

Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Hong Kong

Hing-wah CHAU

Intangible Cultural Heritage, Hong Kong Heritage Museum

hwchau@lcsd.gov.hk

The People's Republic of China is the sixth country in the world to ratify the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2004. Subsequently, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) also agreed that the Convention should apply to the HKSAR with effect from 7 December 2004. In order to implement the Convention which comes into force since in April 2006, the HKSAR Government has, on the one hand, strengthened the institutional capacity for safeguarding the local intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and, on the other hand, has been actively supporting and engaging the community in the safeguarding measures which include the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission and education of the ICH in Hong Kong. This paper outlines the safeguarding measures done by the Hong Kong Government in the past few years.

In term of institutional capacity building, the Home Affairs Bureau is responsible to drawing up policy for safeguarding the local ICH while the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) is the agency for implementing the safeguarding policy. Shortly before the enforcement of the Convention on 20 April 2006, the LCSD established an ICH Unit under its Hong Kong Heritage Museum to implement the safeguarding measures. Besides, The Secretary for Home Affairs appointed an Intangible Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee in July 2008 to advise the Government on the conduct of the first territory-wide survey of ICH in Hong Kong and the compilation of the first inventory of ICH. Ten local professionals, academics and community personalities were appointed and they have given invaluable advices to the Government. Furthermore, the LCSD commissioned the South China Research Center of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology in August 2009 to undertake the first territory-wide survey of ICH in Hong Kong.

The Government has all along been attaching great significance to the safeguarding of the ICH and to raising the public awareness in the need to protecting such heritage. The Government has, on the one hand, supported the protection, transmission and promotion of local ICH and, on the other hand, has encouraged public involvement in the protection, transmission and development of the

traditional culture of Hong Kong. Considering such factors as significance, individual nature and degree of in danger of lost of the ICH items, the Government will adopt a diversified approach with multiple perspectives in the safeguarding measures. To comply with the requirement of the Convention in inventory-making, the Government is currently heavily engaged in the territory-wide survey of the ICH in Hong Kong for the purpose of establishing an ICH inventory and database. To raise the visibility and public awareness of local ICH, the governments of Guangdong province and Hong Kong and Macau SARs had jointly applied and succeeded in 2006 to inscribed Cantonese Opera and herbal tea drinks onto the first national list of ICH in China. The three governments then made further application via the Central Government to the UNESCO and eventually succeeded in inscribing Cantonese Opera onto the UNESCO Representative List of ICH of Humanity in 2009, making it the first item of the world intangible cultural heritage in the three regions. Besides, the Hong Kong Government submitted application to the Ministry of Culture in September 2009 for inscription of four local ICH items onto the third national list. The four items are the Jiao Festival of Cheung Chau, the Dragon Boat Water Parade of Tai O, the Fire Dragon Dance of Tai Hang and the Yu Lan Ghost Festival of the Hong Kong Chiu Chow Community. The result is expected to be announced by end of 2010. More importantly, the Government aims at promoting and transmitting ICH by raising the awareness of the youth through formal education. In collaboration with the Education Bureau, appropriate elements of ICH will be added into the Chinese Literature curriculum, the learning experiences of "Aesthetic Development" and Liberal Study curriculum under the New Senior Secondary School Curriculum to raise the interest of the young people in ICH. For instance, Cantonese Opera has been included as a compulsory or elective unit among the new music curriculum. The Government is committed to the safeguarding of the rich and diversified local intangible traditions and items which are significant to the cultural identity of local community.