CURRENT SITUATION OF SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN MONGOLIA

Background

Mongolia is a very vulnerable country especially in the areas of cultural identity, expression and safeguarding of traditional culture. Much has been lost in recent years. Western influences are often preferred by younger members of society who account for the majority of the Mongolian population. Under the socialist regime, school children were not taught folklore arts or encouraged to learn traditional customs and other cultural practices. As a result of this, traditional customs and culture can best be found in the grandparents of the current young generation. This generation of older adults is rapidly passing by in life, and with the male life expectancy of 64 and female 69, the primary source of traditional culture of the small tribes is almost at the point of no return. Looking at results of research, observation and analysis is clear that globalization, assimilation and urbanization are significantly impacting intangible cultural heritage in Mongolia.


The UNESCO launched to release and declare the ‘a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity’ in 2001, while the third release of the list was issued in 2005 so that there are over 80 intangible cultural heritage inscribed in the list. As intangible cultural heritage created by the Mongolian nationality, ‘morin khuur’ (horse head fiddle) was declared as ‘a Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity’ in 2003 whereas ‘urtii duu’ (long song) in 2005 so that they were incorporated in the ‘Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity’ in 2008 based on 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

In order to implement UNESCO Convention on Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, Mongolian National Commission for UNESCO has launched in-depth research on development and current situations of intangible cultural heritage in cooperation with other relevant domestic institutions under support from partner institutions of Japan and South Korea and UNESCO

Case study

Title of the project “Elaboration of the ICH Inventories in Mongolia”

1. Background

The aims of the project are to establish the National intangible cultural heritage safeguarding system, to elaborate and renew the National Representative List and the List of ICH in need of urgent safeguarding, to identify and recognize the ICH bearers and to establish the National registration and information database in the framework for implementing the UNESCO Convention for “Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage” and the “Law for Protection of Cultural Heritage of Mongolia”.

The groundwork for safeguarding the ICH is to establish the national registration and information system for ICH and its bearers at the national level. The successful establishment of the above system and its well-founded, realistic and intact implementation is a fundamental essence for elaborating the further coherent sets of research and safeguarding activities in these respects. Therefore, we have focused on conducting and organizing the primary registration work for existing and its bearers at the national level. Accordingly,
the effective implementation of the registration work as considered to be as a main source for further activities and thought as a main objective to implement in the framework of the project. The project has implemented under UNESCO financial support.

II. THE OBJECTIVES TO IMPLEMENT IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT

a) To identify the elements of ICH in the National Representative List and the List of ICH in need of urgent safeguarding and their bearers, and to create national registration and information fund.

b) To establish the permanent mechanism of the national registration and information system of ICH.

c) To elaborate and provide the methodology and advisory for conducting and organizing the primary registration work for the ICH and its bearers and distribute them to all soums (territorial administrative units subordinate to a province), provinces, cities and districts. To publish and distribute the relevant handbooks and Catalogs for information.

d) To raise the public awareness and increase their involvement and participation in activities of implementing the identification of ICH and its bearers.

e) To identify the ICH elements existing in Mongolia and their bearers and conduct evaluation on the current state of ICH safeguarding measures.

f) To document the identified and registered ICH elements and their bearers with audio and video recordings, photo and the registration form.

g) To conduct monitoring in each provinces and districts the Ulaanbaatar city, on the establishment and implementation of the ICH registration and information on fund, and to provide support and advisory.

h) To put the final report of the registration work of ICH and its bearers and the evaluation report on the current state of the ICH safeguarding measures through the “National Committee for selecting and designating the ICH and its bearers”.

i) To organize the National Symposium on “The Current Issues for Safeguarding the ICH” and the seminar on “The Establishment of the National Registration and Information System of ICH in Mongolia” involving the representatives of ICH experts, researchers, scholars, professionals, bearers and information and registration officers.

III. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

3.1. TO ESTABLISH THE PERMANENT MECHANISM OF THE NATIONAL REGISTRATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEM OF ICH.

In the framework for implementing the project, the “National Committee for selecting and designating the ICH and its bearers” consisting of 25 individuals was established, its drafts of the structure, rules and operational directives were elaborated. The National Committee, pursuant to the directives of the 2003 UNESCO “Convention for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage”, is in operation with aims to research and identify the original forms of ICH elements existing in Mongolian territory, to designate and recognize the ICH bearers, and further to regulate the relations with the government, its cooperation and support for registering the ICH and its bearers, selecting the accurate safeguarding measures, documenting and transmitting the elements to the next generation.

Accordingly, with the need to implement the objective to conduct the primary registration work of ICH and its bearers, the Sub-committees for selecting and designating the ICH and its bearers at the local level were established at the Departments of Education and Culture in each Provinces and each Districts of Ulaanbaatar city. The Sub-committees, consisted of the local representatives of experts, professionals and cultural activists, who were well experienced and able to conduct the evaluations on ICH, including the local administrative individuals, were thought to be the main basis for successful implementation of the primary registration work of ICH and its bearers.
In addition, employing and designating the right personals as ICH registration and information methodologists and officers, acknowledging their responsibilities and providing with necessary working regulations and advisory have created the favorable working condition to conduct the registration.

3.2. The elaboration of the handbook, registration for advisory and methodology

As a preparatory work for implementing the project, the following necessary forms for conducting the “primary registration work of ICH and its bearers” were elaborated and delivered to the provincial and city “Sub-committees for selecting and designating the ICH and its bearers” at the local level:

1. Form for registering the ICH bearers
2. Form for registering the ICH elements
3. Form for registering the ICH elements in need of urgent safeguarding
4. Form for registering the representative ICH elements
5. Form of detailed registration of ICH and its bearer (only for the individuals who were designated bearers by the Committees)

The copies of handbook called “The methodology for registering and documenting the ICH and establishing the registration and information fund” were published or office use and were distributed to all the soums (subordinate units to a province), provinces, districts and khoroo (subordinate units to a district). The handbook provides an essential elements for professionals including ICH related information such as: “The Policy on Culture”; “The Law for Protection of Cultural Heritage”; The 2003 UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding the ICH; the rule and operational direction of the “National Committee for selecting and designating the ICH and its bearers”; the Forms of registration of ICH and its bearers and their instructions how to complete; the methodologies of Documentation with photo, video and audio records; the National Representative List of ICH and etc.

3.3 Increasing an active involvement of cultural professionals and public in the implementation activities of the project

In order to provide an active involvement of cultural professionals and public in establishing the registration and information, the series of ads about the “Primary registration of ICH and its bearers” were advertised through public (national and local) media, newspapers and advertisement centers. As a result, many applications from concerned individuals, groups and communities were received and reviewed. During the preparation period for implementing the project, the series of TV programs on importance of safeguarding, researching and transmitting the ICH and about conducting a “Primary registration of ICH and its bearers” and the “Establishing the national registration and information system of ICH” were broadcasted through national and local TV channels.

The activity of questionnaire concerning the “The methodology for safeguarding and inventorying the ICH” was carried out nationwide among 115 representatives of cultural specialists, professionals and ICH bearers. The filled out questionnaires were evaluated, and their recommendations and opinions were used in elaborating and improving further activities for safeguarding the ICH.

3.4 Field surveys

In the framework of the project, the research teams have worked in field surveys to conduct research, identification and documentation with audio and video records for the elements on “National Representative
List and the List of ICH in need of urgent safeguarding and their bearers. The field surveys have covered the provinces of Arkhangai, Bayan-Ulgii, Bayankhongor, Bulgan, Govisumber, Dornogobi, Do noid, Dundgobi, Zavkhan, Uvurkhangai, Umnugobi, Sukhbaatar, vs, Khovd, Khuvsgul and Khentii. The teams have worked with multiple responsibilities to conduct monitoring on implementation of the project at local level, the establishment of the ICH registration and information fund and the implementation of the primary registration work of ICH and have provided support and advisory. Teams have documented with audio and video records overall 57 ICH bearers and their skills repertoire. From overall, 50 are practicing performing arts, 2 are practicing traditional social practices and rituals and 5 are practicing traditional craftsmanship.

3.5. The national registration census of the ICH and bearers

In the framework for implementing the project, in cooperation with the provincial and city sub-committees for selecting and designating the ICH and its bearers, the “Primary registration work of ICH and its bearers” has successfully conducted for the first time. Following the conclusion of their registration work in the first half of 2010, the soums and districts have sent their national registration reports to the sub-committees. By integrating the reports from sub-committees, the final registration census of the “Primary registration work of the ICH and its bearers” has completed by the 30th of October.

“Primary registration work of the ICH and its bearers” has conducted and concluded successfully at the national level covering 85% including 283 soums (sub-inmate to a province) of 21 provinces and all 9 districts of the capital Ulaanbaatar. Overall 80 ICH elements were identified and registered and 3339 individuals were identified as ICH bearers.

The following statistical analysis can be made from the national registration census:

The ICH involvement percentage in the registration by mains
Involvement of ICH bearers in the registration by thei age 

The percentage of ICH elements registered in the National Representative List and the List of ICH in Need of Urgent Safeguarding
The National Committee has reviewed and evaluated the report of the “national registration census of the ICH and its bearers” and the “evaluation report of the current state of safeguarding measures”. During the regular conference of the National Committee, in accordance with the contents and objectives of UNESCO Project “Living Human Treasure”, as a start of the work the certain initiatives have taken into consideration to include several ICH bearers holding the rare and unique elements in their original forms in the state protection and to support and promote their transmission and training activities for the younger generations. Therefore, 35 individuals with high level skills were designated and acknowledged as the “Intangible Cultural Heritage Bearer” and were awarded with certificates. These individuals were designated as ICH Bearers by the following criteria:

1. The bearer should be a recognized and acknowledged in his or her community as holding the ICH element.
2. The bearer should possess the high level skills of the original forms of ICH, its distinct characters, technique, repertoire and school.
3. The bearer should possess the ICH element in connection to its livelihood and traditional customs and rituals.
4. The bearer should be experienced in training and transmitting his/her knowledge and skills and have the ability to conduct training.

3.6. National Symposium on “The Current Issues for Safeguarding the ICH” and the seminar on “The Establishment of the National Registration and Information System of ICH in Mongolia”

In the framework of the project, the Center of Cultural Heritage in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Mongolian National Commission for UNESCO and the City Department of Culture and Arts have organized the National Symposium on “The Current Issues for Safeguarding the ICH” and the seminar on “The Establishment of the National Registration and Information System of ICH in Mongolia”. The directors of the local museums, representatives of the specialists responsible for culture at the local government administrations, and information and registration officers from 21 provinces and 9 districts of Ulaanbaatar city have actively participated in the Symposium and seminar. More than 20 individuals including the relevant administrative individuals from the Ministry, experts, researchers and scholars of various ICH elements have given their presentations on the current safeguarding issues of ICH, its documentation, need for urgent safeguarding, cultural law and policy, legal environment and other important issues concerning the ICH elements, and conducted discussions on the same issues. The activities of these two day Symposium and seminar were documented on video records (4 hours on DVD) and distributed to all participants along with all presentation materials on CD.

3.7. The publishing of the introductory catalog of the elements in the “National representative List and the List of ICH in Need of Urgent Safeguarding”.

The Catalog includes the introductory and detailed descriptions and photos of eight ICH elements inscribed from Mongolia in the UNESCO “Representative List of ICH” and the “List of ICH in Need of Urgent Safeguarding”; brief descriptions and photos of 88 ICH elements included in the “National Representative List of ICH” and the “List of ICH in Need of Urgent Safeguarding” approved by the Education, Culture and Science Minister’s 293rd decision on March 5th of 2010; and the brief biographies and photos of 100
individuals in the “List of Designated ICH bearers with high level of skills and knowledge” approved by the Minister’s decision.

IV. Achieved results

By implementing the project “Elaboration of the Inventories of the Representative List and List of ICH in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in Mongolia”, the following results were achieved.

1. Before the implementation of this project, the inventory-making of ICH and was being done poorly and partially without particular set out system or regulations. As a result of the successful implementation of the project, we were able to establish the primary steps of further systematic and permanent inventorying that can be elaborated and improved annually.

2. Before the implementation of the project, the involvement in the activities of ICH inventorying have covered smaller areas only by the places the research teams have been. As a result of the implementation of the project, we could conduct the “primary registration work of ICH and its bearers” at the national level covering every administrative units existing in Mongolian territory. Thus, the scope of the inventorying was expanded to a national level. By employing and designating the right personals as ICH registration and information methodologists and officers, acknowledging their responsibilities and providing with necessary working regulations and advisory at the primary stage of ICH inventorying in soums (subordinate to a province), khoroo (subordinate to a district) and at the middle stage in provinces and districts, we were able to establish the permanent operational mechanism of the national registration and information system of ICH and its bearers.

3. During the implementation of the project, we could conduct the “primary registration work of ICH and its bearers” for the first time covering 85 percent of all the administrative units in Mongolia.

4. By providing an increased involvement and participation of the public in the in the activities for identifying the elements in the National Representative List and List of ICH in Need of Urgent Safeguarding and their bearers, we could set the groundwork for establishing the information database for further annual elaboration and improvement of the above Lists. In addition, every soums and provinces have created their own ICH lists to exclude the elements they pride, and took responsibilities to further safeguard and transmit them to the younger generation.

5. By the successful implementation of the project, as the increased public involvement, the awareness and understanding of ICH and importance for safeguarding it have tremendously raised.

6. In the framework of the project, the knowledge and methodology on safeguarding, researching, identifying and documenting the ICH have significantly improved among cultural administrative individuals, researchers, information and registration officers, ICH bearers and other relevant bodies.

Conclusion

The successful implementation of the project “Inventory of the Representative list and list in need of urgent safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Mongolia” has indeed played a key role to establish the groundwork for inventorying and safeguarding the diverse intangible cultural heritage of
Mongolia. Making inventory is the great contribution itself to enhance the National capacity building for the implementation of the UNESCO Convention for safeguarding of the Intangible cultural heritage.

ICH inventory is a primary acts as a strong foundation with potential to develop documentation and safeguarding the ICH further and serves to preserve and safeguard cultural heritage as well as providing a basic for stimulating future creativity. In that sense, we are fully engaged to continue the ICH inventorying with further objectives of improved coherence of safeguarding measures.