

Brief Descriptions of the First Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Hong Kong

1. Nanyin (southern tunes)

Nanyin or “southern tunes” is a narrative song art presented in the Cantonese vernacular and once grew in popularity in Hong Kong during the early 20th century. It was mostly performed by blind artists who performed narrative singing accompanied on the zheng, the yehu, and with the clapper for the beat. The lyrics often told the demise of the lowest stratum of society at the time. Today, the singing and tune of nanyin is blended into Cantonese opera and tunes as part of their singing features.

2. Spring and Autumn Ancestral Worship of Clans

At every vernal and (or) autumnal equinox, or during the fourth and the ninth lunar months, members of the clan will gather together either to hold an ancestral worship ceremony at the ancestral hall, or visit their ancestors’ graves up on the hills to observe filial piety and pay tribute to their ancestors. Clans in the New Territories consider the ancestral worship ceremony an important clan and village activity. Today some local clans still follow the practices of “eating on the hillside” (to cook and eat the food after the offering ceremony at the graves), distributing sections of pork to clan members and speaking in the “walled village dialects” during the rituals.

3. Tin Hau Festival in Hong Kong

Tin Hau temples all over Hong Kong are main venues of worship for followers of the deity, Tin Hau (Goddess of Heaven). This practice serves to bond villagers and the fishing communities through communal worship. Every year, on the 23rd day of the third lunar month – or on a date determined by the community – people would celebrate the birthday of the Goddess with a diverse programme of activities. Some neighbourhood organising committees would organise Cantonese opera performances as an act of thanksgiving to the Goddess, and exchange the fa pau (paper floral tributes). Some may also hold parades on land or at sea.

4. Mid-Autumn Festival - the Pok Fu Lam Fire Dragon Dance

Every Mid-Autumn Festival (on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month), the

residents of Pok Fu Lam Village would hold a fire dragon dance. Dozens of athletic men would wield the fire dragon with agility as they parade through the streets and lanes in the village to invoke blessings for well-being and peace. The entire process, which consists of crafting and modelling of the dragon, consecration, conducting the dragon dance and sending the fire dragon to the sea, involves active participation of residents of the neighbourhood. So it is a highly bonding activity for the local community.

5. Taoist Ritual Tradition of the Zhengyi School

Taoist doctrines and rituals in Hong Kong are by and large conducted by two schools, namely the Zhengyi (Orthodox Unity) and the Quanzhen (Complete Perfection). The Zhengyi school is subdivided into two systems, that of the New Territories and that of the urban areas. The Taoist ritual tradition of the Zhengyi school in the New Territories include rituals and almsgiving services conducted among the walled village communities on birthdays of the deities, the jiao festivals, kaiguang (rituals for dedication, consecration and sanctification) and for salvation of the souls of the departed from purgatory. The Taoist ritual tradition of the Zhengyi School in the urban areas are categorised into two types, “blue altar” and “yellow altar”. The former is for celebrating auspicious occasions, while the latter is for funerals and burials.

6. Sek Pun (Basin Feast)

Villages of the New Territories would hold basin feasts or sek pun for occasions such as religious offerings, jiao rituals, weddings, the “lantern lighting” ritual to mark the birth of a baby boy and the inauguration of the ancestral hall. As a symbol of unity, clansmen will gather together at the table to eat at a basin feast. Basin feast is part of a unique food culture preserved by villages in the New Territories. In addition to the bonding and reinforcement of lineage, it also serves the social function of recognising the status of members of the clans.

7. Hong Kong-style Milk Tea Making Technique

The Hong Kong-style milk tea is also known as “silk stocking milk tea”. The tea-making process involves setting the ration of different kinds of tea leaves, boiling and infusing the tea, force-pouring the tea, infusion and force-pouring the milk. The resulting beverage is a firm favourite among the Hong Kong locals. Their version of milk tea making reflected the East-West fusion trends of Hong Kong as well as the lifestyle and food culture of the local people.

8. Paper Crafting Technique

With paper crafting techniques and painting skills, simple materials such as bamboo splints, rice paper strips, coloured papers, silk fabrics, etc. are turned into all kinds of crafted products. Paper crafting plays an important role in the traditional festive celebrations and rituals, some of the common crafted products include fa pau (paper floral tributes), effigies of the Ghost King, lanterns, dragons, lions and unicorns for ritual dance, and paper offerings. The technique embodies the history and culture of different ethnic groups and carries significant social and cultural values.

9. The Sewing Techniques of Hong Kong-style Cheongsam and Kwan Kwa Wedding Costume

Men's cheongsam is a symbol of the identity of elders among clan members in the New Territories, thus carries important social meanings. When women's cheongsam emerged as a trend in Hong Kong, its sewing technique was influenced by Western design concepts and the traditional form, and slowly a distinctly local style had been developed. Kwan kwa, mostly decorated with dragons and phoenixes, is handmade traditionally, and is a traditional gown for the bride.

10. Bamboo Theatre Building Technique

During the birthdays of deities, the jiao festivals or the Yu Lan Festival, various communities and neighbourhoods of Hong Kong would have a temporary bamboo structure erected at the venue, for the purposes of staging Chinese opera performances as thanksgiving to the deities and for rituals. The makeshift structure is made up of bamboo poles and fir beams, erected as standards and ledgers to form frameworks. Covered with metal sheets, the gigantic "tent" can keep out the sun and the rain. The size of a bamboo theatre is flexible according to needs - it can be as small as to accommodate only a hundred or more, or big enough for thousands. The bamboo theatre building technique is exemplary of the age-old wisdom of Chinese architecture.

11. Cantonese Opera*

Cantonese opera is one type of Chinese traditional theatre (xiqu), with singing and spoken lines delivered in the Cantonese dialect. It is popularly found in the Cantonese-speaking regions, which include mainly Guangdong, Guangxi, Hong Kong and Macao. In each opera production, the story is told through the "four

basic skills” of singing, acting, delivery of spoken lines and martial arts, enhanced by stage makeup, costumes, props and the percussive beats on gongs and drums. The presentation format is a fine mixture of literature, Chinese opera, dance and martial arts. The singing style, role types, makeup, stylised movements, libretti and singing scores are all rich in artistic value. Aside from being a form of performing art for public entertainment, Cantonese opera can serve as religious drama (shengongxi) presented as part of the ritual of thanksgiving to the gods and spirits, or to appease the ghosts (dajiao). It is therefore highly praised for its social and cultural values. Cantonese opera was inscribed onto the first national list of ICH in 2006, and the UNESCO List of ICH in 2009.

12. Herbal Tea*

Popularly found in the South China region, herbal tea (“leung cha”, or “cooling tea”) is a decoction of Chinese medicinal herbs made according to traditional Chinese medicine theories. The climate of South China is known for being “hot and damp”, and its water is regarded as being “heaty”. So in order to prevent the heat and damp symptom-complex, to cool the body and prevent the common cold, different types of decoction have become part of the unique food culture of the region. Herbal tea in Hong Kong has a history of over a hundred years. Decades ago, the herbal tea shop had another function as a neighbourhood “entertainment centre”. Today, herbal teas are still very much a part of everyday life and are representative of folk knowledge and traditional culture. Herbal tea was inscribed onto the first national list of ICH in 2006.

13. Cheung Chau Jiao Festival*

The activity has been practised for more than 100 years. Cheung Chau was devastated by a plague in the late Qing dynasty. Local residents set up a sacrificial altar in front of Pak Tai Temple to pray to the god Pak Tai to drive off evil spirits. The residents even paraded deity statues through the village lanes. The plague ceased after performance of the ritual. Since then, residents on Cheung Chau have organised a Jiao Festival every year to express thanks to the god for blessing and protecting them. With residents' participation every year, the ritual has been passed down through the generations. Cheung Chau Jiao Festival was inscribed onto the third national list of ICH in 2011.

14. Tai O Dragon Boat Water Parade*

During the annual Dragon Boat Festival, three fishermen's associations, Pa Teng, Sin Yu Heung and Hap Sim Tong, organise a religious activity known as the dragon boat water parade. On the morning before the festival, members of the associations row their dragon boats to visit four temples in Tai O, where they receive statues of Yeung Hou, Tin Hau, Kwan Tei and Hung Shing. They carry the deity statues back to their associations' hall for worship. On the day of the festival, the deity statues are put on sacred sampans towed by the associations' dragon boats to parade through Tai O's waters. The deity statues are returned to the respective temples after the ritual. This unique religious activity has been preserved for more than a century. Tai O dragon boat water parade was inscribed onto the third national list of ICH in 2011.

15. Yu Lan Ghost Festival of the Hong Kong Chiu Chow Community*

There are about 1.2 million people originating from Chiu Chow in Hong Kong who actively carry on their traditions. During the ghost festival, which lasts for a month every year, the Chiu Chow people in Hong Kong organise the Yu Lan Festival that starts from the first day of the seventh lunar month and continues until the end of that month. Having been held for more than 100 years, the festival is to offer sacrifices to ancestors and the wandering ghosts in the netherworld. The main activities include burning incense and joss papers, performing live Chinese operas and dramas for ghosts, distributing auspicious rice and auctioning auspicious objects. Yu Lan Ghost Festival of the Hong Kong Chiu Chow community was inscribed onto the third national list of ICH in 2011.

16. Mid-Autumn Festival – the Tai Hang Fire Dragon Dance*

The event has been held for more than 100 years. Tai Hang was originally a Hakka village. Legend has it that a plague broke out there in 1880, in order to ward off the disease the villagers crafted a dragon and planted joss sticks on it. On the evening of the 14th, 15th and 16th of the eighth lunar month, the villagers paraded the fire dragon through the village and let off firecrackers. The plague ended after the event. From then on, the villagers have performed a three-day fire dragon dance every year to bless themselves. Tai Hang fire dragon dance was inscribed onto the third national list of ICH in 2011.

17. The Arts of the Guqin (the Craft of Qin Making)*

The arts of the guqin include the techniques for making the qin (a seven-stringed plucked instrument). Qin making is a craft that starts with chopping and

trimming a piece of wood, and involves nine steps, namely seeking, chopping, hollowing, fitting, assembling, cement priming, sanding, lacquering and stringing, until it reaches the final stage of becoming an instrument. Local craftsmanship of qin making can be traced back to Xu Wenjing, a master qin player of the Zhejiang school (pai). He taught the craft to Choi Chang-sau, whose family operated the Choi Fook Kee musical instrument shop, in the 1950s. Choi Chang-sau started the Qin Making Class, teaching the craft publicly to local qin players so that it can be perpetuated in Hong Kong. The arts of the guqin (the craft of qin making) was inscribed onto the fourth national list of ICH in 2014.

18. Quanzhen Temples Taoist Ritual Music*

Taoist ritual music consists of the Zhengyi (Orthodox Unity) and the Quanzhen (Complete Perfection) traditions. The Quanzhen Temples Taoist Ritual Music has been developed in Hong Kong for many years. The Taoist music inherited by Fung Ying Seen Koon is considered one of the most typical representatives of the Quanzhen temples tradition in Hong Kong. After decades of inheritance in Hong Kong, the liturgical music of Fung Ying Seen Koon has evolved into a kind of Taoist music with local characteristics under the influence of Cantonese opera and its singing style, Cantonese tunes, and other religious music genres such as Confucian and Buddhist music. Quanzhen temples Taoist ritual music was inscribed onto the fourth national list of ICH in 2014.

19. Hakka Unicorn Dance in Hang Hau in Sai Kung*

The activity has been practised for more than 200 years. The Hakka people believe the Chinese unicorn, the qilin, is an auspicious animal that can ward off evil and bring good luck. So, on all celebratory occasions such as Chinese New Year, weddings, birthday parties, the inauguration of an ancestral hall, moving into a new home, welcoming guests, the jiao festivals and birthdays of deities, there would invariably be a unicorn dance. Since the Hakka people brought the unicorn dance, fusing local traditional music and martial arts, with them to Hong Kong, the unicorn dance has developed its own styles and sequence of movements. Hang Hau Hakka unicorn dance was inscribed onto the fourth national list of ICH in 2014.

20. Wong Tai Sin Belief and Customs*

The folk religion of Wong Tai Sin originated in the Jinhua area of Zhejiang Province and was introduced into the Lingnan region at the turn of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Local Wong Tai Sin belief and customs originated in 1915. In

1921, Sik Sik Yuen was established to manage the Wong Tai Sin Temple. After a century of inheritance, nowadays the folk religion of Wong Tai Sin has developed in conjunction with charitable features and has been widely circulated in Hong Kong and overseas Chinese communities. Sik Sik Yuen has founded various social services for the local community, achieving Wong Tai Sin's "grant every wish" spirit. Wong Tai Sin belief and customs was inscribed onto the fourth national list of ICH in 2014.

* The 10 local items which have already been inscribed onto the national list of ICH.