

DR CHAN MAN-HUNG:

Thank you, Mr Ma. I would also like to thank all of you for coming today, as well as the organisers for the invitation to attend this forum. I dread using Mandarin to speak and I think that's also the dread of many people, especially if it's a serious lecture.

Well, I have a precedent. Mr Chan used Cantonese, so that's what I'm going to use. And I'll only spend a very short time using Cantonese to express the most, but I have to apologise that the disclaimer is that my Cantonese is not very, that great.

Where is the life in traditional culture? And I think it all boils down to the concept of modernity and our way of life and these are the pillars of traditional culture and arts.

In March this year, I was invited to attend the Southeast Asian Forum and three countries participated: Japan, Korea and China. China was represented by mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong publishers. These publishers are all publishers of humanity subjects in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

During this Publishers of Southeast Asia Conference, they already held the third conference in Seoul last year and the fourth conference will be held in April in Hong Kong next year.

The convening of this conference has triggered some of the ideas that I would like to share with you today.

The Conference of Southeast Asian Publishers was organised because it was felt that the publishers, as they approached the 21st century and as they faced the onset of the IT era, they hoped that the publishers in the three lands of Southeast Asia can, through publication and exchanges, promote the better understanding of the people among the three lands in Southeast Asia.

After the discussions in the three seminars what was most discussed was, on the one hand, that the publishers of the three territories in Southeast Asia, we can say that other than the individual -- there was no direct dialogue or exchange among the publishers.

Also, those publishers who attended the seminar should be very well-versed with the humanities, but most of the delegates to the conference, most of them don't know anything about the culture and arts in the other two regions. Some of them we don't even understand anything about the culture and arts in the neighbouring countries. I think this is a very common phenomenon in Southeast Asia. Or East Asia, rather.

The triangles are Japan, Korea and China. Historically speaking we all know that these three countries all fall within the circle of the Chinese Hanchi or Chinese character or the circle of Confucius culture, there was very close culture exchanges.

At the moment, at the economic and political level, the three countries are very much interdependent and related.

In terms of geography, history and despite the close relationship among the three countries, there is a lack of understanding on the part of each country about the culture and arts of the other two countries.

The reason for this was that according to one Japanese publisher was that in recent history the intellectuals in East Asia, they tend to be more focused about the culture from the West rather than focusing their attention on the cultural conditions in the neighbouring countries.

Furthermore, Japan wanted to become a major power and they have chosen to adopt a policy of aggression, found a policy of colonialism against their neighbouring countries. As a result, cultural exchanges among the East Asian countries has become restricted because of that.

Although after the second world war, with the changing political paradigm, despite all that, all the East Asian countries were still very xenophobic and they were even in a state of confrontation.

After the three publishers' conferences, the publishers in the three lands have arrived at a consensus. That is: through quality exchange and cooperation among the publishers of the humanities in the three lands we can overcome and also remove the political disputes and conflicts among the three countries and promote understanding among the people of the three countries.

It was also felt that the basis of cultural exchanges and exchanges among the people of these three countries should be founded on our history especially, and that we should start this process of understanding our history.

Therefore China, Japan and Korea, the scholars and publishers in these three countries have overcome many difficulties and they have compiled a history of the three nations in East Asia. And the publishers in Japan and Korea also published a history of Korea and Japan, in order to help the people in the other country to understand the culture of the other.

So against this background, we may contemplate whether or not we should try to have a new understanding of Asia. All the East Asian countries, all the Asian countries, not only are engaged in political disputes, they are also cultural barriers among these countries.

The three nations in East Asia have against a background of modernisation being Westernisation, historians have done a lot of research into this phenomenon and the political disconnect among the people of the three countries in recent years is not something that can reverse within a short time.

But as the Asian countries and East Asian countries and Asian countries advance in economic, cultural and international terms, furthermore with the new paradigm of increased political cooperation, these Asian countries have to reconsider the cultural position of the respective countries and the need for cultural cooperation and exchange. Such needs and understanding are now more and more recognised by intellectuals in these countries.

In East Asian countries before and after the second world war, both the government and the people have actually -- are focused on Asia. But because of Japan's history of aggression, many Asian countries are apprehensive about Japan's proposal for exchanges and forming regional organisations.

But I think Korea has set a very good example recently. Korea has worked very hard to promote cultural innovation and promoting cultural exchanges among the Asian countries. They have been most proactive in promoting

the cultural exchanges and cooperation among Asian countries. They were very, very active.

I can give you some recent examples. With the collaboration between the Korean government and the people, they have built an artist's village somewhere near Seoul and they have built a book city or the publishing centre for Korea. In that book city, they have already built a centre for Asian cultural exchange.

In October this year, there were already two seminars held about Asian cultural exchanges. I think you've probably seen it in the news that in Seoul they have organised a conference on Asian cultural exchange. The UNESCO had also convened a conference attended by 43 countries and the ministers from those countries also attended the conference on the Asian railway conference.

Korea has organised a series of economic, political exchanges which shows that Korea now has adopted a new perspective.

Such examples, there are many such examples in Asia, but I don't know whether or not the staging of the ACCF is based on the same understanding or whether or not we have shared the same historical perspective.

Since the handover, Hong Kong has positioned itself as Asia's world city. I really have not tried to find out why Hong Kong -- the reasons why we have positioned ourselves as Asia's world city and the justification. But according to my own observation and understanding, for Asian countries -- I think for Hong Kong to position itself in this manner is understandable and appropriate.

Over a long time, Hong Kong has had very frequent exchanges with neighbouring Asian countries and the rest of the world. Among all the East Asian cities, there is no other city which is as cosmopolitan as Hong Kong and there's no other cities where we have so many ethnic minorities from Southeast Asia.

Unfortunately, we have -- traditionally we have very limited understanding about the culture and history of the neighbouring Asian countries. Over the last century, as the most cosmopolitan city in China and given the China globalisation, Hong Kong is, as in the past, does not -- only have

a very superficial understanding of international history and I don't think we can really call ourselves "Asia's world city", if we call ourselves "Asia's world city". But we only have a superficial understanding of the history and culture of neighbouring countries, especially the countries in East Asia. But given the close relationship among the three countries, although there have been many disputes and animosities in the past among the three countries, but whatever the case, there are very close economic, political, business, tourism, connections and exchanges among these countries.

Given such close connections, if we have let the understanding about the history and culture of Southeast Asia, this is not very good. And I don't think if that's the case we can really be called Asia's world city.

In the past and also now, I think Hong Kong really can play the role of an intermediary among these Asian countries, especially in the cultural and economic arena. That's why I think Hong Kong should really seriously consider Hong Kong's role vis-à-vis Asia and especially East Asia.

In the past, Hong Kong was indeed one of the few cosmopolitan cities in Asia, but our cosmopolitan characteristics not only should be maintained but in the past we were more inclined towards the West and I think we should gradually move towards becoming a city with a truly international perspective.

Another cooperation with Asia and East Asia is not only urgently needed for us. Actually, Asian countries are already adopting an Asian or East Asian perspective in collaborating with other countries and Hong Kong's experience can make a contribution here. Through the movies, for example, Mr Chan Koon-chung already gave one example.

Hong Kong has a long history of international exchanges, our international perspective and our modern ideas and concepts. Furthermore, over the years Hong Kong has a long history of building economic connections with other countries, so Hong Kong is well placed to become -- is going to play a very important role in the economic and cultural exchanges among Asian countries. This is a mission. History has entrusted upon Hong Kong.

So what we need is to understand this new situation and we should be able to look at the issue from the deep structures of our culture.

Next I would like to talk about the life of traditional or the vibrancy of traditional arts and culture. In the 19th century, Western culture led the developed world history. East Asian countries and all Asia were trying to build up the economy and military. The people were seeking for modernisation and that has become the major theme of development for most East Asian countries.

In order to build up the economy and the military and to ensure that the social culture become modernised, the relationship between traditional culture and Western culture has always been the subject of exploration among the intellectuals in these countries, and also there has been a lot of debates.

Even for those of us who are close to 60s or 50-something, starting from our university days, we had spent a lot of time reading and exploring about the relationship between tradition and modernisation. If we have a good understanding of historical development, then for the sub-topic -- I think we can have two basic understanding about tradition vis-à-vis versus modernisation.

First of all, I don't think there should be any more dichotomy between wholesale Westernisation and to be a purely Oriental culture. The exchange and cooperation among East Asian culture is something that we should embrace and also how we can have a new innovation with the exchanges of Eastern and Western culture. We need also theoretical explorations.

However, after more than a century of incessant discussion, I think that it's now time for us to take concrete actions. Should attempt the different levels and different sectors, I believe that in the end we would be able to resolve this dispute that has been going on for more than a century.

So I think we should focus more on the implementational aspect. Since I was a university student until I finished my PhD thesis, I've been exploring this subject. And when worked as a publisher, I'm always convinced that implementation of practice is very important.

Next I would like to talk about how do we modernise traditional arts and culture.

What is the authors, the writers or the scientists, they all work -- they are all seeking new knowledge.

As a publisher, the biggest incentive and motivation for him is to seek new knowledge, cultural knowledge and disseminate it to the rest of society. As a publisher, wherever you are based, traditional arts and publication of traditional arts and cultural subjects are very important.

Through publication, how can we promote the modernisation of traditional arts and culture? That is the mission and responsibility of publishers.

I personally, because of opportunities, because of my own concepts and with 25 years publication experience, most of the publications were in the area of a traditional culture. Of course this is no -- there is no coincidence in that. It really reflects the sort of personal approach to the modernisation of traditional art and the dissemination of that art to the general public. It's really that sort of process.

Perhaps I can tell you that the sort of books that were published in the past, like the five years costumes of China, the national treasures, the traditional fabrics, et cetera, all these books have been proved to be extremely popular overseas and as a publication house for us to infiltrate the international market, I believe that we can call that really a sort of achievement.

I'm not going to talk anything further about all those books because of time constraints. In the area of publication from my own personal experience, I believe how traditional art can be modernised is most important. Or the preservation of traditional culture with at the same time caring for the energisation of the culture. I believe two concepts are of paramount importance, which include the modernise concept and the daily life orientation.

I believe there are two sort of meanings to that. Firstly, we adopt modern concepts, ideas, methodologies, in our expressions, in the publication of the books for the dissemination of knowledge. This is one way of modernisation.

And then a more in-depth modernisation is through the publishers' understanding of traditional art via the process of publication energising

the traditional art. This is the methodology. And finally promoting the modernisation of traditional art. So I believe the meanings are twofold. I believe for the publication of traditional art without the sort of energisation, without going through the process of energisation or not using modern concepts in the work of publication, we would only be publishing déjà vu sort of publications. And that would cause the general public to depart or to leave traditional art. As a matter of fact, I have great admiration for Mr Sun Jung Mun, who is not just literati and in the research of traditional heritage, in the research of history, he has made great achievements.

In the early 1950s, he had mooted the idea that there should be a revolution in the Chinese sculpture and he was advocating the usage of traditional things for modern purposes, in other words the Chinese handicraft, Chinese art has to be modernised and all for the purpose of modern-day usage.

Only by doing that Chinese traditional crafts would be energised for modern day usage. This is similar to the innovative industry idea of modern days, but he made that point 50 years ago.

Apart from what I mentioned earlier on, and as a matter of fact the publication of the artistic books are not really just focusing on the core value of the arts but rather from a more macro sort of aspect of culture. Whether it's a Chinese person or a non-Chinese person, I believe they should find that sort of understanding and the culture in doing such publication work.

Of course we would also adopt a universal perspective to make a comparison with the traditional Chinese art to find the sort of energy in the Chinese art like the calligraphy and painting, Chinese painting really on a point basis compared with the so-called focus nature of the Western painting.

Of course I think we can make comparisons in those areas and we're using those concepts to infiltrate in our publication of traditional culture, traditional architecture and art. The Western culture in most cases are focusing on the sort of churches or church construction.

For the Chinese construction, the traditional house is really modelled on the palace, the imperial palaces. For aesthetics, for practicalities, there is a set of principles and those principles can be understood via



modern architecture. So we were using that sort of approach in our compilation of such publications.

Apart from those books, apart from those publications, through the archaeological work of the last several years, we realised that we have to rewrite the Chinese cultural history. In our past understanding of Chinese history, of Chinese cultural development had always been focusing on the mid and downstream of the Yellow River and focusing on the Han ethnicity and also on the 24 dynasties of the past. Of course, I believe that that shouldn't be the only way for us to understand the Chinese history.

So the archaeologists, they work in their areas and those who specialise in documentation, they work in their areas. And they were put together and then we started to publish a new series of books with the new perspective of Chinese culture in mind.

That series of books was extremely successful in Hong Kong, and there were Korean and Japanese versions of that series published later as well.

So to adopt a new approach to the space, time and the focus of Chinese cultural development, well, will certainly cast an impact on all the readers.

Such an approach is not just a modernised way of publication, but the question is whether we should really get out of the -- final way out of the box of just -- well, taking into consideration the 24 dynasties, the Yellow River basins, et cetera, I believe that is really something for us to consider.

So what was behind us at that time was really that apart from the -- we can actually use a publication to energise the traditional culture, including history, including art, et cetera. In other words, the energisation of a tradition, of heritage, I believe is what Chinese people should be doing these days.

I believe Mr Chan Koon-chung had already touched on that point, despite the differences in our approaches. But I think that what lies behind our minds are quite similar. So this is the conclusion of my deliberation. Thank you.