



La Grande Arche



Louvre Museum

An Overview 解説

French cultural policy enters pivotal era.

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再考の時期にきたフランスの文化政策

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In France, the national government takes a leading role in supporting the arts. Also, since the birth of a socialist party government in 1981, the budget for cultural programs has nearly doubled, to the point that it now represents nearly 1% of the entire national budget. It is also a widely accepted fact that a wider variety of creative activities, including mass (entertainment) culture, have become recipients of this cultural support from the government, and that, despite the fact that the national government takes the leading role, there has also been a trend toward decentralization and greater shift of decision-making rights to the localities.

In recent years, however, studies have emerged that question these commonly held ideas about France's cultural policies and programs since the 1980s. In the following pages I would like to refer to these recent studies in taking another look at the actual state of cultural support conducted by the national and local governments with special focus on the question of "democratization of culture."

The disparity between Malraux and Lang

To understand the history of French national cultural policy we can look for its origins in the era of absolutism. However if we understand cultural policy as referring not only to support for (and control of) the creative activities of artists but also referring to policies aimed at promoting the access of the people to cultural activities, then we must recognize two decisively important events in the history of France's cultural policy development. One is the establishment of the Ministry of Culture with André Malraux as its first Minister in 1959, while the other is appointment of Jack Lang as Minister of Culture in 1981 with the ascension of a socialist government. Of these two, the latter can be said to have changed the basic framework of France's cultural policy to its present form, and the defining characteristics of this policy can best be understood by comparing it with the cultural policy under Malraux.

In short, what Malraux applied himself to as the first Minister of Culture was a policy known as the "democratization of culture." This "democratization of culture" meant making France's sophisticated artistic culture available to all citizens of France equally. To realize this end, Malraux applied himself to the construction of cultural facilities (called "Houses of Culture") throughout the country. These "Houses of Culture" were what could be called multipurpose culture centers with facilities for presenting everything from theater, music concerts, movies and television to exhibitions and lectures.

However, in the ten years before his term as Minister ended in 1969, only seven of these "Houses of Culture" were completed, and even today there are a total of only 15. This failure was due in part to the great cost construction of such facilities, but even more so, it is believed to be the result of a failure to gain the support of the general public. This is surely due to shallowness of the concepts Malraux's "Houses of Culture" policy was based on. He believed that the democratization of culture could be achieved by simply supplying cultural facilities and ignored other

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*1 *région* (regional)

Referring to the 1964 division of the country into inclusive regional governments above the *département* level. However, these bodies were only given the power to rationalize and implement programs initiated and administrated by the national government departments

*2 DRAC *directions régionales des affaires culturelles*

(regional bureaus of cultural affairs)

Bureaus established throughout the country as part of the program of decentralization of power in the 1970s. Besides serving as intermediaries in the distribution of cultural funding these bureaus also served an advisory and evaluating function with regard to the related local agencies based on Ministry Of Culture policy.

sociological factors like class and family and education. Also, his concept of democratization of culture involved the spreading of the finest artistic works of Paris throughout the country, which completely failed to take into account thematic questions like stimulating the various regional cultures that exist around France. In contrast, when Jack Lang was appointed Minister of Culture in 1981 under a new left-leaning government, he proceeded to pursue the democratization of culture with a very different interpretation of what that concept involved. In short, Lang had a much broader definition of what constituted “culture” and greatly expanded the framework of things eligible for cultural support to include not only regional culture but also the vast range of so-called mass culture and the entertainment industries. In other words, he interpreted the democratization of culture not as the spreading of traditional fine art but as the preservation and support of a wide variety of culture that was deeply rooted in the lifestyles of the people. Furthermore, he sought to achieve this not by reducing the amount of support going to traditional fine arts but by greatly increasing the national budget for the arts (twice the previous year’s budget).

The important mainstay of this new policy of supporting culture in its full diversity was the stimulation of cultural activities in the various regions of the country. In order to change the system of centralized governance that had typified French politics for so long, the new left-leaning government implemented laws in 1982 and 83 aimed at decentralizing governance by transferring several powers formerly held by the national government to publicly elected regional legislatures (*1). Of course, these changes also affected cultural policy, with the formation of a network of regional bureaus (*directions*) of cultural affairs throughout the country, DRAC (*2). Presently there are 27 of these regional bureaus of culture in France and it is said that 90% of the financial support for cultural projects supplied under the nation’s cultural policies are decided at the regional bureau of culture level. What’s more the combined budgets of the local governments for cultural support are presently 2.5 times larger than the budget of the national Ministry of Culture. Even more important in Lang’s new policies, however, was the new focus on support for mass culture. In fact, it was the support of mass consumer culture and amateur cultural activities that characterized Lang’s culture policy more than anything else. Under Lang, the Ministry of Culture set about the task of tearing down the barriers art and the masses, the different standpoints dividing the arts, amateurs and pros, inequalities based on regional or ethnic differences and the like. Within this framework, the Ministry was especially diligent in its efforts to break down the hierarchy existing between fine and low art.

The Ministry began by taking on the problem of the existing culture policy of selecting recipients of aid based on their respective forms of artistic expression and began to actively extend support to the many areas of “common people’s culture” that had previously been ignored, such as doll theater, operetta, circus and culinary culture. France’s new Ministry of Culture turned particular attention to young people’s culture, especially popular music, including pops and rock. For example, in February of 1982 Lang released a new music policy including numerous guidelines for the support of pops. These included support for young musicians seeking places to practice and support to regional organizations willing to supply such facilities. Even more striking was the construction of halls specifically for rock concerts. The first of these was the Le Zenith, which opened in January of 1984 in the La Villette area of Paris, and gradually this was followed by plans to build similar facilities in other regions of the country. It was an especially striking development in France in the first half of the eighties to see areas like pops and rock music which had previously been regarded as small branches of the entertainment industry become eligible recipients of government cultural support. In May of 1989 the Ministry of Culture established a new post for an officer in charge of rock music, with the first officer being a 25-year-old music magazine editor named Bruno Ryon. As officer in charge of support for rock music Ryon was given an initial budget of 43 million francs. This trend of support for popular music continues today, having been the object of special policy emphasis in 1998 and 99. The Ministry of Culture also gave its support to comic book culture. In April of 1982, Land held a conference for professional comic artists. Then, in a press conference

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in January of 83, he made a point of noting that comic books had been looked down on as a medium criticized as having a bad influence on young people and lacking cultural value. He called for comics to be recognized as a valid art form. Later, President Mitterrand's visit to the annual International Comic Festival in the city of Angoulême in 1985 led to the idea of founding a National Comic Center the following year. That center would eventually open in January of 1991. Other similar developments in the area of popular culture industries were the establishment of a national Center for Photographic Art, a School of Photographic Art in Arles and a Museum of Advertising.

All this shows that the diversification of aid recipients into various cultural fields is one of the important characteristics of France's culture policy after the ascension of the left-leaning government. At the same time, however, France's socialists pursued what can be considered rather conservative policies that contrasted with this. We refer to the building of large-scale facilities under President Francois Mitterrand's "Grand Project." It had become a common practice for French presidents to undertake monumental building projects since Pompidou, but this practice reached a new level under Mitterrand and drew much attention in that a single president was undertaking the construction of several large projects. While the funding for culture-related facilities under the "Grand Project" came from the budget of the Ministry of Culture, the projects were directed by Mitterrand himself. This meant that these projects were managed independent of the other Ministry of Culture programs. It is said that the president's involvement in the projects went beyond the mere formulating of plans to include specific and often quite detailed instruction throughout the execution of each project.

The construction projects undertaken under Mitterrand's Grand Project included (1) the Grand Louvre (the large-scale renovation of the Louvre Museum, including the building of the pyramid), (2) The National Library, (3) the Opera Bastille and (4) the Grand Arch (international communications center at the Arch of Triumph). Because the Grand Project was placed administratively under the presidency rather than the Ministry of Culture, it avoided any interference when France had a change of government (conservative government from 1986 - 88) and continued uninterrupted. It is safe to say that Jack Lang and Francois Mitterrand were the two leaders of French cultural policy in the eighties, but as we have seen above, the cultural policies and programs they each pursued were quite different in direction, at least on the surface. While Lang sought to change cultural policy and programs to fit the needs of the times, Mitterrand pursued more traditional policy methods in the creation of national monuments.

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*3 FRAC *fonds régionaux d'art contemporain*

(regional contemporary art funds)

Established in 1982 the aim of these funds was to heighten the sensitivity of local citizens to the contemporary arts (including painting, sculpture, photography, decorative arts and crafts). Besides collecting of works, they also engaged in the lending of works between localities. Work acquisitions are based on decisions by independent committees of specialists in each locality. The committees are made up of regional legislators, independent specialists and representatives from the national government. The present budget of FRAC funds for work acquisitions represents about one half of the total public budget for acquisition of contemporary art.

*4 FRAM *fonds régionaux d'acquisition des musées*

(regional museum acquisition funds)

Established in 1982 the aim of promoting the activities of local art museums under the same system as FRAC.

*5 COREPHAE *commissions régionales du patrimoine historique, archéologique, et ethnologique*

(regional commissions for historical, archeological and ethnic patronage)

These are advisory committees for the designation of cultural and historical assets and monuments in the various regions. Their aim was to give local populations a voice in the selection of cultural properties and assets.

The actualities of regional division of governance

Now let us turn to the question of the actual degree to which the cultural policies Lang set in motion were effective in achieving their aims. Let us also ask if his were actually revolutionary policies that contrasted significantly with Mitterrand's aims.

A recent study by Kim Eling suggests that the seemingly impressive French cultural policy is in fact not as revolutionary as many think, and also that it is not really centralized in nature. In fact, Eling insists that the decision-making process in France's cultural programs is in practice not much different from the British system based primarily on third-party organizations.

For example, a look at the actual state of division of power to the localities reveals that the Ministry of Culture has not completely transferred power to the local governments. Rather, through the formation of supporting organizations like the regional contemporary art funds FRAC (*3), the regional museum acquisition funds FRAM (*4) and the regional commissions for historical, archeological and ethnic patronage COREPHAE (*5), the Ministry has further divided power and created working partnerships. The Ministry also expanded its network of regional culture bureaus and sent personnel and funds to them. Even more important was the fact that a contract system was implemented and the regional bureaus incorporated into it.

This meant that in reality the ability of the local governments to allocate funds for cultural programs was constrained by the contracts signed with the regional culture bureaus. In other words, the new policy sent more government funds to the regions but only to be allotted by a system that retained the old paternal attitude of national governance. It is also that in actual practice the regional bureaus to this day are given annual instruction by the Ministry of Culture about their selections of which regional bodies to give priority to in funding. And, in fact regional governments that were not used to this kind of negotiation were most likely to accept the suggestions of the Ministry as the "results of true dialogue."

Of course, this contract system was not implemented with complete disregard for the wishes of the regional governments. In reality, there was no tendency for funding to be concentrated in certain regions, and in 1982 all the regional governments signed contracts and most of those were subsequently renewed. Furthermore, these contracts served to stimulate investment activities by the regional governments. And, most of all, the combined budget of the regional governments for cultural activities has come to exceed that of the national government, including the Ministry of Culture, as a result of the new policy. However, this can also be interpreted as a situation that gives the Ministry of Culture the right to intervene in decisions about policy by the regional governments at no expense of its own. According to Eling, this means that from the standpoint of the regional governments, having the Ministry of Culture as a partner in their cultural policies ensures the "quality" of their programs. And that is proof of how powerful the value judgments of the Ministry and its subsidiary regional culture bureaus are.

Even more evident in terms of this inequality between the central and regional governments was the Grand Project. Although the national funding for cultural programs has tended to increase year by year, the percentage of budget allotted for the Grand Project rose from just 15% in 1981 to nearly 70% by 1986. This meant that less budget could be directed to other art and cultural programs, which naturally required a reduction in size of the other programs. Of course the policy of division of power toward the regional governments also suffered as a result of the Grand Project. For example, the budget allotted for division of power in 1985 was 126 million francs, but that was cut in half to 63 million in 1986. What's more, all of the Grand Project's construction projects were in Paris, which clearly ran contrary to the socialist parties' of regional division of power.

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Examining French cultural policy and programs

Concerning the question of whether or not progress has been made in achieving Lang's aim of the "democratization of culture," the answer is not yet clear. The birth of the left-leaning government led to a year-on-year budget increase of 1,440% in the budget category of "cultural development" which includes programs for the democratization of culture and arts education. But, this is merely proof of the fact that funding for the democratization of culture was nearly nonexistent at the time, and in fact the 1981 budget for cultural development programs was a mere 41 million francs. Furthermore, due to the subsequent influence of the Grand Project, the budget in this category would decrease in ensuing years. In contrast, as the budget for cultural activities doubled with the birth of the socialist government, the percentage of that budget going to the main cultural sectors like theater and music remained at their previous high levels. In short, while the previously ignored sectors like art and visual works like film and video received increases of 123% and 220% respectively, the traditionally strong sectors of theater and music also got significant raises of 75% and 50% respectively. In other words, there was little change in the distribution of funds in terms of percentages.

When viewed in light of these facts, it seems that actual effect of Lang's aim of securing and promoting cultural diversity was limited. Of course, as we mentioned earlier, there has been various types of support for attention-getting mass culture, but most of this support has been in the form of one-time programs and not really large in terms budget. In short, what has happened with French cultural policy since the eighties is that more chances for support were offered by bringing out a bigger pie, but the result has been that the priority of traditional arts organizations has been maintained, thus creating a situation that can hardly be called revolutionary.

In answer to the question of why the result has turned out this way, Eling came to the conclusion based on numerous interviews that it was caused by the intervention of powerful special interest groups in the fields of the organized arts to influence policy. In other words, there are enough influential special interest groups in the fields of the traditional arts that have lobbied effectively against the bureaus in charge of policy-making to protect their interests and influence. This can be considered a situation that stands in opposition to the traditional image of French culture programs as being led by the national government. And in such a situation, the decision-making power of the policy deciding bureaus becomes especially strong in budget categories like "cultural development" where special interest lobbies cannot exist in the first place and in areas lacking organization like mass culture or still immature areas like the new creative field, both of which do not have access to the negotiating strength of interest lobbies. In such areas the budget allocations would thus be subject to the trends of the times, concludes Eling. This leads to the idea that the actual effect of the culture policy since 1982 has been to divide the recipients of funding into something similar to sects. Seen from another perspective, we might say that there has been almost no efforts directed at achieving the kind of balance between the different sects that should be one of the essentials of a true support of a diversification of culture. In other words, it can be said that since Lang the cultural policy has recognized diversification of culture on a symbolic level but, at the same time, it has contributed to the preservation of traditional value systems and patterns of power and influence.

Lessons from the French example

Based on what we have seen, it appears that French cultural policy has not

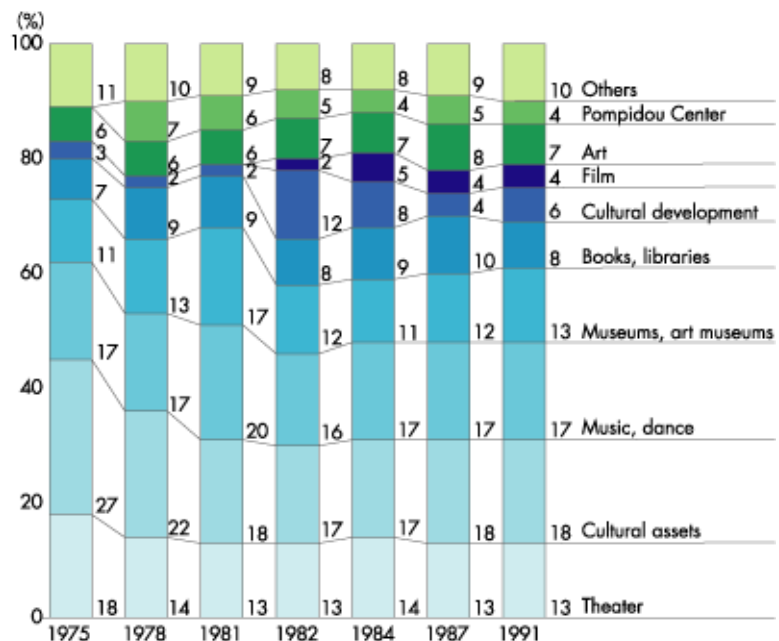
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achieved the level of regional division of power that it is reputed to have, nor does the Ministry of Culture have a complete hold on decision-making power. In the end, systems are nothing more than tools for people to use, and their effect depends on how they are used. Thus, we should not assume that we can understand a nation's cultural policy and programs based simply on a comparison of systems. French cultural policy is clearly a complex mix of the types of issues we have looked at here and, as the standards of cultural values continue to diversify in today's society, the French example, in which the Ministry of Culture and its subsidiary organizations are attempting to be the major agents in the active support of cultural programs, is surely worthy of continued study. If indeed the previously mentioned tendency to recognize the value judgments of the Ministry of Culture and DRAC as guarantees of the "quality" of cultural programs, (while of course value judgments like the actual decisions of what programs and artists will receive funding are made by independent committees with specialization in the various fields) it is because the bureaus involved have sought to developed their abilities to make competent and refined judgments in the cultural fields and that the offices involved take appropriate responsibility with regard to the judgments and decisions they make. This is why the bureaus involved in French cultural policy and programs make a point of promoting transparency regarding the concepts and aims behind their policies, and are indeed following this policy of transparency and openness.

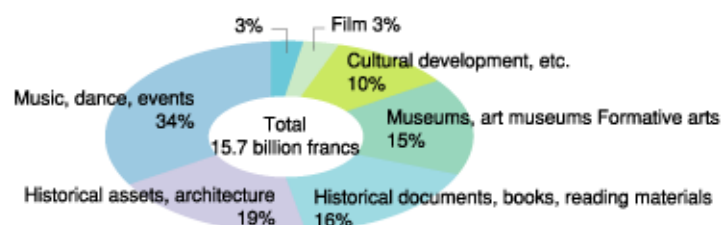
Changes in breakdown of Ministry of Culture Budget (Excluding Grand Project)



Note: The total cultural budget for 1999 was 15.7 billion francs, representing 0.97% of the total national budget

Source: Formulated based on Ministry of Culture statistics

Breakdown of Ministry of Culture Budget (1999)



Source: Based on French Ministry of Culture statistics