

# **\$100,000 survey draws a blank**

by  
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WHAT do you think of the Hongkong government? That was the question that 2,000 people were faced with earlier this year — and most of them thought it was too vague to answer.

The Home Affairs Branch spent \$100,000 on a survey to discover people's "image" of the Hongkong government. But they now agree that the survey was so generalised that the results are worthless.

The survey was described as one way to reach the "so-called silent majority" of Hongkong, who do not use existing channels of communication, or who regard such channels as inadequate.

"But the questions were so generalised that we can't really draw any conclusions from them," said Meyer Ng, a principal assistant secretary in the branch's General and Community Information division.

"We have to refine our techniques in the future in order to have confidence in drawing conclusions from such a survey," Mr Ng added.

Explaining that the survey was undertaken as "very much an experiment", he said that the questions covered the whole spectrum of government activity.

Asked what specific questions featured in the survey, he cited one example: "What do you think of the performance of the Hongkong government as a whole?"

Such questions do not allow for detailed analysis, Mr Ng said.

The idea was that if a large enough sample was included in the survey, then the different views of each individual would balance out, thus pointing toward some conclusions.

## **'WATERTIGHT'**

"But we're not sure that theory is watertight," Mr Ng said.

The methodology of the survey was as scientific as possible, he said, it was only the approach that was experimental.

"In fact, the reaction of most people asked was 'it's too general'," said Mr Ng.

Another survey is being planned for this time next year, but some revision of the questions is expected. It is hoped that a series of surveys will be possible, in order to spot trends of opinion, and the varying concerns of people.

"I believe there are people who think that existing channels (for expressing one's opinion on government) are inadequate," said Mr Ng, hinting that this fact was a discovery of the survey.

"But we have so many channels now we find it difficult to believe that there are not enough," he added. "Anything you name, I think we've got it."

Such channels are the press and other media, the Unofficials of Legislative and Executive councils, the City District Offices, and the District Boards, he said.

"I think from the government's point of view these channels must be adequate, but in view of people's reaction we have to examine how the channels are working, and perhaps improve them," said Mr Ng.

"The so-called silent majority may not be able to use these channels, because to use them you have to be non-silent," he added.

Mr Ng believes that people in Hongkong are getting used to expressing their views these days, and if they want to say something, "I'm sure they will find a way to do so."

The Community Information Unit's first survey was the start of a process which will hopefully cater to everybody's need to speak out.

Meanwhile, "we have to rely on existing channels — we haven't been asked to do anything special," said Mr Ng.