

Mobilising the Community

Hong Kong and other Asian countries making concerted effort to the Foundation for Vibrant and Sustainable Cultural Growth

Eight cultural ministers and representatives from Asian countries shared their views in promoting sustainable cultural development through triggering public participation in the Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum (ACCF) 2015 held last week.

Organised by the Home Affairs Bureau of the HKSAR Government, the ACCF 2015 was another insightful panel discussion regarding Asian cultural and art development. Held on December 7, representatives from eleven countries - Mainland China, Brunei, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Myanmar, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand, as well as cultural heads from Zhejiang and the Macao SAR Government - came to Hong Kong and exchanged experience and ideas in promoting local cultural heritage and regional art development.

Under the theme "Community-wide Support: the Foundation for Vibrant and Sustainable Cultural Growth", the Minister of Culture of the Chinese Government, Mr Luo Shugang, pointed out that while the government is eager to build up cultural infrastructure, the active participation of non-governmental organisations plays a key role in the development as well. For example, in 2014, 85 per cent of cultural and art performances in the Mainland were conducted by non-government-owned groups.

The Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, also noted that arts and culture should be fostered, administered and appreciated under a "bottom-up"

approach in his opening speech at the panel discussion session. He said: "Apart from the provision of the necessary infrastructure to cater for growing demand within the community, it is equally important to mobilise the collective efforts of different sectors in the community for the continuous development of the arts and culture."

Mr Prashant Agrawal, the Consul-General of India to Hong Kong and Macau, added, "Cultural development, which is a people-centric phenomenon, cannot be undertaken by governments alone without the valuable support of community". He further noted that the participatory approach brings in the elements of inclusiveness, plurality and diversity, which in turn enriches the process of cultural development and makes it sustainable.

Challenges to preserve local culture

But the highly connected world has also made art and culture conservation arduous. H.E. Mr Sokun Som, the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts of Cambodia, pointed out that globalisation could make local customs and traditions difficult to continue. In view of the challenge, therefore, Cambodia is focusing in collaboration with local communities for cultural development so that they will develop a stronger local identity and take the role in conserving and developing local arts and culture.

On the other hand Dr Nanda Hmun, the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry



Participating cultural ministers and representatives took turns speaking on the theme in the ACCF 2015.



"Belt and Road" initiative taken forward by the Central Government will facilitate Hong Kong to expand friendship and enrich the development of Asian culture and arts among countries along the "Belt and Road"

Mr Lau Kong-wah, Secretary for Home Affairs

of Culture in Myanmar, recounted the reconstruction experience of Bagan as an example, saying that while new structures were needed for their people for Buddhist pilgrimage after a major earthquake in 1975, the reconstruction work became controversial because some believed that the ancient sites with some 3,000 temples, monasteries and pagodas were not authentically restored. She said the balance between community need and general expectation is never an easy task for the authorities.

Ms Sim Ann, the Senior Minister of State for the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth of Singapore, shared the crucial belief in implementing cultural policies, "The faith

is we have to believe that we are better off as a community who share one identity rather than mere cohabitants." She added that the Singapore government has been working for a vibrant and sustainable culture and art development by honouring traditional cultures and heritages, encouraging broad-based participation and focusing on innovation.

Art and Culture are a nation's strength

Talking about the significance of culture and art development for a country, Mr Bang Sun-gyu, the President of Asia Culture Center and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and

Tourism of South Korea, believed culture to be the key component of a nation's strength in the 21st century, "Culture gives happiness to people; it is the social capital to promote the integration of society; and a new growth engine to spearhead the creative economy," he addressed in the panel discussion session.

Mr Bang also emphasised the importance of cross-country cultural exchange. He mentioned the newly-opened Asia Culture Centre in Seoul serving as a platform for Asian cultural exchange and creation, as of this moment art and cultural organisations

from India, Vietnam and Singapore are in the list of participating countries.

Unique advantages to exchange

The government officials were involved in active discussions following individual presentations, including answering questions from the audience.

When asked in the Question and Answer session on how Hong Kong can contribute in collaborating with the Mainland's implementation on art and culture development, Mr Luo Shugang believed that a further and deeper collaboration between Hong Kong and the Mainland will be beneficial to both. "While Hong Kong has its advantages to offer, including its abundant cultural talents as well as its international cultural connections, the Mainland is also providing more channels and different platforms for the two to collectively promote Chinese culture," Mr Luo stated.

Mr Lau Kong-wah, meanwhile, added that the grand and visionary "Belt and Road" initiative initiated by the Central Government will foster connectivity between some 60 countries. With its unique advantages, Hong Kong has all it takes to expand friendship and enrich the development of Asian culture and arts among countries along the "Belt and Road".

After the morning session with constructive opinion exchange, participating delegations were invited to visit the Asia Society Hong Kong Centre and the Hong Kong Maritime Museum, where both organisations reflect how private enterprises alone or through partnership with the government can successfully promote culture and arts.



Non-government art and cultural groups are contributing to the cultural development in the Mainland in an active manner.

Mr Luo Shugang, Minister of Culture

The Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum

The Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum (ACCF) has been hosted by the Home Affairs Bureau since 2003 to foster regional cultural co-operation and promote culture and arts industries.

The meeting brings together cultural ministers and senior officials from Asian countries to discuss and exchange ideas and to share views on the good practices and promote culture and arts.

The Home Affairs Bureau held the ACCF for the ninth time in 2015 with the theme of "Community-wide Support: the Foundation for Vibrant and Sustainable Cultural Growth". Representatives from eight Asian countries came together in Hong Kong sharing their views through their vivid presentations and speeches at the Asian Cultural Ministers' Panel Discussion session.