

VII. Pending Issues

Q1. Is any of the intangible cultural heritage in your country in danger of disappearance or transformation?

(Please include the name of the particular heritage, location, problems encountered, etc.)

In the Republic of Korea, the intangible cultural assets of regions in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea(DPRK) are being transmitted mainly by communities of persons whose home towns are now in the DPRK. However, the communities are finding it increasingly difficult to transmit such intangible cultural assets as they continue to be disconnected to their geographical foundations. Several items of the highest artistic merit including the Bongsan Mask Dance are sometimes being transmitted as forms of art, but their disconnection from the regional communities from which the assets originated is hindering the transmission through methods that are more natural.

Q2. What are the reasons the heritage is in danger and what type of safeguarding measures have been taken? Please be specific.

The Korean government supports the transmission of intangible cultural assets from regions that are now in the DPRK by designating items as a nationally-designated important intangible cultural asset, a city- or province-based intangible cultural asset, or an intangible cultural asset from the five northern provinces.

There are 13 intangible cultural assets from the five northern provinces (currently in the DPRK) that have been designated and are being protected by the Cultural Heritage Administration: eight items including the Bukcheong Lion Dance and Sounds of the Southern Provinces as nationally-designated important

intangible cultural assets, and five items including the shamanic ritual Mansu-daetakgut and Intangible Cultural Asset No.1 of Hwanghae Province.

Q3. What are the pending issues for safeguarding ICH in your country that you have found through interviews and the field survey?

The intangible cultural assets of Korea have been protected under the leadership of the ROK government for about half a decade. In this process, a practice settled in which the government regards intangible cultural asset transmitters not as main agents but rather as a community to be supervised, while the individual transmitters in the private sector also consider themselves as receivers of government support.

It seems important that the autonomy of the private sector is raised with regards to protecting intangible heritage, and that a new cooperation system between the private sector and the government is formed.

Q4. What kind of problems and difficulties were encountered during the safeguarding projects?

The National Intangible Heritage Center (NIHC) is currently establishing a bottom-up protection system for intangible heritage, where the participation of local governments is more important than that of the central government.

However, local governments are often lacking in their capacity to protect intangible heritage. In the case of city or provincial governments, it is hard to find an employee who supervises intangible heritage with expertise. This is hindering the establishment of a bottom-up protection system.

Q5. What future plans are there for the safeguarding of ICH (programme information)?

The NIHC is currently creating a system for the protection of intangible heritage records. Based on the results of previous projects to archive intangible heritage records, the effort to collect and manage records is being expanded. Articles (tools, manuscripts, etc.) that were created or left by deceased cultural

transmitters are being collected, and a digital archive is under construction through which records can be collected without any restriction and accessed by the public via a user-friendly system.

In order to establish a bottom-up heritage protection system, the NIHC has recently appointed local scholars established in their respective local communities as “intangible heritage keepers” and have since been supporting their activities. There still is a long way to go, but as of now all their activities have been promising.

Q6. What type of contributions and cooperation from the international society is needed for the safeguarding of ICH in your country?

Meaningful policies and systems on the global level need to be established. For now, Korea does not seem to require any external material support. However, an external opportunity will be an important stimulant toward developing domestic policies and systems. For instance, if the international society were to offer globally accepted guidelines on how to archive records and manage archives on intangible heritage, it would contribute to the development of Korea’s capacity to archive records and manage archives on intangible heritage.

Q7. What role do you expect ICHCAP to play in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in the region in terms of programmes, projects, etc.?

One suggestion is to consider the Asia-Pacific region as a single category and plan a joint project among countries in the region. For instance, there could be a joint project to protect intangible heritage from along the Silk Road, covering the intangible heritage that originated from the land and sea routes comprising the Silk Road as well as their unique culture of trade. The countries would each select a representative agency, which will be supervised by an Asia-Pacific center in charge of planning and mediation. The intangible cultural assets established as a result would then be suggested as candidates for joint registration as part of the cultural heritage of humanity.

In such a global project that requires cooperation among Asia-Pacific countries, the NIHC could serve as the main representative of Korea.

Q8. What should be considered to encourage or to ensure active involvement from the community in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage?

In Korea, communities are often the most effective on the city and province levels. Considering villages as the main unit is not without merit, but because cities and provinces operate their own local governments they have real power to plan and manage policies. Therefore, the capacity of personnel in local autonomous entities (local governments) on the city and provincial levels needs to be strengthened.

In addition, it is important that realistic strategies are established in order to realize an ideal state of community participation, and as mentioned above the NIHC has launched a project to organize local scholars, who will comprise the core workforce in community participation.

There is also a need to reestablish the concept and reality of community in Korean culture, as well as to review the concept and reality of groups and individuals who are suggested as the main agents of intangible heritage. In Korea, both communities as well as individuals exist as main agents of important intangible heritage.