

HKSAR Government committed to preserving and developing Cantonese opera

The Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, today (August 19) received a certificate of the inscription of Cantonese opera on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Representative List) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) at the presentation ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

"The Government will continue to support and maintain a cultural environment for the promotion, preservation and development of Cantonese opera. We will work closely with the sector to build audiences and reinforce the unique market dynamics of Cantonese opera," Mr Tsang said.

"We will also encourage the sector to reform, enhance professionalism and nurture young talent so that together, we can preserve and cultivate this traditional performing art," he added.

The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage took effect in 2006. UNESCO promulgated the implementation guidelines in 2008 detailing the application mechanism and criteria for inscription on the Representative List. There were 22 items from China inscribed on the list first released in 2009, including Cantonese opera which was jointly applied for by Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao. Cantonese opera became the first item of the world intangible cultural heritage owned by the three places.

The Chinese Ministry of Culture decided to present certificates issued by UNESCO to every applying body. State leaders who were present at the ceremony today included Madam Liu Yandong, State Councillor, and Mr Cai Wu, the Minister of Culture.

Following the inscription of Cantonese opera on the Representative List on September 30, 2009, the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) applied to the Legislative Council for funding of \$69 million for injection into the Cantonese Opera Development Fund for further preservation, research, promotion and development of Cantonese opera. Of this amount, \$9 million was earmarked for implementation of the "Hong Kong Young Talent Cantonese Opera Troupe". So far the Fund had received over \$100 million in funding, and granted a total of about \$33 million to support around 350 projects on Cantonese opera development and training

programmes.

The HAB also applied for funding of \$680 million for the construction of an annex building with a medium-sized theatre, training facilities and research centre at Ko Shan Theatre. Together with the existing theatre of 1,031 seats, the new theatre is expected to further enhance Ko Shan Theatre's function as a dedicated venue for Cantonese opera.

Moreover, the Cultural Presentations Section of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department has enhanced its "Paichangxi Repertoires of Cantonese Opera Series" by inviting experienced Cantonese opera performers and tutors to teach performing skills of the traditional southern school. Subsidies were also provided to Cantonese opera troupes to perform new works.

Mr Tsang said, "In addition to the funding support provided by the Cantonese Opera Development Fund, the HAB has deployed around \$30 million for the promotion and development of Cantonese opera in 2009/10."

The Government has offered subsidies for various educational and publicity programmes to help build audiences in the community, including the Xiqu Education Project, Community Cultural Ambassador Scheme, District Cantonese Opera Parade, School Culture Day Scheme, School Arts Animateur Scheme, Arts Experience Scheme for Senior Secondary Students and Let's Enjoy Cantonese Opera in Bamboo Theatre.

In addition, the Hong Kong Heritage Museum recently collected about 2,700 Cantonese opera artifacts, increasing the total collection to more than 23,000 items. The museum also video-recorded a number of traditional works for archive and research, held thematic exhibitions, offered guided tours for the local community to the Cantonese Opera Heritage Hall and thematic exhibitions, as well as provided assistance to the Hong Kong Tourism Board to bring exhibitions and performances to visitors.

The Hong Kong Arts Festival 2010 opened with "Cantonese Opera Treasures" staged by the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong, which was also presented at Expo 2010 Shanghai China in August.

To enhance co-operation and co-ordination, the governments of Guangdong, Hong

Kong and Macao agreed at the 11th Greater Pearl River Delta Cultural Co-operation Meeting held in June this year that a working group be set up on preservation of Cantonese opera.

"The art of Cantonese opera has been developing in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao for over a hundred years, and it remains one of the most favourable types of performing art in the region. With the encouragement of the successful inscription of Cantonese opera on the Representative List, the SAR Government will continue to work hand in hand with the community to take this art to its next level," Mr Tsang said.

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