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Panel on Home Affairs

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 14 May 2010**

**Construction of an annex building for the Ko Shan Theatre and
injection of fund into the Cantonese Opera Development Fund**

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the provision of performance venues for Cantonese opera (including the construction of an annex building for the Ko Shan Theatre ("KST")), and funding support for the development of Cantonese opera (including the injection of fund into the Cantonese Opera Development Fund ("CODF")). It also summarises past discussions by Legislation Council ("LegCo") Members on these subjects.

Background

2. Following its successful inscription onto the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's ("UNESCO") Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity on 30 September 2009, Cantonese opera has become the first item of world intangible cultural heritage in Hong Kong. For the preservation of this art form, the Financial Secretary announced in the 2010-2011 Budget the following initiatives -

- (a) the provision of funding of approximately \$730 million for the construction of an annex building at KST; and
- (b) the injection of \$69 million into the CODF to further support various Cantonese opera preservation, promotion and development projects.

Venue provision for Cantonese Opera

3. To meet the development needs of the Cantonese opera sector, the Administration has advised LegCo of its plan for the provision of performance venues for staging Cantonese opera in the coming years in various LegCo forums, including the Council meetings on 4 February 2009 and 21 October 2009 and the Panel meeting on 13 February 2009. The Government's key initiatives are summarised as follows.

Development of performance venues of different scales

4. The Government will develop the following venues for Cantonese opera performances of different scales-

- (a) 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;
- (b) to construct an annex building to the KST 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, training, rehearsals, and audio-visual production of Cantonese opera; and
- (c) to build a large-scale theatre of 1 200 to 1 400 seats, and a small-sized theatre of 400 seats and various practising facilities in the Xiqu Centre of the West Kowloon Cultural District ("WKCD"). The project, which is scheduled for completion in 2014-2015, will provide permanent performance venues of international standards for staging professional performances of Cantonese opera.

Improvement works to the KST

5. In anticipation of the cessation of operation of the Sunbeam Theatre in three years' time (details of which is elaborated in paragraph 15), the Administration has planned to improve the supporting facilities of KST with a view to establishing the theatre as a dedicated venue for large-scale Cantonese opera performances. The key improvement works include -

- (a) provision of additional toilet cubicles, dressing rooms, directional signboards, parking spaces; planning of a covered walkway leading to KST; installation of illuminated advertisement boxes to promote the performances at KST; and replacement of the current seats by more comfortable ones; and

- (b) construction of a new annex building, as detailed in paragraph 4(b).

Funding support for the promotion of Cantonese opera

6. According to the Administration, over \$30 million has been allocated for the promotion and development of Cantonese opera in 2009-2010. To support the development of Cantonese opera, the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee ("COAC") was set up to advise the Government on policies in relation to the promotion, preservation, study and development of Cantonese opera in May 2004. To tie in with the work of the COAC, the CODF was established in November 2005 to raise donations to provide funding support to programmes and activities on the study, promotion and sustainable development of Cantonese opera.

7. The CODF has granted about \$20.3 million to support some 260 Cantonese opera projects since its establishment, of which about \$3 million is for the implementation of a three-year grant scheme for the Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Troupe for New Talents. It has also supported various Cantonese opera performance projects by budding artists or jointly presented by experienced artists and budding artists, as well as other promotional performance projects, children or youth cultural exchange and arts education programmes, and professional training and community promotional projects. Subsidies are also made available to venue development projects, research and archival projects to provide comprehensive support for the development of Cantonese opera.

Past discussions

8. The major views and concerns on issues relating to government policies, venue provision and funding support for Cantonese opera expressed by LegCo Members since February 2009 are set out in the ensuing paragraphs. Members may refer to LC Paper No. CB(2)818/08-09(05) issued on 12 February 2009 for relevant discussions held before that date.

Policies for the conservation of Cantonese opera

9. A Member asked whether the Administration had formulated specific policy proposals and plans for the preservation, conservation and development of Cantonese opera in accordance with the UNESCO's requirement following its inscription onto UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity; and given that the relevant authorities on the Mainland had enacted specific legislation on the conservation of local traditional operas, whether the Administration would follow the practices of the Mainland to conserve Cantonese opera or other traditional operas.

10. According to the Administration, the Government was dedicated to the preservation, promotion and development of Cantonese opera under the following

policy objectives: (a) to develop performance venues for Cantonese opera; (b) to nurture Cantonese opera professionals, preserve the tradition and promote creative works; (c) to promote Cantonese opera education, audience building and community participation; (d) to foster cooperation among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, and promote cultural exchange; (e) to preserve the essence of Cantonese opera and showcase treasure of Hong Kong's cultural heritage; and (f) to promote Cantonese opera as a major tourist attraction.

11. To take forward these policies, the Government had set up the COAC and CODF as described in paragraphs 6 and 7. The Government would continue to listen to the views of the COAC and the Cantonese opera sector, and make reference to the practice of the Mainland and other regions to consider how suitable legal protection for the conservation of Cantonese opera could be provided.

Venue provision for Cantonese opera

Interim measures to address the venue shortage problem

12. Some members expressed concern about the continued shortage of performance venues for Cantonese opera in the interim before the completion of the new performance venues mentioned in paragraphs 4. These members urged the Administration to take immediate action to address the problem. A member enquired as to whether the Government would set up a dedicated permanent venue on Hong Kong Island for Cantonese opera performances.

13. The Administration responded that during the interim period before the completion of the WKCD's Xiqu Centre, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department ("LCSD") would provide additional time slots at its venues for staging Cantonese opera performances by implementing special measures for venue hiring. These included: (a) according priority for the Cantonese opera sector in staging performances at the Sha Tin Town Hall and the Tuen Mun Town Hall under the "Venue Partnership Scheme"; (b) implementing LCSD's "priority venue hiring policy for Cantonese opera performance" in the KST; and (c) reserving time slots at major performing arts venues in the urban areas and the New Territories (including City Hall, Hong Kong Cultural Centre, Kwai Tsing Theatre, Sha Tin Town Hall and Tsuen Wan Town Hall) for priority hiring by Cantonese opera troupes.

14. On the provision of performance venues for Cantonese opera for the Hong Kong community, the Administration advised that the Government had to consider from a broad perspective of the overall development needs of Cantonese opera and prudently take into consideration factors such as the availability and rate of utilisation of existing facilities, as the provision and operation of performance venues involved heavy capital investment and long-term commitment of resources.

Issues relating to the Sunbeam Theatre

15. Members passed a motion at the Panel meeting on 13 February 2009 to urge the Administration to consider the cultural conservation of the Sunbeam Theatre in view of its distinctive history and status in the Cantonese opera sector. The Administration responded that since the Sunbeam Theatre was privately owned and commercially run, the Government needed to consider carefully any decision that might interfere with market operation. The Administration also noted that the landlord of the Sunbeam Theatre had made himself clear to the operator, Hong Kong United Arts Entertainment Co. Ltd. ("HKUA"), that he already had other development plans for the Theatre and that he would not sell the property or renew the tenancy with HKUA after three years. On account of the above, the Government had been actively arranging venues for staging performance of Cantonese opera and would help local professional troupes to migrate smoothly to venues managed by LCSD and other performance venues within these three years. In particular, it would focus its efforts in redeveloping an alternative performance venue for Cantonese opera at the KST.

Issues relating to the development of a Xiqu Activity Centre at Yau Ma Tei

16. During the deliberation of the proposal for the conversion of Yau Ma Tei Theatre and Red Brick Building into a Xiqu Activity Centre, members requested the Administration to consider relocation of the public toilet, refuse collection point and street sleepers' shelter adjacent to Yau Ma Tei Theatre to enhance the overall setting of the area, and report to the Panel on a quarterly basis the progress of the reprovisioning arrangements.

17. According to the Administration's latest update on 16 March 2010, it had identified potential sites for relocating the refuse collection point and street sleepers' shelter, and the technical feasibility study concerned would be completed in June 2010. On the relocation of the public toilet, the Administration advised that no suitable site in the vicinity could be identified following the studies conducted by the relevant government departments. Having considered the needs of the public and the users of Yau Ma Tei Wholesale Fruit Market, the Administration proposed to reprovision the public toilet at the same project site with enhanced design after the relocation of the refuse collection point and street sleepers' shelter.

Funding support for Cantonese opera

18. Regarding a Member's enquiry as to whether the Government had reviewed the existing financial sponsorship mechanism for the development of Cantonese opera and increased the amount of such support, the Administration replied that the Government had supported the development of Cantonese opera through different forms and channels. These included support by the LCSD to about 500 Cantonese opera and operatic singing performances each year; funding of Cantonese opera performance, education, promotion and other development projects by the CODF and the Hong Kong Arts Development Council; and subsidy by the Home Affairs Bureau for Cantonese opera programmes organised by the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts. In 2010-2011, the Administration would continue to support the

development of Cantonese opera through the injection of \$69 million into the CODF to further promote various Cantonese opera preservation, promotion and development projects.

Latest development

19. The Administration will consult the Panel on the proposals for the construction of an annex building for the KST, and the injection of fund into the CODF to support the continued development of Cantonese opera at its meeting on 14 May 2010. It will also brief members on the progress in the conversion of the Yau Ma Tei Theatre and Red Brick House into a Xiqu Activity Centre. Prior to the meeting, arrangements have been made for Panel members to visit the KST, as well as the existing sites of the Yau Ma Tei Theatre and Red Brick Building and its surroundings, on 7 May 2010.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
11 May 2010

Panel on Home Affairs

**Relevant documents on Construction of an annex building for
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Committee	Date of Meeting	Minutes/Paper/ Council question	LC Paper No./ website
Panel on Home Affairs	12.12.2008	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)817/08-09 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha20081212.pdf
		Letter provided by Administration dated 4 May 2009 on the quarterly report on the progress of the re-location of public toilets, refuse collection point and the street sleepers' shelters in relation to the project on conversion of Yau Ma Tei Theatre and Red Brick Building into a Xiqu Activity Centre	CB(2)1471/08-09(01) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha1212cb2-1471-1-e.pdf
		Letter provided by Administration dated 16 March 2010 on the quarterly report on the progress of the re-location of public toilets, refuse collection point and the street sleepers' shelters in relation to the project on conversion of Yau Ma Tei Theatre and Red Brick Building into a Xiqu Activity Centre	CB(2)1116/09-10(01) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha1212cb2-1116-1-e.pdf
Council meeting	4.2.2009	Hon Timothy FOK raised a written question on assistance to the Cantonese Opera sector.	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/chinese/council/floor/cm0204-confirm-ec.pdf (pages 52)

Committee	Date of Meeting	Minutes/Paper/ Council question	LC Paper No./ website
Panel on Home Affairs	13.2.2009	Administration's paper on Development of Cantonese opera and other Xiqu and future of the Sunbeam Theatre	CB(2)818/08-09(04) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha0213cb2-818-4-e.pdf
Panel on Home Affairs	13.2.2009	Background brief on Development of Cantonese opera and other Xiqu and future of the Sunbeam Theatre	CB(2)818/08-09(05) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha0213cb2-818-5-e.pdf
		Minutes of meeting	CB(2)1280/08-09 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha20090213.pdf
		Administration's response to a motion on the cultural conservation of the Sunbeam Theatre passed at the Panel meeting on 13 February 2009	CB(2)1104/08-09(01) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha0213cb2-1104-1-e.pdf
Council meeting	21.10.2009	Hon Tanya CHAN raised a written question on the preservation and promotion of Cantonese Opera	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/chinese/counmtg/floor/cm1021-confirm-ec.pdf (page 69)
Finance Committee	26.3.2010	Presentation to the Finance Committee of Legislative Council by Mr TSANG Tak-sing, JP, Secretary for Home Affairs	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/fc/fc/sp_note/session18-hab-e.pdf

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