

For discussion on
14 March 2008

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs

The Promotion of Cantonese Opera and other Xiqu

Purpose

This paper sets out the Government's efforts in the promotion of Cantonese Opera and other Chinese Xiqu for Members' information and discussion.

Background

Policy objective of promoting Cantonese Opera and other Xiqu

2. As mentioned in the last year's Policy Address by the Chief Executive, Cantonese Opera is a refined and popular art form, as well as an emblem of our local culture. The Government is dedicated to the preservation, promotion and development of Cantonese Opera.

3. With regard to the promotion of Cantonese Opera, the Government has set the following directions and targets to support the preservation and development of Cantonese Opera –

- a) To develop performing venues for Cantonese Opera;
- b) To promote Cantonese Opera education, audience building and community participation;
- c) To provide training to Cantonese Opera professionals, preserve the tradition and promote creative works;
- d) To foster cooperation among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, and promote cultural exchange;

- e) To preserve the essence of Cantonese Opera and showcase treasures of our cultural heritage; and
- f) To promote Cantonese Opera as a major tourist attraction.

4. We are currently promoting the development of the art of Cantonese Opera with the concerted efforts of the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC), the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA), the Education Bureau (EDB), the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) and the District Councils (DCs). As regards the promotion of other Chinese Xiqu, our objective is to provide the public with opportunities to experience and appreciate the diversity of the Chinese culture and arts so as to strengthen Hong Kong's role as an international cultural metropolis.

Our work in the promotion of Cantonese Opera

Establishment of the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee

5. The HAB set up the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee (COAC) in May 2004 to advise the Government on policies and issues in relation to the promotion, preservation, study and development of Cantonese Opera. The COAC conceives from time to time different projects to meet the specific needs of the development of Cantonese Opera and invites representatives with different expertise from the Cantonese Opera sector to join its working groups and offer their advice. The COAC also organised public consultation sessions and focus group meetings to gauge the views of the Cantonese Opera sector. Three sub-committees on venue, promotion and preservation have been set up under the COAC to underpin its work in different areas.

Establishment of the Cantonese Opera Development Fund

6. To tie in with the work of the COAC, the Cantonese Opera Development Fund (CODF) was established in November 2005 to raise donations to support and fund programmes and activities on the study, promotion and development of Cantonese Opera. Managed by an Advisory Committee and an Executive Committee, the CODF has so far raised over

\$20 million and granted about \$12 million over the past two years to support some 180 Cantonese Opera projects carried out by local organisations or individuals.

Establishment of the Programme and Development Committee and the Chinese Traditional Performing Arts Panel by LCSD

7. Established by the LCSD in January 2007, the Programme and Development Committee (PDC) is supported by six Art Form Panels (AFP), including the Chinese Traditional Performing Arts Panel which covers, inter alia, Cantonese Opera and other Chinese Xiqu. The PDC and AFPs are tasked to advise the LCSD on the strategies of performing arts programmes, including local, Mainland and overseas, and to formulate structured and sustainable strategies to identify and support the development of budding and small-scale performing arts groups.

Development of performance venues for the Cantonese Opera

8. The Government is well aware of the concerns of the Cantonese Opera sector over the shortage of venues for performance, training and practicing, as well as their aspirations for a permanent performance venue. The Government has been in close contact with the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong to exchange views on the matter. We have already had the following plans in place to provide venues of different scales to meet different development needs of the Cantonese Opera (including other Xiqu) –

- a) Xiqu Centre in the “West Kowloon Cultural District”
A Xiqu Centre dedicated for the Cantonese Opera and other Xiqu is proposed to be built in the “West Kowloon Cultural District”. To provide a permanent venue for the Cantonese Opera sector, the Centre will comprise a large theatre (1,200 – 1,400 seats), a small theatre (400 seats), and other practicing and supporting facilities.
- b) Conversion of Yau Ma Tei Theatre and Red Brick Building into a Xiqu Activity Centre

To provide a venue mainly for small-scale performances by young artists and for training purpose, the Yau Ma Tei Theatre and the Red Brick Building will be converted into a small theatre of about 300 seats and several practicing or activity rooms. The conversion project is estimated to cost about \$120 million, and scheduled to commence in 2009 and complete in 2011.

c) Construction of an Annex Building for the Ko Shan Theatre

The scope of the construction project includes the building of a medium-sized modern theatre of 600 seats, and several large practicing rooms and audio-recording studios. The construction of the Annex Building is estimated to cost \$450 million, and scheduled to commence in 2010 and complete in 2012. The LCSD will continue to improve the existing facilities in the Ko Shan Theatre to better meet the needs of Cantonese Opera performances. It is expected that the existing and new theatres of the Ko Shan Theatre will produce a synergy effect for the further development of Cantonese Opera.

d) Training venue for the Cantonese Opera Academy of Hong Kong

Since 2004, the LCSD has rented out several squash courts in the Tung Chau Street Park to the Cantonese Opera Academy of Hong Kong (COA). These squash courts have been recently renovated to provide better training facilities. The LCSD has also converted the vacant areas in Tung Chau Street Park into an office and rented it out to the COA at a concessionary rate.

The Government will continue to explore the feasibility of providing performance venues and training or practicing facilities of different scales in different districts, taking into account the development needs of the Cantonese Opera sector.

9. The LCSD and the HKADC also make use of existing venues to support the staging of Cantonese Opera performances through the

following measures and projects –

a) The Cantonese Opera sector as an important “venue partner” of LCSD

As a transitional arrangement before the completion of the “West Kowloon Cultural District” project, we encourage the Cantonese Opera sector to take part in the LCSD’s “Venue Partnership Scheme” in order to stage Cantonese Opera performances and related activities at large and regular venues of LCSD in the coming few years. The LCSD is considering the applications and will announce the results of the scheme in the first half of 2008.

b) Implementation of priority venue hiring policy and reduction of hire charges in LCSD performance venues

The LCSD has implemented the priority venue hiring policy for the Cantonese Opera performances since late 2004. In 2007, the number of full-length Cantonese Opera performances and excerpts of Cantonese Opera & operatic singing performances in Ko Shan Theatre increased to 127 and 118 respectively. The LCSD will continue to review the effectiveness of the priority venue hiring policy and keep on adjusting the policy to cater for the needs of the Cantonese Opera sector.

c) Pilot Partnership Scheme on Xiqu Venue at Sunbeam Theatre

Grants are given by the LCSD to the HKADC to support the implementation of Pilot Partnership Scheme on Xiqu Venue at the Sunbeam Theatre. Under this scheme, Cantonese Opera troupes, new talents in particular, are given opportunities to stage performances at the Sunbeam Theatre between 2006 and 2008 to gain more performing experiences. The HKADC also plans to subsidise arts groups to organise appreciation workshops and opera viewing activities for schools at the Sunbeam Theatre.

Promotion of Cantonese Opera education, audience building and community participation

10. The LCSD, the CODF and the HKADC organise or subsidise thematic and large-scale arts education, community promotion and audience development projects. They also support pilot educational research projects to provide reference cases to schools, such as the Community Cultural Ambassador Scheme, the School Culture Day Scheme, the Pilot Scheme for Senior Secondary School Students, the Research and Pilot Scheme on the Teaching of Cantonese Opera, and the Cantonese Opera Promotion Scheme for the Youth and Community.

11. The progress made in respect of the curriculum development of Cantonese Opera and the provision of relevant teacher training is as follows –

- a) The Music Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 3) published by the Curriculum Development Council in 2003 has recommended that teachers should develop students' music skills through the introduction of different varieties of music including the Cantonese Opera. In order to enable teachers to acquire knowledge and learning & teaching skills of Cantonese Opera, the EB has organised a number of workshops and seminars on the learning and teaching of Cantonese Opera for primary and secondary teachers since 2000.
- b) In the New Senior Secondary School Curriculum to be implemented in 2009, Cantonese Opera is included in the core and elective module of the music curriculum. In addition, students can study the scripts of Cantonese Opera by taking the elective module under the Chinese Literature curriculum of the new senior secondary education. The learning experiences of “Aesthetic Development” under the New Senior Secondary School Curriculum would help provide senior secondary students with opportunities to get to know and learn Cantonese opera and other Xiqu.

- c) In the tertiary education, courses on Cantonese Opera or Xiqu are offered at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Baptist University, the Hong Kong Institute of Education and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts.

12. The COAC has been facilitating and encouraging community organisations in the promotion and development of Cantonese Opera. A member of the COAC has initiated to set up the Cantonese Opera Innovation Association, which is a non profit-making organisation formed by the commercial sector, to promote the development of Cantonese Opera and introduce innovative management and market promotion strategies to the sector.

Training of Cantonese Opera professionals, preservation of the tradition and promotion of creative works

13. To promote the continued development of Cantonese Opera, the HKAPA, the HKADC, the CODF and the LCSD provide professional training and skills enhancement opportunities for new and budding artists with potential, render support to the performance of traditional plays and implement projects with innovative ideas through the following initiatives –

- a) Supporting professional training courses

The HKAPA offered early in 1999 a two-year full-time diploma programme in Cantonese Opera for students attaining Form Five level or above. It has also offered a two-year full-time advanced diploma programme in Cantonese Opera since 2001. Starting from 2007-08, the HAB has allocated funds to the HKAPA to support its full-time and part-time evening programmes on Cantonese Opera including performance, music accompaniment, creative work and research.

While the HKADC has subsidised the COA's part-time evening courses in performance and other short courses since

1996, the LCSD has helped present the internship and graduation performances for these courses.

b) Nurturing talents through the provision of grants to Cantonese Opera troupes

The CODF launched a three-year grant scheme to set up the “Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Troupe for New Talents” to enhance training for new artists of the sector. A grant of \$3 million has been approved to subsidise the operation of the “Hong Kong Young Talent Cantonese Opera Troupe” for a period of three years starting from 2008. The troupe has recruited 10 new artists, including graduates from the HKAPA and other young performers, as their resident artists through open recruitment.

The HKADC has provided extra funding in 2007-08, through its One-Year Grant Scheme which funds the operation and production costs of arts groups, to support the development of the “Hong Kong Youth Cantonese Opera Troupe” towards excellence. Members of the troupe are mainly graduates from the COA.

c) Capacity building of budding artists through performances

Since the establishment of CODF, it has approved about \$6 million to sponsor over 110 productions performed by budding artists or jointly presented by master and budding artists to nurture new talents. Apart from the continued support of performance projects by new artists through “Project Grants”, the HKADC will launch the Budding Artists Grant Scheme in 2008-09 to provide opportunities for new arts practitioners to participate in professional arts activities. In addition, the LCSD invites budding artists to take part in the District Cantonese Opera Parade and other free Cantonese Opera and operatic singing shows to enrich their experiences in performing.

d) Sponsoring traditional productions and commissioning outstanding creative works

To keep pace with the ever-changing environment, it would be necessary for the Cantonese Opera sector to build up young audience which is as important as maintaining their traditional performance techniques. The attractiveness of traditional Xiqu can be enhanced through various means such as producing new plays, developing new stories and applying different sorts of stagecraft, set and costumes. For the preservation and innovation of Cantonese Opera, the LCSD, the HKADC and the CODF organise and sponsor the staging of both traditional and new productions.

Fostering cooperation among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, and promoting cultural exchange

14. The 1st Greater Pearl River Delta Cultural Cooperation Meeting was held in Hong Kong in November 2002. One of the deliverables of the meeting was that Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao had agreed to enhance cooperation in respect of Cantonese Opera. A working group on the promotion of Cantonese Opera among the three places was subsequently set up to take forward different projects. So far the major cooperation projects have included the Cantonese Opera Day, the proposed inscription of Cantonese Opera on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the compilation of the Dictionary of Cantonese Opera, collaborative performances, and the International Conference on Cantonese Opera. The three places have successfully applied to the Ministry of Culture for the inclusion of Cantonese Opera into the first batch of heritage items on the intangible cultural heritage list at national level. We will continue to work together with Guangdong and Macao to apply to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for the inscription of Cantonese Opera on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

15. Cultural exchanges with other places are promoted through the funding support of the CODF which have funded several study tours and performances in the Mainland and Canada. The Arts Development Fund, which aims to providing funding support for local artists and arts groups to carry out cultural visit and exchange programmes, has sponsored a number of Cantonese Opera productions, Jing Opera and Qun Opera performed in

the Mainland, Europe and America.

16. The HAB has extended its promotion efforts through the network of Cantonese Opera through the Beijing Office of the HKASR Government and other overseas Economic and Trade Offices (ETO). In 2000, the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong was funded to take part in the Drama Festival of China in Beijing and the Arts Festival of China in Nanjing. In 2006, we again supported the Cantonese Opera sector in forming a delegation to perform in the Hong Kong Cultural & Heritage Celebrations in Vancouver, Canada. In October 2007, the Beijing Office invited the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong to perform excerpts of Cantonese opera in Beijing in celebration of the 10th Anniversary of Hong Kong's reunification with China. The ETO in New York is planning to invite a local Cantonese Opera troupe to stage performances in New York in late 2008, so as to introduce the art of Cantonese Opera to the mainstream audience in the United States.

Preserving the essence of Cantonese Opera and showcasing treasures of cultural heritage

17. The LCSD, the HKADC and the CODF support the preservation of Cantonese operatic antiques and the study of the history of Cantonese Opera. They share the essence of Cantonese Opera with the public through the following channels –

a) Collection and display of Cantonese operatic antiques and films

Currently, the Hong Kong Heritage Museum (HKHM) has a collection of over 20,000 items related to Cantonese opera. In addition to displaying these heritage items in its Cantonese Opera Heritage Hall on a regular basis, the HKHM also organises from time to time thematic exhibitions, for example, “Fong Yim Fun - Life & Work of a Female Cantonese Opera Artist” and “A Synthesis of Lyrical Excellence and Martial Agility - The Stage Art of Ng Kwan Lai”. There are also 248 Xiqu films (including Cantonese Opera films) in total in the Hong Kong Film Archive for public enjoyment.

b) Preservation of traditional Paichang Xi and masterpieces of famous Cantonese Opera artists

While Paichang Xi is a prescribed form of Cantonese Opera performance, most of them have been lost with the passage of time. The LCSO has not only arranged a number of performances of Paichang Xi by troupes from Hong Kong and the Mainland, its HKHM has also conducted thematic studies and kept records on this subject, and has so far built up a record of over 20 Paichang Xi, including “Searching the Palace”, “A War between Father and Son” and “Water War”. In addition, the LCSO organises performances of masterpieces by famous Cantonese Opera artists and with the consent of the artists and musicians, the HKHM would record at multi-angle such performances to fully reflect their performing skills in terms of singing, acting and movement, speech delivery, acrobatics and martial arts for the reference of Cantonese Opera students.

c) Establishment of the Xiqu Information Centre

The HKADC has supported the operation of the Chinese Opera Information Centre (COIC) of the Chinese University of Hong Kong since 2000. The COIC collects, organises and archives information on traditional Xiqu, and provides information on its website and telephone enquiry services.

d) Archives and publication of Cantonese Opera information

Both the HKADC and the CODF support the publication of books on Cantonese Opera and projects on the archives and study of related information. Examples are the Survey on Ritual Performances of Cantonese Opera conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and projects to archive and publish information on Mr. Lam Kar Sing and Ms. Fong Yim Fun.

Promoting Cantonese Opera as a major tourist attraction

18. Since 2002, the HKTG has launched the “Cultural Kaleidoscope”

programme which includes the promotion of Cantonese Opera in response to the visitors' interest in traditional culture. With the assistance of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, the HKTB organises guided tours every Saturday for visitors to enjoy Cantonese Opera performances and these cultural tours have been very well-received by the tourists. The HKTB also put on its website information on the current and coming local Cantonese Opera performances in Hong Kong and arranges coverage of these programmes by overseas media.

19. To attract more tourists to enjoy the festive atmosphere in bamboo theatres, ritual performances of Cantonese Opera presented during traditional festivals, such as the Birthday of Tin Hau, the Birthday of Tam Kung and the Cheung Chau Bun Festival are usually the highlights of the HKTB's publicity programme.

Resources spent on the promotion of Cantonese Opera

20. In 2007-08, the resources allocated to the development of Cantonese Opera development amounted to about \$35 million. The total number of full-length Cantonese opera and excerpts of Cantonese opera performances (excluding Cantonese operatic singing performances) organised by the LCSD or arts groups and presented in the 13 LCSD venues increased from 241 in 2005 to 327 in 2007, and the number of audience from about 150,000 to about 220,000. In 2008-09, the LCSD plans to organise over 350 performances, more than 100 of which will be ticketed performances.

Efforts in the promotion of other Xiqu

21. Both the LCSD and the HKADC support the promotion of other Xiqu and their work in this regard include –

a) Promotion of other Xiqu by LCSD

The LCSD has been actively introducing other representative and valuable traditional Xiqu, including classical repertoires of different schools. Troupes specialised in Jing Opera, Qun Opera, Yue Opera, Chuan Opera and other regional theatrical genres are invited to perform in Hong Kong from time to

time, for example, the “Chinese Regional Opera Series” and the “Chinese Operas with an Ancient Lineage”. Other Xiqu are also introduced to the general public through the Community Cultural Ambassador Scheme which consists of a series of activities such as appreciation sessions/demonstrations, workshops, movies, seminars and graduation performances.

The LCSD also presents experimental Xiqu programmes to attract young audience to examine the versatility of other Xiqu from a new perspective. Moreover, thematic seminars, appreciation classes and exhibitions on other Xiqu are held to enhance the appreciation ability of the audience. English and Chinese subtitles are available in all other Xiqu performances organised by the LCSD to attract local and overseas audience.

In 2008-09, the LCSD plans to present over 100 performances of other Xiqu, more than 40 of which will be ticketed ones, to attract an estimated audience of 30,000.

- b) Support of the HKADC for the development of other Xiqu
Since its establishment, the HKADC has been providing support to the development of Xiqu genres (Jing Opera, Qun Opera, Yue Opera and Puppetry) other than Cantonese Opera. Starting from 1998, a Jing/Qun Opera troupe has been funded through the HKADC’s “Administration Support Grant”, which is a one-year funding support on administrative expenses for an arts group, and later through the “One-Year Grant”. The operation of a Yue Opera troupe was sponsored with the “Administration Support Grant” in 1997. The HKADC has so far provided a total grant of over \$7.2 million in support of other Xiqu groups through the above grant schemes.

In 2007-08, the resources for the Xiqu Art Form Group (including Cantonese Opera) stand for 10% or \$7 million of the total allocation among the ten art form groups supported

by the HKADC. It is estimated that the financial provision for the development of Xiqu (including Cantonese Opera) in 2008-09 will be over \$8.8 million.

Way Forward

22. We will continue our efforts in preserving, promoting, enhancing and rejuvenating Cantonese Opera, and in improving the situation of the shortage of performance venues for Cantonese Opera.

Home Affairs Bureau
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