

SCED's speech at Creative Asia Forum 2012 (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, at the Creative Asia Forum 2012 in Tokyo today (May 15):

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to join you all today. This forum highlights the strong bond between two of Asia's great cities - Tokyo and Hong Kong. A warm welcome to our guest speakers from Hong Kong and Japan, and to all participants here at the Marunouchi Building Hall.

I understand that Marunouchi in English roughly translates as "inside the circle".

This is appropriate for today's forum. Through this event we aim to strengthen the circle of creative collaboration between Japan and Hong Kong. Through co-operation and mutual understanding we can expand the creative circle of both places by bringing more creative thinkers together and nurturing creative talents to enhance our overall competitiveness.

I believe that Japan and Hong Kong are ideal creative partners. We are both located at the heart of Asia, we cherish Asian values and our people are well-known for being hard-working, studious and full of ideas.

We also take pride in our own individual cultures and traditions that reflect our unique history and development.

Tokyo and Hong Kong are both ranked among the top five global cities according to the Global Cities Index 2012 released just last month. This is testament to the creative achievements of both places.

Allow me to give you a brief update of the development of Hong Kong's creative sector and what our city brings to the table as a creative hub in Asia.

First of all, we offer a cosmopolitan and business-friendly environment at the cultural crossroads of East and West. This is reflected in our arts, entertainment, lifestyle and in our creative visions for the future.

We are highly motivated by a desire to make Hong Kong a more creative and innovative city in which to live, work and study. To this end, we have identified creative and cultural industries as one of six areas where Hong Kong enjoys an advantage in our region and where there is great potential for growth and development.

The Hong Kong Government has made it a priority to support the development of our creative sector by, among other things, providing space, supporting events and nurturing creative talents.

Hong Kong has developed an extensive cluster of creativity-related industries. In 2010, there were over 34 000 such establishments in Hong Kong. They employed more than 189 000 people.

As a driving force for Hong Kong's economy, creative industries have registered strong growth in recent years. In 2010 creative industries contributed some 4.6 per cent of our Gross Domestic Product compared with 4 per cent in 2008.

One important area is film. Hong Kong has a long history of film-making. Film stars such as Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Donnie Yen and Jet Li have become household names around the world. Our actors, directors, cinematographers and producers have received over 300 international awards for their outstanding performances in the past decade.

Our television and music sectors are also influential market players in the region. Similar to Japan's J-pop, Hong Kong has its own Cantopop brand of music, which is especially popular with people slightly younger than myself!

Our designers have also established their own brands based on excellence, quality and creativity. A more recent trend has been the extraordinary achievement of our animation and comics industries on the world stage.

While we are doing well, we are also eager to learn from, and collaborate with, Japan's world-renowned creative talents in these and other areas.

Importantly for our creative sector, Hong Kong is fully committed to promoting creative freedom. This is based on our core values of maintaining a free media, free

flow of information and ideas, liberal immigration policies and no restrictions on the flow of capital or on corporate ownership.

Hong Kong is also right on the doorstep of Mainland China with its population of 1.3 billion people, strong economic growth and insatiable appetite for creative ideas and innovations.

As a city in China but outside the Mainland, Hong Kong is a key player in promoting our nation's broader market liberalisation. On this topic, allow me to mention one important initiative, namely the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement, or CEPA.

CEPA is a wide-ranging free trade pact that helps to open up Mainland markets for Hong Kong companies, including overseas firms incorporated in Hong Kong.

The film industry is a good example of CEPA at work. Under CEPA, co-productions between Hong Kong and the Mainland are treated as Mainland China films for distribution throughout the country. They are not subject to the same import quotas as foreign films. Since CEPA was implemented in 2004, the number of Hong Kong-Mainland co-productions has grown significantly from about 10 per year to around 30 per year. Last year, six out of the top 10 box office hits in Mainland China were co-productions with Hong Kong filmmakers.

Because CEPA rules are nationality-neutral, foreign companies can invest in CEPA-qualified firms and enjoy the same benefits as local companies. I encourage Japan's film industry to collaborate with their Hong Kong counterparts to take advantage of CEPA in tapping the Mainland market.

To ensure that Hong Kong's creative industries continue to scale new heights, the Government has set up a dedicated agency called Create Hong Kong. Create Hong Kong provides one-stop services to help promote the development of creative industries, both from within Hong Kong and from various platforms overseas. Its functions include grooming talents, nurturing start-ups, promoting creative industries and supporting relevant trade fairs.

Create Hong Kong also runs dedicated funding schemes to support programmes which are conducive to the development of our creative sector. It also provides financial support for the production of small to medium-budget films.

This public-private collaborative approach has proved successful. Some 300 projects have benefited from such funding support over the past three years.

A highly successful project supported by Create Hong Kong is our annual Business of Design Week, or BODW. This is an internationally acclaimed design event featuring world-renowned experts sharing their insights on creative and business aspects of design. Japan was our partner country for the successful BODW in 2010.

Please don't forget to mark your diaries for this year's BODW in December.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe there is strong potential for greater collaboration between Hong Kong and Japan to expand the circle of creativity and promote a more creative and competitive Asia.

I have mentioned some of Hong Kong's strengths in this area and how our city can help Japan export its creative ideas to Hong Kong, Mainland China and around our region.

We also welcome our friends from Japan to get involved in our city's hugely ambitious West Kowloon Cultural District project. This project is in the early phase of development. It comprises a 40-hectare site along prime waterfront land overlooking our spectacular Victoria Harbour. When completed, the district will be home to 15 arts venues, including world-class arenas for performing arts and a modern M+ museum.

We look forward to gaining insight from Japan's experiences in developing its excellent arts infrastructure so that we can establish West Kowloon as a must-visit arts and cultural centre in Asia.

Last, but by no means least, we have designated 2012 as Hong Kong Design Year. Our slogan is "A City Driven by Design", which underscores the importance of design to Hong Kong. Over 40 design-related activities ranging from workshops, exhibitions, competitions and forums have been organised to celebrate Hong Kong Design Year. And, yes, this Creative Asia Forum is one of our special Hong Kong Design Year programmes.

I wish this forum every success and encourage our Japanese friends to come and visit Hong Kong soon.

Thank you very much.

Ends/Tuesday, May 15, 2012