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Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)

1. Project Title:

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Creative Industries in Flux: A Critical Investigation into the Challenges, Agency and Potential of Cultural and Creative Workers in Hong Kong

驟變中的創意產業：對香港文化及創意勞工所遭遇挑戰、代理及潛力問題之批判性研究

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December 2017
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(a) Executive Summary

(1) Abstract of the research

The cultural and creative industries (CCI) have proven to be a driving force of economic growth in today’s globalized economy with significant developmental potential. In light of the rising importance of the “knowledge economy”, the SAR government has in the past decade emphasized creative industry development as a new and significant pillar of the Hong Kong economy, which can be seen through extensive coverage of its consistent inclusion in annual policy addresses and continual allocation of budgets since 1999. With an annual growth rate of 9.4% (compared to 5.6% of general growth), the creative industry contributed 4.9% to the GDP in Hong Kong in 2012. From 2011 to 2012, the GDP generated by the creative industry increased by 9.2% to HK$9.78 billion, and sustains approximately 200,000 creative jobs across a range of sectors from media, fashion to the animation industry. The future of Hong Kong’s creative industries seems to have great potential for economic growth, cultural and creative development and recognition, and generating jobs given the attraction to creative careers that are increasingly attracting a considerable amount of young, educated individuals entering these occupational fields.

Beneath this ideological optimism, however, the real labour conditions facing creative workers globally often contradict popular assumptions. Cultural industries scholars Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010: 18) have observed that the realities of this creative sector are not so positive as large proportions of creative industry workers often struggle with the levels and quality of work in addition to a lack of secure career progression. These problems appear to reside in feelings of “self-exploitation”, a blurring of work and leisure, feelings of isolation and anxiety, lack of solidarity, autonomy, job security plus a perceived lack of social recognition (Gill 2002; Ross 2003; Ngai, Chan and Yuen 2014; Chan, Krainer, Diehl, Terlutter & Huang 2015; Tse 2015).

There is a critical need to undertake a rigorous qualitative investigation into the creative industries policy discourse aiming to strengthen the local creative economy and to match this up with the actual experiences and working conditions of creative workers, in addition to ensuring a resulting positive impact on a sustainable future for the creative industries to ensure a competitive advantage for Hong Kong. This project is expected to inform a direction for this rapidly evolving creative business environment, and signal the most appropriate government policy response to ensure more equitable creative labour management in the interests of assuring secure employment and economic growth in the interests of positioning Hong Kong as a leading creative hub. By focusing on three selected industries – public relations and advertising, television and print media, qualitative research methodology, including in-depth interviews, our research has elicited ethnographic narratives of work experiences, to generate research data for analysis resulting in future policy recommendations.
摘要

在今天全球化经济体系中，文化和创意产业已被证实为推动经济发展的重要力量。而于过去十年间，随着「知识经济」理念的广泛传播，香港特区政府极力建创意产业在本地经济发展中所起之重要支撑地位——这自1999年以来，政府在年度施政报告对其重要性的阐述和持续对其作财政预算拨款尤可看出。2012年，创意产业以9.4%的增长率（相比综合经济增长率5.6%）为香港GDP作出4.9%的贡献。

2012年，创意产业以总值79.8亿港元，对香港GDP总额贡献增至9.2%，并为社会提供了逾20万就业职位，涉及行业横跨媒体、时尚界、动漫工业等。表面看来，创意产业为文创劳工提供良好工作环境，每年均能吸引大量受过高等教育的年轻一代投身相关领域。因此，香港创意产业在推动经济发展和提供就业机会上似乎有广阔的发展空间。

然而，在普遍被看好的乐观形势下，文创劳工的真实工作环境与大众普遍认为的情形却大相径庭。如著名文化产业学者Hesmondhalgh与Baker（2010：18）所述，创意产业内部长期的的真实情况并不乐观，大批文创劳工依然在工作的层次和质素问题上挣扎。文创劳工正不自觉地经历著「自我剥削」，工作与生活之间的界限越见模糊，而且经常感到孤立、焦虑、缺乏团结合与工作自由，情绪常有失业危机和缺乏社会认同感所影响——而这些问题的严重程度可见一斑（Gill 2002; Ross 2003; Ngai, Chan and Yuen 2014; Chan, Krainer, Diehl, Terlutter & Huang 2015; Tse 2015）。

就以上种种，我们认为当务之急乃推行一系列能够深入且谨慎地探究本地创意产业发展的政策论述之研究，除了认真审视本地文创劳工的真实工作状况之余，亦为未来创意产业之可持续发展献策。此项目旨在瞬息万变的商业环境与资讯中归纳出发展方向，令政府能恰当地权衡各方利益，作出最公正的创意产业劳工管理政策回应。透过聚焦三大创意产业：公关及广告业、电视工业及印刷媒体工业，研究团队以各种定性研究方法（包括深访访问）细心搜集、梳理及分析有关从业员之日常工作细腻体验，继而作为日后策划有关政策时之重要参考资料。
Layman’s summary on policy implications and recommendations

The research will significantly benefit future policy developments for the cultural and creative industries in Hong Kong by highlighting and aligning existing problems experienced by industry workers with appropriate social and economic policies to ameliorate these perceived issues as a way of making the most of creative talent as a driver for employment and economic growth. Currently, there is a mismatch between existing policies and the needs and experiences of industry workers. First, the government has been overly focused on injecting funding into the development of infrastructural projects that may not necessarily guarantee the successful facilitation of creative activities or the ensured employment of creative personnel. Second, these existing initiatives do not effectively synchronize workers’ skill sets with the demands of the market, calling for a reprogramming of training schemes that can better accommodate the creative sector operating under the increasing influence of digital media. Third, the existing quantitative findings at a macro level do not address the internal problems of these creative industries and their workers in such areas as prevailing labour conditions, which may result in the formulation of sub-optimal policies.

In light of the above concerns, the study generated in-depth, qualitative findings from an ethnographic study of selected representative creative industries to complement previous quantitative research focused on deriving economic value from the creative industry sector. A detailed ethnographic study of these industries drawing upon the lived and subjective experiences of creative workers identifies areas to assist in formulating policies of higher relevance and applicability to the Hong Kong creative workforce. By investigating the professional and social lives of creative industry workers, crucial structural measures may be suggested, such as those that mitigate the exploitative nature of working conditions as a way of retaining a substantial and capable pool of creative labour, while at the same time ensuring that these industries in the creative sectors fulfil their societal, cultural and economic capabilities, in line with global creative industry policy benchmarks.

Moreover, the study critically analyses existing training schemes to optimize the industries’ investment in skilled human resources aligned with the interests of nurturing the creative worker and enabling them to attain their full potential. The current approach to training has produced an excess of creative professionals at certain levels that has tended to aggravate the saturation of the creative workforce. Consequently, the research aims to foster more strategic development of the creative workforce through policy development to stabilize creative labour, optimize on its development and prevent the mass migration of creative talent.

The study also presents an accurate view of the everyday realities of working in the creative sector from the viewpoint of employees as a way of correcting optimism about the sector as determined by the macro, quantitative research data. Capturing insider views from a range of creative workers on the effects of current policies, particularly those regarding educational and training schemes, will foster a greater coherence between the government and this industry sector in fine-tuning existing initiatives, as well as identifying potential non-governmental and private sector support and strategic partnerships for future development of the sector.

In terms of public policy implications emerging from this study, some of the many suggestions that the government and commercial organizations can implement to support the Hong Kong creative industries and enhance worker security are, for instance, developing information sharing cross-sectoral networks, government-supported
educational schemes, on-the-job training, promotion of self-regulation executed by professional associations, subsidies/incubation programs for the optimization of the organizational structure, and workflow development through collaboration with professional organizations, or even as Hesmondhalgh & Baker (2011: 59) suggest, forming alliances across occupational groups. These policy recommendations can be divided into two strands – data mapping and information about the creative sector dissemination and education and training to develop and nurture creative talent. All of the recommended policy directions rely on the close collaboration of government and industry, founded on public and private partnerships linking up and working in the interests of networks of stakeholders including workers (pre-entry; new entry and longer term professionals), educators and employers.

Firstly, industry and government should work together in mapping the creative sector in terms of a needs analysis identifying and disseminating the latest data on the sector for a range of stakeholders. In addition, this on-going mapping exercise would enable the information gaps that exist that potentially might hinder the sector to realise its full potential. Secondly, higher education institutions teaching creative industries subjects and preparing students for work in these sectors could work more closely with these industries in understanding their needs. In addition, industry representatives would benefit from a closer association with emerging generations and their new skills and outlooks. Also, professional associations could work in closer collaboration with government departments to creatively re-work the meaning and practice of creative work. This could be done by co-developing training schemes in emerging skills such as digital technology, or professional certification programmes to validate and systematise the work of these organisations and the value of the creative worker.

In this way, the real value of creative work could be more universally understood with investments made in the training of upcoming creative workers in more relevant work and life-skills, thereby enabling them to attain and sustain a work-life balance resulting in a less precarious workplace culture in the future.
透過強調和調整創意行業工作者在現實中所遇到的難題，並採取適當的社會和經濟政策以改善這些問題，從而讓創意人才能夠充分將其能力轉化成就業和經濟增長的動力，這項研究將為未來針對香港文化創意產業的政策發展帶來顯著的好處。目前，現行政策與行業工作者的需求和現實經驗不符。首先，政府過分注重資金注入基建項目的開發，但此未必能保證創意活動能夠順利進行或保障創意人才的就業安穩。其次，這些現有的倡議項目並不能有效地將工人的技能與市場真正需求同步化，政府或需要重新規劃培訓計劃，以使有關創意人員更能適應及有效處理受數碼媒體日益增長影響的日常運作。第三，現有對文化創意產業過份正面的宏觀及量化分析，並沒有指出及解決一眾創意產業及其勞工當前所面對的严峻內部問題及勞動困難狀況，這可能導致政府只能制定出次優文化政策。

鑑於以上種種考慮，本研究特色在於透過民族志方式，選取具代表性的創意產業作為研究目標，繼而產生較深入的定性研究結果，以補充過去大部份以創意產業所衍生出來的經濟價值作為焦點的定量研究。透過對這些行業進行詳細的民族志研究，並根據創意勞工們的真實生活和主觀經驗，我們的研究結果有助於政府制定更具針對性和適用於香港創意人才的文政策。通過調查文創工業勞工的職業生涯和社交生活，我們可以提出一些更重要的結構性措施，例如如何減少其工作中的剝削條件，以此來保留一群為數不少、有能力的創意勞動力者，同時確保創意產業跟從並符合全球創意產業政策基準，使勞工能夠發揮其潛力，讓創意產業在社會、文化及經濟各方面作出貢獻。

此外，本研究亦對現有培訓方案進行批判性分析，務求使創意行業對培訓人才的資源投放策略得以改良，並從培育創意工作者的利益層面出發，使他們充分發揮潛能。另外，目前的教育培訓方針亦產生了過多的創意專業人才，加劇了特定創意勞動人口飽和。因此，本研究旨在通過政策制定促進創意勞動力的策略性發展，穩定創意勞動力，優化發展，防止創意人才大規模流動及流失。

正當社會上廣泛流傳著一種以宏觀角度、定量研究數據展現出來的創意工業前景樂觀之議論，這項研究提供了一個更準確的觀點，讓大眾知悉創意工業日常工作之現實狀況。從行內各種創意勞工的觀點出發，了解當前政策（特別是有關教育和培訓計劃）對其真實影響，將會促使政府和行業之間有更好的協調，促使政府和私營部門的相互支持和建立夥伴關係，為未來策略性發展作出貢獻。

就制定公共政策而言，本研究建議政府和有關商業機構可以落實一些可行的合作方案支持創意產業及提高創意勞動穩定性，例如：政府支持的教育計劃、在職培訓、推動職業聯盟自律、優化組織結構的補貼/培育計劃、通過與專業組織合作的工作流程發展等，甚至如Hesmondhalgh & Baker（2011：59）所提出：「組建跨職業的工會聯盟群體。」這些政策建議大致可以分為兩大方向——創意行業數據脈絡和資訊之傳播，以及教育和培訓創意人才。而所有建議政策方向，均建基於政府和工業之間的密切合作，強調以公/私營夥伴關係以連繫一眾有關持份者【包括工人（未入行、新入行和行內長期專業人士）、教育者和僱主】並以其利益出發。

首先，創意工業和政府應該共同合作，找出並分析有關創意行業次最新資料與需求，並向一眾利益相關者發放有關資訊。此外，該持續進行的分析活動有助填補可能阻礙創意行業實踐其潛力的資訊缺口。其次，開設有關創意產業課程和培育學生投身有關工作之高等教機構，需要更緊密地和這些行業合作，並瞭解他們的需求。行業代表應與新一代人員密切聯繫，亦更理解他們的新技能和願景，並從中受益。此外，專業協會應和政府部門密切合作
，以嶄新方法重新肯定創意工作的意義和實踐。透過共同開發培訓計劃（例如數碼科技應用知識、專業認證文憑），更有系統地驗證一眾創意機構和創意工作者的作品，從而提高大眾對其專業能力及真正價值的理解及認受性。

通過以上種種渠道，創意工作的真正價值可被更廣泛理解，未來的創意工作者亦能通過參加與相關工作和生活技能更有關的培訓，更大機會實現和維持工作與生活之間的平衡，從而減低未來職場文化中的不穩定性。
(b) Main Body

(1) Introduction

Hong Kong Cultural and Creative Industries

In a “consumer-generated” and “market-based” context (Potts, Cunningham, Hartley and Ormerod 2008: 168), “creative industries” refer to a system of activities that respond to the flows, novel values and economic extractions from social networks (Potts et al. 2008: 170). The term is commonly expressed in a plural form to acknowledge the unique logics that different types of cultural productions follow rather than to erroneously generalize them as being in a “unified field” (Hesmondhalgh 2013: 24). It also represents the confluence of conventional cultural industries – publishing, design and multimedia and so on – and the commercialization of intangible, knowledge based cultural creation. The creative industries manifest themselves as unique forms and are tailored initiatives in different regions, offering ample scope for economic growth (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011: 3).

In Hong Kong, the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) comprise of eleven component domains: art, antiques and crafts; cultural education and library, archive and museum services; performing arts; film, video and music; television and radio; publishing; software, computer games and interactive media; design; architecture; advertising; and amusement services (“Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics” 2014: FB3). Since it has grown as the “vanguard of economic growth”, policymakers perceive creativity as a “doctrine” in economic planning to foster the next generation of creative professionals (Potts et al. 2008: 168). While policies in Europe prioritize the best outputs of their national cultures, commercialization of creativity is more common in other parts of the world. In the US, it has been observed that the planned development of CCI has influenced the landscape and demography of cities (Florida 2003: 8), resulting in the consumer-oriented market rather than policies that consolidate long-term sustainability of the industries. Hong Kong is no exception, as the city’s CCI are largely driven by commercial opportunities with limited regard to the actual needs of creative workers and employers (Keane 2004: 274).

It has been acknowledged that CCI are “high value-added” and “employee-intensive”, contributing to the global GDP at approximately 7% and growing at a rate of 10% per annum (Hong Kong Ideas Centre 2009). Seoul, a close neighbour of Hong Kong, has ascended in the global cultural scene in response to appropriate policies by the South Korean government to promote the Hallyu culture (Won 2015). More recently, Seoul has unveiled the “2030 Seoul Plan”, which aims to pursue creative and sustainable urban living, as well as to promote cultural activities in collaboration with citizens (“2030 Seoul Plan” 2015). Such measures have proven effective in pooling creative personnel in a “flexible, self-organized and micro-organizational set-up” (McRobbie 2013: 1000), as demonstrated by a cluster of fashion enterprises in NeuKoelln, Germany that are also characterized by egalitarian management, co-working culture and active engagement with the public (McRobbie 2013: 998).

However, as Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010: 18) have remarked, “the quality of working life available in this rapidly growing creative sector may not be as good as many would hope”, meaning that workers in CCI struggle with fundamental concerns about “how much work they do” and “how much they get paid for it” (2009: 7) in addition to what types of work they do and how closely they are aligned with their training and skills sets. These findings have inspired the proposed research significantly. Currently, there is a dearth of qualitative studies examining the working conditions within CCI (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2010: 5) with an emphasis on what Ross (2003) and Gill (2002) posit as “self-
exploitation”, and the blurring of “work” and “non-work” life. Moreover, Pun’s (1999) study on the working conditions of Chinese working girls in factories in Dongguan, given its geographical adjacency and social relevance, also motivates this proposed research to further examine working conditions of creative professionals from their own perspective in Hong Kong with an in-depth qualitative approach as a way of generating nuanced data researcher to understand the phenomenon from the individual perspective of those who are involved in it (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014).

1. Governmental Perspective

Widely perceived as “increasingly significant sources of wealth and employment” (Hesmondhalgh 2013: 8), CCI are the key driver of economic growth in Hong Kong. The industries have shown the highest growth rate in its contribution to GDP among the six designated industries (from 3.8% in 2008 to 4.9% in 2012) and a comparatively higher rate of employment than those of the other industries (“Four Pillars and Six Industries in Hong Kong: Review and Outlook” 2015). A global expansion of “knowledge economy” has constantly emphasized “human creativity as the ultimate inexhaustible source of growth” (Menger 2006:801; as cited in Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011:3). Equally, the emphasis on CCI as a new economic pillar is mentioned throughout Hong Kong’s policy addresses since 1999 to date, when the city’s first large-scale investment into cultural infrastructure was proposed; the West Kowloon Cultural District project aims to shaping the district into a creative hub (“Cultural Policy” 2015). Other policy outputs have ensued from these initiatives, such as the PMQ, the Hong Kong Movie Development Council and the Create Hong Kong office. In particular, the Create Hong Kong Office provides “one-stop services and better support to industries” (“Creative Industries” 2014), nurtures human capital, and fosters the atmosphere and development of creative establishments. To amplify these objectives in support of nurturing the creative industries, the CreateSmart Initiative (CSI) was launched in 2009 to offer financial support and strategic directions to local creative industries (“Creative Industries” 2014). This initiative recently expanded its funding to include a wider scope of activities, such as the Design Business Collaboration Scheme, to match creative services with the needs of SMEs in project-based collaborations involving local design companies and academic institutions (“Creative Industries” 2014).

In recognition of the economic potential of creative industries, the government has consistently invested in the arts and culture sector; the 2015/16 budgets allocated 500 million HKD to fashion, 200 million HKD to film, 300 million HKD to arts and a top-up of 300 million HKD into the CreateSmart Initiative (“The 2015-2016 Budget”, 2015). Under these injections, the creative industries grew steadily, contributing to 4.9% of GDP in 2012 (“Creative Industries”, 2014). From 2011 to 2012, the GDP generated by the creative industry increased by 9.2% to HK$9.78 billion, employing approximately 200 thousand people. With an annual growth rate at 9.4%, as compared to 5.6% of general growth, the CCI develop steadily to date and holds promising prospects in 2012 (“The Cultural and Creative Industries in Hong Kong”, 2014). Creative labour in Hong Kong is continuously expanding as a whole, though a declining employment rate in publishing, TV and advertising segments was recorded between 2008 and 2012 (“Legco Research Brief” 2015) due to changing needs in the consumer marketplace and digitisation of the communication landscape. All in all, the creative lifestyles and desirable working conditions of CCI attract a considerable amount of educated young people to enter the field.

However, this statistical data in favour of a burgeoning creative industries scenario could be misconstrued, as they cannot reflect the realistic predicament of CCI, such as low job security and exploitative work conditions. Despite monetary allocation and support, the Hong Kong government has fallen short of tackling such persistent problems facing CCI. In particular, the design industry is characterized by high turnover rates and low
morale of workers, even though it receives comparatively higher governmental support than any other industry; efforts such as DesignSmart Initiative and Design Incubation Programme have not yet manifested substantial improvements in training and working conditions of designers, to whom an arduous workload and job insecurity have become the accepted norm. Hence, a direct financial injection by the government, regardless of value or frequency, produce little practical impact if this support does not take into account the distinctive styles, needs and operational models of specific creative industries. Direct incentives for entry workers in creative fields, or promotional schemes that attract students, are therefore urgently needed to retain talent at an early stage (Susan, personal communication, September 14, 2015).

2. Industrial/ Organizational Perspective

Behind the “fetishisation of creativity” (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011: 3) in highlighting the prestige of the industry, the discourses among employees within the industry are drastically different (Susan, personal communication, September 14, 2015). For example, many creative laborers in Shanghai were subject to sub-par facilities or non-clustered environments, which exposed them to “fractured and disparate working conditions” that stifled their creative capacities and motivations for work (Berardi 2009, as cited in Kanguieser 2012). The overall scale of the creative industries in Hong Kong is also increasing with the emergence of the new media and digital communication platforms. However, a contested relationship between the new and traditional media has recently emerged, threatening the role and livelihood of the latter. As the results extracted from our pilot study show, Hong Kong’s creative industries are prone to unnecessary talent outflows arising from low wages, long working hours and excessive pressures that characterize the industry (Susan and Rosanne: personal communication, September 14 and 15, 2015).

Usefully, Miege acknowledged the industry’s high susceptibility to technological and organisational changes (Miege 1989; as cited in Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2010: 6). In order to understand the industry’s qualitative significance in the changing market, he selected specific forms of media in accordance with their “models of production” In line with Miege’s approach, this proposed research selects three forms of traditional media – TV, PR and advertising and print – that remain significant to Hong Kong due to their robustness in “regionally scaled markets” and their relevance to the local demographics of the workforce (“Baseline Study on Hong Kong’s Creative Industries”, 2003). As these three industries represent substantial economic worth and a high employment rate overall – amounting to 28.1 billion HKD and 68,270 workers and representing 28.1% of total value-added and 34.1% of total employment – investigating them further and in more depth will generate useful insights into the long-term financial sustainability of the creative industries as a whole.

2.1 TV Industry

Oxford Economies estimated that the film and television industry contributed approximately HKD 7,041 million to the GDP and provided 13,270 job opportunities in 2014 (Oxford Economies 2015: 2). However, these promising statistics may not accurately reflect the waning state of the TV industry globally or locally. Despite the industry’s efforts in producing hybridized content to cater to the demands of Mainland, the market share of “made in Hong Kong” in the Mainland is limited by the “widespread penetration of audio-visual products” (Chan & Krainer 2015) from overseas, especially from Korea and Japan. Besides, the statistics can mislead the public into accepting an idealized picture of creative industries based on the notion that the creative talent pool is expanding; yet the distinction between full-time and freelance workers and their challenging and varied workplace experiences is often not made clear or made public.
The industry’s GDP and rate of direct employment show that TV programming and broadcasting are still the major entertainment sources for Hong Kong people. In terms of gross output and earnings, TV programming and broadcasting exceed that of the film industry and its subsidiary home entertainment productions (i.e. Blue-ray discs, DVDs of films) by a wide margin (Oxford Economies 2015: 4). However, an unstable environment in the local television industry surfaces when it is examined more closely. Low viewership figures due to poor production quality (“illogical plots and recycled set”; as cited in Chow 2013), growing international competition, varying standards of digital privacy, and the emergence of free online streaming have seriously narrowed the industry’s scope and stunted its future growth. Besides, mature TV industries in Asia are experiencing difficulties in expanding their local productions on a regional scale, for audiences have developed “more elaborated preferences” (Curtin 2015: 14), which cannot be met in the short term, or can only be met by a handful of industries capable of quickly adapting to particularities of the markets.

As a typical “creative job”, working in the TV industry is often supposed to achieve both the “self-realisation of workers” and “economic expansion” (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008: 98). However, under the current downturn workers are obligated not only to stay creative, but also to invest time and energy to “maintain good working relations” in order to secure their job (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008: 104). As the previous avid consumers of Hong Kong TV productions in Pan-Asia region such as Mainland and Taiwan now have their domestic industries well established (Tse 2015), Hong Kong’s TV industry nowadays faces reduced prestige and public recognition. Besides, Hong Kong’s oldest broadcasting company ATV’s was denied license renewal due to its critical financial condition and depressing viewership numbers (Chu 2015). This highlights the bleak scenery surrounding the television industry in Hong Kong, which will lead to job insecurity and problematic working conditions for employees in the future.

2.2 Print Media
As part of a global trend the print industry, and especially print magazines, has been vastly affected by the development and commercial application of digital media. Take a local instance: Next Media recently downsized its print magazine business in view of the prioritisation to distribute its digital content. Currently, several printworks in Hong Kong have shut down, such as Hong Kong Daily News and Sing Pao Daily, inflicting market diversity and unemployment in the industry (Yeung 2015). As a result, freelancing with digital media is gaining in popularity among both laid-off professionals and remaining employees. This phenomenon not only leads to a brain drain, but also causes the low productivity of print media, as an employees’ performance is often affected by the temporary nature of their freelancing job (Tse 2015: 267)

The growth in digital media, especially the abundance of user-generated content, has a significant impact on the fashion media. As Tse has observed, the fashion media in Hong Kong is losing its exclusivity in connecting Asia with Europe as social media platforms enable users to freely engage with fashion trends around the globe (2015: 268). This transition exacerbates the ecology of the industry, because editors are forced to prioritise advertising concerns over content quality, and thus are pressured by their counterparts in Mainland, where the industry is more “content-oriented” and favored by fashion marketers (Tse, 2015: 268). The decline of print media can also be observed in its decreased readership. Whilst most newspapers and magazines digitalised their printed content available online, the bonus of digital editions (e.g. visual and audio materials) cannot be accessed via the print edition apparently. Therefore, print-edition readers are often disadvantaged, compared with those who read online propelling them to turn to digital reading in the end (HKTDC 2012).
Statistics support this universal trend and the negative feelings and insecure working conditions that print media workers generally experience. Succeeding the desolate situation in 2011 when paid-newspaper readership was only at 53% (HKTDC 2012), the publishing industry’s performance has been fairly moderate due to the challenges posed by free access to information online, even though it has remained the second largest component of CCI in 2014, (Census and Statistics Department HKSAR (2014): FB8).

2.3 PR and Advertising Industry
The component communication industries of advertising, public relations, branding and marketing have increasingly merged across the past decade in the wake of the global economic downturn and a series of mergers and acquisitions taking place across multinational media conglomerates based in Hong Kong, such as Publicis, WPP and Omnicom. In view of this, the original professional boundaries between these creative industries have blurred thereby requiring the traditional categories to be updated (Peirson-Smith & Devereux 2009). Hence, public relations companies in Hong Kong typically offer a package of communication deliverables including advertising, branding and marketing services (Peirson-Smith 2014). In other countries, such as the UK, this has been recognised in the categorisation of advertising as a creative industry sector alongside marketing. As public relations is playing an increasingly dominant role in the creative industries, notably for its ability to offer one-stop strategic communication services and high level generation of digital content, alongside advertising, it was deemed necessary to include this sector in the investigation as a way of understanding the realities of how these creative sectors and their workers are functioning in contemporary Hong Kong.

2.3.1 PR Industry
The PR industry in Hong Kong is in the ascendant, aligning with global trends for the sector (Chen 2013), mainly because it has creatively adapted to the changing business environment by offering its services as a one-stop shop providing clients with a range of communication services from media relations to managing online presence (Peirson-Smith & Devereux 2009). The growth rate for the industry in Hong Kong and Asia is very rapid, being much faster than other professional services driven by the recognition of corporations and government organisations that they need to pro-actively manage their reputations and engage their stakeholders in order to maintain their competitive edge in a tri-lingual environment (Peirson-Smith et al 2011). Over the past decade, the greatest change in the industry has been the emergence of digital media. These interactive communications platforms have made the local and global marketplace much more dynamic thereby highlighting the importance of engaging stakeholders and acting as their intellectual knowledge managers (Peirson-Smith 2014) rather than just marketing communication services to them.

As a consequence, the challenge for the public relations sector is that demand for PR talent far exceeds supply, in addition to the fact that there is no recognised professional certification in Hong Kong for the industry. Whilst long working hours are the order of the day, as in the advertising industry often resulting in employee burn out, the key issue for workers in this field is the need to understand the implications and applications of new technologies and digital communications channels. From the employer’s perspective, another issue facing the industry is the need to train up and retain talent, given the absence of a recognised formal training path in Hong Kong. The turnover of PR employees is extremely high and PR workers which often impacts on the quality and reputation of the industry itself (Peirson-Smith 2014). Many interviewees at various levels of seniority suggested that they lacked career support or mentoring, in addition to a lack of professional or official recognition for their work resulting in low morale and high
turnover. As a result, the government and professional associations, such as The Council of Public Relations Hong Kong (CPRHK), could work together to devise professional certification for the industry to develop a defined career trajectory so that workers feel more understood, valued, less exploited. Equally, employers can invest more training of employees in-house by building on their existing baseline knowledge of the industry.

2.3.2 Advertising Industry

Hong Kong’s advertising industry is in a constant flux as technological advancements continue to fuse with traditional media platforms. Although digitalisation is observed to have prevailed customer experience over traditional methods of communication (Lun 2013; as cited in Chen 2013), advertising still remains robust in the local market; with a recorded growth of 11.14% between 2006 and 2007, during which the value of exports increased from 4,292 to 4,770 million HKD (“The Cultural and Creative Industries in Hong Kong” 2015). A recent report by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council also noted a continuous 3.3% annual growth between 2009 and 2010, followed by an acute rise to 12.6% in 2012 (HKTDC 2014). Until August 2015, however, local companies’ expenditure on advertising was observed to be having fallen 1% in comparison to 2014 (“The First Shrink Since 6 Years: Constrained by Retailing Business, Next Quarter is Predicted to Witness Double-digital Drawdown”, 2015).

As a mature advertising hub run by internationalised agencies, Hong Kong has an ample scope to “assist Mainland companies’ advertising and marketing activities globally” (Hong Kong Ideas Centre 2009) and thereby sustains its growth from the flourishing Mainland economy. However, behind these promising trends discrepancies were noted among multinational agencies (4As), and local agencies (2As) that are structurally similar to small-medium enterprises (Pang 2015: 3). Hierarchical structure, low salaries and “harsh working conditions with little prospects for promotion” often characterize the then prestigious 4As, while 2As provide “a larger extent of flexibility and space as in line with the growth of new creative industries (Susan, personal communication, September 14, 2015). “The Bees Group”, a 2A firm that introduced profit-sharing system and people-oriented culture, allows its workers to experiment with diverse specialties and focuses less on their hierarchical positions (Pang 2015: 13). Ultimately, the injection of human capital into the local “2As” leads to an alleviation of exploitative working conditions and progressive changes within the Hong Kong advertising industry. However, such a transition does not guarantee improved working conditions or the fine-tuning of operational problems displayed by the 4As.

During a pilot interview, one seasoned advertising practitioner also recommended that the government offers support for more timely training to entry level advertising workers in the local market to consolidate their IT skills, and to train them more strategically as “creative technologists” capable of incorporating new technologies into client portfolios (Rossane, personal communication, September 15, 2015).

2.4 Freelance

Freelance writers, primarily within the broadcast and print media industries of Hong Kong, offer an intriguing perspective on the exploitation of creative labour. In Hong Kong, freelancing is generally considered as ‘good work’ in terms of lucrative earnings and job autonomy. Some freelance writers and broadcasters claimed that their monthly earnings are 3 to 4 times higher than their previous salaries in full-time positions (Tsang 2015: 12).

To broadcast companies, hiring freelancers is a means of reducing production costs (Kim 2013: 570). This profit-oriented intention may subject freelancers to unfair conditions, such as hiring them on a project-to-project basis or forcing them to work for
free (Randle & Culkin 2009: 95). Although many freelancers are able to overcome such harsh working conditions by staying passionate about and connected to their chosen profession (Kim 2013: 573) and appear to accept that project-based hiring is becoming “a fact of occupational life” (Randle & Culkin 2009: 112), in Hong Kong, financial insecurity and uncertainty in moving up the social ladder are still the apparent disadvantages of freelancing. Besides, workers can deal with problems only on an individual level without any support, as they are mostly isolated from labour unions (Kim 2013: 572).

However, freelancers cast different views on the term “exploitation” in their workplaces. As Tsang concludes (2015: 13), the line distinguishing freelancing as representing good or bad work is not an easy one to draw. A heavy reliance on networking was found to detract freelancers from their core jobs and to have burned them out because they felt as though networking had become “a central part of the job” (Randle & Culkin 2009: 101), and that there was no distinction between leisure and work. Additionally, it has been revealed that in the knowledge-intensive, communication industries, such as journalism, PR and advertising, employees are more vulnerable to be subject to overwork and burnout (Chan, Krainer et al. 2015: 6). Since most freelancers engage in these industries, their working “autonomy” is not as great as outsiders might perceive it to be, as client requests usually outweigh their freedom (Tsang 2015: 12). Therefore, although “exploitation” may lack universal favorability to describe freelancers’ working conditions; these young professionals are as likely to suffer from more work stress than other full-time professionals are exposed to.

3. The Ethnographic Research
Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) have shown that the importance of ethnographic research on creative workers lies in the deep data and humanistic perspective it provides. By comparing the lived experience of creative workers in fields with different logics of operation, they found out a common theme of ambivalence and noted a “complicated freedom” among these workers.

Lui and Wong (1992), in their research on Hong Kong’s social mobility and morality in the 1990s stated that the relatively open social structure allowed a “tunnel effect” where citizens can only foresee their success in upward mobility. However, this has hugely changed in recent years because of the growing social stagnation, where younger generations see less possibility of moving up through the social hierarchy. As Kim points out, “when workers became long time employees, they had limited future options” (2013: 573), and this is how the inert structural mobility within the creative industries is exacerbated.

This current research aims at investigating the experience and evolving working conditions of the creative workforce in Hong Kong in order to provide an overview of the reality of creative industries for future policy directions. As Kane, Fung and Moran (2007)’s research has suggested, interventional policies not only assist employees directly, but also can benefit the creative industries from the sidelines. Hence, the ethnographic account of this study will inform policy makers of how certain policies, even targeted at other recipients, such as tax relief, welfare adjustments and government-industry alliances, can aid the creative industries as well. Besides, it is worth noting that as Hong Kong’s creative industry grows into a knowledge economy, where employees are meticulous in weighing their risks and gains (Kane, Fung and Moran, 2007: 118), government’s informed responses to the deadlock facing the industry can serve as an important reference for people’s risk calculation, which could contribute to meliorating a status quo for the industry.
A recent research by Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups has discovered that youths in Hong Kong hold a pessimistic view towards the creative industries as a whole and are reluctant to join the industry (Ngai, Chan & Yuen 2014). In addition, this research also concluded that the current policies guiding the creative industry from the Hong Kong Government lacked an identifiable, holistic strategy (Ngai, Chan & Yuen 2014). This draws us to the importance of this current research: by analysing ethnographic accounts focussing on the working conditions and challenges faced by creative workers, whose productivity greatly relies on the favourable work conditions that can ensure their ability in “symbolic creation”, rather than their physical strength, then tailored policies can be devised to address their future needs. Matching the workers’ actual experiences with existing or potential solutions will help the industry adapt to the rapidly evolving creative business environment and sustain its long-term growth through fuller realisation of job satisfaction, productivity and wealth creation.

(2) Objectives of the study

- To highlight discrepancies between the image and reality of how the creative industries actually operate
- To provide an overview of the appropriateness of categorized creative industry in the Hong Kong context
- To examine differences in process and development across cultural and creative industries in Hong Kong
- To investigate the experiences and evolving working conditions of the creative workforce in PR & advertising, TV and print media
- To understand factors that are affecting the performance of the post 80s and 90s generations as a creative workforce
- To propose new policy directions to further enhance the growth and development of selected creative industries by focusing on the actual needs of creative workers and employers
(3) **Research methodology**

Our study critically examines the effectiveness of government policies directed to creative industries based on the unexplored work conditions of actual creative workers within the production of creative industries in Hong Kong based on ethnographic research, including semi-structured individual interviews with creative industry practitioners, informal dialogue and workplace observations of the PR, advertising and media industries. The research was conducted in several stages, targeting various actors and applying different research methods (from qualitative methodology) to ensure that a fuller and deeper experience of creative workers in the industry is covered, elicited and analyzed. Aligning with guidelines set forth by globally renowned cultural industries scholars Hesmondhalgh & Baker (2010: 7), special emphasis is placed on subjective experience over generalizability, monitoring and analyzing all sorts of nuanced actions/embedded cultural meanings from our respective informants, based on the relevant social and cultural theories. In this research, the primary focus is to investigate creative workers who occupy full-time positions in the aforementioned creative industries of PR and advertising, TV and print media. For example, the creative labourers’ work lives, social lives, creative awards obtained, vision and daily experiences, as well as their social communication with peers and others is being documented and dissected to elicit authentic data results in the research findings. This is followed by a second phase exploring the working conditions of freelancers within these specific industries who are targeted as an extension of the research scope to provide a more fully rounded view of the operations and perceptions of the workforce in these sectors for comparative analysis leading to implementable findings.

**Literature Review**

To gain a more extensive and deeper understanding of cultural and creative industries during the early stage of our research, a list of relevant literature was compiled to include more recent/contemporary texts for further review. To keep up with the ongoing developments in the cultural and creative industries, related public policies and sociological research in Hong Kong and overseas, local and international mainstream media reports, public discourses, and academic literature on the cultural and creative industries were regularly reviewed, filed and further analysed, forming the basis of and for the development of an appropriate interview guide for data collection, also for research output in the form of scholarly papers and video segment transcripts emerging from the study.

**Process of Respondent Recruitment**

In the process of respondent recruitment, initial contacts were made by exploring the professional connections of the PI and Co-I. All of the interviewees are recently active in the creative industries. The list of potential interviewees was then reviewed and discussed with Co-I for further recruitment based on their employment statuses, specializations and seniorities, before consolidating a schedule for the three rounds of interviews. Between June 2016 and March 2017, formal invitations were prepared and sent to suitable interviewees accordingly.

**Pilot Interviews/Updating Interview Guide**

In November 2016, a few pilot interviews with selected creative industry workers in Hong Kong were first carried out to acquire preliminary insights into the salient issues of concern. Questions in interview guide were then fine-tuned based on ideas elicited from these pilot studies. The amended interview guide was resubmitted to and was approved on 24th June, 2016 by the Human Research Ethics Committee, HKU Research Services, before data collection commenced.
Updating Research Methodologies/ Resubmitting Informed Consent Forms
To facilitate further discussion in the public policy community and academia (a two-day public policy seminar/forum was proposed and was held in late March 2017). For appropriate cultural policy planning and implementation, the research methodology was further updated to include video-taping of the semi-structured interviews and field observations. Consequently, the amended informed consent form was resubmitted to and was approved on 24th June, 2016 by the Human Research Ethics Committee, HKU Research Services, before data collection commenced.

Data Collection and Observation Processes

a) Ethnography
Ethnography is a report on social life that focuses on the detailed and accurate description of people and a research method comprising of “a cocktail of methodologies sharing the assumption that personal engagement with the subject is the key to understanding a particular culture or social setting” (Hobbs 2006: 101). It is well suited to accumulating a diverse range of data from an array of research methods (such as that of participant observation, in-depth interviews, archive research etc.) for the generation of authentic/holistic perspectives to the fulfil the proposed study’s aim of investigating the true working conditions, and operations of creative workers though worker perceptions. This multi-method research approach engenders “a vivid document with human resonance impossible to recreate by the application of other methodologies” (Hobbs 2006: 102), not only elucidating innate cultural and symbolic meanings, but also capturing the intricate details of creative labour, such as the work and social lives of creative workers situated in Hong Kong.

b) Semi-structured individual interviews
As clarifications and holistic insights are required to uncover the hidden/embedded problems and restrictions of the creative industries and facing creative workers, semi-structured interviews were used. This approach uses open-ended questions to facilitate a free-flowing and improvisational dialogue, engendering answers of greater depth and understanding, allowing for “much wider range of contexts and situations to be examined than the in-depth study of a single case” (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011:16). Essentially, the goal of the individual interviews was to elicit ethnographic narratives from the insider perspective of selected creative workers. Therefore, in-depth interviewing (Stokes 2013) was used as a method well suited to the proposed study’s aim of uncovering the actual working experience and condition of creative workers.

In the process of respondent recruitment, initial contacts were made through snowballing techniques (initial participants identifying further suitable participants) with initial interviewees, professional networks of the PI and Co-I, and extended invitations to worker and company representatives in the three individually targeted industries. 48 industry practitioners from different backgrounds (of varying seniorities, employment conditions, employers’ organizational backgrounds), were recruited for a one-to-two-hour semi-structured interviews in addition to potential company or office visits, where applicable, with consent and access being obtained from all interviewees. The interviewees were evenly distributed across the three selected industries (PR and advertising, TV, print media industries)—a total of 16 interviews were conducted for each sector, with 8 junior (working experience 1 to 5 years) and 8 senior workers (work experience 5+ years) to offer a well-rounded perspective of creative workers’ perceptions of the conditions throughout the entire hierarchical structure. All 3 rounds of semi-structured interviews were completed by March 2017. Upon gaining the interviewees’ consent the interviews were audio- and video-taped. All completed interviews have been transcribed, translated and
further codified for data analysis. Each interviewee was offered a set amount of an honorarium for their time.

The interview questions were grouped around the main research objectives (see Section 8), but were also tailored to the job profile and the description of the interviewees. Senior workers were questioned about their views in hiring the younger generation and their general experiences as program directors (or founders of the company). Junior workers were asked to share their experiences in job-searching, working conditions, job satisfactions, difficulties personal goals/dreams and their views about career prospects within the creative industry, for example. Apart from these ethnographic accounts, interviewees were also asked for their opinions towards specific policies initiated by the government, and how these impacted on individual workers, the organisation and the industry as a whole. In summary, five categories of questions were asked: personal, organizational, industry-related, global and external factors as well as views towards government policies.

The data acquired were analysed through a combination of content and narrative analysis (Stokes 2013) using a grounded theory approach (constant-comparative method) (Glaser & Strauss 1967) Based on the open coding of the raw data collected, the PI and Co-I developed initial inductive categories. The subsequent axial coding related the initial codes to one another, and the final selective coding identified a set of the most important recurring codes, which were chosen to represent the key concepts. These concepts and recurring themes about the subjective experiences of the creative workers were highly useful for formulating informed insights on which public policies and recommendations are developed.

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

**A. Personal**
1. How old are you?
2. What work position do you occupy in the company?
3. Can you give a brief summary of your academic background?
4. Can you give a brief summary of your past working experiences?
5. How did you enter the field? Why did you enter the field?
6. How long have you worked in this industry?
7. How would you describe your work on a daily basis?
8. What is your perception of being part of the creative labour in Hong Kong?
9. Can you tell us more about your work conditions and experiences as a “creative worker”?

**B. Organizational**
10. What do you like and/or dislike the most about your job?
11. Did your education prepare you for your job in the creative industries? Why/why not?
12. Did your previous and on-the-job training equip the necessary skillsets for you to fulfil your job duties? Why/why not?
12. Have you ever thought about changing careers? If so where would you work in preference to where you are now working? Why or why not?
13. How would you describe your work relationship with your colleagues (seniors, juniors, same level staff, external parties and more). Can you share some examples? Are they merely your work counterparts or are they your friends?
14. Can you see a chance for you to get promoted in your company? Why?
   - Is this due to the limitations within the organizational culture/ organizational structure? What are the challenges and obstacles to your advancement?
C. Industrial
15. Do you think that the work environment in your industry provides you with any of the following?
   ✓ Work-life balance
   ✓ Flexibility
   ✓ Creative autonomy
   ✓ Economic prosperity
   ✓ Recognition
   ✓ Career prospect
   ✓ Social support
   ✓ Fulfillment and self-actualization

16. Is the work environment the same as you have expected before joining the industry or your current job? Why/why not?
17. How do you see your future career as a [creative worker]? Do you think the creative industries in Hong Kong have a future? Why/why not?
18. Have you noticed any major events/incidents/crisis in your creative industry in the past few years? If so, how did they make you feel in terms of how these scenarios were handled? Please explain
19. Do you think that there is a positive relationship between favourable working conditions for creative workers and effective production?
20. Do the creative industries in Hong Kong have a future? Why/why not?

D. Social/ cultural/ economic/ global factors
21. Currently, do you think Hong Kong is a favourable place to develop a career in your specialized creative industry? Why or why not?
22. Are there any external factors affecting your work:
   - Technological advancements/ developments
   - Industry trends
   - Any other kinds of factors?
23. Do you think your work is respected or underappreciated by society? Why/why not?

E. Public policy implication
24. Are you aware of any government policies that have been implemented to support your industry? If yes, how would you comment on its effectiveness?
25. What do you think the government can do for your industry (in the short run? In the medium run? In the long run?)
26. Are there any other issues related to our research that you would like to share with us?
   - In terms of the creative labor working conditions?
   - In terms of the work conditions for effective creative production and output?
   - In terms of industrial development?
   - In terms of educational development?
   - In terms of the overall social, cultural and economic future of Hong Kong?

c) Observation
Following each round of the interviews, one or two cases from each of the three industries were selected for the PI and Co-I to carry out observations and hold further informal dialogue with respective creative industry workers. Adopting the roles of participant observers, the PI, Co-I and/or RAs visited the respective workers’ workplaces, observed their everyday work conditions/procedures, facilitated informal conversations with these
workers in their natural environments, following workers’ everyday experiences in the office and observed their interactions and participated in their work/leisure activities (after work “happy hour”, dinner gatherings, work parties and more). The resulting fieldnotes were completed by April 2017. During company visits with the organisations’ and individual workers’ approval, their employees’ daily workplace environments were filmed. All informal interview audio and video recordings were transcribed, translated to English, and saved to a password-protected drive for further codification and analysis, based on recurring themes and matched against existing academic and mainstream media discourses (as will be elaborated below). Fieldnotes were also written up for a more comprehensive record of site visits. This was done particularly, to further articulate key research findings in local and overseas academic conferences/research seminars presentations. Hence, two to four representative videos from each of the three creative industries were selected to compile a 25-minute short documentary.

**First version of the 5-minute showreel can be seen at:**
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1jHIu7etMDQNmJiS2RPeWJ4Y2c/view

**Final version of the 25-minute short documentary can be seen at:**
Research results/findings

The public policy implications and recommendations emerging from the findings of this study are based on the perceptions gaps that we identified between institutional aspirations for these industries set against the actual, subjective views of creative workers at all levels of experience and seniority. Below is a summary of our findings showing five traditional sources of job insecurity within the creative sector hindering the industry development and rendering precarious labour conditions, namely, (i) Pay; (ii) Work Hours; (iii) Professionalisation and Unionisation; (iv) Socialising, Networking and Isolation; and (v) Feeling of Diminishing Industrial Support.

Pay
Pay scales are notoriously low in the creative industries, especially for entry level workers, given the oversupply of junior labour in all three sectors—advertising and public relations, television and print media, most of whom are often willing to carry out unpaid duties for excessive overtime, regardless of future economic return (Siebert and Wilson 2013: 716). From a union viewpoint, unpaid work is ‘undermin[ing] everyone as it creates this attitude that […] they all are cheap’. The positive correlation between work hours and wages is not necessarily applicable to creative workers, as they must ‘do whatever is required to support commercial interests’ (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 8).

Consensus prevailed in the research findings that these jobs were not well-paid in the early career stages, so that low starter salary levels being the norm were often regarded as a standard rite of passage. The abstract, intangible nature of creative output was also a contributor to the devaluation of creative labour as enhanced by increasing technological access for many people:

Design and creativity are abstract. It’s not like a cup of coffee that you can brew it [physically]. So it’s often undervalued. […] [We] spend so much energy on it, but they think it can be free. One time my little cousin said to me, ‘I can take photos similar to yours, and you’re even charging people for that.’

Tracy, Assistant Art Director, 4As ad agency

Sam, a PR manager who left the agency side for an in-house department, concurred:

Money. That’s one of the reasons why I went from ordinary PR to financial PR. […]In general… PR is not well paid for sure. In the end, Hong Kong is a very pragmatic, very finance-inclined society… it’s not healthy, but there’s nothing we can do, we need to make a living.

Equally, in the advertising sector acceptance of low wage levels was rationalised by informants as an industry norm thus devolving responsibility within the system. Yet, disillusioned junior ad workers in local agencies desired better salaries, being exploited ‘as hard as donkeys’ (Brianna). Among more senior seasoned personnel was a pragmatic understanding that wage levels would improve if time was served and that young executives showed potential and commitment to their job. Long hours and relatively low pay were seen as a test in determining if the executive was committed to the industry:

[I joined the ad industry] because of my personal interest 2 years ago. […] my current salary is really bad. It really can’t meet the level I personally expect… I think I’ll soon change my job.
Ming, Account Executive, 2As ad agency

Compared with what we got paid 20 years ago when we graduated, you’re getting paid higher now. But... the sort of living standard, it’s also getting higher... I don’t think it’s growing in proportion anymore.

Colin, Director, local PR agency

The traditional approach was seemingly being replaced in independent organisations with a human relations-oriented understanding of how to invest and incentivise creative workers by monetarily rewarding team success, rather than expecting them to work hard for a purely monetary return, and also in paying them in other ways, for example, through health and insurance schemes. In contrast to the hierarchical structure of multinational ad agencies (4As) with their typically low salaries and harsh working conditions and reduced prospects for promotion, local advertising agencies (2As) seemed to provide a greater flexibility, aligned with a new growth in the creative industries. For example, a 2As firm founded by a former 4As agency CEO (Kevin) introduced a profit-sharing system and people-oriented culture to acknowledge creative talent, and allowed its workers to experiment with diverse specialties and focus less on changing their job title. This injection of human capital into the Hong Kong based 2As could lead to an alleviation of exploitative working conditions and progressive changes, although these measures do not necessarily improve working conditions or solve the 4As’ operational problems. As Kevin noted, the value of more strategic pecuniary incentives could work very well to motivate workers in this culture:

In the beginning I sold shares to them at a very low price. If they bought it in early years, it was also a high growth phase... Those who bought shares at the start, now their share value has more than doubled. Every year, just the dividends are a double-digit percentage.

Kevin, Founder and CEO, local advertising group

Colin, senior director of a small PR consultancy, explained that PR personnel and their clients in China used to be paid much less than their equivalents in Hong Kong causing some resentment when Hong Kong PR executives had to work on joint cross-border projects. Given China’s rapid economic growth across the past decade in first and second tier cities, this comparative wage gap is seemingly now closing.

Respondents also perceived that their particular creative industry sector was not as profitable as it had been previously due to the global economic recession and the rise of digital technology, often resulting in ad agencies and media companies shrinking in size, restructuring or even regularly closing down.

I feel that it [advertising and media industry] is getting harder. [...] [A]s time went on, not many people watch TV anymore. [...] And newspapers are closing down, and magazines too.

Leah, Senior Account Manager, global outdoor ad agency

In general, pay and career prospects were considered lower and slower than in previous decades and high staff turnover currently mirrored job insecurity as the best staff were often poached. For smaller PR agencies, the issue of high staff throughput and ‘chasing the dollar’ was still a source of stress for employers given the significant investment made in
employee training and the challenges experienced when attracting and retaining new talent with the right skill-set.

All respondents acknowledged that these industries had changed exponentially within the last decade in terms of digital and social media-based stakeholder communication. Some saw this as an everyday part of working life, with others recognised the challenges that it posed in stimulating competition from other media sectors using specialist social media and digital marketing agencies. Executives at all career levels expressed concerns about the future of their industry in terms of dealing with social and digital media dominance regarding staff training, competition and profitability.

The changes are [the rise of] Facebook, social media, those are really powerful... a lot of print ads in the past ... it’s now digital, or... we need to come up with ideas that fit in those places. So it’s very different...And they also change very fast.

Sarah, Associate Creative Director, 4As ad agency

Actually I think there are fewer opportunities for development. PR mainly relies on media to promote corporate image, but now there are fewer media, they’re closing down. [...] There’s so much social media going on all of a sudden now. There’s no need for PR to do media relations. Instead it’s now digital agencies.

Jenny, Junior PR Executive, local PR company

At the same time, as other cultural labour research has discovered (McRobbie 2002), material incentives were not the sole reason driving workers to seek or remain in employment. In particular, in their empirical study of low-pay workers in the UK, Shildrick et al. identified motives for work beyond its instrumental nature, such as work as a ‘family tradition’ (2012: 92). Non-monetary values of working have been passed down inter-generationally, ranging from the social and psychological benefits of work and in providing role models for future generations, demonstrating an inheritance of a ‘cultural predisposition toward work’ (2012: 92–93). Conceptualising work as ‘the right thing to do’, and tacit support for the ‘culture of work’ highlighted how non-material incentives contributed to workers’ dignity (Shildrick et al. 2012: 94). Senior advertising personnel Sarah characterized ‘ad-(wo)men’ as ‘athletes’ undergoing intensive, strenuous training to grow, whereby doing ‘overtime is a must’.

Furthermore, job insecurity in terms of pay became intensified, in comparison with other ‘more successful’ groups, such as ‘more professional’ workers in law and banking; their Mainland Chinese counterparts; and the slow pace of wage increases.

**Work Hours**

Evidence of self-exploitation existed in all four industries due to the acceptance of protracted work hours being a systemic part of the nature of this type of work. Informants at various career levels largely agreed that working hours were long and unpredictable, sometimes reaching 14-15 hours a day, depending on project deadlines, with client demands often cited as being the main reason. Some PR respondents considered this expectation for long working days as ‘exploitation’, but there was also additional evidence of ‘self-exploitation’ through the acceptance of working conditions as being typical and expected of the creative industry employee.
But now I think I got used to it... it’s part of my life. It’s become the new normal as they call it in China.

Colin, Director, local PR agency

Agencies are the worst for sure. Because it’s like a factory, [...] work until the middle of the night.

Sam, Investor Relations Manager, financial services company

On normal weekdays, junior advertising practitioners usually worked for 12-16 hours a day, with weekend and overnight work occurring on a regular basis. Some advertising agencies did commit to limiting employee daily work hours or discouraged evening work meetings, yet often failed to enforce this as being ‘impractical’. Informants considered these requirements as being unfavourable in the long term. As a consequence, they considered job-hopping or joining another non-creative industry when at their early career stage. This scenario also reflected the specific organisational culture of larger agencies considered to operate with lower staffing levels than are actually needed, sometimes resulting in even longer hours at work:

It’s very hard to estimate when you need to work and when you don’t. Sometimes you’ve redundancy sometimes you are short of people. If you hire too many permanent workers, sometimes they really don’t know what to do.

Tracy, Assistant Art Director, 4As ad agency

Yet, while some larger agencies enjoyed the latitude to hire more staff, others considered that they did not hire the right ones or were making overseas hires from the parent company lacking local linguistic skills and thereby amplifying the local staff workload. Equally, there was a perception that Asian PR firms were likely to be more exploitative as their work was more undervalued by clients and hence the operational margins were tighter.

This acceptance of long work hours as the systemic norm was also explained away by some respondents as being based on the intrinsic pleasures found in this type of creative work associated with psychological rewards and self-actualisation (Arvidsson et al., 2010; McRobbie, 2002; Nixon and Crewe, 2004).

I think you gotta expect a certain amount of work outside your normal hours? But I think that’s sort of part of the fun... and you’re seeing the results live on your Twitter feed... It’s exciting, whilst taking time out of your weekend perhaps.

Harris, Junior Consultant, local PR agency

It is the recognition that I think is important: salary and promotion cannot be the sole reward for one’s contribution, sometimes it could be devolvement of power and the trust to let one be a leader.

Christy, Junior PR Executive, international PR agency

In addition, while technology and software development enhanced work efficiency, the work hours of PR practitioners has actually expanded. There was an understanding that
given the all-embracing reach of technology, employees never ‘switched off’ including at the weekend:

It is common practice for us to bring work back home. Managers and above have their own laptops with the company’s drive which allows them to work anytime anywhere. We use Outlook, so we can also work at home. [...] We need to work during weekends if there are events.

Christy, Junior PR Executive, international PR agency

Cultural recognition also existed that in space-challenged Hong Kong the office could function as a common area after office hours and that young workers often welcomed staying late using this habitat in a more social way:

Something about younger staff... bear in mind they’re still living at home with their parents, sometimes in very small apartments... a guy in the creative department said, ‘I sleep on the sofa in my home, I have to wait for my granddad to go to bed so I can get my bed so I will happily stay til 10pm here, do some work, be on social media on my desk’.

Macy, Managing Director, international PR agency

However, while in-house PR and advertising jobs comprised regular work hours, smaller independent agencies took the lead in honouring the work-life balance ensuring a fixed length working day and guaranteed weekend release time. There also appeared to be mindfulness on behalf of smaller agency bosses that flexible working hours as long as the job was done, for example, were essential to cultivate happy and productive workers in a human relations sense.

There were also marked generational differences in attitudes towards creative work and what was considered to be acceptable or otherwise. To this point, Julia reflected on evolving work attitudes between previous and existing generations, observing that older ad and PR executives were more loyal to the company relating pay to work performance, whereas younger workers sought rapid promotion and often bargained for salary increases in advance of validated performance. Different generational attitudes were also cited by some respondents as being a difficult issue. For example, the PR industry faced a changing workplace outlook from the younger recruits more keen on a better work-life balance from the outset, thereby causing pressure for more experienced middle managers to fill the work gap,

People in the past would be more obedient. [...] But today... [t]hey would directly tell you that, ‘I want your compliments... I want promotion... I want a higher salary... other employers want me now... and it all depends on whether or not you want to ‘try everything’ to keep me here.

Julia, Deputy General Manager, 4As media agency

But the kids now... do not expect they’d stay to do OT, to work to the bone for you... So this means mid-management are burdened... And the juniors may think that ‘the work now is meaningless’.

Sam, Investor Relations Manager, financial services company
Professionalisation and Unionisation
There was a general consensus among all respondents that they lacked professional recognition, government guidance or unionisation in providing worker protection, unlike other professional sectors such as law or medicine. Some respondents perceived the PR industry as lacking real power as a weak institutional voice in a territory that is politically organised on the basis of functional constituencies. Some noted that government’s role should be that of a signpost to accredited agencies for outside businesses. Others saw government as having the responsibility to regulate working hours per se, although some respondents were more sanguine about structural intervention given that without it the industry had more freedom to evolve as a one-stop communication shop for clients. Many believed that the professional associations should be responsible for facilitating both internal and external professional validation. However, some senior PR executives noted that professional association membership was often not worth the monetary investment given the poor return of support or the lack of value added services provided.

The PR industry is not recognized or maybe understood leading to a lack of agency: [but] the things they [the professional associations] organize are all very futile. For example, awards. It’s not that if you get this award, it means anything… I think it’s a badge of recognition, but it’s not influential in society.

Sam, Investor Relations Manager, financial services company

While some practitioners still preferred to work in international advertising agencies, many believed that the status of 4As was no longer so prestigious. Junior ad practitioners, working in a HK4As member company also cited the increasing issue of hierarchical work structures with less personal flexibility being allowed.

I don’t know... but although 4As [Association] has an influence, it’s not absolute anymore. Even though I’m a member, participating. [...]But then the clients think you’re not famous.

Lillian, General Manager, international ad agency

Because they [4As] are not HK companies, they listen to their headquarters. Maybe it’s more flexible at local companies than 4As.

Leah, Senior Account Manager, global outdoor ad agency

Creative workers in both industries may justify work pressures and inequities in terms of normative practices and ultimately take responsibility for this, in bypassing the role of unions. The effectiveness of labour unions may depend on their level of agency, engagement and intervention strategies (Rigby and O’Brien-Smith 2010). Percival and Hesmondhalgh (2014) highlighted how unions often fail to defend workers adequately against unpaid work. Historically, in Hong Kong unions are largely weak and relatively toothless (Chen and Snape 2003). Hence, informants tended to dismiss the ability of unions to protect workers from exploitation.

Socialising, Networking and Isolation
Socialising and networking in creative labour is a significant way of securing future work on an organisational and individual basis, and is a standard way of doing business in Hong Kong by fostering connections. Respondents acknowledged this, even if they did not always have the time or inclination to be involved.
The most important in this industry is networking … you will know who to find downstairs to answer the questions you’re not sure about…who can give you opportunities that you wouldn’t see on LinkedIn but only via internal referrals.

_Brianna, Associate Planner, 4As ad agency_

Exchanging information can also reduce uncertainty whilst increasing security for individuals in casualised labour markets (Randle and Hardy 2017). In response to immense work pressures junior advertising staffers valued the relaxing ‘snacks and wine’ and unwinding in the office ‘gaming’ corner. Yet, the separation between work and play was often ambivalent as relaxation time often occurred within organisational space creating the notion of a workplace ‘family’.

We are quite close, because of [long] work hours. I see them more than I see my mum or aunt or other friends...still see each other on weekends...outside work, and we mix, it’s not just a work-relationship.

_Tracy, Assistant Art Director, 4As ad agency_

The friendship bonds also appeared to be strong among work teams given the collaborative nature of the PR industry. As PR is a ‘people facing’ industry by nature, it was expected that the social aspect of the workplace would be more valued. Therefore, the PR workplace appears to accommodate people with a wide range of competencies and personality types without imparting feelings of isolation.

The idea of celebrating group and individual success also formed part of the corporate ethos for smaller organisations giving individuals a sense of place and worth. In larger, multi-national ‘matrixed’ PR outfits investment in the individual was manifested in more structured mentoring, thereby reducing isolation through in-house recognition, albeit within the confines and controls of organisational culture. Increasing work pressures often impacted on organising collective down-time, such as corporate outings, which some regarded as detrimental to office morale:

In the past we had company trips, but later it became a great burden for the company so we cancelled it in the past two years. What has replaced the trip is the lunch gathering...We hope the company trip can resume because we worked hard in the past two years.

_Julia, Deputy General Manager, 4As media agency_

In the advertising industry the structural divisions between small and large agencies also affected stress levels connected to socialising with colleagues and making sense of authenticity. Often, informants described a stressful atmosphere in a highly competitive, work pressured, large-scale organisational environment, where people tried to outshine each other. Here, colleagues gossiped and compared their respective capabilities, workload and survival skills at work. Linking previous experience at a small agency to her current 4As ad agency, Emily confessed to being trapped between actively socialising and networking across different teams beyond close social ties. At the same time, she isolated herself to avoid leaking honest thoughts to her competitive peers and senior colleagues in case they were used in evidence against her.

...some departments’ colleagues do have...I call it a ‘gossip dinner’ in which people expose secrets or rumours of their own departments. I feel tired after hearing too much
gossip, which has created a ‘trust-less’ atmosphere and you feel that many pairs of eyes are watching you.

_Brianna, Associate Planner, 4As ad agency_

Clearly, socialising and networking take on many forms as a source of collegial reaffirmation, new projects and future career advancement. Equally, this can be a source of social stress adding to workplace negativity on top of existing work pressures. The narrow advancement ladder in team-based PR industries also highlights the complexity of social networking based on exchanging business cards causing added workplace stress.

So, even within the same team there was quite big competition. [...] It feels like promotion has to be kept to yourselves, that ideally nobody knows you’re promoted, that even your business cards are printed secretly.

_Yannis, Senior Account Executive, international PR agency_

**Feelings of Diminishing Industrial Support**

Most informants shared feelings of insecurity and uncertainty that impacted on them emotionally and psychologically concerning career development. This was especially real when facing an unpredictable economic landscape, constant layoffs, slow career progression, pressure to gain awards and high staff turnover rates.

Both employer and employee expressed frustration concerning the obstacles to their career management expressed at all levels and on both sides. Many executives noted that TV, print media, PR and advertising are high stress industries, requiring commitment and dedication, in addition to working under pressure in unpredictable situations.

[Advertising] was very profitable in the past, you could spend big money. But now it feels like we are being ‘squeezed’... [T]he economy isn’t that good. So everyone’s quite stressed. But you should be relaxed to do creative work.

_Tracy, Assistant Art Director, 4As ad agency_

Copywriters in particular, saw bleak career prospects ahead, believing the industry to have gone more ‘visual’ and ‘digital’ and evolving so fast that their traditional functions and competencies are marginalized. Many senior informants also found it difficult to catch up with the new digital skills required, especially when competing against the rapidly rising Mainland ad industry.

It’s a dark future... I think it’s getting more ‘niche’ to be a copywriter in HK or even around the world. People look at visuals more than words. [...]there isn’t an attitude that words are important.[...] Not many understand copywriting is a profession. [...]People will increasingly think that we don’t need people who work with words.

_Ryan, Senior Copywriter, local ad agency_

Technological development has also allowed clients to participate more in creative production, causing them to underestimate the value of creative agency resulting in a negative impact on workplace culture:

Many people from the ad industry, now [have become] internet warriors. They’d comment on ads. But these individuals, [...] just endlessly criticise [Hong Kong ads]. This makes everyone think that ‘yes, HK ads are so weak!’
Sarah, Associate Creative Director, 4As ad agency

Others cited a trend among larger multi-national agencies towards more contractual hiring in an employer’s market in the midst of global economic uncertainty. The work attitude of a younger generation and refusal to do overtime also seemed to cause more pressure on senior managers to take up the responsibility as they were always there and could be relied on.

Equally, some respondents lamented that PR is a much-misunderstood industry. Unlike ‘above the line’ advertising, PR was ‘below the line’, undervalued, anonymous and was often the first thing to be cut in the marketing budget and this had a negative impact on professional morale. There was also a feeling that clients still needed to be educated about its increased importance in managing omni-communication channels and its capacity for generating all forms of digital content.

We are not doing a good enough in educating clients. Typically you got a small budget to start with PR, instead of trying start with advertising you can’t afford. You just give us the leftover HKD20,000 and see what they can do to supplement it.

Macy, Managing Director, international PR agency

Frustrations were expressed at all levels concerning career management, being a source of anxiety for all levels of executives. Respondents also observed ‘the chances for promotion, are not as fast as in the past’ (Sam), yet, despite the high staff turnover in the industry, company loyalty paid dividends in assuring career advancement.

I could not wait too long, if there is no foreseeable promotion during the first half of next year, and then I may consider leaving.

Brianna, Associate Planner, 4As ad agency

One PR executive believed that they had to lock into an organisation and demonstrate dependability to assure promotion, thereby compromising their own agency and generating a feeling of being trapped:

The chance of being promoted would be higher if I stay there for longer... There are two reviews per year... by self-assessment and others’ nomination... Our company is inclined to promote internally rather than hiring newcomers.

Christy, Junior PR Executive, international PR agency

Among the younger workers the ability to embrace job flexibility, and self-organised work was often experienced as ‘freer in some sense yet also harsh and isolating’ (McGuigan 2010: 334):

So now it’s the other way round – it’s me who wants to know how my career path will go, I think that both parties need to think ahead to know whether one should stay or leave [the company].

Patricia, Junior Media Executive, 4As media agency
(5) Policy implications and recommendations

In terms of public policy implications emerging from this study, it would appear that the welfare and future of the creative industries rests not purely on implementing economic strategies, but on a clear understanding of the importance and value of emerging human capital as a political solution. The role of government could be to recalibrate the emphasis on creative work as creative capital, and further redefine a work-centred society starting with the education system as a way of addressing workplace beliefs, values and behaviours. With the collaborative support of industry and the education system, action could usefully be achieved on two levels of increased awareness and elevated public visibility for the creative sector, in addition to the nurturing of creative human resources.

Therefore, these policy implications and recommendations can be themed into two main areas: collating and sharing baseline information/data in the public domain to develop a greater understanding of the social and economic value of the creative industries; developing and nurturing Hong Kong’s creative talent through focused education and training initiatives to assure future innovation and growth in the creative sector through more investment in time and money. All of these initiatives should be approached and achieved in a holistic way, following the lead of the successful creative industry policy directions of other countries such as the UK, considered as a global leader in this regard, such as the Creative Industries Council (CIC 2017). This approach would be based on directives from public private partnerships, involving a range of key stakeholders including players from government, industry, higher education and professional associations working together to achieve a common goal to invest in and boost the creative sector and assure the well being of the creative worker.

1. Networked public information provision across creative industry sectors

Firstly, there appears to be the need for a constant update of data relating to the growth, development and contribution of the creative sectors to the economy building on previous baseline studies (CCPR/CPU, 2003) and the 2005 Creativity Index. This updated mapping every 2-5 years of the creative industries sector in Hong Kong would enable employers and workers to view and benchmark the growth and contribution of their field of work to the local, regional and international economies. Access to this data would empower creative workers enabling them to track the economic health and development of their industry of practice in the interests of managing their future career progression. It would also identify the data gaps such as the freelance needed to and will enable a more updated mapping of the creative industries landscape in Hong Kong.

Secondly, given the positive response to the videos based on our ethnographic interviews with creative industry workers, it would seem that there is a need to provide informative behind the scenes insights into the daily operations of creative workers, a government-initiated promotional campaign featuring and explaining the work of the various industries in the creative sector and positioning creative work as a valuable professional choice will work towards creating a recognisably healthier, happier and more productive creative industries workplace in the future.

The implementation of these proposed actions driven by the relevant public/private sector stakeholders will involve greater co-operation between professional associations and government departments such as Create HK, the Education Department and the Central Policy Unit and professional associations such as the Council of Public Relations Hong Kong, the Newspaper Association, the Publisher’s Association and the 4A’s, for example.
2. Developing and nurturing Hong Kong’s creative talent

There appears to be a need to focus on expanding and fostering a creative and cultural environment conducive to elevating creative talent and finding a natural outlet for the development and exploitation of Intellectual Property (IP) that will also contribute to a healthy creative economy. Hence, the welfare, protection and future of the creative industries rests not purely on implementing economic strategies, but on a clear understanding of the importance and value of emerging human capital as a political solution. The role of government could be to recalibrate the emphasis on creative work as creative capital, and further redefine a work-centred society starting with the education system as a way of addressing workplace beliefs, values and behaviours. With the collaborative support of industry and the education and training system, action could usefully be achieved on two levels.

Firstly, higher education institutions teaching creative industries subjects and preparing students for work in these sectors could work more closely with creative industry sectors through training workshops, mentoring schemes and seminars. The government’s financial support to both sides will greatly incentivize such initiatives. In addition, industry representatives would benefit from this closer association with emerging generations in understanding their needs, skills and ambitions. Working on the information yielded in the on-going creative industries research and data tracking suggested above, the critical skills required, such as multi-platform competencies for digital content generation and preparedness planning for technological advancements, will be identified and incorporated into training programmes and professional development training undertaken by higher educators, professional associations and in-house organisational training programmes.

Secondly, in the absence of professional accreditation in many of the creative industries analysed in this study, and the patent feelings of worker insecurity and a lack of career direction expressed by research respondents in this study, more a career guidance is needed, not only to attract new entrants, but also to enable creative workers to determine a viable career path based on access to useful information about education, training, career structure and job opportunities. One solution could be for industry leaders and professional associations to work with existing colleges and university departments offering creative industry based courses to benchmark and devise industry recognised accreditation and certification schemes. This approach could also be initiated using an online platform or app following the model of UK based Creative Choices (www.creative-choices.co.uk). This online platform, run by independent charity and licensed skills council, Creative & Cultural Skills (https://ccskills.org.uk/about), offers careers guidance and mentoring for industry entrants and by industry experts, whilst monitoring and campaigning for fair access to creative work and equitable pay levels to reduce and counter elitist creative industry practices. In addition, industry driven online resources and online creative communities such as Hiive (https://app.hiive.co.uk/) and IdeasTap also offer viable models to follow and adapt for the mentoring and professional development benefit of Hong Kong’s professional creative sector.

Also, professional associations could work in closer collaboration with government departments, professional associations and industry leaders, as is in evidence in the UK’s successful collaborative initiative, Creative Industries Federation (CIF), to creatively rework the meaning and practice of creative work, nurturing more social respect for creativity and both its cultural and economic value in society, among workers, clients and across industry sectors via the launch of information campaigns. Consideration should also be given to setting up creative industry apprenticeship schemes incentivised by government support and subsidies as in the UK under the remit of Creative Skillset (see
Sector Skills Assessment for Creative Industries of UK Creative, Creative and Cultural Skills, 2011). This could be implemented by co-developing both entry and professional level training schemes in emerging skills such as digital technology, Intellectual Property (IP) management, enterprise and innovation. Also, the development of professional certification programmes would validate and systematise the work of these creative occupational sectors and the value of the creative worker.

In this way, through a range of networked, collaborative efforts based on public/private sector driven initiatives and founded on the twin pillars of more open information dissemination and education and training for and on behalf of the creative sector. Hence, the real value of creative work could be more universally understood by a range of stakeholders with investments made in the training of upcoming creative workers in more relevant work and life-skills, thereby enabling a secure flow of creative talent and enabling creative workers to attain and sustain a work-life balance resulting in a less precarious and more meaningful and assured workplace culture in the future.

In the end, we summarize the details of our research’s public policy implications to propose the following 10 specific policy recommendations:

**Policy Recommendation 1:** That a creative industries collation taskforce is created by cross-sectoral Hong Kong Government departments (Create Hong Kong; Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, Central Policy Unit) to map and track the creative industries sector and disseminate developmental data every 2-5 years. This could also be extended to an annual needs analysis to identify key issues that need to be focussed on.

**Policy Recommendation 2:** That a cross-sectoral creative skills and opportunities database be set up containing useful information for creative workers relating to educational training, professional development, career options, qualification enhancement, job openings, industry reports and trend data.

**Policy Recommendation 3:** That industry leaders and professional associations work with existing colleges and university departments offering creative industry based courses to benchmark and devise industry recognised accreditation and certification schemes.

**Policy Recommendation 4:** That a government-initiated promotional campaign is produced to elevate a better understanding of the creative industries and featuring the work of the various industries in the creative sector and positioning creative work as a valuable professional choice. This will work towards creating a deeper understanding of how these industries work for the benefit of future and existing professionals, in addition to professionals working in other complementary sectors such as technology, in addition to the wider public.

**Policy Recommendation 5:** That the government in collaboration with industry and the professional associations work together and launch a creative industries careers campaign to ensure equity in recruitment and pay and also to provide clear information about the right balance of skills and competencies required to take up and develop a career in the creative industries. In addition this campaign would work to dispel erroneous information about the nature of careers across the creative sector.

**Policy Recommendation 6:** That relevant government departments ensure that creative subjects, innovation and enterprise studies should be an established part of the school curriculum.
**Policy Recommendation 7:** That funding and support is provided from public-private sector partnerships driven by professional associations for in-house and external training schemes, creative incubator initiatives and mentoring schemes.

**Policy Recommendation 8:** That a series of events be organised between government departments, professional associations and industry the creative sectors to showcase the breadth, reach and value of the creative sector aimed at an audience of students, parents, employers and educators.

**Policy Recommendation 9:** That selected creative organisations adopt a school, college or university department to foster direct industry-educational partnerships at the local level.

**Policy Recommendation 10:** That creative industry apprenticeship schemes are set up by industry and are incentivised by government support and subsidies.
Details of the public disseminations held

Local and overseas academic presentations
Three academic conference presentations on the preliminary findings of this PPR research were given at the University of Leeds in September 2016, the University of Hong Kong in December 2016 and the University of Manchester in April 2017. The PI also gave a lecture on the same topic at the Department of Sociology, University of Hong Kong, in October 2016. Additionally, the PI presented his ongoing research on cultural and creative industries in East Asia along with this PPR project’s findings at Coventry University London Campus in September 2016, and King’s College London in September 2017. The Co-I also presented a research presentation to academic colleagues at City University of Hong Kong in November 2017 attended by 50 people on the contested discourse relating the creative industry sector as based on the perceptions of its workforce.

These presentations enabled the dissemination of research findings to, and generation of feedback from researchers within and outside the discipline of sociological study of cultural and creative industries, both in Hong Kong and Europe. Importantly, the first trip to the UK (University of Leeds) also allowed the PI and Co-I to meet with Professor David Hesmondhalgh (internationally renowned scholar in creative industry and creative labour theories, at Department of Media and Communication, University of Leeds) and confirm his participation at the Public Policy Seminar held in late March 2017 at HKU, alongside other academics at research institutions in Hong Kong.

Preparation of Public Policy Seminar
Apart from Professor Hesmondhalgh, scholarly and industry experts in Hong Kong were also invited to participate and/or attend the Public Policy Forum, to facilitate better coherence among diverse industry insiders, policy makers, and the academia on the conditions of the culture and creative industries. Confirmed forum panel discussants include Professor Anthony Fung (School of Journalism and Communication, Chinese University of Hong Kong), Dr. Chow Yiu Fai (Department of Humanities and Creative Writing, Hong Kong Baptist University), Dr. Sylvia J Martin (Department of Sociology, University of Hong Kong), alongside the PI and Co-I. Invitations to the Forum were also extended to representatives in the public and private sectors, including the representatives of CreateHK and HKTDC, senior management at global and local PR and advertising agencies, TV, and print media companies, and their worker representatives.

The publicity issued prior to this forum included a promotional poster with the above mentioned details of the event and online registration was open to the public and designed and distributed to local research institutions, including HKU, CityU, CUHK, HKBU, HKPolyU and others.

The HKU Faculty of Social Sciences’ Public Policy Forum
The Public Policy Forum entitled, “Creative Industries in Flux: A Critical Investigation into the Challenges, Agency and Potential of Cultural and Creative Workers in Hong Kong” was held at the Faculty of Social Sciences, the University of Hong Kong, on 31st March 2017. For publicity and further articulation of the PPR research findings, a pamphlet was designed and distributed to all Forum attendees, and a 15-minute preview of a 25-minute documentary was shown during the event. Additionally, Cantonese simultaneous interpretation was arranged for the Forum, so that research output was accessible to more potential audiences.
Public and academic dissemination of research findings

Two original manuscripts arising directly from the PPR project, provisionally entitled “Creative labour and ‘neo-precarity’: A critical investigation into emerging precarious challenges for formal workers in advertising and public relations industries” and “Beyond the social centrality of work and post-work conditions: Creative labour’s experience and reaction to the crumbling meaningful employment in the cultural and creative industries” were prepared and have been submitted to leading international peer-reviewed journals in the study of work and employment, as well as cultural and creative industries. Meanwhile, the PI and Co-I have also been successful in getting their book proposal accepted by Routledge, a renowned international academic book publisher. Entitled Hong Kong Creative Industries in Flux: A Critical Investigation into the Challenges, Agency and Potential of Creative Workers, the complete 80,000 words book manuscript will be submitted to the publisher in late September 2018; the book is expected to be published officially in 2019. All the above forthcoming publications will include an acknowledgement of the funding support of this project from CPU/PICO.
(7) Conclusion

Overall, our findings broadly align with the research of Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) as creative workers in the three selected cultural and creative industries experience ambivalent working conditions in terms of long hours, relatively low pay, lack of security and the pressures of consistently investing in career progression through active networking and advancement, resulting in a relatively high job turnover, isolation and lack of agency. As in other industry sectors, poor labour conditions continue to persist without any union support. In this precarious and uncertain workplace environment, creative workers are affected psychologically and emotionally by these daily pressure-cooker working conditions. As with other creative workers, they tend to accept this as an industry norm, recognising it to be ‘self-exploitation’. They ‘seem torn over the precariousness of their work – bemoaning the mental and emotional states produced, but also resigned to insecurity speaking of it as necessary and even desirable’ (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011: 41) given its associated cachet with symbolic content production. The situation for creative workers is typified by the contradictions in the struggle for self-sufficiency and security; between individual interests and collective ones and competition versus collaboration. They appear to be caught up in the endless ‘entrepreneurship of self’ that has mythic potential but that is seemingly never satisfied (Frayne 2015).

Three new themes – all of which are related to the five traditional sources of job insecurity (Pay; Work Hours; Professionalisation and Unionisation; Socialising, Networking and Isolation; and Feeling of Diminishing Industrial Support) have emerged from the current research. This contrasts with previous work done on creative labour across the past decade notably in terms of emerging intergenerational conflicts, technological change and an underestimation of creative labour and creativity within these industries and society. Intergenerational conflicts within the cultural workforce were manifested in their attitude towards, and understanding of the work ethic. The new generation of creative workers appear less inclined to yield to the system. A lack of agency on the part of many young creative workers means that they tend to have no loyalty for their organisation and ‘jump ship’ in Hong Kong’s relatively robust economy for a few dollars more, which can be read as a form of resistance and another take on the ‘complicated version of freedom’ (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010). Technological advancement has amplified the blurring of work and leisure, whilst also contributing to the devaluation of creative workforce expertise. Lastly, it has also been argued that creative skills are not valued compared to other ‘professional’ occupations in terms of wages or professional respect. While creative workers tended to dismiss the possibilities of successful union intervention, they complained about the little support that they received from their employers in career management, leaving them to their own devices, feeling that the value of PR and advertising seemed to be increasingly disregarded, diminished or replaced by other (newer) professions.

The working realities of these three creative sectors stand at odds with global government rhetoric, emphasising their strategic importance in driving economic success. Clearly, this policy-driven narrative works in favour of the producer-owner in late capitalist society, as opposed to accommodating the interests of the worker who is seemingly positioned as a pawn in the game of creative point-scoring on political and economic agendas (Florida, 2000). In the case of Hong Kong, the Government of HKSAR should take further steps aligned with the two identified areas for action: providing networked public information provision across creative industry sectors and developing and nurturing Hong Kong’s creative talent based on 10 actionable policy recommendations to bridge the gaps presented in this public policy research report to facilitate a holistic, sustainable development of cultural and creative industries for the future.
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