

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs
(13 February 2009)

Motion : “This Panel opines that the development of the Ko Shan Theatre and the Sunbeam Theatre may go in tandem, and given the history and status of the Sunbeam Theatre in the Cantonese Opera sector as part of the important collective memory of Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong, the Government should consider the cultural conservation of the Sunbeam Theatre so as to preserve a performance venue for traditional Cantonese Opera.”

The Administration’s Response to the Above Motion

At the meeting of the Panel on Home Affairs on 13 February, the Secretary for Home Affairs remarked that since the Sunbeam Theatre was privately owned and commercially run, the Government must carefully consider any decision that might interfere with market operation. We note that the landlord of the Sunbeam Theatre made himself clear to the operator, Hong Kong United Arts Entertainment Co. Ltd. (HKUA), that he had already had other development plan for Sunbeam Theatre and that he would not sell the property or renew the tenancy with HKUA after three years. It will be practically difficult if it is expected that 3 years later the Sunbeam Theatre can be preserved either as a performance venue for Cantonese Opera or as part of the “collective memory” of Cantonese Opera. The Government has been actively arranging venues for staging performance of Cantonese Opera and will help local professional troupes to migrate smoothly to venues managed by LCSD and other performance venues within these three years.

2. Since the implementation of the LCSD’s “priority venue hiring policy for Cantonese Opera performances” at the Ko Shan Theatre in 2004, the number of troupes using the theatre for Cantonese Opera performances has been increasing year by year. In 2008, 149 Cantonese Opera performances and 106 Cantonese operatic concerts were staged in the theatre. The LCSD has also kept improving the supporting facilities of

the Ko Shan Theatre to cater for the needs of large-scale Cantonese Opera performances. Such measures include provision of additional toilet cubicles, dressing rooms, directional signboards, parking spaces, etc. It is also planned that a covered walkway leading to the theatre will be constructed, illuminated advertisement boxes to promote the performances be installed and current seats be replaced by more comfortable ones. The new Annex Building of Ko Shan Theatre, which is scheduled for completion in 2012, can be used for various purposes such as performances, training, rehearsals, and audio-visual production of Cantonese Opera. We expect that the existing and new theatres will produce a synergy effect to establish the Ko Shan Theatre as a dedicated venue for Cantonese Opera and other Chinese Xiqu.

3. In addition, LCSD has devised a new priority venue hiring measure whereby time slots are reserved at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, the Hong Kong City Hall, the Sha Tin Town Hall, the Kwai Tsing Theatre and the Tsuen Wan Town Hall for booking by Cantonese Opera troupes. We are consulting the Cantonese Opera sector on the proposal. It is estimated that additional 262 days of time slots will be provided for Cantonese Opera performances in 2009-10.

4. The Government has also planned to construct a Xiqu Centre of international standards in the West Kowloon Culture District (WKCD) scheduled for completion in 2014-15. By then, there will be five venues of different scales available for Cantonese Opera performances. They are –

- (a) a large theatre of 1 200 to 1 400 seats and a small theatre of 400 seats in the Xiqu Centre in WKCD;
- (b) the existing theatre of 1 031 seats and a medium-sized theatre of about 600 seats in the new Annex Building of the Ko Shan Theatre; and
- (c) a small theatre of about 300 seats in the Xiqu Activity Centre in Yau Ma Tei.

We have to consider from a broad perspective the overall demands of the Cantonese Opera sector for performance venues and how public funds should be properly expended.

5. Some Members raised the question of performance venues on the Hong Kong Island. At present, venues managed by LCSD are available for use by people and groups from different districts. Larger-scale facilities on the Hong Kong Island, such as the Hong Kong City Hall, the Queen Elizabeth Stadium, the Sheung Wan Civic Centre and the Sai Wan Ho Civic Centre, can be used for cultural performances, including Cantonese Opera performances and Cantonese operatic concerts.

Home Affairs Bureau
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