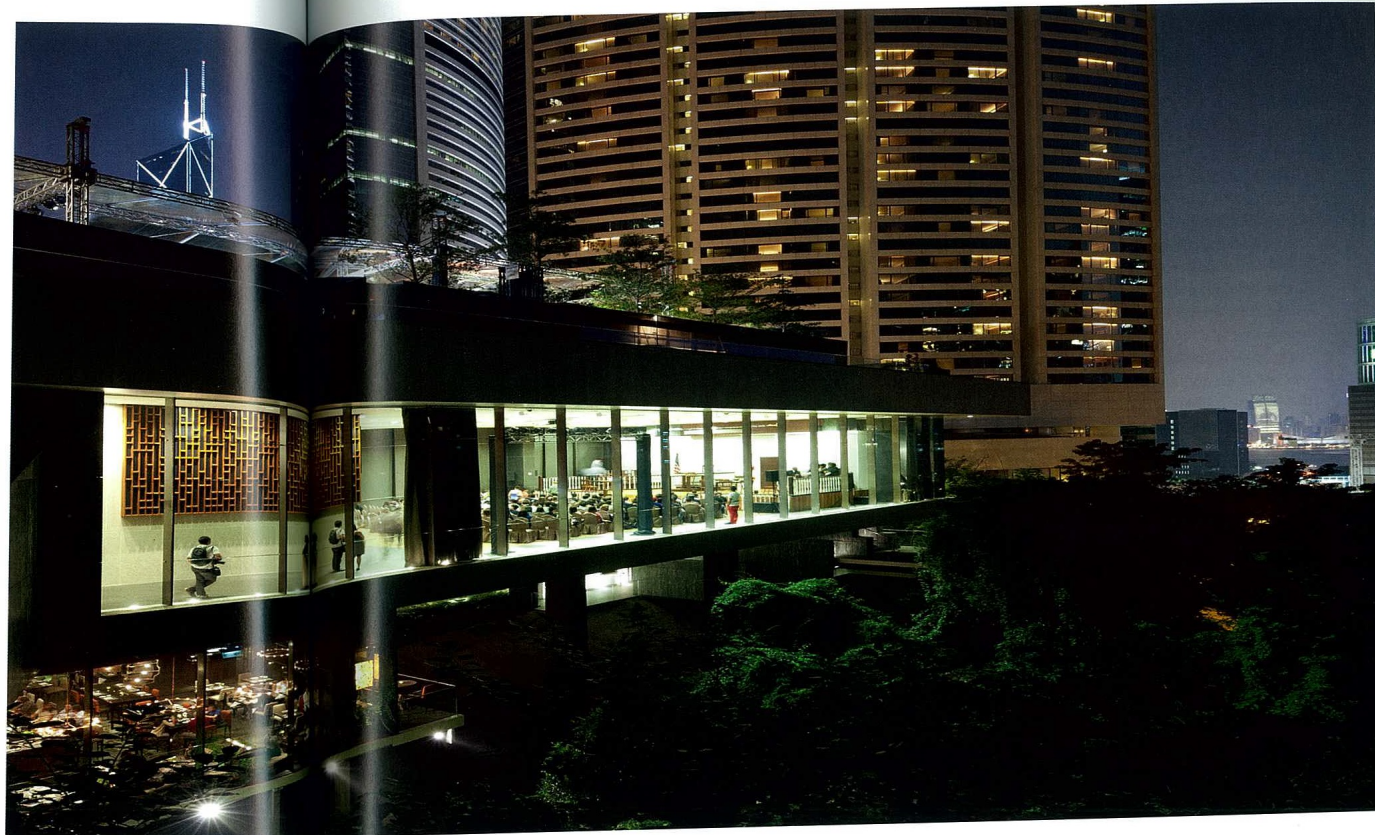




# ASIA'S SOCIETY MAN

Ronnie Chan wants to take the Asia Society to new heights, with art leading the way.

STORY RYAN SWIFT



**R**onnie Chan – chairman of Hang Lung Properties, chairman of Asia Society Hong Kong, and co-chair of Asia Society globally – is tired. In a stylish meeting room at Asia Society's distinguished Hong Kong headquarters, Chan slumps into the chair. He's been up from very early in the morning on Hang Lung business, and mixing his day job with another day job, that of being a driving force behind the Asia Society. At first, he is hesitant to talk.

A question about art sets him off. "My brother and mother are the art collectors – I am uncultured," Chan suddenly asserts. "I have no interest in art."

It's a disconcerting way to begin an interview about the role of Asia

Society in the Hong Kong art scene. But Chan seems to have a slightly mercurial streak. His mention of being uninterested in art – he calls himself the "black sheep of the family" – seems to ring untrue. For within minutes, he is picking through the huge collection of art-related tomes that line the shelves to pinpoint events or milestones in Asia Society's history, particularly in its patronage and support for the arts.

"The Asia Society is a leader in Asian arts," Chan says abruptly. It is here that Chan begins the history lesson. The Asia Society was set up in 1956 by John D Rockefeller III, a strong patron of the arts who was keenly interested in Pacific affairs. Rockefeller accompanied General Douglas MacArthur and John Foster Dulles on a widely

proclaimed peace mission to Japan in 1951, which aimed to establish long-lasting, friendly relations between Japan and the United States, after a brutal war in the Pacific a mere six years prior.

Rockefeller came away from the trip with the belief that there needed to be a "two-way street" for cultural exchange between Asian countries and the United States. By 1956, his ideas took shape in the form of the Asia Society. Chan, who has been the chairman of Asia Society Hong Kong since it was founded 24 years ago, refers to "John D" frequently and with respect. Since 2011, Chan and Henrietta Holmsman Fore – a former US government official who was chief of the US Agency for International Development –

**ABOVE**  
The Asia Society's headquarters in Admiralty is surrounded by trees and greenery amid Hong Kong skyscrapers