

**Extract from the minutes of meeting of the
Panel on Home Affairs held on 20 April 2001**

X X X X X X X X

Action

**IV. Culture and Heritage Commission (the Commission) Consultation
Paper**

[Consultation paper entitled Gathering of Talents for Continual Innovation
issued vide CB(2)1156/00-01 on 23 March 2001]

6. The Chairman welcomed Prof H K CHANG, the Commission Chairman, and Secretary of the Commission to the meeting. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Commission Chairman introduced the consultation paper with the aid of a video presentation.

Role and Composition of the Commission

7. In response to members' enquiries about the role of the Commission, the Commission Chairman said that there were certainly some overlapping areas between culture and arts, but in general culture covered a broader spectrum of activities of which the arts was a major component. The work of the Commission in cultural development should be viewed from an overall perspective, although part of its work would inevitably overlap with those of the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB), Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA), Hong Kong Arts Centre (HKAC) and Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC). The key responsibility of the Commission was to formulate a set of principles and strategies to promote the long-term development of culture in Hong Kong. Its recommendations would be considered by relevant bureaux such as the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) for implementation by relevant government departments and statutory bodies as appropriate. As culture was an all-embracing term, the work of the Commission would have an impact on a wide spectrum of areas including education, housing, city planning, broadcasting and information, social welfare, industrial and economic development, etc. Accordingly, the work of cultural development should affect a number of bureaux and departments. He believed that relevant bureaux and statutory bodies would consider the recommendations of the Commission in their policy formulation, and that the role of the Commission should not be in conflict with that of the local communities in cultural development.

8. Mr IP Kwok-him asked about the correlation between cultural development and trade and economic development. He also invited the

Action

Commission Chairman to elaborate on the holistic approach for the promotion of cultural development. The Commission Chairman explained that cultural development was closely related to many policy areas such as education, urban planning, tourism, creative industries, trade and economic development and others. He cited the significance of the Silk Road in the evolution and formation of Chinese culture, and said that the major trading cities along the Silk Road had served as a gateway for cultural exchanges between China and central Asian, Indian and Persian cultures.

9. Mr Albert CHAN questioned how the Commission could promote and develop local culture without a wide representation from relevant departments and stakeholders such as the education, housing and city planning sectors. He considered that transforming Hong Kong from a cultural desert to a "cultural greenland" would take considerable time and involve a lot of resources and efforts. Given that the Commission would not involve in the management of cultural facilities and activities, he expressed reservations about the effectiveness of the Commission in fostering community culture.

10. In response, the Commission Chairman said that while the Commission should include representatives from different fields as far as possible, he believed that the present composition was an appropriate and manageable size. He added that Hong Kong was a special administrative region of China and 97% of its population were Chinese. As an international city with a knowledge-based economy, the strength of Hong Kong in cultural development lied in its foundation of Chinese culture and its open and receptive attitude towards other cultures. It was the consensus of the Commission that the long-term goal of the Commission was to expand the global cultural vision on the foundation of the Chinese culture, drawing on the essence of other cultures to develop Hong Kong into an international cultural metropolis known for its openness and pluralism.

11. The Commission Chairman further pointed out that local culture could take different forms to develop in different walks of life. To play a supportive role, Government should encourage the whole community to appreciate and participate in cultural activities. To materialise its policy commitments, Government should be responsible for developing adequate cultural facilities and allocating sufficient resources to facilitate formation of cultural groups and organisations. The Commission Chairman believed that when the average age of the population and its disposable income increased, the community as a whole would look forward to better quality of life and more varieties of cultural and recreational activities. He considered that culture was an important ingredient of a society's human capital. The Administration should consider how Chinese characters in the best known novels such as Protean "Monkey King" in "Journey to the West" should be promoted and became popular human capitals. Mr Timothy FOK shared the view, saying that Hong Kong should make better use of its cultural assets so as to become economically successful in the future.

Action

People-oriented and community-driven cultural development

12. The Chairman expressed concern that as the Commission was a non-statutory body appointed by the Chief Executive, the new structural framework might create an environment conducive to domination of cultural services by the Government as well as bureaucratic interference. He asked how the Commission could function independently and execute its strategies for people-oriented and community-driven cultural development in the long term.

13. The Commission Chairman responded that he did not see that the existence of a government-appointed institution would have any contradiction to cultural development. He pointed out that it was quite common in overseas countries to have similar government-appointed bodies for the promotion of cultural policies and directions in cultural development, and yet the local communities there were able to take the lead in planning and organising cultural activities. In fact, the formulation of policies for cultural development needed active participation and support of the community. The Commission Chairman added that the Commission had 17 members including the Chairman and only two government officials were appointed as ex-officio members. Other members were appointed in their personal capacity, including four ex-officio members who were Chairmen of AAB, HKAPA, HKAC and HKADC.

14. Mr Albert CHAN expressed support for the principle of community-driven cultural development. However, given that local communities and cultural organisations such as Chinese opera and drama groups were unable to find suitable venues to stage performances, many people simply did not have the opportunity to appreciate and participate in these arts and cultural activities. He considered that the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) had failed to provide sufficient cultural programmes and venues for the community to nurture an interest in arts and culture. The Chairman said that although he supported that cultural development should be community-driven, he was concerned that the Government's resources to support culture and arts services would be decreased. He stressed that availability of venue was of paramount importance for non-governmental organisations to promote the development of culture and arts.

15. The Commission Chairman responded that "community-driven" in the context of cultural development should be interpreted from a wider perspective. Basically, the active participation of the community in proposing cultural programmes and organising cultural activities should to some extent reflect the existence of community-driven cultural development. There was no conflict between Government's provision of resources and community driven cultural development. He believed that the Government had no intention to reduce the resources to be provided for culture and arts services even though the future cultural development would be community-driven. He stressed that the Commission had only recommended the Government to reduce its direct involvement and management in the long run and in a progressive manner.

Action

16. Dr TANG Siu-tong noted that the Commission was not an executive body for organising cultural activities and its key responsibility was to formulate a set of principles and strategies which would be implemented by relevant government departments and statutory bodies for promoting long-term cultural development. Dr TANG queried whether it would be tantamount to indirect Government domination in contradiction with the principle of community-driven cultural development.

17. The Commission Chairman responded that cultural development in every community was an arduous task which needed active participation and consensus of both the Government and the public. He did not consider that the Government was taking a dominant role since local communities and performance groups could proactively seek funding support and apply for use of performance venues for organising cultural activities from LCSD and HKADC, etc. In particular, increasing autonomy of the three performing companies, namely the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, the Hong Kong Dance Company and the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre, by way of corporatisation was proceeded in the light of enhancing community-driven development of cultural programmes in these areas.

18. The Chairman and Mr WU King-cheong were of the view that the Administration should adopt a non-interventionist policy to enhance community-driven cultural development. The Commission Chairman responded that the six principles and strategies highlighted in the consultation paper were interdependent among each other and equally important for the purpose of cultural development. They were recommended to be implemented in a well coordinated manner.

19. Miss Cyd HO considered that corporatisation of performing companies should aim at enriching the community-driven element in statutory bodies for providing cultural services. Allocation of cultural resources should not be reduced. She cited the example of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra to illustrate that corporatisation without proper consultation might lead to a lot of management problems.

20. The Commission Chairman opined that the proposal to corporatise was mainly to achieve management independence and self-financing. While the Administration and the community as a whole appeared to be in favour of gradual corporatisation of the performing companies, the Commission had not reached a conclusion on the issue.

Overseas experience

21. Mr WU King-cheong declared interest as Chairman of the Hong Kong Dancing Company Limited. He expressed support for the principles and strategies put forwarded by the Commission for long-term cultural development.

Action

He cited the National Ballet of Canada as an example to illustrate that cultural development did require government funding support to thrive. He pointed out that the career span of a performing artist was relatively short. The Administration should provide adequate incentives and work arrangement after retirement to attract young talents to engage in dance performances.

22. The Commission Chairman responded that through coordination of community efforts, a national-wide network had been established in Canada to facilitate the fostering of young talents in ballet performance. With sufficient funding support from the local governments, junior schools in each province would train and recommend students with an aptitude for ballet to the National Ballet of Canada for advanced professional training. The success of Canada was mainly the result of a national favour and support for ballet performance, which demonstrated that cultural development could not be separated from the needs of the people and the community at large. He added that unlike Canada, Hong Kong did not have a well-formulated policy for cultural development yet. Hopefully, the Commission would be able to fulfill the mission by advising the Government on the issue.

Coordination of efforts

23. Miss Cyd HO said that as a Legislative Council member, she was concerned about the powers and functions of the Commission in the context of cultural development, and how the Commission would strengthen coordination among relevant government departments and public bodies. The Chairman added that the Administration had delayed time and again making a decision on the construction of Tai Po Civic Centre on the excuse that its consultation with the Commission was still underway.

24. The Commission Chairman clarified that the Commission was only an advisory body and would not interfere with the formulation and execution of cultural policies for the construction of individual civic centres. He understood that the Administration was reviewing the policy of providing civic centres and might take the Commission's advice into consideration before deciding the standard and policy for the provision of civic centres.

Preservation of heritage

25. Dr TANG Siu-tong considered that the Government should provide reasonable compensation to owners and bear the maintenance cost for conservation and preservation of historical buildings and archaeological sites. The Commission Chairman responded that while the Commission would recommend strategies for better preservation of local heritage, the Chairman of AAB, an ex-officio member of the Commission, was also working closely with the Administration in this regard. The amount of government allocation available would be determined by various stakeholders.

Action

The way forward of the Commission

26. Mr Timothy FOK expressed appreciation of the Commission Chairman's dedication to the Commission's work. Given limited resources, Mr FOK suggested that the Commission should liaise with the Government on how to establish a fair and transparent funding mechanism to provide a level-playing field to various stakeholders in the cultural sector. The Commission Chairman responded that he would consider the suggestion.

27. Miss Cyd HO enquired about the Commission's plans after the consultation exercise. The Commission Chairman responded that the next move of the Commission would depend on the results of the current consultation. So far the response to the consultation had been favourable and the Commission would make its final recommendations to the Administration. He informed members that the Commission would hold a retreat meeting in end of May to review work progress and decide the way forward.

X X X X X X X X

Legislative Council Secretariat

4 September 2001