

## LEADING THE NEWS

SOCIETY

# COLLUSION BAD FOR HK, SAYS PHILANTHROPIST

**Greed** and too cosy a relationship between big business and those in high public office make city hard to govern, scion of Robert Ho Tung observes

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A leading member of one of Hong Kong's most famous families says the city is becoming ungovernable owing to greed and government-business collusion and that it's an open question whether the new administration will make a difference.

In an exclusive interview with the *South China Morning Post*, Robert Ho Hung-ngai, a grandson of the compradore tycoon Robert Ho Tung, said recent allegations of corruption in high office have fuelled anti-wealth sentiment in society at large.

"But one should differentiate between wealth and greed. Wealth itself is a good thing, but greed is not," said the Vancouver-based philanthropist, who turns 80 this year.

"What our society is against is not wealth but greed, especially greed among the wealthy.

"With collusion between those in high government office and big businesses, how can one govern a society?"

As to whether the new administration under Leung Chun-ying will bring a change, Ho said there is always hope.

"But we won't know until after he gets [started], after July 1. There are all sorts of bad impressions of him already," he said. "But we'll see."

The complexity and sensitivity of

government-business relations, Ho said, are what prompted his grandfather to admonish his family "not to get involved in politics" after he declined an invitation to join the Executive Council in the colonial administration.

"Our family has always been low-key. We enjoy walking down the street without being recognised; that's our goal," Ho said.

Ho, who was born in Hong Kong, where he founded the Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation in 2005, is upbeat about his family's work in the city. He said they try to make up for things it lacks – especially in the education of young people – regardless of any changes in government policy.

"I think Hong Kong still lacks the programmes other countries have provided, particularly in North America and Europe," he said.

"[The foundation] can do much more to promote arts appreciation



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ROBERT HO HUNG-NGAI

and educational programmes for the young generation. We are proactive in our programmes, engaging both the parents and students together.

"But we are only one unit, and I think the government should have better facilities and teaching programmes to encourage young ones to appreciate the arts."

He observed that there are very few activities today to capture the attention of young people, and so they end up spending too much time on computers and with electronic devices. The crowded classroom environment offers little stimulation, and even the home is not holding together.

"The family is falling apart. We are very family-oriented in my generation, but now it's fragmented, perhaps because living space is limited."

Even the members of the Ho Tung clan, now in its fifth generation, rarely get together.

"We used to, but not any more; now we are scattered all over the world," Ho said.

Asked about the family property, Ho Tung Gardens, on The Peak, he declined to comment, because "it belongs to my sister [Ho Min-kwan]. What she wants to do is her business. I have no opinion [on that], and I don't want to get into trouble".

On his sister's claim that "my grandfather didn't spend more than a few nights there [the main house at Ho Tung Gardens] during his entire life", Ho said it would be more accurate to say "Sir Robert wasn't a permanent resident at Ho Tung Gardens. But he was definitely there, and I was with him, especially during the hot summer months."



Robert Ho stands in front of a portrait in his foundation's office of his grandfather, Robert Ho Tung. Photo: Nora Tam