

議會新主席專訪

New chairman on various issues

本刊記者 Staff reporter

何栢霖先生由九五年起擔任議會理事，九七年起擔任副主席，在今年十一月十四日的主席選舉中，在沒有對手的情況下獲選為二零零三至零六年度議會主席。何先生十一月下旬接受本刊訪問，談及很多關於業界的重大事務。以下為訪問的撮要。

主席與理事會

擔任主席後，會不會擔心以後放在公司的時間變得少了？

現代管理最重要的是公司的管理層可以獨立處事。事實上，在過去兩三年間，我已經把公司改組過，主要的人事和內部的結構等方面都有所整頓，因此我現在對公司的管理層更有信心，相信無須事事都由我親自決定。

此外，議會日常的運作已經上了軌道，無須主席操心，而我對總幹事和副總幹事都很有信心，辦事處的支援也很足夠，加上很多事都交由各個委員會或理事會等處理，主席是不需要每件事都過問的。因此，我認為主席最需要多花時間的，應該是議會整體的策略和公共關係等方面。

你認為主席和理事會的關係是甚麼？

主席和理事會是一個整體，大家集體負責，並且集體領導議會；主席只是代表理事會對外發言而已。主席不應該是

Mr Ronnie Ho was elected Chairman of the TIC for the term 2003-2006 on 14 November 2003 uncontested after serving as a Board Director since 1995 and a Deputy Chairman since 1997. In an interview with *The Voice* in late November, Mr Ho talked about a wide range of issues of much importance to the industry. The following is an excerpt of the interview.



On Chairman and the Board

Are you concerned that you'll have to spend less time on your company after taking up the office of TIC Chairman?

The crux of modern management is that the managers of a company must be able to work independently. During the past two or three years, I've revamped my company in relation to senior management and internal structure. I now have greater confidence in the management, and believe I don't need to make all the decisions myself.

Apart from that, the daily operation of the TIC has already been on the right track and doesn't need my attention. Also, I'm confident about the abilities of the Executive Director and his Deputy, and the support of the Executive Office is also very good. Besides, many things are handled by various committees, the Board, etc, so I don't think I need to pay attention to every issue in person. I think I should instead spend the largest chunk of my time on strategic issues and public relations concerning the TIC.

In your view, what's the relationship between the Chairman and the Board?

The Chairman and the Board should be collectively responsible for

權力的中心，不應該凌駕於理事會，而應該負責執行理事會的決定。

獨立理事與透明度

議會在這幾年間得到社會很大的認同，而公眾對議會的要求和期望也十分高。你認為目前的《議會理事守則》和《委員會委員指引》足夠不足夠？

以目前來說是足夠的，但當然，隨着環境的轉變，我們也會不時檢討有關規定。議會去年修章，增加了獨立理事的人數，理事會現在有三分之一是獨立理事，相信對於議會的監察起了正面作用。以往有一種觀點，認為不需要那麼多外人監察。但社會對透明度的要求不斷提高，只要我們處事公正，多些獨立人士加入理事會只會提升議會的形象。

你覺得議會的透明度夠不夠？

我覺得透明度是足夠的，但有不少同業卻認為不夠。其實，議會經常向會員發出各種通告或指引，詳細解釋理事會的決定或業界最近的事務，又定期出版《議會季刊》，報導議會的各種政策、活動等等，再加上八個屬會的代表又在理事會和各個委員會，可以把議會的決定告知會員，因此透明度應該是足夠的。有些會員可能太忙吧，沒有時間翻閱通告、《季刊》之類的資料，又或許是有了先入為主的觀念吧，老是說議會黑箱作業，我覺得這些批評未必公允。

有沒有考慮過讓會員旁聽理事會的會議？

首先，會員未必會對理事會的會議有很大興趣，但如果太多人有興趣的話，議會也沒有場地。再者，旁聽的會員能不能夠嚴守旁聽的規則？假如有會員旁聽時，在一些和自己利益相關的事務上隨意發言，干擾會議，那豈不是適得其反？畢竟，八個屬會都有代表在理事會內，屬會代表有責任把理事會的決定通知屬會本身的會員。

the TIC and collectively running it. Therefore, he's no more than the spokesman of the Board. The Chairman shouldn't be the centre of power, nor should he be above the Board. I'd rather say he's responsible for carrying out the decisions of the Board.

On Independent Directors and transparency

The TIC has gained widespread recognition among the community these years and the public has high expectations of the TIC. Do you think the existing TIC General Code of Conduct for Directors and the Guidelines for Committee Members are strict enough?

At present, I think they are strict enough; but of course, we'll review them from time to time. Last year, we amended the M&A so that a third of the Board members are now Independent Directors. I think that's good for governance. There used to be a point of view that considered it unnecessary to have so much outside monitoring. However, the demand for transparency has increased. If we're impartial, more Independent Directors will help enhance our image.

Do you think the transparency of the TIC is enough?

I think our transparency is enough, though I know quite a number of members think otherwise. As a matter of fact, circulars or directives are regularly sent to members to explain the decisions of the Board or latest trade issues in detail; our quarterly *The Voice of TIC* covers various policies and activities of the TIC; and members can also learn about our decisions from the Association Members, which have representatives on the Board and various committees. So, our transparency shouldn't be in question. Perhaps some members are just too busy to flip through circulars or *The Voice*, or perhaps some of them are just blinded by their own prejudice. I think their criticisms may not be fair.

Will you consider allowing members to sit in on Board meetings?

First, I don't think they will be interested; and if too many of them are interested, I'm afraid we don't have the venue. Second, if they sit in on meetings, will they obey the rules of meeting? If a member sits in on a meeting, freely comments on issues that may affect himself and disrupts the meeting, wouldn't that defy the meaning of allowing him to sit in? Don't forget that Association Members have representatives on the Board and they have a duty to tell their own members what the Board has decided.

On the income of the TIC

During the SARS crisis, the levy collected by the TIC has

議會收入

非典型肺炎期間，議會的印花收入大跌，造成嚴重赤字。這反映出議會的收入過於依賴印花，很容易受到外圍因素的影響，你有甚麼看法呢？

我想這個問題要花時間詳細檢討，因為當中牽涉不少因素。即使不算非典型肺炎的期間，這兩三年的印花都沒有甚麼增長，有時更會出現負增長。政府從來沒有資助過我們，議會一向都是自負盈虧的。議會始終不是商業機構，而是負責行業自律監管的組織，但議會現在所發揮的功能已經不單純是業界的自律監管組織了，例如有時會協助推廣香港的旅遊業等等。資源沒有增加，但工作卻增加了，的確會有支絀的情形。

議會的收入主要來自印花，而印花是由外遊旅行社支付的。可是，議會現在也監管入境旅行社，那算不算是外遊旅行社津貼議會監管入境旅行社？

那的確惹起不少爭議，我們會繼續向政府反映情況，不過，到目前為止，政府始終沒有承諾會資助我們。或許可以這麼說，我們現在以外遊業的資源幫助政府監管入境業，而政府沒有給予任何財政支援，這種情況不妨當作外遊業界正在履行社會責任。

希望未來當外遊業要處理一些問題時，政府也會幫助我們。例如明年一月增加機場稅，有經營票務的旅行社要求我們向政府爭取，經旅行社收取的機場稅能夠有佣金。又例如現在經營外遊團的風險非常高，一旦在旅途上發生意外傷亡，旅行社承擔的賠償金額往往十分巨大。旅行社以往購買責任保險，都是包括個人傷亡的，但一些旅行社今年為責任保險續保時，卻發現個人傷亡被剔出保障範圍，而這卻正是旅行社最可能因疏忽而被索償的地方。外遊團風險越來越高的問題一直存在，只是因為競爭越來越劇烈，有些同業採取駝鳥政策而已。我們會再向政府反映這個問題。

sharply dropped, resulting in a huge deficit. This indicates its income is too reliant on levy and can be easily affected by external factors. What's your view on this matter?

I think it'll take some time to look into the situation since it involves many factors. However, even if we exclude the SARS period, the levy has still shown little growth or even negative growth during the past two to three years. The Government has never subsidised us and we've stood on our own feet from day one. Although we're not a commercial enterprise but a self-regulatory body, we're now playing a role more than just monitoring travel agents. For example, we sometimes help to promote Hong Kong tourism. Our resources remain the same, but we have more work to do, so it's not unexpected we find it hard to make ends meet.

The TIC's income mainly comes from levy, which is contributed by outbound agents. However, the TIC is now also monitoring inbound agents. Is it true that the outbound agents are actually subsidising the TIC to monitor the inbound agents?

This situation does arouse much concern and we'll continue to raise it with the Government. However, up to now the Government hasn't promised to subsidise us. Let me put it this way: we're now using the resources of the outbound industry to help the Government monitor the inbound industry without any subsidy. Perhaps we should take it as the outbound industry performing a social responsibility.

I do hope when the outbound industry needs assistance from the Government, it won't be lacking. For example, the airport tax will be raised next January. Some ticketing agents have urged us to fight for a commission for collecting the tax for the Government. Let's look at another example. The risks of outbound tours are very high nowadays since the potential compensation borne by travel agents would be enormous if there were any accidents during the journey. The liability insurance bought by travel agents used to cover personal death and injury. However, when some agents tried to renew their policies this year, they found personal death and injury was no longer covered. In fact, this is the very area that needs to be protected against negligence claims most. We all know the risks of outbound tours have been increasing. But since the competition is also increasing, some members choose to play ostrich. Anyway, we'll continue to bring up this matter with the Government.

On the inbound and outbound industry

The law to regulate inbound agents has been in place for over a year. What do you think of it?

入境業與外遊業


監管入境旅行社的法例已經生效一年了，你認為成效怎樣？

我覺得成效不錯，而經由議會處理的投訴也不算多。香港每年有上千萬遊客，要求沒有投訴並不實際。至於內地旅客購物的問題，相信當他們的見識逐漸提高之後，會追求名牌貨品，不會再滿足於到旅行社指定的商店購物，因此這個問題是可以由市場力量解決的。我反而更關注一般零售商店的經營手法，希望它們能夠以誠待客。特別是遊客區的一些商店，由於租金高昂，以正價售賣貨品根本不能生存，因此經常有欺騙遊客的情況。這個問題存在了很多年，政府也早已知道，不過沒有正視而已。

你認為入境業的前景怎麼樣？

長遠來說，入境業必須尋求轉變，因為不斷把團價壓低，單靠購物的回扣來津貼成本是行不通的。當然，這不單是香港同業的問題，內地的業者也要負上責任。特別是現在個人遊開放了，旅客根本不需要到那些和旅行社有聯繫的商店購物。任何市場都是一樣的，剛開放的時候旅客都十分熱中購物，因為他們不僅買東西給自己，也會代親戚朋友購物，但慢慢他們購物的金額必定會越來越小。這些都迫使入境業者認真思索未來的經營方向。

那麼外遊業的前景又怎樣呢？

外遊業和入境業也差不多，競爭也非常激烈，很多條線路都迫使當地的接待社不收錢，有些甚至要用領隊的收入來補貼旅行社。這種情況十分惡劣，因為假如旅行社要靠領隊的收入來補貼，那麼旅行社和領隊已經不再是僱主和僱員的關係，而旅行社對領隊也沒有甚麼控制權了。假如旅行社不斷減價，變成單靠旅行團的數量來維持營運，當中牽涉的風險必定十分大，因為只要稍一不慎，出了甚麼意外，就會涉及巨額的賠償了。現在唯有寄望旅行社的老闆能夠反思經營的方針，不然的話誰也沒法幫忙。 

I think its effects are pretty good, and there aren't many visitor complaints that have to be handled by us. Hong Kong has more than 10 million visitors each year. It's unrealistic to expect a zero complaint environment. However, when it comes to the shopping problem concerning mainland tourists, I think market forces will take care of it. Because when they've become more sophisticated, they'll go after designer brands rather than buying things at shops that have connections with travel agents. I'm more concerned about the practices of retailers in general and hope they can deal with visitors honestly, especially for shops in tourist areas where visitors are often fleeced. As the rentals in these areas are very high, it's impossible to survive by selling goods at the market price. This problem has existed for years, and the Government knows it too; it's just that it doesn't tackle it.

What do you think of the prospects of the inbound industry?

In the long run, the inbound industry has to change. Traders simply can't keep on cutting tour prices and take shopping commissions to recover the costs. Of course, Hong Kong's traders aren't to blame solely because mainland traders are responsible too. Now mainland visitors can come individually, they don't need to go to shops that have connections with any travel agents. All tourist markets are the same. In the beginning, when tourists become free to travel, they'll go on a spending spree since they're not just buying things for themselves, but for relatives and friends as well. However, when they have more chances to travel, they'll spend less and less on shopping. All this makes inbound traders think hard about their future business strategies.

How about the outbound industry?

There isn't much difference between the outbound and inbound industry: both are undergoing very keen competition. The local agents of some destinations are being pressed into not taking any reception fees. And some of Hong Kong's tour escorts are also under pressure to subsidise their employer. This situation is very bad, because if a travel agent relies on the commission of its tour escorts, it's no longer the employer and the escorts no longer the employees, which means the travel agent has no control over the escorts. If travel agents continue to slash prices and depend on sales volume to keep the company afloat, then the risks involved would be very high. Because if there was any accident, the compensation would be huge. I can only wish members would reflect on their way of doing business, otherwise no one would be able to help them. 