

SHA's speech at Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum 2011 (English only)

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Following is the speech by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, at the Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum 2011 - Panel Discussion by Asia Cultural Ministers today (October 8):

Minister Cai, heads of delegations, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning everyone and a warm welcome to all our honourable guests. Thank you for joining us here in Hong Kong for the Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum 2011 (ACCF).

Asian cultures have a long and rich history and are known for their diversity and inclusiveness. Over thousands of years, people in the region have travelled, traded and intermingled, and this process continues today. The more we interact and collaborate, the more we are able to appreciate the beauty and sophistication of each other's cultures and to further build deeper friendship and understanding among our people.

In recent years, the rise of Asia has been gaining attention around the world. This progress and development owes much to the resilience and resourcefulness of our people, as well as improved education and quality of life. Cultural exchange and co-operation amongst us will take us to new heights and help us flourish further.

Here in Hong Kong, we are highly committed to promoting regional cultural co-operation and exchange in Asia. As an international city at the heart of Asia, Hong Kong has built strong links with different Asian economies, and has actively engaged in different forms of cultural exchanges across a wide spectrum. For instance, we will hold the World Cultures Festival - Enchanting Arts of Asia from late October to November this year and have invited artists and art groups from different Asian economies to showcase the varied and inspiring cultures and traditions to Hong Kong people and our overseas visitors.

The ACCF is one of our key initiatives to foster the exchange of ideas and experience in policymaking and policy implementation for arts and culture. This year's forum is the seventh ACCF we have organised since its launch in 2003.

The focus of our exchanges this year will be Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). Cultural heritage embraces many elements closely linked to our way of life. It can be

seen and found in our traditions, spoken language, performing arts, social practices and traditional crafts, to name a few. But its diverse and intangible nature poses certain challenges in our efforts to preserve and promote this form of cultural heritage.

While the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted by UNESCO provides a framework, how this is translated into practice is a huge subject that has been tackled in different and creative ways by different governments depending on the local context, needs and wishes of the population. I am sure we can share many experience and insights on this subject.

In the Hong Kong context, many different cultures have made their home in our city. But at the same time, many of our traditional cultures and practices have been well preserved and maintained over a long period of time.

Four of our traditional festivals or activities have just this year been inscribed onto the third national list of intangible cultural heritage - the Bun Festival on Cheung Chau, the dragon boat water parade in Tai O, the fire dragon dance of Tai Hang and the Yu Lan Ghost Festival of the Hong Kong Chiu Chow community. All four have unique characteristics and cultural value. In spite of modernisation and urbanisation, they have been passed from generation to generation. This has not only helped maintain the bonds within these particular communities, it has also helped the wider population to learn more about and appreciate these traditions and practices, which in turn has increased the cultural capital of our city.

Here in Hong Kong, we adopt a multi-pronged approach to protect, nurture and promote ICH. This includes in-depth research, education, promotion, application for inscription and transmission.

Apart from financial and human resources provided by the Government, local communities and organisations are encouraged to participate and support safeguarding measures as part of our concerted efforts to preserve local ICH.

For example, we place much emphasis on fostering the development of Cantonese opera, which was inscribed onto UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009. This item was nominated jointly by the governments of Guangdong, Macao SAR and Hong Kong SAR to preserve a performing arts tradition that is deeply rooted in our three communities.

We have supported Cantonese opera development through various channels. In May 2004, we set up the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee which includes master artists and presenters of Cantonese opera, academics and educators and other professionals interested in promoting the art genre. This Committee advises the Government on policies and issues relating to the promotion, preservation, study and development of Cantonese opera.

We established a Cantonese Opera Development Fund in November 2005 to provide funding support to various Cantonese opera projects. Since its establishment, the Fund has provided grants to support over 400 Cantonese opera performances, professional training programmes, community promotional projects, arts education and cultural exchange programmes as well as research and archival projects. In addition to 13 performing venues provided by the Government, we have also started to build new performing venues of different size to provide training, rehearsal and performing venues for use by the Cantonese opera sector. We also maintain close collaboration with the Guangdong and Macao SAR Governments to preserve, promote and develop Cantonese opera in the Pearl River Delta.

At the moment, we are also carrying out a major survey of intangible cultural heritage in Hong Kong to identify local ICH elements in accordance with the framework set out in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. We expect the survey will help identify more heritage items from local communities, groups and individuals so we can rally their support to preserve Hong Kong's intangible cultural heritage. The survey findings will also provide a comprehensive basis for formulating further supporting measures for the preservation, promotion and enhancement of intangible cultural heritage.

Later today, we will invite our guests to join the cultural programmes at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum and experience first-hand our rich cultural traditions in Hong Kong. The preservation of Cantonese opera is one of the major subject areas for this particular museum. I am sure you will enjoy the visit, which offers a variety of exhibitions and multi-media programmes to showcase Cantonese opera treasures from its collection as well as the unique characteristics of this local indigenous art form.

It is good to note that some other museums in Asia have also devoted resources to safeguard intangible cultural heritage, including research, preservation and promotion as well as collecting objects for display. We welcome stronger links between the museums of Asia to help safeguard intangible cultural heritage and enhance public

understanding and appreciation of the ICH in different places.

I would like to thank our honourable guests in advance for sharing their valuable experience so that we can all pursue the common goal of protecting our intangible cultural heritage for the benefit, enjoyment and education of current and future generations. May I wish you all very fruitful discussions at today's Forum, and an enjoyable stay in Hong Kong.

Thank you.

Ends/Saturday, October 8, 2011

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