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Panel on Home Affairs

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 11 May 2015**

Safeguarding and promotion of intangible cultural heritage in Hong Kong

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Administration's work on safeguarding and promotion of intangible cultural heritage ("ICH") in Hong Kong, and summarizes major views and concerns of members of the Panel on Home Affairs ("the Panel") on 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.

The first intangible cultural heritage inventory of Hong Kong

5. 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 Hong Kong's ICH. In July 2008, the Home Affairs Bureau set up the ICH Advisory Committee ("ICHAC") to steer and to advise on the territory-wide survey of ICH and measures to safeguard ICH. In August 2009, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department ("LCSD") commissioned the South China Research Center of HKUST to conduct a territory-wide survey of ICH in Hong Kong with a view to collecting research data for compiling the first ICH inventory of Hong Kong. The Panel was briefed on the draft ICH inventory of Hong Kong in June 2013. To involve the community in the drawing up of the ICH inventory of Hong Kong, LCSD launched a four-month public consultation exercise between July and November 2013.

6. When the Panel was briefed on the promulgation of the first ICH inventory of Hong Kong at its meeting in June 2014, members were advised that the first ICH inventory of Hong Kong included 480 items. According to the Administration, due to resource and time constraints, the inventory drawn up from the first territory-wide survey only included items with sufficient information, and a total of 149 other items which lacked detailed information at the present stage¹ could only be submitted to ICHAC for consideration after further research and more information was gathered. The Administration would, in consultation with ICHAC, devise a mechanism for updating the inventory regularly and for the submission of proposals by the public.

7. Members were also advised that based on the findings of the territory-wide survey and the first inventory of ICH, the Administration would devise and implement safeguarding measures, which might include (a) launching a

¹ The survey team encountered complications 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, the scope of the item was too wide and involved complex definitions.

preliminary online ICH database which provided information on the 480 inventory items for public access; (b) selecting items of high cultural value which required urgent preservation from the inventory for more in-depth study and drawing up the first representative list of ICH for Hong Kong; (c) in the long run, selecting suitable items on the representative list to respond to invitations from the the Ministry of Culture for application for inscription on the national list of ICH; and (d) organizing different types of educational and promotional activities through collaboration between the Hong Kong Heritage Museum and local educational institutions, communities, as well as the individual bearers and bearer organizations of ICH items.

Members' views and concerns

8. Members' major views and concerns on issues relating to safeguarding and promotion of ICH in Hong Kong expressed at the Panel meetings in June 2013 and June 2014 are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Compilation and updating of the ICH inventory

9. Members were concerned about the criteria for an item to be manifested as an ICH and considered for inclusion into the ICH inventory of Hong Kong, and whether there would be a limit on the number of items for inclusion into the ICH inventory. Concern was also raised about the Administration's follow-up plan on the first ICH inventory, in particular in respect of adding more information to ICH items already in the inventory and expanding the list to cover those items which lacked detailed information at the present stage and could only be submitted to ICHAC for consideration after further research and study.

10. The Administration advised that 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). The Administration would, in consultation with ICHAC, devise a mechanism for updating/enriching the content of individual items in the inventory and for the submission of proposals by the public for ICHAC's consideration of adding new items.

Safeguarding and transmission of ICH items

11. Members stressed the importance of protecting and preserving endangered ICH items, and expressed deep concern about the safeguarding measures to be

taken by the Administration for the promotion and transmission of the 480 items in the first ICH inventory, particularly those of high cultural value. The Administration was urged to allocate additional resources for safeguarding and transmission of ICH items, and consider prioritizing ICH items so that more resources would be given to protect and promote those items of high heritage value. There was also a view that the Administration should proactively involve communities, groups and, sometimes, individuals in safeguarding ICH.

12. The Administration advised that 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. The Hong Kong Heritage Museum and the Hong Kong Museum of History had been organizing activities in the format of seminars, talks, field visits and demonstrations to promote local ICH to the public. Closer collaboration between the Hong Kong Heritage Museum and local educational institutions, communities, as well as the individual bearers and bearer organizations of ICH items would also be strengthened.

13. Following the promulgation of the first ICH inventory, the Administration would consider 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 Administration with a basis for prioritizing resources and safeguarding measures, particularly for highly important and endangered ICH items. 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.

Recent developments

14. According to the Administration's reply to Members' initial written questions during the examination of the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-2016, the Administration in 2015-2016 would set up a dedicated ICH Office at an estimated expenditure of \$6 million. In addition, an annual funding of \$10 million had been earmarked for the operation of the new ICH Office and for the implementation of safeguarding and promotion of ICH.

15. The Administration will update the Panel on the progress of its work on safeguarding and promotion of ICH in Hong Kong at the meeting on 11 May 2015.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
4 May 2015

**Relevant papers on
Safeguarding and promotion of intangible cultural heritage in Hong Kong**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Home Affairs	14.6.2013 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
	17.6.2014 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes

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