

Preface

In the fall of 2013, ICHCAP convened an international conference celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Convention for the Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage. Held in Gwangju, this conference aimed at reflecting on the ten-year implementation of the Convention and its achievements as well as searching to develop future tasks.

Under the title of “Reflection on the Efforts to Safeguard ICH and Prospects for the Future”, this conference provided a useful opportunity to review the effects and outcomes of the ICH Convention on many countries in the Asia-Pacific region and to share theoretical discussions as well as practical experiences with a panel of experts and various stakeholders dedicated to safeguarding ICH.

The papers in this report show that the Convention has positively influenced the world in safeguarding, transmitting, and revitalizing ICH and has helped achieve great results in terms of institutionalization, inventorying, awareness-raising, and research.

But they also pointed out that most implementation activities thus far have focused on inscribing ICH elements on the Representative List, without trying other necessary safeguarding actions, such as preventing non-registered ICH elements from disappearing, protecting ICH through transmission, and calling for more action at the state and community levels.

Above all, these papers show how ICH safeguarding has contributed to developing spiritual cultures and the advance of civilizations in history. In addition, with the papers explaining the background of the Convention, this report can be an important reference for researching and discussing ICH.

Professor Tu Weiming of Harvard University (at the moment of Beijing University) gave a keynote speech in which he sought a holistic spiritual culture by connecting reason, emotion, spirit, and body in Asian values and Confucian culture and proposing a spiritual humanism as a new paradigm for overcoming the modern notion of the Enlightenment-centered reason.

Professor Lourdes Arizpe, a leading anthropologist in Mexico and former Assistant Director-General of the Culture Sector of UNESCO, had taken the lead in the ‘Culture and Development’ discourses of UNESCO until the resolution of the Convention, thereby playing an important role in establishing the concept of ICH and defining its categories. Her presentation delivered information and deep insights on the history of the Convention and the relationship between ICH and the community. She could not participate in the conference in person due to her schedule; nonetheless all the participants watched and listened to her forty-minute video presentation with great interests.

Mr. Tim Curtis, Head of Culture Unit of UNESCO Office in Bangkok, also helped in reviewing the past ten years of the Convention by summarizing the outcome of the Convention in the Asia-Pacific region and suggesting new directions and tasks on safeguarding and promoting ICH. Ms. Noriko Aikawa, a leading player in UNESCO when the Convention was formulated, also gave helpful suggestions by revealing the challenges in making the mandatory ICH inventories and giving improvement directions.

Many others in the ICH field from the Asia-Pacific region shared their informative stories with us.

As I said in my presentation, the ICH Convention was a great success, and it is further expected to influence institutional improvements, safeguarding practices, and research and development throughout the world.

Hoping this report will be helpful in safeguarding and promoting ICH throughout Asia-Pacific region and in all UNESCO Member States, I thank all who participated.

Samuel Lee, PhD

Director - General
International Information and Networking Centre for
Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region
under the auspices of UNESCO (ICHCAP)