

立法會 *Legislative Council*

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Panel on Home Affairs

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 13 February 2009

Development of Cantonese Opera and other Xiqu and the future of the Sunbeam Theatre

Purpose

This paper summarises past discussions by the Panel on Home Affairs (the Panel) on the development of Cantonese Opera and other Xiqu in Hong Kong and the future of the Sunbeam Theatre.

Development of Cantonese Opera

2. In the 2007-2008 Policy Address, the Chief Executive stated that the Government was dedicated to the preservation, promotion and development of Cantonese Opera, a refined and popular art form and an emblem of the local culture. To promote Cantonese Opera, the Administration has set the following directions and targets-

- (a) to develop performing venues for Cantonese Opera;
- (b) to promote Cantonese Opera education, audience building and community participation;
- (c) to provide training for Cantonese Opera professionals, preserve the tradition and promote creative works;
- (d) to foster cooperation among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, and promote cultural exchange;
- (e) to preserve the essence of Cantonese Opera and showcase treasures of this cultural heritage; and
- (f) to promote Cantonese Opera as a major tourist attraction.

3. The Administration briefed the Panel on 14 March 2008 on measures to promote Cantonese Opera and other Xiqu. These included -

- (a) establishment of the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee and the Cantonese Opera Development Fund (CODF) to advise and support programmes and activities on the study, promotion and development of Cantonese Opera;
- (b) establishment of the Programme and Development Committee and the Chinese Traditional Performing Arts Panel to advise the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) on the strategies to identify and support the development of budding and small-scale performing arts groups;
- (c) development of performance venues for Cantonese Opera, including a Xiqu Centre in the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) (with a seating capacity of 1 200 to 1 400), conversion of the Yau Ma Tei Theatre and the Red Brick Building into a Xiqu Activity Centre (with a seating capacity of 300) and construction of an Annex Building for the Ko Shan Theatre (with a seating capacity of 600 seats);
- (d) introduction of various measures to solve the venue shortage problem, such as the "Venue Partnership Scheme" in Sha Tin Town Hall and Tuen Mun Town Hall and the "Priority Venue Hiring Policy" to enable the staging of Cantonese Opera performances in the Ko Shan Theatre and other major venues;
- (e) reinforcing the efforts in promotion of Cantonese Opera education, audience building and community participation, training of Cantonese Opera professionals, preservation of the tradition and promotion of creative works; and
- (f) enhancing the financial support for Cantonese Opera, such as granting some \$ 17 million to CODF since its establishment in 2005, setting aside \$15 million by LCSD for supporting Cantonese Opera and operatic singing performances and providing some \$7.6 million through the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC) for Cantonese Opera projects in 2008-2009.

4. On 12 December 2008, the Administration briefed the Panel on the financial proposal for the conversion of the Yau Ma Tei Theatre and the Red Brick Building into a Xiqu Activity Centre. The proposal was endorsed by the Public Works Subcommittee on 21 January 2009 and will be discussed at the meeting of the Finance Committee on 13 February 2009.

Promotion of other Xiqu

5. The Administration has been supporting the promotion of other Xiqu through LCSD and HKADC which have from time to time invited troupes specialised in Jing Opera, Qun Opera, Yue Opera, Chuan Opera and other regional theatrical genres to perform in Hong Kong. Since its establishment in June 1995, HKADC has provided grants in support of the development of other Xiqu genres (such as Jing Opera, Qun Opera, Yue Opera and Puppetry).

Past discussions by the Panel

6. The views and concerns raised by members regarding the promotion of Cantonese Opera and other Xiqu and the future of the Sunbeam Theatre at the Panel meetings on 14 March 2008 and 12 December 2008 are summarised in the ensuing paragraphs.

Promotion of Cantonese Opera

7. Some members considered that the Administration had failed to attach importance to the promotion of Cantonese Opera and other Xiqu in the past. They urged the Administration to enhance training opportunities for script-writers, composers and musicians in the field of Cantonese Opera, as well as funding and venue support for the development of Cantonese Opera and other Xiqu.

8. The Administration informed the Panel that HKADC had applied for funding from the Arts and Sport Development Fund to provide opportunities for budding artists to stage new productions of Cantonese Opera. Since 2005, HKADC had sponsored educational programmes promoting Xiqu in schools. In addition, publicity programmes were launched overseas to regularly publicise performances by local Chinese opera troupes to facilitate advance ticket purchases by visitors planning to travel to Hong Kong.

Venue support for Cantonese Opera

9. In response to members' concern about venue support, the Administration advised that various measures would be taken to relieve the venue shortage problem before the completion of the Xiqu Centre in WKCD around 2014-2015. These measures included the construction of an Annex Building for the Ko Shan Theatre, inclusion of the Cantonese Opera sector as an important venue partner of LCSD, and conversion of the Yau Ma Tei Theatre and the Red Brick Building into a Xiqu Activity Centre. In addition, the Administration was considering the provision of a major regional performance venue with a seating capacity of over 1 000 as part of the redevelopment project of Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate to serve districts such as Kwun Tong, Wong Tai Sin, Kowloon City and Sai Kung.

Sunbeam Theatre

10. In relation to the discussion on the shortage of performance venues for Cantonese Opera, members had expressed grave concern about the possible closure of the Sunbeam Theatre upon the expiry of its tenancy agreement in early 2009. A member stressed that Sunbeam Theatre embodied the collective memory of the local community and was a part of the local cultural heritage to be preserved. Another member asked whether the Administration would provide financial assistance to enable the Sunbeam Theatre to continue its operation.

11. The Administration informed the Panel that in case the Sunbeam Theatre ceased to operate, the Administration would put forward short-term measures to deal with the venue shortage problem. For example, LCSD had planned to provide subsidy for performing groups to enable them to hire non-LCSD venues suitable for staging Cantonese Opera. The Administration had also studied the upgrading of district community halls to make them more amenable for such performance. Slots of major venues under LCSD would be reserved for use by Cantonese Opera troupes, and special measures would be taken to enable hirers to make use of venues in the New Territories which had not been fully utilised.

Recent development

12. In January 2009, the Administration informed the Panel that the tenancy of the Sunbeam Theatre had been extended to the end of February to enable the staging of Cantonese Opera during the Lunar New Year. In its reply to Hon Timothy Fok's written question raised at the Legislative Council meeting on 4 February 2009 (**Appendix I**), the Administration advised that it had been proactively supporting the discussion between the operator and the landlord on renewing the tenancy of the Sunbeam Theatre and looked forward to reaching a satisfactory arrangement between both parties. The Administration reiterated its development plan for providing venue support for Cantonese Opera in future and advised that an estimated 262 days of time slots for performances would be provided additionally by LCSD for the Cantonese Opera sector in 2009-2010.

Relevant papers

13. A list of relevant papers with their hyperlinks at the LegCo website is in **Appendix II**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
12 February 2009

Press Releases

LCQ7: Developing venues for Cantonese opera

Following is a question by the Hon Timothy Fok and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (February 4):

Question:

As it is learnt that the tenancy renewal for the Sunbeam Theatre in North Point has not yet been settled, it is expected that the project of converting the Yau Ma Tei Theatre into a Xiqu Activity Centre with a small theatre will not be completed until 2011, and the supporting facilities and seating capacity of the Ko Shan Theatre do not exactly meet the requirements of Cantonese opera performances, will the Government inform this Council whether it will take immediate measures to assist the Cantonese opera sector in solving the problem of shortage of performance venues?

Reply:

President,

The Government is thankful to the Sunbeam Theatre's landlord for his continued contribution to the development of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong over the years. We have been proactively supporting the discussion between the operator and the landlord on renewing the tenancy of Sunbeam Theatre. We look forward to reaching a satisfactory arrangement between both parties.

In the development plan for providing venues for Cantonese opera, the Government has decided to develop the following venues of different scales to meet the various development needs of the Cantonese opera sector:

1. to convert the Yau Ma Tei Theatre and the Red Brick Building into a Xiqu Activity Centre with a small theatre of about 300 seats. The project which is scheduled for completion in 2011 will provide a venue for small-scale performances and operatic singing activities;
2. to construct an Annex Building to the Ko Shan Theatre comprising a medium-sized theatre of about 600 seats, large-scale rehearsal rooms and audio-recording studios. The Annex Building which is scheduled for completion in 2012, together with the existing theatre of 1,031 seats can be used for various purposes such as performances, rehearsals, and audio-visual production of Cantonese opera; and
3. to build a large-scale theatre of about 1,200 to 1,400 seats, a small-sized theatre of about 400 seats and various practising facilities in the Xiqu Centre of the West Kowloon Cultural District. Scheduled for completion in 2014-15, the project will provide permanent performance venues of international standards for staging professional performances of Cantonese opera (The seating capacity of Sunbeam Theatre is 1,033).

Currently, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has been providing additional time slots for staging Cantonese opera performances by implementing special measures

for venue hiring, including:

1. "Venue Partnership Scheme"

The LCSD has supported the Cantonese opera sector to take part in the "Venue Partnership Scheme" in the Sha Tin Town Hall and the Tuen Mun Town Hall from 2008-09 to 2011-12. The sector will be provided with a total of 118 days of time slots for performances in these two venues in 2009-10.

2. Further development of the Ko Shan Theatre into one of the major performance venues for Cantonese opera

Since the implementation of LCSD's "priority venue hiring policy for Cantonese opera performances" in the Ko Shan Theatre in 2004, the number of organisations 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 theatre can provide another 100 days or so of time slots for Cantonese opera performances in 2009. The LCSD has been fine-tuning the policy in response to the development needs of the Cantonese opera sector. At present, apart from full-length performances, excerpt performances are also accorded priority.

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 additional provision of toilet cubicles, dressing rooms, directional sign boards, 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.

3. Reserving time slots at major performing arts venues in the urban areas and the New Territories

For 2009-10, the LCSD is going to make an additional provision of about 44 days of reserved time slots at several major performing arts venues for priority hiring by Cantonese opera troupes. These venues include the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, the Hong Kong City Hall, the Kwai Tsing Theatre, the Sha Tin Town Hall and the Tsuen Wan Town Hall. It also plans to increase the additional provision to about 70 days of times slots for Cantonese opera performances starting from 2010-11. We are consulting the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee, the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Chamber of Commerce on the proposal. Apart from priority hiring of reserved time slots, Cantonese opera troupes can continue to hire the 13 performing arts venues of the LCSD through ordinary booking.

To sum up the above measures, we estimate that about 262 days of time slots for performances will be provided additionally by the LCSD for the Cantonese opera sector in 2009-10.

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**Relevant papers on development of Cantonese Opera and other Xiqu
and the future of the Sunbeam Theatre since the third Legislative Council**

Date of meeting	Meeting	Question/Motion/ /Paper	LC Paper No.
24.5.06	Council meeting	Hon CHOY So-yuk raised a written question on a permanent venue for Cantonese Opera.	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/chinese/counmtg/floor/cm0524ti-confirm-c.pdf (pages 84-87)
28.6.06		Hon Albert HO raised a written question on performance venues for Cantonese opera.	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/chinese/counmtg/floor/cm0628ti-confirm-c.pdf (pages 48-50)
18.4.07		Hon Timothy FOK raised a written question on the redevelopment plan for the former Yau Ma Tei Theatre.	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/chinese/counmtg/floor/cm0418-confirm-ec.pdf (pages 11-12)
10.10.07		The 2007-2008 Policy Address	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/0708speech_e.pdf
7.11.07		Hon Audrey EU raised a written question on the inventory of Hong Kong's intangible cultural heritage and a "Hong Kong Memory" central database.	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/chinese/counmtg/floor/cm1107-confirm-ec.pdf (pages 52-53)
14.3.08	Panel on Home Affairs	Paper provided by the Administration on "The promotion of Cantonese Opera and other Xiqu"	CB(2)1310/07-08(03) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/ha/papers/ha0314cb2-1310-3-e.pdf

Date of meeting	Meeting	Question/Motion/ /Paper	LC Paper No.
		Minutes of meeting	CB(2)2690/07-08 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha080314.pdf
12.12.08		Paper provided by the Administration on "Conversion of Yau Ma Tei Theatre and Red Brick Building into a Xiqu Activity Centre"	CB(2)427/08-09(05) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha1212cb2-427-5-e.pdf
7.1.09	Council meeting	Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG raised a written question on the development of Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong.	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/chinese/counmtg/floor/cm0107-confirm-ec.pdf (pages 60-63)
4.2.09		Hon Timothy FOK raised a written question on assistance to the Cantonese Opera sector.	please refer to Appendix I