

# 香港劇場年鑑 2016

舞蹈 · 戲曲 · 戲劇

HONG  
KONG  
THEATRE  
YEARBOOK  
2016  
Dance  
Xiqu  
Drama



香港劇場年鑑2016（舞蹈、戲曲、戲劇）

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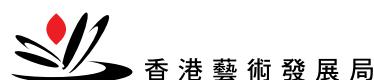
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# 文化治理？還是共享城市？——從演出量增、場地增加、專業發展等現象談起<sup>1</sup>

小西

正如陳國慧與肥力去年在《香港劇場年鑑2015》分別撰文所指出，演出量增、場地增加、專業發展等現象，的確是香港劇場界近年的發展大趨勢。<sup>2</sup>然而，跟過去同類的年度現象回顧不同，本文將會為這些已經持續了好一段時間的現象探源，指出這些現象出現的脈絡，並以二〇一六年的一些相關事件說明這些現象的最新發展。可以這麼說，筆者多多少少採取了歷史學家黃仁宇在他的名著《萬曆十五年》中的進路，嘗試透過二〇一六年這個可能平平無奇的年份，以小見大。

## 演出量增的遠因近因

根據陳國慧對於二〇一三年至二〇一五年「香港戲劇製作數量」的整理，加上二〇一六年的統計（表一），本地戲劇演出量增加的現象無疑已持續了好幾年的時間。表面上看，演出量增似乎為本地戲劇的發展帶來了一片榮景。事實上，每逢週末都差不多有七至八個演出等著劇場常客與過客購票入座，在每年秋季或大時大節（例如香港藝術節）期間，演出同日同時撞時間的情況並不鮮見。但演出數量多，且持續增長，是否就代表了觀眾數量亦隨之而穩步上升？由於筆者沒有這方面的準確數字，故暫時無法作出任何進一步的分析。但從表一所見，香港絕大部分戲劇製作，仍然由民政事務局（民政局）/康樂及文化事務署（康文署）、香港藝

術發展局（藝發局）等官方或半官方機構所資助，令人好奇香港這個資本主義社會在文化政策上，到底是社會主義的信徒？還是凱恩斯主義的旗手，相信政府該採取擴張性的文化政策，通過增加文化需求促進文化市場增長？究其原因，筆者將指出，香港戲劇界的演出數量之所以持續增長，主要跟香港特區政府近二十年、帶有新自由主義意味的文化政策發展有關。

## 由「成果」評核到「影響」評核

就以民政局所資助的旗艦劇團之一「香港話劇團」為例，在二〇一五至二〇一六年的創作年度，便製作與合辦了26個演出，共430場，其中包括7個主要製作（共81場）、8個黑盒劇場製作（共278場）、11個合辦節目（共71場），加上社區外展及教育活動、場地伙伴計劃活動、外地文化交流演出及活動以及其他活動，數量不可謂不巨（共2,711場）。<sup>3</sup>香港話劇團是民政局所資助的三大旗艦劇團之一，<sup>4</sup>擁有龐大的公共預算與資源，能夠製作出海量的演出及其他活動，本來就不足為奇。然而，就香港話劇團所辦活動之數目以及活動種類之廣泛程度，除了是劇團一向的大眾路線所至，更主要恐怕跟九七年後香港特區政府在文化政策上走向講求審計與量化的新自由主義路線有關。

回頭看，這個轉向始於九七後一系列區域組織與文化政策的改革。<sup>5</sup>改革的結果，除了解散兩個市政局，成立康文署，接管兩個市政局有關提供及發展文化藝術、體育及康樂的工作，還有著當時受前市政局資助的四大藝團公司化。<sup>6</sup>公司化的結果，是四大藝團在接受民政局大比數的資助之外，還需要積極在社會上尋求其他公共資源。根據由後來成立的表演藝術委員會於二〇〇五年十一月推出的《表演藝術委員會諮詢文件》中的建議，受民政局資助的四個演藝團體以及藝發局的

三年資助藝團，該由同一機構提供資助，「方便制訂一套評估表現的共用準則，以及提供公平公開的環境，讓演藝團體爭取公共資源。」<sup>7</sup>至於新的評估機制和準則，除了對藝團的整體藝術水平與表現作出評核，更關注藝團在拓展觀眾與爭取贊助方面的表現、對香港市民以及香港國際形象的影響。<sup>8</sup>這樣說來，香港話劇團近年的銳意擴張，也就不難理解。在新自由主義年代的審計與量化文化中，跑數是王道。<sup>9</sup>

1. 本文題目來自筆者於二〇一八年一月二十日在國際劇評人協會台灣分會所主辦的「IATCTW 2018年度論壇」「年度觀察－現象篇」一節上的發言題目。由於本文並非聚焦在二〇一六年才有的現象，而是以一些二〇一六年的事件，說明一些已經延續了好幾年的現象，所以同一題目也適用於二〇一六年的現象回顧。
2. 陳國慧。2017。〈二〇一五年香港戲劇發展概觀〉，《香港劇場年鑑2015》，頁103-110。香港：國際演藝評論家協會（香港分會）。<http://www.iatc.com.hk/theatre2015/a=doc&id=100879>；肥力。2017。〈收集專業軟件的年代——從西九文化區的舞蹈工作坊思考香港舞蹈發展〉，《香港劇場年鑑2015》，頁11-18。香港：國際演藝評論家協會（香港分會）。<http://www.iatc.com.hk/theatre2015/a=doc&id=100872>
3. 香港話劇團。2016。〈季內製作及活動一覽〉，《香港話劇團年報2015/2016》，頁20-34。<http://www.hkrep.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/annualreport1516.pdf>
4. 其他兩個旗艦劇團分別為「中英劇團」和「進念・二十面體」。
5. 一九九八年六月，政制事務局發佈《區域組織檢討諮詢文件》，開展對包括兩個市政局在內的區域組織檢討。之後，民政局則於一九九九年三月公佈《文化藝術及康樂體育服務顧問報告》以及政府的初步回應。
6. 當時四大藝團，除了香港話劇團，還包括「香港管弦樂團」、「香港中樂團」和「香港舞蹈團」。
7. 表演藝術委員會。2005。《表演藝術委員會諮詢文件》，頁11。[http://www.hab.gov.hk/tc/related\\_departments\\_organizations/asp45\\_news.htm](http://www.hab.gov.hk/tc/related_departments_organizations/asp45_news.htm)
8. 同註7，頁10。
9. 有關這場改革，筆者另文有更詳細的分析，參閱：鄭威鵬。2016。〈由四大到九大藝團：論香港文化資助政策的變與不變〉，《Graduate Journal of Cultural and Creative Industries》，Volume 2，頁60-64。[http://gjcci.weebly.com/uploads/5/4/0/1/54017633/07\\_由四大到九大藝團.pdf](http://gjcci.weebly.com/uploads/5/4/0/1/54017633/07_由四大到九大藝團.pdf)

## 康文署也跑數

當然，近年本地戲劇演出數量的增長也始於康文署的持續擴展。現時康文署有提供戲劇演出的單位包括其轄下的文化節目組、藝術節辦事處以及觀眾拓展辦事處，它們坐擁大量資源，主辦以及贊助的專業劇團製作演出不計其數。

值得注意的是，近年文化節目組除了繼續主辦以及贊助專業劇團製作的首演演出外，還開始有系統地投放資源於重演演出上。自二〇一一年開始，文化節目組更主辦「劇場·再遇系列」，讓具質素的演出有機會重演，從而接觸到更多的觀眾。除了重演之外，自二〇一三年開始，文化節目組也主辦了「新能量系列」，讓一些新進的劇團有機會製作較具實驗性的演出。雖然「新能量系列」在二〇一六年暫停一年，但這兩個系列一直延續至今，讓文化節目組所提供的演出數目與種類得以持續增長。

至於藝術節辦事處，則繼續每年舉辦「國際綜藝合家歡」，並隔年梅花間竹地主辦「新視野藝術節」以及「世界文化藝術節」等兩個專題藝術節。可以這麼說，自二〇〇一年主辦「中國傳奇藝術節」始（中國傳奇藝術節在二〇〇三年還舉辦了一屆，之後在二〇〇五年便為世界文化藝術節所取代），藝

術節辦事處一直都是三條腿走路：二〇〇二年開始主辦的新視野藝術節，每兩年都從世界各地引入實驗性較強的前沿演出；二〇〇五年開始主辦的世界文化藝術節則延續中國傳奇藝術節的精神，旨在引介全球各地具民族色彩的文化；至於二〇〇〇年開始主辦的國際綜藝合家歡則走大眾親子路線。

凡此種種，康文署既有演出種類多元性，也有觀眾入座率的考慮，作為為香港廣大市民提供文化節目的主要官方機構，本是無可厚非。然而，康文署近年的這些變化與發展，是否也可視為九七後一系列文化政策改革的量化與審計化走向的必然結果？

## 「西九」衝擊波

當然，近年香港戲劇演出數量的持續增長，也跟西九的主動進擊不無關係。就以二〇一六年為例，西九文化區管理局便積極地在「拓展觀眾與觀眾發展」與「專業發展」等兩方面持續發展其「機構品牌」。

為了迎接在不久未來將陸續落成的大小西九表演場館，為未來的西九文化區培養觀眾，西九表演藝術部除了繼續積極主辦「自由約」等大型「與眾同藝」的活動外，還承著於二〇一五年主辦的「國際劇場工作坊節」的餘緒，撮合了英國藝術家安提·漢普頓



新視野藝術節2016「對談新視野 藝文沙龍講座系列」

照片提供：國際演藝評論家協會（香港分會）



國際劇場工作坊節工作坊

照片提供：國際演藝評論家協會（香港分會）

與「影話戲」，共同創作「自動劇場」作品《另一個人》（香港篇）。此外，他們也仿倣「英國國家劇院現場」的意念，在二〇一六年十一月網上直播「鄧樹榮戲劇工作室」與北京「白光劇社」合作演出的希臘悲劇《安提戈涅》。

西九表演藝術部近年的積極進取與創意探索，的確為本地戲劇界提供了不少專業交流的機會，從而激發新的創作意念與計劃。與此同時，他們所主辦的「自由約」這一類大型的「與眾同藝」活動，更為業界與大眾帶來了一種對於表演藝術的全新想像。二〇一七年，西九文化區更與太古地產合作，合辦「自由約@太古坊」藝術節，在太古坊旗下的ArtisTree、餐廳、辦公室大堂、草坪等場地，推出13個節目、合共29場演出，涵蓋戲劇、舞蹈、音樂、展覽、多媒體等不同範疇。相應地，康文署近年也頻頻變陣，除了香港藝術館閉館三年維修、文化中心翻新，將於二〇二〇年落成的東九文化中心大概也會在「西九年代」為本地的表演藝術帶來不同的發展圖像。

### 場地增加及其隱憂

正如筆者在另文中指出，近年香港戲劇演出數量的持續增長，大概也跟本地小型演出場地的數量增多有關。<sup>10</sup>固然，香港的表演場地仍然以康文署系統的官方場地為主導，從表面上

看，近年並無明顯變化。然而，康文署近年卻陸續將旗下場地改裝成黑盒劇場（例如二〇〇八年啟用的葵青劇院黑盒劇場、二〇一七年啟用的大埔文娛中心黑盒劇場，和可用作黑盒劇場的牛池灣文娛中心文娛廳），加上二〇一四年啟用的高山劇場新翼演藝廳，以及香港話劇團近年銳意發展其位於上環文娛中心的排練室作黑盒劇場之用途，本地小型演出場地的增長可謂有目共睹。扣連到前述康文署系統及其資助的旗艦劇團在九七後的發展大勢，演出與場地數量之間的關係，可謂雞與雞蛋的問題，都是新自由主義年代的審計與量化文化的必然結果。

此外，近年也有不少團址位於工廈的中小型專業劇團，曾把劇團排練室變成以「劇場」為名的臨時演出場地，例如同流黑盒劇場（同流）、水泊劇場（天邊外劇場）、DG黑盒劇場（劇場工作室）、愛麗絲劇場實驗室排練場（愛麗絲劇場實驗室），也為本地演出量增加的現象提供了有利的空間條件。我們知道，劇團開始進駐工廈，是一九九八年金融風暴以及二〇〇三年沙士的產物。當年由於經濟衰退，本地整體物業市場往下調，工作上需要較大與彈性空間的劇團與藝術家，也就能夠以較低廉的租金進駐工廈。然而，以現時的消防與屋宇條例來說，不少劇團在工廈的辦公室與排練室的合法性一直成疑，勿論工廈劇場。為此，民間一直爭取工廈藝術工作室合法化，但換來的

除了消防署與屋宇署的不斷巡查，便是二〇〇九年為時任發展局局長林鄭月娥推出、無助工廈藝術工作室合法化的「活化工廈」政策。

事實上，工廈劇團排練室與工廈劇場這種「妾身未明」的狀態，令工廈劇團長期處於「走難」的狀態，常常要為消防署與屋宇署有可能的突然巡查而擔驚受怕，加上二〇一六年六月的淘大工業村迷你倉大火之後，巡查不斷，工廈劇團就更是風聲鶴唳，已辦了四屆、有不少工廈劇場演出的「香港藝穗民化節」更因此而暫別劇壇。

### 專業發展遍地開花

近年與演出量增、場地增加等相伴而生的，自然是方興未艾的「專業發展」現象，而要數箇中的重要推手，自然是西九表演藝術部。就以二〇一六年來說，他們便先後主辦與合辦了「新作論壇」、「劇場的繼承者們」、「T-Talk論壇」、「製作人網絡會議及論壇」等多種專業發展活動，這些活動無疑為本地的戲劇工作者帶來了新的創作靈感與資源，也為文化藝術節目數量急速膨脹的年代提供了文化軟件上的支持。

此外，值得一提的是，除了西九表演藝術部，近年銳意拓展「專業發展」領域的民間機構，還有香港藝術行政人員協會。就以二〇一六年為例，他們便分別舉辦了「藝術行政管理講座系列」、「藝術行政人員101系列」、「文化領袖論壇」、「藝術行政管理公共論壇」、「香港藝術行政人員協會招聘日」等多種針對本地藝術行政人員與入門者需求的活動。

### 文化治理？還是共享城市？

無可否認，過去十多年，我們的確見證了本地戲劇界在演出與場地數量、專業發展的持續增長與發展，尤其在一個「文化變得有用」的年代，文創與城市品牌等文化治理話語抬頭，難免會令人有一種「文化蒸蒸日上」的形勢大好之感。然而，當歐美文創話語開始有退潮之勢，現下香港帶有文化凱恩斯主義意味的種種舉措，會否只是供過於求的文化泡沫？

況且，如前所述，香港的文化資源單一，長期由民政局、藝發局、西九文化區管理局等官方或半官方機構所主導，偏向經濟發展（文創與城市品牌）的文化治理話語，又會否不無吊詭地令本地戲劇創作的發展變得更單一？而大量有導向的資源投入，又會否過早地馴服掉本質上桀驁不馴的初生創作力量？

10. 小西。2013。〈小劇場遍地開花〉，《香港戲劇年鑑2011》，頁15-17。香港：國際演藝評論家協會（香港分會）。

幸好，近年戲劇界有不少團體與創作人，開始嘗試在龐大的體制外建立另類的機制與網絡，分享資源，互相支持。例如「天邊外劇場」自二〇一二年開始舉辦了四屆的香港藝穗民化節，還有二〇一七年的「西九外劇場節」，便嘗試在官方的文化治理的紋理以外，透過舉辦藝術節在民間搭建一座更為有機、對應民間需要的「共享城市」。要知道，文化從來都是建構複雜多元的城市肌理的「都市共享資源」之一。根據美國著名批判地理學家大衛·哈維的解釋：「共享資料並不是作為一種特定事物、資產甚至特定的社會過程建立起來的，而是作為一種不穩定的和可以繼續發展的社會關係而建立起來的，這種社會關係存在於某一自我定義的社會群體，以及實際存在或有待創造的、對其生存與生活至關重要的社會與（或）實際環境的種種特點之間。」<sup>11</sup>能否在文化治理的天邊外活出另一個天地，就得看戲劇界的想像力與決心了。

<sup>11</sup>. (美)戴維·哈維 (David Harvey) 著，葉齊茂譯。2014。《叛逆的城市：從擁有城市權利到城市革命》，頁74。北京：商務印書館。作者按：此處譯文按葉譯再作修改。

表一

<b>香港戲劇製作數量</b>		<b>2016</b>
由香港藝術發展局資助劇團製作	71	12%
由民政事務局資助劇團製作	38	7%
由獨立的專業劇團製作 (包括康文署主辦節目和由康文署場地伙伴計劃資助劇團)	135	23%
由業餘劇團製作 (包括藝術局資助項目和香港演藝學院戲劇學院節目)	277	47%
由非本地劇團製作	66	11%
<b>總數</b>	<b>587</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### 小西

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# Cultural Governance, or Sharing City? —An Analysis of the Phenomenon of Increased Programme Numbers, Venues and Professionalisation in Performing Arts<sup>1</sup>

Damian Cheng

As Bernice Chan and Felix Chan point out in their articles in *Hong Kong Theatre Yearbook 2015*, it is clear that the rise in programme and venue numbers and growing attention to professional development have been a major trend in the local theatre scene in recent years.<sup>2</sup> Unlike previous discussion addressing the trends and phenomena of a particular year, this article traces the root causes of phenomena that have existed for an extended period of time, and examines their overall trajectory and latest development in the context of relevant happenings in 2016. I have, to a certain extent, followed the premise of *1587, a Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* by Chinese historian Ray Huang, in my quest to project a broader view out of 2016, a seemingly insignificant year in history.

## Short- and long-term causes of the rise in programme numbers

According to “the number of Hong Kong drama productions” from 2013 to 2015 compiled by Bernice Chan, together with the 2016 statistics detailed in Table I, the recent years have witnessed a continuous increase in programme numbers. The upward trend, if taken at face value, seems to denote a boom in Hong Kong theatre. In fact, every weekend there are as many as seven or eight programmes for regular and occasional theatregoers to choose

from; during the fall or peak season (such as the Hong Kong Arts Festival), clashes are not seldom. However, does it follow that the vast and rising programme numbers signify a steady growth as well in the size of audience? The lack of precise figures on hand forbids me from making further analysis of this issue at present. But as Table I indicates, the absolute majority of theatrical productions were, as expected, subsidised by government or semi-government institutions, such as the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) under the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), and the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC). Curiously enough, when it comes to cultural policies, is the capitalistic Hong Kong indeed a follower of socialism, or a flagbearer for Keynesianism which employs an expansionist approach to boost the demand for cultural products and the size of its cultural market? The fundamental reason behind the steady increase in programme numbers is, as I am about to point out, the neoliberalist cultural policy adopted by the HKSAR Government over the past two decades.

## From assessing output to assessing impact

Let's take a look at the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre (HKRep), one of the HAB-funded flagship theatre companies in the city. In 2015/2016, HKRep presented

and co-presented a total of 26 programmes in 430 performances; among which were seven main stage productions (in 81 performances), eight black box productions (in 278 performances), and 11 co-presentations (in 71 performances). It also organised community outreach and educational activities, Venue Partnership Scheme programmes, cultural exchange programmes and other activities, presenting an astounding sum of 2,711 performances in total.<sup>3</sup> Showered with public funds and resources as one of the three HAB-backed flagship theatre companies,<sup>4</sup> HKRep has what it takes to produce an enormous body of varied output. This has something to do with HKRep's constant emphasis on mass appeal and, in my opinion, even more to do with the

HKSAR Government's changing directions after the handover in 1997, as its cultural policies have turned to neoliberalism where auditing and quantification are the key focus.

In retrospect, this change of direction had its origins in the reform of district organisations and cultural policies after the 1997 handover.<sup>5</sup> Apart from the abolition of the two municipal councils, whose role in providing cultural and arts, sports and recreational services were taken over by their successor LCSD, reform also brought about the corporatisation of the four major performing arts groups formerly subsidised by the Urban Council.<sup>6</sup> Now corporatised entities, the four big players are required to seek

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1. The title of this article comes from a presentation I gave on "Observations of the Year: Some Phenomena" at the IATC TW 2018 Forum organised by International Association of Theatre Critics (Taiwan), dated 20 January 2018. This article does not focus on phenomena specific to 2016, but makes use of certain happenings in 2016 to deliberate on phenomena which have existed for a number of years. In a way, the analysis also applies to 2016.
  2. Bernice Chan. 2017. "A Survey of Developments in Hong Kong Theatre in 2015", *Hong Kong Theatre Yearbook 2015*, pp. 111-120. Hong Kong: International Association of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong); <http://www.iatc.com.hk/theatre2015/?a=doc&id=100879>; Felix Chan, "Time to Bring in Professionals: Contemplating the Development of Hong Kong Dance through West Kowloon Cultural District Dance Workshops", *Ibid*, pp. 19-28; <http://www.iatc.com.hk/theatre2015/?a=doc&id=100872>
  3. See "Summary of Productions and Activities", *Hong Kong Repertory Theatre Annual Report 2015/2016*, pp. 20-34: <http://www.hkrep.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/annualreport1516.pdf>
  4. The other two flagship theatre companies are Chung Ying Theatre Company and Zuni Icosahedron, respectively.
  5. In June 1998, the Constitutional Affairs Bureau published the *Consultation Document on Review of District Organisations* to start reviewing district organisations, including the two municipal councils. This was followed by the *Consultant's Report on Culture, the Arts, Recreation and Sports Services* released by HAB in March 1999, as well as preliminary response from the government.
  6. They are namely HKRep, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, and Hong Kong Dance Company.

other public resources on their own, while receiving a large chunk of the subsidy HAB has for its grantees. According to the *Committee on Performing Arts Consultation Paper* released by the newly formed Committee on Performing Arts in November 2005, the four HAB-backed arts organisations and other HKADC three-year grantees should be financed by a "single funding body", in order to "facilitate the formulation of one set of assessment criteria to measure their performance and provide a level-playing field for them to compete for public funding resources in a fair and open environment".<sup>7</sup> Under the new assessment mechanism and criteria, not only were the applicants' overall artistic achievements to be considered, but also their "tangible and intangible results, such as audience building and sponsorship, the effects on other sectors of the community and the international image of Hong Kong".<sup>8</sup> With conditions like that, it is little wonder that HKRep has been so keen to expand in recent years. Amid the rise of audit culture and quantification in the neoliberal era, hitting sales quotas is the order of the day.<sup>9</sup>

### **LCSD also busy meeting quotas**

The growth in programme numbers, needless to say, should also be attributed to the ongoing development of LCSD. At present, the units under LCSD which offer dramatic performances include the Cultural Presentations Section (CP), Festivals Office, and Audience Building Office. With vast resources at their command, over the years they have presented and sponsored countless productions by professional theatre companies.

It is worth noting that CP has been making systematic efforts to invest in reruns, alongside the premieres they present and sponsor. Starting from 2011, they have organised the Re-run Run Shows series for restaging quality productions and bringing them to a wider audience; and starting from 2013, they have introduced another series titled New Energy to allow up-and-coming theatre groups to create works with an experimental edge. Despite the suspension of New Energy in 2016, both series

7. See *Committee on Performing Arts Consultation Paper*, pp.15: [http://www.hab.gov.hk/file\\_manager/en/documents/policy\\_responsibilities/arts\\_culture\\_recreation\\_and\\_sport/asb/asb45\\_CPA\\_full\\_e.pdf](http://www.hab.gov.hk/file_manager/en/documents/policy_responsibilities/arts_culture_recreation_and_sport/asb/asb45_CPA_full_e.pdf)

8. Ibid, pp. 13.

9. For a more thorough analysis of the aforementioned reform, see my other article: Damian Cheng. 2016. "From Big Four to Big Nine: On the Changing and Unchanging Cultural Funding Policies in Hong Kong", *Graduate Journal of Cultural and Creative Industries*, Vol 2, pp. 60–64. [http://gjcci.weebly.com/uploads/5/4/0/1/54017633/07\\_由四大到九大藝團.pdf](http://gjcci.weebly.com/uploads/5/4/0/1/54017633/07_由四大到九大藝團.pdf)



New Vision Conversations: The Arts Salon Series, New Vision Arts Festival 2016  
Photo courtesy: International Association of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong)



Workshop of International Workshop Festival of Theatre  
Photo courtesy: International Association of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong)

survive to this day and keep boosting CP's output in terms of programme number and genre.

The Festivals Office, on the other hand, has continued with its annual International Arts Carnival, as well as two topical events — the New Vision Arts Festival and the World Cultures Festival — every other year. Ever since presenting the Legends of China Festival in 2001 (succeeded by another instalment in 2003, and replaced by the World Cultures Festival since 2005), the Festivals Office has adopted a three-pronged approach: The biennial New Vision Arts Festival from 2002 onwards brings in experimental, avant-garde productions from all over the world; the World Cultures Festival inaugurated in 2005 treads in the footsteps of the Legends of China Festival to showcase ethnic cultures worldwide; and the annual International Arts Carnival since 2000 offers family delights with popular appeal.

All this goes to show that the LCSD, as the premier government institution that provides cultural events for Hong Kong citizens, leaves little room for criticism, given the fact that they are obligated to fill the seats for the varied programmes they present. That said, are these changes and development the LCSD has gone through in recent years the inevitable results of the reform of cultural policies in post-1997 Hong Kong, which became more quantity and audit driven?

### **Shock waves from West Kowloon**

Beyond dispute, the overall upward trend in programme numbers cannot be separated from the proactive approach taken by West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (WKCDA). In 2016, for example, WKCDA actively developed its corporate branding in two dimensions, “audience building and development” and “professional development” respectively.

Prior to the opening of multiple performance venues at West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD), WKCDA's Performing Arts Department has embarked on a wide range of efforts to nurture audiences for the forthcoming cultural hub. On top of public engagement activities such as Freespace Happening, they took further their 2015 International Workshop Festival of Theatre, pairing up British artist Ant Hampton and local theatre company Cinematic Theatre in an Autoteatro production titled *Someone Else* (Hong Kong Version). What's more, they imitated National Theatre Live in streaming live in November 2016 the Greek tragedy *Antigone*, a collaboration between Tang Shu-wing Theatre Studio and Baiguang Theatre Studio, Beijing.

Through its diverse efforts in creative exploration, WKCDA's Performing Arts Department has indeed

fostered exchange among theatre practitioners, in turn sparking off new ideas and endeavours. The highly interactive and engaging Freespace Happening has also ushered in a brand new understanding of the performing arts for both theatre professionals and the general public. In 2017, WKCD teamed up with Swire Properties in presenting Freespace at Taikoo Place, putting up 13 programmes in 29 performances spanning theatre, dance, music, exhibits and multimedia artwork at different locations under Taikoo Place, such as the ArtisTree, restaurants, office lobbies, and lawn areas. In response, the LCSD too has set in motion a series of projects. Alongside Hong Kong Museum of Art's three-year closure for renovation and the facelift scheduled for Hong Kong Cultural Centre, the East Kowloon Cultural Centre, due to open its doors in 2020, is set to broaden the local performing arts scene while all eyes are on WKCD.

### **Surge in performance venues and latent problems**

As I pinpoint in another article, the growing number of theatre performances in recent years is also related to the emergence of smaller sized performance

venues citywide.<sup>10</sup> Today the majority of Hong Kong's performance venues are still run by LCSD, so there is no major change on the surface. However, the LCSD has revamped many of its venues into black box theatres in recent years, such as the ones at Kwai Tsing Theatre (opened in 2008) and Tai Po Civic Centre (opened in 2017), and the Cultural Activities Hall at Ngau Chi Wan Civic Centre which may double as an experimental theatre. Also on the list are the Ko Shan Theatre New Wing Auditorium (opened in 2014), and HKRep's rehearsal room in Sheung Wan Civic Centre which the company has used as a black box theatre in recent years. The growing number of smaller sized performance venues is a notable trend. Considering the post-1997 developments of LCSD and the flagship arts groups under its patronage, the relationship between programme number and venue number is in fact a chicken and egg situation, a natural outcome amid the rise of neoliberalism, as well as the culture of auditing and quantification associated with it.

Meanwhile, a number of small to medium sized professional theatre groups housed inside industrial buildings have at some point converted their rehearsal rooms into provisional performance

<sup>10</sup> Damian Cheng. 2013. "Small Theatres Sprouting Up across the City", *Hong Kong Drama Yearbook 2011*, pp. 15–17. Hong Kong: International Association of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong).

venues titled as theatres in recent years. We Draman Group's black box theatre, Theatre Horizon's Water Margin Theatre, Drama Gallery's black box theatre, Alice Theatre Laboratory's rehearsal room are cases in point, contributing to the rise in programme numbers as a whole. As we all know, theatre groups' occupancy of industrial buildings began as a by-product of the 1998 financial crisis and the SARS outbreak in 2003. Economic downturn caused a slump in property prices, which made industrial units more affordable for theatre companies and artists in need of sizeable and flexible workspace. However, under the prevailing fire and building safety ordinances, office space and rehearsal rooms within industrial buildings are not entirely lawful, not to mention theatres. The community has strived to advocate the legalisation of art studios in industrial buildings. The result has been, ironically, ceaseless inspections by the Fire Services Department and Buildings Department, and the 2009 revitalisation of industrial buildings policy put forward by Carrie Lam, then Secretary for Development, which failed to serve the needs of art workers.

While the legal status of these rehearsal rooms and theatres remain undefined, theatre groups quartered in industrial buildings are in constant fear of surprise crackdowns by the Fire Services Department and Buildings Department. That fear has escalated further,

as inspections have been more frequent than ever after the deadly fire at the Amoycan Industrial Centre's mini-storage facilities in June 2016. The toll was soon felt, as Hong Kong People's Fringe Festival, a huge part of which taking place within industrial complexes, came to a halt after its four-year run.

### **Professional development a citywide phenomenon**

On the heels of the rise in programme and venue numbers is the budding phenomenon of professionalisation in performing arts. A leading proponent is no doubt WKCDAs Performing Arts Department. In 2016, for instance, they presented and co-presented a wide array of related activities, such as New Works Forum, Theatre Atelier Project, T-Talk, Producers' Network Meeting & Forum. These endeavours have undoubtedly brought the theatre community new inspirations and resources, but also the cultural software necessary for the surge in programme numbers.

Other than WKCDAs Performing Arts Department, also of particular note is the Hong Kong Arts Administrators Association (HKAAA), another non-government body dedicated to promoting professional development in the industry. In 2016, the year in question, they hosted the Arts Management

Seminar Series, Arts Administrator 101 Series, Cultural Leadership Summit, Arts Administration and Management Public Forum, HKAAA Recruitment Day and more, to cater to the needs of local arts administrators and those who aspire to join the profession.

### **Cultural governance or sharing city?**

It is fair to say that in the past decade or so, we have witnessed a continuous rise in the number of theatre programmes and venues, as well as greater emphasis on professionalisation in performing arts. The expediency of culture, in this day and age, has become a general norm. As cultural governance-related lingoes such as creative industries and city branding are mentioned so often, many are led to believe that a culture boom is well underway. However, as such lingoes are now fading into oblivion in Europe and America, could the Keynesian-esque moves in present-day Hong Kong be, after all, nothing but bubbles that mirror an excess supply in the cultural market?

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier on, Hong Kong's cultural resources have long been homogeneous, firmly in the hands of government or semi-government institutions such as HAB, HKADC, and WKCDA. Would cultural governance lingoes

(creative industries and city branding), essentially slanted towards economic growth, give rise to the paradox of Hong Kong theatre becoming even more homogeneous? Would the allocation of massive resources, which steers recipients towards a desired target, end up snuffing out the rebellious vigour of young artists before it blossoms?

Thankfully, over recent years many groups and individuals in the theatre community have been building their own mechanisms and networks outside the mammoth establishment to share resources and support each other. Theatre Horizon, for one, put together the Hong Kong People's Fringe Festival for four consecutive years from 2012; another example is the 2017 Outer West Kowloon Theatrefest. Beyond cultural governance imposed by the authorities, these attempts served to create a more organic "sharing city" that would better fulfill people's needs. Culture has always been one of the "urban commons" in the convoluted web of maze-like cityscapes. David Harvey, a renowned American geographer, remarks: "The common is not to be construed, therefore, as a particular kind of thing, asset or even social process, but as an unstable and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be-created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood."<sup>11</sup> As to whether a



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new world would emerge beyond the confines of cultural governance, it all hinges on the imagination and determination of our fellow comrades in theatre.

(Translated by Elbe Lau)

■ 11. David Harvey. 2012. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, pp. 73. UK: Verso.

Table I

<b>Number of drama productions in Hong Kong</b>		<b>2016</b>
Number of productions by theatre companies supported by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council	71	12%
Number of productions by theatre companies supported by the Home Affairs Bureau	38	7%
Number of productions by independent theatre companies (including those presented by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and productions by theatre companies sponsored by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department's Venue Partnership Scheme)	135	23%
Number of productions by amateur theatre companies (including those sponsored by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council and productions by The Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts)	277	47%
Number of productions by non-local theatre companies	66	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>587</b>	<b>100%</b>

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### Damian Cheng

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