

To: The Chairperson of “The Betting Duty (Amendment) Bill 2003”

Re: Protestation

The Home Affairs Bureau has already tabled the Betting Duty (Amendment) Bill 2003 to the Legislative Council on April 9. In protest against the aforementioned bill, I hereby present my arguments as follows:

1. The government has failed to take into account the possible destructive impacts of such bill made on the Hong Kong community as a whole.

There are certain genetic features inherent in each ethnic race, whose society is likewise characterized by its unique external environment as well as cultural heritage. Various customs, moral restraints, and laws have been established accordingly to protect the people, and thus promote a healthy and dynamic social milieu.

Genetically speaking, the European race has greater tolerance to alcohol; historically speaking, they opted for wine-making as a means to purify their drinking water; whereas the Chinese people opted for tea-boiling. As a result, alcoholism is a much more serious social problem in the western society when compared to the Chinese society. However, in regard to the issue of gambling, the Chinese people are more vulnerable than westerners. Among Chinese scattering all over the world, it is by no means difficult to locate “problematic gamblers” and “pathological gamblers”, who have been causing much agonies and wounds to their families and the society alike. Are the Chinese people more prone to become “problematic gamblers” than westerners? Has gambling been doing much harm to the Chinese society than others? Taking into account the cultural makeup and social historical factors of Chinese, will soccer betting be pragmatically “authorized and regulated”, or turned into a situation beyond control? While the Hong Kong Jockey Club is establishing ever more betting stations, the fire of illegal horse-racing betting is flaming even higher up. All these questions demand prudent attention, to which the government fails to pay.

By reasons of the strong social tie and a sense of undeniable responsibility often found among Chinese family, “problematic gamblers” and “pathological gamblers” have been causing severe financial and interpersonal damage. Should the Hong Kong government fail to give the whole matter prudent consideration and empirical research, and rush to pass the bill, it would only be an act of gross irresponsibility.

2. Legal soccer betting is in itself a high-risk social experimental betting.

The Chinese society has long since adopted the approaches of repression and marginalization to handle the problem of gambling. Repression—date: gambling was

only allowed in the midst of feasts and celebrations; location: gambling was seen as an act of indecency in public space; bet: in agricultural society, collective capital was shared by the clan instead of the individual, it was thus an effective restraint on heavy betting. Marginalization—a message has been conveyed that only people of degradation would run a betting business.

Nowadays as the Hong Kong government strongly advocates legalizing soccer betting, not only does it promote the omnipresence of gambling, it also creates a fallacious sense of uprightness and makes betting an integrated part of the life of Hong Kong people. While the government allows an entity, with the nameplates of “charity organization” and “sport association”, to organize soccer betting, the government categorizes charity, sport and betting into the same sphere, by so doing, an unheard-of social experience is set up in the Chinese society. Not only does the bill go against the publicized government policy of not encouraging gambling, it also promotes an extremely unhealthy activity, which should cause all Chinese societies around the world alarm. It might not be possible to eliminate all unhealthy and destructive practices in society, but the government can by no means deny its responsibility to crack down on them. Seeking to legalize soccer betting is simply an act that seriously damages the constructive restraint of traditional Chinese moral code.

Chinese scattering around the world do have a tendency to gather together, and thus China Towns can be located in most major cities worldwide. Unfortunately, the term “China Town” is almost synonymous with filthiness, social disintegration, gangsters, and underground casinos—a phenomenon that puts a lot of overseas Chinese to shame, and raises the alarm about the Chinese social problem. It is plain that the government should set up an upright example to crack down on unhealthy practices and promote a healthy way of living. The enormous bet received by the Hong Kong Jockey Club is rivalled but by none other organizations, does the Hong Kong government honestly aim to turn Hong Kong into “The Gambling Centre of Asia”?

3. The legal soccer betting ordinance will wholesale the interests of Hong Kong.

One of the main functions of government is to distribute precious values of society. Most sociologists would agree with the 19th century German sociologist, Max Weber, on the three types of precious values of a society: privileged benefits, power, and fame. All these precious values should be distributed by the government in compliance with usual practices and preset standards to mould the particular society.

In times of feudalism, rulers would make use of their absolute authority to hoard the aforementioned values for their own good. Today we witness history repeats itself as the Hong Kong government has commissioned the Hong Kong Jockey Club as the

licensed operator of soccer betting. Such licence is synonymous with the goose that lays golden eggs, the government has causally let go of it to the Hong Kong Jockey Club without any open bidding. The deal will only generate annual tax worth about a billion for the government, but an enormous amount shall go straight to the treasury of the Hong Kong Jockey Club. The decision made by the government has thus sold public values dirt cheap—an open act of betraying the interests of Hong Kong as a whole.

In the old days, the “Royal Jockey Club” was an entity of royalty and nobility, who enjoyed a very privileged status in all dealings. In the whole incident of promoting legalizing soccer betting and persuading the government to grant the exclusive operating licence without an open bidding to the Hong Kong Jockey Club is a clear demonstration of its influence of social power. It is against common sense that the Hong Kong government still insists on granting even more privileges to it.

Soccer is a popular sport that is beloved by Hong Kong people, especially the youngsters; in case the Hong Kong Jockey Club is going to get involved in the soccer business, its already supreme social status and influence will no doubt reach its zenith soon. Allowing an organization whose main business is taking bets to monopolize Hong Kong, it reminds us of Macau before the 1999 Takeover, to which such a society are not what the Hong Kong people looking forward. I am convinced that when the Hong Kong people are given a clearer picture of how the government has been granting incredible privileges to the Hong Kong Jockey Club, they shall all raise their protestation against the betrayal deed of the government.

The Hong Kong Jockey Club has long been having an air of the most generous donor of Hong Kong. They have contributed to various charity of society out of its huge income made from the betting business, and thus it has risen to fame as the most well-known big donor. Not only are the beneficiaries subjected to its influence, the Hong Kong government is likewise under its influence voluntarily. Under the former British administration, we had to comply with the British way with no choice; but today the HKSAR is taking steps for the worse by unnecessarily linking the monetary profit gained from legal soccer betting with public social welfare. Tax should be under the absolute control of the government, who in return provides for public social welfare, therefore, there is no need for the service of a so-called charitable organization whose income comes from taking bets.

Nowadays, there are many Principal Officials under the accountability system of the Hong Kong government, who openly admitted that they take no responsibility to the moral culture of the society. Since it is beyond their capability to crack down on illegal betting activities, they might as well turn Hong Kong into “The City of Gambling.” I hereby sincerely urge all the honored members of the Legislative

Council to take into account the well-being of Hong Kong in a long run, refuse to commence any high-risk social experiment that would wholesale the interests of all Hong Kong citizens, and give your pledges not to pass the bill.

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