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**Chapter 4.**  
What Are the ICH Safeguarding Tasks?  
Voices from the Asia-Pacific Region

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# Implementation of the 2003 Convention in Mongolia and ICH Safeguarding Tasks

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## Mongolian Activities and Experiences in Implementing the 2003 UNESCO Convention

The intangible cultural heritage of any nation and ethnic group depends upon a locality, environment, business way of life, language, and condition of cultural history that is very diverse and unique. Thus, the intangible cultural heritage of any nation symbolizes their identities and constitutes an integral part of the world culture.

The Mongolian nation and its ethnic groups are an inseparable part of the global population. The Mongols and their ancestors have lived and moved from place to place on the vast territory from the Altai Mountain ranges to the Khyangan Mountains, from Lake Baikal to the Chinese Great Wall. This area is a part of the vast and grassy Eurasian plain that stretches for several thousand kilometers from the Danube River to the Korean peninsula, and on which animal husbandry-based nomadic cultures and agricultural farming-based sedentary civilizations long co-existed.

These people increased their animal population and developed a specific economy

and production activity on the vast territory of Central Asia and created the nomadic culture and civilization that are now globally recognized. The circumstances and specific cultural spaces in which the Mongols have been living define the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) of the Mongol nation and its peculiarities.

The Mongolian government attaches greater importance to the preservation of this cultural heritage. Mongolians feel inspired with warm enthusiasm to protect and promote their national identity. This enthusiasm flows. We have done a number of projects to safeguard and promote the ICH in Mongolia.

The Parliament had constituted legal empowerment aimed at safeguarding and promoting the social functions for ICH, and adopted the Mongolian State Cultural Policy, The Millennium Development Goals-Based Comprehensive National Development Strategy of Mongolia, and the Law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage. Greater attention was given to increase the involvement of bearers in safeguarding ICH.

The president of Mongolia issued decrees on the reverence and the safeguarding of some outstanding ICH elements, such as the traditional music of the *morin khuur* (horse-headed fiddle), traditional long songs, *khuumei* (throat) singing, and the national traditional dance, *biyelgee*.

Establishing the National Registration-Information (Inventory-Making) System for Intangible Cultural Heritage is one of the main priorities for activities in the framework for implementing the UNESCO Convention at the national level. Relying on territorial and administrative infrastructure and organization, the Center of Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science of Mongolia is implementing a project called, Consolidated Registration-Information System for ICH. The national inventory is categorized the same as the ICH domains identified in the UNESCO Convention. In 2010, the primary registration work of ICH and its bearers was conducted, covering 85 percent of all administrative units in Mongolia. Overall, 88 ICH elements and 5,701 individual ICH bearers were identified. The results of the registration census are a valuable asset gathered as a source to further elaborate the short- and long-term objectives, policies, and programs for safeguarding and transmitting ICH.

Since ratifying the UNESCO Convention, Mongolia has had nine elements inscribed on the ICH lists. To safeguard these elements, the government is implementing long-

and medium-term programs nationwide. In the framework of implementing these programs, provinces and soums have elaborated sub-programs and are undertaking relevant activities.

In addition, the Ministry of Culture of Mongolia, NGOs, community-based organizations, ethnic groups, and practitioners regularly organize traditional art festivals as well as contests and exhibitions on traditional performing arts and craftsmanship. Currently, there are more than thirty NGOs in Mongolia actively working in the field of safeguarding and promoting ICH and its bearers. These organizations have also taken other measures to promote traditional culture and the arts in all provinces and cities in Mongolia, which shows progress.

### International and Regional Cooperation Activities in Line with Implementation of the 2003 Convention

Mongolia is one of the developing countries actively taking part in various activities concerning ICH safeguarding through international cooperation.

Since 1997, Mongolia has more closely cooperated with UNESCO. Mongolian experts and specialists have participated in UNESCO programs and projects to safeguard ICH. Under the UNESCO auspicious and with the financial support of Japanese Funds-in-Trusts, the Central Asian Epic International Symposium and Festival was held in Mongolia in 1998. At this moment, Mongolian cultural figures and artists with active participation of UNESCO advisor Ms. Noriko Aikawa established the National Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage (an NGO) and started activities for registering ICH bearers and practitioners and documenting audio and audio-visual recordings and other types of media.

For the last few years, thanks to the generous support from the Cultural Heritage Administration of the Republic of Korea and ICHCAP, we have been implementing a series of important projects to form a favorable legal background, establish an inventory fund of ICH, and introduce UNESCO's Living Human Treasures System into Mongolia.

Since 2007, the Mongolian and Korean joint project entitled Introduction UNESCO Program a Living Human Treasures System in Mongolia has been implemented by the Foundation for the Protection of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of Mongolia

(a UNESCO-accredited NGO) and ICHCAP, and this joint project has continued as a joint cooperation project between Korea and Mongolia, Establishing a Safeguarding System for the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mongolia.

### ***Results and outcomes of this project***

- Organization of the symposiums and workshops on the crucial and emerging issues of ICH and its safeguarding in the two countries were held in Ulaanbaatar and Seoul (2008 and 2009, respectively)
- Field missions and research expeditions by experts of the two countries carried out in Mongolia and Korea (2008 and 2009, respectively)
- Major important measures taken to create a favorable legal environment for safeguarding ICH—namely, modifying relevant heritage related laws as well as elaborating initial documents, including regulations of identifying and registering the intangible heritage, rules of the national council for identifying ICH and its bearers, which were approved by the Minister of Culture of Mongolia in 2009
- Elaboration and approval of national lists of ICH by the Minister of Culture
- Involvement of national experts in preparing nomination documents for the ICH lists
- Implementation of field surveys on ICH and bearers in selected provinces and registration and documentation of ICH elements and bearers
- Photo exhibition about the UNESCO ICH Representative List to enhance visibility
- Publication Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Mongols and dissemination of the volume among policymakers, ICH specialists, cultural workers and school teachers to improve a public awareness and to safeguarding and transmit ICH

In the evaluation meeting of “Establishing a Safeguarding System for Intangible Cultural Heritage in Mongolia”, Mongolian institutes and ICHCAP agreed to proceed with a future project within the framework of information and networking, the main functional areas of ICHCAP. A new joint project, Safeguarding ICH by Utilizing Information Technology in Mongolia, was implemented from 2010 to 2011. At the same time, ICHCAP had a pilot survey on the restoration and digitization of superannuated and damaged ICH-related data in Mongolia at the Institute of Language

and Literature of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences; Mongolian National Public Radio; and the Center of Film, Photo and Audio Documentations at the National Central Archives.

Restoration and digitization of the timeworn and damaged ICH analogue archive data would not only be a highly significant measure for ICH safeguarding, but also a starting point for establishing a nationwide integrated database and an online network on the ICH-related materials.

Overall 713 hours of recordings cover 700 GB storage as digitized format. These files were being kept on the hard drives at the Institute of Language and Literature. The digitization of these audio recordings as well as the categorization and creation of a new database have a significant value and are assets for research, study, and dissemination to everyone interested. As a result of the project, a ten-CD box set was produced for dissemination purposes. Through this project, Mongolia gained expertise in the field of restoring and digitizing superannuated magnetic tapes.

Also as a result, a Mongolian ICH website was created, and it will be further maintained and improved. The website will serve as a tool for reference as well as raising awareness on the importance of ICH in addition to promoting and safeguarding ICH. Using new ICH information technology is expanding. It is certain that safeguarding, restoring preserving, disseminating, and transmitting ICH through technology will inevitably contribute to the information sharing, cooperation, and promotion of cultural diversity at the national, regional, and international levels. With respect to the multinational element, Traditional Folk Long Song—Urtiin Duu, which is inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity for Mongolia and the People’s Republic of China, the governments of the two countries have established the Joint Administrative Committee and have carried out the Joint Field Survey for Urtiin Duu along with the Russian Federation. The survey covered the three mentioned countries in areas populated by Mongolian communities. The research and documentation materials were gathered and exchanged. Furthermore, the states are planning to publish an anthology called Urtiin Duu of Mongolian Nationalities.

## Some ICH Safeguarding Tasks in Mongolia

Mongolia has experienced rapid globalization and urbanization. The space of the ICH has undergone dramatic change. The modern trends of mass culture and art are invading Mongolia. There is a real possibility that the traditional ICH of nomadic life could faded in a short span of time. The trends of urbanization, the flow of human population from the countryside to the cities, globalization, popular culture, standardized education, and arbitrary tourism are having a bad influence upon the younger generations. These factors reduce the youth's interest and reverence toward national cultural heritage. The survey conducted says that traditional Mongolian ICH has basically decreased and has almost disappeared in some regions due to the aforementioned historical reasons. This is a matter of concern.

In our view, undertaking the following measures to safeguard, preserve, and promote Mongolian ICH could have a positive effect.

- The main ICH bearer of any nation is the national language. Therefore, the protection, promotion, and development of our national language must be the sacred duty of Mongolians. Parents and families are obligated to let their children acquire a good level of skill of their own language.
- Along with the family unit, other important protectors and supporters of ICH are ethnic groups and communities. Their roles are emphasized in the 2003 Convention. The system transmitting ICH is the root of the existence of the nation and ethnic groups.
- It became a pressing task to work out a national program to teach the Mongolian language and national culture to students at all primary and general education school levels.
- For the past fifty years, the number of practitioners of customs and ceremonies, masters of the traditional treatment of animals, long-song performers, fiddlers, performers of traditional dances, and craftsmen has decreased rapidly. Now our primary task is to select good ICH practitioners, to encourage them and bestow them with honors, and to raise public awareness to broaden apprenticeship training.
- It is now necessary to pursue a policy to revive rituals, customs, and festivities concerning the animal pastoralism and agricultural farming among the livestock

breeders and farmers at the bag level (unit of a local administration) or sum level (an administrative unit subordinate to a province), and even at the family level.

- It is fitting to pursue a policy to propagate and disseminate Mongolian ICH nationally and globally. The propagation of one's culture means learning about other cultures and world heritages. It is our obligation that the government of Mongolia attracts the attention of Mongolians to be a center of Mongolian studies and studies of global nomadic ICH. Life demands that we promote Mongolian studies on the broad scale, inscribe the various ICH elements on the UNESCO lists, propagate Mongolian culture in the itineraries of tourism nationally and globally, introduce new cultural products, and establish new cultural sites.