

Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage

HK and Asian countries turning visions into actions

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The forum, first initiated by the Bureau in 2003 and held this year for the 7th time, aimed at fostering regional cultural collaboration, promoting culture and the arts, and enhancing Hong Kong's profile as the cultural hub of Asia. It provided an invaluable opportunity for cultural ministers and

senior officials from 11 Asian countries to discuss various issues and share experiences in preserving intangible cultural heritage.

The countries were the Mainland China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam.

This year's panel discussion, a highlight of ACCF, carried the theme of "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: From Vision to Action".

At the discussion, the Minister of Culture Dr Cai Wu stressed that preserving and passing on the country's



Participating cultural ministers and senior officials exchange views with the audience at a Q&A session.

intangible cultural heritage is tantamount to promoting the national spirit of the Chinese people and thus vital to the continuation of Chinese culture and promotion of co-operation among communities all over the world.

The Chinese government accords high priority to the safeguarding and preservation of intangible cultural heritage through government-led efforts such as laying down proper policy frameworks and mechanisms and allocating funds for preservation work. Dr Cai said the central government had spent nearly 1.5 billion yuan on the preservation of intangible cultural heritage items up till this year. And about 2.2 billion yuan had already been spent on similar preservation efforts at the provincial level up till 2010.

Dr Cai said the central government also focused its efforts on promoting community participation by creating an environment to allow active community involvement and raise public awareness through education.

Many of our intangible cultural heritage elements such as cultural activities need to be transmitted from generation to generation through people and thus working with these people and communities to preserve their knowledge and skills are of utmost importance, he pointed out.

Dr Cai urged nations across the region to step up exchanges and co-operation in order to learn from each other's experience. He proposed fortifying regional efforts by hosting a forum every two years focusing on ways to safeguard Asia's intangible cultural heritage.

Addressing the panel discussion session, the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, said that Hong Kong is highly committed to promoting regional cultural co-operation and exchange in Asia.

"While the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)



Hong Kong SAR Government is committed to promoting cultural co-operation and exchanges with governments across the region.

Tsang Tak-sing, Secretary for Home Affairs

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."

"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," Mr Tsang explained.

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

"We are also carrying out a major survey of ICH in Hong Kong to identify local elements in accordance with the framework set out in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH. We expect the survey will help identify more heritage items from local communities, groups and

individuals," Mr Tsang said, adding that the survey findings would also provide a comprehensive basis for formulating further supporting measures for the preservation, promotion and enhancement of ICH.

Mr Tsang said progress was being made in Hong Kong with four local ICH items – the Cheung Chau Jiao Festival, the Tai O dragon boat water parade, the Tai Hang fire dragon dance and the Yu Lan Ghost Festival of the Hong Kong Chiu Chow community – all being successfully inscribed earlier this year onto the third national list of ICH. Cantonese opera was inscribed onto the UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009.

Besides attending the panel discussion, participants were invited to view exhibitions on Cantonese opera at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, where all participating cultural ministers and senior officials also had an opportunity to meet with representatives from the local arts and cultural sector.