

Summary

As Bhutan joins other nations on the path of development, change is inevitable in the face of globalization and urbanization. Culturally, the country is moving from nature-oriented spiritual traditions to a more secular science-oriented modern viewpoint. Socially, Bhutan is shifting from a primarily agrarian rural community to urban-based townships. Economically, Bhutan is transitioning from subsistence farming to a consumer-driven market economy.

Mass produced market goods, cultural products, and even artworks have invaded Bhutan, displacing traditionally produced objects. New materials and access to large amounts of new information have further impacted ways of thinking, often with challenging results. Urbanization, the implementation of democracy, globalization, the impact of (often foreign) popular culture, and the results of a modern education system are having positive impacts on livelihoods, yet at the cost of cultural and social traditions. As younger members of the community are towards the demands and results of a modern education, traditional festivals, folklore, literature, and other cultural practices are losing their significance and priority in the minds of many, thus threatening to undermine not only the essence of these practices, but also their basic survival.

Gross National Happiness (GNH), as opposed to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the development philosophy of Bhutan. Preservation and promotion of cultural heritage is one of the four pillars of this philosophy and has been one of the priorities of Bhutan's five year plan. Bhutan currently carries out cultural preservation, protection and promotion activities in accordance with the existing policies, legislation, guidelines, rules and regulations.

Bhutan ratified the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage ("ICH Convention") in 2005, under which Bhutan is obliged to create national legal framework for the protection of country's intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, recognizing the urgent need to have legal framework of the preservation and promotion of Cultural Heritage in place, the cooperation between the Department of Culture, Kyushu University (represented by distinguished Professor of Law, Kyushu University, Japan) and UNESCO New Delhi (represented by Ms Moe Chiba, programme Specialist) formally established to enhance efficient technical and financial cooperation to develop national legal framework in the area of cultural heritage in Bhutan for three years from October 2012 to October 2015 (to be extended for three years until 2 October 2018).

First, Cultural Heritage Sites Bill was drafted followed by Intangible Cultural Heritage Sites Bill in 2012. Prof. Kono and Ms. Chiba has provided guidance throughout the drafting process and looked for consistency with international heritage laws. Upon completion of drafting of Cultural Heritage Sites Bill, it was submitted

to Cabinet Meeting held in September 2015. The Meeting instructed to merge Tangible and Intangible into one bill, following which the three draft bills (Heritage Sites, amend the Movable Cultural Property Act 2005 and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Bills) are merged into one Bill as Cultural Heritage Bill. As of now, the Cultural Heritage Bill is envisaged to have submitted to the Parliament for deliberation perhaps in the spring session.

Though, the Government of Bhutan ratified the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Bhutan is yet to establish a national inventory of ICH as per the obligations laid out in the Convention. The Department of Culture (through the National Library and Archives) has been shouldering the responsibilities of implementation of activities of ICH required as per this convention. Under the technical support and financial assistance coordinated by the UNESCO-Delhi, three capacity building workshops were conducted in Bhutan from 2012 to 2014 on different themes as follows:

1. Capacity Building Workshop on Implementation of the 2003 Convention at the national level from 14 to 18 May, 2012. It had the participation of a total of 28 participants which comprised of district cultural officers, focal points from the National Library & Archives, Department of Culture, Folk Heritage Museum, Institute of Language & Cultural Studies, HELVETAS-Swiss Development organization- an NGO based in Bhutan having ICH mapping as one of their programmes.
2. Capacity Building Workshop on Community-based inventorying of Intangible Cultural Heritage under the Implementation of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Bhutan was held from April 2-9, 2013. There were 20 participants including district culture officers, focal points from the National Library & Archives, Royal Academy for performing arts, Institute of language and Cultural Studies, Institute Traditional Medicine, Institute of Zorig Chusum (13 arts of Bhutan), National Museum of Bhutan, representative from Local government officials and UNESCO Natcom -Bhutan.
3. The third and the final workshop on the Process of Preparing nomination Dossiers under the two lists of the Convention: Representative List of ICH and the List of ICH in Need of Urgent Safeguarding was held from 4 to 8 March 2014. There were participants from all the relevant agencies.

This Capacity Building Workshops were well-timed coinciding with the project of Development of National Inventory System of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Bhutan undertaken with the funding support of ICHCAP's project (2011-2014) and it facilitated to great extent.

This four year project resulted into publication of Bhutan's first ICH book entitled, "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bhutan, formally launched on 29 July 2015 at Hotel Le Meridian in Thimphu, Bhutan. The book today serves as basis to lay the groundwork for a full national inventory of ICH of Bhutan.

As part of launching ceremony of the book, the National Library and Archives (Dept. of Culture) and International Information and Networking Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (ICHCAP), a UNESCO Category II Centre in Korea, also organised a symposium on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) on 29 July, 2015 in Thimphu.

Documentation as well as research of ICH are being carried out by government and non-government agencies, private agencies as well as individuals through whatever equipments possible such as through written documentation; photographic documentation, video filming, audio recordings; through workshops, seminars as well as contests, exhibitions and festivals on a regular basis are being carried out. As of today, at least five organizations are actively involved in the documentation and inventorying of ICH related areas currently. Those organizations are:

- 1) The National Library and Archives is carries out research and document of all kinds of ICH in Bhutan;
- 2) The College of Language and Cultural Studies, Taktse, Trongsa, is documenting both tangible and intangible cultural heritage;
- 3) Shejun for Bhutan's Cultural Documentation and Research is documenting mainly written heritage and oral traditions;
- 4) The Music of Bhutan Research Centre is documenting and archiving the traditional musical traditions of Bhutan;
- 5) Bhutan Oral Literature Project: Culture, Language, Environment is documenting local dialects and languages of Bhutan.

While the College of Language and Cultural Studies has already created its website, the rest four are working to create their own website and make their documentation outcome available through online database. The objectives are to keep updating the data as an inventory resource for researchers and academicians, make the information reference depository for future generation of Bhutan. Despite all the efforts being made, Bhutanese ICH whether tangible or intangible, is still a subject where much work remains to be done.

Considering the current state of ICH in the country, there is an urgent need to carry out awareness-raising on the importance of safeguarding ICH for general public, especially in rural area where ICH holding communities, bearers and practitioners are based, as well as for the decision-makers so that support and help are received from all levels or sections of society while documenting ICH of Bhutan. This will ensure the effectiveness of implementation for all cultural plans and programmes not solely to preserve and promote past practices, but also to help mitigate the impacts of mass culture while contributing to a heightened understanding of Bhutanese culture and identity.