

ROUNDTABLE

The Bay Area at heart of cultural revival

Region's similarities in linguistics, culture will help achieve arts, innovation hub dream, experts say

By **LUO WEITENG** in Hong Kong and **CHAI HUA** in Shenzhen

With the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area gearing itself up as a mecca for arts and culture, the vibrant region, with an open mind, creative thinking, great respect for traditional cultures and an in-depth understanding of its history, is at the forefront of the culture-led, innovation-driven urban renaissance.

The views were espoused by experts at the China Daily Asia Leadership Roundtable in Hong Kong on Tuesday. The event was held as part of the two-day Greater Bay Area Cultural Heritage and Creative Innovation Conference, themed "Establishing the Cultural and Creative Nexus for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area".

A 20-page development road map through 2035 unveiled by China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism in December last year bolstered the nation's vision of catapulting the Greater Bay Area into an arts and culture destination.

Han Wangxi, director of the Shenzhen Innovative and Creative Design Development Office, emphasized the significance of showing great respect for traditional Chinese cultures, based on the undertakings and goals of building shared cultural values.

The Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions, along with nine Guangdong cities in the Greater Bay Area cluster, should be further connected through minds and souls, taking advantage of their cultural and linguistic similarities, he said.

Equal importance should be attached to the concept that "culture is mobile". "The mobility of culture is the innovation of culture. As we're on the cusp of great cultural change, Shenzhen is exactly an innovation-driven city. At the heart of Shenzhen's culture making is the spirit of innovation," Han said.

He also highlighted the increased collaboration between Shenzhen and Hong Kong in the Greater Bay Area in creating an inclusive and diversified regional culture.

"It used to be said that the Greater Bay Area has no history. But I've discovered from the Nantou City project that such an impression is wrong. It's just that we had not paid adequate attention to this aspect before," Freeman Lau Siu-hong, secretary-general of the Hong Kong Federation of Design Associations, told the conference.

Nantou City, located in downtown Shenzhen, has a history of more than 1,700 years and is believed to be the origin of the southern Guangdong metropolis. However, it had been neglected in the past, with so many historical landmarks and fortifications there standing in the

midst of residential buildings housing migrant workers.

In fact, many Hong Kong people also hail from this location, Lau said. The Shenzhen government started a project to renovate Nantou in 2019, and Lau was invited to participate. After an in-depth study of Nantou's history and culture, he found the place full of development potential for cross-border design and creative cooperation.

Nantou City is now home to an array of renowned traditional Cantonese cuisine brands, exhibition and art studios, fashion shops and bookstores from both Guangdong province and Hong Kong.

Many Hong Kong designers, Lau said, have opened studios in Nantou after learning about its history and environment. Shared history and cultural heritage have formed a solid bond for the joint development of cross-border cultural and creative industries, he said.

Like Nantou City, many other places in the Greater Bay Area are waiting to be explored, including Chung Ying Street, which is wedged between Shenzhen and Hong Kong, Lau said.

Hong Kong-born Frankie Lui, founder of Atelier Global, has spent his whole working life in the Greater Bay Area carving out a path for his career as an architect.

"Architecture is a special form of medium. It's a kind of culture in itself and the carrier of culture at one and the same time," he said.

Citing two of his projects — Shenzhen Longhua Book City and the Master's Art Museum located between Shenzhen and Dongguan — as vivid examples, Lui demonstrated how traditional cultural and human elements can be weaved into modern architecture.

Xing Lili, founder of gambiered Guangdong silk brand Jancho, shared her experience in applying traditional crafts in modern times.

Gambiered Guangdong silk is a national intangible cultural heritage, using handmade, natural materials and complex techniques, but it's gradually fading away from the global fashion stage. "We've tried to preserve Chinese culture and weave in contemporary elements," she said.

Within five years, the brand has become a leading couture label that



Freeman Lau Siu-hong (center), secretary-general of the Hong Kong Federation of Design Associations, shares his insights with other panelists at a roundtable themed "Establishing the Cultural and Creative Nexus for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area" on Tuesday. PHOTOS BY EDMOND TANG / CHINA DAILY

has won a string of awards, including the Shenzhen Global Design Award.

Patrick Mok Kin-wai, an assistant professor in the Department of Art and Design at the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, said kung fu is also a significant element of Cantonese culture, citing how martial arts has integrated with Chinese dance to create a modern performance.

"We also make use of virtual reality to capture the fast motions in a show named Converge," said Mok, adding that the Greater Bay Area should encourage diversified development of multiple domains, like the special market of dancing performance.

Over the decades, the Pearl River Delta has seen the most rapid urban expansion in human history — a predominantly agricultural region being transformed into the world's "largest continuous city".

As the Greater Bay Area is seen as one of the country's most notable urbanization initiatives, Chin-ee Ong, associate professor at the School of Tourism Management of Sun Yat-sen University, said it's important to strike a balance between development, innovation and cultural preservation.

Contact the writers at sophia@chinadailyhk.com

Hong Kong must reshape its cultural soft power, says Simon Ho

By **CHAI HUA** in Shenzhen grace@chinadailyhk.com

Hong Kong was once one of the largest export economies for cultural products, but its impact on the cultural and creative industry is much lower now, and it needs to reflect on how to reshape its cultural soft power, said Simon Ho Shun-man, president of the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong.

He stressed that Hong Kong desperately needs more art and cultural development because the industry is one of the fastest developing sectors with much potential for an economic and social impact.

The industry is a key force to drive social cohesion while also being an important way to drive the diversification of the city's economic structure, Ho said.

In addition, the professor said, the cultural and creative industry can play a pivotal role in the development of economic strength because it can be less labor and capital intensive, and the startup costs in the domain are affordable to many young people.

In the 1980s, Hong Kong established a strong popular cultural industry, but now it needs a reboot, Ho said, suggesting that the Hong Kong authorities identify culture as a core factor to be considered by all policy bureaus, a principle which can help raise the metropolis's cultural soft power again and reshape the image of Hong Kong as an international cultural art center.

Considering similar languages,



Simon Ho Shun-man, president of the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, speaks at the forum.

cultures, folk customs and geographical proximity, he is advocating for Hong Kong to jointly explore the cultural heritage and creative resources with other cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

In the national 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) outline, it was proposed for the first time to support the development of Hong Kong into a communication and exchange center of Chinese and international culture and art.

In the blueprint for the development of the Greater Bay Area, the central government also encourages fully leveraging the strengths and expertise of Hong Kong talent in the film and television industries, and supports Hong Kong in its development into an exposition hub for television and film.

The area shares a huge amount of material and non-material

cultural heritage, such as Lingnan culture on Cantonese operas, kung fu, lion dancing, paintings, TV series, and films.

Lingnan culture is a significant component of Cantonese culture, most notably in food, art and architecture, and Cantonese opera.

However, Ho found there have been few cross-border collaborations in the sector, joint developments of creative and cultural content and associated intellectual properties, while current collaborations mainly rely on business entities.

He said, "We need to build up a strong overarching executive body to coordinate the cultural and creative resources of the three regions."

As Hong Kong's cultural and creative industry faces challenges such as high rents, a shortage of venues, and relatively small markets, he suggested launching cross-border incentive policies on purchasing, taxation and land resources and establishing a common platform for cultural intellectual properties in the Greater Bay Area.

Ho said that the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong has been cooperating with many partner institutions in Guangdong province, including student exchanges and other joint projects, and added that the university established the Greater Bay Area Innovation Centre in 2019 to promote and assist cross-border innovations and business startups in the Greater Bay Area.

HKSAR urged to integrate into GBA to break through constraints

By **ZHOU MO** in Shenzhen sally@chinadailyhk.com

Hong Kong should capitalize on the vast Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area market to break through the limitations facing its cultural and creative development and seek better growth of the industry, officials and scholars said on Tuesday.

They made the call at the Greater Bay Area Cultural Heritage and Creative Innovation Conference, jointly organized by the Department of Art and Design, the Centre for Greater China Studies of the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, and China Daily.

Hong Kong has advantages in a range of cultural and creative areas, including movies, TV, music, and design, and has great potential for development, said Bernard Chan Pak-li, Hong Kong under secretary

for commerce and economic development.

The city is home to more than 40,000 cultural and creative industry-related enterprises, with over 200,000 practitioners, Chan said, adding that the industry's added value has hit HK\$100 billion (\$12.9 billion), roughly 4 percent of the city's GDP.

However, a relatively small market size and shortage of land are hampering the industry's development, Chan noted.

"Therefore, Hong Kong should seek coordinated development with other cities in the Greater Bay Area," he said, adding that the 11-city cluster's rapid economic growth, affluent population and high demand for culture and art will bring big opportunities to Hong Kong's cultural and creative industry.

"As an important city in the Greater Bay Area with a vibrant, open and

creative environment, Hong Kong can play a key role of 'bringing in' and 'going out.' It not only can work together with mainland enterprises to explore overseas markets, but also can expand development space for its creative industry by integrating further into the mainland market," Chan said.

He added that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government is ramping up efforts to promote development of the industry through two special projects — the Film Development Fund and the CreateSmart Initiative. The aim is to provide support to startups and nurture talent, help businesses explore new markets, enhance the creative atmosphere in the city, and foster digital transformation of the industry, Chan said.

Chan's view were echoed by Simon Ho Shun-man, president of the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, who



Bernard Chan Pak-li, Hong Kong under secretary for commerce and economic development, talks to the audience at the panel.

also said that integration into the Greater Bay Area market is the solution to breaking through Hong Kong's constraints in the development of its cultural and creative industry.

Ho pointed out that cooperation among Guangdong province, Hong Kong and Macao in the field is "not

that much and deep" at the present time. "Government, private sector, schools and industry can take this opportunity to enhance cooperation and unleash our potential," he said.

Zhou Li, deputy editor-in-chief of China Daily Group and publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily Asia Pacific, said the Greater Bay Area has a special cultural ethos, which is developed from its unique conditions. The three parties in the area — Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao — share similarities in tradition and language, but have different economic systems and laws.

"Compared to (the time and effort invested in) urban construction, infrastructure and tech development, cultural construction of the Greater Bay Area could be a long expedition and constant efforts are needed," he said.

Zhou said there are three elements to be reckoned with when it comes to

cultural and creative development.

First, to be open to the world, assimilate the excellent culture and civilization from other places in the world; second, harness the benefits of technology and circumvent its drawbacks; third, hold dear to the idea of being human-centered, he said.

Tam Kwok-kan, dean of the School of Humanities and Social Science at the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, emphasized the importance of education in the development of a cultural and creative industry.

The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong attaches high importance to creative education and its integration with the industry, and it has set up new subjects over the past few years to support its development, he said.

"The industry is now focusing on proposing new disciplinary developments to coordinate the development of a cultural and creative industry in China and across Asia," he said.