



突破
BREAKTHROUGH

突破青少年服務中心
香港
電話: (852) 2632 0306
傳真: (852) 2632 0322

Breakthrough Youth Village,
33, A Kung Kok Shan Road,
Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong
Tel. (852) 2632 0000 Fax: (852) 2632 0322

Position Paper on Protection of Youth from Obscene and Indecent Materials.

By Dr. Wing Tai Leung

Associate General Secretary and Chair of Media Strategy Committee

Breakthrough Ltd.

Wingtai@breakthrough.org.hk

Tel: 26320306

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Introduction

In response to the Consultation Paper on the 2000 Review of the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance, as one of the largest youth organizations in Hong Kong, Breakthrough would like to respond in a few areas. The key concerns are: society of responsibility for the young, myth of children and youth media, censorship on the ground of decency, news platform as adult media, media education urgency and direction, incentive for good media works, and Hong Kong as a city of leadership.

Society of Responsibility

Every generation is responsible to nurture the young in a healthy, open, diversified and culturally rich environment. The focus of society should be on the positive, and minimize the negative exposure. There are developmentally inappropriate materials, media included, that are detrimental to youth development. Explicitly obscene and indecent materials can be packaged with a cover. The public does not have to be forced to see it all.

Myth of Children and Youth Media

Children and youth consume all types of media. They stay up later than the television family hours. Saturday children's programs are not necessarily appealing to them. Media categorization is ineffective. Young people have access to obscene and indecent materials in the form of VCD, magazine, book, web-site, and any kind of media. It is a matter of bad taste and choice.

Censorship and Control of Media

Censorship on the ground of decency is not the best route. In media history, the Hollywood Decency Act forbade male and female lying on the same bed, smoking cigarette, and speaking foul languages. As it turned out, media quality degenerated further because media contents were detached from social reality and lost their dynamics. It is even worst to censor media on political ground. The experiences in Eastern Europe speak for themselves. One may create an elephant by killing a mouse.

News Platform as Adult Media

It is very unfortunate that some of the finest newspapers in Hong Kong with excellent news reporting also feature articles on patronizing prostitute. The blatant tabloids will

not generate such a dichotomy. Most families buy only one set of newspaper. Indecent materials become so accessible to children. We strongly urge the media professionals and news organizations to develop a council for self-regulation. We need to balance press freedom with other social concerns.

Media Education Urgency and Direction

Hong Kong is very much in urgent need of media education for the younger generation and their parents. Media education should have a broader agenda than mere attack on indecency and obscenity. Media education can embrace semiotic, worldview, power structure, critical framework, social development and creative expression. We need to introduce elements of media literacy in our language curriculum, social studies, and youth services.

Incentives for Good Media

While our concern for media of bad tastes is necessary, we must encourage good media works. Media journalism, creative media artworks, and worthwhile projects need our better attention. If Hong Kong is to improve our media professionalism and media literacy of our citizenry, we need to focus on raising our cultural taste and wisdom of choices.

Hong Kong as City of Leadership

At one time Singapore was a 'fine city,' full of rules and regulations. The administrative chores of implementing fines are gigantic. Hong Kong has been a place of creativity, diversity, critical thinking, and full of choices. Singaporeans are coming in batches to learn this cultural richness and diversity. This fact itself can warrant us not to reverse the city-roles. Hong Kong has been a communication and media hub of Asia and the World. We need to create a better media environment for creativity and cultural diversity. When we focus enough of the positive, we may drive out the bad taste from the market. Or at least, we need to tolerate deviants in our society, they are reminders of our human frailty.