

TOYS PARADISE, WITH GLORY KEEPING ON

The three-month "TOYS PARADISE – Creativity & Toy Culture of Hong Kong" Exhibition is already open to the public. *Hong Kong Industrialist* introduces its content, and discusses the advantages and outlook of the Hong Kong toy industry.



With the endeavours of local toy manufacturers in the past 60 years, Hong Kong has now become the second largest toy exporter and is renowned as the world's "toy town".

A key event of 2012 Hong Kong Design Year, "TOYS PARADISE – Creativity & Toy Culture of Hong Kong" Exhibition is organised by the FHKI, funded by Create Hong Kong, in collaboration with the Hong Kong Design Institute and supported by Hong Kong Toys Council and The Toys Manufacturers' Association of Hong Kong. The event is now open to the public free of charge from 16 December 2011 to 19 March 2012.

Toys, developed from simple and handmade designs in the early days to today's trendy electronic and scientific ones, have witnessed and reflected the evolvement of our society. Four display zones of the Exhibition allow visitors to feel the historical changes through the development of toys. First, at "Emerald City", a display of around 100 toys, such as double-headed clay figurine, double-headed cloth horse and bamboo snake, illustrated the evolution of toys from Ching Dynasty to the 1960s; and how different materials such as clay, bamboo poles, cloth and paper were used to make toys.

The Hong Kong toy industry is second to none world-wide, in a leading position with several advantages.



In the second display zone, "Toy Town" visitors will see around 800 toys produced during the years which were considered as the pinnacle of Hong Kong toy industry. These toys, including Batman figures and ray guns for boys; furniture for playhouses, and various kinds of dolls for girls, reflect the widespread use of plastics resin, the application of electronics, technological advancement, and how societal development promotes the toys industry.

In addition, visitors will witness the "Toy Legend" through dozens of selected items such as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles action figures. Series of luxury cars are also displayed from representative local toy manufacturers that have mass produced and sold award-winning toys to the rest of the world. This is the glorious era in which post-war Hong Kong emerged as the kingdom of toys.

Finally, "Return to Neverland" will exhibit 300 new toy creations from over 200 local students, who created many innovative toys after getting inspiration and guidance from a series of workshops and 12 local artists.

C K Yeung, Project Leader and Hong Kong Toys Council Executive Committee Member says the Hong Kong toy makers had always hoped to show the history and achievements of the industry at a permanent exhibition, but this was not possible due to the lack of resources. This three-month exhibition to a certain extent fulfills industries' wish.



C K Yeung
楊子江

He says, "Over 70 per cent exhibits are from local designer Joel Chung. He has built up a huge collection of toys since the 1980s, so we decided to work together on the exhibition. As most toys made by Hong Kong manufacturers were exported to Europe and the US with very few selling to the local market, the public has little chance to know about the products of our toy industry. We hope through this exhibition the public can learn about our efforts and achievements by tracing the history of toys made by Hong Kong manufacturers."



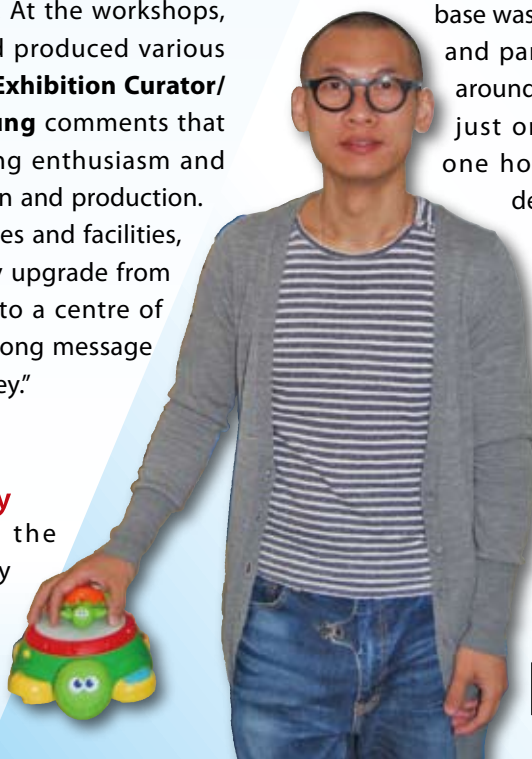
He adds, "Our other aim is to encourage the younger generation to get a better understanding of the toy industry and to spark their interest in toy design and production. Hopefully, we can attract them to our industry in the future."

A series of student workshops and seminars have been held for more than 200 students from over 20 secondary schools. At the workshops, the students designed and produced various kinds of toys from scratch. **Exhibition Curator/Project Manager Joel Chung** comments that the students showed strong enthusiasm and great potential for toy design and production. Given the necessary resources and facilities, Hong Kong can successfully upgrade from a toy manufacturing base to a centre of creativity and design – a strong message the exhibition wants to convey."

Advantages of Hong Kong Toy Industry
According to Mr Yeung, the Hong Kong toy industry is second to none world-

wide, in a leading position with several advantages. First, toy manufacturers are well experienced in production and have fully mastered industry knowledge (such as the regulations in Europe and the US). He explains, "When the EU and US Consumer Product Safety Commission are about to promulgate new regulations, they usually come to Hong Kong to seek our advice and sometimes accept our reasonable suggestions."

Secondly, the Hong Kong toy industry has a comprehensive supply chain and efficient logistic support. One single toy usually needs many different kinds of materials, such as fabric and electronic and machine parts, so the supply of materials is essential to the production. Mr Yeung says, before 1980, when the production base was still in Hong Kong, material and parts suppliers were located around the manufacturers. It took just one phone call and about one hour to have the materials delivered to the factory. Then as manufacturers moved their production lines to the PRD, relevant suppliers also moved there to continue their support to them. Besides, the highly efficient ports in Hong Kong and Shenzhen are a powerful back-up to the development of the toy industry.



Joel Chung
鍾燕齊

“Our industry benefits from these two incomparable advantages. Some industry players have visited other places in Asia in recent years, and found them way behind Hong Kong in terms of supply chain and logistics, in spite of cheaper labour costs.”

However, the SAR Government is not well enough informed about all these advantages. Mr Yeung says, “Most of us focused mainly on our businesses and rarely promoted these advantages. The Government did not notice them too. Now we need to do much more promotion and closely co-operate with academia and designers to maintain our leading position. We hope that from this exhibition the SAR Government will get a clearer understanding of our advantages and support the industry by a series of policies in the future, to drive the industry forward.”

Whilst meeting all requirements, industry players should maintain their competitive edge by investing in innovation and design.



Combine with Creativity, Explore Domestic Sales

Despite the glory that the Hong Kong toy industry has enjoyed in the past 60 years, it is now confronted with enormous challenges as the economy is undergoing tremendous changes. **Bernie Ting, Chairman of Hong Kong Toys Council** says, “The most significant challenges we are facing are increases in materials prices and wages in the Mainland. Added to these is the lacklustre export market and increasingly strict international toy safety standards. Whilst meeting all requirements, industry players should maintain their competitive edge by investing in innovation and design. By doing so, Hong Kong can evolve from a manufacturing base to an innovation base for the toy industry. This is the only way that we can maintain our leading position against severe competition.”



Hong Kong toy makers have been controlling the quality to meet increasingly strict international safety standards.
香港玩具製造商一直嚴格遵行不斷提升的國際標準。

Manufacturers themselves have, in fact also realised the importance of design and creativity. According to the Opportunities and Challenges of Hong Kong Toy Industry Survey conducted by the FHKI, Hong Kong Toys Council and The Toys Manufacturers' Association of Hong Kong, more than half of the manufacturers believe it is a must to transform to ODM from OEM, and over 20 per cent of them plan to recruit more talent.

However, the Hong Kong toy industry needs more creativity, according to Mr Yeung, and is short of talent. Many industry players, though interested in design, do not have thorough understanding of children's interests or thinking. Being in the industry for a long time, they are accustomed to choose designs based on their own perception.

Outsiders' lack of understanding, or even misunderstanding, also results in the shortage of talent. “Many young people have no clue about the toy industry and its scope.” Mr Chung explains, “They think toy design is the same as engineering design, or associate the toy industry with large-scale manufacturing that is far from their reach. In fact, the toy industry involves a wide range of activities, ranging from printing, graphic design, package design, photography, cartoon to marketing. Youngsters can contribute

their talent by entering the toy industry. The workshops we held turned out to be an excellent opportunity for those students who have not yet planned their career. They gained a better understanding of toy design and production, and the possibility of turning their interests into careers.

Mr Chung continues, "Products coming from the workshop are entirely novel, which is a stimulus to our industry. We also notice that many students have shown great interest in toy design, and possess the ability to think like toy designers. Thus the toy industry should closely co-operate with schools and the design sector to attract more talent into the business." Funded by Create Hong Kong, this event has inspired the youngsters, which enables toy industry to find and attract more talents.

Right now, toy manufacturers are eager to get a share of the fast-growing Mainland market. Statistics from Hong Kong Trade Development Council show that the Hong Kong toy industry took 25 per cent of share of the Mainland toy market from January to September 2011, with sales revenue two per cent higher than 2010. While economies in Europe and the US are still sluggish, over 60 per cent of manufacturers surveyed consider domestic sales as one of the solutions, and tentatively plan to increase the



Toys made by Hong Kong manufacturers are popular around the world, bringing glory to local toy industry. 香港製造的玩具行銷全球，創造輝煌。



portion of domestic sales in their turnover.

Mr Ting says, "Although the total sales volume in the Mainland is far behind that in the US, we forecast it will grow at double-digit rate in the future. Nonetheless, it is anything but easy to make a hit in the Mainland market as the toy industry is also dictated by culture, and is strongly related to socio-economic environment and the ideology of the public."

Hong Kong manufacturers are more familiar with the Mainland culture than their counterparts from overseas, which means they have an advantage in exploring this market.



"The culture in the Mainland is totally different from that of Europe and the US", adds Mr Yeung, "Manufacturers can only grasp the opportunities by paying attention to its unique culture and finding a right starting point. Take the big hit Mainland cartoon *Happy Goat and Big Big Wolf* as an example, the Chinese culture is integrated into the vivid storyline and modified based on children's preference. It is a huge success and has generated massive sale of affiliated products including toys. Their experience also illustrates that marketing is essential to success."

Hong Kong manufacturers are more familiar with the Mainland culture than their counterparts from overseas, which means they have an advantage in exploring this market. In addition, according to Mr Ting, the industry should keep attracting new talent and make good use of the Government's policies that encourage creative industries. By combining creative designs with Mainland culture, they will succeed in domestic sales and "toy town" will become a toy empire with creativity and brands.

