



Samuel Chan Che-chung

Sandee Tang is currently working as a part-time project co-ordinator at Artist Commune



Grace Wong

Clementine Chan, Managing Director of CCDC received around 100 applications for the position of arts administrators this year.

This autumn, around 450 students graduated in fine art and other arts related degrees at undergraduate and graduate level in Hong Kong. In the coming years, that number is expected to rise further.

Some of these arts graduates will have taken courses in arts administration and will be looking for jobs as curators, programme officers, administrators, fundraisers and marketing specialists in the arts and cultural sectors.

Many will have entered their studies with an eye on the West Kowloon Cultural District project and the expected boom it will create in Hong

Their job is basically to manage and support day to day operations in the arts sector, for organisations ranging from arts and cultural groups, to galleries, museums and theatres.

Foreseeing a significant growth in demand for local arts professionals, more and more tertiary institutions started to offer arts related programmes. Among them were City University of Hong Kong, which set up the School of Creative Media in 1998, followed by Baptist University of Hong Kong, which established its Academy of Visual Arts in 2005. Next year, the Hong Kong Institute of Education will also introduce a new degree programme in creative arts and culture.

Making

Kong's arts and cultural scene. According to government projections, the core performance venues, exhibition centres and an ambitious institution that will be built in the first phase of the project will create 3,740 jobs, 820 of which will be for managers and operational staff.

The question is, whether the nascent local arts sector will really create a market for the growing number of arts professionals. Although arts administrators are currently a rare breed in Hong Kong, arts administration is an established profession in the United States and Europe.

Figures from the five local universities and Hong Kong Art School show that around 320 students graduated from arts related courses this year at undergraduate level. Another 130 completed postgraduate programmes in arts administration and cultural management. Compare this with the figures from before the boom – when around 30 students graduated with fine-arts degrees every year from The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and the University of Hong Kong.

Eric Leung Shiu-kee, the director of Artist Commune, a non-profit art group, says the establishment of the arts hub

project has already had a significant effect on the local demand for art practitioners and administrators.

The job market has also improved because the corporate world in Hong Kong has cottoned on to the promotional potential of supporting the arts. Companies are hiring more arts administrators to take charge of arts exhibitions in shopping malls and other public spaces. There is also a higher demand for arts graduates from auction houses whose business has been driven by the rapid growth of the Chinese art market.

“There is no doubt the demand for artistic talents and administration

Club and the Hong Kong International Film Festival Society.

Leung questions whether the West Kowloon project will continue to provide new opportunities in arts administration. He believes that once the first batch of administrators is hired, the vacancies could dry up and refers to the example of the LCSD hiring only around 10 new staff after a seven-year recruitment freeze.

“What makes matter worse is that very few art groups in the territory can afford to employ their own staff since most of them are receiving funding mainly from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council,” says Leung.

into employment, more youngsters are willing to step into the field without worrying about how to make a living.

Leung cites as an example the 38 students of the Arts Faculty at The University of Hong Kong who majored in fine arts this year, compared to only three or four in the past.

“Many began to think those working in the arts and cultural industries can earn well too. But nobody can be sure whether this is an insight or a mistaken impression at the moment,” he says.

Even parents are more willing to let their children choose a career

Art Work ?

by Samuel Chan Che-chung and Phyllis Lee

personnel is growing, but the question is whether the market's demand for these talents can satisfy the massive supply of more than 400 arts graduates every year?” says Leung. He thinks the answer is no.

In Hong Kong, over 60 per cent of arts administrators are employed by the government as staff members of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), while the remaining work for the territory's 10 government-sponsored major performing arts groups, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC), Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong Fringe

He points out that although there will be more funding for groups with the development of the West Kowloon project, the money will be given as grants for projects rather than as annual funding to the organisations themselves. This means there will be little new money for human resources.

Still, such sobering thoughts may be far from the minds of the young people who are entering studies in the field with high hopes of what the future holds after the arts hub takes off. With the belief that the project will translate

path in the arts. “Working as an arts administrator sounds reputable, but how many can really become one after studying the related courses?” he asks.

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Clementine Chan, the managing director of City Contemporary Dance Company (CCDC), shares a similar view. “West Kowloon is like a big white elephant, granting all of us hopes and ambitions. But the direction and the details have not yet been clearly explained and confirmed.”

CCDC is one of the major performing arts group in Hong Kong and Chan says the company received more job applications this year than in the past. But not many of the candidates were up to the job.

“I found fewer than 10 suitable candidates among the 100 applications received. A lot of them don’t have the experience or even worse, they don’t know what art and culture are.”

The experience issue is one that worries Sandee Tang, who is currently studying for a master’s degree in cultural management at the CUHK. She is not hopeful about the prospects the future arts hub will bring for young graduates.

“What the West Kowloon Cultural Development Authority needs is a group of experienced art professionals to lay

the foundations for the future cultural district,” she says.

“I guess they will be looking for professionals in specific areas when hiring the so-called “less experienced” staff instead of fresh graduates.”

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Painting has been Tang’s passion since childhood. She followed her interests and chose to study visual arts at Hong Kong Baptist University without giving much thought to job prospects.

“Baptist University emphasizes that their programme sets out to nurture local talents for the future West Kowloon

district, and I, for a time, imagined that I could earn a decent living working in the arts industry,” she recalls.

Tang realises that was just a fantasy. Apart from talent and qualifications, networking and connections are vital for getting jobs in the arts field.

She now hopes that working at Artist Commune as a part-time project co-ordinator and pursuing a master’s degree in cultural management will allow her to meet a variety of art practitioners and build up her connections in this field.

However, she worries that she cannot see a promising career working for small arts organisations.

“There is the director on top, followed by the manager and then it’s you in the whole company. Well then, your only foreseeable prospect will be to become the manager and then the director,” she says drily.

The size of an arts group or organisation also determines the extent of the duties undertaken by their administration staff. At Artist Commune, Tang is responsible for every aspect of

daily operation, ranging from setting up exhibition venues to event promotion, giving guided tours, budgeting and booking venues.

Tang knows a background in the arts may be just one of the things employers at art galleries or institutes are looking for in job candidates. “What they need most are probably people who have training and working experience in marketing and public relations,” she says.

Roger Garcia, the new executive director of Hong Kong International Film Festival Society agrees. “When you go for a job interview, somebody is going to ask you, ‘Look, why are you coming for this job?’ Then you have to be able to say, ‘Because I’m really good at accounts or I am a really good writer,’” Garcia says. “It’s not ‘I love movies’, that’s a given.”

Film festivals have developed fast and become a kind of industry in the past 10 to 20 years, says the renowned film festival programmer and juror. “There is a possibility that film festivals can be a career in the same way that museums have been a career for many years.”

Seeing a shortage of successors in the industry, Garcia is planning initiatives to nurture the city’s future film festival programmers. These include internships

for local and overseas film students to come and experience the festival.

He sees this as a good opportunity for film students to have both cultural and commercial exposure as Hong Kong’s International Film Festival and the film market take place at the same time.

“It’s great for film students to go see a movie and listen to a director talking about it and then go to Hong Kong FILMART to see how the cinema business is transacted as well and to listen to seminars and panel discussions about the challenges of distributing and financing films,” he says.

Meanwhile, the HKADC has launched a series of arts management sessions and also the Cultural Internship Scheme to cultivate local arts professionals. The LCSO, likewise, is offering training programmes for arts administrators.

Nevertheless, these programmes may not specifically serve young art talents and guarantee them a job opportunity afterwards.

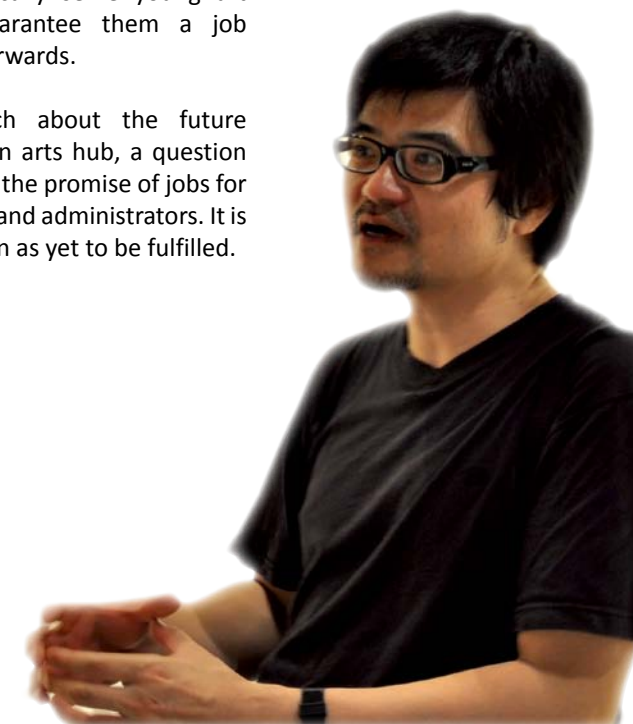
Like so much about the future Western Kowloon arts hub, a question mark hangs over the promise of jobs for art practitioners and administrators. It is still a grand vision as yet to be fulfilled.

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Samuel Chan Che-dung

Roger Garcia demonstrates how the editing machine works. (Machine is on with film rolling)



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Eric Leung Shiu-kee shows concern about the future demand for art administrations in Hong Kong.