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Panel on Home Affairs

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 28 May 2018**

Safeguarding, promotion and transmission of intangible cultural heritage

Purpose

This paper summarizes the past discussion of the Panel on Home Affairs ("the Panel") on the safeguarding, promotion and transmission of the intangible cultural heritage ("ICH") in Hong Kong.

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 ("HAB") 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 ("SCRC") 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. In March 2013, SCRC submitted detailed research data on nearly 800 survey cases and a draft ICH inventory of about 480 items to ICHAC. In June 2014, after thorough examination of research information of the draft inventory by ICHAC and the completion of a four-month public consultation, the Government promulgated the inventory which consisted of 480 items.

Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Hong Kong

6. In the 2015 Policy Address, it was announced that the Government would enhance the safeguarding measures of ICH and strengthen such work as identification, documentation, research, preservation, promotion and transmission of the heritage. In addition, the Government planned to draw up the first Representative List of local ICH ("the Representative List") based on the first ICH inventory published in 2014 to provide a basis for prioritizing resources and safeguarding measures for ICH items, especially those of high cultural value and with an urgent need for preservation. In August 2017, LCSD announced the Representative List which comprised 20 items (see **Appendix I**).

Members' views and concerns

7. When the Panel discussed the promulgation of the first ICH inventory of Hong Kong and the proposed Representative List at its meetings on 17 June 2014 and 27 February 2017 respectively, concerns were raised on the safeguarding, promotion and transmission of ICH. The major views and concerns expressed by members are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Safeguarding of ICH items

8. Some members suggested that the Administration should make reference to the Mainland, Taiwan and Macau and consider the need to legislate for the preservation and protection of ICH in Hong Kong. There was also a view that ICHAC should be upgraded to be a statutory body so as to further enhance its work. Some other members suggested that the Administration should consider producing television Announcements of Public Interest on local ICH and partnering with District Councils in taking forward the various promotional initiatives.

9. The Administration advised that it had no plan to legislate for safeguarding ICH, and it noted that overseas countries including Australia, Canada, Singapore and the United Kingdom also did not have relevant legislation to safeguard ICH. However, 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 ICH Office¹ would also organize exhibitions, talks, field visits and demonstrations for promotion of local ICH to the public. Closer collaboration with local educational institutions, communities, as well as the individual bearers and bearer organizations of ICH items would also be strengthened. On the international front, the Administration would strengthen the cooperation with the tourism sector with a view to promoting traditional festivals and Hong Kong's ICH to overseas visitors.

Transmission of ICH items

10. Some members considered that the transmission of the ICH items was most important. Taking the "Paper Crafting Technique" and "Bamboo Shed Theatre Building Technique" as examples, these members urged the Administration to support the trades and help them find market space for survival, and make use of government projects/events to provide opportunities for demonstrations and promotion of those techniques. Members also suggested that the Administration might collaborate with the Tourism Board in establishing a "cultural estate" to showcase the ICH items on a long-term basis. They hoped that the relevant trades could achieve sustainability without having to rely on the relevant funds.

11. Some members considered that items such as the "Sewing of *Cheongsam* and *Kwan Kwa*" and "Paper Crafting Technique" should not be preserved only

¹ In May 2015, LCSD upgraded the ICH Unit originally under the Hong Kong Heritage Museum to an ICH Office to heighten various endeavours on safeguarding ICH.

in museums. In their view, other policy bureaux such as the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau should be involved in providing policy support for the promotion and sustainability of these trades; HAB might also consider collaborating with social enterprises in the education and promotion of those items.

12. According to the Administration, due to dwindling market demand, there were difficulties for the transmission of certain ICH items. The Administration would closely liaise and collaborate with organizations and bearers concerned to step up efforts in the education, promotion, transmission and safeguarding of the ICH items on the Representative List through exhibitions, talks, seminars, bearer demonstrations, workshops, in-depth research and publications to enhance the public awareness and understanding of those ICH items. The Administration further advised that it aimed to step up efforts in the promotion and safeguarding of the ICH items.

Funding support to projects for preservation and promotion of ICH

13. Some members enquired whether the Administration would consider setting up a dedicated fund or special fund for the purpose of preserving and promoting ICH. Citing the "Colourful Band of Hakka Women's Cool Hat" and "Yu Lan Ghost Festival of the Hong Kong Chiu Chow community" as examples, these members requested the Administration to consider allocating more resources to support the development and transmission of traditional craftsmanship and festive events lest some of the items in the ICH inventory might vanish in the near future.

14. The Administration advised that it had been financing the preservation and promotion of ICH items of Hong Kong through the recurrent funding for the ICH Office. Besides, the Lord Wilson Heritage Trust aimed to conserve and preserve the human heritage of Hong Kong by organizing activities and providing funding support to assist community organizations and individuals in implementing heritage-related activities and research projects, including those related to ICH. This apart, HAB had set up the Cantonese Opera Development Fund to provide funding support to projects and activities relating to the study, promotion and sustainable development of Cantonese opera. The Chinese Temples Fund also provided support for the work relating to traditional culture including ICH. In addition to financial support, the Administration would continue to encourage the participation and support of different sectors of the community with a view to achieving the objective of safeguarding local ICH. The Administration actively encouraged other organizations, including the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, to provide funding support to event organizers of ICH items. At present, the Administration had no plan to set up another trust fund to support the safeguarding work of ICH.

Recent developments

15. In his 2018-2019 Budget, the Financial Secretary announced that the Government would allocate \$300 million to strengthen the protection, promotion and transmission of ICH. It was also announced that \$500 million would be allocated to LCSD for the acquisition of museum collections and holding exhibitions. The Administration will brief the Panel on the proposed funding support to ICH and museum initiatives at the next meeting on 28 May 2018.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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Appendix I

The First Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Hong Kong

Item No.	ICH Domain	Item
1	Performing Arts (4 items in total)	Cantonese Opera *^
2		Hakka Unicorn Dance in Hang Hau, Sai Kung *
3		<i>Quanzhen</i> Temples Taoist Ritual Music *
4		<i>Nanyin</i> (Southern Tunes)
5	Social Practices, Rituals and Festive Events (10 items in total)	Cheung Chau <i>Jiao</i> Festival *
6		Tai O Dragon Boat Water Parade *
7		Yu Lan Ghost Festival of the Hong Kong Chiu Chow Community *
8		Mid-Autumn Festival – The Tai Hang Fire Dragon Dance *
9		Wong Tai Sin Belief and Customs *
10		Spring and Autumn Ancestral Worship of Clans
11		Tin Hau Festival (or Birthday of the Goddess of Heaven) in Hong Kong
12		Mid-Autumn Festival – The Pokfulam Fire Dragon Dance
13		The Taoist Tradition of the <i>Zhengyi</i> (Orthodox Unity) School
14		<i>Sek Pun</i> (Basin Feast)
15	Knowledge and Practices Concerning Nature and the Universe (1 item)	Herbal Tea *

Item No.	ICH Domain	Item
16	Traditional Craftsmanship (5 items in total)	The Arts of the <i>Guzin</i> (The Craft of <i>Qin</i> Making)*
17		Hong Kong-style Milk Tea Making Technique
18		Paper Crafting Technique
19		The Sewing Techniques of Hong Kong-style <i>Cheongsam</i> and <i>Kwan Kwa</i> Wedding Costume
20		Bamboo Theatre Building Technique

* The ten local items already inscribed onto the national list of ICH would automatically be included in the Representative List of Hong Kong.

^ Cantonese opera was inscribed onto the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, making it a world ICH item.

Appendix II

Relevant papers on Safeguarding, promotion and transmission of intangible cultural heritage

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Home Affairs	14.6.2013 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
	17.6.2014 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
	11.5.2015 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
	27.2.2017 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes

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