**SCMP Article**

**No reason to reject Palace Museum gems**

There is a Chinese phrase about blowing on fur to try and find something wrong with it (chui mao qiu ci). For example, Hong Kong is offered a unique opportunity: to have its own Palace Museum, containing treasures from Beijing’s Palace Museum – the Forbidden City. The response from many politicians and commentators is to complain, notably about a lack of public consultation.

As a member of the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority board, appointed just last November, I agree that this was a fairly sudden announcement.

This project – to mark the 20th anniversary of reunification – relies heavily on cooperation with the central authorities. Under their system, preparatory work is secret, and a public announcement comes after. This is the norm in Beijing: I am also a delegate to the National People’s Congress, and I am used to seeing agendas only shortly before meetings.

At best, putting this plan before the Legislative Council would add years to the process. (Even without the Palace Museum, the West Kowloon project will take at least another 15 years to finish.) At worst, it would become a political weapon for people looking for a chance to insult Beijing as an end in itself.

In fact, it is already being used as a political weapon – against Chief Secretary Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor, who may run for the post of chief executive.

Now let’s look at it from a different, and positive, angle. Would anyone seriously suggest that we should turn down the opportunity to have part of the Palace Museum’s collection? Obviously not.

If Hong Kong wants to be in the same league as New York and London, it needs more than a financial sector, some amazing food and the usual shopping scene. It needs world-class cultural assets, to enrich life for local people and for visitors from overseas.

M+, the West Kowloon museum for modern and contemporary visual culture, is already in the pipeline. It will contain the unsurpassed Uli Sigg collection of modern Chinese art and various international exhibits.

The Hong Kong Palace Museum, with its focus on historic China, will complement it magnificently. It will showcase the Forbidden City and a selection of its treasures. The museum in Beijing displays only around 1 per cent of its 1.8 million items, so the choice is huge.

There will be plenty of scope for local input as our cultural experts will be able to discuss the selection of artefacts, management of the museum and so on. Artefacts can be rotated, so we will enjoy new exhibits from time to time. As well as the works on loan from Beijing, the museum will also have space to display items from local collections.

These facilities will give Hong Kong international-class major museums. They will not cover the same ground as world-famous museums in New York, London or Paris – they will offer things you cannot see in those cities.

Duncan Pescod, chief executive officer of the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority, said that other cities would “give their left arms” for the Palace Museum artefacts. We can be pretty sure that Shanghai and Shenzhen are among them.

I have heard concerns that we will focus on national and international material, and ignore Hong Kong heritage and culture. I do not think the local arts community should worry. Both the Hong Kong Palace Museum and M+ will, in fact, have scope for local subject matter and content. And the rest of West Kowloon will accommodate a diverse range of performing and other arts, much of it from Hong Kong.

Most of all, the arrival of two world-class museums should encourage broad development of our entire arts and culture scene. We should see more career opportunities in the field, and growing expertise among local curators, museum and arts administrators and other talent. And I expect we will see greater awareness and interest in the arts among local and overseas audiences. We will not have a shortage of venues – and there will be demand for content.

We should not blow on this fur to look for faults – don’t look a gift horse in the mouth. However you look at it, the Palace Museum is going to be an amazing addition to our community’s cultural wealth.