



HONG KONG
maritime
museum
香港海事博物館

Hon Ip Kwok-him, GBS, JP
Chairman of the Panel on Home Affairs,
c/o Legislative Council Secretariat,
Legislative Council Building,
8 Jackson Road, Central,
Hong Kong.

4th February 2010

Dear Mr Ip,

I am writing to comment on the paper to be presented to the Legislative Council's Home Affairs Panel on 5th February, 2010 (LC Paper No. CB(2)858/09-10(01)).

Given that this paper is in large part an outcome of the presentation by the Hong Kong Maritime Museum to the panel on 11th January 2008, we feel there are three points worthy of comment, each a function of the three principle problems which had brought the museum to the Legislative Council chamber in the first instance:

1. The museum needed government support not merely in principle, but in kind. We should like to place on record in this respect how gratified we are that the government has responded generously to our representations both in terms of the provision of premises and funding. There are many formalities yet to be completed before we have a new and larger museum in an ideal location, but we feel the essential foundations are laid and now only due process, application and effort stand between us and a splendid new testament to Hong Kong's distinguished maritime past, present and, we are sure, future.

However, this gratitude is tempered by the manner in which the government has couched its response. For what it has given in particular, and makes express in paragraphs 27-29 of its paper, it in those same paragraphs, as elsewhere, significantly undermines. For the Home Affairs Bureau paper not only fails to address our two other, significant and related problems, but in taking the line it does, rides roughshod over them.

2. An independent museum like our own needs a clear legal and policy structure into which it fits. Without that, we remain indistinguishable to government officials – and therefore to the government's regulatory system...
 - a. on the one hand from a cinema or theatre; for we are only a 'place of public entertainment' and must meet all the regulatory requirements therefore. From this our fellow museums in the LCSD system are in part sheltered.

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- b. on the other from any other private business company trading in the market place; for there is no such creature in Hong Kong as a 'private' (or independent) museum, which can attract to itself the many and important concessions, provisions and privileges that a 'museum', as a place for the preservation of heritage, for its display and thereby the education and cultural enrichment of our fellow citizens, gets in other jurisdictions.

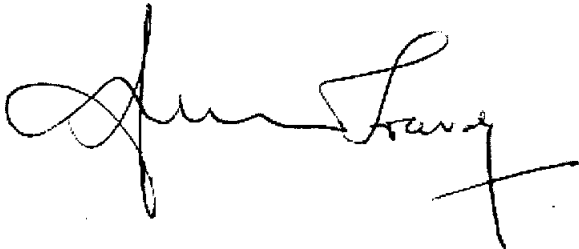
It is evident from the Home Affairs Bureau paper that this vital matter has been completely ignored and we are thus condemned to continue labouring under the manifest handicaps that brought us to you two years ago.

3. Finally, what is critically needed is a level playing field as between publicly operated and funded and both partially subvented and wholly privately funded but independently operated museums; a level playing field that is created and sustained by a coherent, well articulated and comprehensive policy towards museums. This, the paper before you manifestly not merely fails to provide, but resolutely turns its back upon.

In short, sir, what the administration gives with one hand, it takes away with the other. It is to give us a helpful forward boost, for which we are duly grateful. And then it by implication sets us performance targets it expressly declares that its own museums cannot meet and should not be required to meet if they are to do their proper job as museums. Having done that to us, it ensures that its own museums are so funded and cosseted that we shall find it hard to retain staff, attract members of the public, and grow further in fulfilling our mission.

Surely, sir, this is a manifest contradiction revealing a significant failure properly to address the problems which your panel acutely identified and accepted when last we appeared before you? A short term fix has been achieved at the cost, the significant cost, of long term gain.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Hardy', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Anthony J. Hardy, Chairman, Hong Kong Maritime Museum Limited