



**Presentation by Hong Kong Ballet
For Special Meeting on 6 January 2005 about
“Development of West Kowloon Cultural District”**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There have been so much criticism of the WKCD (West Kowloon Cultural District) that people have become blind to the beauty and merits of this vision – which I, personally and on behalf of the Hong Kong Ballet Company would like to point out.

For the moment, let’s put aside the controversies on the issue of the politics of a single developer and the likes and dislikes of the canopy design, the beauty of the WKCD “vision” lies in the fact that:

- 1) Hong Kong does need at least one, if not more, a cultural landmark – not a small one but rather a large scale, world-class architectural feat so to identify it to be able to have the same standing, at least physically as other metropolitan cities in the world.
- 2) So many critics of this project worry about the software that will go into the hardware. Well, frankly speaking, Hong Kong is a commercial city that has very little cultural history. Nonetheless, it is moving forward by leaps and bounds in its cultural development with our local talents and the influx of outside talents and influences and this should be ensured to continue. However, at this point and stage, we cannot wait for the software to lead the hardware, but rather we should develop hardware and software simultaneously. In this case of WKCD, the hardware should be able to spearhead and encourage the development of the software as it will attract the best foreign or even local cultural events and talents.
- 3) In order to build a full scale, world-class cultural infrastructure, that can accommodate the visual and performing arts, we need a major master plan, a major funding body, and a major operating organization. This cannot be executed in a piecemeal fashion. This is something that has to be worked out between the government and the private sector.

Government Power & Land

Private Sector Resources

A Master Plan A Funding Body A Supervising Body An Executing Body
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- 4) We have already come so far on this WKCD plan in which so many world-class designers/architects/planners/developers/economists/politicians have done research, planning and resulted in these design proposals. We should capitalize on that resources.

Can we ever imagine that we have Norman Foster, Caesar Pelli, Kenzo Tange...etc putting their expertise in this city?!! (By the way, I Love Caesar Pelli's proposal of this JUNK SAIL IMAGE CURTAIN WALL!!) No matter what happens, we should not forgo these wonderful designs, but rather capitalize on them. Perhaps we should put all the good elements and make it a great Master Plan.

- 5) Since so many developers are competing for this project. Is there a way which we can channel this competitive spirit to produce more of these cultural hubs?? I think that in many ways, the Swire proposal makes good sense. Personally, while I think we need one major cultural landmark, the canopy is oversized, almost like an serpentine with a tail too long. I would like to see a more sensible scale canopy and have other developers take up other hubs such as our existing cultural hubs, the Cultural Centre in Tsimshatsui, APA/HK Arts Center/City Hall.
- 6) With relation to Hong Kong Ballet (HKB), I wish to point out that for the past few years, the government has been cutting funding support to art and cultural activities for which HKB also suffered. The Company has been operating under deficit and within a few years, HKB would have used up its reserve. We fully understand why the Government had to cut its funding support and it is time that we have to turn to the private sector. We therefore do not understand why on one hand there are voices expressing that the government should not be involved in the business of art and culture and now when the private sector are ready to take up the responsibilities, the same accusation is now pointed at them. It is understandable that the private sector needs to make money to support art and culture. This is a very logical formula. We do believe that the WKCD is a viable project but we must have the belief that the government will oversee and monitor this project with advisory committees. We should also trust that whoever is awarded this project will honour their commitment according to their proposal. Without trust and belief, Hong Kong will not be a healthy community.
- 7) It is true that HKB has an interest in WKCD project and we have partnered with one of the land developers. HKB has been looking for a home base for the past ten years. The government is unable to provide such facilities but the WKCD can. The Company is now recognized as a world-class professional ballet company; our audience numbers are growing both here in Hong Kong and internationally. Invitation for the Company came from Mainland

China, Spain, Portugal, Italy and U.S.A. The Company could be among the best ballet companies in the world if we have our own rehearsal venue and home base in order for the Company to develop. Historically one notes that all major companies around the world have their own home base. We are doing about 50 performances in Hong Kong annually but we have the potential to do more. The WKCD will provide such facilities. I am sure other established performing companies have the same need. I therefore urge all the opposition voices to think clearly before destroying the one and only opportunity where we can finally have a platform for the long-term development of art and culture in Hong Kong.

Cissy Pao Watari
Board Chairman