

LCQ14: Determining English names for public places and facilities, streets and government buildings

Following is a question by the Hon Andrew Wan and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (May 29):

Question:

The West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (WKCDA) has earlier determined the English name for the newly completed "Xiqu Centre" which is situated in the West Kowloon Cultural District as "Xiqu Centre". Instead of adopting the commonly used term "opera" to refer to "Xiqu", the term "Xiqu" (Hanyu Pinyin for "Xiqu") is used in that English name. However, quite a number of visitors to Hong Kong, as well as local people who are ethnic Chinese and those who are non-ethnic Chinese, have relayed to me that they have no idea of what "Xiqu Centre" means. Some members of the public have pointed out that the naming of "Xiqu Centre" has deviated from the Government's established practice for determining the English names for streets and buildings in Hong Kong, i.e. using the Cantonese transliterations of their Chinese names or English terms with the same meaning. Besides, the term "Xiqu" has been invariably translated as "Chinese Opera" on a number of webpages of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and on the printed materials for activities and exhibitions held by it. On the other hand, the term "opera" is widely used in the Chinese communities. For instances, the term "Xiqu" is translated as "opera" by the relevant organisations in places such as Beijing and Singapore. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that it is uncommon to see English names of local buildings comprising Hanyu Pinyin, whether it knows the specific reasons for WKCDA to adopt "Xiqu Centre" as the English name for "Xiqu";
- (2) whether it will request WKCDA to consider changing the English name for "Xiqu" to "Chinese Opera Centre", or adding "Chinese Opera Centre" to its English name by way of a note, so that people from different sectors can have a clearer idea about the functions of the venue;
- (3) of the existing policies on as well as criteria and procedure for determining the English names for public places and facilities and government buildings; the public places and facilities as well as government buildings whose English names comprise Hanyu Pinyin; and
- (4) whether it will adopt Hanyu Pinyin in determining the English names for public places and facilities, streets and government buildings in future; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that, and whether the fact that the English name for "Xiqu" has given rise to controversies is one of

the reasons?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (WKCD), my reply to parts (1) and (2) of the Hon Andrew Wan's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) WKCD is a statutory body established to develop the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) into an integrated arts and cultural district. Being the first major performing arts venue in the district, Xiqu Centre has the vision to be a world-class platform for the conservation, promotion and development of various forms of xiqu (Chinese traditional theatre) in Hong Kong, in particular Cantonese opera. The opening of Xiqu Centre is conducive to developing a locally-rooted xiqu network that has a regional impact with an important role in international arts development.

As far as Xiqu Centre is concerned, the naming hinged on the substance of the art form. The term "Xiqu" has been used in both the artistic and academic fields for decades. Following the report of the Performing Arts and Tourism Advisory Group under the Consultative Committee on the Core Arts and Cultural Facilities of the WKCD, WKCD has been using the English name "Xiqu Centre" as a working title for the proposed venue for the art form concerned since its establishment in 2008.

WKCD kept an open mind on the English naming of the venue, and it noted that different English terms have been used by different organisations when referring to this art form and there is no single universal English term for it. In the course of considering the English name of the venue, WKCD has engaged different stakeholders, including academic and artistic professional groups through different platforms and channels. Different options had been given full consideration before settling on the current title.

During the discussion with the stakeholders, WKCD was aware that one of the important views from academic and artistic professional groups was that the term "Xiqu" represents a unique Chinese traditional performing and theatrical art form which should be differentiated from opera or theatre in the Western culture in order to reflect the unique identity and the distinct artistic techniques including singing, recitation, acting and acrobatics in the variety of genres of the art form.

WKCD takes the view and believes that the current English name "Xiqu Centre" is an appropriate and balanced choice to communicate the uniqueness of the xiqu art form to local and international audiences. WKCD will establish the reputation of Xiqu Centre as a world-class performing arts venue and enhance public understanding of the rich traditional Chinese art form of xiqu in due course.

After consulting the Development Bureau, the reply to parts (3) and (4) of the question is as follows:

(3) and (4) At present, the Lands Department (LandsD) is responsible for the naming of streets pursuant to the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap 132), while the naming of geographical places is executed by the Geographical Place Names Board which is chaired by LandsD, and consists of representatives from relevant departments.

In general, when naming a new street and geographical place, the English name is normally the transliterated version of the Chinese name in Cantonese Romanisation, unless the street concerned is named after a particular place/object and there is specific Chinese/English term for that particular place/object in common use, in which case the literal translation is used.

Proposals (in Chinese and English) of street naming and geographical place naming will be circulated among relevant government departments and the District Council for their consideration and comment. Relevant District Offices will conduct local consultation among representatives of residents and local organisations on the bilingual naming proposals. A notice of the proposed bilingual geographical place name will also be posted on site and advertised in local English and Chinese newspapers for public consultation. The accepted street name will be published in the Government Gazette and accepted geographical place name will be shown on official maps published by LandsD.

As far as government buildings are concerned, they are usually named by the project proponents taking into account the nature of individual projects, and it is hard to make generalisation.