



## International Mask Arts & Culture Organization (IMACO)

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### Organization

The International Mask Arts & Culture Organization (IMACO) was established in 2006 to construct archives of mask-related culture that is integral to cultural community symbols.

Masks are a part of most cultural spheres. They are a valuable cultural heritage that reflects the culture and history of a community.

IMACO, through research, preservation, and data accumulation, aims to develop an understanding of mask culture. Moreover IMACO focuses on the value that masks promote in terms of freedom, peace, and equality, which in turn gives us an approach to understand human values. IMACO has members who are responsible for documenting mask and the symbolic culture related to masks; this would include mask creators, mask dance performers, and mask museums.

IMACO opened its organization structure so that all cultures can participate. In 2006, twenty-four countries agreed to establish their headquarters in Andong, Republic of Korea. Since then, 131 individuals and group members from 56 countries have joined.

### Activities

Masks are just tools, but they are a part of humanity's universal culture and cultural integration, which showcase value of cultural diversity. Masks are very special as culture elements in that they are tangible manifestations of the symbolism that runs through the culture of individuals, villages,

and nations. In this regard, to understand masks and their communities is to understand history and the perspective through which the individuals and communities view the world.

To help stimulate and revitalize interest in mask dances and related performances, IMACO established the annual Andong Mask Dance Festival. The festival serves as a venue for cultural exchange among international participants involved with mask performances. As a consequence, as mask-related data is collected through these exchanges, IMACO has reinforced its activities and has delved deeper in its research activities. Furthermore, IMACO has been investigating mask culture and related activities as a way to formulate an idea for sustainable creation into the future. IMACO focuses on the meaning of preserving culture and researches activities that can contribute to adding value to mask culture in the future.

Specifically, research activities are based on a community's values and the relationship of masks to myths, rituals, and mask-making processes as well as the symbolic value of masks to music, dance, and other arts. As a form of international collaboration, IMACO supports mask-related festivals of other nations as well.

In addition to festivals and related activities, IMACO also publishes a web magazine to strengthen interchange among members and to provide mask-related data.

Since 2006, IMACO held symposiums, workshops, exhibitions and other events



International conference in Bangkok © IMACO

related to masks and their symbolic and academic meanings. For example, the organization held an international conference in Bangkok, Thailand (2009), Bali, Indonesia (2011), and Thimphu, Bhutan (2013), and in 2015, IMACO is planning to hold an academic symposium with the Shanghai Social Science Academy in China.

### Plan

The most emphasized and promoted task of IMACO is the creation of the World Mask and Culture Map. Since masks are symbols of a community and represent characters related to the community, the act of making a mask culture map is also an exercise in identifying the cultural DNA of a community.

The cultural mask map will be an important instrument in examining and classifying data related to mask culture. It will also help us understand the accumulated perspectives of individual communities and promote the coexistence of diverse values.

IMACO is working not only on listing data values but also on networking, researching mask culture, and promoting understanding so that mask performers can work creatively. IMACO also publishes an online magazine, promotes mutual interchange, and supports international visit to festivals and exhibitions.

### Prospects

IMACO pursues the "value of cultural diversity," which is aligned with the aims of UNESCO. IMACO endeavours to infuse humanity with the rich value of diversity that can only come from sharing accumulated cultural knowledge. For its work in shaping the future of human perception through masks and the symbolic value of masks, IMACO was recommended to be accredited by the Intergovernmental Committee of the UNESCO ICH Convention as an advisory body of intangible cultural heritage in 2013.



World Mask Dance Festival © IMACO