

For discussion on
19 May 2015

Legislative Council
Panel on Home Affairs and Panel on Development
Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the
West Kowloon Cultural District Project

Update on the development of Xiqu Centre

PURPOSE

This paper serves to update Members on the progress of the Xiqu Centre project.

BACKGROUND

2. The prime objective of the Xiqu Centre is to encourage the robust development of Cantonese opera and other forms of Chinese opera in Hong Kong, in particular the growth of Cantonese opera which is closely tied to the growth of Xiqu in the region. It is crucial to develop a locally-rooted Xiqu network that has a regional impact and also plays a role in international arts development. Construction of the Xiqu Centre started in 2013. Prior to the opening of the Xiqu Centre, the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (WKCDA) has started an ambitious programme of artistic endeavours comprising performances and collaborations with practitioners, artists and organisations locally and regionally to explore the future direction of the Xiqu Centre.

PROGRESS OF BUILDING PROJECT

3. The foundation construction works of Xiqu Centre commenced in September 2013 and were completed in late 2014, following which the main superstructure works have commenced in December 2014. The construction works is generally on track and the target completion date of 2017 remains unchanged. Throughout the past year, WKCDA has engaged organisations from the performing arts sector as well as other Xiqu practitioners to update them on the building progress of Xiqu Centre and to gauge

their feedback on technical requirements to ensure that users' views would be taken on board in a timely manner.

PRE-OPENING PROGRAMMES OF THE XIQU CENTRE

4. To realise the Xiqu Centre's objectives of audience development, artistic excellence and facilitating exchange, an array of pre-opening programmes have been conducted since 2012 so as to prepare the audience for the opening of the Xiqu Centre.

Audience development and artistic development projects

5. Through long-term and systematic initiatives, WKCDA is working to build new audiences of different generations and different types. New productions have been presented by upcoming artistic talents who are nurtured through the provision of professional training and resources. WKCDA has undertaken the following initiatives to realise the strategic aims:

West Kowloon Bamboo Theatre 2012 to 2014

6. The West Kowloon Bamboo Theatre was the first cultural event to take place on the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) site since 2012, which marks the launch of the design and construction stage of the district. The programme direction has been refined over the years, with productions ranging from traditional Xiqu performances presented by local and overseas established and young artists, to contemporary and other art form programmes. The mission of audience development has been accomplished in this project.

7. For West Kowloon Bamboo Theatre 2014, WKCDA introduced for the first time a project entitled "Rising Stars in Cantonese Opera Showcase 2014". The aim of the event was to encourage the professional development of young talents and to provide them with a platform to showcase their artistic performance. 14 rising stars were shortlisted for the two-night competition at the end of which five were presented awards. Participants and winners of the competition would take part in training programmes, performances and promotional activities presented by the Xiqu Centre.

Rising Stars of Cantonese Opera 2015

8. As a continuation of WKCDA's effort to cultivate young talents through the Rising Stars series, WKCDA organised the "Rising Stars of Cantonese Opera" from 21 February to 2 March 2015. The event aimed to offer rising stars ongoing training opportunities and to nurture a new generation of artists for the future Xiqu Centre. 12 young local artists from "Rising Stars in Cantonese Opera Showcase 2014" were invited to perform in the event. It provided a platform for the young artists to observe and learn from each other in the form of a showcase.

9. By showcasing the young performers' potential, WKCDA hopes to engage not only Cantonese opera lovers but also the younger generation as an audience-building exercise. WKCDA will continue its effort in cultivating a pool of young talents through these events in the run-up to Xiqu Centre's completion targeted in 2017.

Cultural exchange projects

10. One of the key objectives of the Xiqu Centre is to serve as a centre for artistic exchange, through developing a locally-rooted Xiqu network, while embracing Xiqu artists in the region, including Macau, Taiwan and the Mainland, and connecting with other cultural players in Asia and the international arena. WKCDA has organised the following programmes to realise these strategic aims:

Xiqu Centre Seminar Series

11. In collaboration with the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, Xiqu experts and artists from the Mainland and Taiwan were invited to conduct dialogues with local experts and share their experience and insights on future development of Xiqu. Four sessions have been held since 2013 with demonstrations and master classes offered.

Xiqu Cultural Exchange Programme 2015

12. In collaboration with the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong, WKCDA launched a Xiqu Cultural Exchange Programme that enables young artists to learn from key Xiqu institutions and experts in the region. A delegation of 10 emerging talents were sent to Hangzhou to visit the Zhejiang Xiaobaihua Yue Opera Troupe (浙江小

百花越劇團), an acclaimed all-female troupe, from 1 to 7 April 2015. They took part in a series of artistic training and learning sessions on various aspects such as singing technique, acting skills and body movement. WKCDA will continue to organise similar activities in the coming months.

13. Through these opportunities, WKCDA aims to establish a Hong Kong-based Xiqu network that is well-connected to the regional Xiqu industry, as well as develop long-term and close partnerships with the professional Xiqu institutions and bodies to prepare for the future Xiqu Centre.

Research and development projects

14. To support the hardware and software development, WKCDA also conducts research projects to examine different aspects from both WKCDA's and audiences' angles. As an iterative process, these projects provide testing grounds for WKCDA to fine tune the development plan and direction of the Xiqu Centre.

Tea House Theatre Taster

15. As part of the design process for the unique performing venue of Tea House Theatre in Xiqu Centre, WKCDA is doing prototypes to test out ideas around the design, operation and programming for the Tea House Theatre. With a seating capacity of around 200 people, a replica space was created at the Lyric Theatre of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts with refreshment served and live theatre performances presented. The first and second prototypes were held in March 2014 and early May 2015 respectively. Detailed feedback has been collected from the audience on various aspects of the event which informs the ongoing artistic, technical and operations development of the future Tea House Theatre in the Xiqu Centre.

Audience research

16. WKCDA is commissioning the Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Audience Research as a pilot study. The exercise aims to derive a snapshot of the current local adult Cantonese Opera audience market, and to ascertain their perceptions of the art form and the factors affecting their participation. Results of the research project are expected to be available in the third quarter of 2015 and

will be used to inform the ongoing planning of the artistic strategies for the facilities.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

17. On the governance and management structure for Xiqu Centre, WKCDA will conduct recruitment of the senior management positions of an Artistic Director (AD) and a General Manager (GM) in 2015/16. The AD will take charge of the artistic direction of the entire venue while the GM will be responsible for the operational and technical side of venue management, operations, administration and overall financial performance of the venue. The AD and GM will be jointly responsible for the running of the Xiqu Centre.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

18. The Xiqu Centre Advisory Group was established by WKCDA in 2013 to advise on the planning and development of the institutional framework for the venue. In the past year, the Advisory Group had various discussions on the building design, artistic direction, business model and sponsorship opportunities of the Xiqu Centre. WKCDA has been working closely with the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts as partners in performances, cultural exchange and young artist training projects. In addition, WKCDA has regular exchanges with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee under the auspices of the Home Affairs Bureau as well as other Xiqu practitioners and organisations on various issues regarding Xiqu promotion. WKCDA will continue to explore potential artistic and education partners, and to update the public as well as stakeholders on the latest development of the project.

DISCUSSION

19. Members are invited to note and provide comments on the latest development of Xiqu Centre.

West Kowloon Cultural District Authority
May 2015