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**Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of
the West Kowloon Cultural District Project**

Meeting on 9 February 2018

Updated background brief on the development of Xiqu Centre

Purpose

This paper provides updated background information on the Xiqu Centre in the West Kowloon Cultural District ("WKCD"). It also summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by members of the Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the West Kowloon Cultural District Project ("the Joint Subcommittee") on issues relating to the development of the Xiqu Centre.

Background

2. The Xiqu Centre, located on the corner of Canton Road and Austin Road West at the eastern edge of WKCD, will be the first core arts and cultural facility to be opened in WKCD. According to the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority ("WKCDA"), the Xiqu Centre will be positioned to become the best venue for Xiqu in the region in a world-class facility with a core mission to preserve and develop the art of Xiqu, which includes Cantonese opera and other Xiqu genres.

3. The design and the design consultant for the Xiqu Centre, Bing Thom Architects and Ronald Lu & Partners Company Limited, were selected from the Xiqu Centre Design Competition launched in 2012. The winning concept features a lantern-like design integrating the core elements of traditional Chinese architecture, namely, a gateway and pavilion, a courtyard, nature and the concept of "qi", the flow and transition between internal structures and

neighbouring buildings. The six-storey Xiqu Centre, occupying an area of 13 800 square metres, comprises a 1 050-seat Grand Theatre; a 200-seat Tea House Theatre, which is tea house with a performance stage; rehearsal and training spaces; arts education facilities; retail, dining and entertainment ("RDE") facilities; public open spaces as well as associated facilities such as car parking spaces. An illustration of the façade design of the Xiqu Centre and its location plan are in **Appendices I** and **II** respectively.

4. As advised by WKCDA in June 2017,¹ the target was to complete the Xiqu Centre building (with occupation permit obtained) in November 2017 for its soft opening in the third quarter of 2018.

Major views and concerns expressed by members

5. Issues relating to the development of the Xiqu Centre were discussed at meetings of the Joint Subcommittee. The major views and concerns expressed by members are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Project cost

6. Some members expressed grave concern that the estimated project cost for the Xiqu Centre and related facilities based on the chosen design stood at \$2.7 billion in money-of-the-day ("MOD") prices, which was more than double the cost estimate for the same facilities in 2006. Members were concerned if the the final project cost of the Xiqu Centre could be contained within the target budget.

7. The Administration and WKCDA advised that the estimated project cost of \$2.7 billion (in MOD prices) was based on the current scope of the Xiqu Centre, which included additional accommodation such as arts education facilities and increased open spaces. The Administration assured members that it was fully aware of its monitoring role and would request WKCDA to make every effort to adhere to the target budget and, where practicable, seek to further reduce the project cost.

8. WKCDA indicated that it had undertaken rigorous value engineering exercises to make the design of the Xiqu Centre more cost-effective thereby reducing the total project budget by up to \$100 million. While the development of the Xiqu Centre was still in progress and hence the final project cost could not be confirmed at this stage, a contingency fund was

¹ [LC Paper No. CB\(1\)1105/16-17\(01\)](#)

available to cater for any cost overrun. WKCDA would continue to explore and implement other possible cost-saving measures for the project without compromising the overall functions and quality of the facility.

9. Some members enquired whether the Xiqu Centre would operate on a self-financing basis, and whether the estimated project cost had taken into account depreciation expenses and repair and maintenance costs of its facilities, in addition to its daily operating expenses.

10. WKCDA advised that instead of applying the quest for self-sufficiency on a venue-by-venue basis, self-sufficiency would be strived for at the district level as theatres and museums generally would not generate much profit. Towards this end, WKCDA would have to offset the costly operation of the arts and cultural facilities by the income derived from the other elements in WKCD. Specifically, the RDE part of the commercial sites in WKCD, including the RDE facilities in the Xiqu Centre, would be vested in WKCDA to provide it with a steady source of recurrent income through rental proceeds. As for the operating and maintenance costs for the Xiqu Centre, such expenses would be borne by WKCDA and had already been budgeted.

11. Noting that the area of the RDE part in the Xiqu Centre had been reduced under the current scope, members expressed concern that this would have the effect of reducing the rental proceeds. They enquired about the reasons for such reduction. WKCDA advised that according to a consultancy study, given the lower pedestrian volumes, the RDE spaces on the upper floors of the Xiqu Centre were generally of less value than those on the ground floor. The proposed reduction of the floor area of RDE facilities on the upper floors sought only to enhance the overall efficiency of the provision of such spaces in the Xiqu Centre.

Design and facilities of Xiqu Centre

12. While some members appreciated the design of the Xiqu Centre and the facilities to be provided therein, some other members considered that the architectural design of the Xiqu Centre appeared to be lacking in traditional Xiqu elements.

13. WKCDA stressed that eminent representatives of the Xiqu community had been engaged as members of the Jury Panel for the Xiqu Centre Design Competition. It had been the specific request of the local Xiqu community that a more modern design should be adopted for the Xiqu Centre so as to enhance the appeal of Xiqu to the younger generation.

14. Some members enquired whether WKCDA would consider increasing the seating capacity of the Grand Theatre of the Xiqu Centre. Members also called on WKCDA to make available appropriate set-ups in the Grand Theatre and other theatres of the Xiqu Centre to achieve the best acoustic effects. There was also a suggestion that a multi-media library/resource centre should be set up to facilitate access to collections of Xiqu performances and Xiqu-related educational software by students and members of the public.

15. According to WKCDA, the seating capacity of the Grand Theatre, i.e. 1 050 seats, was proposed with reference to that of other Cantonese opera performance venues in Hong Kong (e.g. the Sunbeam Theatre),² and was considered ideal by the local Xiqu community. The Grand Theatre was designed specifically for the staging of Xiqu performances, where performers would be able to perform without microphones and speakers. Taking into account the needs of local troupes, WKCDA would provide rehearsal and production spaces in the venue to facilitate new productions and rehearsals by up-and-coming artistic talents. WKCDA had been in discussion with the Xiqu sector to explore methods to help preserve and reinvent the archives of Xiqu/Cantonese Opera. At the same time, WKCDA had been working on collection of scripts of Xiqu/Cantonese Opera performances and development of an online database for relevant documentation.

16. On members' views that appropriate barrier-free facilities should be provided in the Xiqu Centre, WKCDA advised that as it was expected that the Xiqu Centre would appeal to elderly people in particular, the building had been designed with a focus on facilitating universal access. Various facilities such as escalators, lifts, staircases and ramps with handrails would be provided to satisfy all public access requirements.

Governance and management structure of Xiqu Centre

17. On the future mode of governance of the Xiqu Centre, WKCDA advised that the Authority would directly operate the Xiqu Centre, instead of engaging a single troupe to take on a residency role there. An advisory committee would be set up to advise the WKCDA management on matters relating to the programming, partnership, management and operation of the Xiqu Centre. An Artistic Director, who would be responsible to the management and the Board of WKCDA, would be appointed to take charge of the artistic direction of the venue.

² The seating capacities of the two theatres of the Sunbeam Theatre are 1 033 and 340 respectively. (Source: <http://sunbeamtheatre.com/hk/facilities.php>)

18. Some members considered that apart from establishing the key artistic objectives for the Xiqu Centre, WKCDA should also draw up quantifiable and objective indicators to facilitate review of the operation and evaluation of the performance of the Xiqu Centre in different aspects. According to WKCDA, it was formulating a suitable business plan for the Xiqu Centre that would actively support its artistic visions. Issues such as hire charges for the facilities in the Xiqu Centre, charges for performances and number of performances to be staged, etc. would be considered.

Hiring policy

19. Some members held the view that well-known, high quality and long-run productions would appeal to visitors. Members noted that "supporting longer-run productions" was among the five proposed guiding principles for the venue hiring policy for WKCDA.³ In this context, members enquired about the definition of "longer-run" productions, and how WKCDA would support long-run productions in the Xiqu Centre, in particular, whether some Cantonese opera virtuosos would be allowed to mount major shows in the Xiqu Centre for a longer period. Some members also asked if non-Chinese opera programmes, e.g. pop music, drama, would be allowed to use the venues in the Xiqu Centre.

20. WKCDA advised that in Hong Kong, most of the Cantonese opera troupes usually staged performances for one week at a time, with six shows within the week. Only a few troupes could perform continuously for three to four weeks. WKCDA would strike a balance among the five guiding principles in considering venue applications with the top consideration being the artistic standing of the programmes. When other requirements were met, a hirer who intended to stage a longer-run performance would be given the priority. Also, Chinese opera programmes would be accorded priority in using the venues in the Xiqu Centre. If any venues were still available in the Xiqu Centre after the scheduling of Chinese opera programmes, WKCDA would flexibly allocate the resources to maximize the utilization, such as releasing the venues to artistic groups of different art forms or organizers of community activities.

³ The five guiding principles proposed by WKCDA were: (a) artistically-driven on the choice of programmes and companies; (b) maximizing utilization of each space; (c) user-friendly, flexible and responsive to market changes; (d) supporting longer run productions; and (e) taking into account financial implications. ([LC Paper No. CB\(1\)1105/16-17\(01\)](#))

Audience building for and positioning of Xiqu Centre

21. There was a suggestion that WKCDA should engage an expert in Xiqu education to take charge of matters relating to the promotion of Xiqu education, audience building and community participation. Members also considered that WKCDA and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department should enhance their co-ordination in optimizing the usage of venues for Xiqu performances, and the nurturing of young artists and the building up of audience for the Xiqu Centre.

22. WKCDA advised that the Authority had been working over the past years on building new audiences of different generations and different types for the future Xiqu Centre through various pre-opening programmes such as the West Kowloon Bamboo Theatre and the Tea House Theatre Taster. WKCDA would conduct more audience building programmes after the opening of the Xiqu Centre. In parallel, the Administration had introduced various initiatives in recent years to cultivate young talents in Cantonese opera.

23. Some members further enquired about the respective positioning of the Xiqu Centre and the Yau Ma Tei Theatre ("YMTT"), and how WKCDA would ensure that the two venues could complement or collaborate with each other. WKCDA advised that YMTT, with a seating capacity of 300, would serve mainly as a training venue for budding artists of Cantonese opera, whereas the Xiqu Centre aimed at providing a platform for emerging talents of Cantonese opera to showcase their artistic performance.

Latest developments

24. At the invitation of WKCDA, the Joint Subcommittee conducted a site visit to WKCD on 21 December 2017 to learn the latest development of the WKCD Project. At the construction site of the Xiqu Centre, Members took the opportunity to see for themselves the construction progress of the major facilities in the Xiqu Centre, including the Grand Theatre, the Tea House Theatre and the Atrium.

25. At the meeting of the Joint Subcommittee to be held on 9 February 2018, the Administration and WKCDA will brief members on the latest development of the Xiqu Centre, including the construction progress, opening plan and programming strategy.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
5 February 2018

戲曲中心外牆設計示意圖
Illustration of the design of the façade of Xiqu Centre



由譚秉榮建築事務所及呂元祥建築師事務所設計
Designed by Bing Thom Architects and Ronald Lu & Partners

資料來源: [西九文化區管理局網頁](#)
Source: [Website of the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority](#)

戲曲中心的位置圖
Location plan of Xiqu Centre



資料來源：[立法會 CB\(1\)1105/16-17\(01\)號文件的附件](#)
Source: Annex to [LC Paper No. CB\(1\)1105/16-17\(01\)](#)

Development of Xiqu Centre

List of relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Former Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the West Kowloon Cultural District Project (in operation in the Fifth Legislative Council)	25.2.2013 Item III	Agenda Minutes
	8.4.2013 Item II	Agenda Minutes
	3.7.2013 Item II	Agenda Minutes
	29.11.2013 Item III	Agenda Minutes
	28.3.2014 Item III	Agenda Minutes
	24.11.2014 Item II	Agenda Minutes
	19.5.2015 Item I	Agenda Minutes Response of the Administration/WKCDA to members' concerns raised at the meeting
Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the West Kowloon Cultural District Project	20.12.2016 Item III	Agenda Minutes

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the West Kowloon Cultural District Project	13.6.2017 Item II	Agenda Minutes Response of the Administration/WKCDA to members' concerns raised at the meeting