

## Education



Daniel Chua, left, will head a new program to train 20 leaders next year to fill the void in cultural institutions in the city.

# Growing culture leaders

**Kenneth Lee** finds out how talent will be groomed in Hong Kong's new arts landscape

**I**N A CITY with the GDP of a small nation and few modern artists of world renown, a chorus of lament goes up about the lack of cultural activities and initiatives in Hong Kong. That's about to change. With HK\$21 billion earmarked for the West Kowloon Cultural District, the government plans to reinvigorate the local cultural scene with museums and art infrastructure. But aficionados of culture think what is sorely needed are cultural leaders to accompany the funds pouring into brick and mortar.

That's the primary argument by Daniel Chua Kwan Liang, head of humanities at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Hong Kong. Chua is also director of the Advanced Cultural Leadership Programme, or ACLP.

This inaugural program of a year's duration comprises a series of leadership experiences that inculcate knowledge and expertise from leading figures in the international art world. It aims to train 20 leaders next year to fill the void in cultural institutions in the city.

"I hear everyone complaining of a lack of leadership and too much bureaucracy," Chua said. At the same time, they mourn the lack of celebration of cultural beauty. "Hong Kong is actually very beautiful – it's a Cinderella. All we need is the prince to find the shoe in order to make Cinderella a princess."

The prince is Chua's program, which targets CEOs and senior management of arts organizations. It has four components: a leadership retreat which will pair the participants with big names in the art world; three four-day leadership courses; a series of workshops and lectures; and a project that will

articulate a new idea. "For something different, not just mere improvements – which Hong Kong is very good at – there needs to be transformative leadership," Chua said.

Transformative leadership isn't about getting from B to B+, but more about how to get from A to B, a qualitative leap and something new. And this requires new training.

"We expect culture to do a lot of things: to reinvigorate derelict areas in urban planning, give a sense of place or a sense of the past and heritage, and also to provide core values for society. Basically, we expect culture to make a large social impact. This requires training new leadership to do something different, and this is the motive for ACLP," he added.

The first program of its kind in Asia, ACLP is based on the Clore leadership program in London. The program, a two-year boot camp for curators and senior management in the art world, instructs participants on how to create, fund and establish cultural initiatives. Clore fellows include CEOs and artistic directors of Europe's leading museums and galleries.

HKU's program isn't about academic credentials, but about providing leaders with the necessary autonomy to realize their visions. "You don't want course credits, you want a new vision, and the ability to implement it," said Chua, adding that the program is dedicated to giving its participants inspiration, and the necessary skills to "make it happen."

Nor is the focus on quantity, as the program's interspersed modules make up a total time less than that of an average diploma or certificate course. It's more about intense personal coaching, an immediate injection of talent and expertise that Chua hopes will energize the current leaders in the cultural sector to greater and better things.

"Think about people that made a difference in your life. If you were to meet them face-to-face for 10 minutes, wouldn't it change your mindset radically? That's what this program aims to do. It's about impact and quality, not quantity of instruction."

In terms of teaching content, the program has some pretty impressive names attached. "This is my dream program and I have put together a dream team," Chua says.

Prominent culture scholars from Britain headline the program's international faculty. "In coming up with the program, I focused on two things: quality and delivery," Chua said.

For quality, he leveraged on the expertise from two leading brands, Hong Kong University and the Clore leadership program. The projected teacher-to-participant ratio is three to two, an unheard of number in institutionalized education today.

Although there will be a transfer of knowledge, Chua stresses that it's more about discussion and dialogue rather than a strict teacher-student relationship, given the expected participants' seniority and position. "And remember, it's not going to be just lectures but also lively discussion and debate."

In terms of delivery, Chua aims to equip leaders with the ability to carry out their visions. "The program is very practical. We're going to give participants the cutting edge in business and marketing knowledge to realize their dream." The program has signed on people like Benson Puah, CEO of The Esplanade and the National Arts Council in Singapore, and Daniel Tang Wing-cheung, founder of The China Club and Shanghai Tang.

Cultural leadership is like gardening, Chua said. "You have to cultivate it." With the West Kowloon Cultural District looming on the horizon, it seems a good time for Hong Kong to invest in creating leaders who will shape and "garden" Hong Kong's cultural produce.

"The West Kowloon Cultural District is going to create around 300 jobs. So the cultural sector is going to grow massively in the next couple of years. We need leaders who will channel energy and funds into creating something new for Hong Kong."

kenneth.lee@singtaonews.com