

For discussion on
25 March 2019

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs

**Promotional Activities for the 10th Anniversary
of Inscription of Cantonese Opera onto Representative List
of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**

Purpose

This paper reports to Members on the major promotional activities to be held by the Government and the relevant organisations for the 10th anniversary of the inscription of Cantonese opera on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (the Representative List).

Background

Application for inscription of Cantonese opera on the Representative List

2. Cantonese opera is a traditional culture of iconic significance in Hong Kong. In 2006, the governments of Hong Kong, Macao and Guangdong Province jointly applied to the Central Government for inclusion of Cantonese opera in the First Batch of the National List of Representative Elements of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). In 2009, the three governments also submitted an application through the Ministry of Culture (now the Ministry of Culture and Tourism) to UNESCO for inscription of Cantonese opera on the Representative List. The application was successfully approved, making Cantonese opera the first-ever world ICH item shared by the three places and helping the art form gain wider recognition.

Policy Objectives and Measures

3. Since 2009 when Cantonese opera was listed as a world ICH item, there has been an increase in the awareness of and the recognition for the art form among members of the public in Hong Kong. The

Government has also provided more resources to create conditions conducive to the sustainable development of Cantonese opera. Then in August 2017, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) announced the first Representative List of ICH of Hong Kong, which covers 20 items, including the world ICH item – Cantonese opera. With the concerted efforts of the Government and the industry, the number of Cantonese opera performances has been on the rise in recent years. In 2017-18, there were more than 850 such performances staged at LCSD venues, with an attendance of over 540 000.

4. In 2004, the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee (COAC)¹ was set up to advise the Government on policies and issues in relation to the promotion, preservation, study and development of Cantonese opera. The Government also established the Cantonese Opera Development Fund (CODF)² in 2005 to provide support for projects and activities in relation to the study, promotion and sustainable development of Cantonese opera. Having received an injection of \$70 million from the Government in 2018, the CODF introduced new funding measures in late 2018 to enhance its support to the development of Cantonese opera. The new funding approach mainly covers the following: raising the funding ceiling for areas under various funding schemes to encourage the production of more quality Cantonese opera performances and implementing more programmes that support the development of Cantonese opera; widening the funding scope to include, for example, the new Performance in Mainland/Overseas Scheme in order to encourage local Cantonese opera troupes to perform outside Hong Kong; and opening applications relating to arts education for local primary and secondary schools to encourage them to promote education about Cantonese opera at school level.

5. Apart from the above measures, the Government also actively promotes the development of Cantonese opera on the various fronts below, with the main initiatives summarised in paragraphs 6 to 13:

- (i) developing performance venues for Cantonese opera;
- (ii) nurturing talent for Cantonese opera and promoting creative works;

¹ The composition of the COAC includes both the experienced and new performers from the Cantonese opera sector, administrators, relevant scholars, those from the education sector, etc.

² Since its inception in 2005, the CODF has allocated a total provision of about \$100 million to fund almost 800 projects, including the support to the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong to implement the Yau Ma Tei Theatre (YMTT) Venue Partnership Scheme under which over 100 performances and promotional activities were organised every year since 2012.

- (iii) promoting education about and exchange on Cantonese opera, facilitating audience building and encouraging community participation; and
- (iv) preserving the essence of Cantonese opera.

Developing performance venues for Cantonese opera

6. The Government has been committed to providing adequate and suitable venues of various scales to support the transmission and development of Cantonese opera. The Xiqu Centre, which has just opened in January 2019, is the first major venue in the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD). Housing a Grand Theatre (1 065 seats) and a Tea House Theatre (244 seats), the Xiqu Centre is a world-class venue specially designed to cater for the artistic needs of quality xiqu (viz. Chinese opera) performances. As the year 2019 marks the 10th anniversary of the inscription of Cantonese opera, the commissioning of the Xiqu Centre will be conducive to developing a locally-rooted xiqu network that has a regional impact with an important role in international arts development.

7. Other new venues opened in recent years include the converted YMTT (300 seats) commissioned in 2012 and the New Wing Auditorium (600 seats) of the Ko Shan Theatre commissioned in 2014. The YMTT is also planning its phase II development works in the future to provide ancillary and expanded facilities for its Theatre so as to enhance YMTT's function as a venue dedicated to Chinese opera performances and the training of budding Cantonese opera artists.

8. Other Government initiatives to provide performance venues in support of Cantonese opera include the Venue Partnership Scheme implemented by the LCSD where local Cantonese opera troupes can apply for becoming venue partners. Apart from receiving a subvention³, such art groups can hire the venues for Cantonese opera performances and related activities within an agreed number of days at no charge. From 2018-19 to 2021-22, the LCSD has partnered with Cantonese opera troupes to implement the Venue Partnership Scheme at the Sha Tin Town Hall, Tuen Mun Town Hall, Yuen Long Theatre and YMTT. Furthermore, the LCSD reserves time slots at five major performance venues, namely, the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, Hong Kong City Hall,

³ Starting from 2018-19, the Government has raised the ceiling of annual programme fee from \$1.1 million to \$1.5 million for each venue partner (which is a small or medium sized performing art group) under the Venue Partnership Scheme.

Kwai Tsing Theatre, Sha Tin Town Hall and Tsuen Wan Town Hall, for professional Cantonese opera troupes to enjoy priority booking every year.

Nurturing talent for Cantonese opera and promoting creative works

9. To effectively nurture Cantonese opera talent, the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts was granted an additional funding to set up the School of Chinese Opera in the 2013/14 academic year. A four-year programme on the Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Chinese Opera was also introduced in the same year. Moreover, with the establishment of the Cantonese Opera Academy of Hong Kong (COAHK) in 1979, the LCSD and Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC) have also subsidised the COAHK to organise part-time training courses in performance and other courses.

10. Starting from 2012, the Government and CODF have supported the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong (CAAHK) every year in the implementation of the YMTT Venue Partnership Scheme. The Cantonese Opera Young Talent Showcase under the Scheme has supported, since its launch, the staging of about 600 Cantonese opera performances in total featuring young budding artists, and over 100 new talent of Cantonese opera have been recruited. Apart from nurturing performers, training for various professional roles such as musicians, prompters and administrators in the industry has also been provided under the Scheme. With the participation of the CAAHK, the revitalised YMTT has successfully developed into the cradle of budding artists for Cantonese opera.

Promoting education about and exchange on Cantonese opera, facilitating audience building and encouraging community participation

11. To meet the needs in the preservation of traditions, the transformation and innovation of Cantonese opera, to promote education about Cantonese opera and to facilitate audience building, the LCSD, HKADC and CODF have been organising or sponsoring the presentation of both traditional and innovative productions, large-scale educational and exchange programmes relating to arts (e.g. the School Culture Day Scheme organised by the LCSD, the Training and Exchange Summer Camp on the Art of Cantonese Opera for the Youth in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao and the Cantonese Opera Excerpt Competition for Children and the Youth funded by the CODF), community promotion and audience building activities (e.g. the Community Cultural Ambassador

Scheme and the annual Cantonese Opera Day organised by the LCSD), etc. In addition, for the five years starting from 2018-19, the Government will provide \$140 million for the LCSD to support local art groups and artists to go on exchanges in the Greater Bay Area. Local Cantonese opera artists will also benefit from the development of the performance market in the Area.

Preserving the essence of Cantonese opera

12. The Hong Kong Heritage Museum (HKHM), Hong Kong Museum of History, Hong Kong Film Archive and Hong Kong Central Library under the LCSD all have their own collections of artefacts, films and other information relating to Cantonese opera respectively. The HKHM houses a permanent Cantonese Opera Heritage Hall and possesses a collection of about 30 000 Cantonese opera artefacts. Such collection is a highlight in the HKHM where thematic exhibitions are organised from time to time to present the valuable information on Cantonese opera to the public.

13. Furthermore, commissioned in 2017, the Cantonese Opera Education and Information Centre at the Ko Shan Theatre New Wing is open to the public for free. The Centre employs cutting-edge video technology to re-edit and consolidate a wealth of valuable information and video footage relating to Cantonese opera, while the digitalised information of and the knowledge about Cantonese opera are displayed and introduced in an interactive way. The LCSD will continue to enrich the collection in the Centre, and will organise a range of audience building activities to further the transmission of the art of Cantonese opera.

Promotional Activities for the 10th Anniversary of the Successful Inscription of Cantonese Opera

14. As this year marks the 10th anniversary of the inscription of Cantonese opera, the LCSD and WKCD's Xiqu Centre will take this opportunity to promote the message of the anniversary through a series of special and regular activities. The major activities are summarised below:

LCSD

Activity Type	Brief Description
Performance	<p>Large-scale performance <i>The Imperial Emperor of Heaven Holding Court</i> - Co-ordinated by the CAAHK, the first and foremost Cantonese opera classic set piece will be staged at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre from 8 to 10 November.</p>
	<p>The 10th Chinese Opera Festival - Running from June to August this year, the Festival will showcase not only performances of different regional genres, but also Cantonese opera programmes, namely the new production <i>A Love Poem Stained with Blood</i>, the adapted <i>A Story of Qin Emperor's Sword</i>, and a re-run of the adapted <i>Sacrificing the Son</i>.</p>
Community Promotion	<p>Cantonese Opera Day 2019 - The event, falling on 24 November, includes programmes such as operatic excerpts to be performed by emerging Cantonese opera artists, children and youth actors; singing performances by winners of inter-school Cantonese operatic singing competitions; and activities like demonstration workshops, game stalls, talks, autograph sessions with celebrated artists, exhibitions, etc.</p>
	<p>Community Cultural Ambassador Scheme - Under the Scheme, art groups/practitioners who are devoted to promoting the transmission of Cantonese opera promote the art in the community through a variety of activities, such as workshops, backstage tours of ritual performances, carnivals, etc.</p>
	<p>Trial Scheme on Community Performing Arts Programme - In 2019-20, the Programme will be implemented in collaboration with the Sai Kung and Wan Chai District Councils respectively, as well as with community organisations. Under the Programme, Cantonese opera rehearsal courses, showcase performances, exhibitions, graduation shows, etc. will be arranged to help children and young people in those districts develop their interest in Cantonese opera.</p>

Activity Type	Brief Description
Community Promotion	<p>Let's Enjoy Cantonese Opera in Bamboo Theatre - The programme, in collaboration with cultural/community organisations, will be held at bamboo theatres located at Yuen Kong Tsuen in Yuen Long, the Tin Hau Temple Plaza in Tuen Mun and Hang Hau Village in Tseung Kwan O respectively in the 2018/19 academic year. Featuring free performances of Cantonese opera excerpts tailor-made for students/children and interactive educational sessions, the programme provides them with the opportunity to set foot in bamboo theatres to learn more about this unique kind of temporary structure and to appreciate Cantonese opera at the same time.</p>
Cultural Exchange	<p>A Showcase of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao Cantonese Opera Masters / New Stars - Starting from 2011, the biennial programme has been jointly presented by the three places and the latest edition will be held in December 2019. Each of the three places invites artists from the other two to perform with its local counterparts for artistic exchange on Cantonese opera.</p>
Arts Education	<p>Cantonese Opera at Schools - It is a project organised in collaboration with a Cantonese opera troupe/association under the School Performing Arts in Practice Scheme in the 2018/19 academic year. To cultivate an interest in Cantonese opera among the new generation, students will be arranged to perform an innovative children's Cantonese opera when they have completed the school-year-long arts training in Cantonese opera at school.</p>
	<p>Cantonese opera <i>Fa Muk Lan</i> under the Arts Experience Scheme for Senior Secondary Students - The classic Cantonese opera <i>Fa Muk Lan</i> will be staged at various LCSD venues for senior secondary students to appreciate in May 2019. A pre-performance demonstration workshop will also be held to deepen students' understanding of the story and the development of Cantonese opera scripts.</p>

Activity Type	Brief Description
Arts Education	2019/20 School Culture Day Scheme - Guided Cantonese opera performances will be arranged under the Scheme. Activities of which include excerpt performances, guided demonstrations and interactive sessions to provide students with the opportunity to have exposure to and to learn about Cantonese opera.
Preservation and exhibition of artefacts and films	The HKHM will digitise its documentary materials and collection items relating to Cantonese opera in phases. Launched in December 2018, the first phase involves the digitisation of about 800 libretti. The HKHM also plans to hold an exhibition on Cantonese opera costumes in 2019. Exquisite costumes of different decades will be selected from its collections to reflect the change in Cantonese opera costumes and the characteristics of craftsmanship in production.
	The Hong Kong Film Archive will organise an exhibition on Cantonese opera films from September to December 2019 and select several dozen masterworks of Cantonese opera films for screenings and seminars. By presenting the precious film clips, the essence of Cantonese opera can be conveyed and the history about the relationship between Cantonese opera and films can be shared with the audience.
	Hong Kong public libraries worked with the Hong Kong Association of Cantonese Opera Scholars to arrange an exhibition entitled “The Ups and Downs of Ritualistic Cantonese Opera” at the Hong Kong Central Library from November 2018 to February 2019. Part of its exhibits were provided by the HKHM.

Xiqu Centre in WKCD

Activity Type	Brief Description
Performance	The West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (WKCDA) presented the Cantonese opera classic <i>The Reincarnation of Red Plum</i> as the opening performance under the artistic curation of Dr PAK Suet-sin. The programme was well received with all tickets for the nine

Activity Type	Brief Description
Performance	<p>performances sold out.</p> <p>The Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Chamber of Commerce arranged a series of Spring Festival Showcase in February to continue WKCDA's usual practice of putting on Chinese opera performances during the Lunar New Year.</p> <p>A master selection of excerpts, including Cantonese opera, from award-winning artists of the renowned Plum Blossom Award Art Troupe of the Chinese Theatre Association was showcased when they came to Hong Kong in March.</p> <p>The Standard Chartered Tea House Theatre Experience, a programme curated and directed by Mr LAW Ka-ying, will be performed by the Tea House Rising Stars Troupe at the Tea House Theatre, bringing an exquisite appreciation experience to audiences who are new to this art form.</p>
Community promotion	<p>The Xiqu Centre will present a special screening series as part of its Opening Season programme, showcasing iconic Chinese opera films. Other activities include guided tours, talks, workshops and a special school programme.</p>
Cultural exchange	<p>The National Seminar on Erhuang Vocal System, to be co-hosted with the Traditional Theatres Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Arts in September 2019, is being planned. The seminar will include demonstrations and illustrations by Professor WANG Kwei, Mr YUEN Siu-fai and other professionals from Guangdong, Guangxi, Foshan, Zhanjiang, etc. Scholars will also present their papers and exchange views on the occasion.</p>

15. The CODF also encourages funding applications from the industry or groups for relevant promotional programmes. We learnt that some community organisations have planned to seek funding support from the CODF to organise promotional activities to disseminate the message of the 10th anniversary of the inscription of Cantonese opera.

They will make concerted efforts with the Government to enhance public awareness of and interest in Cantonese opera. The Cantonese Opera Excerpt Competition for Children and the Youth, to be held in the third quarter of this year with the funding support from the CODF, will be one of the highlights.

Way Forward

16. The Government is committed to preserving and promoting Cantonese opera, which is an important local traditional art form. Over the years, our work has been supported by the participation of the Cantonese opera sector and numerous community organisations. Through the promotional activities for the 10th anniversary of the successful inscription of Cantonese opera, we hope to further enhance public understanding of and their interest in this traditional art form, to facilitate the sustainable development of Cantonese opera amid a fast-changing modern society, and to enrich Hong Kong's vibrant and diverse cultural landscape.

Advice Sought

17. Members are invited to note the above plan to organise promotional programmes for the 10th anniversary of the successful inscription of Cantonese opera.

Home Affairs Bureau
Leisure and Cultural Services Department
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