

SHA's speech at Asian cultural ministers' meeting at ACCF 2007 (English only)

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Following is the speech by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, at the Asian cultural ministers' meeting of the Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum 2007 today (July 23):

Honourable Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

We have heard very meaningful speeches. They attest to our common belief in cultural exchange. I'm further impressed by Minister Wi's conviction that the promotion of cultural exchanges supports cultural diversity and makes it as a universal value. We treasure cultural diversity because, as the Honourable Dato Wong says, we should prepare our society to face the changes of modernity, without sacrificing our own identity. I see identity as a basic human right.

Modernity and cultural diversity would seem, at first sight, to be a contradiction in terms. There is growing concern that globalisation rings the death knell of our cultural distinctions. But I do believe that we need not surrender our heritage to the creeping shadow of globalisation. Our past can enrich and shape both our contemporary and future worlds. In undergoing modernisation, we can continue to find enlightenment from the classical roots whence we sprang.

Here we are today, meeting in a setting which I believe, is an example of a fascinating mix of modernity and cultural heritage. This beautiful Garden is an artistic presentation of timber structures in the Tang Dynasty-style. As a classical garden in a modern city, it is a place where you can enjoy peace and serenity in the midst of urban hustle.

In this we have an example of what I feel sure we all collectively aim to achieve: a tangible commitment to uphold our respective cultural and artistic freedoms. We have just shared our views on Asian modernity and cultural diversity. From your valuable comments, I'm glad to note that it is our common goal to provide an environment where arts, culture and creativity can continue to flourish. Modernisation need not mean replacement. It can also include renewal, refurbishment and renaissance, together with the rekindling of those very elements that made our respective culture distinctive in the first place.

At our last ACCF Asian Ministers' Meeting, in November 2006, we proposed the idea of an ArtSIA calendar to assemble, through one web platform, the collective efforts of all our participating countries and cities, so as to encourage cultural exchange and assist the interflow of cultural information.

I will come back to this proposal right after this speech. For the moment, may I take this opportunity to thank you all for your support and participation in this Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum of 2007. I look forward to further lively discussion on "Culture Coming Home", the theme for this year in coming two days. Thank you.

Ends/Monday, July 23, 2007

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