



Our ref : LO/HKU
Your ref :

17 October 2002

Mrs Sharon Tong
Clerk to Panel of Security
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Members of the Security Panel,

While everyone agrees that political systems have the right to defend themselves from seditious acts, mature systems also have the responsibility to insure its citizens have open access to competing sources of information so that the people can make up their own minds about the issues that effect their lives. For this reason, I believe all libraries, but particularly academic libraries, should be exempted from regulations that require them to exclude from their collections, books and other materials with points of view that differ from the government. Even regulations that would require librarians to resort to a defense on the basis of "reasonable excuse" will have a chilling effect on what is collected and made accessible to Hong Kong's faculty and students.

I believe there are several main reasons why Hong Kong's libraries should be exempted from any regulations effecting what goes into their collections:

1. Libraries are neutral places where books and journals with competing scientific theories, political ideologies, religious beliefs, etc., can all be found quietly sitting on shelves awaiting being opened by readers. In our library within 10 feet of Marx's *Das Kapital* are books about competing economic theories, taxation methodologies, etc. Libraries, unlike military and political battlefields, are places where competing ideologies can be peacefully contemplated.
2. An informed public is the best guarantee that democratic values are maintained. If differing points of view cannot be lawfully shared, the ruled sometimes feel they must revert to violence to get themselves heard. Democratic societies are founded on the principle that everyone gets the opportunity to speak, and if their arguments are believed by majority of the voters, to become the rulers. The printed word is one of the most important ways of communicating one's views and should not be abrogated.
3. Hong Kong can rightfully be proud of its higher education system. The SAR government has made it clear it wants universities like the University of Hong Kong to compete at the highest levels internationally. In such circles, universities with libraries that cannot freely collect and make available all points of view, cannot be seen as equals.

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4. With the web, censorship is hopeless anyway. Libraries are selective while the web is totally non-selective. Censoring what is in libraries, while the web is open and cannot be closed off, is counter-productive.
5. At the point that Hong Kong rejoined China, the agreement was struck that the two societies could coexist for decades. Freedom to read/collect was part of the existing society – it shouldn't now be weakened or discarded.

I would be very pleased to speak further about this topic with the panel.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Anthony W. Ferguson
Librarian

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