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Panel on Home Affairs

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 13 June 2014**

Hong Kong's first intangible cultural heritage inventory

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Administration's compilation of Hong Kong's first intangible cultural heritage ("ICH") inventory, and summarizes major views and concerns of members of the Panel on Home Affairs ("the Panel") on issues relating to the subject.

Background

Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

2. The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage ("the Convention") adopted in October 2003 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization was extended to Hong Kong in December 2004. The Convention stipulates, among other things, that each State Party shall identify and define the various elements of ICH present in its territory with the participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations for the purpose of establishing an ICH inventory.

3. According to the Convention, ICH refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills (as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith) that communities, groups or individuals of the territory recognize as part of their cultural heritage. To qualify as an ICH, the item must be transmitted from generation to generation and is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and also provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human

creativity.

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

Territory-wide survey on Hong Kong's ICH

5. In compliance with the Convention, the Administration planned to conduct a territory-wide survey on ICH ("the survey") in Hong Kong with a view to establishing an ICH inventory. In 2006, the Administration commissioned the Division of Humanities of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology ("HKUST") to carry out a pilot study on ICH in Hong Kong. The study report also made recommendations on how the survey should be conducted, including the methodology and composition of survey teams. In July 2008, the Government set up the ICH Advisory Committee ("ICHAC") to steer and to advise on the conduct of the territory-wide survey on Hong Kong's ICH.

6. In August 2009, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department ("LCSD") commissioned the South China Research Center ("SCRC") of HKUST to conduct a territory-wide survey of ICH in Hong Kong with a view to collecting research data for compiling Hong Kong's first ICH inventory. The survey was carried out in two stages: (a) documentary research; and (b) field study and oral history survey (e.g. interview with the bearers). SCRC/HKUST's survey team reported results of the documentary research and progress of the field work to ICHAC regularly between 2010 and 2012.

7. ICHAC has deliberated the criteria for shortlisting surveyed items for inclusion in the ICH inventory. Noting that the purpose of the territory-wide survey is to consider whether a surveyed item can pass the threshold of meeting the Convention's definition as set out in paragraph 3 above (i.e. it is transmitted from generation to generation and provides the community and group with a sense of identity and continuity), ICHAC agrees that an item falling within the five domains mentioned in paragraph 4 above and meeting the threshold should be included in the draft ICH inventory for public consultation at a later stage.

In-depth assessment of the relative cultural heritage value and importance of individual items will be conducted when ICHAC selects and nominates items for the representative list of ICH for Hong Kong.

Public consultation on the draft ICH inventory

8. Taking into consideration the views and suggestions made by ICHAC, SCRC/HKUST completed in early 2013 the survey report which provides detailed research data on nearly 800 survey cases and a draft ICH inventory of over 200 major items. In addition, there are quite a number of "sub-items" under some "major items" (e.g. Yu Lan Ghost Festival or Jiao Festival) as they take place in different areas/communities in Hong Kong or follow different traditions.

9. While the survey report and the draft ICH inventory were subsequently discussed and endorsed by ICHAC, ICHAC considered that some of the survey cases required further research and/or deliberation before a recommendation could be made on whether they should be included in the draft ICH inventory. In view of the complications encountered by the survey team in conducting field work for certain items (e.g. no bearers could be found to conduct interviews; the bearers refused to provide information due to commercial secrets; and the scope of the item was too wide and involved complex definitions), ICHAC agreed that those items should be re-examined when more information could be gathered.

10. To involve the community in the drawing up of the ICH inventory of Hong Kong, LCSD launched a four-month public consultation, commencing from July 2013, to gauge public views on the draft inventory list recommended by ICHAC. According to the Administration, LCSD would attend meetings/briefings organized by various district organizations including the 18 District Councils and Heung Yee Kuk. It would take into account the public views received and consult ICHAC again before publishing the first finalized ICH inventory list for Hong Kong in 2014.

Members' views and concerns

11. The Administration briefed the Panel on the outcome of the first territory-wide survey of ICH in Hong Kong at the meeting on 14 June 2013. Members examined the draft ICH inventory and the list of items to be further considered. Members' major views and concerns are summarized below.

Criteria for inscription of items as ICH

12. Members enquired about the criteria for an item to be manifested as an

ICH and considered for inclusion into the ICH inventory of Hong Kong. As advised by the Administration, according to the Convention, to qualify as an ICH, an item must, among others, be transmitted from generation to generation and was constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history. From a historical perspective, "generation to generation" meant a considerably long period of time and ICHAC recommended that an ICH item should have passed down through two to three generations (i.e. around 70 to 80 years).

13. Noting that SCRC/HKUST had assessed each of the surveyed items in regards to the following aspects: (a) the number of practitioners, (b) status of transmission, (c) uniqueness as Hong Kong's ICH, (d) historical depth, and (e) association with community, members asked whether these factors carried equal weighting.

14. According to the Administration, ICHAC had discussed in detail the shortlisting criteria for inclusion of surveyed items in the draft ICH inventory. The draft inventory drawn up from the first territory-wide survey was not meant to be all inclusive and exhaustive. As the purpose of the survey was to consider whether a surveyed item could pass the threshold of meeting the Convention's definition, an item falling within the five domains under the Convention and meeting the threshold would be included in the draft ICH inventory for public consultation. In-depth assessment of the relative heritage value and importance of individual items would be conducted with a view to selecting the representative items of ICH for Hong Kong.

Mechanism for updating the ICH inventory

15. In response to an enquiry on whether there would be a limit on the number of items for inclusion into the ICH inventory, the Administration advised that the content of the inventory would be enriched periodically with information of individual items to be updated and new items to be included and no limit had been set. The Government would, in consultation with ICHAC, devise a mechanism for updating the information of individual items and inclusion of additional items into the ICH inventory. The community would continue to be involved in the process.

Safeguarding and transmission of ICH items

16. Members enquired about the Administration's timetable for finalizing and publishing the first ICH inventory list. Concern was raised about how the Administration would follow up on the recommendations made in SCRC/HKUST's survey report. Stressing the importance of protecting and preserving endangered ICH items, members enquired about the resources to be

allocated for safeguarding and transmission of ICH items and whether consideration would be given to prioritizing ICH items so that more resources would be given to protect and promote those items of high heritage value.

17. The Administration advised that a four-month public consultation would be launched commencing from July 2013 to gauge public views on the draft inventory. Subject to the public views received, the Administration would consult ICHAC again before publishing the first ICH inventory list for Hong Kong. On the basis of the survey and Hong Kong's first ICH inventory, the Government would, in consultation with ICHAC, draw up measures to enhance the promotion, preservation and transmission of the ICH items. Having regard to the differences among various ICH items in terms of their importance, nature and urgency for immediate protection actions, a host of safeguarding measures which covered identification, documentation, in-depth research, preservation, promotion and transmission of the heritage would be devised and implemented. Consideration would be given to selecting items of high heritage value from the ICH inventory for drawing up a representative list of ICH for Hong Kong, which would provide the Government with a basis for prioritizing resources and safeguarding measures, particularly for highly important and endangered ICH items. The Administration further advised that the threshold for inscription of an item onto the representative list was higher than that for the inventory, the former of which might include considerations such as uniqueness of the item, its historical, literary, artistic and scientific values, etc.

Latest developments

18. The Administration will report on the outcome of the public consultation and the finalized ICH inventory at the Panel meeting on 13 June 2014.

Relevant papers

19. A list of the relevant papers on the website of the Legislative Council is in the **Appendix**.

Appendix

Relevant papers on Hong Kong's first intangible cultural heritage inventory

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Home Affairs	14.6.2013 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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