

The Legislative Council
31 January 2005.

Notes of remarks by
David PONG Chun-Yee, Vice-Chairman, The Ink Society

The Ink Society fully supports the West Kowloon Cultural District development (“WKCD”). We urge the Government to proceed with the tender in its current format without further delay.

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 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.

Throughout the past two years, the Ink Society has met numerous museum professionals, scholars, art historians, collectors, dealers and artists from around the world. 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.

WKCD will also help cement Hong Kong as the leading market for Chinese and certain disciplines of other Asian art. Major exhibitions and auctions of Chinese art that used to be held in Europe and the United States have moved to Hong Kong in recent years. While this trend will continue in the coming years, the establishment of WKCD will ensure that Hong Kong is the undisputed leader in the commercial art market. The arts depends crucially on on-going patronage; this is true around the world. Therefore WKCD will bring not only financial gains to Hong Kong, but will help foster the continuing development of creative industries.

The time for consultation is over. Government has consulted the public on the arts and culture issue for years. Hong Kong does not need to “rethink our cultural policy” by debating it for another ten years. We need to stop complaining and start working. It is now time for the arts community to seize this unprecedented opportunity. Government and the developers will listen. They understand fully that WKCD cannot succeed without the arts community’s support and active participation. It is the now responsibility of the arts community to put forward constructive and meaningful proposals. It is not too late. It is only the beginning of a long journey.