

**Hong Kong Arts Development Council
International Arts Leadership Roundtable 2016**

Plenary 1: The Development of Cultural Ecology

Performing Arts in Hong Kong

Full transcript of the speech by

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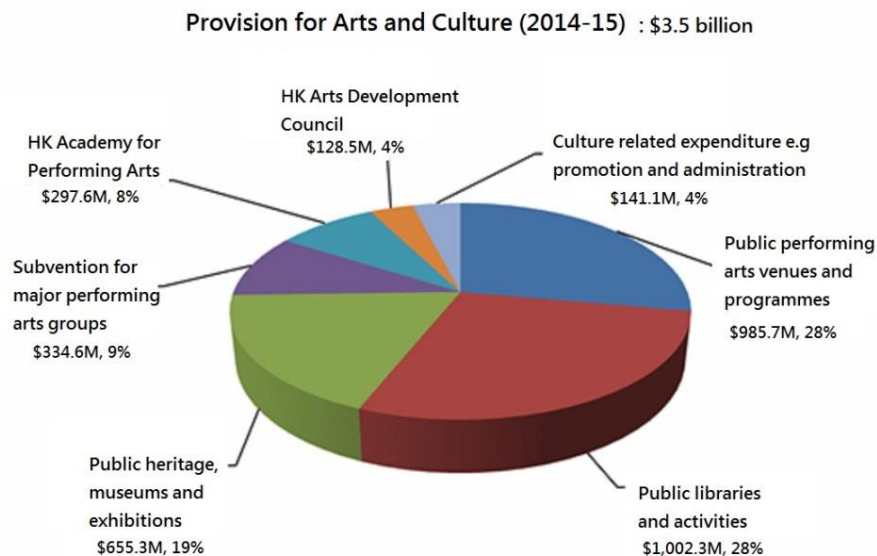
Good morning guests, colleagues and artists. There is much pressure on me being the third speaker in the morning and having heard so many enlightening words from Kathy and Rupert before me. Within the coming twenty minutes, I will give a very brief background on the arts scene, focusing on the performing arts, and then concentrate on what will be done from the angle of an arts administrator in the government, at LCSD, according to my imagination, if not hallucination.

This slide fits the ambience at the Maritime Museum so well. Hong Kong is rooted in Chinese traditional culture, and this has sewn seeds for the importance to preserve our heritage, which indirectly mows our way to what we are doing in the realm of performing arts. I would like to tell you a story, a story of how in the past thirty years, government, practitioners and artists have worked together to arrive at the scene today.

Once upon a time, there were days when arts and culture were put under the form of the Social Services Department and the Urban Council. The City Hall was built in 1962, much according to the British built of city halls, which included a performing venue, a library and a marriage registry. In the 1970s, it had given birth to performing companies under the form of the Urban Council, which are now our flagship companies. We had Hong Kong Philharmonic established in 1974, Hong Kong Repertory Theatre in 1977, Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra in 1977, Chung Ying Theatre in 1979, Hong Kong Ballet 1979, City Contemporary Dance Company (CCDC) in 1979, and also Hong Kong Dance Company (HKDC) in 1981. In the 1980s, we opened venues in the New Territories. The New Territories were non-urban areas under the former Regional Council. The Hong Kong Cultural Centre was opened in 1989, which has been a major breeding ground for the artistic development till today. The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts was established in 1984 to provide professional trainings in different art forms, including technical arts. During the 1990s we witnessed a great leap forward for the performing arts because the government assumed a strong role as a presenter for a simple reason: to provide variety and opportunity to appreciate the arts as a service. We stage programmes instead of repairing drainage. The Hong Kong Arts Development Council was also established in 1995 to support the development of the arts through grants, allocations, policies and advocacy, and to nurture talents. In 2000, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department was established. The biggest difference is that we focus on cultural and leisure areas while the former realm of the

work under the Urban Services Department related to hygiene became the scope of work of another government department. With the corporatisation of the performing companies, and later named the Big Nine, the government will shoulder the annual funding. In 2008, we launched the Venue Partnership Scheme to foster a partnership between the performing venues and the arts group partners to enhance image and character of the venues, while enlarging the audience space and optimising usage of the facilities to encourage community involvement in the development of the arts.

The chart shows how funding has been dispersed to different arts-related areas, e.g. the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, subventions for major performing arts groups, the LCSD, etc. The Hong Kong Arts Festival also receives annual subvention from the LCSD. The areas are mentioned here as a broad-brush because of time limit.



I would like to say something about our past support to the performing arts. In terms of performing venues, there are sixteen venues under the LCSD, including two stadia. Sorry to say that we have to accept the accusation that we monopolise the market, but there are many non-LCSD venues emerging in recent years, including university auditorium and spaces we engineered. Here you can see the spread of our venues all over Hong Kong.



We present star programmes as well as productions by young and upcoming artists and arts groups. We also present three major arts festivals in a year under different themes for different sectors of the audiences in the community. Of course we have the Hong Kong Arts Festival every year to bring about lots of big star programmes as well.

Our role as a major presenter for the arts has never stopped, and tickets are heavily subsidised so that more people can enjoy our programmes with affordable prices. Our efforts to preserve, promote and develop Cantonese opera, which is an art form declared as intangible cultural heritage, has reaped results. Yau Ma Tei Theatre and Ko Shan Theatre are homes for preservations and development. Yau Ma Tei Theatre is also a cradle to nurture young talents in the field. On a similar note, the major performance venues at the West Kowloon Cultural District, the Xiqu Centre, dedicated to Chinese operatic performances, will also be in place in 2019.

I have briefly mentioned the role of the Academy for Performing Arts and the Arts Development Council earlier, but I would not drown on it anymore. Worth mentioning is the introduction of Cultural Studies in tertiary institutes recently. Trained administrators are now readily available in the market and hopefully in the coming years as well. As the LCSD, we launched the Arts Administrator Trainee Scheme since 2010 to nurture a pool of young administrators in arts management, stage management, museums, public relations and promotion as well. There are such places shared with the Hong Kong Arts Festival as well as our venue. We have been tracking down the career paths of these trainees and I am happy to find out that many of them are working in the field as far as possible as they are trained. This is to support the cultural software of Hong Kong in preparation for the West Kowloon Cultural District, which will enhance Hong Kong's position in the international cultural metropolis. Government has further injected HKD 150 million in five years since 2013 for such training purposes. In the past ten years, government has also injected new funding to support the arts, including the Cantonese Opera Development Fund since 2005. HKD 8.65 million has been injected to sponsor Cantonese opera projects. HKD 30 million has been injected to the Arts Capacity Development Funding Scheme every year, in other words, the Scheme has received over 140 million since 2011. For Contestable Funding Pilot Scheme for the Major Performing Arts Groups, so far HKD 57 million has supported 19

projects since its launch. The Art Development Matching Grants Pilot Scheme will be launched this year, and there will be HKD 300 million dollars injected. It is to support fundraising efforts through government's matching grants, and thereby facilitate growth and development.

We are aware of concerns about inadequate performance venues. On average over 70% of bookings of our venues have to be declined due to unavailability. I am sure you know that the West Kowloon Cultural District is already in full swing. Let's give a bit more patience. We heard you, and we are working on this.

The East Kowloon Cultural Centre is a new project under the LCSD to meet the cry for more performance spaces as well. Piling work for the Centre has already started last month. The new venue to the scale of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre will house a 1,200-seat auditorium, a 550-seat theatre, and three studios for music, dance and drama with 120 to 250 seats. There will also be arts booths for creative use. It is located in an area surrounded by residential estates in East Kowloon where we have only a small, 287-seat Ngau Chi Wan Civic Centre, which was built since 1987 in the area. The East Kowloon Cultural Centre is not a shrine, but as a way to encourage community involvement.

We are also reviewing our current Venue Partnership Scheme, which is in the third term in its nine years. We will see if we can further strengthen the character of specific venues to create synergy with the community through partnership with the artists there. This will inevitably lead us to review our current booking system to see how we best use specific venues, in particular, our major territory-wide venues. This is a very complicated issue that can only be tackled by across-the-board rethinking, even if it is against our role as a presenter.

If you noticed, we are gradually putting more of our programmes in the New Territories, including major visiting programmes. In future, you might even find certain star programmes are only staged in the venues in the New Territories, and not in urban areas. We do this because we are fully aware that many new families are living farther away in the New Territories, similar to many world cities. While travelling cost might be an issue to a layman family, which makes them hesitated to go all the way to see the shows in urban areas. We put more shows near them. These are the audiences we need to build with more efforts. We are very happy to see the Hong Kong Ballet staging four shows of their core programmes in Tuen Mun Town Hall. The shows were all sold out, meaning there is a hungry gang of audience there waiting for us.

We are also gradually adjusting our role as a presenter by further encouraging artists to be more independent. We started a new mode of presentation, where we offered, not just a fee, a venue, a ticketing service, but also the box office income, which was kept by the government in the past. This will give incentives to arts groups to work harder to market their shows to bigger gains. We are aware of private presenters in the field, who try to hire our venues but in vain. Their programmes are very good too. Government should not fight with market and therefore we position ourselves more in the New Territories in the coming future. Why not share the market where private impresarios can flourish? Government should do the more difficult tasks, and make public money worth spending. We do not appal exploring other opportunities. We will not lose our jobs doing that.

We heard the appeals to the need for a home base from artists, arts groups, and even the Hong Kong Arts Festival. On this complicated issue, you should be happy about the Arts Development

Council's new project to create new arts spaces in Wong Chuk Hang for visual artists and in Tai Po by making use of a vacant school premise for artists. They are projects with support from government. We are also working closely with the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority to bring about the best synergies and cooperation at the dawn of the new clusters of new venues in Hong Kong. I assure you, we are working very hard on this.

And on funding, if you see this trend of increasing funding, can you still say the government is insensitive to the importance of resources? I appeal to your understanding that there is a limit to resources. And be fair to what government has been doing so far. Pardon us if we act like housewives in market when we negotiate the fees with you artists. Forgive us if we ask you to fill out forms as it is never our intention to ask you to write Nobel laureate type of proposals. We just need to be careful because we are using public money. In Hong Kong we have learnt to rush but not suitably wait. Stay and see. Are we blind to drowning ourselves to maintain a high level of activities to justify getting a certain amount of budget for our games? Why can't we do less? And with this less, I mean being better in quality. Why should we judge by activities level rather than content?

Michael MacLeod of the Hong Kong Philharmonic told me recently that the average age of a music audience is, in the West, 69. I am sure our audiences are much younger on average. I never boast what we do in audience-building is enough, nor can we claim full success yet. We become quite stale in this now – bringing shows to schools, organising workshops, putting training to schools - and we rely on artists to propose more creative means in future. Apart from building young audience, which we have been doing for a long while, we witness a growing segment of silver-hair audience with the aging population, similar to Singapore and Australia. LCSD is already curating programmes for elderly audience, and they are not just Cantonese opera programmes. Our Community Oral History Theatre Project is in its fifth year already. With this we trained the elderly people from a specific district, e.g. Sham Shui Po, to act on stage, and to make use of their own stories as an oral history to produce a drama to be shown to the public in the same district.

On cultural exchange, which is also our challenge in future, with the hot initiative of the Belt and Road Initiative, I see a strong relationship with the enhancement of cultural exchange in coming years. At LCSD, we are humbling expanding our cultural exchange team to strengthen ties and bridge local artists with opportunities to go out of Hong Kong. We have already established a permanent platform with the Shanghai International Arts Festival for exchange of programmes by young artists at the New Vision Arts Festival. We are also sending young dance choreographers to Guangzhou and Beijing, making use of CCDC's venues there. They will perform in these cities after the shows in Hong Kong presented by us to optimize their overseas experience. The ADC's successful initiative to bring artists to Korea last year, and to Germany and Australia in future, has proven our concerted effort through government support to showcase. You will also notice a growing support for overseas touring performances by the Economic and Trade offices.

On the last issue, the government is fully aware of dedicated professionals in the field to take up both management and technical aspects in the field. We are also aware of many experienced arts administrators are with the LCSD. We treasure knowledge management intensely. We would ask for sincere cooperation with stakeholders as well as sharing their knowledge and experience. Let's not forget our predecessors in the administration in the past years, who have laid down

fertile ground for what we can do better today and in future. Our efforts in nurturing artist talents, in broadening audience base, in increasing access to the arts, and in providing space for the arts might not be enough. I appeal to your understanding that we have all worked hard to what we have today. Let's treasure it. With harder work, fair discussion, deliberation with stakeholders and a little bit more passion and courage, and in preparation to celebrate our 20th anniversary next year for the establishment of our Special Administrative Region, let's celebrate our artists and treasure the relationship in the field. As the story ends, we shall live happily ever after. On this note I conclude my sharing with you all today. Thank you.

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