



Strengthening Regional Capacity-building and International Cooperation for the Safeguarding of ICH

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Cultures are too often dichotomized into Western vs. non-Western, male vs. female, elite vs. folk, or tangible vs. intangible, and in each instance, the former term is privileged over the latter. Particularly with modernization and the accompanying expansion of the Western cultural world, Western cultures are frequently considered more rational than, more valuable than, and superior to non-Western cultures, which many would claim are irrational or inferior. Such views of cultural differences have been promoted by the globalization of European and American cultures, as non-Western cultures have not expanded their influence to the same degree.

Similarly, as many feminists have pointed out, the culture of women has long been considered to have relatively less value and importance than that of men. And cultural critics have noted that folk cultures are often regarded as being old, outdated, and worthy only of being forgotten.

Intangible cultural heritage has also been viewed as relatively less important than tangible cultural heritage. Although UNESCO adopted the 'Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage' in 1972, for example, the scope of 'cultural heritage' in the convention was limited to tangible heritage, such as the pyramids at Giza or the Great Wall of China. A convention for intangible cultural heritage was not adopted until 2003, 31 years later, which shows the discrimination against the latter.

The unfairness of the above dichotomies has become increasingly apparent. Developments in the fields of cultural studies, anthropology, folklore, and gender studies warn us against the injustices that often result from creating such cultural hierarchies. They show that all cultures are important and meaningful in their own way. UNESCO's 'Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity' (2001) is in alignment with this principle.

Following the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural Heritage in 1972, several of the member states of UNESCO called for the creation of a protection system for traditional culture and folklore. In 1989 the UNESCO General Meeting finally adopted 'Recommendations on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore,' recommended that member states implement training programs for the protection of intangible culture and compile lists of intangible heritage, and undertook a variety of other measures. The 1989 Recommendations, however, had limited effectiveness on the protection of intangible heritage, which prompted UNESCO to adopt a program for Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 1998. According to this program, the task of selecting world's intangible cultural heritage began. Each member state could submit one item of intangible culture for selection every two years. An international committee of judges would evaluate the submissions and could approve them as masterpieces of intangible culture.

This proclamation for the oral and intangible heritage of humanity generated 19 approvals in 2001, 28 in 2003, and 43 in 2005. Thus, a total of 90 items were declared masterpieces of humanity's intangible culture by 2005.

This declaration of masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity attracted much international interest and enthusiasm in a relatively short period of time. To the 2001 call for submissions, 31 states responded, but to the 2005 call, 91, or nearly three times as many states, submitted nominations. And this rising concern played an enormous role in developing the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. By the conclusion of the 32nd general meeting of UNESCO, October 17, 2003, the new Convention was approved overwhelmingly. The Convention afforded legal force. With the approval of this convention, the world's intangible cultural heritage will now be protected and safeguarded by the close cooperation and monitoring of the member states.

The new Convention was passed on October 17 of 2003, it required ratification by 30 member states for it to become effective. On January 20 of 2006, Rumania became the 30th state to ratify the convention. Three months

later, on April 20 of 2006, the Convention formally came into effect. The Director General of UNESCO, Koïchiro Matsuura, observed this immense interest throughout the world in intangible heritage because of the threats from the processes of modernization and globalization to intangible heritage all over the world. The relatively short time in which many nations ratified the Convention shows that many nations felt that international protection measures were urgently needed. As of 2009, 116 member states have ratified the Convention.

Tangible and intangible cultural heritage can be differentiated in several ways. If tangible cultural heritage constitutes the historical assets of humanity in the past, intangible cultural heritage is the living traditional culture that conveys past historical experiences that have been handed down to the present. And if tangible heritage appears fixed and unchanging, intangible cultural heritage appears to be dynamic, constantly changing with the times. In other words, if tangible cultural heritage is dead heritage, intangible cultural heritage is living culture.

Accordingly, the contents of conventions for protecting these two types of heritage are different. Conventions for tangible cultural heritage emphasize their 'authenticity' and their value. In other words, evaluative criteria emphasize whether or not a historical structures or relic bears the special characteristics of the era in which it was made. Because intangible cultural heritage is constantly changing with the times, however, basing its authenticity on whether or not it bears the special characteristics of a particular era is a nearly impossible task.

More than anything else, moreover, it can be seen that the most important value of intangible heritage is that it shows diversity and equality with other intangible heritage. Comparing different items of intangible heritage, it is inappropriate to regard one as more important or valuable than another. This is a major point of different between the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and the 2003 International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. In the 1972 Convention, the first and second article, spoke of designating (tangible) items defined as having 'outstanding universal value,' but the 2003 Convention's definition of intangible heritage does not include such an evaluative criterion. Instead, it speaks of compiling an inventory consisting of two categories: (1) a List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, and (2) a Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Convention, Articles 16 and 17).

The designation of tangible heritage as the world's cultural heritage was based on the 'outstanding universal value' of historical relics. The Pyramids, the Great Wall, and similar 'supremely valuable' historical structures were designated. Therefore, nations which had several such structures were deemed as civilized while those that did not were implicitly seen as relatively inferior. Europe dominated the possession of such tangible heritage while other nations, which had fewer such designations, were given a sense of deprivation.

In contrast, non-Western societies currently hold the leading number of the 90 intangible cultural designations that UNESCO granted by 2005. Among these 90 designations, 7 are multinational, and of the remaining 83, the leading number of designations (27, or nearly 1/3) are located in the Asia-Pacific region. And at the recent meeting in Abu Dhabi, of the 76 new designations that were added, the Asia-Pacific region holds the largest number.

There are many cases in which an intangible heritage designation is a symbol of a country's national identity. Especially in this age of globalization, when Western cultures are rapidly spreading throughout the world, and each nation's traditional culture faces the crisis of disappearance, protecting each nation's intangible cultural heritage is very important. Of course, traditional cultures are disappearing in the Western nations too, but there the disappearing traditional culture is composed of 'old things' while they are in a position to ceaselessly create without limit new things that match the current era. Among non-Western nations, in place of the disappearing traditional culture of yesteryear as 'ours,' the new cultural creations that are replacing them are often of Western origin. If one considers the case of Korea's pansori, this is plainly evident. Therefore, one can understand why non-Western nations are especially interested in protecting their intangible cultural heritage.

UNESCO's series of policies for the intangible heritage of the world can be seen to have the following meanings. First, rather than regarding tangible heritage as the principle form of culture, it brings the recognition that intangible heritage is just as important and valuable an asset for humanity. Second, because the designations of tangible heritage were primarily given to Western states, there is greater interest in intangible heritage arising in non-Western societies.

The greatest potential value of intangible cultural heritage in this era of globalization is its ability to resist the domination of a particular region's culture throughout the world. Already in the modern age, the power of westernization, culture created in the west have spread and are consumed

throughout the globe. For example, one can experience on any day American music, dance, movies, and food being consumed not only in the United States but also all over the rest of world as well.

All peoples throughout the global village listening to the same kind of music, performing the same dances, and eating the same food is sad and not ideal. Biologists point to the need for several kinds of species to exist to maintain a healthy globe. For one species exists by causing the extinction of all others is likely to bring about the end of the world. Likewise, under the overpowering influence of westernization, only by protecting and continuing the existence of the disappearing traditional and intangible cultural heritage of non-Western societies can varied human cultures survive. This is absolutely necessary for the survival of humanity.

I have already made the point that the current direction of intangible heritage policies should be fundamentally different from those of tangible heritage. The tangible heritage of the world consists of designations or historical relics and remains that have outstanding universal value. When these were declared the majority of this heritage was concentrated in the West. This centering of the West accustomed many to regarding the rest of the world as 'other.' The areas where many of these designations were located were given a sense of superiority from implicitly being regarded as more civilized and having achieved more historical development. Nations that had relatively fewer designations were made to feel inferior. The intense competition with which UNESCO's tangible designations were pursued clearly shows this point. The emphasis given to the hierarchical evaluation of the quantity of heritage designations and competition of the world (tangible) heritage policies brought western logic and those policies granted hegemony to Western societies.

The intangible heritage policies that we have newly initiated have to convert people to a definitely new paradigm. We have to rid ourselves of the perspective that what is designated on the representative heritage list has greater value or superiority over intangible heritage that is not so designated. Rather than looking at culture in terms of hierarchies of value and competition, all intangible heritage has its own value and should be seen from a culturally relativistic perspective. From the position of the group that created and possesses that intangible cultural heritage, a view of its value should be learned. The intangible cultural heritage of the world deserves 'equal respect and understanding.' We have to generate that paradigm shift. When we discuss international cooperation regarding intangible cultural heritage we ought to start with this philosophical basis.

I. International Cooperation

Therefore, because of the differences between tangible and intangible heritage, a spirit of international cooperation regarding for the latter is best attained by following the direction that best reflects it.

How are intangible cultural heritages to achieve equal respect and understanding? Priority should be given to correctly understanding each nation's intangible cultural heritage. An attitude of understanding another national group's intangible cultural heritage needs to be fostered. Unlike tangible heritage, intangible cultural heritage and its performers from one area can travel to perform in another. Each nation's intangible cultural heritage exhibits the coexistence of the universality of humanity and the special features of the community in the area where the intangible heritage was created and transmitted.

Intangible cultural heritage has been transmitted for hundreds if not thousands of years by a regional community and carries its historicity. And as it has been adapted to each era until today as it was transmitted, it is a surviving tradition. In that way the region's special characteristics are embedded. Thus, when a region's intangible cultural heritage is introduced to another area, the regional characteristics of that heritage should be explained sufficiently to enable the people of that other region to understand it. Simply introducing intangible cultural heritage by itself, without an explanation of its social and historical context, shows a lack of concern for that intangible cultural heritage. When I was invited to China under the sponsorship of the Chinese Arts Institute to participate in an international scholarly conference on intangible cultural heritage, I met a person who taught ethnomusicology at the University of California at Los Angeles. The person told me of her experiences when lecturing on pansori, a Korean intangible cultural heritage. When she let the students listen to a recorded sample of pansori, their responses displayed a lack of attention. They were bored and showed no interest. On another lecture, she first showed the popular Korean movie *Seopyeonje*, which narrated a story of pansori singers and their performances, and then let her students listen to the recorded sample. On that occasion, she related, the students became interested in the pansori and were able to gain a sense of its artistry. In other words, introducing the intangible cultural heritage by itself is not effective. But when the historical, cultural and social contexts are also introduced, an understanding and appreciation

of the intangible cultural heritage emerges. By doing this, one can see that an intangible cultural heritage's creation and transmission by individuals, groups, and communities gains respect.

We also have to consider copyrights to intangible cultural heritage. The rights of those who created and transmitted an intangible cultural heritage have to be respected. Usually when we speak of a copyright we tend to limit it to an individually created work of art. Intangible cultural heritage, however, is not created by an individual. It is the product of a community. The issue of ownership and other rights to intangible heritage is now taken up by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), which is now preparing rules for protecting traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions. These laws favor an area's community residents who own the intangible cultural heritage. These copyright laws not only have programs for affirming their rights to their intangible cultural heritage. They are also to include rules against using cultural expressions negatively or disparagingly. WIPO considers legal issues of state and international laws as well.

II. Strengthening the Abilities of Regions

The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage came into effect and many nations have signed this Convention, but in the majority of the nations the importance of intangible heritage is still not as well recognized as that of tangible heritage. In the case of the Republic of Korea, when the law for cultural property was introduced in the 1960s, the majority of the population thought of that such property consisted only of Seokguram Grotto, the Great South Gate, or other such tangible culture that should be preserved. There was almost no recognition of intangible culture such as masked-dance dramas or shamanistic rites and even less support for the idea that these should be preserved. Moreover, the majority of folk artists were regarded with contempt. Those that belonged to performing groups were even more distained. According to the recollection of Yim Suk-jay, when an intangible property division was formed by the government and he was invited to serve as head of its committee, he looked for performers of masked-dance dramas and told them that because the dances they performed were an illustrious art and that he would make them Living Human Treasures who

would have a right to continue their performances, but his persuasive efforts often met refusal. He had to make several efforts to finally gain their consent. More than forty years later, the situation is very different today, as performers seek to become Living Human Treasures.

In spite of this, intangible cultural heritage is not recognized as being as important as tangible cultural heritage. More concern about intangible cultural heritage appears to exist in the Republic of Korea than in most other nations, but despite the nation's Living Human Treasure system, less than 10 percent of the budget of the Office of Cultural Heritage is expended on intangible heritage. Even in Japan, where there is as much interest in intangible cultural heritage as there is in Korea, I have been told that less than 10% of its heritage budget is spent on intangible heritage. Many other nations that have no experience protecting intangible cultural heritage, there is almost no funding to speak of. Therefore each member state needs to educate its citizens about the importance of intangible cultural heritage, allocate as much funding as it does for tangible cultural heritage, and otherwise strengthen its capacity for protecting its intangible cultural heritage. (This recommendation applies to UNESCO as well. The human efforts and financial resources that it expends on intangible cultural heritage are far less than those utilized for tangible cultural heritage. It should shortly rectify this imbalance.)

The budget allocated for intangible cultural heritage should not only be expended but the absence of an institution charged with responsibility for maintaining intangible heritage and insufficiency of appropriate staff specialists should be remedied to strengthen the region's capacity. Therefore, governments, research institutes, groups of intangible cultural specialists, and local societies should join hands in promoting this concern and the capacity to address it.

The Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention that went into effect in 2003 emphasizes the importance of the individuals, groups, and communities that transmit intangible cultural heritage. In other words, emphasizing that the local society where the heritage is transmitted has to become the principal party of its intangible cultural heritage is another means of fostering the local capability.

That capability, for example, can be promoted by recording the intangible cultural heritage, having it designated on UNESCO's list and having members of the local community actively participate. While local people define and designate their intangible cultural heritage, the government, research institutes, and non-governmental organizations should help and

cooperate with them. The local residents can use their own methods for recording their intangible cultural heritage, or they can become familiar with skills for using tape recorders and video cameras. They can also learn to represent and maintain their intangible cultural heritage and learn about possibilities for its use, such as creating a local cultural center. These are other methods for empowering local communities. In the locality where an item of intangible cultural heritage is located, elders can become teachers of the heritage or designated as leaders who can transmit the heritage to younger generations. Local residents can also form ties with governmental institutes or local institutes which should be formalized. Thereby the local residents can participate in the decision-making regarding their intangible cultural heritage.

Those in charge of a locality's intangible cultural heritage, whether from the central, regional, or lesser localities, should encourage the local residents to express their opinions regarding policies related to that heritage. And the region's schools should have their students participate in some of the programs and compilation of lists. These would be one of the additional ways to stimulate the young generation's interest in their intangible cultural heritage.

In addition, the compilation of a list of intangible cultural heritage is an extremely effective way to assemble information about intangible cultural heritage. To the extent possible, it should be transformed into computerized databases. Especially those items that are facing the crisis of disappearance require particularly urgent measures. The local people who transmit intangible cultural heritage can accept responsibility for all of these steps to strengthen their local capacity.

III. The Asia-Pacific Intangible Cultural Heritage Center and International cooperation

On the 21st of last month, UNESCO recognized Korea, China, and Japan's Intangible Cultural Heritage Centers for the Asia-Pacific region, assigning these institutions to the level of category 2. This was a departure from its generally past practice of recognizing only one center for a given area. Among these three intangible cultural centers, there is a division of labor. The Korean center has responsibility for the area of information and networking, China's

center is in charge of the education and training of intangible cultural heritage specialists, and Japan has the task of research.

The designation of these three centers for the Asia-Pacific appears to be a worthy development for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. The reason is that the effort can be found in several places.

Compared with the measures for the protection of tangible cultural heritage, the policies for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage have no simple standard. For example, China's method of protecting the wooden structures of its tangible heritage can be applied for protecting Korea's wooden structures. In that way, one country's protection technology for tangible heritage can be usefully applied with minor adaptations elsewhere in the region.

Moreover, the definitions and concepts for intangible cultural heritage are inconsistent, and the intangible heritage itself is highly varied. And because intangible cultural heritage is a product of one area's historical, social, and cultural conditions, one area's measures for safeguarding its intangible heritage are not as easily applied to another area's intangible heritage.

Of course, although the definitions of intangible cultural heritage are spelled out in the 2003 Convention, the concept of intangible cultural heritage includes many different forms, and each regional nation's interpretation and understanding of its intangible cultural heritage is necessarily varied. The concept of intangible cultural heritage in a given nation governs what has to be protected in that nation. Some nations, for example, regard open places, such as marketplaces, part of their intangible cultural heritage. Others do not. Moreover, each nation's awareness of its intangible cultural heritage will differ according to its economic and political conditions. The rapid attacks of westernization, industrialization, and urbanization that an area has experienced affect the speed at which its traditional culture faces a crisis of disappearance.

Also there are differences between the level of interest in intangible cultural heritage between the nations and regions. Even within the Asia-Pacific region, there is a high level of interest in the Republic of Korea, China, and Japan, there is far less interest in many other nations of the region and in other areas of the world. Korea, China, and Japan have numerous entries registered on UNESCO's Representative List, but some other nations in Asian and Pacific areas have not applied for the registration of any items. The Asia-Pacific Regional Centers should strive to raise interest in Intangible Cultural Heritage in these areas and make efforts to eliminate such regional differences.

The Asia-Pacific is a very important region for intangible cultural heritage. Not only does more than half of the world's population live here, but it is also a very politically, economically, and culturally diverse area.

In light of these facts, it is a welcome development that intangible culture centers are being established in the Asia-Pacific region's three nations of Korea, China, and Japan. And dividing responsibilities for the area's various intangible cultural heritage is entirely appropriate. Toward that end, the intangible heritage centers of these three nations need not only to pursue their own respective topics but also earnestly cooperate and help each other. Moreover, the formation here of safeguarding measures developed from these centers should help other regions of the world as well.