

Billion-dollar world trade is child's play ⁵⁻⁷

THE Hongkong toy industry started with plastic flowers, blossomed into a boom market and is now the No 1 toy manufacturer in the world.

Hongkong's toy manufacturers this week held the 12th annual Hongkong Toy and Gift Fair, attracting important buyers from Asia, the United States, Australia and Europe.

Fair organising committee chairman Mr Dennis Ting said Hongkong toy exports had reached \$10 billion annually, making it the territory's fifth largest market after clothing, electronics, watches and clocks.

This year's exhibition — staged by the Hongkong Trade Development Council — had 173 exhibitors, with 41 putting on product demonstrations.

There are more than 2,000 toy factories in Hongkong and about 50,000 toy makers, six per cent of the manufacturing workforce.

More than three quarters of these factories employ less than 20 people and the bulk of factories — even the backyard cottage industries — manufacture for overseas companies.

Trade and Industry Secretary Mr Eric Ho told exhibitors and visitors the Hongkong toy industry had a legendary past that originated

as an offshoot of the plastics industry.

"With the help of improved technology, toy products have evolved from plastic dolls to diecast cars and now, the latest electronic toys with LED displays and synthesised voice response," he said.

One doll which gained a lot of attention at the fair was a life-size "girl" who promised to put her "owner" to

sleep by recounting lengthy bedtime stories.

An organising committee spokesman said: "Last year Hongkong toy exports went through a rather difficult year, dropping 13 per cent to \$9,783 million.

"The first seven months of this year have shown a moderate two per cent turnaround, climbing to 7.2 per cent of Hongkong's domestic exports."