Kong. Fung, who during this era was working within the government offers his feelings on the matter, "I say 'Why Hong Kong suddenly looking for WKCD? Why?' Was it just because of tourism? Was it just because of somebodies mind set? And I don't get an exact answer but I feel that this is from Tung Chee Wah, even though he doesn't have a very clear statement about why there's such change, but I can see that he is the man, he really wanted to change the economic development, or maybe - he doesn't want to be over weighted on property development, therefore he's looking for something for Hong Kong, develop for the new generation, maybe he sees cultural participations in Hong Kong, could be something for the next generation." (Fung)

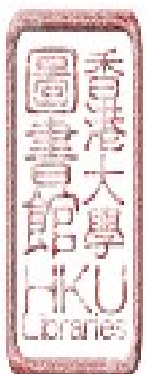


As it turns out, the WCKD was a proposal from the Culture and Heritage Commission, established in 2000, by Tung Chee Wah.

18. The Blueprint

In April 2003, the Culture and Heritage Commission submitted its Policy Recommendation Report. I must admit, I discovered this document rather late in the evolution of this study. Having conducted the majority of my interviews, the recurring theme was the notion that Hong Kong does not have a cultural policy or a Cultural Bureau to implement it. And yet, here, contained within 50 or so pages of freshly Xeroxed A4 paper, was a veritable Aladdin's cave of cultural treasures – yet to manifest. I was literally stunned! Here, clasped in my palms was a blue print for Hong Kong's cultural policy. Still reeling, and positively charged, I shared my discovery with Yu. A moments contemplation was soon followed with a growing and wry smile: "Ah, yes!" Yu, remembered the report.

I am immediately struck by its depth, sincerity, sound logic and heart. The report offers a clear vision, which is relevant and resonant given the various issues surrounding culture, as highlighted by the respondents. Perhaps most significantly, the vision put forward is genuine and is not public relations marketing speak. The report opens with a definition of culture, which is all too often ignored, followed by an overview of the past four decades. We are next treated to a genuine tour de force, via *Cultural Identity, Cultural Literacy, Cultural Legacy and Development, the Current Scene and Cultural Facilities*. This is followed by the policy



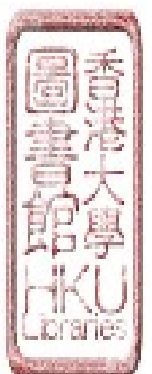
recommendations, which are expressed in six principles: "people-oriented", "pluralism", "freedom of expression and protection of intellectual property", "holistic approach", "partnership" and "community-driven." These principles, by the nature of their title, should give the reader a strong sense of the vision laid out. These measures, in short, would go a long way to dealing with the fragmentation and lack of a unified vision, by placing emphasis on partnerships and human contact - an antidote to the brittle bureaucratic structures that we currently have in place.

Another significant recommendation of the report, is the restructuring of cultural institutions, via increased corporatization and public-private partnerships. Thus the existing centralization, and in effect - monopoly over performance venues and museums etc., can be broken – though this would be achieved in phases.

The report is highly optimistic, and clearly the authors – arts practitioners and cultural experts themselves, are committed to their long-term vision and implementation of the recommendations.

'If Hong Kong becomes a city where life is celebrated through cultural pursuit, a city where its people are enchanted by the arts, enlightened by different cultures and enriched by social diversity, we will certainly have a vibrant cultural scene.

Our vision to turn Hong Kong into an international cultural metropolis will not be an unrealistic goal.' (CHC, 2003)

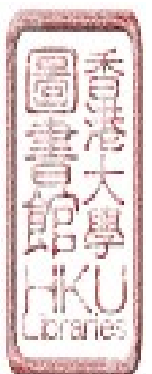


This was gold! The recommendations contained within, despite being written in 2003, were from sound logic and as such have stood the test of time. Days later, and chance encounter with John Batten, provided the opportunity to share my discovery – of course Batten was well aware of the document, “The Culture and Heritage Commission (Report) was a sensible document - and its recommendations would not have been difficult to implement. It is pathetic that it was not debated.” (Batten)

19. Shelved!

The West Kowloon Cultural District Project was underway, with a budget rubber-stamped, and thus the wheels were turning (though not without a few broken axels along the way), however the report was just that - 50 or so sheets of A4 paper, and easily shelved. I had assumed that this was a somewhat nonchalant move by Donald Tsang as he cleared the decks of unfinished legislation, however, I was shocked to discover LCSD arts administrators effectively vetoed the report:

“They (CHC) are suggesting to corporatize the museums and create a museum board or museum trust and the staff and the curator will not be civil servant anymore, will be professional staff, curator - like what we have in M+. I remember this recommendation was s specific, the HAB, needed to move it forward. But HAB did not do it in the end, because they said they found a lot of resistance from the staff. That means, those civil servants curator do no want to be corporatized - do not want to have a 5-year contract, or 3-year contract - but this is natural. If you ask a group

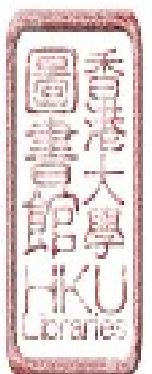


of civil servants, do you want your contract to be changed to a 5-year contract with MPF and other things, of course they will say no, because they are hired under a civil servant structure... there's no competition.” (Yu) Batten confirms this tragic turn of events, “Unfortunately, HK's art community is not strong in pushing for institutional reform. And, the Home Affairs and LCSD committees that advise on the arts are stacked with pro-government supporters and many of those of not directly involved in the arts - or, older artists who have been given 'honorary adviser' roles purely based on their seniority - not competence!” (Batten)

The blue print may not have been perfect – but it was a good start. I find it incredulous that this would have been shelved. And surprised that it has been left to gather dust. Isn't it time we took a look at it again?

20. Cultural Desert or Cultural Cadaver?

Hong Kong has in the past been described as a cultural dessert, which is clearly not the case in 2015. Is it possible however, that Hong Kong is heading towards becoming a 'Cultural Cadaver'? Shock, horror! Well, no, but left to government actions alone, I do fear for the cultural ecology of Hong Kong. Fortunately, the independent and private cultural sectors, despite the many challenges they face, have been making progress. The WKCDA, which operates somewhat autonomously, has a strong team of arts practitioners and curators, rather than arts administrators only. An image just flashed before my mind; (perhaps I'm scrabbling for metaphors!) a defibrillator* The bottom-up energy, and I would include

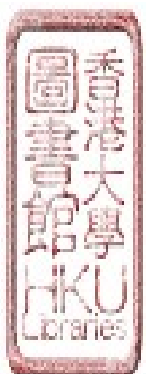


the WKCDA and M+ teams within this category, is providing the necessary electric shock to kick start an otherwise highly bureaucratic, cultural corpse. To reiterate Leung's earlier view, "I you think about like 40 years Zuni, 30 years ago Videotage, 20 years ago Parasite - all these people they have nothing when they set up these institutions. These all come from people with vision. That faith - of 'I want to do something, no matter what' and that's the energy, that's what art is." (Leung) Returning once again to the theme of the Cultural Bureau, another chance encounter - this time Kingsley Jayasekera, provides clarity of thought, "I think the issue is the fact that there is too much already happening and if you actually bring in a cultural bureau at this stage - you bring in another level of bureaucracy - things have moved on too much - there's a very strong sense that there is a growing number of independent organizations that have come to find these answers themselves." (Jayasekera)

*A device that delivers a therapeutic dose of electrical energy to the heart and depolarizes a critical mass of the heart muscle, terminates the dysrhythmia and allows normal sinus rhythm to be re-established by the body's natural pacemaker. (Wikipedia)

21. Conclusion

Can Hong Kong do without a Cultural Bureau? Well, first and foremost, that 'do' has been bothering me. Aside from the green wiggly line, that Microsoft Word has kindly offered, to suggest a grammatical error – 'do' is pretty vague. Survive, flourish, compete, excel, would be more descriptive words. Based on the assumption that 'do' is taken to represent some positive action or transformation, then, the short answer is yes. Hong



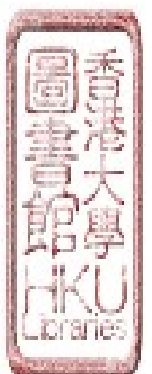
Kong CAN do without a Cultural Bureau. However, A Cultural Bureau might in fact be a good thing for Hong Kong, but contingent on a clear and transparent mandate, and a Chief who the cultural sector will support are two obvious requisites. Leung is concerned, "I always ask this question: Do we really want to set up an institution which highly regulates this whole culture in Hong Kong?" (Leung) Jayasekera thinks not, we've already moved beyond this phase, "Hong Kong needs a cultural policy - it doesn't need a bureau to implement it, because there are lots of organisations that are successfully doing things. It needs a cultural policy as a blueprint for everyone to follow and understand and buy into." (Jayasekera)

A blueprint much like the Culture and Heritage Commission's Policy Recommendation Report. All roads lead back to that report!

22. Recommendations

We need to revisit that report. Simple. In my opinion it should be taken off that shelf and re-examined from our current perspective in the year 2015.

There needs to be a serious look at the current mindset of our cultural civil servants and the metrics by which culture is measured. The mandates of various government departments touching culture, should also have their mandates revisited.



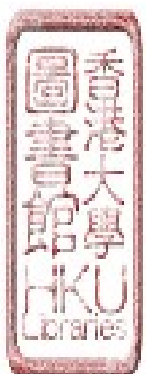
Culture it seems cannot be instigated by top down policies. When it does, it is likely to become ideological, or at the very least politicized and thus discredited. Culture should be nurtured from the bottom-up energies, rather than engineered from above.

23. Further Research

This study may serve to kick start the debate again in 2015. Certainly amongst the respondents there is an air of interest in revisiting these discussions; many of whom were not aware of the 2003 Report. I would hope to continue with this line of enquiry and expand further upon this paper. I have accumulated invaluable feedback from some of Hong Kong's key cultural players, and due to the limitations of word count, and perhaps in part, time – there is a great wealth of feedback yet to include. I shall do my utmost to honor this in the future.

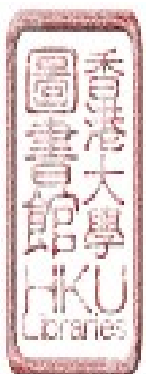
It would also be prudent to look at examples of cultural policies, and even Cultural Bureaus, at the global level – though again, this would require a greater scope of work.

The theme of evaluation and the metrics to measure the success or failure of cultural products arose time and time again. Low and Chu offered marvelous insights into the notion of Impact, and Qualitative Longitudinal Tracking – both of which merit further research.



24. A Final Word

Due to delays with the park construction, Clockenflap has been invited back to the WKCD in 2015. This comes as a huge relief, as our discussions with various government departments - towards securing Kai Tak, have been progressing at a worryingly slow pace!



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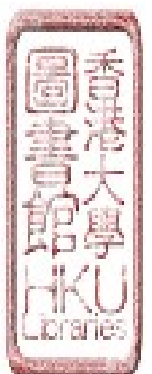
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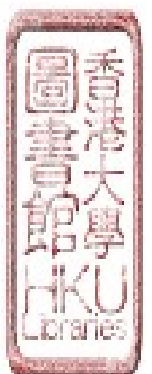
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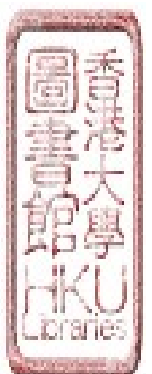
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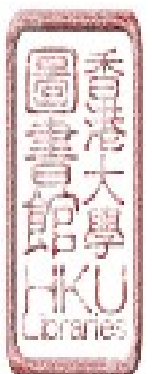
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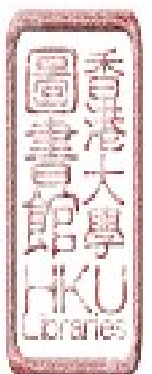
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