

**Keynote Speech by  
David C Lee,  
Chairman of the Hong Kong Housing Society,  
at the Inauguration of the CII-HK**

The Construction Industry Institute, Hong Kong (CII-HK) is a joint initiative, which has been developed by the industry and the academia. The Hong Kong Housing Society, together with the Hongkong Polytechnic University, are glad to be the pioneers in supporting the establishment of the CII-HK.

The CII-HK model was adopted to help the industry to work in collaboration with the local research community, to steadily improve the overall performance of the construction industry through upgrading technology and encouraging investments in research.

We are also very glad to see that a tremendous amount of support has been provided by contractors and developers. This demonstrates that the Hong Kong developers and contractors are all responsible members and parties in the industry, and are committed to improve the standard of construction in Hong Kong.

In the boom years before the financial crisis in 1997, the market was so good that we had no time, and indeed might even have forgotten, about the need to continuously improve the construction industry. Simply put, we were too contented, as life was too easy.

We are glad to see that in that respect, things have turned around, and the industry is now more concerned about many of the things like

- why the cost of construction in Hong Kong is so high,
- how can we improve our methods of construction,
- the environmental issues, etc, etc,

which were mostly ignored in the past.

Hong Kong has enjoyed a leading position in the world's construction industry in the past, but we have slipped in the past years. It is high time for us to catch up. With high quality research, contribution from the industry and determination, I am confident that Hong Kong will resume its leading position in the very near future.

The present efforts appear to focus mainly on new buildings. The Hong Kong Housing Society is also mindful of the importance of maintaining good quality of the existing buildings. Hong Kong now has a total of 40,000 buildings, of which about one quarter are older than 30 years, or three quarters are less than 30 years old. I have used 30 years as the water shed line, because the buildings built in and after the 70's are quite different from those built before in their design, and use of materials, etc. These differences are outlined below. The condition of the older buildings is known to be quite bad. But even for the newer buildings, we also see signs of fast deterioration.

The newer buildings are larger and taller than the older buildings, and therefore my estimate is that over three-quarters of our population, or over 5 million people, are living in these buildings. If we want the quality of the living environment of this majority of our population to be maintained at a high level, we have to make sure that the quality of these buildings are also kept at a high level.

Buildings in Hong Kong built during and after the 70's have characteristics, which are very unique. They include

- use of high strength reinforced concrete (up to Grade 60, and was mixed in-situ up to the mid-90's);
- use of high tensile steel;
- the chemical composition of the water used in the concrete depended on the source of the water, which in turns depended on the water supply condition for the whole of Hong Kong at the time of construction;
- use of aluminum for windows;
- use of mosaic or other tiles as external cladding material;
- the cruciform design with the deep re-entrants,
- the design of scissor stairs;
- the drainage and waste discharge systems for very tall buildings (as highlighted by SARS); etc.

As buildings get older, repairs and maintenance become increasingly more important and expensive. As far as I know, there is at present, no organization in the world carrying out any research on buildings like ours, and Hong Kong has to rely on the not entirely relevant researches carried out in other countries. We believe that if Hong Kong is to maintain a high or at least, reasonable standard of maintenance for such buildings, and therefore the quality of life of the people living in them, we have to make sure that the quality of these buildings is well maintained.

The Hong Kong Housing Society has therefore decided to sponsor researches on repair and maintenance of such buildings, as part of our commitment to maintaining the quality of housing for the people of Hong Kong, and also as our contribution to the community.

The Hong Kong Housing Society will seriously consider engaging the CII-HK as the agency to monitor and co-ordinate such researches. Our initial thinking is that the results of such researches will be available to all members of the community. Such researches, and the subsequent maintenance works, will create jobs.

The Hong Kong Housing Society is committed to contribute to the welfare of the community in the area of housing and related services. With the help of the CII-HK, the Hong Kong Housing Society aims to improve the quality of *housing* for the *society*.

Thank You.

The Hong Kong Housing Society  
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