

Beyond Conventional Wisdom - Steps to Diversified Development

Submission on the 2008-09 Policy Address

Executive Summary

The Professional Commons

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Overview

1. There is a general view that Hong Kong lacks a sense of new direction and is not sufficiently strong to overcome the external challenges arising from globalization, as well as the internal pressures from the deteriorating socio-economic conditions of Hong Kong. Against this background, the Professional Commons believes that the Hong Kong Government's policies should, in essence, be forward-looking, encouraging of diversity, sustainability, and providing opportunities for all, as well as being "people-oriented".

2. Based on our research results, we have proposed a list of policy proposals for the consideration of the Chief Executive in the preparation of the 2008-09 Policy Address. Our policy recommendations will cover the following areas:

- i. Diversity and economic strategy;
- ii. People's livelihood and social mobility;
- iii. West Kowloon Cultural District and cultural policy;
- iv. Healthcare reform;
- v. Climate change; and
- vi. Universal suffrage and better governance.

Diversified Development in the Regional Economy of Hong Kong

3. "Diversity" should be one of the guiding principles that steer the economy of Hong Kong to a new direction and help bring sustainable growth in the long-term. The Government should review its development strategies based upon Victoria Harbour as soon as possible, particularly from the perspective of exploring new development opportunities beyond the metro core. The development of "Secondary City Centres" in the New Territories appears to be a sensible alternative to redress the spatial imbalance and relieve the pressure of the metro core. To this end, the Government should formulate a regional economic development policy to facilitate new growing points in the New Territories to provide high-level services as well as enormous employment opportunities. Kam Sheung Road is an optimal site of the "Secondary City Centre" in the New Territories as it has the potential to be a major

transport hub linking Hong Kong with the Mainland if the Hong Kong station of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link is built around the existing Kam Sheung Road West Rail Station. With the inflow of people and capital from the Mainland, Kam Sheung Road can further develop into a Mainland-Hong Kong business, trade and exhibition centre; a hotel hub; a regional headquarters for the Government; regional headquarters for the Government; a cluster of cultural and arts facilities; residential areas; and even a university town.

Vibrant Digital City Life

4. A cross-sectoral approach should be adopted to help bring a win-win situation among the local Information and Communications Technology (ICT) industries and other sectors which would energize the development of Hong Kong as a whole. The Professional Commons cites ICT application in tourism as an example. For instance, different Global Positioning System maps can be designed to link up with different list of online directories targeting the needs of different groups of inbound visitors so that they can explore and experience the vibrancy of Hong Kong's city life easily.

Facilitate the Development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

5. To provide a better business environment for the SMEs, the Government should adopt a holistic approach and critically review its propositions of the bias towards management in public policy issues in relation with economic activity, and placed social objective an equally important status in policy making. In sum, it would be important to rectify the mindset of “managerial supremacy” and “administrative convenience” and their overriding status in public policy management. Major changes should be imposed on two outstanding examples: the rental policy of Hong Kong Housing Authority (HKHA) commercial premises and hawker licensing policy of the Food and Health Bureau. The HKHA should reduce the size of the supermarkets and large-scale retail space, as well as the number of chain stores, so as to increase the number of small-scale retail spaces. Also, the wet markets could be reprovisioned, so as to lower the opening and operating costs of small businesses. In terms of hawkers licensing, the Government should increase the number of licenses of hawkers in the New Territories, issue licenses in accordance with the needs of the particular sector, and designate hawker permitted areas in public housing estates. Street hawking not only provides the grassroots a good means to earn a living, but facilitate the emergence of a more vibrant and diversified market as well

Dynamic e-learning

6. The Government has recently launched an initiative on exploring the feasibility of e-books in school teaching. The Professional Commons regards that the positive effects on e-books should go beyond the savings on household expenditure. E-books and other electronic based learning platform provide a much more diversified, dynamic and interactive form of learning experience with a much wider range of learning materials from which to choose. It would be of equal importance for the Government to facilitate the development of an open-source learning database, covering learning materials from all over the world for the free access from the public.

“Opportunities for All”

7. The Government should also place the facilitation of upward social mobility of individuals regardless of their background as the grand vision for the future development of Hong Kong, and address the long-term needs of the society through a “forward-looking” approach. In this regard, greater importance should be attached to realizing the potential of the school students through mandatory participation of sports and fine arts programme under a “One Sports, One Fine Arts” programme. Further, short-term relief for associate degree students and their parents in relation to education expenditure should also be provided. Preparing a “Chinese as a second language” curriculum for students in ethnic minorities, providing language and adaptive programmes for the ethnic minorities and new arrivals, and adopting new ICT devices in tackling digital divide for the disadvantaged are further measures that the Government should consider adopting.

Improvement of livelihood

8. In a bid to help relieve growing inflationary pressures, the Professional Commons proposes the provision of an across-the-board “Public Transport Subsidy” scheme in the fiscal year of 2009/2010 under which 30% fare rebate will be provided to all public transport passengers (except for cross-boundary trip). It would be advisable for the Government to provide a multi-purpose “Citizen’s Account” for every adult population in Hong Kong to serve their development and retirement protection needs. It would also be important to introduce family friendly measures to improve the working environment.

“West Kowloon for the People”

9. The Government should adopt a “West Kowloon for the People” approach in developing the West Kowloon Cultural District. It would be important to turn West Kowloon into a catalytic force behind the development of local culture or even the development of an overall integrated culture. The development mix of the district should be revised with private residential development be reduced by one-third and communal facilities of low priority be relocated, in order to reserve more space for cultural and recreational use. Members of the community that prefer leisure activities to cultural performances could choose to spend a leisure day in the green space of the district. A larger green park can be provided through exclusively allocating the 15-hectare of public open space to the Park and its supplementary facilities.

Phasing Development of West Kowloon Cultural District

10. The current phasing development of the West Kowloon Cultural District should be further divided to enable early usage of the cultural facilities and the green park. It is feasible to advance the completion date of small scale or even temporary performance areas (for example, black box theatres and open air performance areas, etc.) to late 2012 for the accommodation of street performers as well as small-scale “people’s arts fairs”.

“Community Cultural Network”

11. To avoid turning West Kowloon to be an “isolated cultural island”, there should be a “community cultural network” in place across the territories and “community cultural centres” at the district level to provide cultural development venues on the middle level.

Healthcare for All

12. The Professional Commons proposes that the current healthcare system should be improved beyond the issue of the healthcare financing. It should apply the “Money Follows Patient” principle for funding hospital and specialist care, in which patients’ healthcare costs will be allocated in accordance to their choice, regardless of whether the care providers are private or public sector practitioners. Pilot schemes should be conducted to subsidize the healthcare needs of the low income groups for greater use of primary care in the private sector. A proper primary care system could serve as a

gatekeeper in reducing unnecessary or improper use of specialist/ hospital care, which will in turn help contain healthcare costs in the long run. Its emphasis on early detection and preventive care and its role in coordinating and monitoring care at different levels is also in the interest of the patients. The introduction of a territory-wide electronic medical records system would be conducive to better clinical judgment.

Tackling Global Climate Change

13. Given the increasingly severity of global climate change, we propose a Climate Challenge Fund should be created, including a Pearl River Delta Climate Challenge Fund targeting specifically for cross-boundary climate change issues. The Pearl River Delta Climate Challenge Fund may be used to support measures under the mitigation strategy in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Adaptation measures should also be funded to contain the economic and social damages caused by climate change. In order to raise energy efficiency locally, a “Low Carbon Professional Aid Scheme” and a “Green Community Subsidy Scheme” shall be established under the Climate Challenge Fund

Proposals for the 2012 Elections

14. As for electoral reforms for the 2012 elections, the Professional Commons proposes the introduction of “Comprehensive Functional Constituencies” in Legislative Council. Under the new system, there will be 6 larger functional constituencies (hereafter FCs) and eligible voters will be restricted to individual citizens only. Four large FCs are to consolidate the current FCs which is categorized according to the nature of the business activities. Two new FCs will be introduced for other non-business sectors, professional or unionized labour voters, and for non-economic active persons. The electorate base of the 6 FCs consequently will amount to 5.8 million, matching that of the geographical constituencies. All eligible voters in Hong Kong will then be allowed to participate in both the elections for the geographical constituencies and functional constituencies, i.e. “One-Person-Two-Votes”.

15. The Professional Commons also proposes to keep the number of Election Committee members for the selection of Chief Executive to 800 in 2012. The election method of the 200 members from the fourth category remain unchanged. The 600 members from various business, industrial and professional categories (first, second

and third categories) are to be elected using the same concept of Comprehensive FCs. The nomination threshold for an eligible Chief Executive candidate should be no more stringent than the present arrangement, ranging from 50 and 100 Election Committee members.

Facilitating E-participation

16. The Government should facilitate e-participation as part of the roadmap towards the democratization of Hong Kong. A better leveraged ICT platform will allow the Government to establish a “one-stop” consultation and engagement web portal for all Government consultations encompassing different policy areas. E-petition should also be allowed through the “one-stop” consultation portal. The Government should adopt a single and personalized “e-account” system on government services, known as “MyGov” (My Government).

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