

Editorial Note—The Policy Paradox: The Changing Face of Cultural Policy in Asia

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Cultural policy in Asia has never been merely a matter of governmentality, limited to serving as an instrument of public administration for implementing cultural plans. It is a field in which culture is imagined and circulated within situated contexts, thereby empowering cultures to be shaped at various levels of society. While policy seeks to frame culture, culture often escapes instrumentalization and perhaps governance. It is this contradiction that animates this special issue, *The Policy Paradox: The Changing Face of Cultural Policy in Asia*.

The paradox lies in the fact that cultural policy is often asked to do "infrastructural" work—preserving heritage and building cities, stimulating creative economies and generating soft power, enabling innovation and attracting tourists, and fostering social cohesion and championing national identity. It is true to a degree that policy imaginary in Asia is particularly "infrastructural" responding to rapid urbanization and economic ambitions of emerging Asian societies.

This special issue begins with the premise that cultural policy in Asia must be read as a cartographic exercise outside paradigmatic approaches of Western cultural policy frames. This is foregrounded in the rationale that, first, cultural policy is often insufficient to address the lived complexity of cultural practice, which continuously bleeds into the social fabric of societies. Secondly, Western models of cultural policies have been part of the colonial enterprise in Asia. These policies primarily map, classify, and legitimize ways of being, thereby lending themselves to oversimplifying culture. Culture is objectified and cultural labour instrumentalized.

The essays gathered here approach cultural policy through these tensions, asking not only what policy does for culture, but also what concept of cultural policy it presumes. Moving across India, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and comparative international contexts, the essays and case reports provide an entry point for understanding cultural

policy as situated lived practice.

LIN Yi-Chen's essay on Taiwan offer insights into governance networks, public value and organisational agency. The essay on heritage regeneration examines the outsourcing of publicly owned heritage sites under New Public Management. Public value emerges through sustained collaboration among public agencies, operators, communities and civic actors. Heritage is not only what is conserved; it is what is negotiated through memory, access, use, disagreement and shared responsibility.

The essay by **Dev Nath PATHAK** and **Deotima GHOSH** on contemporary India offers one of the issue's key conceptual provocations through its examination of "rigid roots". Reading official cultural policy through Ministry of Culture documents, annual reports, and cultural schemes, the author argues that culture is increasingly framed through a logic of the "national," in which roots (albeit tradition) become sacred, fixed, and territorially bounded. Yet South Asian cultural histories have always been shaped by routes: trade, migration, linguistic affinities, religious circulation, artistic exchange and shared civilizational sensibilities that exceed the modern nation-state. The distinction between roots and routes is therefore a critical intervention demonstrating how the state's desire to preserve culture may paradoxically immobilise the very flows that historically produced it.

This tension is further expanded in the two essays on Hong Kong. On cultural infrastructure, **Melody Hoi-lam YIU** traces Hong Kong's cultural development from late-colonial welfare provision to post-handover culture-led development, thereby reframing cultural facilities not as discrete landmarks, but as infrastructural systems that both enable and limit cultural production. **Zexun ZHANG's** essay on the West Kowloon Cultural District examines global city-making and its complex contraindications. West Kowloon is simultaneously a state-led and market-shaped cultural megapolis seeking global symbolic capital.

Takao TERUI's comparative article on generative AI and the creative industries examines Australia, Canada, Singapore and the United Kingdom to ask how governments balance creative labour protection with technological innovation, revealing how emerging technologies are absorbed into existing systems of governance frameworks instead of expanding cultural policy to questions of data, machine learning and emerging creative labour in creative tech.

A number of essays and case reports shift the issue of cultural policymaking from policy as institutional design to policy as practice—a situated work in which cultural actors negotiate agency by creating value through their own built infrastructures. Read together, they demonstrate the resilience of Asia's cultural policy field in embodying grassroots-led capacity-building enterprises. **WU Chen-Ping's** case report on Wan Theater reveals how physical space is a generative asset and a transformative force, while **HUANG Li-Yun's** report of Give Meet Five Ltd. extends into intellectual property and cross-sector collaboration to enable critical discourse on the creative sector at the level of production-making. **Audrey Wai Yen WONG** and **Sunitha JANAMOHANAN's**

forum note on ANCER Research Camp foregrounds advocacy as cultural research. Addressing its 2025 research camp, *Arts and Advocacy*, it studies how research can inform legal and policy reform amidst socio-cultural change.

This volume provides two key insights. First, cultural policy is infrastructural, with visible signifiers such as buildings, festivals, districts, etc., and reveals little about the logic of protocols, socio-economic challenges, and hidden hierarchies of value. Secondly, cultural policy in Asia is an interdependence of large institutions and small organisations, formal policy and informal practice. This is where the policy paradox becomes most apparent. The changing face of cultural policy in Asia is therefore a reconfiguration of the cultural imagination itself—rethinking policy as purely a site of public service endeavour to one that is composite of cultural authorship of creative and social communities.

Building on the *CPME* journal's reflexive, critical, and subjectivity-oriented approach to "Asia Culture as Method," the special issue "The Policy Paradox: The Changing Face of Cultural Policy in Asia" exemplifies a reflexive mode of knowledge production through the adoption of new cultural vocabularies and value interpretations that are gradually diverging from Western frameworks. It seeks to ground meta-level discourses on cultural value in lived experiences across Asia and to render them practically operational, thereby transforming the discourses into an innovative knowledge system through engagement between local and international cultural policy and management¹. Such practices resonate closely with the diverse local imaginaries of everyday life culture and the varied forms of cartographic knowledge in Asia.

1 Liu, Jerry C. Y. 2022. "Chief Editor's Preface to the Inaugural Issue—Taiwan/Asia-Pacific—Culture as a Method: International Knowledge Regime and Network Ecology of Culture: Policy, Management, and Entrepreneurship." *Culture: Policy, Management, and Entrepreneurship*, 2022, 1(1): 17–28.

