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# Speech by the Hon Mrs Selina Chow Liang Shuk-yee, GBS, JP
# Motion Debate on Fashion Centre of Asia Pacific, 3 July 2003

Selina Chow:

Madam President, there are talks recently that the SAR Government wishes to turn Hong Kong into a fashion centre. This is something I like very much to see. For many years I have been very interested in fashion design. Though I am a layman, I have quite close links with fashion design sector. Hong Kong is a well-developed and successful centre for the textile and clothing industry and it is only right that Hong Kong should become a fashion centre of Asia Pacific. So I support wholeheartedly the motion moved by Mrs Sophie LEUNG today. Having said all these, dreams are but dreams after all and the focus of our discussion should be the realization of this dream.

The first thing we need to make clear is that a centre for textile and clothing does not mean the same as a centre for fashion. To achieve the latter, there must be a local creative industry that can continuously enhance and update our expertise. I have discussed with some experienced designers on this topic in order to gauge their views. They told me, to materialize the ideal to turn Hong Kong into a fashion centre, the first thing to do is to implant the spirit of fashion design in our soil. Only when this is done that it can grow here and then develop beyond our boundaries. Let us stop and think. Other fashion centres such as Tokyo, Paris, Milan, London and New York have all sorts of vibrant activities in relation to fashion. Designers there have lots of opportunities to display their works and their concepts. The people there give recognition to their creative endeavours and take pride in them. In Les Halles, Paris, the entire district is filled with fashion outlets, and huge crowds of locals and tourists are attracted to there. The crowds also make the service industries there thrive. In Hong Kong, we have a market for selling fashion garments, from prestigious brands to low-end items in the hawker precincts. But do we have a spot where all the works of our designers can be displayed? No, we do not have such a place. So how can we ever call Hong Kong a fashion centre?

Therefore, we ask that the Government should provide a place to be turned into a regular rendezvous for a hundred or so designers, where they can set up their own outlets. Added to this should be some exhibition venues for designers to display their works on a regular basis. That will make the place popular. There is a view that the more artistic a person is, the less management and business abilities he has. Just look at

those world-renowned designers, they will have one or more brilliant management and marketing persons as partners. The centre proposed above should provide management and institutional support and this will give designers a head start in their career. Some people suggest that the best place for such a centre can be found in the redevelopment area in Central. The Government should give serious thoughts to that idea.

Some masters of fashion design have praised the work done by the Hong Kong Government under the existing system to promote the growth of the design industry in Hong Kong. This applies especially to the fashion festival and fashion week held biannually by the Trade Development Council (TDC). The TDC also makes great efforts in promotion both on the Mainland and overseas and its achievements are remarkable. However, such promotion and exhibition activities are only held rarely, two to three times a year. These activities cannot hope to train up talents in fashion design and take root here as the display time and chances are limited. One gets an impression that things are not put to their best use as so many resources are used to support these activities but the designers can only display their creations in such a short duration.

Another key factor to consider is the way we train up talents in fashion design. Due to the small home market, local designers employed by manufacturers will set their eyes on the export market and their products will draw reference from the latest designs overseas. They will try to do so through different media, such as visuals, illustrations and magazines. As far as I know, famous design schools overseas like St. Martins of London mentioned by Mr HUI Cheung-ching earlier offer courses in culture and the arts. Their museums hold exhibitions of fashion through the ages. All these will enrich the creative environment of design students, as well as their understanding of life and people. These will add to the profundity and growth of fashion culture and they are conducive to the training of creative designers.

Madam President, there are views that the limited market here in Hong Kong has hampered the development of designers and reduced the incentive for the design trade to expand. However, things have greatly changed and everyone is setting their eyes on the huge mainland market as an outlet for the Hong Kong fashion industry. We have heard about CEPA and that will bring business opportunities. At this time when the mainland market has flung wide its doors, with the economic take-off of the Mainland and the recognition given by the mainland people to Hong Kong fashion designs, plus the demand for brand names and packaging, all these will present an excellent impetus to enable the industry to engage in value-added pursuits. We have also heard the Government say that we can no longer compete with others by offering the lowest prices, we ought to make ourselves more competitive by adding value to our products. In view of this, the Government must launch favourable policies that can help the industry, especially its designers, establish our position as a fashion centre.

Thank you, Madam President.