

Speech by Secretary for Home Affairs at premiere presentation of Hong Kong Panorama: A Rhapsody of Cantonese Opera (English only)

Following is a speech delivered by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, at the premiere presentation of Hong Kong Panorama: A Rhapsody of Cantonese Opera at the Queen Theatre in The Park in New York today (October 11, New York time):

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening. It gives me great pleasure to be present here in New York to welcome you to the premiere performance of Hong Kong Panorama: A Rhapsody of Cantonese Opera. This also marks the opening to the "New York Celebrates Hong Kong 2008" Festival.

I congratulate the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, New York on hosting this series of programmes by local and international artists with close ties to Hong Kong. Throughout the Festival, New Yorkers will be able to experience for themselves, through operas, art exhibits, dance performances and educational symposiums, the cultural diversity and economic vitality of Hong Kong.

The status of New York as a cultural capital of the world is long recognised. In Hong Kong, we aspire to become the cultural metropolis of Asia and will be looking to New York for ideas on ways to rise to the challenge.

In New York, we see a celebration of the diversity of the arts. Our cultural policy in Hong Kong shares the same philosophy. We are working hard to nurture local arts groups, promote public arts education and support cultural exchanges.

We are also pushing ahead with plans to establish a world-class cultural district along our harbour waterfront, what we call the West Kowloon Cultural District. It will be a 40-hectare site with 15 performing arts venues and a new concept museum as well as galleries and restaurants.

When completed, it will be our own version of the West End with a Manhattan skyline. We aim to attract the finest arts and cultural entertainment from New York and around the world, and attract audiences from near and far. It will also be a good opportunity to develop our homegrown artistic talent and raise the profile of arts and

culture in Hong Kong.

Performing tonight is the Ming Chee Sing Chinese Opera, one of the most popular and renowned troupes in Hong Kong. I'm sure you will be dazzled by the refined artistic presentation.

Cantonese Opera is a unique part of Hong Kong culture. It has its roots in traditional operatic performances in Central China but has absorbed indigenous music and singing of the South, as well as international cultural influences of modern times, so that it now manifests rich and distinct characteristics. I must admit that I am still trying to figure out, why in Beijing Opera in Northern China, traditionally they have male actors playing female roles, while our Cantonese Opera has actresses playing male roles, as you see in the leading performer this evening, the very striking Miss Koi Ming-fai, who will sing and dance and do martial arts and is every gesture the macho hero.

Although Cantonese is a dialect spoken in Southern China, including Hong Kong, Cantonese Opera is regarded as a national treasure. Through our successful application, China's Ministry of Culture has included Cantonese Opera on the list of intangible cultural heritage at national level.

Finally, I thank the Ming Chee Sing Chinese Opera for crafting the performances for tonight and tomorrow. My heartfelt appreciation also goes to Queen's Theatre in The Park for their support in hosting this event.

I wish you all a very enjoyable evening.

Ends/Sunday, October 12, 2008