

National Intangible Heritage Center of Korea

New Comprehensive Institute on Intangible Heritage at the forefront of ICH safeguarding

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Introduction

The National Intangible Heritage Center (NIHC, Director Hong-dong Kim), a national institution under the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea, was officially opened in the city of Jeonju, Republic of Korea, in October 2014.

Intangible cultural heritage is a valuable form of cultural asset that contains greater internal meaning than is visible on the surface, and its importance continues to grow every day. However, due to the non-physical nature of intangible cultural heritage, there are challenges to safeguarding and transmitting it, especially since the cultural element itself can be lost when its bearer passes on.

Currently, there are 132 state-designated elements of important intangible cultural heritage in Korea with 174 bearers, and 38 of these have been identified as being in a vulnerable state of viability with poor foundations for transmission or insufficient numbers of bearers.

The NIHC fulfills comprehensive functions for safeguarding and strengthening transmission foundations for intangible cultural heritage, including vulnerable elements, while supporting the independent viability and revitalization of traditional arts and crafts.

Activities

The NIHC is a comprehensive cultural space for safeguarding and transmitting intangible cultural heritage and serves as a venue for exchanges in the intangible cultural heritage sphere. Equipped with specialized facilities such as performance halls, exhibition spaces, international conference room, digital archives, and educational/experiential space, the NIHC is a comprehensive cultural space where one can directly experience a variety of intangible heritage.

Specific projects include holding intangible cultural heritage exhibitions/performances and educational programs as well as providing support for Intangible cultural heritage bearers, domestic and international exchange, and contents creation.

Exhibition/performance projects are programs that allow the public to experience intangible cultural heritage up close in events



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that make use of a variety of intangible heritage contents.

Regular performances and special performances with innovative concepts by intangible cultural heritage bearers and course graduates as well as a permanent exhibition and special exhibitions with panorama video and representative symbols of intangible cultural heritage are being planned or already in operation to bring the historical and cultural value of intangible cultural heritage to life.

The educational program projects include capability-building workshops for bearers and course graduates as well as experiential education programs held every Saturday for the general public. Efforts are being made to provide children with opportunities to experience intangible cultural heritage up close and to teach them that intangible heritage is not a difficult concept but a fun and enjoyable part of culture.

Various support projects are in operation for transmitters to facilitate the revitalization of important intangible cultural heritage. For traditional crafts of vulnerable transmission status, measures to revitalize them, such as developing designs and supplying traditional raw materials, are being sought while support will be provided to improve their independent viability.

Domestic and international exchange projects support exchange. At the domestic

level, various public events, such as academic seminars and exhibitions, are held along with the operation of the Guardian of Intangible Heritage program (a local investigation committee) for a bottom-up strategic approach to intangible heritage safeguarding and transmission. At the international level, the overseas lecture project for intangible cultural heritage transmission among foreign nationals of Korean descent will be expanded. Foreign nationals of Korean descent will also be invited to Korea to experience intangible cultural heritage as part of efforts to protect traditional culture.

Contents-creation projects involve collecting materials pertaining to intangible heritage while preserving records of past bearers, collecting oral records from surviving transmitters, and conducting studies on the current transmission status to ensure the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage resources to future generations.

Outlook

The NIHC has embarked on a mission of creatively transmitting intangible heritage, encouraging ways in safeguarding, transmitting and using the intangible cultural heritage of humanity as a comprehensive space just for intangible cultural heritage.

The NIHC aims to continue to develop as a place for all of us to share and appreciate intangible heritage as part of our lives.