

INTRODUCTION TO THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND NATURAL DISASTERS

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Background and Objectives

The Asia-Pacific region is one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world, and various hazards such as typhoons/cyclones, storms, floods, droughts, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and tsunamis sometimes trigger disasters that affect people living in the region. Although various knowledge and practices for dealing with hazardous events and situations have been accumulated in the region over time, the more pronounced influence of climate change in recent years is making such event more extreme and unpredictable. The rapid acceleration of globalisation, urbanisation and associated development, and social and cultural changes prominent in many places in the region contribute to increased vulnerability and disaster risks, and they are also major factors threatening the viability of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) alone.

Against this background, the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI) launched the project 'Preliminary Research on Intangible Cultural Heritage and Disaster Risk Management in the Asia-Pacific Region' in 2016 as a new initiative to understand ICH in relation to natural hazards and disaster risk management (DRM).

The project captured the momentum of the increasing international awareness on disaster risk reduction (DRR) and sustainability, and by extension, disaster risk management and responses for cultural heritage. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 adopted at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015 emphasises the importance of protecting cultural heritage (article 30(d)), and lists culture as one of the measures to reduce vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness, and strengthen resilience (article 17). Also in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by UN member states with 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development (SDGs); Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) stipulates that actors should 'strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage' (11.4), and '... substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, ...' in line with the Sendai Framework (11.B). However, major efforts taken for protecting and safeguarding cultural heritage are still largely centred on 'tangible' cultural heritage, and practical strategies and frameworks for ICH are yet to be explored.

Concerning culture and heritage in this context, UNESCO's medium-term strategy (37C/4) emphasises the importance of post-conflict and post-disaster responses. This assertion was further strengthened in the latest biannual Programme and Budget 2018–2019 (39C/5). Concurrently with IRCI's project, UNESCO also started to strengthen activities in the area of ICH; 'Intangible cultural heritage in emergencies' has been discussed in the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage since 2016, in which the need to foster links between disaster risk reduction and ICH has been stressed. In addition, a desk study was carried out by Wilson and Ballard (2017) upon UNESCO's request. As a category 2 centre under the auspices of UNESCO, IRCI aims to contribute to this international development through the implementation of this project.

This project began by assessing the state of affairs in various countries in the Asia-Pacific region, examining how ICH, culture, and communities are considered in the context of DRM and how ICH safeguarding and management deals with the risk and impacts of disasters. The activities also focused on cultivating cooperative relationships and networks of researchers within the region. We then took steps to deepen our understanding of this issue through the implementation of field surveys to assess the situation of ICH in relation to natural hazards and disasters (see Iwamoto, Ohnuki, and Nojima eds. 2018). This Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on Intangible Cultural Heritage and Natural Disasters (7–9 December 2018) culminated IRCI's achievements over these three years.

This project has two major areas of interests: 1) how natural hazards and disasters impact ICH and its transmission, and 2) how ICH could be mobilised for DRR. These points were further explored in the workshop sessions as they provide a foundation for the further development of discussions and practical programmes for the safeguarding and mobilisation of ICH for DRR.

While the project attracted considerable interest from researchers and specialists in culture and heritage including museum personnel and government officials, it has become clear in the course of the project that ICH researchers' interest and commitment to the subject of 'ICH and natural hazards and disasters' remain limited. Therefore, one of the most important aims of the workshop was to encourage the active involvement of ICH researchers and specialists in work on the subject to enhance research and safeguarding programmes that are specifically focused on ICH in the context of natural hazards and disasters. In this respect, recent efforts in Japan of post-disaster recovery of ICH after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011 that involved a considerable number of researchers on ICH and culture are highly effective in showcasing how ICH contributes to the reconstruction of disaster-affected communities and how researchers can contribute to this process. The workshop aimed to share these cases from Japan through a special session and excursion to enhance participants' understanding of the subject.

Workshop Structure

The workshop was programmed over three days to discuss issues related to intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the context of natural hazards and disasters in the Asia-Pacific Region. Recognising that the commitment of ICH researchers and specialists in the process of disaster risk management (DRM) has been extremely limited through IRCI's preliminary research activities in 2016–2017, this workshop aimed to encourage the active involvement of ICH researchers and culture sectors in this process, while instigating further research on ICH in relation to natural hazards and disasters.

Accordingly, DAY 1 (7 December 2019) of the workshop was devoted to a series of presentations by participants from the Asia-Pacific region (Bangladesh, Fiji, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Vanuatu, and Vietnam) in three interrelated sessions of: Natural hazards/disasters and the transmission of ICH (Session 1); Challenges and lessons learnt from disaster experiences, and the potentials of local knowledge (Session 2); and Enhancing dialogue between ICH and disaster risk management (Session 3).

While exploring diverse cases and issues from various countries in the region, the workshop also aimed to share cases of ICH revitalization and the recent development of related research activities in Japan, notably after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011. For this purpose, an excursion to Takenoura community in Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture was scheduled on DAY 2. On this excursion, participants engaged in field observations, lectures, and interactions with people in the communities to learn about how the revitalisation of ICH contributed to the community's recovery after the 2011 tsunami disaster. Following this field experience, a special session, 'Efforts of post-disaster revitalisation of ICH in Japan', was scheduled in the morning of DAY 3. Furthermore, owing to the participation of the Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Latin America (CRESPIAL), who was also very keen to work on this subject, participants had an opportunity to learn about the situations of ICH and disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean.

All the points addressed at the workshop were integrated in the outcome document 'Statements and Recommendations for Safeguarding ICH in Disasters and Mobilising ICH for Disaster Risk Reduction' (see Annex 1), while individual papers and reports presented at the workshop by participants are published in this volume.

Workshop at the Intersection

This workshop was organized at the intersection of ICH safeguarding and DRM/DRR, and also at the intersection of the risk management of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. There has been considerable interest in incorporating traditional local knowledge or indigenous knowledge in DRR (e.g. Dekens 2007; Mercer et al. 2010; Shaw et al. 2009). Defined as 'the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings' (UNESCO 2017), such knowledge and practices could be effective tools for reducing

risk, and they constitute a part of ICH. Therefore, the cultural and historical contexts in which they are put into practice and through which they are transmitted have to be better understood, especially by DRR practitioners who are actively working in the field. In addition, bringing in ICH perspectives and mobilising ICH for DRR will be more effective and meaningful by collaborating with researchers and practitioners in DRR. Inviting a number of researchers in the field of DRR along with ICH researchers and specialists, this workshop intended to create a space for productive dialogues that are positive and mutually respectful.

As previously mentioned, disaster risk management for cultural heritage has progressed with a strong emphasis on tangible, built heritage, the damage and destruction of which is evident. For the most part, ICH has been left behind in this growing trend, in part because of its intangible nature, the damage of which is often left unrecognised, but also because no tools or strategies have been available to assess such damage. However, ICH is gaining more recognition in recent years in the context of protecting and safeguarding ‘tangible’ cultural heritage, as heritage values and landscape are managed and maintained by intangible cultural practices. ICH required for the reconstruction of heritage in Nepal is a good example (Government of Nepal 2015). Although this workshop did not directly address the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage, this is certainly an area that should be further discussed. The ‘People, Place, and Story’ model proposed by Wilson (see this volume) as well as the concept of ‘living heritage’ coined by UNESCO during the workshop could encourage the development of discussions on integrated approaches for safeguarding tangible and intangible cultural heritage from disasters, and the safeguarding of heritage as a whole.

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