Industry Paper

Not without irony: Is Asia the new cultural policy moment?

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Abstract
International cultural engagement is currently experiencing its own ‘policy moment’ both in Australia and internationally. This paper aims to examine the development of new thinking about best practice models for international cultural engagement and the response of Australian policy makers. The paper argues that the ‘Asian century’ is a key factor in the current focus on international cultural policy, but that this particular ‘moment’ presents certain challenges and paradoxes for government policy makers, funding agencies and the cultural sector if they are to implement more relevant and effective policies for cultural engagement with Asia. It concludes that, somewhat ironically, the emergent paradigm requires a re-evaluation and inversion of some of the assumptions and concepts derived from business and ‘new public management’ that underpinned many of the initiatives of the first ‘cultural policy moment’ of the mid-nineties.

Biography
Lesley Alway has been Director, Asialink Arts based at the University of Melbourne, Australia since June 2010. Lesley has worked with cultural organisations in the government, non-profit and private sectors. Her previous roles include Managing Director of Sotheby’s Australia, Director/CEO of Heide Museum of Modern Art, Director, Arts Victoria and Director, Artbank. Her academic qualifications include a BA (Hons) and BEd from the University of Melbourne and an MBA from Monash University. Corresponding author: L.alway@asialink.unimelb.edu.au
Introduction

International cultural engagement is currently experiencing its own ‘policy moment’, both in Australia and internationally, through a re-evaluation of assumptions and models contained in research, symposia and reports released over the last eighteen months. This critical thinking about the new landscape for international cultural engagement is related to three key factors including the concept of ‘soft-power’, increased artist mobility due to new transportation and communications technologies but primarily to the global shift of economic and political power, from the West to the East, giving rise to the so-called the ‘Asian Century’ (Alway 2013; Holden 2013). This last factor has seen a significant investment by Asia in its own cultural infrastructure and international cultural relationships and a strong focus by the West on strengthening its cultural relationships with Asia.

In this new environment, it is apparent that old models of international cultural engagement are not necessarily relevant or effective and that a new paradigm is required. This paper aims to examine the response of Australian policymakers to this phenomenon and the development of new thinking about policies and models of best practice for international cultural engagement that have emerged in Australia and internationally over the last two years. It argues that the so-called ‘Asian century’ has precipitated a new cultural policy moment both in Australia and internationally, but that this ‘moment’ presents certain challenges and paradoxes for both government policy and funding agencies and the cultural sector itself.

Firstly, it reviews Australia’s response to the rise of Asia in recent policy initiatives through the White Paper on Australia in the Asia Century (Australian Government 2012) and the new National Cultural Policy, Creative Australia (Australian Government 2013). Secondly it outlines recent Victorian research on Asia engagement to give a truly ‘glocal’ perspective based on actual quantitative and qualitative data. Thirdly, it reviews some of the recent international scholarly research and reports from the United States, Europe and the United Kingdom on international cultural engagement. Finally, it explores the intersections and implications of both the Australian and international research and the exploration and documentation of new models of cultural engagement with Asia, for Australian policy makers.

Australia and the Asia Century

‘Collectively, Asian economies are the world’s largest and fastest growing, and they represent a major opportunity for Australian business’ (Asialink Taskforce for an Asia Capable Workforce 2012:6).

The rise of Asia, and its implications for Australia, is well documented and is the subject of consistent commentary in the news media. As with many other sectors of the Australian economy, Australian artists and cultural organisations have been highly active in Asia for over twenty years. Much of the contemporary interest in the region has been stimulated by such pioneering initiatives as the Asia Pacific Triennial launched by the Queensland Art Gallery in 1993 and Asialink Arts’ extensive program of arts residencies, touring and exchange programs that have involved over a thousand artists since 1991. More recently activity has accelerated, in part due to a range of new
initiatives as well as response to demand from the arts sector through support provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Australia Council for the Arts, Austrade and various the State and Territory Governments. Unlike many countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany and France that have a single agency to manage their international cultural relationships, Australia has what can be characterised as a more ‘diverse and devolved’ model of support. A mix of government and non-government agencies play various roles across the political (diplomatic), commercial (trade), and creative (engagement) dimensions of international cultural exchange, although in reality there is a strong cross-over and interrelationship between all three aspects.

It is useful to briefly document the broad range of Australian support infrastructure for international cultural exchange. DFAT provides support through a variety of sources. Its cultural diplomacy section manages a number of programs including the Australia International Cultural Council, specific international programs to promote indigenous, performing and visual arts as well as an annual country focus program. Over recent years, priority has been given to Asia including Korea (2010/11), China (2011), India (2012) and Vietnam (2013). Forthcoming focus country programs have been flagged for Indonesia (2014), Turkey (2015) and Brazil (2016). Each Australian consulate and embassy has a small discretionary public diplomacy budget and a number of foundations, councils and institutes such as the Australia China Council, Australia India Council and the Australia Japan Foundation are managed separately through DFAT country desks and have some resources to support a variety of programs and projects across various sectors including business, science, education and the arts. The Australian Government’s key cultural funding body, the Australian Council for the Arts also provides a range of support through its various art form, market development and key organisations funding programs. Some support is also made available through State and Territory arts budgets and to a lesser extent from corporate and philanthropic sources.

The sense that Australia might be on the precipice of new cultural policy moment was due to the concurrence of both the White Paper, *Australia in the Asia Century* announced by the previous Prime Minister, Julia Gillard in October 2012 and the long-awaited new National Cultural Policy *Creative Australia* delivered in March 2013 by then Minister for the Arts Simon Crean. Both of these documents gave prominence to the important role of the arts and cultural understanding to Australia’s future relationship with Asia.

*Australia in the Asia Century* White Paper

*Australia in the Asia Century* launched in October 2012 highlighted the importance of cultural links as a key pathway for developing and deepening Australia’s relationship with Asia. Both in the ‘Context’ and the ‘Roadmap’ sections of the paper, cultural engagement was positioned as a key component and contributor to developing the capabilities and connections with Asia, particularly through Asia-capable leaders and institutions, closer people-to-people links and vibrant cultural connections. The paper also emphasised the importance of ‘two-way, collaboration and partnership’ opportunities. This was a strong departure from past policy rhetoric that promoted an ‘export’ focus and the ‘presentation of Australian stories’ to international audiences.

However, whilst *Australia in the Asia Century* committed to ‘strengthen cultural diplomacy and exchange to build trust, understanding and confidence in our cultural, political, security and economic relationships’, no immediate resources were identified for the implementation of these aspirations. The paper included a call for a more detailed policy response to the Asia agenda for the cultural sector through a ‘revamp’ of the Australia International Cultural Council, and through the Government’s consideration of a major review of the Australia Council that had been recently completed and was to be announced as part of the forthcoming national cultural policy. The Australia Council subsequently announced a new ‘Creative Partnerships with Asia’ program to fund collaborative and reciprocal exchange projects between Australia and Asia. Six grants were announced across a range of art forms and countries in May...
Creative Australia

The development of new national cultural policy had originated with the previous Minister for the Arts, Peter Garrett and was finally delivered in March 2013 by then Minister, Simon Crean. The section of the policy on international opportunities notes that:

The impact of the Asian Century will reach into the heart of Australia. This is an opportunity of enormous potential...but there is also the risk that this opportunity will be missed. Without a deep, multi-layered two-way cultural engagement at all levels, the material and human potential of this potential will fall well short... Arts and culture are crucial to strengthening Australia’s formal and informal relationships with the countries and peoples of Asia.

Despite this emphatic rhetoric about the importance of Asia, there were no specific initiatives to support increased cultural engagement or new models mentioned in the introduction. Indeed, the policy referred to the framework outlined in Australia in the Asia Century.

Likewise, the review of the Australia Council noted the preparation of Australia in the Asia Century and commented that ‘there is a clear role for the Council to look for opportunities to build a strong dialogue with our Asian neighbours, particularly China and Indonesia. The opportunities for artistic engagement in Asia and the role that the Council will play in this should be explicitly addressed as part of Dr Henry's paper [what was to be Australia in the Asia Century]’ (Trainor and James 2012). Unfortunately none of the recommendations on the restructure of the Australia Council specifically addressed its role with Asia, referring the issue to the Australia in the Asia Century. This policy circularity and shifting of responsibility for initiatives and investment in cultural engagement with Asia, risks the very issue alerted to in the cultural policy: ‘the risk that this opportunity will be missed’.

On the Ground & In the Know: The Victoria–Asia Cultural Engagement Research Report

Given the acknowledged importance of Asia, there is a major incentive for governments and associated agencies to develop policies and programs to support and nurture the efforts of enterprises in forging trade, education, social and cultural relationships in the region. To do this effectively, requires good quality information and data. This is available for many industries, but unlike other sectors such as trade, investment and tourism, there is very little quantitative or qualitative research available on cultural engagement between Australia and Asia.

To redress this ‘data deficit’ Asialink Arts, with the support of Arts Victoria, developed The Victoria–Asia Cultural Engagement Research Report (Asialink Arts and Arts Victoria 2013). The objective of the research was to undertake a pilot study to better understand the quantity and quality of cultural engagement between Victoria and Asia. The research identified possible policy and program interventions to improve the Asia capability of the Victorian cultural sector, assessed the quality and identify gaps in the existing statistical data available on trade in cultural goods and services between Asia and Australia; and provided a research model that could be extrapolated to other States to provide a national overview and analysis of the cultural sector.

The research model comprised data collection from four key cultural sector groups including Government & Statutory Agencies and University based organisations, Non-Government Organisations including Artist Run Initiatives, commercial and private sector organisations as well as individual artists, many of whom work across and with the other three groups.

The researchers collected and reviewed data from existing ABS statistics on trade in cultural goods and services, undertook a quantitative and qualitative survey of eighty-
six Victorian organisations, reviewed existing data sets and reports available on Victorian artists and carried out a series of round-table discussions and case-studies. The overall picture arising from the research findings was one of a developing maturity in the Victorian arts sector with regards to the opportunities and challenges of engaging with Asia. The research also revealed the extensive diversity, depth and richness of the cultural relationships that have evolved and are ongoing between Victoria and Asia. Likewise, artists and arts organisations are looking to increase their engagement with Asia over the next five years and want the tools and support to facilitate this.

The key findings included that the current available ABS data on trade in cultural goods and services is inadequate to give a nuanced picture of Australia or Victoria’s engagement in cultural services and activities with Asia. At the same time Asia is a priority for more than sixty percent of organisations that responded to the survey, and a higher priority for arts organisations in the next five years compared to the previous five years with more than half of organisations surveyed having a specific Asia strategy. Key countries identified in these strategies are India, Indonesia, China, Japan, Singapore and South Korea and the key reasons for cultural engagement are: cultural exchange, creative development, cultural diplomacy, business development and research.

The report makes a number of recommendations to improve cultural engagement with Asia. These include the development of long term, sustainable relationships rather than one-off projects; the provision of opportunities for two-way exchange and reciprocity in projects; building individual and organizational capacity and knowledge; coordination of opportunities for peer to peer networking and the provision of quality information and advice, including documentation about opportunities, logistics and experiences. The report also recommends a stronger leadership and advocacy role at the political, bureaucratic and key agency level to promote the ‘value’ of cultural engagement with Asia to other areas of government, business and the broader community. It also highlights the need to invest in research on Asia-Australia cultural engagement and capability to ensure Australia is at the forefront of best practice in this field.

A ‘moment of opportunity’: recent international reviews of cultural exchange policy
Several key international reports have also examined the issue of international cultural exchange and its role in the new global context. These reports analyse recent developments in cultural exchange and go some way to proposing new models for consideration.

Salzburg Global Seminar and the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation 2012
In April / May 2012 the Salzburg Global Seminar and the Robert Stirling Clark Foundation held a seminar on Public and Private Cultural Exchange – Based Diplomacy: New models for the 21st Century. This seminar commissioned scholarly papers and a conference that examined what it termed ‘a moment of opportunity… an auspicious moment in the evolution of international cultural engagement….there is a palpable sense of opportunity in the field. The tone and texture of cultural discourse, the range of included voices in creative practices, the organisational and technological infrastructure for conducting transnational cultural exchanges, are all undergoing a sea-change – and generally for the better’ (Salzburg Global Seminar 2012: 5).

The seminar noted the implications of the shifting global power base as a key feature in defining a new framework for cultural exchange stating that ‘accelerated industrialization and economic integration, in particular in East and South Asia, the gulf and Latin America, have created a new global environment for cultural engagement’ (Salzburg Global Seminar, 2012:10). It identified that ‘successful policy … demands diversity, autonomy, the cultivation of local artist and practitioner networks, and a considerable amount of trust in local civil society and private sector partners’. Likewise, results take time, and cannot necessarily be measured by quantitative evaluation metrics and should be detached from ideology: ‘The best propaganda is no
This latter point can be demonstrated by the strength of the Goethe Institute programs that deliberately do not promote ‘German’ culture and yet generate wide respect for its cultural engagement, precisely because it doesn’t engage in nation-state marketing, preferring instead to support local cultural initiatives. The report argues that good exchange builds lasting relationships, not one-off projects; have follow up and are collaborative. ‘The ‘curatorial authority’ that Western countries had enjoyed in defining the terms of cultural interchange is giving way to more complex relationships that are, by design, equally weighted and reciprocal’ (Salzburg Global Seminar 2012: 11).

The report notes a number of challenges to improving cultural exchange practices and programs including out dated legacy systems for transacting global cultural exchanges; inadequate documentation of the value of international engagement and the absence of strategic communication and coordination among participants. It also outlined various areas of opportunity including collaborating to provide better education and training for the general public as well as arts professionals with regard to arts engagement; generating appropriate resources for developing trans-national partnerships among arts professionals; supporting strategic leadership in the field through improved communication and coordination; developing research instruments to measure the impacts of cultural engagement and making use of new technologies to facilitate cross-border communication, exchanges and artistic collaborations.

British Council Report 2013
A recently released paper commissioned by the British Council, Influence and Attraction: Culture and the Race for Soft Power in the 21st Century (Holden 2013) examined current data and research in the field of international cultural relations and international diplomacy. It concluded that ‘a new era of international cultural relations is dawning, where in the West, the old model of cultural display is giving way to a more nuanced understanding of culture as an arena of exchange and mutual learning. As the rationale shifts, and the technological capabilities change, we can expect to see innovation in cultural relations’ (Holden 2013: 34).

The report outlined six principles that should inform governments’ role in developing a new framework for international cultural relations:

- Create conditions for broad and deep cultural exchange to flourish – because peer-to-peer exchange is more likely to generate trust
- Work with commercial and third sector initiatives – because it encourages innovation and decreases reliance on public funds
- Adopt a mix of traditional and digital strategies – because it is cost-effective and responds to increasing technological sophistication
- Pay as much attention to inward-facing as they do to outward-facing cultural relations – because that will help to develop a culturally literate and globally aware population
- Support cultural exchange through independent, autonomous agencies – because direct government involvement invites suspicion and hostility
- Embrace long-term relationship building instead of short-term transactional and instrumental thinking – because it is more effective.

Whilst neither of these reports is based on specific data surveys of artists or arts organisations and indeed both comment on the lack of data, they draw similar conclusions on the future issues and challenges for international cultural engagement. Their recommendations are also remarkably consistent with those derived from the Asialink Arts and Arts Victoria report. This ‘independent’ correlation should provide some additional assurance as to the veracity and robustness of the outcomes and recommendations of this report. Taken together, one might expect that the data and conclusions might result in a re-appraisal of the rationales, models and methods of...
A Cultural Policy Moment Redux: Mapping the New Models

Australia’s key cultural policy moment was in the mid ‘nineties with the launch of the first national cultural policy *Creative Nation* (1994) and the Victorian Government’s arts policy, *Arts 21* (1994). At that time, the ‘moment’ was driven from the top down with the policy agencies shaping the agenda for ‘the field’ which then adopted the new frameworks and reshaped their missions and agendas. These policies represented a radical transformation in that they were both based on the application of new business models to the cultural sector. More specifically they were influenced by the translation of Porter’s ‘Value Chain’ (Porter, 1985) to the cultural sector. This radically revised the potential for policy interventions in the arts and cultural sector from previously ‘supply’ or product focused policies (primarily grants to artists), to ‘demand’ side policies (with a focus on audience development, marketing and distribution).

This business or industry based approach affected or infected the cultural policy framework and funding agency programs nationally and through most states, particularly with the enthusiastic adoption of strategic and business planning models with their attendant key performance indicators, outputs, and outcomes, targets and milestones. The last fifteen years has seen ‘Western Management 101’ writ large across the Australian cultural landscape. This is unsurprising given the influence of market oriented, efficiency focused ‘new public management’ models on most western bureaucracies throughout the ‘eighties and ‘nineties (Ferlie, Ashburner, Fitzgerald & Pettigrew, 1996). For the most part Australian arts organisations adapted to the new ‘business model’ agenda and requirements intelligently and enthusiastically – and certainly delivered many benefits with a knowledge of corporate governance, budgeting and business plans providing the necessary information base to support their operations, take artistic risks, build audiences and diversify income - at least to date.

However, I consider that there are two caveats on the current effectiveness of this approach: (i) business practices themselves have changed in the intervening period; and (ii) the rise of Asia may require a rethink of what are predominantly western management models. If the sector and government does not respond accordingly our current model of corporate management in the arts may in fact become a straightjacket, hindering the adaptability and flexibility of cultural organisations and artists required for a different time and a new world.

The reality is that business and the world moved on about ten years ago, but it is not clear that some of our cultural policy and funding agencies noticed! The twenty to thirty pages, three to five year corporate and strategic plans are now much less relevant to many businesses in today’s fast changing world. Certainly a business plan is required, but the general rule is that if you can’t fit it on one page, no one will read it. Likewise, much greater flexibility is required to respond to a fast changing global environment and opportunities as they evolve.

A reshaping of global economic, political, social and cultural power has occurred as a result of the rise of Asia. Our western models are not necessarily relevant. The mindset of a straight-line linear equation between an input and output (or outcome), predicted in advance with an identified target measured by a key performance indicator is not necessarily the most effective way of developing strong cultural relationships, particularly in Asia. The perspective that has been conveyed in various contexts can be distilled as “why would you bother doing something, particularly as a creative project, if you already know the outcome?” Moreover, working in Asia requires trust, the development of long term relationships, partnerships and reciprocity, not simply a desire to deliver your product to a new market in the terms of our transactional culture. These insights and findings, highlighted by both specific research data and in the international literature, are also reinforced by contemporary business perspectives on working in Asia, with comments such as: ‘we need people that understand how to do business in Asia, how to build relationships, how to work effectively in what is a cultural exchange.'
Asialink Arts recently trialled a new ‘research’ based model for developing a long term cultural engagement strategy with India that was predicated on the search for common ground to build enduring relationships based on the principles of partnership, collaboration and reciprocity (Alway, 2012). From the initial research visit in early 2011, a diverse range of distinct, but often linked and cumulative projects have evolved over the last three years. Most of these projects or ‘outcomes’ could not have been predicted in advance as were only possible because of the relationships and trust that developed between artists, curators, producers and organisations over time. As such, in assessing ‘value’ the projects were difficult to define within a traditional corporate framework. Instead, Asialink Arts has experimented with a form of ‘concept-mapping’ (Novak and Canas, 2008) as a tool for documenting and tracking the ‘value’ and outcomes of the engagement strategy. By tracking the network of projects that eventuate, and documenting the associated funding that is subsequently leveraged, it is also possible to develop a metric based ‘return on investment’. Whilst the use of concept mapping for documenting new models of cultural engagement is only in the preliminary stages, it does seem to be more appropriately aligned to the non-linear and evolutionary premise of the research / relationship engagement model. Asialink Arts will be undertaking further research and testing of its potential.

Conclusion
Given the increasing importance of Asia and the encouragement of governments to go forth and seek new fertile ground for ‘our stories’, if we are to be ‘successful’ in this, I would argue that we have to change our ‘mind-set’. Policy makers and funding bodies may need to review current models of international engagement that require specification of project outcomes many months, if not years, in advance of the project actually starting. Ironically and with some symmetry, the emergent paradigm to work effectively in the new ‘cultural policy moment’ that is Asia, will require a re-evaluation and inversion of some of the key assumptions and concepts derived from business and ‘new public management’ that underpinned many of the initiatives of the first ‘cultural policy moment’ of the mid-nineties. Likewise, in a reversal of the government led agenda of the cultural policy moment of the nineties, it is clear from recent research that the ‘Asia’ cultural policy moment is being driven from the bottom up: by the artists and organisations themselves.

Endnotes:
i. The term ‘cultural policy moment’ referring to significant policies and events in cultural policy in Australia during the 1990’s was first used by Stevenson, (2000: 12).
ii. There have been some calls for the establishment of a single agency to coordinate Australia’s international cultural engagement (Carroll and Gantner 2012)
iii. The cultural sector was not alone in this as there was no committed budget to implement any of the strategies although a number of commitments were subsequently announced including the Australia Awards, Lowy Institute funding and funding for a National Centre for Asia Capability based at Asialink.
iv. The Review of the Australia Council was completed by management consultants Gabrielle Trainor and Angus James in May 2012.
v. PWC Melbourne Institute Asialink Index 2012 and PWC Melbourne Institute Asialink Index: ANZ Services Report 2012. These annual indexes measure Australia’s engagement with Asia across a range of key components including, trade, investment, education, tourism, migration, humanitarian assistance, transport, finance and business services.
vi. The term ‘new public management’ (NPM) was proposed by Hood, C. (1991).

References


