

**Information Note for
Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs**

**Protection and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Hong Kong:
Jiao-festival of Cheung Chau**

Purpose

This paper aims to brief Members on the efforts made by the Government to support the protection and promotion of the Jiao-festival of Cheung Chau (the Jiao-festival).

Background

2. “Da Jiao”, also known as “Tai Ping Qing Jiao” in written form, is a large-scale religious event in the community. The purpose of the event is to offer sacrifices to wandering spirits and to gratify the deities for the protection and blessings given. The frequency of “Da Jiao” varies among different communities; some are held annually, while others are held every five, eight or ten years. According to the residents of Cheung Chau, a plague broke out on the island in the late Qing dynasty which claimed numerous lives. To ward off the calamity, local residents hired priests to perform ceremonies of penance and rites for all wandering spirits at an altar in front of Pak Tai Temple. The statue of the god Pak Tai was also paraded through the streets to bring peace to the areas. The plague eventually ended. Since then, the residents have organised the Jiao-festival every year to express their gratitude to the god Pak Tai for blessing and protecting the island. The rituals have been carried on continuously for over a hundred years.

3. The varied rituals of the Jiao-festival include receiving the deities, initiation rites, afternoon rites, water rites, collecting dirt with a paper boat, grand parade, rites for wandering spirits, thanking the deities, scrambling for buns, distributing buns, and bidding farewell to the deities. Ritual performances of Cantonese opera are also arranged during the Festival. Besides, the Festival also provides a platform for the residents of Cheung Chau to showcase their rich folk traditions every year. These include folk crafts such as making paper-mache effigies of deities, setting up the bamboo scaffolding of bun towers, and making handmade buns. Also featured at the Festival are Taoist rituals and folk performing arts such as music, floating colours parade, lion and *Qilin* dances, as well as drum beating.

4. During the process of transmission, the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) evolves in response to social and environmental changes over time. The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation also states that “the ICH, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history.” It is such interactivity that leads to the sustainable development of ICH during its transmission process. The Jiao-festival is an event of significant historical and cultural values. Passed down from generation to generation for over a hundred years, the Festival serves to promote community cohesion. The Jiao-festival was originally celebrated only by the Hailufeng community, but was later developed into an activity involving the entire island. This process is a vivid illustration of how the Jiao-festival has been adapted to social and historical changes.

Protection and Promotion

5. The Government provides support through various means for protecting and promoting the Jiao-festival of Cheung Chau. The public museums have been working on research, documentation, application for inscription, organisation of exhibitions and educational activities. Moreover, the Government also provides support to the organising committees of the Jiao-festival and promotes tourism.

Research and Documentation

6. The Hong Kong Museum of History (HKMH) and the Hong Kong Heritage Museum (HKHM) managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) compile records and conduct researches on the Jiao-festival, and acquire related relics such as *Qilin* heads, lion heads, placards used in processions, items used in floating colours parades and old photos as museum collection, and organise exhibitions with a view to enhancing the public’s understanding of this ICH. In “The Hong Kong Story” permanent exhibition of the HKMH, an exhibition area is devoted to folk culture, featuring the reconstruction of various activities of the Jiao-festival, including bun towers, Cantonese opera stage, floating colours parade, lion dance and Taoist altar, while in the New Territories Heritage Hall of the HKHM, the Festival is introduced through exhibits and videos.

7. To promote among the public a better understanding of the cultural substance of the Jiao-festival, the HKHM commissioned the Department of History of The Chinese University of Hong Kong in April this year to conduct, in the form of an oral history study, in-depth interviews with the organising committees and elderly participants of the Jiao-festival as well as the major transmitters of folk art in order to document their memories. The scope of research covers the evolution of the Jiao-festival, the operation of the organising committees and the transmission of different kinds of folk traditions and handicrafts. Relevant findings will be compiled and published.

8. Apart from that, the South China Research Center of The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology commissioned by the Government has commenced a territory-wide survey of ICH in Hong Kong in 2009. Documentary research has already been conducted on a number of items, including the Jiao-festival of Cheung Chau and other jiao-festivals held in over ten local communities. The research includes the study of existing written records, academic publications, archives, newspaper reports, photographs and video recordings, as well as the deployment of researchers to conduct field survey and document the processes of the events. The whole survey is expected to complete in the first half of 2012. The LCSD will establish a database of the ICH in Hong Kong, which will keep a list of inventory items together with the information gathered through studies and researches of the items. The information will be made available for public access and updated on an on-going basis.

Application for Inscription

9. Given the historical and cultural values of the Jiao-festival, the Government engaged academics in 2009 to collate the data and records obtained through years of research on the Festival. In September 2009, the Government made an application to the Chinese Ministry of Culture for the inscription of four ICH items in Hong Kong, including the Jiao-festival, on the third national list of ICH, in order to raise public concern and awareness of these items. At the end of May this year, the State Council approved the third national list of ICH and these four items are all inscribed onto the list, which demonstrates the Central People's Government's recognition of the historical and cultural values of the Jiao-festival.

Bun Scrambling

10. Bun scrambling is one of the highlights of the Jiao-festival. However, the activity was brought to a halt for 26 years after a bun tower collapsed in 1978, injuring dozens of people. In 2005, the LCSD re-organised bun scrambling in collaboration with the Hong Kong Jiao-festival of Cheung Chau Committee (the Committee). Elements of modern architecture and sport technology have now been incorporated in the structure of the bun towers as well as the climbing method, resulting in enhanced safety of the activity.

11. The Climbing Carnival is staged to enable the public to enjoy the fun of bun tower climbing. The activities include game stalls, handicraft making, variety show and climbing demonstrations. Regarding the Bun Scrambling Competition, climbing training is provided for the participants. In addition to the event for individual, an invitation relay is organised for climbing athletes from neighbouring cities and local groups in Cheung Chau. The Bun Carnival held every year since the re-commissioning of the Bun Scrambling Competition in 2005 have been well received by the public. Not only have they attracted over 10 000 participants but also tens of thousands of local and overseas spectators. Among these programmes, the Bun Scrambling Competition has been the focus of attention and has become one of the most representative traditional festive events in Hong Kong. It helps boost the economy of Cheung Chau, create commercial opportunities and promote tourism in Hong Kong.

12. Apart from bun scrambling, the Grand Parade is also a highlight of the Jiao-festival. The Islands District Office was the co-organiser of both activities. It also coordinated various government departments and organisations to assist in the smooth conduct of these activities, which included crowd management and control, fire services, temporary toilets, transport and traffic, media arrangements, cleansing of streets and medical auxiliary services, etc, so that the activities could be carried out in a smooth and orderly manner. The Community Affairs, Culture and Recreation Committee of the Islands District Council also provided financial subsidy to the Grand Parade and the Bun Carnival.

Educational and Promotional Programmes

13. To tie in with the application for the inscription of the Jiao-festival, the HKHM has launched a series of educational and promotional programmes from 2009 to 2011. These include (1) the International Conference on Intangible Cultural Heritage and Local Communities in East Asia, during one session of which expert(s) were invited to use the Jiao-festival as a case study to explore the direction of conservation of the ICH in Hong Kong; (2) public lectures and field visits with the Jiao-festival as the theme; and (3) the “Application for Incription on the Third National List of ICH” exhibition held at the Museum and the Mid-Autumn Lantern Carnival in Victoria Park, introducing the origin, history, contents and transmission of the Festival.

14. In addition, in 2010 the Islands District Office has assisted the Islands District Council in promoting the various activities held during the Jiao-festival through its introduction of tourism of the district. The Government has also been working with the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) to actively promote Hong Kong's cultural tourism so as to introduce the cultural characteristics of Hong Kong's traditional festivals among overseas visitors. This year, the programmes of the four traditional festivals in April and May (namely the birthdays of Tin Hau, Lord Buddha and Tam Kung and the Jiao-festival of Cheung Chau) are packaged by HKTB under its “Hong Kong Cultural Celebrations” to promote Hong Kong's traditional festivals to the visitors. The floating colours parade, which is full of local characteristics, is one of the highlights of HKTB's promotion of the Jiao-festival. This year, with the support of the Committee, HKTB produced a fun viral video to tell the story behind the parade and uploaded this video on online video sharing sites. HKTB also produced a dedicated website and activities guide on the “Hong Kong Cultural Celebrations” which covered the Jiao-festival. Apart from that, HKTB arranged a Cheung Chau bun tower mascot to greet visitors at the Hong Kong International Airport so as to create a festive atmosphere to the visitors. Each year, HKTB issues circulars to the travel trades, including local travel agencies, to notify them of the programmes of the promotional campaigns, including the Jiao-festival. HKTB also encourages the travel trade to develop festival-themed tour products and incorporate them into the travel itineraries for visitors to experience these fun-filled festivals. This year, guided tours themed on the Jiao-festival, such as “Bun Festival Tour” and “Cheung Chau Island Floating Colours Parade” have been organised by local travel agencies.

Conclusion

15. During the process of transmission, the ICH evolves in response to social and environmental changes over time. Passed down from generation to generation for over a hundred years, the Jiao-festival has been evolving with changes in society, both in its rituals and contents. The Jiao-festival has been inscribed onto the third national list of ICH, and the Government will continue to liaise and work closely with the Committee and provide it with support for the continuation and development of this precious local traditional culture.

Home Affairs Bureau

June 2011