
The IRCI Researchers Forum on ICH Safeguarding in the Asia-Pacific Region

Progress and Challenges in the Research for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

- Towards a Sustainable Future -

Presentation Abstracts

(order of presentation)

[Session 1: Progress of the major issues in ICH safeguarding, reflecting on major research projects by IRCI](#)

IRCI's Research Projects: Achievements and Challenges

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Since its establishment in 2011, the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI) has implemented various research projects, in cooperation with various researchers and institutions including universities, museums, government sections and NGOs in the Asia-Pacific region. As a category 2 centre of UNESCO, IRCI's research projects are expected to contribute to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and the implementation of the 2003 Convention.

In the past 10 years, in line with UNESCO's strategy, IRCI carried out various research projects, which were developed under two major lines of activities (Activity Focus). The first was "Promoting Research for ICH Safeguarding," which focused on understanding the state of research relating to the safeguarding of ICH through a series of expert meetings and conferences, while collecting and analyzing information on ICH-related research in the Asia-Pacific region. These activities were instrumental for IRCI to recognize major issues on safeguarding ICH in the Asia-Pacific region and importantly, the role of research for safeguarding ICH. Discussions with experts also directed IRCI to approach more specific themes; for instance, the project investigating the contribution of ICH to SDGs that started in 2018 is now one of the major projects of IRCI.

The projects implemented under the second line of activities were more thematic, and involved case studies in selected countries within the region or sub-region. Themes relating to the measures for safeguarding ICH such as the community-based documentation and the legal systems were investigated under "Research for the Safeguarding of Endangered ICH" until 2015.

From 2016 onwards, “Research on ICH Safeguarding and Disaster Risk Management” delivered two major projects, each addressing different kind of risks: natural hazards/disasters, and conflicts.

Drawing on selected research projects, this presentation reviews what IRCI has achieved as a research centre for safeguarding ICH and what remains as challenges, which should guide the discussion in this Forum envisioning the future of research contributing to the safeguarding of ICH.

Research for the Safeguarding of Endangered Intangible Cultural Heritage: Some Thoughts Reflecting on the Last Decade

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In 2012, IRCI hosted the First ICH Researchers Forum meeting on the implementation of the 2003 UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. At this meeting, Chiara Bortolotto and I presented a review of current research directions in the field of ICH. Since then, a considerable amount of research has been done in the field internationally, including some research by IRCI itself on endangered ICH. A number of databases of ICH-related research have also been established and expanded, including by IRCI and more recently by the UNESCO Living Heritage Entity itself. This paper will reflect on the research that has been done on ICH over the last decade since our 2012 paper, identifying key trends and some remaining gaps. It will also more specifically reflect on the outcomes of the project conducted by IRCI on Legal Systems related to ICH in the Greater Mekong Region. This will be considered in the context of other research on legal aspects of ICH safeguarding globally.

Reflecting on the Statements and Recommendations of IRCI’s ICH Safeguarding and Disaster Risk Management Project

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The principal outcome of IRCI’s Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on Intangible Cultural Heritage and Natural Disasters (Sendai, Japan, 7-9 December 2018) was a series of *Statements and Recommendations for Safeguarding ICH in Disasters and Mobilising ICH for Disaster Risk Reduction*. This guiding document was intended to support those working at the intersection of culture and disaster risk reduction. Recommendations considered strategies for mitigating the impacts of disasters on intangible cultural heritage (ICH); mobilising ICH in community-based DRR and post-disaster recovery processes; and promoting effective dialogue and DRR planning between international, regional and national ICH and DRR researchers and practitioners. This paper provides an overview of the IRCI programs that led to the development of these statements and recommendations, and reflects on further developments in the field over the past four years.

IRCI Research Data Collection for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage: Issues, Challenges and Future

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IRCI is effectively implementing and enhancing the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the Asia-Pacific region through instigating and coordinating research. This is to achieve the organisation's aim to promote the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH. One of the program in this regard is through research data collection, which has been implemented for about a decade. Up till now three projects are launched under this program namely Mapping Research for the Safeguarding of ICH in the Asia-Pacific Region, 2013, Literature Survey on ICH Safeguarding Research in the Asia-Pacific Countries, 2015 and Sustainable Research Data Collection for ICH Safeguarding in the Asia-Pacific Region, 2019. The objectives of these projects were achieved through impressive data collection as the primary outcome. These projects have faced few challenges in their implementation, such as difficulty in grasping the whole picture of research activities in the Asia-Pacific region because this is a new domain. Second, the outcomes are published in the local languages and/or not distributed widely (IRCI, 2015). Third, researchers are also confused and misunderstand the “safeguarding” concept and the importance of ICH (Hussin, 2016). Fourth, The ICH research output data is scattered and not properly documented. Few positive aspects can also be tabbed from these projects like the awareness on “safeguarding” can be strengthened among the scholars/researchers and their future projects on ICH can enrich the body of knowledge of the ICH elements and compelling impact to the beholder of the ICH, the community, government and international society. This paper will discuss the outcomes, analyse the issues and challenges those projects has faced, and will recommend improvements in future research on Safeguarding ICH. The recommendations like improvement on methodology, assessment research on the safeguarding initiatives through the database, collaborative work by all researchers, government and non-government agencies and academic institutions to produce comprehensive data. Documents should also include audio-visuais, which will help and support the conservation, protection and safeguarding of the ICH.

Session 2: Recent international trends and scope for the safeguarding of ICH: From the viewpoint of the 2003 Convention and other perspectives

Intangible Cultural Heritage and Human Security in an Age of SDGs

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Human Security is regarded as foundation for human beings. It seeks to establish participatory solutions and a social ecological system that protect and empower all people. For the protection and empowerment for all, the United Nations stresses the importance of consideration which include: people-centered approaches, comprehensive manner, context-specific activities and a prevention-oriented system. In an age of SDGs, poverty, hunger, disease, threats from fear and violence, sanitation are no longer separate problems, rather they are very intricately connected as “global problematique”. Protecting and inheriting intangible cultural heritage need to be recognized under the “global problematique”, and be considered in the context of Human Security. Human Security has a great potential to build on its unique position to facilitate integrated and collective actions to achieve the SDGs in a more people-centred, comprehensive, sustainable and inclusive manner. Further, Human Security contributes as both an analytical lens and a programming framework that complements and enriches mechanisms to attain the SDGs. In this speech entitled “Intangible Cultural Heritage and Human Security in an Age of SDGs”, the author discusses protecting and inheriting intangible cultural heritage as the context of Human Security in VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) world.

Heritage Studies as Public Ethnology / Sociology: Recent Trends and the Issues Concerned with the Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Heritage studies in this century focus more on people’s practices rather than monuments. Without this general trends, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage would not have been adopted nor ratified. In actuality, this Convention pays more attention to people’s practices rather than movable relics or immovable monuments. Intangible heritage is safeguarded by incessant or continuous repetition of customary practices.

This character of intangible cultural heritage logically follows many issues particular to intangible heritage studies. In this short speech, however, I would like to shed lights upon only two issues: one is fluidity in contrast to solidity; and the other is communicativity in contrast to group identity. I would stress fluidity and communicativity rather than solidity and group identity, but the latter two opposites are also unavoidable topics.

Repetitive practices before heritagization are essentially fluid, because the component practices are not rigidly identical to one another. Especially in modern settings, where societies and landscapes change at a maximum speed, any cultural phenomenon can be the target of security. Therefore, heritagization is a means to secure cultural continuity. However, we had better keep it in mind that heritagization is not a mere resistance to modernity but, as Valdimar Hafstein (2016) argues, natural consequence of reflexive modernity (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994). Once the process of heritagization starts, heritage is exposed to backrush of over-solidification or freezing. To my view, all the primary heritage-supporters and subsidiary professionals struggle to balance the change and continuity, or the fluidity and solidity.

The process of heritagization makes the cultural phenomena manipulatable for intended purposes, whether tangible or intangible. In other words, both World Heritage sites and Intangible Cultural Heritage function as national or group symbols. The problem is that group identity and exclusion are two sides of the same coin. Two or more countries can compete for nomination of single heritage, and successful inscription for one country can have negative meanings for another. To settle the disputes, we have to recall the fact that there is no human who are familiar to all the traditions. We humans cannot be independent from any traditions, but keep human based on one or a few specific tradition(s). Recognition of communicative essence of cultural affection, whether to intangible heritage or other aspects of tradition, will make sense to make ourselves both universal and particular through cultural movements.

In conclusion, heritage studies should contribute to balance contradictory tendencies of heritage: fluid and solid; as well as communicative and exclusive. To achieve it, the discipline should be developed through dialogues between primary heritage supporters, and other subsidiary actors such as researchers and practitioners. Because of this reflectivity, intangible cultural heritage studies inevitably take on public or participatory character. It cannot be monopolized by professionals. The studies on group symbols, whether solid or fluid, can be called as public ethnology or public sociology.

Research and the 2003 Convention

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Research and knowledge are key to culture, development, and our common future. In an increasingly complex and uncertain world faced with many global challenges, UNESCO's emphasis on cultural research aims to better understand, anticipate and imagine the futures of our cultural heritage in the service of our common humanity. The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage encourages research activity as part of "Safeguarding" measures. The Overall Results Framework (ORF) of the 2003 Convention, approved by the General Assembly of States Parties in 2018, includes Inventorying and research as one of the eight thematic areas with

core indicators and corresponding assessment factors. ORF constitutes an important reference in guiding the implementation of the 2003 Convention. Integrating the ORF into project design, monitoring and reporting is important to ensure that global efforts in implementing the 2003 Convention are guided by a common framework. As a research based C2C, IRCI's effort in instigating and coordinating research into practices and methodologies of safeguarding endangered intangible cultural heritage elements present in the Asia-Pacific region has been an important support to UNESCO's initiatives in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, it is of vital importance that IRCI's research orientations are aligned with the ORF and thus can feed directly into UNESCO's initiatives. This presentation will also share some of UNESCO's initiatives on community-based inventorying of intangible heritage in urban areas; living heritage and the COVID-19 pandemic; and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in disaster contexts. By introducing the content, objectives and impact of these initiatives, this presentation aims to highlight the current trends in Intangible Cultural Heritage safeguarding measures.