

The Three Professional Dance Companies addressing
the 10 June Legco Meeting on West Kowloon
Cultural District Development

Mr. Chairman,

I speak on behalf of the Hong Kong Dance Company, the Hong Kong Ballet Company and the City Contemporary Dance Company on the development of the West Kowloon Cultural District.

A great city must have a multi-layered development in culture which will definitely take the shape of a pyramid. The lowest layer is popular material culture such as food and beverages, entertainment and shopping. These compose the basic layer of appearance of a city. However, the cultural achievement of a city cannot be assessed on the lowest layer of popular culture. The higher one aspires in culture, the more elegant and Advent-garde arts will be found. The higher the realm of cultural activities the lesser the audience will result. In the summit of the pyramid only the elite of the city will be present.

A government with vision and accountability will not neglect the establishment of the higher level culture, simply because it attracts less participants. We all know that the assessment of a great city does not rest on the opening of the biggest shopping mall in the world, or the attraction of the highest number of tourists. The critical appraisal is based on whether the city has a culture that the world is looking up in respect. More importantly, human civilization is weaved by the beams of light emitted from the cultural pyramids of great cities in history.

The Tang dynasty (AD 618-907) capital Chang' an is regarded as great because it left us great poets like Li Bai and Du Fu whose poems moved the world. Paris in the 20th Century was great because it reminded us the artistic architecture of the Eiffel Tower or the modern music created by Stravinsky. New York is great not only because of the success of Wall Street and the New York Stock Exchange. Practically there is no great difference in the world's big cities in the doing of business or trading of stocks. However, if one wants to enjoy a dance performance of the highest standard, one has to make a pilgrimage to New York because it is only there that the standard of dance art is re-defined by masters like George Balanchine and Martha Graham.

I hope that the government will invest in the cultural establishment of the highest level, not just focusing on the number of users or audiences, but to win an

opportunity for Hong Kong to become a great city. Hong Kong already has a solid foundation for its popular culture. It is one of the Four Dragons of Asia, a culinary centre, and a shopping paradise. Hong Kong has a solid base for its cultural pyramid. However, we should not be satisfied with such a flat pyramid because there are many financial centers, culinary centers and shopping centers being shaped in other cities. If on one day, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hanoi are catching up with us, what will be remarkable about Hong Kong in historical records?

We wish to create an opportunity for Hong Kong to ascend to be a great city because of the West Kowloon Cultural District. When our younger generation are suffering from the pressure of earning a decent meal, buying a flat or gaining the first bucket of gold, they should be aware that at the spiritual level in culture, they can still move up the ladder. Whether they are successful or not in their pursuit of material culture at the base of the pyramid, as long as they are Hong Kong citizens, they can still climb up the summit of the pyramid through trials in the halls of fame of our cultural establishments. They will feel the noble atmosphere of our time and be proud of our city.

Hong Kong is in need of a West Kowloon Cultural District of the highest level. Its establishment is for the raising of the cultural development of Hong Kong. Therefore, its development must be in line with local art and the Cultural District should be a home base for the creative development of Hong Kong's best artists.

There are many beautiful cultural centres constructed in the world. For example the Washington Centre in the United States, the Southbank Centre in England, and the Promenade in Singapore. How can the West Kowloon Cultural District be an outstanding example admit these similar architectures? Naturally we cannot just rely on inviting famous artists from all over the world to perform here. Without the collaboration of local artists, the District will become a consumer market for expensive imported products. Like many beautiful shopping malls in Hong Kong that sell famous branded products from overseas without a leading local brand, local products therefore can only occupy a very low position in the shopping culture. If the West Kowloon has become a Hong Kong style international shopping mall, it will not help us to establish a higher level cultural district and the former has no intrinsic value.

Ideally the West Kowloon Cultural District should be a home base for the nine flagship performing companies in Hong Kong which are supported by the Hong Kong government. Through decades of hard work we have established the highest artistic standards in Hong Kong. We are the finest soft ware in Hong Kong cultural

development. Moreover, the West Kowloon Cultural District is the most valuable hardware in Hong Kong cultural development. How can both interact and supplement each other to produce the best outcome? The answer lies in the incorporation of the functions of the soft ware at the time of designing the hard ware. Let the soft ware breathe life into the hard ware and supplement each other.

Without the participation and collaboration of the 9 flagship performing companies in Hong Kong, the construction of the West Kowloon Cultural District will be a great waste of human and financial resources. Perhaps the planners of West Kowloon Cultural District have mistakenly thought that when the cultural district facilities are completed, the flagship companies will naturally become hirers and users of these expensive facilities and there is no need to encourage them to make the District their home base. However, the performing companies, if only considered as hirers, will consider other cheaper and more convenient venues like the Hong Kong Cultural Centre at Tsim Sha Tsui, the Hong Kong City Hall in Central, the Kwai Tsing Theatre, the Sha Tin Town Hall and the Sheung Wan Civic Centre. Why should one must perform at the West Kowloon Cultural District?

If the West Kowloon Cultural District aims to shape the cultural halls of fame at the summit of the Hong Kong Cultural pyramid, it should consider allowing the flagship companies of Hong Kong to call it their home and not to be passive to wait for their hiring business.

As for the three professional dance companies among the big nine, we are naturally most willing to make the West Kowloon Cultural District our home. A complete home base should include two parts:-

The first part is a “Hong Kong Professional Dance Centre” which is the daily working and rehearsal space, including rehearsal rooms, offices, costumes and storages etc. The initial estimates from the three companies require a space of 7,500m². We call this space “The Hong Kong Professional Dance Centre” to be managed and operated by the three professional dance companies. Our resources can also be shared with the Hong Kong dance communities at large, organizing various public activities in the promotion and training in dance, open rehearsals, talk demonstrations, a Hong Kong dance archive and public master classes in various forms of dance. We believe that with the professional experience of the three dance companies and the sharing of resources, we can lead the Hong Kong dance communities to a higher level of development.

The second part is a venue specially designed for dance performances called

“Hong Kong Dance Theatre”. We all know that the three pillars of the performing arts are music, drama and dance. In the planning of the West Kowloon Cultural District, there will be a concert hall for music performances, specially designed theatres for contemporary drama performances as well as a Xiqu Centre for traditional Chinese song and music performances. However, a Dance Theatre specially designed for dance performances is never evident. This short-fall in planning obviously ignores the need for the future development of dance in Hong Kong. It puzzles the local dance communities to the extent of insulting.

We strongly urge that the 1,200 seat multi-purpose Lyric Theatre be changed into a pioneering Hong Kong Dance Theatre, reflecting the importance and uniqueness of dance in its outward architectural design and its interior environment design. Dance art has developed nowadays towards a multi-discipline performance art involving dance, drama and *in situ* orchestral accompaniment. Many other performing art forms such as opera, dance drama, musical, children’s drama, puppets as well as acrobatics, are embracing more and more dance elements that could be presented in the Dance Theatre. The naming of a “Hong Kong Dance Theatre” will therefore focus on the promotion of dance.

There are already many multi-purpose lyric theatres in Hong Kong, from Tsim Sha Tsui to Yuen Long, and from Sheung Wan to Sai Wan Ho. All theatres are “multi-purpose” to the extent that they eventually do not fit any single purpose professionally at the highest level. If the West Kowloon Cultural District shares the same aim with the three professional dance companies to raise Hong Kong dance art to the summit of the cultural pyramid, then do not waste money to build another mediocre and faceless “multi-purpose” theatre. With the collaboration of the three most important dance companies: i.e., the Hong Kong Dance Company, the Hong Kong Ballet Company , and the City Contemporary Dance Company, and the co-operation of the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority, we are confident to establish a dance hall of fame at the summit of the pyramid of Hong Kong culture. The “Hong Kong Dance Theatre” will beacon the world with unique interactions between Chinese dance, ballet and modern dance of rich Hong Kong contemporary art character.

Thank you.