

For information on
20 March 2009

**Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs –
Territory-wide Survey on
Intangible Cultural Heritage in Hong Kong**

Purpose

This paper informs Members of our plan to carry out a territory-wide survey of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Hong Kong.

Background

The Convention For the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

2. In October 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) adopted the Convention For the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (the Convention). The purposes of the Convention are –

- (a) to safeguard the ICH;
- (b) to ensure respect for the ICH of the communities, groups and individuals concerned;
- (c) to raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the ICH, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof; and
- (d) to provide for international cooperation and assistance.

3. 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.

4. According to the Convention, ICH means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. The ICH, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

5. The ICH are manifested in the following domains in the Convention –

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

6. China ratified the Convention in 2004. In support of this worthy cause of UNESCO, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) agreed that the Convention should apply to the Hong Kong with effect from 7 December 2004. The Central People's Government notified UNESCO of the Hong Kong SAR Government's agreement accordingly.

7. The Convention shall enter into force three months after the date of the deposit of the 30th instrument of ratification. It was entered into force in April 2006. The Convention stipulates that each State Party

shall –

- (a) take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the ICH present in its territory; and
- (b) identify and define the various elements of the ICH present in its territory, with the participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations.

Preservation and Promotion of ICH in Hong Kong

8. The Government has been working on the preservation and promotion of ICH in Hong Kong. The museums of Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) have been conducting research and recording of local ICH including festivals and rituals such as the jiao-festivals, temple festivals, clan rituals as well as traditional arts and crafts. Artefacts related to these ICH items have been collected during fieldwork and through donations. The museums also organise from time to time thematic exhibitions, public lectures, seminars and conferences on ICH. For instance, in collaboration with the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the Hong Kong Heritage Museum organised a series of 7 public lectures on Hong Kong's ICH in April and May 2007; a 5-day international conference on Cantonese Opera and the "Exhibition of Intangible Cultural Heritage in China" were held at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum in 2007 and 2008 respectively.

9. The Government has also been active in promoting Cantonese Opera, Guangdong music, Chiuchow music and Hakka Folk Songs music, all of which are essence of Hong Kong's ICH and have received much popularity among the local people. The Home Affairs Bureau established the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee and the Cantonese Opera Development Fund in 2004 and 2005 respectively to support and fund programmes and activities on the study, promotion and development of Cantonese Opera. The LCSD has arranged in recent years a number of music performances and related arts appreciation activities such as the Music of Guangdong Region Series in 2007 and the Guangdong Music Project organized by the Windpipe Chinese Ensemble in 2008 and 4

performances of Chiuchow Opera plus other arts appreciation activities in 2007-08 as well.

10. The Hong Kong Central Library, in collaboration with the Hong Kong Arts Development Council and the Composers and Authors Society of Hong Kong, has launched a “Hong Kong Music Collection Campaign” since December 2001. Through the support and generous donations from over 180 local musicians and music institutes, the Library has successfully collected over 57,000 items of music documents as at the end of February 2009, testifying the rich musical ICH in Hong Kong.

Territory-wide Survey of ICH in Hong Kong

11. Having agreed that the Convention shall apply to the Hong Kong SAR, the Government plans to first identify and define the various elements of the ICH present in the territory, with the participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations. The next step is to draw up the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the ICH items. In this connection, we plan to conduct a territory-wide survey of the ICH in Hong Kong for the purpose of establishing an ICH inventory and database.

12. Since the implementation of the Convention is a new initiative to signatories, there are not many existing examples that we can make reference to on how best the inventory should be drawn up. We therefore commissioned in 2006 the Division of Humanities of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology to carry out a pilot study on the ICH in Hong Kong, in order to identify the issues we would need to address for the conduct of a territory-wide survey. The pilot survey made reference to the 78 items of ICH inscribed on the first provincial list of ICH of Guangdong in 2006. According to the study findings, 34 of the 78 ICH items listed by Guangdong are relevant to Hong Kong. The study also reveals that, although those items originated from Guangdong, their contents have evolved after they have been adapted to the local environment. In the process, those ICH items have developed into ones with local traditions differentiable from the ones in the Mainland and have established their own identity in the Hong Kong community. The

study has also made useful recommendations regarding how the territory-wide survey of ICH in Hong Kong should be carried out such as the methodology and the composition of survey teams.

13. It is important that we should ensure that the territory-wide survey would produce useful results for compiling an inventory in the new initiative of safeguarding the ICH in Hong Kong. The Secretary for Home Affairs appointed an Intangible Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee in July 2008 to advise the Government on the conduct of the territory-wide survey. Its membership comprises professionals, academics and community personalities. The membership list is at Annex.

14. Having examined the findings and recommendations of the report of the pilot study and taken the advice of the ICH Advisory Committee, we are embarking on a tendering exercise for engaging academics with relevant expertise and research experience from local academic institutes to carry out the territory-wide survey. The survey will be divided into two field survey areas, each covering nine districts, to achieve efficiency -

- (a) Survey Area A: North, Tai Po, Sha Tin, Sai Kung, Wong Tai Sin, Kwun Tong, Kowloon City, Sham Shui Po and Yau Tsim Mong.
- (b) Survey Area B: Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, Tsuen Wan, Kwai Tsing, Islands, Central & Western, Wan Chai, Eastern and Southern.

15. The field survey will record and document the ICH items in the survey areas in the following manner -

- (a) discussion with local informants to establish the locality, timing, event programme and bearers of the intangible cultural heritage;
- (b) oral history survey with the identified ICH bearers on details of the heritage items;
- (c) photographic and video recording of the particular event in

which the intangible cultural heritage takes place; and

- (d) collection of instruments, objects, artifacts and documents associated with the intangible cultural heritage items.

16. The research methodology and the conduct of the survey will be monitored by the ICH Advisory Committee. According to the present plan, the survey will commence in the second half of 2009 and take about 18 months to complete. The information collected in the territory-wide survey will be documented and studied to form the basis of an ICH inventory.

17. The UNESCO Convention recognizes that safeguarding of the ICH should focus on practices and processes rather than on products, and that the practitioners and custodians of the ICH must play a central role in safeguarding measures. The need to involve communities, groups and, sometimes, individuals in safeguarding their ICH is stated in several articles of the Convention.

18. In order to involve the community in the coming territory-wide survey of ICH, we plan to engage the District Councils and other organizations, including Heung Yee Kuk whose members are familiar with local affairs and local cultural traditions. They will be invited to suggest items of ICH and the associated ICH bearers. The list will be followed up by the survey teams to be commissioned. Other local groups and individuals will be informed of the launching of the territory-wide survey through various channels such as websites and media publicity. They will also be invited to identify and submit ICH suggestions and the associated ICH bearers.

Advice Sought

19. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper and offer suggestions on the engagement with the general public in the course of conducting this territory-wide survey.

Home Affairs Bureau
March 2009

**Membership List of
Intangible Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee**

Chairman: Director of Leisure and Cultural Services

Members: Prof Selina Chan Ching

Dr Michael Lau Wai-mai

Prof Leung Siu-kit

Prof Mak King-sang

Prof Ng Chun-bong

Prof Siu Kwok-kin

Dr Joseph Ting Sun-pao

Dr Yau Wing-kwong

Prof Yu Siu-wah

Representative of the Home Affairs Bureau

Representative of the Leisure and Cultural Services
Department