

**For discussion
on 4 July 2006**

**WKCD-325
MAG/16/2006**

**Consultative Committee on the
Core Arts and Cultural Facilities of the
West Kowloon Cultural District**

Museums Advisory Group

**Views and Issues Concerning
the Four Preferred Museums Themes**

Purpose

This paper proposes the major considerations for taking forward the discussion regarding the museum themes, having regard to views from various sources, particularly those relating to the four preferred museum themes as stated in the Invitation for Proposals in the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD).

Advice Sought

2. Members are invited to –
 - (a) note the views collected on the four preferred museum themes from various sources including the paper MAG/15/2006 (paragraph 3); and
 - (b) discuss and agree on the major considerations in working out the way forward (paragraphs 4 & 5).

Background

3. MAG/15/2006 sets out comments and views collected from various sources regarding the museum facilities in WKCD. The major views related to the four preferred museum themes are summarized below.

(a) Contemporary/modern Art

(i) There was a general consensus that there should be a new museum of art in WKCD covering local arts, Chinese arts, Asian arts and Western arts.

Local arts development was essential to epitomize the cultural identity, nurture emerging artists and build up a cultural atmosphere in Hong Kong. It would provide a continuous support to sustain the flow of artworks for a museum and brand building for the economy. Drawing reference from Japan and Korea, it could be argued that their local arts grow and become internationally recognized because of strong support from their respective governments. A world-class museum should not only contain exhibitions and collections of local arts, but also high standard overseas artwork for increasing the exposure of local community and visitors.

(ii) While there was considerable support to have a new art museum in WKCD, views are diverse on whether it should be a “modern art” or a “contemporary art” museum.

There were two main concerns. One was on the scope of the collections and exhibitions of the new museum. In view of the fact that there were only a few modern art museums in the world and that the scope of modern art was limited to a certain period, it would be easier to put more emphasis on contemporary art, which would enhance the position of Hong Kong as the focal point of the East and the West. The other was on the interface between this new art museum with the existing Hong Kong Museum of Art. Further study would be required on the role and positioning of the two museums.

- (iii) The new art museum in WKCD should accommodate different art forms and media to display arts in people's lives.

There are many art forms and media affecting people's daily lives at different strata. Suggestions were made to include different small and medium-sized museums/galleries on themes such as photography, maritime transportation, science, media art, miniature, toys, children, sports or even to set up a branch from the Beijing Palace Museum in WKCD. It was argued that with such variety of "museums/galleries", WKCD might become a popular place for the local community and an attractive point for tourists.

(b) Ink

- (i) There was no dedicated ink museum in the world.

Most ink art was displayed as part of the exhibitions in some art museums. An ink museum in WKCD would be the first of its kind in the world. It would not only reflect Hong Kong's unique position in the Mainland but also its position as the focal point of Eastern and Western culture to promote ink art.

- (ii) The availability of good quality collections was an important consideration in developing a high quality museum.

It was noted that many valuable ink art collections had been kept by the Chinese in Hong Kong and Taiwan. It was estimated that some 5,000 to 10,000 first-class collections could be easily be secured through donation or long-term loan if there was an ink museum with an independent and reputable governing body in WKCD.

Moreover, as Chinese calligraphy and ink paintings were getting popular, an ink museum would help promote ink art as a form of art for different generations.

- (iii) As the price of the ink art collections had surged sharply over the past years, Hong Kong might lose its comparative advantage in developing an ink museum to neighbouring countries after a few years if Hong Kong does not start preparing for it now.

It was noted that a lot of places were competing for setting an anchor in the ink art area by acquiring collections and developing connections with ink art collectors. There were great concerns that Hong Kong should make use of the context of WKCD to preserve our edge.

(c) Design

(i) As design had close relations with other art forms and had been affecting people's daily life in different aspects, it should deserve a place in WKCD.

(ii) As regards the design characteristics, there was a general consensus that a more flexible term instead of "museum" should be used.

Suggestions included "centre", "institute", "complex" and "institution". Moreover, more interactive activities to illustrate the close relationship between design and different art forms should be organized to arouse interests especially the younger generation.

(iii) The focus of the design "centre" should be on Asian design instead of local design, as this positioning would stand a better chance to be world-class.

It was suggested that the design "centre" in WKCD should comprise a gallery/museum to show the design artworks, a

design research centre and an international design forum. The focus on Asian design would offer enormous scope for new and exciting initiatives that not only provide historical topics but also contemporary trends in design and branding.

- (iv) Preparation should start early to pave the way for the design “centre” in WKCD.

It was noted the Heritage Museum had been building up a comprehensive collection of Hong Kong design artworks, which could form the basis of future design “centre”. A separate exercise might be necessary to study how realignment should be made.

(d) Moving Image

- (i) As moving image was a forward-looking concept, a neutral term such as “centre” or “institution” should be adopted.
- (ii) A “Popular Culture Centre” should be developed, instead of just a moving image museum, in WKCD.

The local popular culture of Hong Kong was unique in the world. It covered subjects like film, digital art, popular music, television programmes, video games, radio programmes which were all closely linked. There was a general consensus that popular culture with a focus on the film industry could show the rich and diverse culture of Hong Kong with sufficient

impact to attract local people, overseas visitors and repeated visits. Moreover, it would help the development of film and other creative industries.

- (iii) The existing Film Archive could expand its scope of collection to other popular culture such as popular music and television programmes to pave the way for the new “Popular Culture Centre” in WKCD.

The Film Archive had been performing an important function of collecting and preserving the film prints and film related materials. The expanded Film Archive could be moved into the new “centre” in WKCD. The venue of the existing Film Archive could be maintained as a storage space for the new “centre”. Moreover, interface with the Heritage Museum could be studied to ensure each museum/centre had clear roles and identities.

(e) Others

- (i) There was a general consensus that the museums/centres should be surrounded by galleries, shops, restaurants and other facilities, which could attract constant people flow. Moreover, the opening hours of these facilities should go beyond normal office hours (e.g. up to 2200 hours) to attract people of different generations and strata.
- (ii) It was suggested those revenue-generating facilities such as

hotels or shops in WKCD to set aside a certain percentage of their profit to support the arts and cultural facilities in WKCD.

- (iii) Small and medium-sized galleries should be established in WKCD to facilitate emerging and local artists to display or even sell their artworks. An art exhibition centre in WKCD would provide an extra rented venue for the display of local artworks.
- (iv) There was a suggestion to set up a “Creative Centre” in WKCD to cover design, popular culture, moving image and other art forms, which are forward-looking and need creativity.
- (v) There were suggestions to set up a “Chinese Book City” in WKCD, which would help nurture the art and culture atmosphere and generate people traffic.

Points for Considerations

4. Members had agreed that some key criteria should be set in assessing whether a museum theme was worth pursuing. These criteria included whether the theme is conducive to achieving the cultural vision and objectives of WKCD; whether local people from different generations would be interested to go there; whether Hong Kong had the experience and expertise in running a museum with such theme; whether the supply of contents and collections would be sustainable and practicable; and whether the exhibits would cover the past, the present and the future. In view of the

above, the following points are raised for considerations:-

- (a) Whether we should adopt a flexible approach in the delivery mode of the museum clusters in WKCD. For example, we may adopt the traditional mode of a “Museum” with themes, which have to operate on a collection basis. On the other hand, we may adopt the mode of “Centre/Institute/Institution” for museums on those themes that require a comparatively flexible structure.
- (b) Whether we should have an “Asian Art Centre” in WKCD, instead of a museum of modern art or contemporary art, in order not to unduly restrict the scope of collections and exhibitions.
- (c) Should the “Asian Art Centre” be collection-based or exhibition-based or both?
- (d) What is the vision and mission of the “Asian Art Centre”? Should it focus on Hong Kong arts, Chinese arts or Asian arts? What should be the priority area?
- (e) Whether an ink museum or gallery should be placed inside the above proposed “Asian Art Centre” to reflect the distinct identity and contribution of ink.

- (f) Whether we should have a “Contemporary Art Museum” inside the “Asian Art Centre” in WKCD. If so, what should be the respective roles of this “Contemporary Art Museum” and the existing Hong Kong Museum of Art.
- (g) Whether we should have a “Creative Centre” in WKCD, which may have sub-centres covering individual themes such as popular culture, toys or photography. If so, what are the vision and mission, functional objective, as well as target audience of the “Creative Centre”.
- (h) Whether it is worthwhile to have one “Popular Culture Centre” and one “Design Centre” under a “Creative Centre” in WKCD.
- (i) Whether the proposed art museum should work closely with local artists and the visual arts sector in order to showcase their work not only to the local community but also overseas visitors, so as to help develop a commercial market for artists.
- (j) What should be the role of government and the private sector in the future operation of the museums/centres in WKCD? A stable funding source, and corporate sponsorships?
- (k) How should the future museums/centres interface with the existing museums?

- (l) Can the themes taken up comply with those key criteria we have agreed on?

- (m) Whether we should have an art exhibition centre in WKCD which rent exhibition space to supplement any centre(s)/museum(s) in WKCD.

Way Forward

5. We believe that some ideas on museum facilities would emerge after the discussion on paragraph 4. LCSD and the Secretariat will further develop the proposals of these museum facilities in WKCD and the need for an art exhibition centre taking into account further research and supplementary information. MAG will aim to finalize the detailed specifications of the recommended museum facilities and the art exhibition centre before mid-August and submit its recommendations to the Consultative Committee by September 2006.

Secretariat, Museums Advisory Group
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