

For information on
15 March 2012

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the efforts made by the Government to safeguard intangible cultural heritage (ICH), including initiatives to support the development of Cantonese opera.

Policy Objectives

2. The Government attaches great importance to the safeguarding of ICH and strives to raise the Hong Kong community's awareness of the importance of ICH and the need to protect such heritage as our cultural resource. The Government supports the protection, transmission and promotion of ICH, and encourages the participation of the community in the safeguarding of ICH to ensure the continuing development of our local culture and traditions.

Intangible Cultural Heritage

3. According to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (the Convention) adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), ICH means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups (or individuals) recognise as part of their cultural heritage. The ICH, transmitted from generation to generation and constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, as well as their interaction with nature and their history, provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. The ICH is manifested in the following domains:

- (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the ICH;
- (b) performing arts;
- (c) social practices, rituals and festive events;
- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and
- (e) traditional craftsmanship.

4. The Convention defines “safeguarding” as measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the ICH, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage.

5. Based on the framework set out in the Convention, the Government has been supporting the safeguarding of ICH through various means, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, promotion and transmission of such heritage. In 2008, the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) established the Intangible Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee (ICH Advisory Committee), comprising local academics, experts and community personalities, to advise the Government on the territory-wide survey of ICH and measures to safeguard the ICH.

Identification and Documentation

Territory-wide Survey of ICH in Hong Kong

6. The Convention stipulates that each State Party shall draw up, in a manner geared to its own situation, one or more inventories of the ICH present in its territory for identification and safeguarding. We are now actively conducting the first territory-wide survey of ICH in Hong Kong, which seeks to identify and document the various ICH items present in the territory and gather enough information for drawing up the first inventory of Hong Kong’s ICH. The Government submitted a paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)1090/08-09(01)) to the Panel on 20 March 2009 to inform Members of the survey plan. On 11 February 2011, a subsequent paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)957/10-11 (03)) was submitted to the Panel to update Members on the progress of the survey.

7. In August 2009, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) commissioned the South China Research Center (SCRC) of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) to conduct

the territory-wide survey which covers all the districts in Hong Kong. To conduct the survey in a systematic manner, the SCRC gathered existing written records, archives and video recordings from university libraries, public libraries, the Public Records Office, museums and academic publications to have a preliminary understanding of the existing conditions of various ICH items in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the SCRC also deployed researchers to inspect and document different ICH items, and to look for and interview people familiar with the ICH items in order to take the oral history of the items with a view to gaining insights into the history and contents of the items and their transmitters' experience.

8. In order to involve the community in the survey, representatives of the LCSD and the SCRC attended a number of meetings held by the district organisations including the meetings of the 18 District Councils and Heung Yee Kuk to explain the details of the survey. The publicity work on the survey has been carried out through various channels, such as press releases, posters, leaflets and websites. Over 1 000 letters have been sent out to non-government organisations and local associations, including clansman associations, business associations, kaifong welfare associations and residents' associations, inviting them to provide information on the ICH. Submissions by the public and local associations were also encouraged.

9. The survey is now in its final stage. The SCRC will submit the final report on the territory-wide survey to the ICH Advisory Committee in mid-2012. Upon completion of the survey, the Government will compile the first inventory of Hong Kong's ICH in consultation with the ICH Advisory Committee. The LCSD will set up a database of the ICH in Hong Kong, which will contain 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.

Inscription of the ICH in Hong Kong

10. To promote among the public a better understanding of Hong Kong's ICH, the Governments of Hong Kong, Macao and Guangdong province jointly applied for the inscription of Cantonese opera and traditional herbal teas on the national list of ICH in 2006. In 2009, the application submitted through the Central Government to the UNESCO for the inscription of Cantonese opera on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was successfully approved, making Cantonese opera the first item of the world ICH in the three regions and hence gaining greater recognition of the art of Cantonese opera. In addition, the Government of the Hong Kong Special

Administrative Region (HKSAR) also submitted an application to the Central Government for the inscription of the Jiao-festival of Cheung Chau, the dragon boat water parade of Tai O, the fire dragon dance of Tai Hang, and the Yu Lan Ghost Festival of the Hong Kong Chiu Chow Community onto the third national list of ICH. In 2011, the inscription of these four traditional festivals which have been transmitted from generation to generation in the local community for more than a century was approved, thus confirming their historical and cultural values.

Protection, Promotion and Transmission of ICH

11. Regarding study and preservation of ICH, the Hong Kong Heritage Museum (HKHM) and Hong Kong Museum of History under the LCSD strive to study and preserve local ICH including traditional folk customs, festive events and craftsmanship. The Hong Kong Museum of History has conducted researches on local traditional festive events, trades and craftsmanship. Meanwhile, the HKHM has been studying and documenting the jiao-festival, ancestral worship of different clans and traditional handicrafts and collecting related artefacts.

12. As regards the preservation of Hong Kong music archive and promotion of studies and researches on Hong Kong music, the Hong Kong Central Library, Hong Kong Arts Development Council and the Composers and Authors Society of Hong Kong have jointly organised the “Hong Kong Music Collection Campaign” in December 2001. As at the end of 2011, the Central Library has collected 75 000 items of music documents, including manuscripts of music scores, lyrics and opera scripts, audio-visual materials, photos, leaflets, house programmes or posters of musical performances as well as newspaper clippings, donated by many local musicians and musical institutes. These materials are available for reference and research by the public.

13. To foster the community’s interest in and understanding and appreciation of ICH, the HKHM has organised various public lectures, seminars, demonstrations, field trips and thematic exhibitions on ICH. For instance, in 2007, it organised a series of public lectures on Hong Kong’s ICH in collaboration with the HKUST. In 2008, it held an exhibition on ICH of China as well as a series of seminars, public lectures and demonstrations. In 2010, it organised an exhibition and a series of seminars, demonstrations and field trips to tie in with the application for inscription of four local traditional festivals onto the third national list of ICH and improve the public’s understanding of the ICH in Hong Kong. In October 2011, it staged the “Genesis and Spirit: A Showcase of Intangible Cultural Heritage of China” exhibition jointly presented by the

Ministry of Culture of China and the HAB, featuring the historical development and safeguarding measures of ICH in the Mainland and the safeguarding work of the HKSAR.

14. To coincide with the implementation of the New Secondary School (NSS) Curriculum, the HKHM teamed up with the Education Bureau (EDB) to organise a programme specially tailored for secondary school teachers in 2011. Adopting the train-the-trainer approach, the programme, comprising a seminar entitled “Intangible Cultural Heritage – Learning and Teaching” and a field study on the dragon boat water parade of Tai O, aimed to enhance the teachers’ understanding of our local ICH and assist them in planning and implementing related teaching activities. Through co-ordination with the school sector, it is hoped that teaching of ICH can be integrated into the NSS Curriculum so as to pass on the knowledge to Hong Kong’s younger generations for promoting the transmission of local culture and traditions.

15. In respect of promoting local traditional craftsmanship, the HKHM has been inviting local paper-craft masters to produce traditional hand-made festive paper crafts, including lanterns and paper effigies of dragon, lion and unicorn for display in the Mid-Autumn and Lunar New Year lantern carnivals organised by the Entertainment Office of the LCSD since 2010. There were also live demonstrations of paper-crafting to promote local folk crafts among the public and overseas visitors.

16. To promote local traditional music, the LCSD organises series of Cantonese music. In 2011, the LCSD presented the Lingnan Music Series, featuring music of Guangdong, Chaozhou and Hakka as well as local Hakka *Shange* (mountain songs). In recent years, many veteran Cantonese music performers from Hong Kong, the Mainland and overseas have been invited. The LCSD also organises Nanyin concerts by a number of artists every year. In 2012, the converted Yau Ma Tei Theatre will stage a series of Nanyin concerts given by singers from Guangdong province, Hong Kong and Macao with a view to promoting ICH.

17. Starting with the inscription of the four ICH items onto the national list of ICH, we will take further steps to implement specific protection and promotional measures. We have liaised with the bearer organisations of these four ICH items to discuss how we can help to support their work and implement specific measures, including in-depth researches, exhibitions, publications, as well as educational and promotional programmes. The following are some of the measures currently in place:

- (a) On the research front, the HKHM has commissioned the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct, in the form of an oral history study, in-depth interviews with the organising committees and elderly participants of the Jiao-festival of Cheung Chau 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. The Museum also plans to commission academic institutions to carry out in-depth studies on the dragon boat water parade of Tai O and the fire dragon dance of Tai Hang and publish their findings in order to raise public awareness of these ICH items;
- (b) On educational and promotional programmes, the HKHM will continue to enhance the promotion of the four ICH items through educational programmes. For example, the Museum joined hands with the EDB in organising a cultural research activity for teachers last year, giving them the opportunity to take part in the dragon boat water parade of Tai O and acquire the necessary techniques in leading students on similar occasions. Encouraged by last year's success, the Museum will once again team up with the EDB in organising activities specially designed for history teachers teaching the NSS Curriculum in April and September, including seminars and field studies on the Jiao-festival of Cheung Chau and the fire dragon dance of Tai Hang. Moreover, the Museum will continue to conduct field studies on the Yu Lan Ghost Festival of the Hong Kong Chiu Chow Community to enhance public understanding of the festival;
- (c) The Government actively encourages other organisations, including District Councils and the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust to provide funding support to event organisers; and
- (d) The Lord Wilson Heritage Trust under the HAB has funded the building of dragon boats and deity boats used in the dragon boat water parade of Tai O to support the continuation of this unique religious activity.

18. The Lord Wilson Heritage Trust has also provided funding support to projects aimed at preserving and recording ICH items in Hong Kong, including local festive events, ceremonies of offering sacrifices to deities, customs of the Hakka community, fishermen's music, and dialects of Hong Kong's indigenous people (including Waitou dialect, Hakka dialect, Tingkok dialect and Tung Ping Chau dialect). The Trust has also sponsored education and promotion projects, such as the protection and promotion project of fishermen's culture, and the education and publication project of Cantonese opera in bamboo theatre.

19. To promote international exchange, the HKHM cooperated with the Chinese University of Hong Kong in organising a 5-day international seminar on Cantonese opera in 2007. In 2009, the Museum and the SCRC of HKUST jointly organised the "International Conference on Intangible Cultural Heritage and Local Communities in East Asia". Moreover, the HAB held the 7th Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum in October 2011, under the theme "Intangible Cultural Heritage – Continuation and Enhancement". Cultural Ministers and leading officials of 11 Asian economies, including China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, shared their insights and experiences of translating the vision of supporting the continuation and enhancement of ICH into actions.

Initiatives to Support the Development of Cantonese Opera

20. The Government has been supporting the preservation, study, promotion and development of Cantonese opera in the following ways:

- (a) developing performance venues for Cantonese opera;
- (b) nurturing Cantonese opera professionals, preserving the traditions and promoting creative works;
- (c) promoting Cantonese opera education, audience building and community participation;
- (d) fostering cultural exchange and co-operation among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao; and
- (e) preserving the essence of Cantonese opera and showcasing treasures of our cultural heritage.

21. The HAB set up the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee (COAC) in 2004 to advise the Government on policies and issues in relation to the promotion, preservation, study and development of Cantonese opera. In 2005, the Cantonese Opera Development Fund (CODF) was established to raise funds to provide funding support to

programmes and activities relating to the study, promotion and sustainable development of Cantonese opera.

Developing Performance Venues for Cantonese Opera

22. In recent years, the Government has adopted a series of measures to support the development of performance venues for Cantonese opera. Among performance venues managed by the LCSD, the Ko Shan Theatre, which has 1 031 seats, is a dedicated venue for Cantonese opera. The LCSD has also reserved time slots at five major performance venues, namely, 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 for priority hiring by professional Cantonese opera troupes. Through LCSD's "Venue Partnership Scheme", local Cantonese opera troupes can apply to become venue partners which entitle them to use the venues for Cantonese opera performances and related activities for an agreed number of days at no charge. In 2012-13, LCSD will implement the "Venue Partnership Scheme" at the Sha Tin Town Hall, the Tuen Mun Town Hall, the Yuen Long Theatre and the soon-to-be-opened Yau Ma Tei Theatre, with local Cantonese opera organisations as venue partners.

23. The Government has also been developing performance venues of various scales for Cantonese opera. The Yau Ma Tei Theatre, which has 300 seats and is scheduled for opening in mid-2012, will serve as a cradle to nurture new Cantonese opera talents. The conversion works have already been completed while the installation and testing of stage systems and audio equipment are underway. An annex building to the Ko Shan Theatre is being built to provide a medium-sized auditorium of 600 seats. The project is expected to be completed in 2013 and will further enhance the Ko Shan Theatre's function as a dedicated venue for Cantonese opera. In addition, a Xiqu Centre in West Kowloon Cultural District with a large theatre of 1 100 seats is being planned and expected to be completed in 2015-16.

Preserving and Promoting Cantonese Opera

24. The CODF has granted about \$53 million to support more than 410 Cantonese opera projects since its establishment. In addition to funding performances, cultural exchanges, arts education programmes, professional training, and preservation and community promotional projects, the CODF has subsidised venue development projects as well as research and archival projects to provide comprehensive support for the development of Cantonese opera. Since receiving an injection of \$69 million from the Government, the CODF has stepped up its support and

funding for projects and activities which aimed at facilitating and promoting the continued development of Cantonese opera, including launching the “Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Troupe for New Talent” three-year grant scheme to systematically nurture more budding artists in Cantonese opera, and supporting the “Yau Ma Tei Theatre Venue Partnership Scheme” with a view to developing the theatre into a cradle for nurturing Cantonese opera new talents. The CODF has also sponsored projects on preserving the essence of Cantonese opera masters through video-recording, for example the publication project of a DVD/book set entitled “The Artistic Achievements of Leung Hon Wai: A Guided Appreciation of Hu Xueyan and The Glorious Zhen Guan Years of Tang Dynasty”. The CODF has made the preservation of the artistry of Cantonese opera masters one of its priorities, and has been encouraging organisations to submit grant applications for video-recording of the highlight performances of Cantonese opera masters and the publication of related documents.

25. On top of the funding support provided by the CODF, the Government has supported the development of Cantonese opera through different channels and means. These include support by the LCSD to over 550 Cantonese opera and operatic singing activities each year, to Cantonese opera organisations taking part in the LCSD’s “Venue Partnership Scheme” and to the HKHM in collecting, studying and showcasing Cantonese operatic artefacts; funding of Cantonese opera performances, education, promotion and other development projects by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council; and subsidy by the HAB for Cantonese opera programmes organised by the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. In 2012-13, we estimate that around \$32 million will be spent for the above work.

26. Throughout the year, the Theatre and Chinese Opera Office of the LCSD stages a variety of Chinese operatic presentations, particularly Cantonese opera. On the promotion and development of Cantonese opera, major projects in the LCSD’s 2012-13 work plan include:

- (a) To continue organising the “Chinese Opera Festival” between June and August 2012 featuring performances by prominent Hong Kong and Mainland opera troupes (including Cantonese opera). In the long run, the LCSD plans to hold the Festival around the same time every year in order to present the best of traditional Chinese opera performances in Hong Kong, thereby making Hong Kong a platform for showcasing traditional Chinese culture. Seminars on the performing art of Cantonese opera masters will also be held during the Festival;

- (b) To continue presenting classical repertoires of Cantonese opera masters or Paichang Xi repertoires of Cantonese opera in 2012-13 by inviting experienced artists to perform masterpieces of the masters or teach performing skills of ancient Paichang Xi with a view to further preserving and promoting the art of Cantonese opera;
- (c) To continue organising the “Cantonese Opera Day” which was originated from the Cultural Cooperation Meeting between the cultural departments of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao first held at the end of 2002. Each year, the last Sunday of November is designated as the “Cantonese Opera Day”. Large-scale activities will be organised to arouse the public’s interest in Cantonese opera and further the objectives of promoting and preserving this local art form by the public’s participation in these activities. The LCSD has organised nine “Cantonese Opera Days” between 2003 and 2011, and 2012 will mark the 10th anniversary of the event. To commemorate the occasion, the LCSD will invite children’s troupes from Hong Kong to perform excerpts of Cantonese opera, provide more performance platforms for talented young Cantonese opera performers, and step up efforts to follow up the inscription of Cantonese opera on the Representative List and further the preservation of the art form through a variety of educational activities, such as workshops and seminars;
- (d) To organise “District Cantonese Opera Parade” which seeks to help preserving the art form by promoting Cantonese opera at the community level, providing performance opportunities for emerging artists to sharpen their skills and nurturing budding Cantonese opera troupes;
- (e) To organise “Let's Enjoy Cantonese Opera in Bamboo Theatre” featuring Cantonese opera excerpts and interactive educational activities tailor-made for students during ritual performances of Cantonese opera at traditional festivals. The programme aims to arouse students’ interest in Cantonese opera by giving them an opportunity to set foot inside a bamboo theatre; and
- (f) To provide Chinese and English surtitles for some classical and new Cantonese opera productions to attract visitors and introduce Cantonese opera to the international audience. The project was launched in 2008 and bilingual surtitles have been uploaded to the LCSD’s website since 2010 to increase the audience’s interest and knowledge in Cantonese opera.

27. To preserve the Cantonese operatic heritage, the HKHM, the Hong Kong Museum of History, the Hong Kong Film Archive and the Hong Kong Central Library under the LCSD have their own collections of artefacts, films and other relevant materials relating to Cantonese opera. In particular, the HKHM is specialised in collecting, studying and showcasing Cantonese operatic artefacts. Its Cantonese Opera Heritage Hall collects and showcases various operatic treasures, including documentary materials, libretti, handbills, special issues, photos, newspapers, song books, costumes, stage props, musical instruments, masks and records. It has so far built up a collection of over 20 000 items. The HKHM also organises thematic exhibitions from time to time. For example, exhibitions entitled “Fong Yim Fun – Life & Work of a Female Cantonese Opera Artist”, “A Synthesis of Lyrical Excellence and Martial Agility – The Stage Art of Ng Kwan Lai”, “The Majestic Stage: The Story of Cantonese Opera Theatres”, and “Splendour of Cantonese Opera: Masters Tong Tik Sang and Yam Kim Fai” were held in 2002, 2004, 2008 and 2009 respectively. The HKHM is currently holding a thematic exhibition called “Virtuosity and Innovation: The Masterful Legacy of Lam Kar Sing”. These exhibitions are very popular among the public. Apart from preserving and displaying Cantonese operatic relics, the HKHM also invites experts and scholars of Cantonese opera to study its collections and plans to publish related publications.

28. Furthermore, since 2000, LCSD has video-recorded over 30 new and classical Cantonese opera plays and Paichang Xi casted by Cantonese opera masters, and has video-interviewed experienced Cantonese opera artists, such as Ng Kwan Lai and Li Chi Kei, Danny, etc. To commemorate the centenary of the birth of Madam Yam Kim Fai, LCSD plans to stage “Yam Kim Fai’s Classics” and screen related movies in early 2013. Subject to the consent of all performers, LCSD will also make arrangement for the video-recording of these performances. Besides, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC) has subsidised the “Video-recording of Renowned Cantonese Opera Artists” project (to archive the works of Wan Fai Yin, Yam Bing Yee, etc through video-recording). HKADC is also designing a commissioned grant scheme to archive the work of master artists through performances, video-recording and publication.

Way Forward

29. The Government will closely monitor the progress of the territory-wide survey of ICH to ensure that it will be completed in mid-2012. The Government will then compile an ICH inventory and establish the related database. The survey findings will help us implement, in accordance with different actual circumstances, more measures to safeguard Hong Kong's ICH, including work relating to their identification, documentation, research, preservation and promotion. In addition to Government's financial and manpower support, we are actively encouraging the participation and support of different sectors of the community with a view to achieving the objective of safeguarding local ICH. In continuing with the local ICH (including Cantonese opera) safeguarding work, we will take account of views from different parties, including the ICH Advisory Committee, the COAC, the CODF Advisory Committee, as well as the Cantonese opera sector and other related fields.

Home Affairs Bureau
March 2012