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How Taiwan and Hong Kong can become Asia's Social Innovation Hubs

The two tiger economies will benefit greatly from collaboration – it will also bring them better social prosperity

By Wendy Pan

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Taiwan and Hong Kong are closely connected to each other, culturally and commercially. Both take pride in inheriting the best ancient Chinese cultural practices, from drinking Oolong tea and practicing martial arts, to respecting elders. Commercially, more than 400 flights go between Taiwan and Hong Kong on a weekly basis, making the route one of the top 10 "busiest commercial airline routes" in the world in 2011. After the 2008 world financial crisis, both economies started to search for a new model of development, a model integrating innovation with broader social needs.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) categorises both Taiwan and Hong Kong as economies that have reached the state of "innovation-driven growth", the third stage of economic development. (Stage 1 of development is "factor-driven development", and Stage 2 is "efficiency-driven development"). Hong Kong ranked No9 in WEF's Global Competitive Index with a score of 5.4, while Taiwan ranked No 13 with a score of 5.3. And yet, 9.2% of businesses in Taiwan and 16.2% in Hong Kong selected "**insufficient capacity to innovate**" as one of the top five problems in doing businesses.

Despite both economies' highly-developed social welfare systems, they both have room for improvement in addressing issues of social inclusion and economic access. In the past few years, organizations have hosted social entrepreneurship conferences and speaker series, creating platforms for knowledge sharing and discussions, and organizing field visits for cross-learning. Social innovators there have also realized that they are facing similar issues – the lack of communication between grass-root organizations and governmental agencies, difficulties in aligning social and business visions, and shortages of socially-minded business practitioners.

What could Taiwan and Hong Kong do to increase collaboration to become Asia's top social innovation hubs?

Co-learning for knowledge accumulation

Despite their similarities, Taiwan and Hong Kong walked different paths in the past century. Taiwan was colonized by Japan for 50 years before starting its own developmental path. Hong Kong, on the other hand, was ruled by the British for over 100 years. This historical difference shaped the model of social innovation: Hong Kong developed a model with strong British influence, while Taiwan learned many of its lessons from Japan. What's interesting is that Great Britain and

Japan are both pioneers in the field of social innovation. By learning from each other, Hong Kong and Taiwan could blend best practices from the east and west, accumulating a wealth of knowledge on social innovation. To achieve this, the two regions should open up their respective social co-working spaces by hosting each other's social innovators and collaborating on social projects to effectively foster knowledge exchange and absorb each other's strengths.

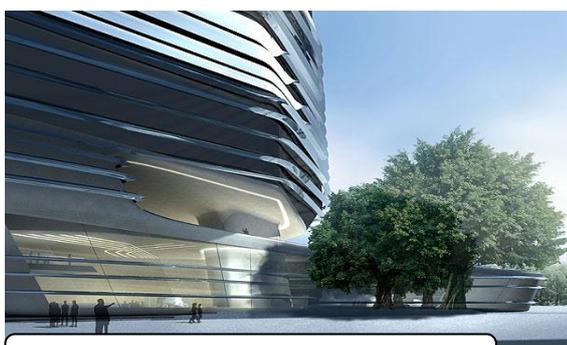


Co-operate to expand and grow

Neither Taiwan (23.2 million) nor Hong Kong (7.4 million) has a large population. This has been one of the major barriers for social enterprises in both places to achieve scale. Based on the law of comparative advantage, social enterprises on both sides could explore opportunities to sell products in each other's market, effectively creating a larger market.

For example, Taiwan is known for producing high-quality agricultural products, while Hong Kong essentially does not have an agriculture sector. Hence, it is possible for a Taiwanese agricultural social enterprise to sell its products to a Hong Kong food distribution social enterprise. This effectively increases the Taiwanese social enterprise's potential market share by a third. Moreover, social enterprises can also co-operate in production and marketing. For instance, a medical screening device can be produced by a social enterprise in Taiwan, sold by a different social enterprise in Hong Kong, to elders with chronic medical conditions in Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China and even other ASEAN economies.

Cross-investing to diversify portfolio



HK's Design Institute for Social Innovation

Venture philanthropy and social investing are more developed in Hong Kong than in Taiwan, not surprising given that Hong Kong has one of the most efficient financial services sectors in the world and ranks No 1 in financial market development (Taiwan ranks No 19). Though Taiwanese society is very generous when it comes to charitable donation, the idea of investing in social-purpose businesses is still novel. If social investors in Hong Kong can start looking into investment opportunities in Taiwan, it would not only help them diversify their investment

portfolio, but also give Taiwanese social entrepreneurs a new source of funding.

Although still small in size and under-studied, the social innovation sectors in Taiwan and Hong Kong are booming. With collaborative efforts from both sides, Taiwan and Hong Kong will be on their way to becoming Asia's leading social innovation hubs.

Wendy Pan is based in Taipei and is a member of [Social Innovation Research Group](#), a think tank funded by the Asian Institute at the University of Toronto.

Food for thought

Does HK have the potential of becoming Asia's Social Innovation City?
Your views and ideas are welcome.

Please send them to the Editor at kakuitse@gmail.com

到香港，公益旅行趣

張瓊齡

香港，是我生平第一次離開台灣造訪的境外之地，那次是隨著合唱團出國演唱表演，此後的十多年，雖然不時就有機會過境停留，卻也總把香港視為過渡之地，不曾以香港為目的地。

再次把香港拉抬到也是目的地的層次(那趟的主行程是到廣西參加中國公益組織「多背一公斤」辦的公益旅行)，是在 2007 年春天，我邀請媽媽在我的中國旅行結束後，獨自到香港與我會合，我們在香港有四天三夜的親子小旅行。

為了讓媽媽有不同的香港經驗，而非泛泛的購物之旅，除了事前請教香港通、香港當地人，也特別從香港的文化與自然面向去做挖掘，無論是到上環「蓮香樓」混在當地人中間喝早茶、到荃灣走訪懷舊風的「三棟屋博物館」、去元朗逛當時才營運不久的溼地公園，以及前往大澳漁村途中、遇見大喇喇在馬路橫行被編號保護的牛群，在在都讓我們驚豔。那次還碰到香港的公益團體在聯合舉辦一個只有十多個攤位的迷你公平貿易產品展，我也帶媽媽去湊熱鬧。

然而，自從 2010 年冬天，我到香港參加了「社會企業民間高峰會議」之後，它就成為我心目中「公益旅行」的好地方，不時就想去走走看看之外，還不斷鼓吹要去香港的朋友，一定別錯過體驗「公益香港」的好機會。

地鐵美孚站附近有個「黑暗中對話」體驗館，是一個精心設計過、讓大眾在 75 分鐘透過盲人導覽員引領之下，可以暫時拋開視覺的慣性，運用聽覺、觸覺、嗅覺、味覺(我們會在全黑的咖啡座裡，購買並享用小點飲料)，來感受外在世界。可以線上預約，也可以到現場湊團，每梯次最多六人，有英語、普通話、廣東話導覽員可選擇。2009 年才開館，目前除了是當地中小學生必去的校外教學體驗館，在香港兩、三百個旅遊景點中，也是名列前茅的景點喔！

喜歡並懷念鄧麗君的歌迷，可以搭乘地鐵到尖東站，這裡有全世界第一家以鄧麗君為主題，販售台、港、日式有機餐點的「甜蜜蜜新生咖啡店」。於 2009 年 1 月 29 日開幕，選在鄧麗君生日開張的這家咖啡店，也延續她的慈善精神，店裡雇用的員工很大比例是精神障礙康復人士，餐點的品質與價格都很值得推薦。我喜歡到這兒喝下午茶。

銀杏館是數一數二的高級有機餐廳，獲選 2011 年香港最佳有機法國餐廳，最大的特色是，所有的服務生都雇用七十歲以上的長者，讓老人家透過服務，持續接觸社會並有收入，長者們親切誠懇的服務態度，讓旅人感到非常溫暖。喜歡吃西餐的人，可以到中環的歌賦街店吃意、法料理，餐前或餐後，還可以逛逛附近的中央書院遺址，那兒曾是國父孫中山先生念書的地方呢！想吃中式餐飲的，則有太子店可以選擇；如果想要體驗戶外野趣的，還可以前往「樂活有機農莊」，這是由一群註冊資深社工及綠色生活導師共同創立，以大自然的耕種方式，融合大地的靈氣，與美麗的天與地共生共存，希望讓大眾對綠色生活有直接體會，非常適合親子同行。

位於黃金海岸的國際十路會，則是住在香港西方人士的慈善大本營，這兒原本是個廢棄的校園，而今儼然是個小小聯合國，專門搜集香港各界捐贈的高素質剩餘物資，其中一半經過分類整理後，轉贈給香港本地有需要的人，另一半則運往世界各地，提供發生戰爭或者天災的地區使用。最近這趟去拜訪，發現他們有個更大的願景，希望把這裡變成是一個全球需求的體驗村，將來到這兒的人，在一一體驗過不同的主題區之後，對於全世界正在面臨的各項弱勢、困難議題，會有更切身的體會，也更加明白自己如何參與公益行動，才可以讓世界變得更美好。

真期待香港有越來越多的公益旅遊景點，當整個香港處處都有愛與溫暖的氣息，它就是名符其實的「東方明珠」了！

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