

Submission to the Subcommittee on West Kowloon Cultural District Development  
In response to the call for the Revised work plan for Phase II study  
by the Zonta Club of Hong Kong

In response to the questions posed by the subcommittee

a) What kind of development approach and financial arrangements will be most appropriate for the development of WKCD project?

The area of West Kowloon would be most effectively developed as a park with some residential and commercial development with parcels of land allotted to different developers under a unified scheme to make the area a greener and more beautiful addition to the harbourfront. The revenues from the sale of these land parcels or from private development on WKCD may be earmarked specifically for arts and cultural development. These would include:

- Building one single, extraordinary Museum of Modern & Contemporary Art instead of four, at a better-situated site than West Kowloon;
- Weighing the priority of building a larger performance venue in West Kowloon, (while taking into account that many performance attendances are low), against the urgent need for major performing groups such as the HK Philharmonic and HK Ballet to have proper rehearsal facilities;
- Building better rehearsal facilities and giving more financial support to the HK Philharmonic and HK Ballet to build on their current strengths;
- Earmarking set-up costs for building good art collections;
- Consider re-developing the Cultural Centre in Tsimshatsui;
- Provide for recurrent costs of these facilities

The above can be sustained through either a) a guaranteed provision coming from the developer(s) for a specific period, or b) a fund from the sale of land parcels in West Kowloon, or c) an endowment consisting of properties in the area which would generate adequate income per year.

In terms of concept, an outstanding museum with a great art collection will be much more attractive to visitors than the existence of a gigantic canopy over a group of nondescript buildings. The cost of building and maintaining the canopy is much better utilized by investing directly in the arts.

b) What role the Government and the local arts and cultural sector should play in WKCD development, and the extent of support the Government should provide for the development of arts and culture in Hong Kong?

The Government needs to take a decisive, leadership role in providing a coherent vision for the WKCD by determining what are its long-term goals for the community. Before doing so it has to understand and define the needs of the community and how to best harness the usage of land towards this purpose. The Government should take a macro-

view of what the harbour means to Hong Kong and how to enhance all harbourfront development for the benefit of future generations.

The Government should listen to the views and needs of the arts community, and understand that they are at the crucial stage of requiring continued Government support. Ultimately, the Government needs to enhance arts education in schools and support the training and development of local talent.

It would be highly risky to place the future of arts and culture in the hands of private business interests, as the arts will require continued financial support and are therefore contrary to the natural interests of developers.

c) What management structure should be put in place to ensure a high level of transparency and professionalism in the planning, development and management of arts and cultural facilities and implementation of related policies in WKCD?

There is currently a great need to take all 21 existing public museums out of the Leisure and Culture Services Department and place them under the administration of an independent, quasi-government Museum Authority consisting of full-time paid government representatives, arts administrators, curators, artists, financial advisers and fundraisers. Such an authority would be charged with negotiating/overseeing and subsequently administering these cultural facilities. Each museum will continue to receive the same government funding support, and keep its current staff structure, but in time greater flexibility can be introduced to the management and financial structure of the museums. This independence will have the effect of stimulating motivation and accountability.

The WKCD should have an independent Board to supervise and negotiate the cultural developments on the site. At a later date this Board will also be in charge of administering the facilities under the umbrella of the Museum Authority.

d) The overseas experience

Many large overseas museums are part of their government administration. These include the British Museum, the Smithsonian Institution, the Louvre, the Palace Museum in Beijing and its counterpart in Taipei, the Tokyo National Museum, and so on. Many are administered through the civil service, but a substantial number have some degree of independence.

In the U.S. most museums are actually privately run: these include the Metropolitan Museum, the San Francisco Museum, the Guggenheim, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Chicago Art Institute, etc. As a result, they have their own Board of Directors, Trustees, and entire departments devoted to fundraising activities. For this reason they are known to favour large, 'popular' exhibition themes that draw big crowds.

The U.S. tax structure gives tax incentives for donations of artworks, and this is how many great collections have been acquired by museums. Hong Kong has many excellent private collections, but while the museums are government-run there are no incentives for museum staff to develop closer relations with private collectors. This situation would also be improved if the government instituted tax incentives for art donations. The greater wealth in Western societies and general appreciation of the arts also translates into more support for the arts from the general public. Arts and culture in Hong Kong is developing towards that direction but still requires considerable support from the public sector in order to survive and thrive.

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by Nancy C. Lee  
Public Affairs Committee  
Zonta Club of Hong Kong