

Promoting cultural vibrancy through literature

Heads of culture from across Asia gathered in Hong Kong to discuss cultural development through literature.

Since 2003, the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) has been organising the Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum (ACCF) in Hong Kong to serve as a platform of exchange in respect of policy and measures for the development of arts and culture. This year, the forum was successfully concluded on November 14, gathering policy-makers from Brunei, Cambodia, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, as well as Mainland China for an in-depth discussion on "Literature and Cultural Vibrancy".

Literature was chosen to be the subject this year because it encompasses many elements of culture, and reflects the cultural vibrancy of a place. Secretary for Home Affairs Tsang Tak-sing opened the dialogue at the Asian Cultural Ministers' Panel Discussion in the morning by emphasising a shared Asian identity, which leads to the possibility of further cooperation.

Mr Tsang said, "while the various cultures in the region carry their unique characteristics, we are bonded together by our geographical proximity, as well as similar historical and social development and philosophical thinking to collectively reflect an Asian identity."

As a pluralistic and bilingual city, Hong Kong has produced important fictions such as the martial arts novels of Jin Yong, while Cantopop lyrics amassed over the years have become an important body of literary work. These are outstanding examples of how Hong Kong literary arts can have influence far beyond the city's geographic boundaries. "With the freedom of artistic expression in Hong Kong, diverse cultural areas are thriving," said Mr Tsang.

Today, the HKSAR Government adopts a multi-



The Secretary for Home Affairs Tsang Tak-sing delivered a speech at the Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum 2013 - Asian Cultural Ministers' Panel Discussion.

pronged approach in support of the literary development. There are various literature festivals, award schemes and creative writing competitions including the biennial Hong Kong Literature Festival organised by the Hong Kong Public Libraries since 1997 bringing together local and overseas scholars, writers, editors, commentators, teachers and literature workers to promote literary arts through thematic seminars, sharing sessions, poetry reading sessions and group reading workshops. The



Cultural ministers and senior officials from 10 Asian countries shared and exchanged views during the panel discussion on "Literature and Cultural Vibrancy".

Hong Kong Arts Development Council also collaborates with the City University of Hong Kong to organise the City Literary Festival.

"As an international business, finance and shipping centre in the heart of Asia, Hong Kong also aspires to become a cultural hub. The West Kowloon Cultural District project, which is now making good progress,

underlines our determination to promote long-term cultural development," added Mr Tsang.

Dr Cai Wu, Minister of Culture of the People's Republic of China, highlighted the opportunities brought about by Asia's economic growth. "Asian countries have enjoyed faster economic development than many other countries in the world and with that, increasing social awareness of and investment into their cultural sectors," said Dr Cai.

To maintain intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity, Dr Cai said his hopes were high for literature as a means for all stances and ideas to be expressed and shared. "I also would like to see the language barriers among different Asian countries to be crossed over, and more literary works of every country translated and introduced to readers from the whole continent."

Dr Cai also spoke on the approach of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China to promoting literary arts. Proper preservation of China's literary heritage that has been passed down through millennia, promoting diversity in literature, providing a favourable environment for writers to work, securing public access to books and libraries as well as encouraging international exchange on literature are ways to ensure the Chinese literary scene continues to develop.

In particular, preserving China's rich reserve of folk literature is a monumental task. "We have worked for 20 years to collect, sort out, edit and publish the Anthology of Chinese Culture and Arts in 10 Categories, in which the essence of Chinese national and folk cultures and customs were assembled and integrated

into the collective memory for the whole nation with the help of modern editing systems," said Dr Cai.

Other eminent speakers from neighbouring Asian countries also shared enlightening views on how their countries strive to preserve and promote their own literary identity. Han Jae-heuk, Consul (Culture and Public Information) of the Consulate-General of the Republic of Korea in Hong Kong, brought up an interesting concept of "creating happiness" as an important value in culture and cultural enrichment.

"Cultural enrichment is about a widely spread culture so that it can act as the pillar for economic and political development. And it will also increase happiness," Mr Han said.

One of the challenges faced by promoters of literary arts worldwide, revealed by Lawrence Wong, Acting Minister of Culture, Community and Youth of Singapore, is the new generation's penchant for multi-tasking and short attention spans. According to Mr Wong, policy-makers in Singapore have tried to address the issue by going digital, to make literature relevant for the young generation.

Following the panel discussion, forum participants then visited the Jao Tsung-I Academy as well as the Bruce Lee Exhibition and the Chinese Traditional Woodblock Prints Exhibition at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum. A library professional workshop entitled "Libraries and the Preservation and Promotion of Culture" was also organised for experts from around the world to share their views and experience in the collection, preservation and promotion of culture and literature.



Mr Tsang (middle), took a group photo with the cultural ministers and senior officials from 10 Asian countries participating in the ACCF 2013 panel discussion.