

A brief submission to the Legislative Council's Panel on Home Affairs by the International Art Critics' Association – Hong Kong

**On the topic:
measures to strengthen the development of cultural software and humanware in
Hong Kong in the light of the vision and objectives of the West Kowloon Cultural
District (WKCD) project.**

Introduction

The International Art Critics' Association – Hong Kong (AICA-HK) comprises writers, critics, teachers and curators of the visual arts. The Hong Kong section of AICA is a full member of the International Art Critics' Association based in Paris, France.

AICA-HK has previously made representations to the Museum Advisory Group (MAG) of the Consultative Committee on the Core Arts and Cultural Facilities of the West Kowloon Cultural District (see attached a copy of AICA-HK's submission dated which may be of interest to Members of the Legislative Council).

Today's topic on "cultural software and humanware" emanates from the Consultative Committee's final Report that made additional recommendations to complement its recommendations directly about the WKCD – these recommendations were felt important because of the the huge capital investment of building cultural facilities on West Kowloon. (see: <http://www.hab.gov.hk/wkcd/pe/eng/report4.htm>)

Firstly, let's reiterate the decision of the Executive Council dated 29 January 2008 which stated: "that the recommendations of the Consultative Committee on the Core Arts and Cultural Facilities of the West Kowloon Cultural District (CC) should be adopted as the way forward" and, at the same meeting, the order for the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority Bill to be introduced to the Legislative Council.

The Consultative Committee's Recommendations

The Consultative Committee on the Core Arts and Cultural Facilities of the West Kowloon Cultural District made specific and extensive recommendations in its Report. In the Briefing Paper to the Legislative Council accompanying the proposed WKCD Authority Bill a summary of the Consultative Committee's Recommendations stated:

"4.35 The Consultative Committee considers that the successful realization of the vision and objectives of the WKCD does not only depend on the timely development of the cultural hardware as defined by the proposed Core Arts and Cultural Facilities (CACF). It also hinges on the timely implementation of a comprehensive strategy for developing the software and humanware in the arts, culture, entertainment and creative industries.

4.36 Having considered the views of PATAG (The Performing Arts & Theatre Advisory

Group) and MAG (Museum Advisory Group) on cultural software, the Consultative Committee is of the view that the strategy for developing cultural software should cover a number of different areas, as set out below (see para 8.2.2 to 8.2.21 in the full Report)

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- (a) an appropriate funding and assessment system for major professional performing arts groups;
- (b) enhancing support for nurturing budding and young artists;
- (c) promoting and enhancing the capacity of local arts and cultural community;
- (d) review of operational modes of existing Government-run performing venues and museums to bring them into line with international practices;
- (e) creating and maintaining community-based alternative art space for artists' creations;
- (f) enhancing manpower training in arts and culture;
- (g) augmenting arts education and audience building to foster greater awareness, understanding and appreciation of arts and culture;
- (h) continued support for preservation, promotion and development of Cantonese opera;
- (i) enhancing cultural exchange and co-operation as well as global networking;
- (j) formulation of a structured and cohesive strategy for the development and promotion of cultural and creative industries in Hong Kong; and
- (k) improving the strategy for the development of cultural tourism in Hong Kong.

In its full Report the Consultative Committee states: "that the actual initiatives and measures for the long-term growth and development of culture and the arts, which fall outside the terms of reference of the Committee, should be developed by the Government in consultation with the local arts community and other concerned parties outside the WKCD project."

The Home Affairs Bureau Briefing Paper dated 9 November 2007

This Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) paper explains Hong Kong's 'Cultural Policy' and outlines the work of the various cultural and arts bodies that receive government funding.

The Paper then briefly outlines (para 26) "measures to strengthen the software and humanware for culture and the arts".

The HAB Paper does not mention that it had itself engaged (to quote the Consultative Committee's last paragraph above) "in consultation with the local arts community and other concerned parties outside the WKCD project" on the topic of cultural software and humanware.

AICA-HK makes the following comments about the HAB Paper:

Cultural Policy: AICA-HK believes that the HAB's "Cultural Policy" articulates general principles about culture – a true cultural policy needs to make further specific statements of implementation about art and culture for it to be meaningful.

Outline of the work of various bodies that receive government funding: The WKCD Consultative Committee emphasized that the public must be involved in the future planning of the WKCD. Rather than trying to give the Legislative Council an overview of Hong Kong's

wide art and cultural scene and its entertainment and creative industries, the HAB Paper merely outlines what the HAB and the Leisure & Cultural Services Department does itself and the organizations that it funds.

AICA-HK believes that this narrow viewpoint of Hong Kong's art and cultural scene has seriously restricted the development of a more mature cultural landscape. To ignore many non-government arts and cultural bodies and initiatives that it does not directly fund (including commercial entities) has long been a serious oversight by government officials. The WKCD Project specifically encourages a variety of initiatives to be involved in the CACF. This HAB Paper (and – importantly – present government arts and cultural policies) adds nothing in trying to have a better appreciation of how to make the WKCD and Hong Kong's diverse art and cultural scene (or the “software and humanware”) better.

Rather than addressing the eleven specific points relating to software and humanware as outlined by the Consultative Committee above, the HAB Paper merely identifies its own “measures” – these appear to be based on placing the work of government art and cultural bodies in a good (almost pro-active!) light, rather than investigating ways to actually improve Hong Kong's arts and culture software.

The Consultative Committee, for example, mentioned in point d/ above a “review of operational modes of existing Government-run performing venues and museums to bring them into line with international practices”. Hong Kong museums are presently run in a moribund way and should be autonomous in their operations. The HAB Paper does not mention a timetable for the introduction of changes in the way Hong Kong's museums can become independently structured and autonomous in decision-making “in line with international practices”.

Specifically – the HAB Paper mentions – and AICA-HK briefly comments on:

a/ A comprehensive manpower mapping survey

The purpose of this survey is problematic, if as AICA-HK and many other arts professionals believe, Hong Kong does not have a Cultural Policy, how can a manpower survey be of benefit if we are directionless with our arts and cultural policies.

b/ Increased support for the arts groups

As mentioned by the HAB Paper, the total budget of government funding for the arts is about HK\$2.5 million – the question that LegCo needs to address: is how is this money spent now and can we re-allocate funding to give better ‘results’. This has not been articulated in this HAB Paper.

Should the monopoly that the Leisure & Culture Services Department presently has on access to manpower and venues be reduced and therefore monetary and physical resources be re-allocated to other arts and culture groups? An important question, considering that the WKCD CACF will house a variety of independent arts and cultural groups that may need to build up their expertise and manpower before being ‘resident’ in WKCD.

c/ Increased funding support for HKADC

The HKADC role as an independent arts funding body has been diminished by a historical reduction of funds and its role (which is actually part of its mandate) to undertake independent research on arts policy issues and give advice to government has never been fulfilled since its inception.

Unfortunately – some argue – the HKADC has become a pseudo-arm of government arts programming. This can be seen in the following three examples: 1/. direct administration of the Shanghai Street Art Space because the Home Affairs Bureau needed, at the time, an administrator for this space; 2/. the political correctness associated with Hong Kong's participation at the Venice Biennial which the HKADC has organized with HAB funding and 3/. its inability to actively engage with a wider range of arts bodies, for example, Hong Kong based international cultural institutes; commercial art galleries etc.

Does the HKADC do a good job? Is it effective? How – if it really is in essence an arm of government arts funding anyway – can it really contribute to the improvement in cultural software?

d/ Increasing funding to HKAPA

There is no mention of other arts education bodies – especially those independent of the University Grants Commission e.g. the HK Arts Centre Art School, private institutions. Indeed – no mention either of other University arts and design courses? Why is the HKAPA the only arts education organization that will “conduct an institutional review in 2008-09, with a view to re-affirming the Academy's role and development directions, taking into account the vision of WKCD.”

Should there be increased funding to other arts education institutions? How do arts education courses relate to the impending opening of the WKCD?

e/. Support for arts groups in Venue Partnership Scheme

The Venue Partnership Scheme with performing arts groups has received criticism from the same groups about its implementation. Why does this Paper not examine these problems?

f/. Enhancing arts education.....reviewing venue hiring....at existing LCSD venues

There has been talk about handing over many of the venues presently run by the LCSD for many years – many of these venues are underutilized and the facilities have too many restrictions placed on their use – e.g. exhibition venues where nails can not be hammered into walls.

Why are there no concrete proposals about which venues will be released for the community to directly run?

g/ Alternative arts spaces

The HAB Paper only mentions schools. Why? Why not explore other possible venues? What seed-funding can be made available?

AICA-HK makes the following further points:

1. Legislative Council Members need to demand specific and quantifiable changes to government arts policy and an implementation timetable from the HAB and LCSD.
2. The WKCD Consultative Committee's Report needs to be respected (and analyzed), as it is the basis for the implementation of the WKCD Authority Ordinance.
3. Fair and proper consultation with community arts groups needs to happen now. Two examples (amongst many!): a/ the Cattle Depot (Artist Village) in To Kwa Wan faces immense problems specifically because: the Government Property Office 'controls' and manages the site in an inappropriate manner not conducive to creativity; the artists' studios have no rationale for their existence; there is no synergy with surrounding housing, neighbouring residents or other facilities; the art exhibition spaces need a strong re-focusing of intent. 2/ the HAB paper mentions international exchanges – many in the cultural sector would consider much that the HAB Paper mentions in this respect as a waste of money – e.g. the Asian Cultural Co-operation Forum. Indeed, it is a very sad and serious fact: Hong Kong has NO dedicated artists' residency programme for visiting artists (except small programmes run for art academics through Lingnan University; The Chinese University of Hong Kong etc). An excellent model that we should consider is the Taipei Artist Village that has an excellent purpose-built facility that can accommodate artists from different disciplines. Hong Kong artists are invited on overseas exchanges, but Hong Kong cannot reciprocate because we have no proper facility!
4. An enlightened and expanded teaching of art and appreciation of culture needs to be implemented (with due consideration for an increase in teaching resources) in Hong Kong's secondary schools.
5. In the Visual Arts, there is no art facility presently showing the 'history of Hong Kong art' – it is hard to envisage how Hong Kong visual arts will make any impact internationally when visiting curators cannot see the range of Hong Kong visual art physically for themselves. At present, the HK Museum of Art has a very small and limited range of Hong Kong art on permanent display. This is unsatisfactory and needs immediate rectification so that artwork done by the "cultural software and hardware" can be seen!
6. Although it is obliquely outside the scope of the subject of this submission, AICA-HK believes there needs to be immediate public engagement in the provisions of the government's proposed WKCD Authority Ordinance. AICA-HK sees some problems with the proposed legislation:

There is a conflict between the ask of the WKCD Authority whilst involved in building the WKCD CACF as compared to its role in administering the built WKCD facility. We believe that once the WKCD CACF is built then a smaller managing WKCD Authority will only be needed.

The WKCD Ordinance as proposed implies that the WKCD Authority will directly control all facilities that are operating in the WKCD CACF. However, the intentions of the Consultative Committee is quite different – the CC explicitly mentions autonomy of individual arts and cultural institutions located in the WKCD CACF – para 8.1.5 (b) of the Report says that the WKCD Authority should have the power to allow the:

“operating, managing and maintaining through different forms of Private Sector involvement (PSI) and partnership agreements with other parties (with special safeguards to ensure curatorial independence and management autonomy for the M+). . . .”

The difference between a WKCD Authority that merely administers and manages the physical WKCD facilities and an Authority involved in the actual running of cultural and art bodies with responsibility for programming and manpower is immense. We do not wish to replicate the LCSD management of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre.

7. Indeed, a further serious and major omission in the preamble introducing the WKCD Authority Ordinance is any references to artistic freedom of expression by performing and visual arts groups operating in the WKCD CACF. AICA-HK will be writing a separate letter of concern and demand for amendments to the Bill to cover artistic freedom of expression in the proposed WKCD Authority Bill to the Administration, HAB Officials, Legislative Councillors and other arts and cultural groups.

Conclusion:

AICA-HK believes that Hong Kong has an excellent arts infrastructure but that the level of government involvement in arts and culture is unnecessarily strong. The opening of WKCD will necessitate that the present government approach to arts and culture will need overhaul.

AICA-HK strongly recommends that an arts and cultural policy for Hong Kong be formulated to take into consideration this new environment.

AICA-HK again recommends that there be an Independent and Substantial Enquiry into Arts and Culture – an excellent model is the Australian *Report of the Contemporary Visual Arts and Craft Inquiry* presented to the Australian Federal Parliament in 2002.

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This submission prepared by John Batten, Member of AICA-HK.

For further information – contact the Secretary of AICA-HK:

Ms Irene Ngan at: hkaica@yahoo.com
www.aicahk.org

February 2008

SUBMISSION
by
the International Association of Art Critics–Hong Kong (AICA-HK)

to
the Museum Advisory Group
of the Consultative Committee on the Core Arts and Cultural Facilities
of the West Kowloon Cultural District
13 June 2006

1. introduction

The International Association of Art Critics (AICA) is a respected professional international organisation representing art professionals, art writers and critics with its headquarters and secretariat in Paris, France.

The International Association of Art Critics, Hong Kong (AICA-HK) comprises academics, writers, critics, artists, cultural workers, gallerists and curators actively involved in Hong Kong's visual arts scene.

2. General Comments

2.1 There has been substantial debate, public comment, legislators' enquiries and reports, and public consultation about the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) over the last two years. There is a wide range of opinion (much of it, unfortunately, self-interested) and most is on public record and available to your Committee.

2.2 Considerable time and expense has been spent by property developers (cost estimated to be HK\$300 million) and public officials (any cost estimates?) in preparing plans and ideas for WKCD. If this project is to go forward, then rational and sensible proposals need to be made so involved parties can make rational and sensible future plans.

2.3 The Consultative Committee (CC), under its Terms of Reference, can only make recommendations about the WKCD to the Government – recommendations that are not binding. It is disappointing that the statutory authority that will eventually oversee the WKCD has not yet been incorporated and that the current consultations will not necessarily lead to substantive decision-making.

If there is political will to make WKCD a reality then the Government needs to urgently take responsibility for formulating a vision for WKCD, or, delegate that responsibility to an independent statutory authority responsible for the WKCD comprising of a committed group of Hong Kong citizens who are passionate about art and culture (and supported by a tight secretariat separate from the Hong Kong civil service).

The present situation of allowing the development of the WKCD project to be led by the Administration – Hong Kong civil servants – is, frankly, not working.

AICA recommends the immediate setting-up of the WKCD Statutory Authority with a Board of Governors comprising enlightened art and culture professionals, architects, business-people, government representatives who are passionate about art and culture.

2.4 There is a diverse composition of members sitting on the Museum Advisory Group (MAG) – we therefore urge individual and groups of members of the MAG to, if necessary, issue a minority report/s if your Advisory Group reaches no satisfactory consensus.

3. Comments on the WKCD in reference to the MAG’s Terms of Reference

3.1 The MAG is asked to make recommendations “...based on the existing arts and cultural policy and having regard to the current provisions in Hong Kong...”

AICA-HK strongly believes that the Government at present does not have a clearly articulated ‘arts and cultural policy’. It is, in part, for this reason that the Government’s previous plans for WKCD were cancelled.

AICA-HK recommends that the MAG should clearly state their dissatisfaction with the lack of an arts and cultural policy as it makes its task in making specific recommendations on the WKCD very difficult as these recommendations should not be made in isolation, but rather, should holistically consider Hong Kong’s entire arts and cultural makeup.

It is disappointing that there has been little meaningful Government initiative in trying to develop an arts and culture policy for Hong Kong. It is particularly lax considering the Culture and Heritage Commission issued its Report in 2003. For example, the recent Legislative Council Report on the WKCD stated a similar concern:

“...Members also raised the concern as to how the future arrangements (including the institutional setup and the funding arrangements) for the WKCD could promote the development of arts and culture with local characteristics and could ensure that the six principles advocated by the Culture and Heritage Commission, namely People-oriented, Pluralism, Freedom of Expression and Protection of Intellectual Property, Holistic Approach, Partnership and Community-driven, would be upheld...”. (LegCo Report on WKCD, 2005)

AICA-HK acknowledges that such ideas are outside the scope of the MAG’s Terms of Reference, however, your Committee needs to express the difficulty in making proposals about the WKCD’s proposed Museum facilities when the Government itself has a directionless arts and cultural policy and one that does not allow for a thorough and necessary examination and overhaul of our publically-funded Museums who are stifled by being part of Hong Kong’s public service without any independent governance.

3.2 AICA-HK believes that the original proposal to have four museums in the WKCD is an arbitrary and illogical number based on no analysis of Hong Kong’s need for museums.

AICA-HK believes that the proposed four themes (ink, design, modern art and moving image) are also arbitrary – again based on no analysis. Unfortunately, these four themes hint at (artistic) media bias as it has never been clear why these particular four themes were ‘suggested’ as possible themes in the original WKCD tender documentation (and, again appearing for your Committee’s consideration in the MAG Terms of Reference!).

AICA-HK therefore recommends that the MAG:

- should categorically reject the idea of having four museums.

- should categorically reject the idea of having ANY themed museums.

AICA-HK’s recommendations for which facilities should be built at the WKCD are in Section 4 of this Submission below.

3.3 The proposal for the WKCD to also have a large “Art Exhibition Centre” appears to be suspiciously similar to many inappropriately large exhibition spaces currently found in Leisure and Cultural Services Department “Municipal Services Buildings” – e.g. the exhibition hall at the Sheung Wan Market. Such exhibition halls tend to be too big, inflexible in not having moveable partitions; low ceilings; grey covered wall fittings etc.

The rationale for such an art exhibition centre has never been articulated – why ‘art’

exhibition centre? Maybe, however, there is a need for a multi-disciplinary trade exhibition hall. Why the need to have an 'art exhibition centre' – how is it related to other WKCD cultural facilities, which organization controls its use etc?

AICA-HK recommends that provision of this 'Art Exhibition Centre' on the WKCD be rejected as there appears to be no rationale for having one nor exploration about how it could be managed.

3.4 The MAG has been asked to recommend on the "scale and requirements" of the WKCD facilities. This seems – again – an arbitrary request and superfluous when the policy decisions related to WKCD have not yet been decided. e.g. to decide to have or not have an art collection (and thus the need for storage space) in one of the arts facilities will affect the amount of space required.

AICA-HK recommends that the MAG clearly states that it will not comment about the "scale and requirements" of the WKCD arts facilities as this is premature while the artistic and financial parameters for the project are still being formulated.

4. AICA-HK's Specific Recommendations for the WKCD:

- **AICA-HK recommends** that an arts and cultural policy for Hong Kong be formulated. This could be undertaken by appointing an independent Enquiry – an excellent model is the Australian *Report of the Contemporary Visual Arts and Craft Inquiry* presented to the Australian Federal Parliament in 2002.

This recommendation (even though strictly outside the Terms of Reference for the MAG) should be included by the MAG in its own recommendations to both the CC and the Government as it of such fundamental importance.

- **AICA-HK recommends** that a holistic approach be adopted in assessing the museum needs of the WKCD and that the role, governance and curatorial direction of the Hong Kong Museum of Art and the Heritage Museum be thoroughly reviewed. Setting-up new museums at the WKCD without assessing our present publically-funded museums would be scandalous.
- **AICA-HK recommends** that the WKCD Statutory Authority be immediately set-up (after due statutory and legislative process) with a Board of Governors comprising art and culture professionals, architects, business-people, government representatives etc.

- **AICA-HK recommends** that an independent Contemporary Art Space be set-up on the WKCD and that it has an educative, curatorial and exhibition role – it will not collect nor have a collection.

This contemporary art space will be independent (with an independent Board of Governors) but will receive adequate funding from the WKCD Statutory Authority. There are many successful worldwide models that can be followed in setting up this contemporary art facility – see Switzerland's various Kunsthaus; the Australian Centre of Contemporary Art (ACCA); the Serpentine Gallery in London, UK etc etc

- **AICA-HK recommends** that the preferred 'museum' that should be built at the WKCD should be modeled on the Pompidou Centre in Paris, France (officially: Centre National d'Art et Culture Georges Pompidou).

AICA-HK believes that such a WKCD Art Centre should be multi-disciplinary, multi-media (in the sense of covering many art forms), multi-functional and be flexible – and run by an independent Board of Governors, funded by the WKCD Statutory Authority.

This Art Centre would have educative, curatorial and collection responsibilities. It could include such facilities as:

- A centre to exhibit new media (video, sound etc).
- A multimedia arts library (a facility that is immensely popular at the Pompidou Centre).
- An anchor museum within this Art Centre could be a Museum of Contemporary Asian Art (modeled on the contemporary Asian art collection; residency projects; and, Fukuoka Art Triennial functions of the Fukuoka Art Museum, Japan).
- A flexible temporary exhibition space that allows (similar to the Pompidou Centre) large important exhibitions (e.g. the major retrospective exhibition of artist Jean Debuffet at the Pompidou).

Such an Art Centre at the WKCD would, consequently, allow the Hong Kong Museum of Art to become – for example – a Museum of Chinese Culture (covering the artistic heritage of the Chinese people – including ceramics; bronze; ink painting; folk arts etc) and the Heritage Museum to become – for

example – a Museum of Contemporary Design (covering all aspects of design: graphic; industrial; applied; engineering; architecture etc).

AICA-HK believes such a flexible WKCD Art Centre would be ideal for Hong Kong and allows for our present publically-funded museums to be effectively rationalized with functions that are focused and complimentary to those that will be initiated within the West Kowloon Cultural District.

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This submission prepared by John Batten, Member of AICA-HK and Convenor of AICA-HK's West Kowloon Cultural District Interest Group.

For further information - contact the Secretary of AICA-HK:

Ms Irene Ngan at: hkaica@yahoo.com
 http://www.aicahk.org