

Asian Culture Complex: a home for cultural diversity

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Introduction: the rise of culture cities

In the early 1990s, various attempts were made to create new urban development models as part of the efforts to improve the outdated and stagnated urban environment and economy after rapid industrialization. One of the attempts was to develop a culture city, which aimed to re-examine native urban characteristics including historical, cultural, and environmental elements of a city and connect the characteristics to urban development strategy.

Behind the emergence of culture cities exists a new economic paradigm called a 'knowledge economy', or a 'creative economy'. As the central axis of the economy has shifted to human capital, in particular knowledge and creativity of individuals, human resources with knowledge and creativity have been regarded as the driving force behind economic development. As a result, the competition to attract the so-called 'creative class' has been intensifying (Florida, 2002).

Under these circumstances, many cities have been actively taking advantage of culture and arts as a means to gain competitive advantages. As the quality of life in the urban environment has become the top priority of urban development policies, cities have recognized the need to promote local culture and arts activities. This has led to building new cultural and artistic facilities in many cities. In particular, after the City of Bilbao in Spain constructed the Guggenheim

Museum and made unprecedented economic progress, cities around the world followed the Bilbao example by building cultural and artistic facilities to promote economic revitalization. Korean cities were not an exception. They have been busy constructing large-scale performance arts centres, art galleries, and museums.

However, few culture cities that focused only on building artistic and cultural facilities achieved what they expected. As many cities invited world-famous architects to build large-scale cultural facilities, similar buildings were built in cities around the world, which ultimately failed to differentiate themselves from other cities. Also, many cities were so pre-occupied with building the facilities that they had no time and energy to develop good cultural programmes. Poor-quality artistic and cultural programmes attracted public criticism.

Today, software-oriented culture cities have been as an alternative to the existing hardware-oriented culture cities (Landry, 2000). Unlike hardware-oriented culture cities focusing only on building physical facilities, software-oriented culture cities strive to develop various cultural programmes using creative ideas.

The foundation for the software-oriented culture city model is the network. 'Network' has a lot of meanings but, in this case, it means an information channel to support communication among individuals. The network as an information channel facilitates information exchanges and mutual understanding among individuals, playing a role in driving innovation (Benner, 2003; Camagni, 1991; Cooke et al., 1997; Keeble et al., 1999; Maskell and Malmberg, 1999). While the existing hardware-oriented culture cities concentrate their efforts on constructing physical infrastructure, software-oriented culture cities strive to create an environment for mutual alliance and shared learning through networks to help invent creative cultural contents (Landry and Wood, 2003).

The Hub City of Asian Culture Project: a new model for network-based culture cities

The Hub City of Asian Culture Project, initiated in 2004, was designed to revitalize Gwangju, a relatively backward city in political and economic terms, as a culture and art city. Gwangju is a city with a population of 1.4 million located in the south-western part of the Korean Peninsula. It became a symbol of democracy and human rights after the 5.18 Democracy Movement in the 1980s. The project aims to make Gwangju, which overcame the scourges of Japanese colonial oppression, dictatorship and poverty using the power of citizens, a place for cultural alliances and exchanges among Asian countries. The ultimate goal of this project is to strengthen the creative energy and cultural capacity of

Korea as well as of other Asian countries.

In particular, the Asian Culture Complex (ACC) in Gwangju, which is scheduled to be completed by 2014, is the essential facility for the project. The ACC is different from existing cultural facilities, as the contents displayed in the ACC are based on networks connecting various forms of culture and arts, across the barriers of nationality, ethnicity and artistic genres.

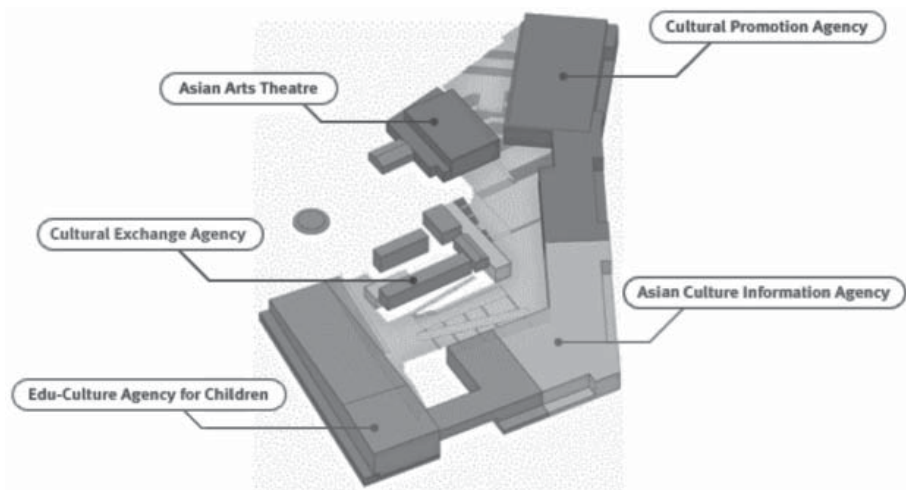
The Asian Culture Complex incorporates the concept of network, the foundation of the project, from the initial design phase. The ACC is a large-scale underground facility, spanning an area of 180 000 square metres. On the ground is a vast grass square, where buildings reminiscent of the 5.18 Democracy Movement are scattered around. This structure is designed to preserve the history of Gwangju and represent open communication among various peoples and countries.



A bird's-eye-view of the Asian Culture Complex

Under the square are the offices of five agencies: the Cultural Exchange Agency, the Asian Culture Information Agency, the Cultural Promotion Agency, the Asian Arts Theatre, and the Edu-Culture Agency for Children. All these organizations are connected to one another, creating a virtuous cycle. The Asian Culture Information Agency collects and studies raw data for creating arts and cultural works. The Cultural Exchange Agency establishes connections with artists and cultural institutions in Asia. The Cultural Promotion Agency utilizes the raw data from the Asian Culture Information Agency to create various content. The Edu-Culture Agency for Children develops exhibition programmes

for children by using content created by the Cultural Promotion Agency. The Asian Arts Theatre promotes creative activities based on collaboration among Asian countries in order to preserve, study, educate, create and appreciate culture and arts in Asia.



The Asian Culture Complex Facilities

Today, collaboration projects among cultural and artistic groups, such as residence programmes, are underway around the world, facilitating the accumulation of new information and knowledge. Regarding this, the ACC will be capable of promoting further innovation, as it ensures continuous information exchanges among Asians through communication and cooperation, regardless of nationalities or genres.

However, the most striking difference between exchanges and cooperation of the ACC and other similar activities is that the ACC not only facilitates information exchanges and shared learning, but also helps increase mutual understanding and trust, as it enables Asians with various backgrounds and experience to meet in person and have a dialogue. The mutual understanding and trust provides the framework, where Asians work together to explore 'Asian values' and ways to promote the co-prosperity of Asian countries through culture and arts.

The discovery and re-invention of Asian values sought by the ACC is a meaningful attempt to understand and express Asia from Asia's point of view, not from the West's point of view. Also, the attempt is very significant in that it lays the foundation for social, cultural and economic development by facilitating the understanding of different cultures and the building of friendly relations among Asians.

The Asian Arts Community: the discovery of Asian values through arts and cultural networks

The discovery and re-invention of Asian values sought by the Asian Culture Complex is carried out through the Asian Arts Community, an arts and cultural network project. While the existing networking activities of cultural and arts organizations have been limited to some parts of Asia, the Asian Arts Community expands the range of its network into the whole Asian region, in order to increase the understanding of the history of arts and culture of Asia and to promote Asian values around the world.

To this end, what is needed is a long-term and strategic approach, not just friendly relations among artists or short-term projects. The Asian Arts Community will be closely linked to the organizations within the ACC to study and develop content necessary for the ACC. The community plans to develop long-term collaboration models by area and region. It aims to collect and study Asian cultural works and carry out culture creation projects in its five business areas of traditional music, video, literature, banquet and dance, within the five regions of ASEAN, Central Asia, Arab, South Asia and Northeast Asia. It will develop a five-year plan for each region by 2014, when the ACC is due to be completed.

The Korea-ASEAN Traditional Music Community was the first of the five regional arts communities. It is designed to develop new cultural content through the traditional music of Korea and ten ASEAN countries. Following the three ASEAN-Korea Meetings on Cultural Collaboration Projects, including the first one in 2008, the ASEAN-Korea Traditional Orchestra consisting of 79 traditional instruments of Korea and ten ASEAN countries was established. The orchestra made its debut in celebrating the ASEAN-Korea Summit in 2009. With the theme of 'Asia Becoming One through Music', 80 musicians wearing splendid traditional costumes played traditional instruments of eleven Asian countries, creating the world's first Asian harmony.

The ASEAN-Korea Traditional Orchestra is the outcome of creative and shared work of Asian countries. It is the world's first orchestra consisting of Asian instruments only. In addition, it has created various by-products that can contribute to the research and development of Asian culture and arts. In particular, the orchestra helps re-examine hidden or forgotten traditional music in Asia through in-depth research into traditional music and instruments. This is significant in that it helps preserve Asian cultural diversity and discovers and shares Asian cultural assets. Information on traditional music in Asia collected through in-depth studies will be digitalized and stored at the Asian Culture Information Agency in the ACC. It will also be utilized as a sound source for composing new music, opening a new horizon in the cultural industry.

The Asian Arts Community is also significant in that it not only preserves, studies and promotes culture and arts, but also creates the intangible assets of dialogue and understanding among cultures, which would not be possible without exchanges and cooperation through networking.

The Central Asia-Korea Arts Community, the second regional arts community, started from a collaborative research into myths and folktales of Korea and Central Asia that had not been properly studied. Representatives of ministries in charge of cultural policy in Korea and Central Asian countries had two meetings in 2009 to explore ways to discover, preserve, re-create and appreciate the archetypes of Central Asian myths and folktales, which were disappearing. Currently, the community is in the process of establishing a collaborative research team consisting of experts in myths and folktales and digital archiving in Korea and Central Asian countries. If the research team is established, on-site investigations will be conducted to discover not only hidden stories in Korea and Central Asian countries but also traces of culture, history and arts within the tales. The archetypes of myths and folktales found in on-site investigations will be also digitalized and stored in the Asian Culture Information Agency at the ACC like the traditional music information and re-processed to be delivered to people around the world in various formats.

Starting in 2010, art communities between Korea, the Arab world and South Asia are being established. As the ASEAN-Korea Traditional Orchestra and the collaborative research into myths and folktales of Korea and Central Asia show, the Asian Arts Community represents 'Asia becoming one through culture and arts'. Today, cultural policies of countries around the world focus on stimulating economic growth using culture and arts. In line with this, the Asian Arts Community has three objectives: contributing to the development of culture and arts through creative works based on convergence and collaboration among genres; promoting economic development with one-source multi-use projects closely linked to the archetypes of culture and art; enhancing mutual understanding and peace through multicultural exchanges.

Policy recommendations

- **Establishing a cultural information network led by citizens**

Even though the Hub City of Asian Culture Project and the Asian Culture Complex are new cultural development models that support information exchanges and creative activities based on networking, their focus is still on information exchanges among experts under the leadership of the government. In this respect, a variety of ways to promote participation of citizens, who are the people that appreciate Asian culture and arts, are needed.

One of the solutions is to build a foundation for cultural governance. It is planned that a culture city consultative body consisting of civil society, universities, businesses and local governments is established to help citizens participate in the process of creating and operating culture cities. This plan is meaningful in that it does not support hierarchy, but helps citizens and local governments to participate in operating a city as equal partners. It is expected that a communication channel to directly deliver the voices of citizens to the government will be opened to help local governments reflect the various ideas of citizens in their policies, which will lead to creation of competitive and differentiating cultural content.

International correspondents managed by the Office for the Hub City of Asian Culture Project have collected information on culture and arts around the world and sent the information to the office. They have played an essential role as a citizen-based information network to ensure that the information is used in policies of the Hub City of Asian Culture Project and the ACC. Currently, a total of 44 international correspondents in 20 countries, including seven foreigners, are collecting cultural information. It is expected that more correspondents will be dispatched to more cities and countries. In the age of Web 2.0, information and knowledge collected online will play a more important role. Therefore, the office plans to expand its online information network by attracting overseas bloggers and opening a mega-blog that will collect all information on culture cities and culture and arts organizations around the world.

• Opening various information exchange channels

Until now, the ACC has focused its exchange programmes on culture and arts organizations and experts only. However, if it expands its horizons and establishes communication channels with government organizations, international organizations and the public, it will be able to broaden the foundation for accumulating information and knowledge.

Good examples of cooperation between the ACC and international organizations are various cooperation programmes between the ACC and UNESCO. Currently, the ACC has carried out projects related to the Central Asia-Korea Art Community in collaboration with the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU) and built a database on cultural policies in cooperation with the Asia-Pacific Regional Centre of the Culturelink Network (APRCN) in order to collect content for the Asian Culture Information Agency at the ACC. Many assess that these collaborative projects have created synergy, as the ACC and UNESCO share human resources, information and know-how.

The ACC also plans to cooperate with other international organizations including the World Tourism Organization and the Global Human Rights Organization in various ways in order to deal with common issues such as preservation of cultural heritage and protection of human rights. In addition, it has continuously pursued projects to contact and cooperate with foreign councils in Korea and discussed ways to establish an international week for each Asian city to reinforce exchanges and cooperation with leading culture cities in Asia.

So far, the office has conducted its networking activities mostly offline. However, it plans to expand its networking activities into online. Currently, it is using online activities to support the UNESCO APRCCN and establish the Digital Archive for Asian arts and cultural assets. The UNESCO APRCCN is expected to serve as the centre of the online network of cultural policy makers and researchers in the Asia-Pacific region based on the database of cultural policies, cultural properties, culture and art groups (artists), and culture cities. In addition, the Digital Archive for Asian cultural assets will collect and store Asia's cultural resources, and disclose them online, serving as a powerhouse for promoting studies on Asian cultures and creative activities using the archetypes of Asian cultures.

Conclusion:

Hub City of Asian Culture – Asia's cultural window to the world

Various peoples, languages, cultures and arts with a long history co-exist in Asia, where the world's first civilization emerged. In the process of colonization by the West and subsequent modernization, Asian values have been distorted and compromised. In the age of a knowledge economy and creative economy, the Hub City of Asian Culture Project aims to highlight Asian culture and arts, which have been so far neglected, and design a new future using Asian culture and arts as the driving force for regeneration of regions, cities and countries. To make this project a success, what is required is trust built through exchanges among countries and the accumulation of information and knowledge. To this end, it is essential to create a sense of community and trust based on the networking of countries not only in Asia but also in the world.

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