

LCQ19: Preservation and development of Cantonese opera

Following is a question by the Hon Tanya Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (October 21):

Question:

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has inscribed Cantonese opera onto the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (world intangible cultural heritages), and the Guangdong Provincial Government and the Macao Special Administrative Region Government have put forward different policies on the conservation and preservation of Cantonese opera. Regarding the development and preservation of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) given that UNESCO requires that the governments concerned must put forward specific supporting policies for the conservation and preservation of items designated as world intangible cultural heritages, whether the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has formulated specific policy proposals and plans for the preservation, conservation and development of Cantonese opera in accordance with such a requirement; if it has, of the details; if not, when the Government will formulate and introduce the relevant measures;

(b) apart from the Yau Ma Tei Xiqu Activity Centre, the Ko Shan Theatre in Hung Hom which is being extended, and the Xiqu Centre in the West Kowloon Cultural District, whether the Government has plans to set up a dedicated permanent venue on Hong Kong Island for Cantonese opera performances; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(c) given that the relevant authorities on the Mainland have enacted specific legislation on the conservation of local traditional operas, whether the Government will follow the practices of the Mainland to conserve Cantonese opera or other traditional operas; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(d) of the details of the latest cooperation programme drawn up by the HKSAR Government, the Guangdong Provincial Government and the Macao Special Administrative Region Government for the conservation and preservation of

Cantonese opera;

(e) whether the Government has conducted a review of the existing financial sponsorship mechanism for the development of Cantonese opera and increased the amount of such support as needed; if it has, of the details of the review and the outcome; if not, whether the Government will conduct the review shortly; if it will not, of the reasons for that; and

(f) whether the Government has specific new plans at present to promote Cantonese opera and provide relevant training in schools to enable more young people to have exposure to and get to know Cantonese opera; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(a) The Government is dedicated to the preservation, promotion and development of Cantonese opera and has set the following policy objectives to provide continued support to the preservation and development of Cantonese opera:

- i) To develop performance venues for Cantonese opera;
- ii) To nurture Cantonese opera professionals, preserve the tradition and promote creative works;
- iii) To promote Cantonese opera education, audience building and community participation;
- iv) To foster cooperation among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, and promote cultural exchange;
- v) To preserve the essence of Cantonese opera and showcase treasures of our cultural heritage; and
- vi) To promote Cantonese opera as a major tourist attraction.

The Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) set up the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee (COAC) in May 2004 to advise the Government on policies and issues in relation to the promotion, preservation, study and development of Cantonese opera. While conceiving different projects to meet the specific needs in the development of Cantonese opera, the COAC focuses on the development of performance venues and preservation and promotion of Cantonese opera. To tie in with the work of the COAC,

the HAB established the Cantonese Opera Development Fund (CODF) in November 2005 to raise donations to provide funding support to programmes and activities on the study, promotion and sustainable development of Cantonese opera.

Furthermore, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) established the Programme and Development Committee (PDC) in January 2007. The PDC is supported by six Art Form Panels (AFP), including the Chinese Traditional Performing Arts Panel which covers, inter alia, Cantonese opera and other Chinese Xiqu. The PDC and AFPs are tasked to advise the LCSD on the strategies of performing arts programmes (including local, Mainland and overseas) and to formulate structured and sustainable strategies to identify and support the development of budding and small-scale performing arts groups. The LCSD has placed much emphasis on preserving the tradition, promoting creative works and nurturing budding artists in organising Cantonese opera programmes. It has plans to rearrange and rewrite traditional Paichang plays. In addition to inviting local experienced masters and budding artists to join hands in excerpt performances of Paichang with traditional singing styles, it also considers inviting master artists of ancient Paichang plays from Guangdong to teach in Hong Kong to further promote Cantonese opera as an art form through performances and exchange platforms.

(b) In the planning for the provision of performance venues for Cantonese opera serving the Hong Kong community, the Government has to consider from a broad perspective of the overall development needs of Cantonese opera and prudently take into consideration factors such as the availability and rate of utilisation of existing facilities as the provision and operation of performance venues involve heavy capital investment and long-term commitment of resources.

At present, various performance venues of the LCSD in Hong Kong are available for hire by Cantonese opera troupes. The Cantonese opera sector has also taken part in the "Venue Partnership Scheme" of the LCSD and enjoys priority in staging performances at two venues of the LCSD (the Sha Tin Town Hall and the Tuen Mun Town Hall). We also keep on improving the priority venue hiring policy for Cantonese opera performances of the LCSD, which includes making the Ko Shan Theatre as the major performance venue for Cantonese opera and reserving time slots for staging performances by local professional troupes at several major venues (including the City Hall, the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, the Kwai Tsing Theatre, the Sha Tin Town Hall and the Tsuen Wan Town Hall). In the coming few years, we will build performance venues of different scales for Cantonese opera at different districts,

including the conversion of the Yau Ma Tei Theatre and the Red Brick Building into a Xiqu Activity Centre (with a theatre of about 300 seats), the construction of an Annex Building for the Ko Shan Theatre (with a theatre of about 600 seats) and the construction of a Xiqu Centre in the West Kowloon Cultural District (with two theatres of 1,200 to 1,400 seats and 400 seats respectively). A total of four new performance venues will be available by then.

(c) As mentioned in (a), we have formulated a set of concrete and comprehensive policy and measures to preserve, promote and develop Cantonese opera. We will continue to listen to the views of the COAC and the Cantonese opera sector and make reference to the practices of the Mainland and other regions to consider how to provide suitable legal protection.

(d) The First Greater Pearl River Delta Cultural Cooperation Meeting was held in Hong Kong in November 2002. One of the deliverables of the meeting was that Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao had agreed to enhance cooperation in respect of Cantonese opera. A working group on the promotion of Cantonese opera among the three places was subsequently set up to take forward different projects. So far the major cooperation projects have included the Cantonese Opera Day, the proposed inscription of Cantonese opera on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the compilation of the Dictionary of Cantonese Opera and the Information Compendium on Cantonese Operatic Antiquities as well as cooperation performances.

Except for the proposed inscription of Cantonese opera on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, details of the cooperation programmes are as follows:

i) Cantonese Opera Day

Starting from 2003, the last Sunday of November has been designated by Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao as Cantonese Opera Day to promote Cantonese opera. At the Tenth Greater Pearl River Delta Cultural Cooperation Meeting in February 2009, Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao also confirmed to continue to enrich the contents of activities of Cantonese Opera Day and enhance the promotion of Cantonese opera among children and young people in the three places.

ii) Cantonese Opera Performance Cooperation Projects

Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao will continue to explore performance tours

and exchanges. In the 10th Anniversary of Hong Kong's Reunification with China in 2007, famous artists from Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao staged two cooperation performances in Cantonese opera excerpts entitled "A Showcase of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao Cantonese Opera Masters" in Hong Kong. On October 30 and 31, 2009, a group of over 20 famous artists from the three places will stage two performances in the "Cantonese Operatic Songs Gala Concert by Cantonese Opera Masters from Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao in Celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China" in the Hong Kong Coliseum.

iii) Dictionary of Cantonese Opera and Information Compendium on Cantonese Operatic Antiquities

In a course of five years and with the direction of the Guangdong authorities, the Dictionary of Cantonese Opera was printed and published in November 2008. A team will be formed by experts from Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao for further improvements and amendments to the Dictionary. As for the collection and collation work for the Information Compendium on Cantonese Operatic Antiquities, museums in the three places are embarking on electronisation of information of their own collections. The ultimate goal is to achieve resources sharing on the Internet.

(e) The Government has supported the development of Cantonese opera through different forms and channels. These include support by the LCSD to about 500 Cantonese opera and operatic singing performances each year; funding of Cantonese opera performance, education, promotion and other development projects by the CODF and the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC); and subsidy by the HAB for Cantonese opera programmes organised by the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA). The Government estimates that in 2009-10, around \$33 million will be deployed for the promotion and development of Cantonese opera.

The CODF has granted about \$20.3 million to support some 260 Cantonese opera projects since its establishment, about \$3 million of which has been granted for the implementation of a three-year grant scheme for the Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Troupe for New Talents. Furthermore, the CODF has supported various Cantonese opera performance projects by budding artists or jointly presented by experienced artists and budding artists, as well as other promotional performance projects, children or youth cultural exchange and arts education programmes, and professional training and community promotional projects. Subsidies are also made available to venue development projects, research and archival projects to provide comprehensive

support for the development of Cantonese opera. In future, the CODF will look for more donations or injections to support the development of local Cantonese opera.

(f) The LCSD, the CODF and the HKADC organise or subsidise thematic and large-scale arts education, community promotion and audience development projects, such as the Xiqu Education in Schools Scheme, the Community Cultural Ambassador Scheme, the District Cantonese Opera Parade, the School Culture Day Scheme, visits to and performances at secondary and primary schools, the Cantonese Opera Promotion Scheme for Tertiary Institutions, the Guangdong - Hong Kong Youth Cultural Exchange Programme and youth training workshops. Pilot educational research projects are also supported to provide reference cases to schools. An example is the Research Project on Interactive Learning through School Visits by Cantonese Opera Master Artists.

To further promote Cantonese opera in the community, the LCSD joined hands with district organisations for the first time between March and April 2009 in organising the Appreciate Cantonese Opera at Bamboo Theatre at bamboo theatres in three different districts for the public. The programme, which included Cantonese opera performances for students and interactive learning sessions, attracted more than 8,000 participants. In view of the satisfactory results, the LCSD will continue to organise such programme in future. The Arts Experience Scheme for Senior Secondary Students and the School Arts Animateur Scheme launched in the 2009-10 academic year by the LCSD will provide Cantonese opera programmes and training for students.

Concerning the promotion of and training in Cantonese opera in schools:

i) The Music Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 3) published by the Education Bureau (EDB) in 2003 has recommended that teachers should develop students' music skills, aesthetics, creativity and imagination, and knowledge of and respect for traditional Chinese culture through the introduction of different types of music including Cantonese opera. In the New Senior Secondary School Curriculum implemented in 2009, Cantonese opera is included in the core and elective modules of the music curriculum. Students can also study Cantonese opera and Cantonese operatic songs by taking certain elective modules under the Chinese Language and the Chinese Literature curricula. The learning experiences of "Aesthetic Development" under the New Senior Secondary School Curriculum will also help provide senior secondary students with opportunities to get to know and learn Cantonese opera and

other Chinese Xiqu.

ii) In order to enable teachers to acquire the knowledge and the learning and teaching skills of Cantonese opera, the EDB has kept organising various workshops and seminars on the learning and teaching of Cantonese opera for primary and secondary teachers as well as producing relevant teaching materials for their reference and use. Since 1999, the EDB and the Hong Kong Schools Music and Speech Association have jointly organised Schools Cantonese Operatic Singing Competitions as well as workshops for teachers. Starting from the 60th Hong Kong Schools Music Festival in 2008, Cantonese Operatic Songs singing has been listed as a regular competition item in the Schools Music Festival each year.

iii) In 2007, the CODF subsidised the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) and four primary and secondary schools to carry out the "Teaching Cantonese Opera in Schools: A Pilot Project". This year, the Quality Education Fund has supported the HKIEd to conduct a three-year Partnership Project on Teaching and Learning of Cantonese Opera in Primary and Secondary Schools which is the second phase of the pilot project with a view to enhancing teachers' experience and confidence in teaching Cantonese opera. Moreover, many Cantonese opera troupes have organised training courses in schools to help promote the development of Cantonese opera.

iv) In the tertiary education sector, courses on Cantonese opera or Xiqu are offered by the University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Baptist University, the HKIEd and the HKAPA.

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