

The Hon. Alan Leong, S.C.,  
Chairman,  
Subcommittee on West Kowloon  
Cultural District Development,  
Room 601D, Citibank Tower,  
3 Garden Road, Central,  
Hong Kong.

Dear Hon. Mr. Leong,

Re :Shortfall and long-term needs in the development of  
arts and culture in Hong Kong

The Ink Society is pleased to be given the opportunity to present its views on the above subject to your Committee.

The Culture and Heritage Commission in its Policy Recommendation Report of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2003 (“the Report”) has already extensively dealt with the issues raised by your Committee under II (a) to (d) of the Agenda in a comprehensive manner. The Ink Society does not wish to repeat their findings and recommendations here save those which are relevant to illustrate the Society’s views and matters which are relevant to throw light on item II(e).

- (1) There is an educated public to support cultural activities in Hong Kong.
  - According to a survey carried out by the Lingnan University for the Culture and Heritage Commission in 2001, 70% of Hong Kong families arranged their children to take part in extra-curriculum arts education activities (see Chapter 3.18 of the Report).
  - Hong Kong has a student population of about 939,000 (primary and secondary schools) for 2003/2004 and applying this 70% formula, we should have 657,000 students who have taken part in arts education programmes/activities and they are Hong Kong’s potential supporters

of cultural activities. This is not to mention the number of our adult population who have participated arts education in their student's days.

- Students participating in various drama and music festivals in Hong Kong are in their thousands every year. This also confirms that we have a receptive audience for cultural activities.

(2) The Hong Kong parents are prepared to invest resources to engage their young in cultural pursuits.

- In the 2001 Lingnan University's survey, it was revealed that Hong Kong parents spent a staggering HK\$2 billion annually just on music educating of their children (see Chapter 3.18 of the Report).

(3) High utilization rate of our existing cultural venues.

- According to the Report, "the utilization rate of LCS'D venues is very high : in 2001, the average rate was 91%. Some major venues such as the Hong Kong Cultural Centre and the Hong Kong City Hall almost reached full capacity" (see Chapter 4.27 of the Report).
- Yet critics say that visitors number to our museum is not high and the performances of our concert halls and opera houses are not well attended. The Report also admits "that high utilization rate does not imply high attendance".

(4) Cultural Apathy?

- There are many factors which create this apparent contradiction. One important reason is that modern people have been pampered with all kinds of instant entertainment gadgets and they will not be attracted to museums, concert halls and theatres unless there are special events. A good example is the recent Impressionist paintings exhibition at the Hong Kong Museum of Art which attracted a total of 280,000 visitors, more than the total number of visitors to the museum for the whole year! We need mega show to draw audience.
- Mega show needs mega money. In addition to sponsorship by

corporations, the Hong Kong Government has to spend HK\$12 million to mount this Impressionist paintings exhibition.

- Yet the total amount spent by all 12 museums in Hong Kong for mounting exhibitions in 2001/2002 was a meagre HK\$50 million only (see Chapter 4.16 of the Report).

(5) Financial Drought

- In 2001/2002 the government's expenditure on culture and arts amounted to HK\$2.6 billion, roughly 1% of the government recurrent expenditure. The corresponding expenditure on education was 19%, health 13% and social welfare 11% (see Chapter 5.13 of the Report).
- With this kind of budgetary constraint, the cultural organizations and performing art groups can barely survive and the Hong Kong audience, deprived.

(6) The future

- We have an educated public eagerly waiting for mega shows but we have a government who is ill-afford to spend more on cultural activities in view of the current financial deflicits.
- This public/private partnership in the West Kowloon Cultural District proposal in whatever final form it will take, is an answer to meet this cultural void and The Ink Society supports the establishment of this West Kowloon Cultural District.
- In the past, Government has acted as the sole "underwriter" of the arts and culture industry in Hong Kong through its ownership and operation of the museums and most of the major venues as well as its subsidies for numerous performing arts groups. There is general consensus that this arrangement is unsatisfactory. Government's overwhelming role in the arts and culture industry, through both ownership and management, is a major shortfall that needs to be corrected. It has created a skewed system of public patronage that crowds out private participation and sponsorship.

- In the long run, Government should be the “facilitator” that creates a friendly macro-environment for the arts to flourish independently. That is precisely what WKCD will provide : a platform for the arts community and the private sector to participate and take charge of the arts and culture industry. That does not mean Government can shy away from its responsibilities. Government must ensure there is adequate long term funding and that the entire WKCD operates under an independent and professional governance system. The Ink Society strongly supports the establishment of a statutory body to oversee the WKCD arts facilities.

(7) The Ink Museum

- The Ink Society definitely supports the establishment of an iconic Ink Museum in the West Kowloon Cultural District. We would refer the Committee members to our Position Paper on this subject submitted to the Committee earlier and do not want to repeat our reasons of support here. Throughout the past two years, the Ink Society has met and discussed with numerous museum professionals, scholars, art historians, collectors, dealers and artists from around the world on this project. The vast majority are envious that Hong Kong now has this golden opportunity. Many have agreed to participate in this exciting project in different capacities. This shows the project has universal appeal. Indeed, the Ink tradition is Chinese contribution to the world culture and it is a rare and historic opportunity for Hong Kong to build this first ever Ink Museum to show to the world that this great tradition is not dead but very much alive and is still evolving.

Yours sincerely,

David Pong  
Co-vice Chairman  
The Ink Society  
3<sup>rd</sup> May 2005