

# INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Report of the Research on ICH  
Contributing to SDGs Project  
(FY 2022–2024)

International Research Centre for  
Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI)



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Intangible Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Communities in the Asia-Pacific Region:  
Report of the Research on ICH Contributing to SDGs Project (FY 2022—2024)

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## PREFACE

The International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI) was established in 2011 within the National Institutes for Cultural Heritage (NICH), Japan, as a Category 2 Centre under the auspices of UNESCO. Since its establishment, IRCI has implemented extensive projects to enhance research for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the Asia-Pacific region, in cooperation with research institutes, museums, NGOs, and government sectors within and outside the region.

One of the major activity focuses under the current Medium-Term Programme of IRCI is ‘Research on the Safeguarding of ICH for Building Sustainable and Resilient Societies.’ Under this focus, IRCI has been implementing various research projects exploring the role of ICH, for instance, in relation to disasters, COVID-19 pandemic, and climate change. Research on ICH contributing to SDGs is an important part of this focus, and IRCI has been conducting a series of ICH case studies in relation to SDGs since 2018. In the past two projects, research focused on education incorporating ICH in consideration of contributing to SDG target 4.7 (FY 2018–2019 project) and its relation to sustainable community development (FY 2020–2021). Subsequently, the third project ‘Research on ICH Contributing to SDGs: Intangible Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Cities and Communities’ was implemented from FY 2022 through FY 2024 to address SDG target 11.4 (strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage), by examining the role of ICH as part of the community’s heritage.

This publication is the result of this three-year project. It presents the project summary and the results of the case studies conducted in the project, as well as other papers shared through symposia, highlighting aspects of ICH in heritage safeguarding and management. To approach SDG target 11.4 from an ICH perspective, the project looked at intangible aspects in well-known heritage properties such as cultural/historic landscapes and World Heritage. This enabled us to draw renewed attention to the interconnectedness between the tangible and the intangible and their integration for safeguarding the community’s heritage. In this respect, this publication will be useful to those interested in World Heritage sites and cultural landscapes, as well as to those seeking holistic approaches to heritage safeguarding.

This project would not have been completed without the active engagement of the project partners: APSARA National Authority in Angkor, Cambodia; George Town World Heritage Incorporated in Penang, Malaysia; and the team of Pasifika Renaissance and Waan Aelōñ in Majel that worked together in the Marshall Islands. Taking this opportunity, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to these partners and all those who worked with them in the field, including community members and ICH practitioners who shared their viewpoints. I would also like to thank the researchers who joined the project by sharing their own case studies at two symposia and contributed to this publication, which significantly enriched the discussions in the project. Mr ISHIMURA Tomo (Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Japan), Mr ONISHI Hideyuki (Doshisha Women’s College of Liberal Arts, Japan), Ms FUJIEDA Ayako (Kyoto Seika University, Japan), Mr IIDA Taku (National Museum of Ethnology, Japan), and Ms DUONG Bich Hanh (UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia) supported the development of the project activities from the beginning and provided



valuable insights as resource persons. While the project was financed by IRCI's own budget, the first international symposium in FY 2022 was supported by the 'UNESCO Future Co-Creation Platform Project (International Grassroots UNESCO Activities)' –programme implemented by the Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU), commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), Japan.

It would be a great pleasure to see this publication become widely used, especially among communities living with cultural heritage, and encourage further research projects focusing on ICH in the context of the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific region and elsewhere, demonstrating the significance of ICH in sustainable development.

MACHIDA Daisuke  
Director-General  
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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATION

<b>ANA</b>	APSARA National Authority
<b>APSARA</b>	Authority for the Protection of the Site and the Management of the Region of Angkor
<b>FY</b>	Fiscal Year
<b>GTWHI</b>	George Town World Heritage Incorporated
<b>ICH</b>	Intangible Cultural Heritage
<b>ICOMOS</b>	International Council on Monuments and Sites
<b>IRCI</b>	International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region
<b>Nara Document</b>	Nara Document on Authenticity
<b>OUV</b>	Outstanding Universal Value
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>WAM</b>	Waan Aelōñ in Majel (Canoes of the Marshall Islands)
<b>World Heritage Convention</b>	Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage
<b>Yamato Declaration</b>	Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approaches for Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage
<b>2003 Convention</b>	Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage



# SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH ON ICH CONTRIBUTING TO SDGS: INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE FOR SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES (FY 2022–2024)

International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI)

## INTRODUCTION

Since the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted with the agreement of the leaders of 193 countries at the 70th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on 25 September 2015, SDGs have been gradually recognized by international communities as common goals to be achieved by 2030. Even though goals and targets that directly address culture and heritage are limited, UNESCO's Culture for the 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2018) emphasizes the importance of culture including tangible and intangible heritage as an enabler and a driver for sustainable development, articulating that 'no development is sustainable without culture.' The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003 Convention) also recognizes the importance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as 'a mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development,'<sup>1</sup> and outlines that ICH can effectively contribute to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015).

Against this background, IRCI has been implementing a series of research projects since fiscal year (FY)<sup>2</sup> 2018, to highlight the ICH in relation to sustainable development, especially through education. The first project<sup>3</sup> focused on SDG target 4.7, which calls for sustainable development and global citizenship through education acknowledging the importance of cultural diversity and the contribution of culture, and investigated the role of ICH in formal and non-formal education (IRCI, 2020). The subsequent project<sup>4</sup> focused on the relationship between ICH, education, and community development, and case studies demonstrated the central role of ICH in the community's sustainability while suggesting potential

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<sup>1</sup> Preamble of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

<sup>2</sup> Japanese fiscal year starts in April and lasts until the end of March of the following year.

<sup>3</sup> 'Multi-disciplinary Study on ICH's Contribution to Sustainable Development: Focusing on Education' (FY 2018–2019).

<sup>4</sup> 'Research on ICH's Contribution to SDGs: Education and Community Development' (FY 2020–2021).

contributions of ICH for many other goals, not just SDGs 4 and 11 (IRCI, 2022).

Recognizing the significance of ICH in connection with the community's sustainability, IRCI started the current project, 'Research on ICH Contributing to SDGs: Intangible Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Cities and Communities' in FY 2022. The project specifically focused on SDG target 11.4,<sup>5</sup> which directly addresses the need to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage for sustainable cities and communities. However, the term 'cultural heritage' in this context is by and large taken as tangible heritage as represented by World Heritage sites, and how ICH contributes to this process has not been investigated in detail. Therefore, the project how ICH could be utilized for strengthening the protection and safeguarding of the community's heritage, by examining the roles of ICH in shaping and maintaining cultural and historical landscapes through case studies in the Asia-Pacific region. The project also provided opportunities for discussion and exchange concerning issues related to synergies between tangible and intangible heritage and the holistic safeguarding of heritage through workshops and symposia.

This report is the final publication of the project and is composed of the results of case studies conducted under the project as well as various cases from the Asia-Pacific region that were shared through symposia, providing various insights for heritage safeguarding and management involving ICH. As an introduction to this publication, this chapter summarizes the major project activities and findings.

## **THE PROJECT OUTLINES AND ACTIVITIES**

### **Objectives**

This project aimed to investigate the roles of ICH in the context of SDG target 11.4, which calls for strengthening the efforts to safeguard cultural and natural heritage. Expecting that local communities having well-known heritage such as historical architecture, cultural landscapes and World Heritage sites are more aware of their heritage value and management, the case studies explored 'intangible' aspects that shape their heritage landscape.

Investigating the roles of ICH in this context was closely connected to the issues of tangible-intangible interactions and the integrated safeguarding of heritage.

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<sup>5</sup> SDG target 11.4: Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.

Even though the Yamato Declaration<sup>6</sup> called for the importance of integrated safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural heritage 20 years ago, discussions concerning this theme did not make much progress until recently. Since the early 2020s, however, this theme has been gaining renewed attention, as exemplified in the UNESCO Conference on Cultural Heritage in the 21st Century, held in Naples on 27–29 November 2023, which brought together the World Heritage Convention and the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage to explore synergies between them.<sup>7</sup> In this context, it was one of the goals of the project to contribute to this growing discussion, especially from the perspective of ICH, and with in-depth case studies from the Asia-Pacific region.

### **Timeline of Activities**

The project was carried out for a period of three years (1 April 2022–31 March 2025) and included the implementation of case studies and discussions through workshops and symposia (Table 1).

The first year (FY 2022) was considered a preliminary phase to establish partnerships for conducting case studies. Case studies to be pursued in the project were sought among various locations and communities in the Asia-Pacific region having well-known tangible cultural heritage or cultural landscape, as people's familiarity with heritage could provide a foundation to investigate the situation of ICH in such places. Accordingly, two places associated with World Heritage sites were selected for the project: Angkor region in Cambodia and George Town in Penang, Malaysia. In Cambodia, APSARA National Authority (ANA) investigated the traditional handicraft production and the livelihoods of the communities inside the Angkor Heritage sites. In Malaysia, the George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI) provided insights into the intertwining nature of tangible and intangible heritage in the context of the dynamic, multicultural historic city of George Town.

The project also supported a case study to be conducted in the Pacific to bring in a contrasting viewpoint of landscape and heritage that is closely related to the island environment. After seeking a possibility of research in Fiji in FY 2022, an alternative research plan was developed in FY 2023 for the Marshall Islands, in cooperation with the Pasifika Renaissance, a Japan-based NGO, and the Waan Aelōñ in Majel (WAM), an NGO based on Majuro, to investigate traditional skills

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<sup>6</sup> 'Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approaches for Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage' was adopted as an outcome document of the International Conference on the Safeguarding of Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage: Towards an Integrated Approach, 20–23 October 2004.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO Conference on Cultural Heritage in the 21st Century. [https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/11/UNESCO\\_CALL\\_FOR\\_ACTION\\_NAPLES.pdf](https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/11/UNESCO_CALL_FOR_ACTION_NAPLES.pdf)



**Table 1** Timeline of project activities

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Month</b>	<b>Activities</b>
FY 2022	April–July	Identification of partners and case studies
	August–March	Case study (preliminary research)
	November	IRCI visited Siem Reap for monitoring and discussion
	February	Project Partners’ Meeting The 1st International Symposium Submission of annual reports by partners
FY 2023	April–May	Development of research plan for FY 2023
	June–January	Case study (full-scale research)
	July	IRCI visited George Town for monitoring and discussion
	February	Submission of annual reports by partners
	March	Workshop in Cambodia
FY 2024	April–May	Development of research plan for FY 2024
	June–August	Case study (supplementary research)
	October	Project Partners’ Meeting The Final International Symposium
	November	Submission of final reports by partners
	March	Publication of the Final Project Report

and knowledge related to the maritime landscape.

Preliminary research conducted in FY 2022 as well as the discussions in the first project partners’ meeting and symposium held in February 2023 helped IRCI and partner organizations refine the research questions and plans, which led to the implementation of major field research in FY 2023. Towards the end of FY 2023, project partners gathered in Siem Reap, Cambodia, for the discussion and exchange based on the findings of respective research activities, and by visiting local communities and craftspeople in the Angkor region.

Case studies were completed in the first half of FY 2024 with supplementary research. The results of the case studies were brought together to the final project partners’ meeting and the symposium held in Kyoto in October 2024, which provided the last opportunity to have in-depth discussions based on the case study findings. After exchanging opinions and receiving feedback, partners completed the final case study reports to be published in this volume.

The following sections summarize major activities and case studies.

## **Case Studies**

### ***Traditional Handicraft and Livelihoods in Angkor World Heritage Site, Cambodia***

ANA conducted research on traditional handicraft and livelihoods among the village communities residing within the Angkor World Heritage Site. The research team started from mapping a wide range of handicrafts and traditional skills in the region, and they subsequently elaborated their case study focusing on traditional weaving practices using rattan and pandanus in Krabei Riel village. The research provided an in-depth account of the rattan craft production including the procurement of raw materials, and the economic impact associated with the market. It pointed out the need to balance sustainable resource use and craft production in harmony with market economy and tourism industry. The outcome of the research by ANA is presented in this volume, as a paper titled ‘The Contribution of Traditional Handicraft to Sustainable Communities at Krabei Riel: Toward Safeguarding and Transmitting ICH within Angkor World Heritage Property.’

### ***Built Heritage Protection and Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding in the Multicultural Historic City of George Town, Penang, Malaysia***

George Town, together with Melaka, constitutes ‘Melaka and George Town, Historic cities of the Straits of Malacca,’ inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2008, and GTWHI which undertook the case study is the site manager responsible for the protection of the heritage properties. The team composed of GTWHI researchers conducted research on the communities’ link to the heritage buildings and the role of ICH in the multicultural and urban context of the heritage city. Notably, they provided a detailed case study focusing on the George Town Heritage Celebrations, in which various communities showcase their ICH practices in many ways. GTWHI, highlighting its role as site manager, emphasized the importance of promoting the participation of all stakeholders and communities to protect the built heritage environment, which in turn contributes to safeguarding their ICH. See ‘Intertwining Built Heritage Protection and Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding: Case Study of George Town Heritage Celebrations’ in this volume for the outcome of this case study.

### ***Seafaring and Weaving Heritage and Sustainable Communities in the Marshall Islands***

This case study was conducted by a team of the Pasifika Renaissance and WAM. The Marshall Islands is a small island nation in Eastern Micronesia, mostly composed of atolls. They focused on two significant cultural traditions of navigation and weaving, both having tangible manifestations such as canoes, basketry, and fine woven mats known as *jaki-ed* that symbolizes traditional Marshallese culture. The study suggests that the revival of these traditions is significant for

economic sustainability and community development while strengthening the cultural identity and community pride. The outcome of their research is presented in the chapter by Nagaoka and Kelen ‘Marshallese Seafaring and Weaving Heritage and Sustainable Communities.’

## Symposia

### ***‘Research on ICH Contributing to SDGs: Intangible Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Cities and Communities’ – The First International Symposium***

The First International Symposium of the ‘Research on ICH Contributing to SDGs: Intangible Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Cities and Communities’ was held in Nara, Japan, on 1 February 2023, as a kick-off event of the project (Annex 1).<sup>8</sup> Being in the first year of the project, the symposium aimed to stimulate the discussion relating to the integrated safeguarding of cultural heritage, through identifying various issues and challenges associated with such approaches.

The symposium began with a keynote lecture titled ‘Fusion of Intangible and Tangible’ by Director General of Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Japan. Then, the results of preliminary case studies conducted by project partners were shared, and various cases in which ICH contributes to the safeguarding and management of historical/cultural landscapes were presented by researchers working in Japan, Nepal, the Philippines, Tajikistan, and Vanuatu. In the discussion session, participants exchanged their opinions on the roles that ICH play in the development and management of heritage landscapes and the importance of safeguarding both tangible and intangible cultural heritage for sustainable cities and communities. The discussion extended to the general but important theme of how to safeguard cultural heritage in the face of significant cultural losses due to modernization, technological development, tourism, and the penetration of the cash economy. Reviving cultural heritage through community initiatives, education, and safeguarding efforts can help recover from a sense of loss and create a new way of life. Enhancing the capacity to recover cultural heritage and collective identity requires dialogue with other sectors. The importance of embracing changes, adapting to ever-changing social situations and maintaining a physical community was also raised.

The symposium was held both in person and online. It was attended by 20 researchers, including project partners undertaking the case studies, heritage researchers in the Asia-Pacific region who presented various cases in which ICH contributed to the safeguarding and management of historical/cultural land-

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<sup>8</sup> This symposium was implemented within the framework of the ‘Future Co-Creation of (International Grassroots UNESCO Activities)’ commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), Japan.

scapes, an expert from the UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia (UNESCO Beijing), and a few Japanese experts as resource persons. In addition, partners in the previous SDGs projects also joined the symposium online. The symposium was also open to the public and welcomed 55 online participants, mostly from the Asia-Pacific region.

The following day, participants made an excursion to the Nara National Museum, where they listened to lectures by the Council for Promoting New Learning Tourism in Nara to learn about its effort to promote Nara City and tourism utilizing cultural heritage in the context of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and SDGs.

### ***Workshop in Siem Reap, Cambodia***

In the second project year, a workshop was held in Siem Reap, Cambodia on 18–19 March 2024. The event was co-organized by IRCI and ANA (Annex 2). This workshop was an opportunity for the project partners to get together to share the progress of their respective case studies and discuss findings and challenges related to the safeguarding of ICH as part of the heritage landscape. By having the workshop in one of the case study areas and witnessing actual community situations, participants were able to gain a wider perspective to elaborate on the results of their case studies. In addition to the project partners, an officer from the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts of Cambodia, who is working in the field of ICH, joined the workshop.

The partners presented their research findings and the participants had intensive discussions, which mainly focused on the role of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in the community. Particularly, participants emphasized that ICH is not just a tool to protect tangible heritage but could be better promoted through the good use of tangible heritage and that the interaction between the tangible and the intangible is important. They also affirmed that such perspectives are necessary for the sustainable management of the heritage of the communities.

On the second day, participants visited the communities near the Angkor Heritage sites where ANA has been conducting research, and had opportunities to interact with rattan craft producers. By experiencing the actual community settings of the Angkor case study, this excursion provided a valuable opportunity for participants to exchange their views and further ideas to elaborate their research.

***The Final Symposium ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Cities and Communities: Perspective for Integrated Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region’***

The symposium was held in Kyoto on 11 October 2024, to culminate the project activities over three years. With the title of ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Cities and Communities: Perspective for Integrated Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region,’ this public symposium aimed to discuss the importance of ICH, by sharing the cases in the Asia-Pacific region that incorporate ICH in heritage management, including the results of the case studies conducted in the project. Specifically, it aimed to deepen our understanding of the interaction between tangible and intangible heritage and their integrated safeguarding, as well as the community-centred approaches to the holistic safeguarding of cultural heritage, by highlighting various ‘intangible’ components that constitute cultural and historic landscapes. In addition, by making the conference accessible to the public, it aimed to enhance the interest in and understanding of the significance of ICH in the context of SDGs among cultural heritage stakeholders and the public.

The symposium featured two keynote speeches and four case reports (Annex 3). The first keynote by Ananya BHATTACHARYA (Contact Base, India) highlighted the ICH practices and heritage tourism at the Indian World Heritage site of Santiniketan, whereas SHIMIZU Shigeatsu (Kyoto Institute of Technology, Japan) introduced the cultural landscape of tea in Uji, Kyoto, with challenges associated with maintaining its heritage value. Other case reports were the result of research carried out under the project, namely, the rattan handicraft production in Angkor, Cambodia; maritime landscape and traditional navigation in the Marshall Islands; and the George Town Heritage Celebrations in Malaysia, as well as the case of community-based safeguarding of traditional ecological knowledge in Kyrgyzstan.

The final discussion started by reminding the participants about the different orientations between the World Heritage Convention and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; then, it focused on the synergy and interconnectedness between tangible and intangible heritage, and the active roles of ICH in the integrated heritage safeguarding and management. Notably, it was highlighted that the holistic understanding of heritage as a system would be important for safeguarding the community’s heritage and that we would have to move away from the categorizations dividing heritage. Recognizing that cultural heritage connects people and contributes to their identity, it was considered important to constantly respond to new challenges to give cultural heritage a new meaning. It was also raised that the concept of authenticity that has been regarded as essential under the World Heritage Convention should be reviewed from the community’s viewpoint and in terms of the framework of ICH.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Key Findings**

For strengthening the effort for safeguarding cultural heritage as a means of making cities and communities more sustainable as outlined in SDG target 11.4, the project emphasized the importance of ICH and called for further discussions on the holistic safeguarding of heritage, integrating both tangible and intangible elements, and the community-centred safeguarding.

Case studies indicate that some ICH elements such as traditional craftsmanship and craft productions are closely linked with people's livelihoods. Certain cultural knowledge, skills and practices, as well as belief systems, are necessary to maintain tangible cultural heritage including historic buildings and cultural landscapes. Being maintained through people's efforts over generations, cultural heritage signifies the community's continuity from the past. It was also demonstrated in some case studies that heritage settings such as World Heritage sites and historic landscapes provide opportunities for actively promoting ICH, exemplifying synergies between the tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

It was repeatedly stated in the meetings held in the project that there is no distinction between tangible and intangible heritage from a community's perspective. This means that any efforts to safeguard the community's heritage will require a holistic approach incorporating all forms of heritage including tangible, intangible, cultural and natural. This would be challenging at the national or international levels, as there are separate Conventions for the tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and cultural policies at the national level also distinguish heritage with similar categorizations. However, it becomes more realistic at the community level, as community members are responsible for safeguarding and transmitting their heritage.

The integration of tangible and intangible heritage within sustainable development frameworks underscores the transformative potential of heritage in fostering economic resilience, community identity, social empowerment, education, and environmental sustainability, and in providing a viable livelihood for future generations.

### **About this Report**

This report is the final outcome of the activities conducted in these three years. Throughout the project, the crucial roles of ICH for strengthening the effort for safeguarding the community's heritage were emphasized. As a way to promote a community-centred view of heritage and its management in the context of SDG

target 11.4, the project also provided opportunities to explore interaction and synergies between tangible and intangible cultural heritage. In this respect, papers shared at the international symposia introducing a wide range of case studies and theoretical considerations from the Asia-Pacific region were significant contributions deepening our understanding of these issues.

Accordingly, this publication is presented as a compilation of research papers, including not only the results of case studies conducted in the course of the project but also the papers presented at two symposia held under the project. A total of 12 papers are grouped into two common categories of *ICH and World Heritage*, and *ICH and Cultural Landscape*, understanding that these two are inter-related, and that there are many shared and overarching themes such as the ICH aspects in historic cities/towns, knowledge and practices linking people with environment, the community-based heritage management and tangible-intangible interactions.

The *ICH and World Heritage* section includes papers on handicrafts in the Angkor region (Im et al.); Heritage Celebrations in George Town, Malaysia (Ting and Ang); ICH in Santiniketan, India (Bhattacharya); community-based heritage management at Chief Roi Mata's Domain in Vanuatu (Ballard et al.); and the role of rituals at the rice terraces of Ifugao in the Philippines (Martin). A comprehensive keynote lecture comparing the 'cultural landscape' in the World Heritage Convention and the 'cultural space' in the 2003 Convention (Motonaka) is also included in this section.

The *ICH and Cultural Landscape* section includes a variety of case studies ranging from agricultural landscape, cultural and spiritual linkage with natural environment, and the townscape with heritage buildings: Uji-cha tea landscape in Japan in the context of market economy and globalization (Shimizu); seafaring and weaving heritage linked with island environment in the Marshall Islands (Nagaoka and Kelen); traditional ecological knowledge forming the cultural landscape in Kyrgyzstan (Doolbekova); traditional living space of Ainu in Japan (Yoshihara and Fujiya); intangible aspects in landmarks and sacred sites in Tajikistan (Rahimi); and the Newar arts and crafts in relation to historic cities and monuments in Nepal (Shakya).

With all these contributions, this report will be an important and valuable resource for ICH researchers, heritage managers, and other stakeholders who are interested in safeguarding the community's heritage and actively promoting it for sustainable development. The report also provides various insights for the growing discussions on the interaction and synergies between tangible and intangible heritage and the efforts for holistic heritage safeguarding, notably from the standpoint of ICH and with a wide range of case studies from the Asia-Pacific

region. It is also hoped that this report will be widely used and referenced to develop effective heritage safeguarding plans and initiatives to achieve sustainable communities through the promotion of cultural heritage.

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## Annex 1

### Programme and List of Participants for the First International Symposium

#### PROGRAMME

<b>Symposium (1 February 2023)</b>	
Venue: Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Main Conference Room	
<b>Opening</b>	
10:30–10:45	Opening Remarks IWAMOTO Wataru Director-General, IRC
	SHIRAI Shun Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), Japan
	DUONG Bich Hanh Programme Specialist for Culture, UNESCO Beijing Office
<b>Keynote Lecture</b>	
10:45–11:30	Keynote Lecture on Cultural Landscape MOTONAKA Makoto Director General, Nara National Research Institutes for Cultural Properties, Japan
11:30–11:40	Q&A session
<b>SESSION1: IRCI Project ‘ICH for Sustainable Cities and Communities’ and Case Studies</b>	
11:40–11:50	Introduction
11:50–12:10	Cambodia: ICH Contributing to SDGs-Angkor Project: Traditional Handicraft & Livelihood IM Sokrithy Director, Department of Research Training and Communication, APSARA National Authority (ANA), Cambodia
12:10–12:30	Fiji: The Role of a Traditional Bamboo Basket, ‘Ikata’ Making on Everyday Life and Landscape and the Resource Management of Bamboo in Natoaika Village Emosi CANIOGO Director, iTaukei Institute of Languages and Culture (TILC), Fiji
12:30–13:30	Lunch
13:30–13:50	Malaysia: Intertwining Built Heritage Protection and ICH Safeguarding: Case Study from George Town ANG Ming Chee General Manager, George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI), Malaysia
<b>SESSION2: Initiatives in the Asia-Pacific regions</b>	
13:50–14:10	Vanuatu: Community-based Conservation and Management of the Chief Roi Mata’s Domain World Heritage Site, Vanuatu Meredith WILSON Heritage Consultant, Australia Christopher BALLARD Associate Professor, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University (ANU), Australia

14:10–14:30	Tajikistan: The study of ICH, related to the Cultural and Natural Objects in Tajikistan Dilshod RAHIMI Head, The ICH Center, The Research Institute of Culture and Information of the Ministry of Culture (RICI), Tajikistan
14:30–14:50	Nepal: The Role of Intangible Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Historic Cities Found in 'Newar Traditional Art & Craft and Dwelling Culture of the Artisan & Craftsman' Lata SHAKYA Associate Professor, Institute of Disaster Mitigation for Urban Cultural Heritage, Ritsumeikan University (DMUCH), Japan
14:50–15:10	The Philippines: Rice and Rituals in the WHS Rice Terraces of The Philippine Cordilleras Marlon MARTIN Chief Operating Officer, Save the Ifugao Terraces Movement (SITMo), Philippines
15:10–15:30	Japan: Correlation Between Intangible Heritage and Landscape/Environment as Cultural Infrastructure - In the Case of the IWOR Concept Promoted by the Ainu People in Japan YOSHIHARA Hideki Officer, IWOR Development Division, The Promotion of Ainu Measures and Policy, Biratori Town Office, Japan
15:30–15:40	Break
15:40–16:40	Discussion
16:40–16:45	Closing remarks OYASU Kiichi Director, Education Cooperation Department, Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU), Japan
16:45	Closing

<b>Excursion (2 February 2023)</b> Venue: Nara National Museum	
10:00	Opening
10:00–10:10	Announcements
10:10–12:10	Lecture by Nara's new learning tour promotion council New SDGs learning programmes utilising cultural heritage in Nara
12:10–13:30	Lunch
13:30–14:30	Nara National Museum
15:00–	*Free time

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Affiliation
<b>Project Partners</b>	
IM Sokrithy	Director, Department of Research Training and Communication, APSARA National Authority (ANA), Cambodia
Emosi CANIOGO *online	Director, iTaukei Institute of Languages and Culture (TILC), Fiji
ANG Ming Chee	General Manager, George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI), Malaysia
NG Xin Yi	George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI), Malaysia
NG Boon Nee	George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI), Malaysia
TING Siew Jing	George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI), Malaysia
<b>Guest Speakers</b>	
Christopher BALLARD	The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Australia
Dilshod RAHIMI	Director, The Research Institute of Culture and Information of the Ministry of Culture (RICI), Tajikistan
Lata SHAKYA	Associate Professor, Kinugasa Research Organization Institute of Disaster Mitigation for Urban Cultural Heritage, Ritsumeikan University, Japan
Marlon MARTIN *online	Chief Operating Officer, Save the Ifugao Terraces Movement (SITMo), Philippines
Meredith WILSON	Heritage Consultant, The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Australia
YOSHIHARA Hideki	Officer, IWOR Development Division, The Promotion of Ainu Measures and Policy, Biratori Town Office, Japan
<b>Keynote Speaker</b>	
MOTONAKA Makoto	Director General, Nara National Research Institutes for Cultural Properties, Japan
<b>Resource Persons</b>	
DUONG Bich Hanh *online	Programme Specialist for Culture, UNESCO Beijing Office
ONISHI Hideyuki	Professor, Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts
FUJIEDA Ayako	Lecturer, Faculty of Global Culture, Kyoto Seika University, Japan
ISHIMURA Tomo	Head, Audio-Visual Documentation Section, Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Japan
<b>Previous Project Partners (*online)</b>	
Renee TALAVERA	Head, Cultural Communities and Traditional Arts Section, National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), Philippines:

Eunice Marie MONTON	Project Officer, Cultural Communities and Traditional Arts Section, National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), Philippines
Lady Laurence TOMAS	Project Officer, Cultural Communities and Traditional Arts Section, National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), Philippines
Bui Thanh XUAN	Deputy Director, Research Division of Continuing Education, Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences (VNIES), Viet Nam
Ehsanur RAHMAN	Executive Director, Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), Bangladesh
Kristian APRIYANTA	Representative, Dewi Fortuna Community Learning Center (DFCLC), Indonesia
<b>Observers (*online)</b>	
SHIRAI Shun	Director for International Strategy Planning Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)
OYASU Kiichi	Director, Education Cooperation Department, Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU)
<b>International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI)</b>	
IWAMOTO Wataru	Director-General
NOJIMA Yoko	Head of the Research section
SASAKI Kazue	Associate Fellow

## Annex 2

### Programme and List of Participants for the FY 2023 Workshop Held in Siem Reap, Cambodia

#### PROGRAMME

<b>DAY 1 (18 March 2024): Discussion on the results of case study in FY 2023</b>	
Venue: Meeting Room located in the Department of Public Order, APSARA National Authority	
9:00–9:30	Registration
9:30–9:40	Opening Remarks NACHIDA Daisuke, Director-General of IRCI
9:40–9:50	Welcome Remarks H.E. LONG Kosal, Deputy Director General, the representative of H.E. Dr HANG Peou, Director General of APSARA National Authority, Cambodia
9:50–10:00	Introduction NOJIMA Yoko, IRCI
10:00–11:00	Presentation on the Results of Case Study in Malaysia NG Xin Yi and TING Siew Jing, GTWHI, Malaysia
11:00–12:00	Presentation on the Results of Case Study in Cambodia IM Sokrithy, APSARA National Authority, Cambodia
12:00–13:30	Lunch Break
13:30–14:30	Presentation on the Results of Case study in the Marshall Islands Alson KELEN, Waan Aelōñ in Majel (Canoes of the Marshall Islands), Marshall Islands, and NAGAOKA Takuya, Pasifika Renaissance, Japan
14:30–14:50	Coffee Break and Snack
14:50–16:30	General Discussion
16:30	Closing

<b>DAY 2 (19 March 2024): Field Trip to Krobei Riel to interact with communities involved in the case study</b>	
Coordinator: IM Sokrithy, APSARA National Authority	
9:00	Arrival at Krobei Riel Community
9:15	Visiting two villages in Krobei Riel
11:00	Lunch on site
13:00	Visit the community and the exhibition center in the village
18:00	Back to hotel

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Affiliation
<b>Project Members</b>	
IM Sokrithy	Director, Department of Research Training and Communication, APSARA National Authority (ANA), Cambodia
TING Siew Jing	Built Environment and Monitoring Officer, George Town World Cultural Heritage Incorporated, Malaysia
NG Xin Yi	Senior Cultural Heritage Officer, George Town World Cultural Heritage Incorporated, Malaysia
NAGAOKA Takuya	Executive Director, Pasifika Renaissance, Japan
Alson KELEN	Director, Waan Aelōñ in Majel, Marshall Islands
<b>APSARA National Authority, Cambodia</b>	
LONG Kosal	Deputy Director General, ANA, Cambodia
ANG Sokun	Facilitator, Department of Research Training and Communication (DRTC), ANA, Cambodia
MAO Seng Yean	Facilitator, DRTC, ANA, Cambodia
SEAR Sokhon	Coordinator, DRTC, ANA, Cambodia
HOR Ritheary	Head, Training Section, DRTC, ANA, Cambodia
TY Chanpheary	Administrator, DRTC, ANA, Cambodia
OU Kong Kea	ANA Staff, Cambodia
LIM Bunhong	ANA Staff, Cambodia
TOUCH Sopheak	ANA Staff, Cambodia
PHON Tara	ANA Staff, Cambodia
<b>Ministry of Culture &amp; Fine Arts, Cambodia</b>	
HOUN Savong	Acting Director, Department of Visual Arts, Cambodia
<b>Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Japan</b>	
ISHIMURA Tomo	Director, Department of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Japan
<b>International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI)</b>	
MACHIDA Daisuke	Director-General
NOJIMA Yoko	Head of Research Section
TSUJI Takashi	Associate Fellow

## Annex 3

### Programme and List of Participants for the Final Symposium

#### PROGRAMME

<b>Symposium (11 October 2024)</b>	
Venue: Kambaikan Building Room A (B1), Doshisha University (Muromachi Campus)	
9:30–10:00	Registration
10:00–10:10	Opening Opening Remarks MACHIDA Daisuke, Director-General of IRCI Shahbaz KHAN, Director, UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia (video message)
10:10–10:20	Introduction TSUJI Takashi, Associate Fellow, IRCI
<b>Keynote Speech</b>	
10:20–11:10	Living Heritage and World Heritage Sites Ananya BHATTACHARYA, Contact Base, India
11:10–12:00	Evaluation and Preservation of the Uji-cha Tea Cultural Landscape: How Is It Possible to Preserve Landscapes That Are Adaptable to Change? SHIMIZU Shigeatsu, Kyoto Institute of Technology, Japan
12:00–13:15	Lunch Break
<b>Case Reports from the Asia-Pacific Region</b>	
13:15–13:40	Traditional Handicraft Contributing to Sustainable Communities at <i>Krabei Riel</i> : Toward Community Development, Safeguarding and Transmitting ICH within Angkor World Heritage Site IM Sokrithy, APSARA National Authority, Cambodia
13:40–14:05	Traditional Canoes of The Marshall Islands: Sustainable Sea Transportation of Today Alson KELEN, Waan Aelöñ in Majel, Marshall Islands NAGAOKA Takuya, Pasifika Renaissance, Japan
14:05–14:30	Intertwining Built Heritage Protection and Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding: Case Study of George Town Heritage Celebrations ANG Ming Chee and TING Siew Jing, George Town World Cultural Heritage Incorporated, Malaysia
14:30–14:55	Local Community Strategies for Safeguarding Cultural Landscapes in Kyrgyzstan Jyldyz DOOLBEKOVA, Taalim-Forum Public Foundation, Kyrgyzstan
14:55–15:10	Coffee Break
15:10–16:25	<b>Discussion</b> Moderator: ISHIMURA Tomo (Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Japan) and NOJIMA Yoko (IRCI) <i>Based on the case study presentations, the discussion deals with issues related to the contribution of ICH to SDG 11.4, including the interaction between tangible and intangible heritage and approaches to integrated heritage safeguarding, and the role of communities.</i>
16:25–16:30	Closing Closing Remarks IWAMOTO Wataru, Ex-Director-General of IRCI MACHIDA Daisuke, Director-General of IRCI

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Affiliation
<b>Keynote Speakers</b>	
Ananya BHATTACHARYA	Director, Contact Base, India
SHIMIZU Shigeatsu	Professor, Design and Architecture Department, Kyoto Institute of Technology, Japan
<b>Case Study Presenters</b>	
IM Sokrithy	Director, Department of Research Training and Communication, APSARA National Authority, Cambodia
ANG Ming Chee	General Manager, George Town World Heritage Incorporated, Malaysia
TING Siew Jing	Special Officer to the General Manager and Built Environment and Monitoring Officer, George Town World Cultural Heritage Incorporated, Malaysia
NAGAOKA Takuya	Executive Director, Pasifika Renaissance, Japan
Alson KELEN	Director, Waan Aelöñ in Majel, Marshall Islands
Jyldyz DOOLBEKOVA	Lead Researcher, Taalim-Forum Public Foundation, Kyrgyzstan
<b>Resource Persons and Observers</b>	
FUJIEDA Ayako	Associate Professor, Faculty of Global Culture, Kyoto Seika University, Japan
IIDA Taku	Professor, Department of Globalization and Humanity, National Museum of Ethnology, Japan
ISHIMURA Tomo	Director, Department of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Japan
IWAMOTO Wataru	Former Director-General of IRCI, Japan
MIZUTA Isao	Director, National Institutes for Cultural Heritage, Japan
ONISHI Hideyuki	Professor, Faculty of Contemporary Social Studies, Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts, Japan
Anudei ERDENEBAT	Academic Deputy Secretary, External Relations and Cooperation Unit, International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilizations, Mongolia
CHOI Milee	Section Chief, Digital Content Development Team, Office of Information and Research, ICHCAP, Republic of Korea
LEE Sailom	Assistant Programme Specialist, Office of Information and Research, ICHCAP, Republic of Korea
<b>International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI)</b>	
MACHIDA Daisuke	Director-General
NOJIMA Yoko	Head of Research Section



TSUJI Takashi	Associate Fellow
YAMAMOTO Hitomi	Associate Fellow
KIZAKI Chikako	Associate Fellow
MIYASHITA Mariko	Associate Fellow



# ICH AND WORLD HERITAGE



# THE CONTRIBUTION OF TRADITIONAL HANDICRAFT TO SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AT KRABEI RIEL: TOWARD SAFEGUARDING AND TRANSMITTING ICH WITHIN ANGKOR WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY

IM Sokrithy,<sup>1</sup> OU Kong Kea,<sup>2</sup> PHON Tara,<sup>2</sup> TOUCH Sopheak,<sup>2</sup> and LIM Bunhong<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Angkor is a well-known archaeological site in Cambodia. The complexity of the site, composed of ancient monuments, water reservoirs, settlements, and roads, reveals the urbanization of the empire. Some of those ancient structures still function for communities living within and around the site. In 1992, Angkor was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Property (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/668>) under selection criteria (i), (ii), (iii), and (iv). Beyond monuments, the Angkor protected zone covers an area of 401 square kilometres, consisting of forests, rice fields, and 112 villages in the province of Siem Reap.

The interconnectedness of community, culture, and nature creates inseparable elements to promote the values of heritage and shape the characteristic landscape of Angkor. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets were adopted during a United Nations summit in 2015 as a plan to tackle global issues by 2030 (<https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>). Sustainability of the community and the cities, including World Heritage Sites, was evident in goal number 11.4 to strengthen community development. Clearly, natural resources from Tonle Sap's shore, the Angkor World Heritage Site, and northern Siem Reap region, play significant roles in safeguarding and sustaining Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) through traditional handicraft practices. The study aims to investigate the connection between ICH roles, nature, and communities within and around World Heritage protected areas by focusing on handicraft production in Krabei Riel, a village located at the southern part of Angkor World Heritage Site. The study illustrates the importance of ICH in shaping the cultural landscape of Angkor World Heritage Site and its environment, and identifies involved stakeholders in handicraft production at international, national, subnational, and

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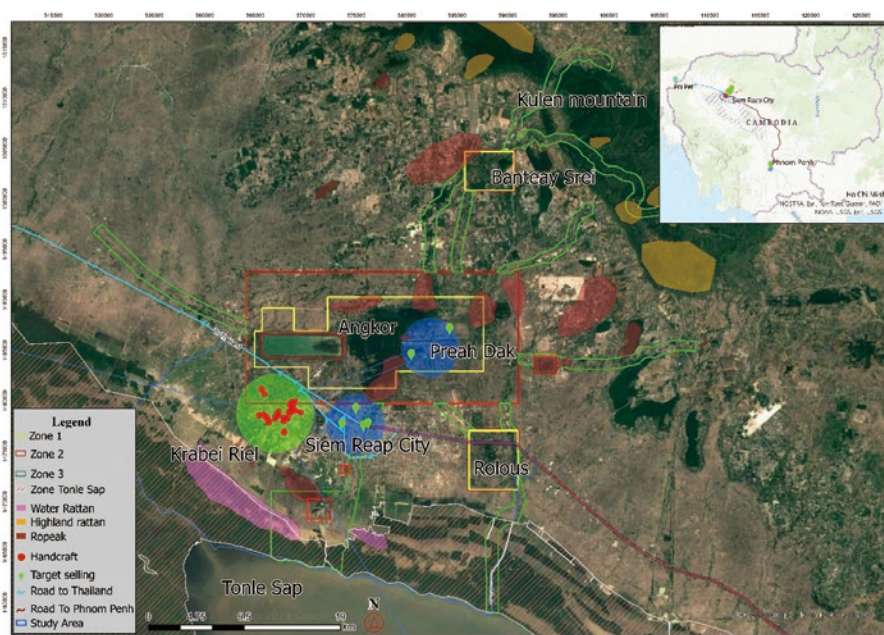
<sup>1</sup> Director, Department of Research Training and Communication, APSARA National Authority, Cambodia

<sup>2</sup> Technical Staff, APSARA National Authority, Cambodia

community levels, including raising awareness on knowledge transmission, which is the core component of ICH.

## GEOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT OF KRABEI RIEL

Geographically, Angkor World Heritage Site is located between the Kulen mountain range in the north and Tonle Sap River in the south. The Kulen mountain range contains the majority of forest and water resources for the Angkor region and Siem Reap city. Meanwhile, Tonle Sap Lake, the largest water reservoir in Cambodia, supplies invaluable resources for fishery, biodiversity, and local consumption for the region, which consequently can be distinguished by three major types of village community. Community Type 1: floodplain stretching from the shore of Tonle Sap, up to the level of the southern area of Siem Reap city, and the area lying along the riverbank of the Pouk, Siem Reap and Rolous rivers. Community Type 2 encompasses the villages scattered from the level of Siem Reap city to the north, to include the main area of the Angkor Park. Community Type 3 covers the upper plains, lying to the north of Angkor Thom up to the Kulen foothills. Each community type occupies one of the main ecological sub-zones of the region and is differentiated by socio-cultural characteristics. It is useful to mention that in 1992 UNESCO adopted 'Cultural Landscape' (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape/>) to recognize the relationship between human and natural environment, while the Angkor landscape protected area was issued in 1991 by royal decree and currently rezoning in 2023.



**Figure 1** The geography of Krabei Riel community and raw materials locations. The map also shows Angkor World Heritage protected zone and Tonle Sap biosphere protection Zone.

Krabei Riel, renowned for handicraft skills and agricultural production, is located at the southern part of Angkor World Heritage Site, south-west of Siem Reap city and 10 kilometres from Tonle Sap Lake. The shore of Tonle Sap (Figure 1) is home to some important areas of biodiversity for aquatic species and plants, which can be harvested all year round. In the monsoon season, the Mekong River flows into the Tonle Sap Basin, with the resulting increase in water levels and water surface flooding the surrounding area for five to six months each year. This ecology creates benefits for local communities living around the lake. The north is home to the Angkor monuments, the beating heart of Siem Reap tourist destination. Besides temples, Angkor also hosts some natural resources to benefit handicraft production. Meanwhile, the Kulen mountain in the upper north stretches from east-to-west, where numerous natural resources are available for harvesting.

## CURRENT STATE OF HANDICRAFT PRODUCTION IN KRABEI RIEL

### Raw Materials and Their Locations

Handicraft production in Krabei Riel employs a number of raw materials (Figure 1 refers), of which the most common is rattan, a climbing palm belonging to the Palm family. Many rattan species are found in Cambodia but most weavers in Krabei Riel use two kinds, which can be harvested in Siem Reap, Kompong Thom, and Preah Vihear provinces. One is called '*ropeak*,' or '*l'peak*' (*Calamus salicifolius*), native to Cambodia and south Vietnam, and the other is generally known as '*pdao*' (detailed later). These materials are essential for handicraft weavers and are found in conditions favourable to soil, sunlight, and environment (Khou, 2008). Weavers in Krabei Riel divide *ropeak* into two different kinds, which are used for different production and purposes due to their shape and length. The first one is called *ropak jael*, while the second is known as *repeat car*. The two kinds of *ropeak* grow at the same habitat, light, and temperature, but weavers will harvest the type best suited to their production activities.

Another important raw material is *pdao*, which weavers categorize into two types: *pdao teuk* (water rattan, *Calamus godefroyi*) and *pdao kok* (highland rattan, *Calamus viminalis*).<sup>3</sup> *Pdao teuk* can be collected from the Tonle Sap shore (Figure 2). During the rainy season, the rising water levels of Tonle Sap Lake create challenges for people collecting *pdao teuk*, unlike *pdao kok*, which can be harvested from mountainous areas of northern Siem Reap city (Kulen mountain) and Preah Vihear province (Tbeng mountain). In Khmer culture, rattan is a much-valued material for its durability and aesthetics (Preap, 2013–2014) and, consequently, weavers in Krabei Riel rarely weave *pdao kok* into mats.

<sup>3</sup> See also Khou (2008) for the various kinds of rattan grown in different regions of Cambodia.





**Figure 2** Local weavers harvest *pdao teuk* from the shore of Tonle Sap (©APSARA National Authority, 2023)

Beside rattan, '*romchek*' (*Pandanus pierrei*) is another important material for handicraft production in Krabei Riel and parts of Siem Reap (Figure 3). *Romchek* can be collected near bodies of water like rivers, channels, streams, and ponds (Ang, 2008–2009). In Krabei Riel, the water irrigation system is actively used in both the dry and rainy seasons for flood prevention and agriculture. The water is irrigated from the western Baray to southern Siem Reap, playing a crucial role in local livelihood. Along those hydraulic systems, *romchek* naturally flourishes and



**Figure 3** *Romchek* harvesting along the irrigation channel in Krabei Riel (©APSARA National Authority, 2024)

provides benefits to weavers searching for easy-to-harvest materials. *Romchek* is mainly used in mat weaving. *Theang tnot* (palm petiole) is widely accessible in and around villages and its palm trees can be used in a variety of ways. Leaves and parts of the *theang tnot* are used in handicraft production and in foods commonly available throughout Cambodia. Many luxury objects are created from *ropeak* and *theang tnot*. Lastly, coconut leaves are also used for handicraft production.

## Handicraft Community and Market Study

The study revealed that the number of families involved in handicraft production increased from 1 percent (2008) to 2.31 percent (2010), for 35 families working on furniture made from rattan and bamboo. The data stabilized at around 2.5 percent in the period 2019–2021, according to Siem Reap Provincial Department of Planning (2022). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the number of families involved in weaving activities differs from village to village and varies in response to trends or challenges. For instance, in Totea village, most weavers abandoned handicraft production in favour of construction work when tourism registered a significant growth in 2012–2013, with many new hotels, restaurants, and houses built in the area. However, the study also noted that weavers in Popis village resumed their handicraft activities during the Covid-19 pandemic, when travel restrictions forced many villagers to work from home.

Crucially, the study noted that more middle businessmen, within and outside the community, had developed a deeper understanding of all aspects of the product, with an additional seven depots created at various villages in the community. These depots collect finished products for export from Phnom Penh capital city to places like Europe and Japan, and from Poipet (a town on the Thai-Cambodian border) destined for Thailand. Other production centres are found in tourist areas and local markets (*psar chas*), frequented by tourists transiting or staying in Preah Dak village (Map in Figure 1 refers).

Current market development creates a competitive environment. In general, weavers divide their products into two main types, based on aesthetics, skill levels, size, and quality. Type 1 is called '*jojós*,' literally meaning 'second hand' in reference to their modest standards, while Type 2, known as '*mode Japan*', means Japanese style, following the current orders by middlemen for exports to Japan, Europe, and the U.S. Type 1 products are usually large in size and devoid of detailed decorations (Figure 4), favoured by some weaving families because they are easy to produce and are in demand. Orders for Type 1 products are received from middle agents for onward sale to Siem Reap city and for export to Thailand (see Annex).





**Figure 4** Weavers create a Type 1 (*joj*) product (©APSARA National Authority, 2023)

Unlike Type 1 items, the size of Type 2 products can be large or small and requires extended weaving times and complex decorations (Figure 5). Several private enterprises purchase Type 2 products from villagers and have assembled catalogues and models for weavers to follow, including suggested size, width, and ornament,<sup>4</sup> resulting in a new level of innovation for Type 2 products. More weavers work on Type 2 items, which are generally designed by, or under instruction from, middlemen, for their ability to generate higher rewards than Type 1 products. One of the findings from our study concerns the weavers of Type 2 items in Roka village, who trained groups in handicraft skills and formed them into units to improve their supply capabilities. Some weavers can now supply both traditional and modern products, depending on material availability and the requirements stipulated by middlemen.

Beyond commercial products, several types of woven items are in demand by villagers as offerings to monks, for use in religious events or traditional ceremonies in Buddhist monasteries. Additionally, some families have switched from *ropeak* to *pdao*, the latter being more readily available near the village, resulting in *ropeak* no longer used in weaving, as observed in several weaving families in Totea village. On the other hand, the diminishing use of *romchek*, in the past widely employed in most villages to weave mats for domestic use, is a cause for concern, with only a few weavers now employing *romchek* to produce mats, due to the rapid influx of modern materials in numerous villages, as discussed later.

<sup>4</sup> A sample catalogue is available at <https://www.manava-cambodia.com/> (Accessed on 4 February 2025).

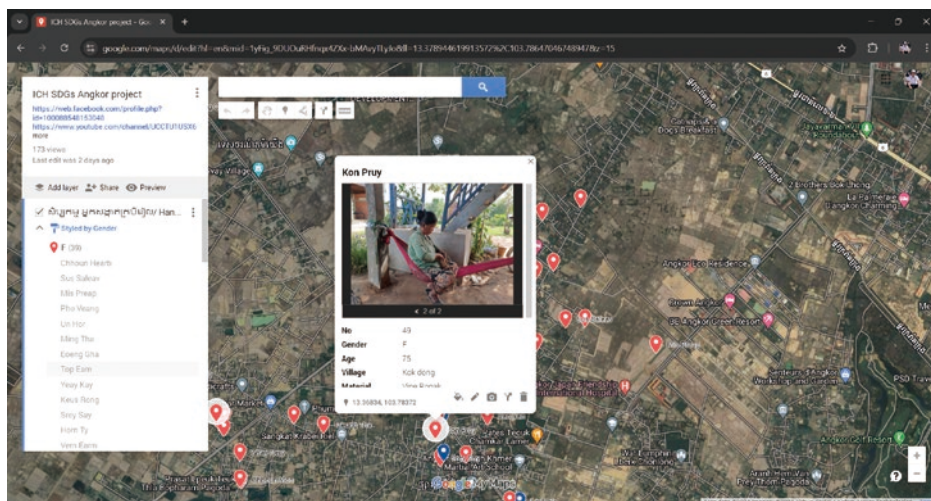


**Figure 5** Type 2 items on display at the private Manava enterprise (©APSARA National Authority, 2023)

## Mapping Weavers to Customers

Aiming at connecting local weavers and customers, a QR code has been generated to ensure that the products can be easily found and can freely reach government institutions as well as public and tourist outlets (both at national and international levels). The QR code connects communities with Google Maps and is a very effective way to identify and locate handicraft communities easily and in real time (Figure 6). This system benefits tourism by developing the availability of tourist products beyond the temples, as well as preserving ICH practices and supporting Krabei Riel communities. Through festivals, events, gastronomy, crafts, arts, and so on, ICH engages local communities with tourists and creates unique experiences. However, plans and strategies need to be based on creative industries for tourist activities. The use of creative industries to promote tourism encourages a unique experience for visitors, supported by a strategy to create more authentic experiences (Arcos-Pumarola et al., 2023). Therefore, sustainable tourism should be clearly explained to local communities to ensure that negative issues are properly managed and reduced.

The QR application is intended to bridge the gap between local weavers and customers. More importantly, tourists can learn about the environment and its neighborhood, to locate weavers working from home within the community, beyond the Angkor monuments. The online platform can also be used to gather information about shops in Siem Reap town and tourist spots where tourists can purchase products near their accommodation. The QR code will hopefully be adopted by local communities and displayed in their business posters and



**Figure 6** Screenshot of mapping displays in Google Maps

installed at conspicuous locations, including tourist spots, in the town and in local stores near the temples. However, it is imperative to boost the technological literacy of local villagers with training programs supported by governmental and NGOs sectors.

### **Transmission of Knowledge in terms of Heritage Education**

In terms of a heritage education program at the APSARA National Authority, a transmission workshop was created at the core of knowledge dissemination to encourage people, particularly the young living close to a World Heritage Site, to recognize the value of heritage, understand the importance of safeguarding ICH, and transmit handicraft knowledge to their peers. A workshop held at Krabei Riel primary school was attended by a commune representative, as well as the village chief, village committee, teachers, weavers, and 200 students. The purpose of the workshop was to disseminate the research results to the community and raise awareness on the importance of knowledge transmission to young people, in order to bridge the gap between theory and practical experience for students engaged in heritage programs conducted by the APSARA National Authority.

ICH is taught in heritage education programs in the Angkor region, with programs educating students on basics such as introduction to ICH and relevant practical examples in the community. Hence, posters were designed with four focus areas consisting of (1) introduction to natural resources and harvest, (2) materials and weaving activities, (3) research methodologies and networking, and (4) marketing of the products (Figure 7). Moreover, three handicraft representatives — practitioners of traditional handicraft activities for generations — were invited to share with students their experience and insights on weaving techniques. The students were interested in the workshop and engaged in the raw materials and the





**Figure 7** Knowledge transmission to students in the community (©APSARA National Authority, 2024)

weaving process. This initiative invites educational institutions to adopt the findings from the annual study program and set up courses for one or two weeks in duration at each school.

## Challenges

The study noted the issues faced by handicraft communities in relation to their craft and ability to support their families financially, with several of them potentially switching to other activities in the near future. Three main challenges have been identified to date: (1) raw materials, (2) financial viability and (3) market opportunity.

Additionally, handicraft production is affected by two major concerns: urban development and growth in demand without sustainable initiatives. The availability of natural resources, and *ropeak* in particular, has caused concerns for the last five years, due to changes in land-use to meet growing demographics in the last decade. For instance, forest areas have been cleared to make room for agricultural cultivation or residential buildings in particular, except in the Angkor protected area, where such developments are not allowed. Current studies on measuring and predicting urban growth in Siem Reap point to an expansion towards the northwest-to-east and west-to-southeast, along the main road, as a result of population growth and tourism development (Liu et al., 2019). The problem of high demand for weaving materials is exacerbated by increasing numbers of people collecting the dwindling stocks of *ropeak*. Lands in these areas were formerly rice fields dedicated to *ropeak*, which could be easily found in Krabei Riel and neighbouring villages until a decade ago. However, weavers report

that these locations have since been transformed into construction sites for real estate development, forcing weavers to travel longer distances and spend more time collecting raw materials, resulting in higher expenses and reduced income. Hien (2023) reports that, in addition to Krabei Riel communities, Angkor villagers face similar issues for the harvest of raw materials, searching for *ropeak*, usually in the hot rainy season after completing the rice harvest, in Prasat Balang district, Kompong Thom province. It has also been noted that, for weavers, *ropeak* is no longer a seasonal harvest but a year-round activity, since handicraft production plays a major role in their family economics.

As mentioned earlier, *pdao teuk* can be extracted from flooded forests of the Tonle Sap shore in both the dry and rainy seasons. In the rainy season, it is necessary to ride a boat to reach the *pdao teuk*, with some weavers selling the raw materials to weavers unable to harvest the product in flood conditions, with the price of raw materials increasing in the rainy season. In the dry season, groups of weavers can harvest *pdao teuk* using a land vehicle. The harvesting of raw materials is being impacted by climate change. According to Fishery Administration and Siem Reap Provincial Administration (2021), wildfires have destroyed floodplain forests in six districts of Siem Reap province, damaging 1289 hectares of flooded forest in 2016–2020. The report identifies causes of fire, but climate change is also playing a role in causing severe droughts to the region, increasing the risk of wildfires.

The use of modern materials is also forcing weavers to modify traditional skills. *Romchek*, which grows in areas close to bodies of water, in the past could be easily harvested and woven into mats. Our study found that weavers are being asked to share some benefits with landowners when real estate increases in value, pushing up the cost of handicraft activities and reducing the net gain from handicrafts compared to past years. Meanwhile, the use of nylon imported from neighbouring countries is becoming increasingly prevalent. In some villages, the number of weavers using *romchek* has decreased from five to one. Political instability also affects shipments and marketing activities. Type 1 rattan handicrafts, for example, are exported overland by Cambodian middlemen to Thailand through the border at Poipet. In the last two years, events in the run up to a general election in Thailand have caused disruptions to production activities where *ropeak* is used. In turn, this has affected the supply chain and the movement of goods, with Type 1 products failing to sell because they were detained at the Cambodian-Thai border for months.

Lastly, while for some families' handicraft weaving is an additional source of income, for many others it is the only source of income and plays a substantial role in their economic viability. According to Pwint (2015) and Richard (2007), who conducted research in Totea and Roka villages, respectively, most weavers in

these villages have produced handicrafts, on average, for more than 25 years. Villagers produce handicrafts with traditional methods, without business knowledge or creativity input. Therefore, the value of traditional weaving techniques should be promoted for its capacity to generate economic benefits for the village, despite the lack of a business concept or modest creativity/design input. Traditional knowledge and handicraft skills should be encouraged to improve the livelihoods of local communities (APSARA, 2013). This means that their handicraft production is driven by demand from middlemen. Moreover, rattan shortages are also a factor mentioned by researchers, who advocate for maintaining the rain forest or replanting rattan to replenish stocks.

## DISCUSSION

The discussion highlights a complex interplay between traditional handicraft practices, environmental conservation, and economic development in the Siem Reap region of Cambodia. A central challenge is the scarcity of traditional raw materials like *ropeak*, used for weaving. This scarcity stems from a combination of factors, including:

- **Over-harvesting:** The demand for *ropeak* has led to its depletion in easily accessible areas, forcing weavers to travel great distances (120–150 kilometres) to source it. This increases costs and time, impacting their livelihoods.
- **Protected Areas:** *Ropeak* grows within the Angkor World Heritage Site protection area and other protected zones like Phnom Kulen, where development and resource extraction are restricted for conservation purposes. While these restrictions are crucial for preserving the natural and cultural heritage, they limit access to vital raw materials, with no viable solution in sight.
- **Shifting Materials:** The shortage of *ropeak* has forced some weavers to switch to alternative materials like *pdao*, which is more readily available. Although *pdao kok* can be harvested from mountainous areas of northern Siem Reap city and Preah Vihear province, this material is much valued in Khmer culture and consequently it is rarely woven into mats. This shift may impact the quality, uniqueness, and cultural significance of weavers' crafts. *Pdao* harvesting also presents challenges, relying on seasonal availability and requiring travel to different areas, including the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve.

These challenges also point to the importance of handicrafts for local livelihoods and the government's efforts to support this sector through initiatives like the 'one village, one product' policy. However, several hurdles remain:

- **Market Access:** While the government and some NGOs are facilitating product displays and exhibitions, many weavers still rely on middlemen, limiting their direct access to markets and potentially reducing their profits. A more unified approach to marketing and distribution is needed, which could include: (a) negotiating lower commission rates for the middlemen; (b) forming a consor-

tium of weavers to deal directly with buyers and consumers, to diminish or even omit the role of middlemen; (c) through the direct support from the concerned authorities.

- **Tourism and Cultural Dissemination:** The proximity of handicraft villages like Preah Dak to major tourist attractions presents an opportunity to showcase and sell local products. However, these villages often lack signage and information about the craft traditions, hindering cultural dissemination and potential economic benefits. Integrating these craft communities into the tourism experience is crucial.
- **Sustainability:** The long-term sustainability of the handicraft sector depends on responsible resource management. The revival of *ropeak* farming in Pursat province, with NGO support, is a positive example. However, broader discussions involving the government, NGOs, and communities are needed in order to address issues like rattan farmlands, sustainable harvesting techniques, market support, and community participation in resource management. Clarifying community access rights within existing environmental regulations is also essential.
- **Collaboration and Investment:** Addressing these challenges requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including international organizations, national institutions, designers, educators, and local communities. Investment in infrastructure, training, and market development is also crucial. Integrating sustainability into subnational master plans is essential for long-term success (United Nations, 2017).

In summary, the future of handicraft production in Siem Reap hinges on finding a balance between environmental protection, economic development, and the preservation of cultural heritage. This requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses raw material access, market development, tourism integration, community empowerment, and sustainable resource management through collaboration and investment.

## CONCLUSION

The intricate woven crafts of Krabei Riel, a testament to generations of tradition, face a precarious future. This study reveals the inseparable link between the natural environment and the continuation of these traditional practices, highlighting how access to resources directly impacts income sustainability and the preservation of ICH. While rattan weaving offers vital economic opportunities for villagers, the craft is facing a critical decline. Material shortages, coupled with changing employment patterns, evolving education systems, and demographic shifts, have significantly hampered the intergenerational transmission of these valuable skills. Consequently, many weavers in Krabei Riel struggle to survive, their livelihoods threatened by the increasing scarcity and cost of raw materials.

Two critical interventions are paramount. First, securing sustainable access to raw materials is essential. This requires collaborative resource management programs involving government agencies, NGOs, and, most importantly, the local communities themselves. A joint task force, comprised of representatives from these stakeholders, should be established to develop and implement a sustainable development plan for the handicraft industry. This plan must address rattan farming initiatives, sustainable harvesting practices, and clear regulations regarding communities' rights to access natural resources (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2023), preventing overconsumption and ensuring long-term availability. Second, establishing direct market linkages with the burgeoning tourism sector is crucial for economic viability. Moving beyond reliance on middlemen, handicraft communities should be empowered to showcase and sell their products directly to tourists. This can be achieved through the creation of dedicated spaces within or near existing tourist attractions, such as the Angkor monuments, and through the development of online platforms to reach a wider client base.

Integrating these craft traditions into the tourism experience not only provides crucial economic opportunities but also fosters cultural exchange and appreciation. It creates a valuable meeting point for culture, recognizing the pride of the community and encouraging local communities to actively safeguard their ICH and the knowledge passed down through generations. By prioritizing environmental stewardship, economic development, and cultural preservation, and by fostering genuine collaboration among all stakeholders, we can ensure that the vibrant tradition of weaving in Krabei Riel not only survives but thrives, enriching both local communities and the cultural landscape of Siem Reap for generations to come.

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## Annex

### Catalogue of Handicraft Productions

No.	Type	Size (cm)	Material	Period (day)	Price (riel)	Photo
1	Spok (ស្ពុក)	50–100	<i>pdao teuk</i> and <i>pdao kok</i>	1–1.5	8,000–50,000 (Price varies with size)	
2	Round mat with slots (ថាស)	50	<i>pdao teuk</i> and <i>ropeak</i>	2	25,000	
3	Round plate with handles (ទ្រនាប់កែវ)	10	<i>ropeak</i> and <i>pdao</i>	0.5	3,000	
4	Round plate (កំប្លោកមូល)	10–20	<i>ropeak</i>	0.5	4,000	
5	Betel box (កន្ត្រកស្លា)	20	<i>pdao</i>	2	60,000	
6	Small basket (កូនចានតូច)	10	<i>pdao</i>	0.5	6,000	
7	Tissue box (កំប៉ុងក្រដាស)	15	<i>pdao</i> and <i>ropeak</i>	2–2.5	16,000	
8	Oval food tray (កំប្លោក ពងក្រពើ)	20	<i>pdao</i>	0.5	6,000–8,000	

No.	Type	Size (cm)	Material	Period (day)	Price (riel)	Photo
9	Mat (កន្លែង)	120 x 200	<i>pdao</i> and <i>khleung por</i>	15	100,000	
10	Mat (កន្លែង)	130 x 200	<i>romchek</i>	7	50,000	
11	Broom (វ៉ែងស)	200	bamboo and coconut petiole	0.5	5,000	
12	Flower basket (កន្លែកផ្កា)	30	<i>pdao</i>	0.5	7,000	
13	Dish mat (ច្រនាប់ចាន)	30–40	<i>pdao</i>	0.5	5,000–9,000	
14	Tea pot-shaped container (ប៉ានតែ)	40	<i>pdao</i>	2	60,000	
15	Fruit basket (កន្លែកផ្លែឈើ)	40	<i>pdao</i>	0.5	10,000	

No.	Type	Size (cm)	Material	Period (day)	Price (riel)	Photo
16	Fruit basket (ថាសប្រាំបីជ្រុង)	40	<i>pdao</i>	0.5	8,000	
17	Food box (ថាសស្រាក់)	30	palm petiole and <i>pdao</i>	3	16,000	
18	Present box (ប្រអប់កាដូ)	20	palm petiole and <i>pdao</i>	0.5	6,000	
19	Vase (ថង់)	10	<i>pdao</i>	0.5	6,000	
20	Trash bin (ធុងសំរាម)	30–50	<i>pdao</i>	2	40,000	
21	Oval tray (ថាសពងក្រពើ)	10	<i>pdao</i>	0.5	4,000	
22	Oval jeal with handles (ជាលពងក្រពើ)	40–60	<i>ropeak</i>	1	14,000	

No.	Type	Size (cm)	Material	Period (day)	Price (riel)	Photo
23	Basket (កន្ត្រក)	20	<i>ropeak</i>	1	10,000	
24	Square jeal (ជាលជ្រុង)	40–60	<i>ropeak</i>	1	15,000	
25	Basket (ជាលជ្រុងមានដៃ)	40	<i>ropeak</i>	2	18,000	
26	Tall container with legs (ជាលសំរាមមានជើង, ជើងផ្កា)	50	<i>ropeak</i> and <i>pdao</i>	2	23,000	
27	Trash bin (ជាលសំរាម, ជាលខោអាវ)	30	<i>ropeak</i>	0.5	8,000	

# INTERTWINING BUILT HERITAGE PROTECTION AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE SAFEGUARDING: CASE STUDY OF GEORGE TOWN HERITAGE CELEBRATIONS

TING Siew Jing<sup>1</sup> and ANG Ming Chee<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

By the conclusion of the 46th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, held in New Delhi, India in July 2024, the total number of World Heritage sites worldwide reached 1,223, comprising 952 cultural sites, 231 natural sites and 40 mixed cultural and natural sites (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). The sustainable management of these World Heritage sites, in line with the World Heritage Policy Compendium, has been discussed and debated among the international heritage professional community. World Heritage site managers who have been tasked to address the complex yet essential day-to-day responsibilities at World Heritage properties, have to adopt innovative and ‘out of the box’ strategies to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of World Heritage property management.

This paper focuses on the initiatives implemented in the Historic City of George Town—a UNESCO cultural heritage site—as an integrated approach to managing the tangible heritage and safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage. Since 7 July 2008, the Historic City of George Town has been inscribed with the Historic City of Melaka as a UNESCO World Heritage serial site under the name ‘Melaka and George Town: Historic Cities of The Straits of Malacca.’

The site was recognized for its ‘remarkable examples of historic colonial towns on the Straits of Malacca that demonstrate a succession of historical and cultural influences arising from their former function as trading ports linking East and West’ (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2008).

As published by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre on the World Heritage List

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(2008), the site was listed based on the following three selection criteria:

Criterion II: To exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design.

‘Melaka and George Town represent exceptional examples of multicultural trading towns in East and Southeast Asia, forged from the mercantile and exchanges of Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultures and three successive European colonial powers for almost 500 years, each with its imprints on the architecture and urban form, technology and monumental art. Both towns show different stages of development and the successive changes over a long span of time and are thus complementary.’

Criterion III: To bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.

‘Melaka and George Town are living testimony to the multi-cultural heritage and tradition of Asia, and European colonial influences. This multi-cultural tangible and intangible heritage is expressed in the great variety of religious buildings of different faiths, ethnic quarters, the many languages, worship and religious festivals, dances, costumes, art and music, food, and daily life.’

Criterion IV: To be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or



**Figure 1** The Historic City of George Town, boundary of Property and Buffer Zones and coordinates (Source: GTWHI, 2022)

technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.

‘Melaka and George Town reflect a mixture of influences which have created a unique architecture, culture, and townscape without parallel anywhere in East and South Asia. In particular, they demonstrate an exceptional range of shop-houses and townhouses. These buildings show many different types and stages of development of the building type, some originating in the Dutch or Portuguese periods.’

This designation recognized George Town and Melaka as cities where the imprints of the Malay, Chinese, Indian and European influences are reflected on the historic urban fabric, forming the multicultural community who practise their rituals and daily lives in the town and creating unique architectural styles of a townscape that are exceptional in East and South Asia (Figure 1).

## **STRATEGIES BY THE SITE MANAGER**

The focus of this paper is within the Property zone of George Town Historic City which is approximately 112 hectares, surrounded by a Buffer zone of 150 hectares, amounting to a total area of 262 hectares. However, having both tangible cultural heritage (such as monuments, buildings and multicultural religious spaces) and intangible cultural heritage (such as multicultural street names, multicultural social practices and festive events and evolving multicultural life-style) within this site has complicated consequences in terms of management.

To address this issue, George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI)<sup>3</sup>—a company owned by the Penang State Government, was established in April 2010 as the Site Manager for the Historic City of George Town. The Site Manager office has the mandate to manage, safeguard, and promote the Outstanding Universal Value of the site and act as an intermediary between government agencies and the local communities, organizations and associations.<sup>4</sup>

According to the George Town Special Area Plan that was gazetted under the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172), there are 82 Category I heritage buildings, 3,771 Category II heritage buildings, 587 Replacement buildings and

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<sup>3</sup> For more information about George Town World Heritage Incorporated, please visit <https://gtwhi.com.my/>

<sup>4</sup> The conservation and management of George Town Historic City are independent of the Melaka Historic City because they are situated under different State Governments and local authorities. Despite both sites being nominated under the same dossier, they have developed their own conservation management plan and system based on local context and resources. Such an arrangement enables both cities to address the challenges and opportunities from the ground promptly.



573 Infill sites in the Historic City of George Town. The George Town Special Area Plan as the main legal instrument of the World Heritage management and the recognition of the built environment categories have been instrumental in protecting the built fabric of the town. Yet, almost all the buildings (99 percent) are privately owned, with a very high percentage of tenanted units. Such complications prompted GTWHI to adopt holistic management strategies based on a few important principles.

Like many other cities in Malaysia, George Town Historic City is a highly urbanised, multicultural, multireligious, and multilingual living city. In this beautiful city, people who speak different languages, practise different social rituals, eat different food and have different religions, live, work, and visit every day, peacefully. Efforts were also conducted by GTWHI to inventorize, document, and implement policy to safeguard the living heritage of this vibrant historic city.

Therefore, as the custodian of this World Heritage site, the GTWHI team manages daily operations, offers professional consultations and mitigates challenges in conserving over 3,800 heritage buildings and approximately 1,200 modern structures and lands within the World Heritage site. The team also works on the living heritage safeguarding with local communities who live, work and use George Town, as well as conducts education and capacity-building programmes for them. To achieve this, GTWHI conducts around 60 projects annually, including cultural heritage promotions in schools, developing and creating volunteer activities to facilitate youth participation, disaster risk reduction, training workshops, and many more.

With an office located within the heart of the World Heritage site, GTWHI has grown into a strong team with 40 positions, consisting of multidisciplinary professionals from the fields of accounting, anthropology, archaeology, architecture, building surveying, conservation, communication, event management, political science, quantity surveying, sociology, town planning, and more.

In particular, GTWHI emphasizes the importance of establishing trust and inviting collaboration from all stakeholders. The GTWHI team actively listens to the underlying issues of the stakeholders, grasping valuable insights and information that contribute to a more sustainable and long-term solution. Such a process prompts the team to communicate in a clear and comprehensible manner, avoiding the use of jargon or terminology that may confuse the audience.

GTWHI also respects the fact that heritage is part of the life and livelihood of the local community. Heritage is an important source of identity building, and GTWHI moves away from segregating or compartmentalizing heritage into subcategories (such as tangible, intangible, movable, immovable and so on). Adhering to these

principles, GTWHI as the site manager can share a common cause with its stakeholders, build a shared identity, and collectively work towards the management and conservation of the World Heritage site for future generations.

Strategies and approaches of GTWHI—incorporating intangible cultural heritage safeguarding on World Heritage management is best exemplified through the George Town Heritage Celebrations, which will be elaborated further as a case study in this paper.

## **GEORGE TOWN HERITAGE CELEBRATIONS**

George Town Heritage Celebrations<sup>5</sup> is a bottom-up project organized by GTWHI that attracts participation from more than 40 multicultural, multilingual, multireligious associations and groups in Penang each year. Held annually in July, the Celebrations feature a variety of interactive and educational programmes such as workshops and performances, which take place in the streets of the heritage enclave.

Back in 2008, George Town Heritage Celebrations commenced as an activity to celebrate the inscription of George Town Historic City as a World Heritage site. From 2009 to 2013, it was continued under the umbrella of George Town Festival as a performance-based event. With the George Town Festival gaining international notice, George Town Heritage Celebrations also gradually grew into a platform for the local community to celebrate their cultures and search for the unique George Town identity that belongs to its people.

From 2014 to 2019, George Town Heritage Celebrations continued to develop by featuring different themes and intangible cultural heritage domains each year. The Celebrations gained increased involvement from community groups, who were mobilized to run their own interactive workshops. GTWHI also brought in professional project teams to help develop the programme content and manage the project execution. It not only enhanced the event but also provided the GTWHI team with valuable experience in event management, allowing them to eventually take over the entire process.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, George Town Heritage Celebrations was forced to pause in 2020 and 2021. It returned in 2022 as a general theme-based event which allowed more inclusive and diverse programmes. In 2023, a new component was introduced: the community-led programme. This initiative empowered the local community to organize their own mini celebrations under the name of

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<sup>5</sup> For more information about George Town Heritage Celebrations, please visit <https://gtwhi.com.my/george-town-heritage-celebrations/>



**Figure 2** Official logo of George Town Heritage Celebrations 2024 (©GTWHI, 2024)

George Town Heritage Celebrations, giving them a sense of ownership over the event.

With July 7 designated as a public holiday in Penang, the Celebrations mostly take place on this day each year. This continuous support and commitment from the Penang State Government has made George Town Heritage Celebrations a highly anticipated event among local and international celebration-goers, who eagerly await this day every year to immerse themselves in the living traditions of George Town. It also raises awareness of the need and importance of safeguarding George Town's Outstanding Universal Value for future generations.

To elaborate on the impact of George Town Heritage Celebrations in intertwining built heritage protection and intangible cultural heritage safeguarding for the local community, it shall be elaborated in the following four perspectives, namely, all for one, community-based heritage celebrations, intertwining tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and engaging the youth and younger generations (Figure 2).

### **All for One**

Today, George Town Heritage Celebrations is a celebration by the community for the community, transcending culture, ethnicity and social background. It is now a platform for people from all walks of life to gather and celebrate their own culture while having the opportunity to learn about others.

Since its inauguration, the Celebrations has been maintaining the same format, that is to have a major celebration event on the 7th of July, with side events that differ each year. During George Town Heritage Celebrations 2024, 22 workshops and interactive performances were carefully curated by the GTWHI team and implemented with the help of professional event service teams and volunteers. Associations and individuals representing different cultures, crafts or social practices of their larger community groups were provided with the platform to show-

**Table 1** List of George Town Heritage Celebrations 2024 cultural workshops and interactive performances

No.	Affiliation	Name of Workshop/ Performance	Type of Workshop
1	Badan Warisan Masjid Melayu Lebuah Aceh	Malay Musical Instruments: <i>Persembahan Bunyian Tradisional dan Gendangan Kontemporari</i>	Music Instruments Workshop
2	Boria Omara	Boria: Warisan George Town	Interactive Performance
3	Dikir Barat Suara Mutiara	Dikir Barat: Clap with Awok-Awok!	Interactive Performance
4	Henna Artists	The Glamorous Henna	Hands-On Experience Workshop
5	Loh Ban Tatt and Teoh Han Hoon Traditional Dough Figurines	Dough Figurine: Beyond Tradition	Hands-On Experience Workshop
6	LUMA	Play-Play Penang!	Games
7	Lum Yeong Tong Yap Temple Youth Section	Chinese Paper Cutting and Flourish Strokes	Hands-On Experience Workshop
8	Malaysian-Japanese Society	Japanese Dance: Love Affairs	Traditional Dance
9	May Lim Siew Seng	Immerse in the Beading World	Hands-On Experience Workshop
10	North Malaysia Malayali Samajam	The Making of Thiru Udayada	Hands-On Experience Workshop
11	Penang Chingay Association	Chingay Parade	On-Street Performance
12	Penang Dhol Blasters	Dhol and Bhangra: Feel the Beat	Interactive Performance
13	Penang Hindu Association	Old is Gold: Spice Grinding and Pounding	Hands-On Experience Workshop
14	Penang Hindu Sabah	Grace In Fabric: Vesti and Saree Draping Workshop	Hands-On Experience Workshop
15	Penang Siamese Committee Association	Loy Krathong Dance	Traditional Dance
16	Penang Telugu Biddalu	Telugu Biddalu Dance: Daathubhajana and Chirathalu	Traditional Dance
17	Persatuan Warisan Dato Koyah	Bamboo Lantern: Shine Like A Star	Hands-On Experience Workshop
18	Sim Art Studio	Build Your Own Tiles!	Hands-On Experience Workshop
19	Teochew Puppet and Opera House	Disguise in Teochew Opera Face	Hands-On Experience Workshop
20	The Pink Hibiscus Club	Make A Kimono Doll Bukkumaku	Hands-On Experience Workshop
21	Wak Long Music and Art Centre	Wayang Kulit: Miniature Puppet Bookmark Creation	Hands-On Experience Workshop
22	Warisan Balik Pulau	The Colours of Batik	Hands-On Experience Workshop

case their culture, be it dancing, making handicrafts or simply playing board games (Table 1).

As the event only went on for a few hours, it was not the aim of the Celebrations to teach the visitors specific skills or techniques, or for them to master a craft, but only to expose them to various cultures, rituals, social practices, etc. Through these experiences, the visitors can be inspired, gain understanding and recognize other cultures that coexist with theirs on the same land—the Historic City of George Town.

The Celebrations also offered an opportunity for community groups to interact not only with visitors but also with one another. This interaction helped them realize that while different cultures have their own uniqueness, many share similar characteristics. They witnessed the passion that the visitors have for George Town’s cultural heritage, through people who came to the event every year and were willing to spend time queuing to experience each workshop. It demonstrated that there is significant interest among the public in different cultures, offering potential for the community groups to organize similar activities by themselves in the future, without fear of lack of public interest (Figure 3).

However, due to limited time and venue, George Town Heritage Celebrations can only accommodate a limited number of community groups each year, while there are still many sub-groups and sub-minorities in Penang that constantly seeking opportunities to be seen. The possible way out of this is to encourage each group to do their own mini version of the Celebrations.



**Figure 3** Local and international visitors were painting the classic patterns of Malaysian Batik (©GTWHI, 2024)

## Community-based Heritage Celebrations

Now that we recognize that the communities can appreciate, interpret and even document their own cultures, it is essential for them to learn how to promote these cultures in various ways, with support from GTWHI. Hence, since 2023, we have introduced a new component under George Town Heritage Celebrations: the community-led programme. Community groups from all over Penang were invited to submit proposals for events that they wished to organize throughout the year. It could be a workshop, a seminar, or even a celebration dinner, as long as it has cultural significance to the communities (Figure 4).

Each year, George Town Heritage Celebrations receive extensive media coverage, showcasing its growing popularity and strong reputation among the public and media. It has become an ideal platform for the people of Penang to promote their traditional crafts and cultures beyond their community groups. Through the community-led programme, we provided financial support for the selected community projects using funding allocated by the State Government. These projects were promoted as side events of the Celebrations, drawing more attention from the community and also the media. Government officials and state assemblymen who were often invited to these community events were able to witness the vibrancy of the events, which in turn helped to secure financial grants from the State Government for conducting the event annually.

The branding of George Town Heritage Celebrations has been very well received, thus many want to be part of it. GTWHI team constantly struggle to decide whether the Celebrations should last one day, three days, or more than three days.



**Figure 4** GTHC 2024 Community Briefing Session for all community groups in Penang who were interested in participating in the programmes (©GTWHI, 2023)



## Intertwining Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage

The Celebrations have always aimed to organize the event within the backdrop of the built heritage landscape. All workshops and performances took place in one of the most culturally significant areas of George Town, which features five Category I heritage buildings surrounded by numerous Category II traditional shophouses. Some workshops were conducted by the communities associated with these heritage buildings and several supported the Celebrations by opening their compound for the use of the workshops and performances. On the event day, the roads were turned into pedestrian walkways, allowing visitors to explore the heritage enclave while enjoying the workshops. This also provided them with an opportunity to visit the ticketed sites free of charge (Figures 5 and 6).

However, there were challenges in utilizing these venues, as some activities could



**Figure 5** Dance performance by the Malaysian-Japanese Society in the compound of Seh Tek Tong Cheah Kongsi, a Chinese clan house (©GTWHI, 2024)



**Figure 6** Visitors were walking along the streets within the historic landscape while exploring the workshops (©GTWHI, 2024)

potentially cause minor damage to the sites. While we strive to maximize the use of these venues, we are careful to avoid causing any harm, which has encouraged our team to be creative in curating the format of the programmes and be mindful of mitigating potential issues. Another challenge is the unpredictable weather associated with outdoor events. We always had thousands of raincoats ready, but fortunately, we have yet to encounter this issue. Organizing such a large-scale event is also very resource-consuming, requiring a significant amount of human resources, time, finances and communication. Moving forward, we aim to explore other suitable venues and formats for George Town Heritage Celebrations.

### Engaging the Youth and Younger Generations

Another important impact of the Celebrations is its ability to provide children and young people with hands-on experiences in cultural activities that are beyond their usual school curriculum. Through the cultural workshops, we have observed how deeply focused the young visitors are, showing a genuine interest in the activities. Through these engagements, we hope to inspire at least a few of them to develop an interest, eventually taking up a more active role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

Like many other historic cities around the world, the younger generation no longer resides in the city and lacks the memories of growing up, playing and wandering around the streets and lanes. George Town Heritage Celebrations has become an intermediary for young people to foster a connection with the city by creating memories of them enjoying the workshops, playing games on the streets, dancing with others against the backdrop of the heritage buildings and many more (Figure 7).



**Figure 7** Children were trying out the traditional Malay musical instruments (©GTWHI, 2024)



We understand that it is crucial to receive recognition from Penang State Education Department, before achieving the bigger goal of integrating cultural components into the school curriculum. Thus, we started off by distributing the event posters to primary and secondary schools around Penang through the platform designated and strictly controlled by the department, of which only permitted printing materials are allowed.

To further encourage public participation in the Celebrations, the Volunteer Programme has played a significant role in providing opportunities for the public aged 16 to 80 years to join the programmes. Over the years, at least 70 percent of the volunteers have been young adults (30 years old and below), with nearly 90 percent of them being local residents of Penang. These volunteers are important frontliners for the success of the Celebrations, as they play important roles in fostering relationships with different communities and visitors from various backgrounds, ethnicities and religions while promoting mutual understanding and respect (Figure 8).

The volunteers received comprehensive training that equipped them with the skills needed to execute their tasks, including briefings on their roles and responsibilities, as well as practices on hand-sign language and sighted guide. For workshops that require specific skills, such as Nyonya beading, the volunteers also underwent simple training with the community groups to ensure that they can assist the visitors in the best possible way.

While it has been encouraging to see increasing youth participation in the programme, it remains GTWHI's target to have continuous participation of the youth, with the hope that they can have strong ownership in the path. The opportunity to improve this is to get support from the education agencies and



**Figure 8** Volunteers were teaching the visitors how to play the innovative board game (©GTWHI, 2024)



**Figure 9** Volunteers of GTHC 2024 (©GTWHI, 2024)

other entities within the government as well as from the private sector (Figure 9).

## **CONTRIBUTION TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

From the above elaborations, it is evident that George Town Heritage Celebrations is one of the exemplary examples of the possibility of synergizing the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and conservation of tangible cultural heritage. In fact, the Celebrations have also successfully echoed the global effort in integrating cultural heritage into sustainable development, the Celebrations have contributed to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 5, SDG 10, SDG 11, SDG 13, and SDG 15.

### **Goal 11: Make Cities and Human Settlements inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable**

The Celebrations contribute the most to SDG 11, which explicitly references built heritage in Target 11.4. Through George Town Heritage Celebrations, we help to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage through community-based activities. The Celebrations have drawn a high number of visitors and generated increased interest in the historic fabric, especially the religious buildings of different faiths, the ethnic quarters, the town-houses and shophouses of George Town Historic City. During July (in particular), such increased interest and attention has a positive impact on encouraging public appreciation of heritage (both tangible and intangible heritage), increasing public participation in such heritage conservation and safeguarding efforts, and providing recognition and encouragement for the heritage practitioners and heritage buildings owners to continuing their dedications.

### **Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls**

While curating the programmes for George Town Heritage Celebrations, the team is dedicated to promoting and achieving gender equality, in particular, empowering all women and girls, to lead, perform, manage or participate in the activities of the Celebrations. The authors' observation over the years since the inception of the Celebrations in 2008 is that the community and the public today have very high acceptance of gender equality in leading cultural heritage organizations (such as holding positions as important decision-makers including the chairperson, secretary or committee member), to lead cultural heritage workshops and stage performances (such as Dikir Barat performance, Lion Dance performance, and traditional dance and music performances), and to serve as part of the project team or volunteer team. George Town Heritage Celebrations' 'gender equality culture' has also yielded far and beyond the organization and George Town, to enable, encourage and empower all genders to be given the same rights to participate in and serve cultural activities.

### **Goal 10: Reduce Inequality within and among Countries**

George Town Heritage Celebrations exemplify the commitment to reducing inequality by providing equal opportunities for all groups, regardless of their differences, to participate in the programmes. The continuous, enthusiastic and high level of involvement from various community groups volunteering as local partners (such as Badan Warisan Masjid Melayu Lebuah Acheh, Penang Hindu Association and Penang Siamese Committee Association) on the annual George Town Heritage Celebrations serves as evidence that this programme successfully creates a comfortable, fair and harmonious platform for all groups. The project team also pays additional attention to ensure that opportunities are given (and created) to encourage and accommodate new groups (such as Penang Hindu Sabah, LUMA and Penang Chingay Association) into the programmes.

### **Goal 13: Take Urgent Action to Combat Climate Change and Its Impacts**

Efforts to combat climate change are reflected in the focus on minimizing single-use materials during the Celebrations and making additional efforts to use recycled and recyclable materials. One of the most successful milestones achieved by this Celebrations is to cultivate the 'Bring Your Own Bottle' culture. Free water dispenser stations were provided at 20 strategic locations. Visitors are encouraged to bring their own water bottles and to refill the drinking water. Introduced in 2016, this campaign is now one of the cultures well practised by heritage celebrations goers, and it is also widely practised by other events and activities conducted in Penang. On top of this, the project team also minimize the usage of non-recyclable materials (such as styrofoam, tarpaulin canvas and poly-

propylene board), and maximizes the usage of recyclable materials (such as timber and metal) for environment decoration.

### **Goal 17: Strengthen the Means of Implementation and Revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development**

Through George Town Heritage Celebrations, GTWHI forms partnerships with local groups and associations of diverse backgrounds, including cultural, linguistic and religious communities, in sharing a vision and project that benefits everyone collectively. The partnership strengthens interpersonal, intra-group and inter-group communication and collaboration at the local, national and international levels, thus prompting a better understanding between groups that are more willing to accommodate differences and celebrate the similarities in an emphatic manner.

## **THE WAY FORWARD**

George Town as one of the leading cases highlighted during UNESCO Naples Conference 2023, has successfully yielded synergy between the 1972 World Heritage Convention and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Through the case study of George Town Heritage Celebrations, this paper has elaborated on the efforts conducted by GTWHI, as the site manager, in intertwining built heritage protection and intangible cultural heritage safeguarding.

Experience from George Town confirms that heritage conservation and safeguarding for George Town needs collective and continuous commitments from all stakeholders, including the heritage building owners, tenants, users, as well as cultural heritage practitioners.

Through the case study of George Town Heritage Celebrations presented in the paper, it is evident that built and intangible cultural heritage are intertwined and have been part of the life and livelihood of the stakeholders and local communities. This event has received gradual recognition and reputation as the melting pot of George Town Historic City and is well-accepted by the general public and the festive goers.

This paper also emphasizes the role of Site Managers as the fundamental link between the international and local. Site managers are the ones who work at World Heritage and advocate for World Heritage. In particular, the goal is to achieve the five Strategic Objectives of the Convention (also known as the 5Cs, including Credibility, Conservation, Capacity Building, Communication and Communities). It is hoped that this paper will be able to yield and generate the

international community to support the shared vision and strategic positioning, and formally recognize the Site Managers' role and function in the World Heritage system for the effective implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention by adopting the George Town Declaration (2024).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> George Town Declaration is a document launched during the 2024 We Are Site Managers International Symposium, urging formal recognition of the role and challenges of World Heritage site managers. For more information, please visit <https://gtwhi.com.my/we-are-site-managers-international-symposium/>

# LIVING HERITAGE AND WORLD HERITAGE SITES

Ananya BHATTACHARYA<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Cultural and natural heritage shape human identity and global cultural landscapes. As the world grapples with challenges like climate change, social inequality, and loss of cultural elements with rapid urbanization, the integration of cultural heritage into sustainable development strategies has become increasingly urgent. This paper explores the frameworks guiding heritage conservation, and examples of transformative shifts towards community-led and holistic approaches to safeguarding cultural resources. It also examines the challenges of tracking and reporting on SDG 11.4 and emphasizes the need for integrating tangible and intangible heritage within broader sustainability agendas. The case study example is about Santiniketan in India, designated as a World Heritage Site in 2023. Santiniketan is not only a centre for education but is also a living embodiment of celebration of nature and culture. At the heart of Santiniketan's ethos is universalism and the seamless blend of tangible and intangible heritage, where art, music, crafts, and education are deeply intertwined with nature. By connecting global cultural exchanges with local traditions, Tagore and his successors at Santiniketan highlighted the potential of culture to bridge diverse geographical regions and inspire innovations in the early decades of the twentieth century. This paper briefly shares the rich legacy of Santiniketan and the dynamic interventions that sustain its cultural vibrancy today.

Art for Life methodology was conceptualized by Contact Base, a social enterprise working across India for safeguarding living heritage as sustainable livelihood. The focus has been on creating an ecosystem that supports skill transmission, innovation, market access, and the development of artists' habitats as cultural destinations (Bhattacharya & Dutta, 2022). The organization has been working with rural communities around Santiniketan for a decade. Efforts for safeguarding local storytelling, music, embroidery and other craft traditions have empowered

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women, engaged youth, and fostered grassroots entrepreneurship and cultural tourism, bridging the rural-urban divide and advancing several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## **CULTURE IN GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes the role of culture in fostering inclusive, innovative, and sustainable growth. It envisions a world that respects human rights, dignity, and cultural diversity, recognizing that both natural and cultural diversity are essential to sustainable progress. Culture is recognized across multiple SDGs as an essential enabler and driver of sustainable development, directly and indirectly influencing economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability. Its integration reflects the understanding that cultural heritage, diversity, and creative industries are vital for achieving the 2030 Agenda. SDG 11 is about Sustainable Cities and Communities. SDG 11.4 is dedicated to strengthening efforts to protect the world's cultural and natural heritage. In SDG 4 (Quality Education) target SDG 4.7 encourages appreciation of cultural diversity and its role in sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that cultural industries and tourism are powerful tools for economic diversification, supporting livelihoods and preserving heritage. In SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 8.3 promotes creativity, innovation, and job creation, while SDG 8.9 focuses on sustainable tourism that highlights and promotes local culture and products, benefiting communities economically. In SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), the target 12.b focusses on sustainable tourism that supports local culture and products. Although traditional knowledge isn't directly mentioned in the SDGs Life Below Water (SDG 14) and Life on Land (SDG 15) cultural practices often align with biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource management, SDGs 14.7 and 15.5 address conserving natural resources and biodiversity through sustainable practices.

The Mondiacult 2022 Conference, convened by UNESCO in Mexico City marked a pivotal moment in reaffirming the critical role of culture in global development. It set the stage for actionable commitments and policy frameworks that aim to ensure culture's integration into all aspects of sustainable progress. A key recommendation was integration of tangible and intangible cultural heritage into national development strategies and policies, linking cultural preservation with economic and social development. The conference strengthened advocacy for explicit recognition of culture as a key component in achieving the UN SDG Goals.

The Pact for the Future Summit in September 2024 brought together world leaders, policymakers, and cultural stakeholders to formalize commitments and concrete actions to embed culture in the sustainable development agenda. The



summit emphasized culture's role in fostering social cohesion, driving innovation, and addressing global challenges such as climate change and inequality. The following two key actions proposed are around culture and heritage:

- **Action 11:** Protect and promote culture as a key part of sustainable development, integrating it into policies and ensuring public investment.
- **Action 32:** Support indigenous, traditional, and local knowledge by fostering synergies with science and technology.

There is now global recognition that integrating cultural heritage into sustainable development is essential.

## MEASURING PROGRESS IN SDG 11.4

Measuring the impact of culture is important for effective integration of culture in post 2030 development goals. Member States report on their integration of culture through Voluntary National Reviews, helping to position culture within the development agenda. A major challenge in tracking 11.4 is data availability. Under indicator 11.4.1, countries have to report on 'Expenditure on Cultural and Natural Heritage.' This indicator captures the financial commitment of countries to safeguarding their cultural and natural heritage. These investments directly impact the sustainability of cities and human settlements by preserving cultural and natural resources to enhance their attractiveness to residents, tourists, and investors and ensuring long-term sustainability of heritage sites through adequate funding and policy support. The indicator measures the 'Total per capita expenditure on the preservation, protection, and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage, by source of funding (public, private), type of heritage (cultural, natural), and level of government (national, regional, and local/municipal).' This includes financial investments made by public authorities and private entities, both at local and national levels, and international partnerships. By examining per capita expenditure, this indicator serves as a proxy measure to assess the financial strength of efforts to conserve heritage assets. The expression of data in purchasing power parity (PPP) allows for cross-country comparisons, and the use of constant values ensures the impact of inflation is eliminated for time-series analysis (UIS, 2023).

In 2022, only 60 countries reported on Indicator 11.4.1, revealing significant gaps in data collection and analysis. This fragmented data often marginalizes culture in global development strategies and funding frameworks like the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). To address this issue, there is an urgent need for improving reporting mechanisms and identifying more effective indicators (UIS, 2023).

Wang et al. (2018) in their insightful work details at length the decomposition



system of target 11.4 into three levels from goals, to targets to indicators. The Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) upgraded indicator 11.4.1 to Tier 2 status and also added 11.4.2 and 11.4.3 as potential indicators to make the measuring paradigm conceptually sound and internationally viable. 11.4.2 focuses on increasing investment in science and technology to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. By investing in science and technology. Target 11.4.2 strengthens efforts to ensure that heritage sites and practices can be preserved for future generations, adapting to contemporary challenges while fostering innovation. 11.4.3 aims to increase education and publicity to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. It emphasizes the importance of raising awareness, fostering appreciation, and building knowledge about cultural and natural heritage as integral components of sustainable development. It recognizes that safeguarding heritage is not just about conservation but also about engaging and educating communities, policy-makers, and future generations.

Public expenditure on cultural and natural heritage lacks standardized reporting mechanisms across many countries, while private expenditure data collection is even more limited. This requires substantial capacity-building efforts and financial investments to enhance data reporting over time. Many countries face resource constraints, both technical and financial, in building the necessary infrastructure to collect and report comprehensive data on heritage expenditure. The scope of measurement also presents a limitation. The indicator primarily focuses on monetary investments in heritage, overlooking non-monetary factors such as national or local policies, fiscal incentives like tax benefits for sponsorships, and legal frameworks supporting heritage conservation. While financial data provides insights into protection efforts, it does not fully capture the extent of these efforts or the benefits they generate. International harmonization further complicates the process. The lack of globally accepted definitions and methodologies for cultural and natural heritage expenditure poses further challenges for consistent data collection. Data collection also needs to encompass tangible and intangible, cultural and natural heritage. Existing frameworks, such as the 2009 UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics and the Classification of the Function of Government (COFOG), need better integration to standardize reporting practices worldwide (UIS, 2023).

For achieving the goals of SDG 11.4, policies and programmes need to underscore the interdependence of tangible and intangible heritage in preserving the cultural and social significance of sites and balance universal standards with localized, community-led approaches to heritage conservation. Fostering inclusive, adaptive, and culturally sensitive practices will pave the way for sustainable and meaningful preservation of humanity's shared heritage.

## GLOBAL FRAMEWORKS ON HERITAGE CONSERVATION

The UNESCO Cultural Conventions delineate the scope and definition of heritage and provide a framework for heritage management and conservation. The 1972 World Heritage Convention and the 2003 Convention on Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage define heritage and conservation through different lenses. The World Heritage Convention revolves around Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), recognizing cultural monuments, buildings, and natural sites with exceptional historical, artistic, or scientific significance. It emphasizes tangible heritage like monuments as well as natural formations. While community participation is acknowledged, the convention primarily centres on the physical conservation of heritage sites through a top-down approach involving national governments and international cooperation. Criterion (vi) of the World Heritage Site inscription recognizes sites tied to living traditions, beliefs, or artistic works of Outstanding Universal Value. This has broadened the understanding of cultural heritage, linking tangible and intangible elements. The significance of places often lies in their social meanings, tied to intangible heritage such as rituals, farming, and crafts, which are connected to the natural environment and cultural landscape. While Criterion (vi) acknowledges intangible heritage, its interpretation often leans more toward intangible values than fully embracing the broader definition of intangible heritage. Many sites have intangible connections that are not fully recognized under this criterion (Skounti, 2011).

The UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage emphasizes the pivotal role of communities, groups, and individuals in identifying, safeguarding, and transmitting their intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Article 15 of the convention states: 'Each State Party shall endeavour to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups, and, where appropriate, individuals who create, maintain, and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management.' While the 1972 convention lays emphasis on authenticity, the 2003 convention recognizes that ICH is inherently dynamic and continually recreated by communities in response to their environment, history, and interactions, making community involvement essential to the sustainability of heritage (Stovel, 2008). The communities decide what constitutes the 'true' or meaningful form of their heritage, which may differ over time and across contexts. The convention warns against safeguarding measures that may 'freeze' cultural practices in an artificial or static form. Instead, it promotes approaches that allow heritage to adapt and thrive in contemporary settings.

Over time, the role of communities in conserving World Heritage Sites has expanded significantly (Rössler, 2012). A major turning point in this process was the adoption of the Nara Document on Authenticity in 1994. This document marked a transformative moment in the history of heritage conservation, empha-

sizing the evaluation of heritage attributes within their cultural contexts. It represented a critical departure from earlier frameworks like the Venice Charter of 1964, which advocated for preserving authenticity but lacked detailed guidelines or methodologies for its assessment. The Nara Document stressed the need to respect cultural diversity when evaluating heritage. It rejected universal criteria for authenticity, asserting that cultural values and credible information sources vary widely across and within cultures. This contextual approach laid the groundwork for more inclusive and culturally sensitive conservation practices. A notable contribution of the Nara Document was its emphasis on integrating tangible and intangible dimensions of heritage. Natalia Dushkina of ICOMOS Russia underscored that authenticity encompasses both physical elements, such as form and setting, and non-material aspects, like tradition and spirit. This holistic understanding broadened the scope of heritage conservation to reflect the full cultural significance of sites (Dushkina, 1995). The document also addressed threats posed by globalization and cultural homogenization. Article 4 highlighted the role of authenticity in preserving humanity's collective cultural memory and protecting minority cultures from being overshadowed. Additionally, Article 9 linked conservation efforts to the values attributed to heritage, ensuring that decisions were informed by credible sources of information. Authenticity was further established as a central criterion in Article 10, which guided conservation, restoration, and heritage listing processes. By addressing the Venice Charter's shortcomings, the Nara Document provided a robust framework for evaluating authenticity and underscoring its relevance in global heritage practices. Overall, the Nara Document reshaped conservation by prioritizing cultural diversity, holistic evaluation, and the central role of authenticity.

The World Heritage Convention's five strategic objectives—Credibility, Conservation, Capacity-building, Communication, and Communities—are vital for effective heritage management. While state parties are primarily responsible for managing these sites, local communities have increasingly been involved (Strasser, 2020). Initially, four C's were established in 2002 to enhance the credibility of the World Heritage List, ensure effective conservation, promote capacity-building, and foster communication. In 2007, the fifth C, 'community,' was added to emphasize the role of local communities in heritage management. These objectives aim to address global heritage conservation challenges, ensuring a balanced representation of cultural and natural heritage. They focus on strengthening the World Heritage List's credibility, protecting heritage through effective conservation strategies, building capacity for stakeholders, raising awareness, and promoting community involvement in heritage management. Community participation is critical, as local communities play a vital role in identifying, managing, and sustaining World Heritage sites (Albert, 2012; Luo et al., 2022).

## COMMUNITIES AND HERITAGE GOVERNANCE

Engaging communities in heritage management presents challenges. These include bureaucratic hurdles, lack of awareness, limited access to information, and insufficient resources or skills. Communities often consist of diverse groups with varying priorities, making consensus difficult. Experts and community members with cultural connections to heritage sites may interpret them differently, leading to differing perspectives on ownership and control. Furthermore, balancing tourism growth with conservation efforts, and development goals with heritage preservation, is complex. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative approaches, capacity building, and continuous dialogue to ensure that community voices are heard and valued in heritage management.

Elinor Ostrom's concept of polycentric governance offers a transformative approach to heritage management by balancing autonomy and collaboration across multiple decision-making centers. By fostering self-organization, incentivizing cooperation, and facilitating dynamic interactions across scales, polycentric systems address the complexity and diversity of heritage conservation needs. This governance model ensures that the collective memory of humanity is safeguarded in ways that are inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable (Ostrom, 1990). Ostrom posited that any group facing a collective problem should address it in ways best suited to their context, whether by adapting existing governance structures or crafting new regimes. This principle is particularly relevant for heritage management, as it allows localized entities to tailor conservation strategies to their unique cultural, social, and environmental contexts. Her research demonstrated that individuals are capable of self-organizing and cooperating effectively, particularly in the context of shared resources. For heritage, this implies that communities, heritage organizations, and governments can work collaboratively to conserve shared cultural assets. Applying the concept of polycentric governance in heritage management empowers communities, regional and national governments, and global institutions to work collaboratively while retaining autonomy. At the local level, communities, as primary custodians of heritage, play a critical role in preserving both tangible and intangible cultural assets. Polycentric governance acknowledges their agency, enabling localized conservation strategies tailored to specific cultural contexts and fostering community ownership of heritage initiatives. By centering community-driven actions, this approach not only ensures authenticity but also strengthens the cultural identity of the custodians themselves. At the regional, national, and global levels, polycentric governance provides a framework for cooperation and resource-sharing without undermining local autonomy.

## VISION OF TAGORE

Visva-Bharati University was founded by Rabindranath Tagore in 1921 at Santiniketan in West Bengal in eastern India. It was established with the aim of promoting a holistic form of education that integrated nature and culture, and the best of both Eastern and Western cultures. Tagore envisioned Visva-Bharati as a place where the world could come together to study and appreciate cultural diversity, fostering international understanding and unity. Santiniketan was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2023 based on Criteria iv and Criteria vi. It is a symbol of internationalism, humanism, and environmental harmony. Santiniketan is an exceptional example of a landscape, architectural ensemble, and technological design that highlights significant stages of human history (Chakrabarty et al., 2024). The buildings showcase innovative material, design, and construction techniques. Classes are held in open-air. This unique combination of built and open spaces makes Santiniketan a remarkable global model of environmental art and educational reform, where progressive education and visual arts are intricately woven together with architecture and the surrounding landscape. Santiniketan stands as a remarkable enclave of intellectuals, educators, artists, craftsmen, and workers who collaborated and experimented with an Asian modernity rooted in an internationalism that draws upon the ancient, medieval, and folk traditions of India, as well as influences from Japanese, Chinese, Persian, Balinese, Burmese, and Art Deco styles.

Tagore's concept of 'indivisibility of life' manifested in the seamless integration of education with work, joy, and play. Traditional crafts are integrated into its education system, fostering creativity, craftsmanship, and community building. The Sangeet (music) and Kala (art) Bhavan were established as separate schools, embodying Tagore's legacy of art and education as monumental examples for future generations. Santiniketan has played a pivotal role in cultural exchange between India and the world. Tagore drew inspiration from the indigenous cultural expressions of Bengal, particularly influenced by Baul philosophy in his songwriting. He incorporated Santhal dance into his choreography, bridging the divide between elite and folk culture. Tagore also promoted the study and practice of Southeast Asian dance forms, encouraging their integration into Indian performance arts. He envisioned Visva-Bharati as a hub where scholars, artists, and thinkers from around the globe could come together for meaningful exchanges. By introducing the aesthetics and techniques of Southeast Asian dance, he innovated a new tradition of dance dramas. Tagore had a deep appreciation for music from around the world and incorporated elements of Scottish and Irish tunes into his own creations. He introduced Batik in Santiniketan after visiting Indonesia.

Central to Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy was the belief in empowering rural

communities through education, healthcare, sanitation, scientific agriculture, and the revival of traditional arts and crafts. His holistic model sought not only to uplift the physical and economic conditions of the village but also to restore dignity, foster creativity, and instill a sense of cooperative living among villagers (Chattopadhyay, 2018). In his vision, Tagore emphasized that culture and heritage have the power to transform birth (often without purpose) to life (necessarily with aspirations). This belief encapsulates how culture, when integrated with daily life, could elevate individuals and communities, turning simple existence into a purposeful and aspirational life. Cultural practices, music, games, and socio-religious festivals played a central role in his rural reconstruction programme. For Tagore, festivals were opportunities for artistic expression, infused with new meanings.

Santiniketan's festivals celebrate the beauty of nature, with signature events. PousUtsav celebrates the harvesting season and encourages the participation of folk artists and craftspeople. While Holi is widely celebrated across India, Tagore created BasantUtsav to emphasize the themes of spring and cultural performances rather than the traditional celebrations. Initiatives such as '*HalaKarshan*' (agriculture), '*Vrikha-Ropan*' (tree planting), and communal celebrations like '*Barshamangal*' and '*Nabo-Barsho*' were designed to foster a sense of community, build self-reliance, and preserve local traditions while introducing modern agricultural methods (Dasgupta, 1993). Tagore's approach recognized the importance of integrating built and living heritage into creating a village that was both forward-thinking and rooted in its traditions. His model embraced an environment where culture, arts, and physical landscape were inseparable from everyday life. Through this praxis-based approach, he envisioned a liberated village, free from ignorance and poverty, one that embodied joy, creativity, and self-sufficiency, and where culture was the transformative force. However, he encountered challenges in implementing his vision for rural reconstruction at Sriniketan, as local communities were often resistant to new ideas. Additional obstacles included a lack of funding and human resources to support this unique initiative.

## **LIVING HERITAGE AND CREATIVE ECONOMY**

Santiniketan is a popular tourist destination, attracting over a million visitors each year who come to enjoy a blend of nature, culture, tangible and intangible heritage. Tourists explore Visva-Bharati University, vibrant local *haats*, and immerse themselves in the region's rich artistic and cultural traditions amid serene landscapes. The Government of India and the West Bengal State Government, has undertaken significant initiatives to develop cultural spaces in and around Santiniketan (EZCC, 2024), build creative enterprise and promote cultural tourism

(MSME & T, 2023). The Rural Craft and Cultural Hub<sup>2</sup> initiative by the Government of West Bengal in collaboration with UNESCO New Delhi Office (2011–2023) aimed to develop grassroots creative economy safeguarding traditional skills in art and craft as sustainable livelihood. The project used the Art for Life model of Contact Base and supported revitalization of traditional skills and promotion and market linkage of art and craft of the region. The performing art traditions covered under the project are Baul music, storytelling traditional called Patachitra, and folk songs and dance of indigenous communities. Baul music is inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Bauls, often regarded as the Sufis of Bengal, sing of self-discovery, transcending religious divides, and spreading love. Joydevkenduli, near Santiniketan, is a historic heritage site that has attracted devotees for centuries. Rina Das Baul from this region has carved a space as a Mahajan (lyricist) and is the first Indian woman folk singer to perform at the prestigious World Music Expo. Patachitra is a visual storytelling tradition where skilled painters, known as Patuas, create intricate works depicting mythological and social themes using natural colours. In this region the stories sung as songs or Pater Gaan, are often centered around the legacy of Chaitanya and agriculture. Very few practitioners remain in this region though the art form thrives in Medinipur region in the southern part of the state of West Bengal.

The popular craft traditions include Kantha embroidery, basketry, pottery and Shola craft. The intervention in Birbhum focused on women practising Kantha embroidery, an age-old tradition of repurposing old fabrics with simple running stitches to create something new. A decade ago, these women worked for low wages while their beautifully embroidered products were sold at high prices in boutiques. Today, women-led collectives have overcome barriers like limited mobility and are now accessing markets directly, even selling online (Bardhan & Bhattacharya, 2022). Surul near Santiniketan is a hub of Shola craft. The supple, porous core of the Shola stem also known as Indian cork is transformed into delicate, intricate wonders. The artists primarily earned from making products for rituals and the young were losing interest. Shola is now used to make a wide range of decorative products. The plant is being cultivated in the marshy wilds and the Shola craft is now a sustainable livelihood.

Santiniketan has long been a popular tourist destination due to its unique blend of culture, nature, and heritage. Even during the pandemic, when long-distance travel was restricted, hotels and resorts maintained high occupancy rate. Seeing this as an opportunity, Contact Base partnered with India Tourism and the British Council to launch campaigns promoting nearby villages where visitors could experience local folk art and crafts. This initiative provided vital support to tradition

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rccgbengal.com>



bearers by opening new market channels during a time when conventional ones were disrupted (Contact Base, 2024; Festivals from India, 2024).

Following the pandemic, the West Bengal State Government expanded the Rural Craft and Cultural Hub initiative to include 50,000 folk artists and craftspeople across the state, many from this region. Patachitra painters, basket makers, terracotta potters, and Shola craft artisans received training to diversify and improve the quality of their products. As part of the project, in 2023, Santiniketan hosted a district ICH festival, raising awareness of the living heritage of rural and tribal communities in the area.

Thus we see how at Santiniketan—the confluence of world cultures and ideas, rural and indigenous tradition has created a unique cultural landscape contributing to several SDGs like alleviation of poverty SDG 1, women empowerment SDG 5, social inclusion SDG 10, global partnerships SDG 16 apart from SDG 4, 8, and 11. To achieve sustainable development, an integrated approach incorporating community involvement, skills transmission, and market access for artisans, fosters economic growth and cultural preservation simultaneously. Integration of tangible and intangible heritage has led to resilience and social cohesion, contributing to multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) beyond just the target 11.4.

## CONCLUSION

In the afore-mentioned case study, cultural heritage serves as a driver of community-based tourism and creative economy offering avenues for the protection and celebration of both tangible and intangible assets. Promoting cultural industries, such as crafts, performing arts, and creative sectors creates sustainable economic opportunities, supports cultural entrepreneurship, and ensures fair compensation for heritage-related work. Responsible tourism models can safeguard cultural resources while fostering economic growth and cultural appreciation. The integration of tangible and intangible cultural heritage within sustainable development frameworks underscores the transformative potential of culture in fostering economic resilience, community identity, and environmental harmony. Supporting local communities, particularly rural and indigenous peoples who are the traditional knowledge holders, through capacity-building and inclusive policymaking, places them at the heart of heritage management. This empowerment ensures that their knowledge, practices, and voices are respected and preserved as integral elements of cultural governance. Santiniketan's model exemplifies heritage as a shared resource and responsibility, where polycentric governance fosters collaboration across stakeholders and scales, ensuring adaptive and inclusive management. This approach underscores that heritage conservation extends beyond preservation, embracing innovation and community-driven initiatives to catalyse

sustainable and inclusive development. By leveraging its cultural legacy, Santiniketan sets a benchmark for heritage as a transformative tool for holistic progress, with lessons resonating globally.

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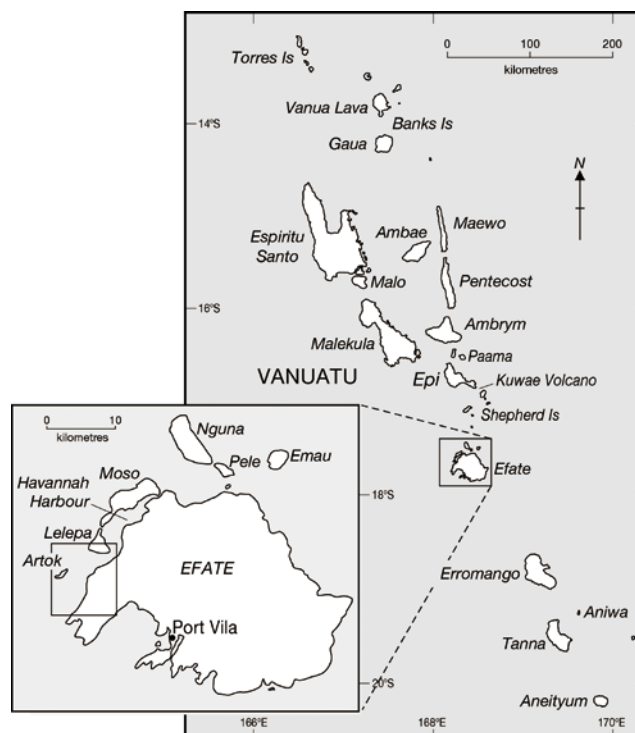


# SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT AT THE CHIEF ROI MATA'S DOMAIN WORLD HERITAGE SITE, VANUATU

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## CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Sustainable development has been a core objective for the managers of the World Heritage site of Chief Roi Mata's Domain in the Republic of Vanuatu (Figure 1). Chief Roi Mata's Domain is rare, as a World Heritage property that has been entirely under indigenous community control and leadership from inception



**Figure 1** Location of Chief Roi Mata's Domain World Heritage site in Vanuatu (Source: ANU CartoGIS)

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of the nomination process in 2004 and then continuously since inscription in 2008. From the outset, Chief Roi Mata's Domain has positioned local livelihoods and the transmission of living heritage at the centre of its management strategy.

While there is now broad understanding and acceptance of the central role of culture in the delivery of effective results for the SDGs (UNESCO, n.d.a.; Labadi et al., 2021; Marcus, 2021), practical evaluations of the positive and negative impacts of engaging culture in this way are not so easily identified (De Beukelaer & Freitas, 2015, p.209). Although sustainable development was not emphasized in the original formulation of the UNESCO 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Bortolotto & Skounti, 2024), it has been a topic of increasing focus for each of the different cultural and heritage conventions (see UNESCO, 2016).

Sustainable development is defined most simply as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, Chapter 2, paragraph 1). Given this strong orientation towards the future, the goals of sustainable development are particularly appropriate for consideration within the framework of heritage safeguarding measures, which also operate with longer-term horizons. Sites inscribed on the World Heritage list, for example, are targeted for preservation in perpetuity.

The goals of sustainable development—formally set out as the Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs (United Nations, 2015)—should be seen not as 'separate spheres of action, but [as] highly interdependent,' overlapping with and impacting on each other, and requiring 'holistic approaches to policies' (UNESCO, n.d.b.). In this respect, the approach to the SDGs closely matches the lived experience of development, which does not distinguish between individual SDGs. Because it expresses the same vision of a holistic experience of life, living heritage or intangible cultural heritage has a particularly powerful role to play in understanding the cultural potential of the SDGs and formulating policies and strategies for their successful implementation. Not surprisingly, recent reviews of the potential contribution of cultural heritage to the implementation of the SDGs tend to feature living heritage quite prominently (e.g. Labadi et al., 2021)

This paper explores the relationship between living heritage and the SDGs within the context of a World Heritage site—Chief Roi Mata's Domain or CRMD—where community management that subscribes to and practices a holistic understanding of heritage is proving highly effective at meeting the SDGs at a local level. Several features of the management of CRMD ensure that the SDGs remain central to any planning process: first, the Republic of Vanuatu has limited capacity to invest in the management or support of CRMD, passing much of the responsibility back to

the community's own managers, the members of the Lelema World Heritage Committee, in determining priorities and finding funding; second, inscription of the site as a cultural landscape has ensured that local cultural values are the foundation of the site's Outstanding Universal Value, and that living heritage plays a central role in site management and planning; and third, ongoing challenges, including natural hazards such as major cyclones and earthquakes, and other issues such as tenure conversion of traditional lands, continue to present problems which throw the SDGs into sharp relief.

The authors of this paper include the current chair (Richard Matanik) and all current members of the Lelema World Heritage Committee, along with two external colleagues who have worked continuously with the Lelema community since 1996 (Meredith Wilson) and 2001 (Chris Ballard). The ideas expressed in this paper have all emerged through ongoing discussion and regular meetings of this group, drawing on the experience and living heritage of the broader Lelema community. We first introduce the composition of CRMD as a cultural landscape, showing how local cultural protocols ground all aspects of site management. Then we consider how the SDGs are engaged at CRMD, more or less successfully, and the ways in which the local management rubric of 'people, place and story' helps the site's managers to make progress on meeting the SDGs. Finally, we review responses to two major natural hazard challenges, Cyclone Pam in 2015, and the 17 December 2024 Efate earthquake, and reflect on how these responses illustrate the capacity and flexibility of living heritage in shaping community adaptation to new circumstances, including climate change.

## **CHIEF ROI MATA'S DOMAIN AS A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE**

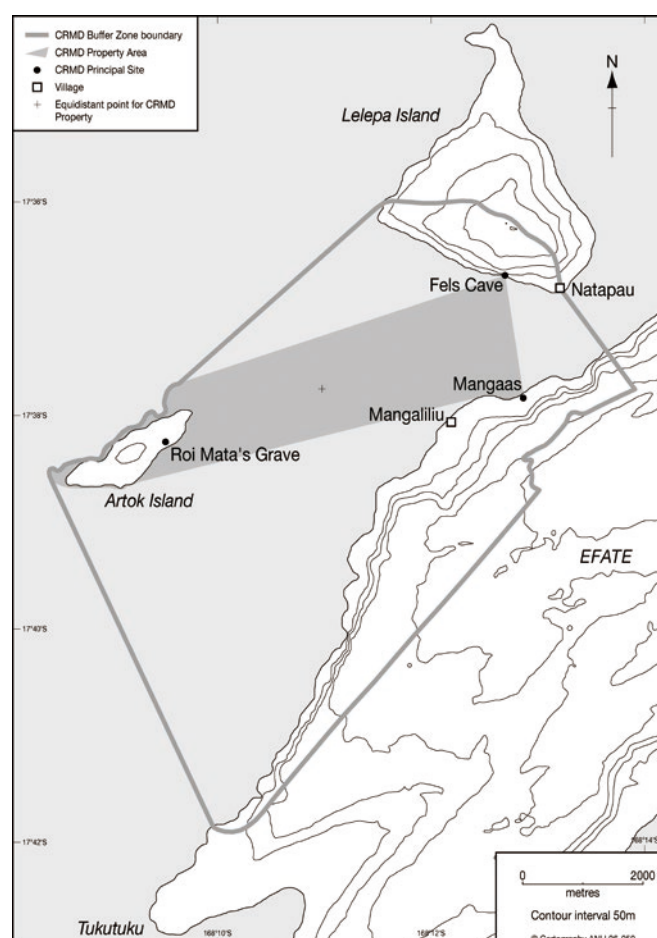
The cultural landscape of Chief Roi Mata's Domain (CRMD) is Vanuatu's only World Heritage site. The nomination process, which began in 2004, was led jointly by the communities of Lelepa and Mangaliliu villages (known collectively as Lelema) with technical support from the Vanuatu National Museum and Cultural Centre and the first two authors (Wilson et al., 2011). In 2008, CRMD became the first cultural World Heritage site inscribed by an independent Pacific Island state (along with the Kuk Early Agricultural site in Papua New Guinea).

The Outstanding Universal Value for which Chief Roi Mata's Domain was inscribed reflected 'the continuing association of the landscape with the oral traditions of Roi Mata, continuity of chiefly systems of authority and customary respect for the tangible remains of his life evident in the continuing *tapu* prohibitions on these places' (World Heritage Committee, 2008). The category of 'continuing cultural landscape' emphasizes the heritage values that continue to inform community life and use of the landscape today.



The cultural landscape concept was introduced primarily to reconcile natural and cultural values at World Heritage sites (Rössler, 2006), but it has also provided an opportunity to restore living heritage and community concerns to a central position (Ballard & Wilson, 2012, p.135). Cultural landscapes often physically encompass local communities within the boundary of their buffer zones (Figure 2), and depend upon those communities for their continued local conservation practices as well as the living heritage that supplies a history for and gives meaning to the landscape. With some variation according to national regimes of legislation and enforcement, local communities commonly exercise a degree of control over access to their land, and the success of conservation of the cultural landscape is thus dependent on the sustained goodwill and cooperation of the community.

Direct engagement with or leadership by local communities in the management of cultural landscapes can introduce further challenges, including meeting community needs and aspirations, especially for access to a cash economy; competing with other forms of land use, including the sale of land, tourism, and resource extraction; managing the relationship between state agencies and local



**Figure 2** The Chief Roi Mata's Domain World Heritage site and buffer zone (Source: ANU CartoGIS)

communities; ensuring ongoing community commitment to the conservation project; and appreciating the dynamic quality of cultural values, which can change with time and conditions and influence the significance of the broader cultural landscape.

Chief Roi Mata's Domain commemorates the life of the last holder of the chiefly title of Roi Mata, who lived during the 16th century and died in about 1600 CE, and especially his role in promoting peace across the Efate region. The area of the designated cultural landscape corresponds broadly to his original domain, covering the nearshore islands of Artok (Figure 3) and Lelepa, and adjacent areas of the Efate mainland. Key locations within this domain are associated with his life at the chiefly residence of Mangaas, on Efate; his death in Fels Cave on Lelepa Island; and his burial, surrounded by between 50 and 300 others who accompanied him to the grave on Artok Island. Mangaas and Artok were declared forbidden zones (*fanua tapu*) at his death and were never inhabited and seldom visited thereafter. This traditional *tapu* (taboo) was originally put in place out of profound respect for Roi Mata's personal power (*natkar*) but has had the effect of conserving the locations and their immediate environments largely intact for almost 400 years. Following 'in the footsteps of Roi' (*nalfan Roi*) and respecting the *tapu* and the *natkar* of Roi Mata are local precepts that organize the lives and the landscape of the Lelema community, and thus the way that it approaches the management of the World Heritage site. It is in this sense that CRMD makes its claim to be a 'continuing cultural landscape.'

The Lelema community strongly asserted its right to determine the spatial extent of the CRMD World Heritage site, and its protective buffer zone in particular, so as to gain World Heritage status for its landscape and knowledge without limiting too narrowly its future options. Under pressure from an ICOMOS review of the draft nomination that recommended considerably expanding the area of the registered Buffer Zone, the community insisted that the key challenge of conservation (beyond the three locations directly associated with Roi Mata's life) was to ensure the continued transmission of the knowledge that gave the landscape meaning (Ballard & Wilson, 2012, pp.143–144). For this to happen, they argued, community livelihoods would have to be maintained and improved without external constraints on their use of the landscape (Trau et al., 2014).

In 2005, the Lelema community formed a committee to oversee the nomination process and planning for management of a possible World Heritage site: the World Heritage and Tourism Committee (WHTC) (later renamed the Lelema World Heritage Committee or LWHC). The LWHC consists of three women and three men, one of whom is elected as chair. The balance in gender composition and in the distribution of roles on the committee has focused attention on training and income-earning opportunities for older and younger women. The



**Figure 3** Artok Island viewed from Mangaliliu Village (©C. Ballard, 2024)

LWHC has also been the hub for development of national and international partnerships, with government and private sector groups engaged in cultural heritage, tourism, education and development. Lelema dance groups developed for the Roi Mata Cultural Tour have performed in Australia and elsewhere, and LWHC members have engaged with World Heritage site managers and cultural heritage practitioners internationally.

## **PEOPLE, PLACE AND STORY: THE SDGS IN PRACTICE**

The decision of the Lelema community to participate in the World Heritage nomination process was not based on the need to manage these key locations associated with Roi Mata, which had been very effectively preserved over four centuries by the customary *tapu*. Instead, led by Chief Kalkot Murmur, the community insisted that a successful nomination should generate economic benefits, to fund education and other development objectives. Linking World Heritage inscription to economic benefits in this way would also help greatly in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the World Heritage site and the community's central role in its management, as well as promoting cultural heritage as a viable and integral part of community life in the longer term. As Marcus notes, 'If a cultural organization or operator lacks a sustainable economic base, then they are in no position to help advance the agenda of sustainability in their work' (Marcus, 2021, p.27).

The primary vehicle of development linked to the World Heritage site has been a cultural tourism enterprise, Roi Mata Cultural Tours (RMCT), entirely owned, managed and staffed by the Lelema community, and led by members of the LWHC (Wilson et al., 2012). The tour operation has aimed to train and involve the widest number of community members, as guides, dancers and boat operators,

many of whom have gone on to work elsewhere in Vanuatu's hospitality industry. An early concern of the LWHC was to limit tourist numbers and impact, but this has opened the door to other tourism operators to work around the margins of the World Heritage-accredited tours.

The assessment of Adam Trau, an international volunteer who worked most closely with the tourism business, is that it 'occupies something of a development no man's land, failing to satisfy or be deemed a 'success' in relation to either international mainstream economics of poverty alleviation or local community expectations and cultural values' (Trau, 2012, p.160); nevertheless, 20 years after its launch, the cultural tourism business continues to operate and to generate incomes. The LWHC is now keen to expand its operations from a purely cultural tourism focus to one that integrates cultural and leisure products, such as snorkelling and diving, in order to appeal to a broader market and grow the numbers of tourists visiting CRMD. In tandem with the tour experience, Lelema women also produce and sell handicrafts to tour groups, working with both modern and traditional designs and forms, and further distributing and redirecting benefits across the community. 'Lelema conceptions and measures of development success through Roi Mata Cultural Tours, such as paying for the school fees of all community children or supplementing aid post supplies, are just as important locally as the provision of full-time employment and increases in personal and household income levels' (Trau, 2012, p.158).

In addition to these direct benefit streams and their allocation to a range of development goals, the World Heritage site contributes significantly to environmental sustainability. World Heritage status and the community's renewed commitment to conservation at the key Roi Mata locations of Mangaas and Retoka have extended the beneficial effects of the original *tapu* restrictions, and attracted new initiatives, including a Japanese-funded giant clam conservation programme, and the Nuwae clean water supply project for Lelepa Island. World Heritage status was also sought as part of a broader strategy to stem or limit the flow of sales or long-term rental of customary land within the Buffer Zone to outsiders. This strategy proved particularly important in conserving the core locations of Artok and Mangaas, both threatened by leasing, but has been less successful in the broader Buffer Zone and beyond (McDonnell, 2024).

Although Lelema community members tend to view these different challenges and opportunities through a more holistic framework that integrates the concerns and perspectives of cultural heritage, livelihoods and development, the LWHC has generated several illustrative models that enable outsiders to appreciate the way that these multiple concerns are brought together in local lives. The first of these is the metaphor of the culturally significant *nabanga* or fig tree, emphasizing the need for strong, deep roots through care for the landscape, the

community and its heritage in order to support and ensure the sustainability of the trunk of World Heritage and the many branches representing different community-led initiatives.

A second model, derived from the tree-image, is the rubric of *pipol, ples mo storian*, or People, Place and Story. In its simplest form, this is conceived as a three-legged stool representing CRMD, with people or community, place or the tangible heritage, and story or intangible heritage each contributing one of the legs essential to hold the stool upright. The strength of each leg is vital for sustainability. Loss or damage to any one of these legs threatens the whole: examples include impacts to community health, education or livelihood; damage to the environment or loss of key places or material items; and loss of language or elders or contexts for the transmission of knowledge. Sustainable heritage conservation depends as much on care for knowledge and for the livelihoods of the knowledge-bearing community as it does on the preservation of the material sites or landscapes of tangible heritage. As the World Heritage Committee notes, 'Heritage protection without community involvement and commitment is an invitation to failure' (World Heritage Committee, 2007, p.2).

## **STRESS TESTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY: NATURAL HAZARD DISASTERS AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

Natural hazards have presented ongoing problems for sustainable development at CRMD, but the ways in which the community has responded to these events will now help in planning for climate change adaptation. Vanuatu is notoriously exposed to an exceptional range of natural hazards, including earthquakes, landslides, tsunamis, cyclones, drought, fire, flood, invasive animal and botanical species, and volcanic eruptions (Wilson et al., 2011; Ballard et al., 2020; Wilson, 2022). In response, over the three-thousand-year history of human settlement, Vanuatu's many different cultures have each learned to adapt and to limit their risk from these hazards, developing bodies of knowledge about the weather, early warnings, preparation, house construction and food security. Much of this extraordinary body of knowledge remains available to communities, even if it has not been practiced effectively for some time.

CRMD has been exposed to multiple hazards over recent years. A small tsunami in 1961 removed the beach on Lelepa Island that had served as the ceremonial ground where Roi Mata watched his dancers, but earthquakes and cyclones have been particularly destructive over the last 25 years. Cyclone Pam, a category 5 event in March 2015, devastated Vanuatu and destroyed most of the World Heritage infrastructure at CRMD; a subsequent assessment of damage determined that the traditional locations remained largely untouched, as they had been carefully positioned to avoid the worst winds, whilst the modern infrastruc-



ture was poorly located and exposed (Ballard et al., 2020). More significant than the infrastructure damage, which was relatively easily replaced or repaired, was the community's own appreciation of the loss of or failure to put into practice its own knowledge of cyclone risk reduction, through appropriate construction and location of housing, and community mobilization, garden and food preparation as the cyclone approached. One food security project arising directly from this experience has been a training programme led by the LWHC in the planting and preparation of wild yam, which is a particularly cyclone-resistant traditional food crop.

Living heritage evidently has an important role to play in sustainable development through disaster risk reduction at CRMD, and these same practices will also provide the foundation for the Lelema community's adaptation to climate change challenges. At present, climate change is likely to introduce changes to the frequency and intensity of cyclones, to the seasonality, intensity and duration of precipitation, and to sea level. Earthquakes have presented a different kind of challenge. A major earthquake in 2002 dislodged part of the ceiling at the entrance to Fels Cave, and this partial roof collapse has been a source of anxiety ever since for the LWHC and the community, as the cave is a major attraction for tourists and a significant contribution to local incomes. On 17 December 2024, another major earthquake struck central Vanuatu, with the epicentre located just 20 kilometres west of Lelepa Island. The cliff above and around Fels Cave collapsed spectacularly, and appears to have blocked the cave mouth entirely. This catastrophe has been only partly alleviated by a programme of photogrammetric 3D documentation of the entire cave funded by UNESCO and conducted jointly by the LWHC, the Vanuatu National Museum and Cultural Centre and the Australian National University just months earlier, in September 2024. This documentation may allow the community and tourists to 'experience' Fels cave and its remarkable rock art virtually in the future, but this blow to the integrity of the World Heritage site and to income opportunities for the community will have to be addressed in innovative ways by the LWHC and its national and international partners.

## **THE SDGS AT CRMD**

Activities associated with cultural heritage practices and safeguarding by the Lelema community, including management of the World Heritage site of CRMD, address most of the SDGs, at least at this very local level. These activities range from poverty reduction and improved access to education and health opportunities through cultural tourism training and income (SDG1, SDG3, SDG4, SDG8), food security measures such as the wild yam project (SDG2), promoting equity of economic opportunity through the gender-balanced management committee and its focus on developing women's handicraft production (SDG5), exploring clean

water options through the Nuwae project (SDG6), improving the design and construction of sustainable infrastructure (SDG9), promoting climate change initiatives amongst the local community and beyond (SDG13), conserving both marine and terrestrial environments (SDG14, SDG15), and developing national and international partnerships that strengthen the capacity of the community to meet these goals (SDG17).

Most of these activities were already underway at CRMD before the adoption in 2015 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. So far at CRMD there has been no open discussion or planning with conscious reference to the SDGs, despite UNESCO promotion of the SDGs and ICH for the Pacific region (UNESCO Office for the Pacific States, & ICHCAP, 2016). While results measured against any of the SDGs individually might appear modest, sustained activity in each area over the past twenty years is a significant demonstration of the power of local autonomy in cultural heritage management, and of planning that is limited in ambition to what can be implemented and sustained locally. What the example of Chief Roi Mata's Domain demonstrates is that community values and leadership are essential ingredients for any action directed towards sustainable development at a local level, and that this holds true especially for cultural heritage programmes.

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# RICE RITUALS AND THE CONTINUITY OF IFUGAO INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

Marlon MARTIN<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The Ifugao people of the Philippines are custodians of a very rich intangible heritage, deeply rooted in their agricultural practices and belief systems. Central to this heritage are rice rituals, which embody the Ifugao's spiritual connection to their environment and their pantheistic belief system known as the *Baki*. These rituals not only sustain agricultural productivity but also serve as repositories of cultural identity and oral traditions. However, the continuity of these rituals faces growing challenges that threaten their transmission to future generations.

One of the most pressing challenges is climate change, which has significantly altered weather patterns, leading to unpredictable rainfall, prolonged droughts, and increased pest infestations. These environmental changes disrupt the agricultural cycles that the rice rituals are meant to safeguard, making it difficult for farmers to adhere to traditional planting and harvesting schedules. As climate change accelerates, the viability of the Ifugao Rice Terraces—a UNESCO World Heritage Site—also comes under threat, further complicating the conditions necessary for maintaining these rituals.

Additionally, shifting economic realities have contributed to the decline of rice rituals. Many younger Ifugaos are choosing alternative livelihoods over traditional farming due to the financial instability of terrace agriculture. The lure of wage labor, education-driven migration, and modernization have led to a decline in the number of farmers willing to uphold ritual practices. Without active practitioners, the knowledge and performance of rice rituals risk fading into obscurity.

Compounding these threats is the increasing influence of new religions, particularly Christianity, which has discouraged or outright condemned the practice of *Baki* among many Ifugao communities. As religious conversions continue, younger

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generations may grow detached from the spiritual significance of rice rituals, further diminishing their role in community life. While some efforts have been made to reconcile Christian beliefs with indigenous traditions, the tension between ancestral rituals and newer religious frameworks remains a critical factor in the erosion of Ifugao intangible heritage.

This paper examines the integral role of rice rituals in the Ifugao terraces, the challenges faced in ensuring their continuity, and the interplay with the conservation of the rice terraces. Part of the discussion includes the wider Ifugao community values upon which conservation initiatives should be based. By exploring these factors, it seeks to highlight the urgent need for adaptive strategies that balance tradition with modernity, ensuring the survival of these invaluable cultural practices.

### **BAKI: THE TRADITIONAL BELIEF SYSTEM OF THE IFUGAOS**

The *Baki* is the indigenous spiritual belief system of the Ifugao people in the northern Philippines. It is an animistic and pantheistic tradition based on the belief in numerous deities, ancestral spirits, and nature spirits that influence various aspects of life, including agriculture, health, warfare, and social harmony. These rituals are performed on significant occasions and during key stages of rice cultivation (Dulawan, 1985). The *Baki* comprises a vast collection of rites and prayers that form the core of Ifugao mythology, narrating stories of gods, goddesses, supernatural beings, ancestors, and natural forces (Dumia, 1979). The performance of these rites entails prayers and chants, including the lengthy *Hudhud* (Dulawan, 2005; Stanyukovich, 2003, 2006) and *Alim* (Del Rosario, 2003; De Santos, 2013).

During ritual performances, the *mumbaki* calls upon the ancestors and an extensive pantheon of over a thousand gods and goddesses, believed to inhabit every corner of the Ifugao universe. Barton (1930) described the immense number of divinities in Ifugao cosmology as awe-inspiring and comparable to the grandeur of their renowned terraced rice fields. These divine beings originate from the Skyworld (*Kabunian*), the Underworld (*Nunda'ul*), the Easternworld (*Lagud*), and the Westernworld (*Daya*). Additionally, other groups of deities exist in the spaces between and beyond these realms, sometimes interacting with mortals in the Earthworld (*Pugaw*). *Pugaw* is the realm where humans settled, identifying themselves as *iPugaw*, meaning 'from' or 'place of origin.' Over time, *iPugaw* evolved into Ifugao, signifying the people of the earth and distinguishing them from inhabitants of other cosmic regions, such as *Ikabunian*, *Ilagud*, and *Idaya*, among others (Salvador-Amores & Martin, 2024).

## Categories of *Baki* Rituals

Ifugao rituals are broadly categorized into two types:

1. *Hongan di Tagu* (Rituals for Persons): These rituals are performed to address the spiritual and physical well-being of individuals within the community.
2. *Hongan di Page* (Rituals for Rice): These are integral to the agricultural cycle, ensuring the successful cultivation and harvest of rice.

## The *Mumbaki*

Central to the performance of rice rituals are the *mumbaki*, or ritual specialists, who serve as custodians of Ifugao spiritual and cultural heritage. These culture bearers are not only repositories of oral traditions and intricate *baki* knowledge but also act as intermediaries between the community and the divine. Their role is deeply embedded in Ifugao cosmology, where they mediate between humans, ancestors, and deities to ensure agricultural fertility, social harmony, and spiritual well-being.

## Ancestral Lineage and Transmission of Knowledge

The tradition of becoming a *mumbaki* is often passed down along kinship lines, typically from father to son, although there were historical accounts of women *mumbaki* who played vital roles in rice ritual performance. The transmission of knowledge follows a rigorous process of memorization, apprenticeship, and participation in actual rituals under the guidance of elder *mumbaki*. The chants, prayers, and ritual sequences are complex and must be learned through years of immersion.

At one time, nearly every Ifugao man was a *mumbaki*, or there was at least one within every extended family. This ensured that the knowledge of *baki* remained widespread and accessible within the community. However, as modernization, Christianity, and formal education have taken root in Ifugao society, the number of practicing *mumbaki* has dwindled significantly, with most practitioners today being elders over the age of 60.

Being a *mumbaki* is not merely a role acquired through training; it is considered an ordained calling by the gods. Some individuals are believed to possess an innate spiritual connection or are chosen through signs, dreams, or divine intervention. A deep sense of responsibility accompanies this role, as the *mumbaki* must uphold the traditions of their ancestors, guide the community in times of crisis, and maintain the sacred balance between the spiritual and physical worlds.

Their responsibilities extend beyond rituals for rice cultivation to healing ceremo-

nies, conflict mediation, and major life events such as birth, marriage, and death. The presence of a *mumbaki* in these ceremonies affirms the interconnectedness of the Ifugao people with their ancestors and deities, reinforcing their cultural identity and the sacredness of their agricultural landscape.

With the dwindling number of *mumbaki*, Ifugao communities face the challenge of preserving this vital institution. Efforts to document their chants and rituals, encourage younger generations to apprentice under elders, and integrate *baki* knowledge into cultural revitalization programs are essential in ensuring that the role of the *mumbaki* continues for future generations.

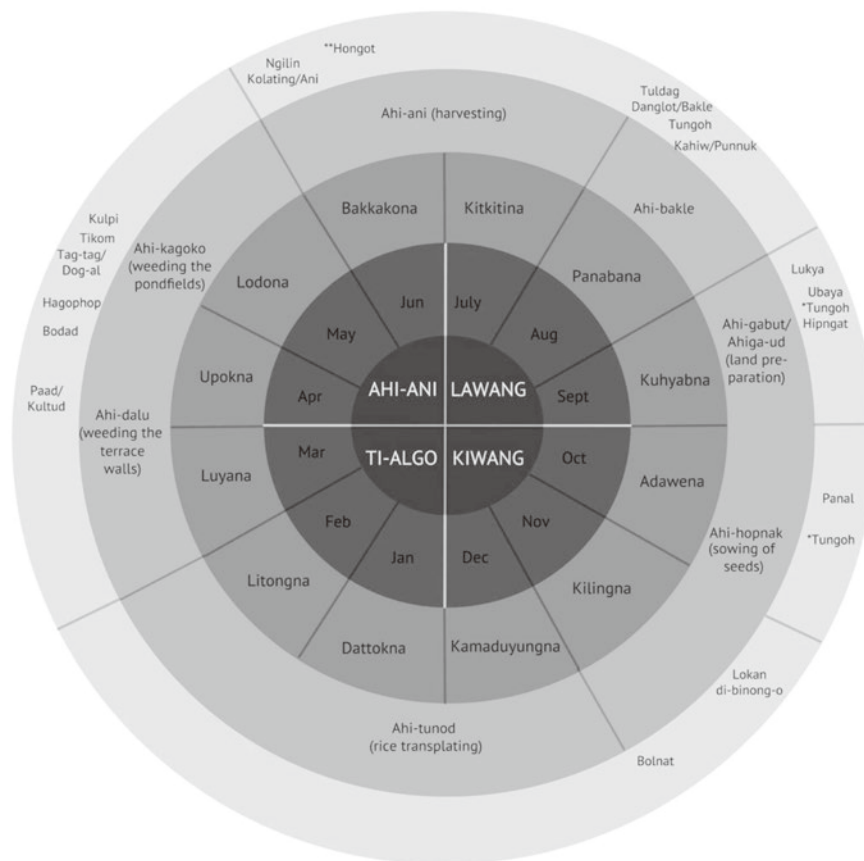
Key Features of the *Baki* Religion:

1. **Pantheon of Deities and Spirits:** The Ifugaos believe in a complex hierarchy of superior gods, spirits, deities associated with natural elements, and spirits of ancestors who continue to influence the living.
2. **Rituals and Offerings:** The *baki* rituals are sacred ceremonies performed by *mumbaki* (shamans or ritual specialists) to seek divine favor, heal the sick, ensure agricultural prosperity, or ward off misfortune. These rituals involve chants, animal sacrifices (such as chickens or pigs), and the invocation of spirits.
3. **Agricultural and Life-Cycle Ties:** Many *baki* rituals are directly tied to the rice cycle, including planting, harvesting, and thanksgiving ceremonies. Others mark important life events such as birth, marriage, and death.
4. **Oral Tradition:** The *baki* system is passed down orally through generations. It includes epic stories, prayers, and chants that preserve Ifugao history, ethics, and cosmology.
5. **Challenges and Decline:** With the spread of Christianity and modernization, the practice of *baki* has significantly declined. Many Ifugao people, especially younger generations, have converted to Christianity, leading to reduced participation in traditional rituals. However, efforts continue to preserve and document *baki* as part of Ifugao cultural heritage.

## RICE RITUALS ACROSS THE AGRICULTURAL CYCLE

The rice cultivation process in Ifugao is marked by a series of rituals, each corresponding to a specific phase (Figure 1):

1. **Terraces Construction:** Rituals ensure the harmonious relationship between humans and nature in shaping the landscape.
2. **Sowing of Seeds:** Invocations and offerings are made to promote fertility.
3. **Transplanting:** Rituals seek blessings for the healthy growth of rice plants.
4. **Weeding:** Rituals are performed to protect crops from harm, man-made or natural.
5. **Pest Protection:** Offerings are made to safeguard the plants against pests.



**Figure 1** The Traditional Ifugao agricultural calendar  
(Outermost ring indicates the rice rituals corresponding to the work phase in the 2nd ring; 3rd ring indicates the Ifugao month, 4th ring Gregorian months, 5th the four seasons of the agricultural year (Source: SITMo))

6. **Harvest:** Gratitude is expressed to the gods and spirits for a successful harvest.
7. **Post-Harvest:** Rituals mark the storage and celebration of the rice yield.

Each ritual involves the invocation of specific gods or groups of gods from the Ifugao pantheon, who are considered superior entities. Sacrifices, often involving pigs or chickens, are made to honor these deities.

### Rice Rituals and Related Practices as Repositories of Intangible Heritage

The rice rituals of the Ifugao are not merely agricultural practices but are expressions of cultural identity. Notably, the *Hudhud* Chants and the *Punnuk* are used below as examples being UNESCO-listed attributes of the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras:

1. The *Hudhud* is not by itself a ritual but a component of the planting and harvest rituals. It is an epic chant of the Ifugao, recounting the legendary exploits of culture heroes and performed during significant life events such



as rice planting and harvest, rites of passage, and funerals. Predominantly chanted by the *munhaw-e* (lead singer) with a chorus (*mun-abbuy*), *Hudhud* follows a call-and-response style and features themes of love, marriage, wealth, and Ifugao virtues. Though primarily romantic in nature, some versions, like the *Hudhud di Kolot* for a boy's first haircut, are strictly ceremonial. Rich in figurative language and poetic devices, these chants emphasize customary laws, religious beliefs, and the significance of rice cultivation. Traditionally performed by elderly women, the *Hudhud* is at risk due to the decline in manual rice farming, religious conversion, and the decreasing number of narrators. Recognized by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001 and inscribed on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2008, its survival depends on revitalization efforts to engage younger generations and sustain the oral tradition.

2. *Punnuk* is a traditional post-harvest ritual performed exclusively by the Ifugaos of Hapao in Hungduan, Ifugao. Recognized by UNESCO under the Tugging Ritual category (along with other tugging rituals in Southeast Asia) in its Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Punnuk* marks the successful completion of the agricultural cycle and reinforces communal harmony. *Punnuk* is a symbolic water tugging contest involving three communities—Hapao, Baang, and Nungulunan—who engage in a spirited competition along the Hapao River. Participants pull on a long, vine-like rope called *pakid* while attempting to wrest control of a carved wooden effigy known as *kina-ag*, which represents fertility and abundance. The playful struggle in the river is believed to bring good fortune and cleanse the participants of misfortunes from the previous planting season.

Despite its deep cultural significance, *Punnuk* is under threat due to the dwindling number of *mumbaki* (ritual specialists) in Hapao who traditionally oversee and officiate the ceremony. As modernization and religious conversion diminish the role of indigenous spiritual leaders, fewer individuals possess the knowledge and authority to conduct *Punnuk* with its full ritual depth. Furthermore, the ritual's increasing revival for tourism purposes presents challenges to its cultural integrity and authenticity. While tourism initiatives provide economic incentives and raise awareness of Ifugao traditions, they also risk transforming *Punnuk* into a staged performance rather than a sacred communal event.

For *Punnuk* to remain a living tradition rather than a cultural showcase, efforts must balance its revitalization with the preservation of its original meaning. This requires strengthening the role of the *mumbaki*, fostering intergenerational knowledge transfer, and ensuring that community-led initiatives maintain the ritual's spiritual and social essence beyond its appeal to visitors.

Several other rice rituals accompany the different phases of the agricultural seasons of the terraces including the *Kolating* or harvest feast, the *Kulpi* or Field Holiday observed after all fields have been planted, the *Bakle* or post-harvest thanksgiving ritual.

## THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF THE IFUGAO RICE TERRACES AND ITS IMPACT ON INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Ifugao Rice Terraces, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995, are not just a remarkable feat of engineering but also a living cultural landscape deeply intertwined with Ifugao intangible cultural heritage (ICH), particularly rice rituals. However, their conservation faces significant challenges that threaten both their physical integrity and the survival of traditional knowledge and practices.

- **Abandonment and Neglect:** Urban migration and shifting economic priorities have led to the abandonment of many terraces, causing their gradual degradation. As younger generations move to cities for education and employment, fewer individuals remain to practise traditional terrace farming. This not only results in physical deterioration—collapsed terrace walls, overgrown fields, and disrupted irrigation—but also leads to the loss of indigenous knowledge on terrace construction, maintenance, and associated rituals such as *baki* (prayer offerings) and *punnuk* (post-harvest celebrations). Without active engagement in these agricultural traditions, the transmission of oral histories, spiritual connections, and customary laws linked to the terraces weakens over time.
- **Impact of Modern Agricultural Practices:** The introduction of high-yield rice varieties, chemical fertilizers, and mechanized farming threatens the sustainability of traditional Ifugao agriculture. While these modern practices promise increased productivity, they disrupt the natural balance of the terraces' centuries-old hydrological system, degrade soil fertility, and replace indigenous rice species that hold cultural and ritual significance. Traditional rice farming is deeply linked to Ifugao belief systems, where each stage of cultivation—from land preparation to harvest—is accompanied by sacred rituals led by *mumbaki* (ritual specialists). The erosion of traditional farming methods thus diminishes the necessity for these rituals, accelerating the decline of Ifugao ICH.
- **Climate Shifts and Natural Hazards:** The Ifugao Rice Terraces are highly susceptible to the effects of climate change, including erratic weather patterns, prolonged droughts, and extreme rainfall. Excessive rain leads to landslides, soil erosion, and the collapse of terrace walls, while droughts cause water shortages, disrupt the irrigation system, and reduce rice yields. These environmental challenges make traditional farming increasingly difficult, discouraging younger generations from continuing the practice. Furthermore, climate-induced damage to the terraces directly affects ritual continuity—many ceremonies are tied to specific agricultural cycles, and when farming is disrupted, so too are the

sacred rites that sustain Ifugao spiritual and communal life.

- **Cultural Shifts and Changing Values:** Urbanization and globalization have contributed to a weakening of cultural ties between younger Ifugaos and their ancestral lands. The communal labor system that once maintained the terraces is fading, as fewer people see value in subsistence farming compared to modern economic opportunities. This cultural shift erodes the social cohesion necessary for collective terrace upkeep, and by extension, the rice rituals that reinforce Ifugao identity and spirituality. With fewer practitioners engaged in traditional agriculture, ICH such as *hudhud* (epic chants sung during harvest), *kolating* or the harvest ritual itself are performed less frequently, making them vulnerable to extinction.

## **BROADER IMPLICATIONS FOR IFUGAO ICH**

Studies emphasize that the sustainability of the rice terraces relies on intricate hydrological and ecological balances, maintained through indigenous knowledge passed down through generations. When these balances are disrupted—whether by abandonment, climate change, or modern agricultural shifts—the terraces’ tangible structure and the ICH they embody are simultaneously placed at risk. The decline of traditional farming weakens the collective memory and spiritual connections that define Ifugao identity.

To ensure the survival of both the terraces and the rituals linked to them, conservation strategies must integrate environmental restoration, cultural revitalization, and economic sustainability. Strengthening intergenerational knowledge transfer, supporting *mumbaki* and other tradition-bearers, and fostering local pride in Ifugao heritage are essential steps in preserving the interconnected legacy of the Ifugao Rice Terraces and their ICH.

## **Challenges to the Continuity of Ifugao ICH**

The continuity of Ifugao ICH, particularly rice rituals, is under significant threat due to various socio-cultural, economic, and environmental challenges. These challenges, while distinct, are interconnected, reinforcing the decline of traditional practices and knowledge systems.

### ***Loss of Indigenous Knowledge: A Declining Cultural Transmission***

The diminishing interest among younger generations in Ifugao rice rituals signals a weakening transmission of indigenous knowledge. Migration for education and employment, coupled with the increasing influence of modern lifestyles, has reduced opportunities for intergenerational learning. Traditionally, knowledge was passed down through participation in rituals and oral storytelling, but with fewer young Ifugaos engaging in agricultural work, exposure to these practices has dras-

tically decreased. Without active practitioners, the intricate chants, ceremonies, and spiritual meanings behind the rituals risk fading into obscurity. This cultural disconnection highlights the urgent need for educational and community initiatives that encourage youth participation and engagement with their ancestral heritage.

### ***Changes in Agricultural Practices: Disrupting the Ritual-Environment Nexus***

Traditional Ifugao agriculture is deeply intertwined with spiritual beliefs and ritualistic practices, yet modern advancements have disrupted this relationship. The introduction of high-yield rice varieties, chemical fertilizers, and mechanized farming methods has altered the traditional rice cycle, reducing the reliance on rituals that once ensured agricultural success. While these changes increase efficiency and productivity, they simultaneously erode the cultural significance of farming, shifting the focus from community-driven, spiritually guided agriculture to market-oriented production. This transition challenges the continuity of Ifugao rice rituals, as they become increasingly detached from the evolving agricultural landscape.

### ***Aging Mumbaki: The Disappearance of Ritual Specialists***

The role of the *mumbaki* (ritual specialists) is crucial to the performance and preservation of rice rituals. However, as the current generation of *mumbaki* ages, there is a significant decline in the number of apprentices willing to take on this sacred role. The reluctance of younger Ifugaos to become *mumbaki* can be attributed to multiple factors, including religious shifts (particularly the spread of Christianity, which discourages indigenous spiritual practices), the demanding nature of training, and the perception that such roles hold less relevance in modern society. Without new ritual specialists to carry forward the knowledge and spiritual leadership, the continuity of *baki* rituals is at serious risk.

### ***Climate Change: An Existential Threat to Rituals and Landscape***

Perhaps the most pressing and uncontrollable challenge is climate change, which directly affects both the rice terraces and the agricultural cycles that the rituals are meant to uphold. Unpredictable weather patterns have disrupted planting and harvesting schedules, weakening the effectiveness of rituals that rely on stable agricultural rhythms. Excessive rainfall leads to landslides, soil erosion, and terrace collapses, while prolonged droughts cause soil degradation and water shortages, making rice cultivation increasingly difficult. As the terraces deteriorate, the rituals associated with their upkeep and fertility lose their physical and cultural foundation. Climate change thus exacerbates existing threats, accelerating the erosion of Ifugao intangible heritage.

## Analysis of Issues

The threats to the continuity of rice rituals and the Ifugao Rice Terraces can be examined through ecological, sociocultural, and economic perspectives. Understanding these challenges in a logical and chronological manner allows for a clearer grasp of their interconnections and the need for holistic conservation strategies.

1. **Ecological Degradation:** The introduction of modern agricultural methods, such as monoculture and chemical-based farming, has disrupted the ecological balance that traditional techniques once maintained. Historically, Ifugao farming relied on diversified planting, natural irrigation systems, and organic fertilizers that ensured long-term soil fertility and water sustainability. However, contemporary practices have led to biodiversity loss, soil depletion, and reduced water retention in the terraces. Over time, these ecological disturbances have made it more difficult for farmers to sustain their traditional farming methods, setting off a chain reaction that impacts cultural and economic aspects of the terraces.
2. **Sociocultural Dynamics:** As ecological degradation makes traditional farming less viable, sociocultural shifts further exacerbate the problem. Urbanization, migration, and globalization have led to a weakening of cultural identity among younger generations. Surveys indicate a declining interest in traditional practices, with only a small percentage of youth engaging in terrace farming or participating in rice rituals. Additionally, modernization has altered lifestyle preferences, encouraging younger Ifugaos to seek alternative livelihoods in urban centers rather than continuing ancestral traditions. This generational gap results in a loss of oral traditions, ritual practices, and indigenous knowledge, making cultural preservation increasingly challenging.
3. **Economic Pressures:** The culmination of ecological degradation and sociocultural shifts has resulted in significant economic pressures. Traditional farming in the terraces is becoming less financially viable due to reduced yields, high maintenance costs, and market competition from commercial agricultural industries. Younger generations, seeing limited economic prospects in rice terrace farming, opt for employment in more lucrative sectors. Without sufficient financial incentives or support systems, many Ifugao families struggle to justify the labor-intensive upkeep of the terraces, leading to neglect and abandonment.

In summary, ecological degradation disrupts the environmental foundation of the terraces, which in turn influences sociocultural shifts by discouraging youth participation in traditional practices. These changes collectively contribute to economic difficulties that make terrace farming and ritual observances increas-

ingly unsustainable. Addressing these interconnected challenges requires an integrated conservation approach that considers environmental sustainability, cultural revitalization, and economic incentives to ensure the long-term survival of the Ifugao Rice Terraces and their associated rituals.

### **The Need for Adaptive Strategies**

The Ifugao rice rituals are not just agricultural customs but integral components of Ifugao identity and cultural heritage. Addressing the challenges to their continuity requires a multifaceted approach that balances tradition with modernity. Revitalization efforts could include:

- Strengthening indigenous education programs to reintegrate traditional knowledge into formal and informal learning systems.
- Encouraging sustainable agricultural practices that align with both ecological preservation and cultural continuity.
- Supporting the transmission of ritual knowledge by creating community-led initiatives that engage younger generations in *baki* practices.
- Implementing climate adaptation strategies to protect the physical integrity of the rice terraces, ensuring that their associated rituals remain viable.

By taking these steps, the Ifugao people can work toward safeguarding their intangible heritage while adapting to the realities of the modern world. The survival of these rice rituals is not just a cultural necessity but a testament to the resilience of indigenous traditions in the face of change.

## **COMMUNITY VALUES AS FOUNDATION OF THE RICE TERRACES AND ITS ASSOCIATED ICH**

The Ifugao Rice Terraces are an exceptional example of a living cultural landscape that embodies both tangible and intangible heritage. Their conservation must go beyond physical restoration to include the cultural values, knowledge systems, and communal traditions that sustain them. A values-based assessment of the terraces highlights four key aspects: *Tawid* (Heritage Value), *Tanud* (Economic Value), *Ki-ohaan* (Community Solidarity Value), and *Tugun* (Indigenous Knowledge Value). Each of these plays a crucial role in Ifugao ICH conservation, particularly in preserving traditional rice rituals. Just as UNESCO requires the presence of Outstanding Universal Values (OUV) for World Heritage properties, these community values as identified by the Ifugao communities themselves (Martin et al., 2024) are the underlying reasons in the continued maintenance of the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras.

These four interconnected values are fundamental to the enduring existence of the terraces and their associated cultural practices, which have persisted for over

four centuries. The continued survival of the terraces depends on the preservation of these values. If these cultural values are lost, the terraces may face neglect, leading to their eventual disappearance and abandonment. Thus, safeguarding these values is essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Ifugao Rice Terraces and its intangible components.

### ***Tawid* (Heritage Value) and the Preservation of Rice Rituals**

*Tawid* signifies the deep ancestral and cultural connection the Ifugao people have with their rice terraces and everything it represents. A legacy, something inherited and something to pass down to the next generations. *Tawid* captures this moral sense of intergenerational responsibility. The terraces are not just agricultural structures but also sacred spaces where rice rituals such as the *baki* are performed to honor ancestral spirits and deities. These rituals are integral to Ifugao identity, reinforcing their connection to the land and their ancestors. To ensure the continuity of *Tawid*, conservation efforts must prioritize the documentation and transmission of rice rituals through cultural education, community-led ritual reenactments, and local policy support that integrates traditional ceremonies into official heritage protection programs.

### ***Tanud* (Economic Value) and the Role of Rituals in Sustainable Agriculture**

*Tanud* underscores the economic importance of the terraces, both in traditional agricultural practices and modern tourism. The cultivation of heirloom rice varieties is deeply intertwined with ritualistic offerings and ceremonies that guide planting and harvesting cycles. These rituals not only ensure agricultural sustainability but also reinforce spiritual and ecological balance. As tourism increasingly contributes to the Ifugao economy, integrating rice rituals into sustainable tourism models—such as eco-cultural tours and heritage festivals—can generate economic benefits while safeguarding ICH. Policies that promote ethical tourism and provide incentives for local communities to preserve rice rituals can help balance economic growth with cultural sustainability.

### ***Ki-ohaan* (Community Solidarity Value) and the Social Significance of Rice Rituals**

The communal labor system is central to the maintenance of the rice terraces, with rice rituals serving as vital social glue. Ceremonies such as *punnuk*, a post-harvest thanksgiving ritual, reinforce social cohesion and collective identity. However, changing social dynamics threaten the continuity of these traditions. Conservation strategies should focus on revitalizing these communal rice rituals by integrating them into educational programs, local festivals, and governance structures. Encouraging youth participation through storytelling, hands-on ritual



demonstrations, and mentorship programs with elders can sustain the communal values embedded in these traditions.

### ***Tugun* (Indigenous Knowledge Value) and the Ritualistic Transmission of Agricultural Wisdom**

*Tugun* refers to the indigenous knowledge system that governs the terraces' construction, maintenance, and environmental harmony, including the sacred rituals associated with planting, water management, and harvest celebrations. These rituals embody Ifugao cosmology and ecological wisdom, serving as an essential means of transmitting agricultural knowledge. However, modernization and external influences pose threats to their survival. To preserve *Tugun*, conservation efforts should include community-driven documentation of rice rituals, integration of indigenous ecological practices into school curricula, and institutional recognition of ritual knowledge as a fundamental aspect of sustainable agriculture. Collaborations with academic institutions and policymakers can help formalize the protection and continuation of these rituals.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Ifugao Rice Terraces are more than just a landscape—they represent a dynamic and evolving cultural heritage system. Effective conservation must integrate physical restoration with the safeguarding of rice rituals that sustain their meaning and function. Community participation, strong policy support, and inter-generational transmission of these rituals are essential for ensuring that *Tawid*, *Tanud*, *Ki-oaan*, and *Tugun* continue to define the Ifugao identity. By fostering sustainable economic practices, reinforcing communal traditions, and institutionalizing indigenous knowledge through sacred rituals, the Ifugao people can maintain the resilience and cultural richness of their heritage in the face of modern challenges.

However, the continued existence of these terraces and their associated ICH faces significant threats, including ecological degradation, sociocultural shifts, and economic pressures. The introduction of modern agricultural practices, urban migration, and declining interest in traditional customs have contributed to the erosion of indigenous knowledge and rituals. While conservation efforts have been undertaken, including UNESCO recognition and community-led initiatives, these challenges necessitate a more holistic and sustained approach.

To ensure the long-term survival of the terraces and their associated ICH, conservation strategies must emphasize ecological sustainability, cultural revitalization, and economic viability. Strengthening local governance structures, integrating heritage education into school curricula, and promoting sustainable tourism

models can create an environment where rice rituals and traditional knowledge continue to thrive. Additionally, financial incentives and policy frameworks should support traditional terrace farming, making it a viable livelihood for future generations. By addressing these issues with a multi-faceted approach, the Ifugao people, along with policymakers and cultural advocates, can safeguard the terraces not only as an agricultural marvel but as a living testimony to their rich heritage and enduring identity.

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# **FUSION OF ‘INTANGIBLE’ AND ‘TANGIBLE’: ‘CULTURAL SPACE (INTANGIBLE HERITAGE)’ AND ‘CULTURAL LANDSCAPE (WORLD HERITAGE)’**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper approaches the theme the fusion of intangible and tangible from two aspects: the ‘cultural space’ defined in the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the ‘cultural landscape’ defined under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention.

This paper consists of four pillars as follows:

1. UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention and ‘cultural space’
2. World Heritage Convention and ‘cultural landscape’
3. Safeguarding the intangible elements of a place
4. Japanese World Heritage properties and their protection of intangible values as ‘cultural landscapes’

The first and second pillars are related to the ‘cultural space’ and ‘cultural landscape.’ Based on these two points, the third pillar is about the intangible elements and meanings of the place. It’s about how to transmit the elements and meanings of the place of human activities from generation to generation. The fourth pillar deals with how the intangible element of the place is protected in Japan’s World Cultural Heritage property, especially the case inscribed on the World Heritage List from the perspective of ‘cultural landscape.’

## **‘CULTURAL SPACE’ UNDER THE CONVENTION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Article 1 of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage defines the purpose of the Convention. Its first objective as listed on Item a. is to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage. It is often said that the peculiarity in this Article is that it uses the term ‘safeguard’ instead of the term ‘protection’ as

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used in the World Heritage Convention. 'Protection' means 'maintaining stability' of the heritage property, while 'safeguard' means 'ensuring the viability' of the intangible heritage. The difference between these two terms is based on the fact that intangible cultural heritage is mainly focused on the aspect of living heritage. It should be made clear that there is a difference in the way of thinking about the transmission of heritage itself between the tangible part, which is mainly covered by the World Heritage Convention, and the intangible part of the heritage, which is mainly covered by the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Article 2 of the Convention defines intangible cultural heritage as follows:

*For the purposes of this Convention,*

- 1. The intangible cultural heritage means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. (omitted below)*
- 2. The intangible cultural heritage, as defined in paragraph 1 above, is manifested inter alia in the following domains:*
  - a. oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;*
  - b. performing arts;*
  - c. social practices, rituals and festive events;*
  - d. knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;*
  - e. traditional craftsmanship.*

The definition consists of a two-tiered structure, with the first section providing a comprehensive definition and the second section providing specific examples. It is particularly noteworthy here that the comprehensive definition in the first section includes 'cultural space.' Intangible cultural heritage is a wide range of intangible aspects of human activities, such as oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social customs, ceremonies and festivals, knowledge and customs about nature and all things, and traditional craftsmanship. However, the place or space in which they are performed is also in view. This is important because it shows that human activities are inseparable from places or spaces.

The 'cultural space' is a place that has been created or recognized by human activities. 'Cultural space' under the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is a place or space in which human activities unfold, and the size and scale of these spaces differ depending on the nature of the human activities. It could be a square in a city or a village where performing arts and festivals are held. Also, it could widely include a natural environment such as farmland, forests, and grass fields where people use for their living.

**Table 1** Criteria for the justification of Outstanding Universal Value (Cultural Heritage)

i.	represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
ii.	exhibit an important interchange of human values over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design;
iii.	bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;
iv.	be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;
v.	be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land use, or sea use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;
vi.	be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria)

What about the World Heritage Convention? Table 1 shows six Criteria relevant for justification of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of cultural heritage properties.

A closer look at these criteria reveals that several terms related to human activities can be seen in each of these cultural criteria. For example, Criterion (ii) requires exhibiting an important interchange of human values, and Criterion (iii) requires being unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization. Criterion (v) includes traditional human settlement and land-use, which expresses human interaction with the environment. In addition, Criterion (vi) goes far beyond the intangibles and requires direct or tangible associations with events, living traditions, and artistic and literary works that have outstanding universal significance.

The World Heritage Convention is a system that justifies the OUV of the tangible parts of heritage property, but it also takes into account the intangible parts such as human activities, events, ideas, beliefs, and art that are reflected in them.

Table 2 is a list of intangible cultural heritage inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, with a strong awareness of the connection with a space or place.

In 2006, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage came into force, replacing the previous Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Then, all the intangible cultural heritage that had been registered under the Proclamation was inherited as elements under the List of the Convention in 2008. From this table, you can see that many of them were registered as 'cultural spaces.' However, the number of intangible cultural heritage registered as 'cultural space' has decreased since then.

**Table 2** Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity connected with a space or place

No.	Year	Name of the element	State Party	Notes*
1	2008	Cultural space and oral culture of the Semeiskie	Russian Federation	
2	2008	Cultural space of Boysun District	Uzbekistan	
3	2008	Cultural space of Palenque de San Basilio	Colombia	
4	2008	Cultural space of Sosso-Bala	Guiana	
5	2008	Cultural space of the Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit of the Congos of Villa Mella	Dominican Republic	
6	2008	Cultural space of the Yaaral and Degal	Mali	
7	2008	Cultural space of Jamaâ El-Fna Square	Morocco	WH
8	2008	Space of gong culture	Viet Nam	
9	2008	Hudhud chants of the Ifugao	Philippines	WH
10	2008	Kihnu cultural space	Estonia	
11	2008	Cultural space of the Bedu in Petra and Wadi Rum	Jordan	WH
12	2008	Royal ancestral ritual in the Jongmyo shrine and its music	Republic of Korea	WH
13	2012	Nachi no Dengaku, a religious performing art held at the Nachi fire festival	Japan	WH (CL)
14	2018	Nativity scene (szopka) tradition in Krakow	Poland	WH
15	2020	Pilgrimage to the St. Thaddeus Apostle Monastery	Iran, Armenia	WH

\* Marked with 'WH' are the World Cultural Heritage properties and 'CL' is Cultural Landscape.

As many intangible cultural heritages other than performances in theatres are often closely related to the place in which they are performed, it might have been considered that there is no need to add the word 'cultural space' to the name of the inscribed heritage element. It may also be considered that the evaluation of the place where intangible cultural heritage has been handed down has shifted to the perspective of World Cultural Heritage.

Let's look at some examples.

### **Medina of Marrakech (Morocco)**

'Medina of Marrakech' of Morocco located in the northwestern part of the African Continent, is a city where cultural traditions common to Morocco intersect, and the entire city is inscribed on the World Heritage List. On the other hand, Jamaâ El-Fna Square, located in the center of Marrakech, is also a 'cultural space' inscribed on the List of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, where many street performers gather and musical, religious and artistic expressions are accumulated. In this case, both the intangible element of human activities and the

tangible element of the square where they are performed were evaluated as 'cultural space' under the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. And the square, which is a 'cultural space,' is also the core of the city of Marrakech, which has been inscribed as a cultural property on the World Heritage List. This is an example of approaching both the human activity that should be passed down to the next generation and the place where it takes place, from both the intangible and tangible cultural heritage Conventions.

### **Kihnu Cultural Space (Estonia)**

Estonia, which faces the Baltic Sea, has islands called Kihnu and Mania, with a community consisting of 600 people. The cultural expressions and agricultural traditions of the community have been kept alive for centuries, mainly through the women of the island. The most iconic of these is the wool handicraft worn by the women, whose designs featuring intricate embroidery are rooted in ancient legends.

'Kihnu cultural space' is also striking in terms of the interrelationship between the rich cultural and natural heritage represented by the islands as a whole. Both islands have preserved their characteristic landscapes of grasslands, pine forests and coastal sands in relatively good condition to this day. This heritage is closely related to the concept of 'cultural landscape,' combined works of nature and of man, defined under the World Heritage Convention. In this way, we can see that the 'cultural space' of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage has characteristics in common with the 'cultural landscape' of the World Heritage Convention.

### **Jongmyo Shrine (Republic of Korea)**

'Jongmyo Shrine' in Seoul, Republic of Korea, is the setting for Confucian ritual dedicated to the ancestors of the Joseon dynasty (14th to the 19th century) that encompasses song, dance and music that have been handed down by the descendants of the Korean royal family. The buildings and the courtyard surrounded by them are inscribed on the World Heritage List. On the other hand, performing arts related to rituals and music are inscribed on the List of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. Although not recognized as a 'cultural space' under the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, the OUV of the place or space where human activities are carried out is justified under the World Heritage Convention.



## **Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range (Japan)**

There are cases where places or spaces of human activities are valued as ‘cultural landscapes.’ Japan’s ‘Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range’ was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2004 as a ‘cultural landscape.’ The scope of this World Heritage property has spread widely over the Kii Mountain Range covering from the southern part of Nara Prefecture to the neighboring prefectures of Wakayama and Mie.

Among the shrines and their compounds that consist of ‘Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range,’ *dengaku* performed at the shrine compound of Kumano Nachi Taisha Shrine is inscribed on the List of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. It is a Japanese folk performing art that has a deep connection with the Kumano Sanzan, one of the sacred sites in the Kii Mountain Range, and has been handed down against the backdrop of the belief in the Kumano Sanzan and its shrines. In this example, the intangible element of traditional performing arts was inscribed as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the shrine’s architecture and compound were registered as attributes of the ‘cultural landscape’ of the World Cultural Heritage property.

I would like to explain in a little more detail about the World Heritage Property, ‘Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range.’

## **SACRED SITES AND PILGRIMAGE ROUTES IN THE KII MOUNTAIN RANGE**

The Kii Peninsula of Honshu Island, which is roughly in the center of the Japanese archipelago, is a mountainous area covered with deep forests and has long been revered as a sacred area. It consists of three sacred sites, Yoshino/Omine, Koya-san, and Kumano Sanzan, and the pilgrimage routes that connect them. Since this area entirely covered with deep mountains and forests became a sacred place for ancient Japanese Shintoism, Buddhism introduced from the Chinese Continent, and *Shugendo*, a fusion of the Shintoism and Buddhism, it was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2004 as a ‘cultural landscape’ deeply associated with outstanding universal beliefs and thoughts.

In the Kii Mountain Range, which has long been a sacred place, the Yoshino and Omine areas were first developed as training grounds for *Shugendo* in the 7th and 8th centuries. From the 9th to 10th century, the high priest Kukai opened an esoteric Buddhism training spot on the top of Mt. Koya-san. Then, from the 11th to the 14th century, the Kumano Sanzan area was developed as a sacred place for the aristocrats living in Kyoto. From the 15th century onwards, this area was further developed into a large sacred site involving commoners of all ages.



**Figure 1** Gotobiki-iwa within the Kamikura-jinja Shrine Compound (©M. Motonaka, 2008)

The small shrine building of Kamikura-jinja exists on the mountain top as an enclave of the shrine compound, and there is a huge rock called Gotobiki-iwa Rock within this shrine compound, which is the object of worship (Figure 1). Before Buddhism was introduced to Japan, it was believed that gods descended on the natural mountain, river, spring, huge rock, large old tree, and deep forest, and these natural features and areas were the objects of worship. Gotobiki-iwa Rock of Kamikura-jinja is positioned as a component part of the World Cultural Heritage because it is important as a place that represents the form of ancient Japanese nature worship.

In early February every year, the residents of the town at the foot of the mountain hold up torches and rush down the steps of the approach from the Gotobiki-iwa Rock at the top of the mountain for the grand Otou Matsuri. In the evening, young people dressed in white robes gather in the town and aim for the shrine building and Gotobiki-iwa Rock at the summit of the mountain. The origin of this festival is said to go back to the 7th century, and it is said that it evolved into the current form by the local residents after the 17th century. The Otou Matsuri is a festival of faith rooted in the local community, so it is designated and protected as an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property by the National Government. Since this festival expresses the close relationship between the practice of faith in the Kii Mountain Range after 17th century and its place or space, we can consider that both have important significance related to the OUV of the World Cultural Heritage property.

Numerous traditional Shinto rituals have been performed in the mountainous areas and pilgrimage routes that make up the World Heritage Property, consisting of huge rocks, rivers, and waterfalls that are objects of worship. All these human

activities have evolved in close association with natural objects and natural areas. In addition to those that have been handed down as activities of the Shinto rituals performed in the shrine compounds, there are also those that have been protected as intangible folk cultural properties under the relevant domestic legislative systems and have been supported by the residents. These human activities should be evaluated as elements of the 'cultural landscape' that expresses the spiritual relationship between nature and humans in the Kii Mountain Range.

One of the three sacred sites in the Kii mountain range, Yoshino/Omine, has a large Shugendo temple called Kinpusen-ji. At the main Buddhist hall of this temple, Zao-do, a *Renge-e* ceremony to offer lotus flowers is held on July 7th every year. This ceremony is followed by the Frog Jumping Ceremony, which is based on the legend of a man who repented of his wrongdoings and was turned back into a human from his green frog form. This humorous ritual is handed down by temple monks and local preservation society members, and is designated as a Nara Prefectural Intangible Folk Cultural Property.

*Yamabushi*, practitioners of *Shugendo*, collect lotus flowers from the pond that the founder of Shugendo, En-no-Ozunu, used for his first bath and carry them to the Kinpusen-ji Temple located on the top of Mt. Yoshino-yama. After the Frog Jumping Ceremony, *Yamabushi* carry the lotus flowers through the pilgrimage route of *Omine Okugakemichi*, which continues for about 80 kilometres from Mt. Yoshino-yama to Omimesan-ji temple on the top of Mt. Sanjou-ga-take of which altitude is 1,719 metres.

In this way, the lotus flowers are carried by *Yamabushi* to Mt. Sanjou-ga-take, a sacred mountain in the core of the Kii Mountain Range. It is no exaggeration to say that these series of events are intangible cultural heritage that has been handed down in the sacred Kii mountain range, along with the practice of *Shugendo* that continues today.

There exist three World Cultural Heritage properties in Nara Prefecture including 'Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range.' One of them is the 'Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara' inscribed in 1998. This World Heritage property consists of eight component parts in total, of which the Kasuga Taisha Shrine Compound and the Kasugayama Primeval Forest have the characteristics of 'cultural landscapes' that demonstrate the traditional nature worship of Japan.

## **'CULTURAL LANDSCAPE' UNDER THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION**

Table 3 shows the definition and three typologies of the World Heritage Cultural Landscape.

**Table 3** Three typologies of cultural landscape under the World Heritage Convention

**1. Landscape designed and created intentionally by people**

⇒landscape constructed for aesthetic reasons which are often (but not always) associated with religious or other monumental buildings and ensembles, such as a garden or parkland.

**2. Organically evolved landscape**

⇒a relict (or fossil) landscape in which an evolutionary process came to an end at some time in the past, such as a historical mining landscape.

⇒a continuing landscape which retains an active social role in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life, and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress, such as a rice terraced or vineyard landscape.

**3. Associative cultural landscape**

⇒landscape justifiable by virtue of the powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations of the natural element rather than material cultural evidence, which may be insignificant or even absent, such as sacred mountains.

According to the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, 'cultural landscapes' inscribed on the World Heritage List are cultural properties and represent the combined works of nature and of man as designated in Article 1 of the Convention, and are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal.

Type 1 is a landscape designed and created intentionally by people, which meets to a garden or parkland. Type 2 is an organically evolved landscape, which meets to a relict landscape related to historical mining or a continuing landscape such as rice-terraces or vineyards. Type 3 is an associative cultural landscape justifiable by virtue of the powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations of the natural element rather than material cultural evidence, which meets to a sacred mountain revered by the people.

In other words, 'cultural landscape' can be said to be a cultural heritage that expresses the physical and spiritual relationship between nature and humans.



**Figure 2** Yoshino-yama mountains covered with sacred cherry trees (©M. Motonaka, 2012)



Among them, sacred mountains, which are objects of Japanese faith, have historically been worshiped as the places of communication with the gods and Buddha, and the places of Shintoism and Buddhism (Figure 2).

‘Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range’ inscribed on the World Heritage List as a ‘cultural landscape,’ has been revered as sacred mountains associated with the belief in the gods and Buddhas for about 1,400 years since the 7th century, and related activities continues unbroken even now. The tangible aspects of sacred sites, pilgrimage routes and other places that are objects of worship, and the intangible aspects related to the activities of various traditional performing arts and Shinto rituals that have been undertaken there, are both incorporated into a ‘cultural landscape’ of Kii Mountain Range as a whole. It is inherited to this day by the local people.

The same can be said for the Kasuga Taisha Shrine Compound and the Kasugayama Primeval Forest of the ‘Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara’ (Figure 3). The five-storied pagoda of Kofuku-ji Temple can be found in the center behind the residential buildings. The mountain range behind is called Kasugayama, which has been the object of worship since ancient times. The area of the gentle cone-shaped hill just behind the five-storied pagoda of Kofuku-ji Temple is the Kasuga Taisha Shrine Compound. The whole mountain range behind the small cone-shaped hill is the Kasugayama Primeval Forest.



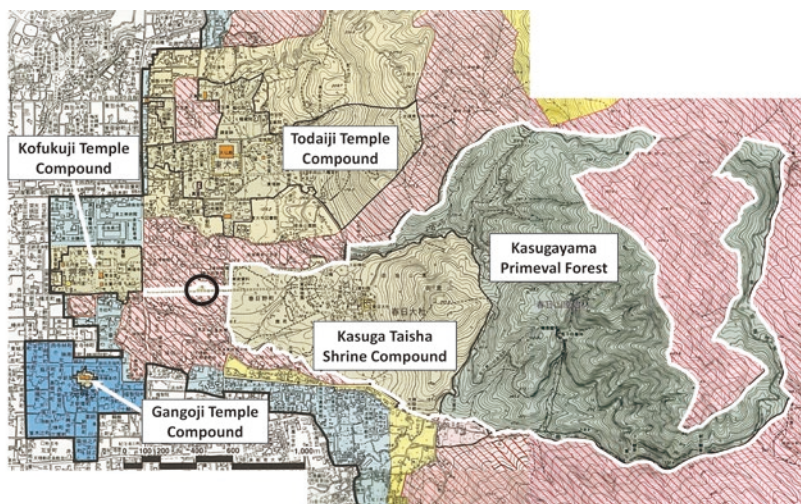
**Figure 3** Small cone-shaped hill within the Kasuga Taisha Shrine Compound and the Kasugayama Primeval Forest that spreads behind it (©M. Motonaka, 2022)



**Figure 4** Small cone-shaped hill within the Kasuga Taisha Shrine Compound looking east from the west (©M. Motonaka, 2013)

Figure 4 is a plan showing the area of the two component parts of the World Heritage property, the Kasuga Taisha Shrine Compound and the Kasugayama Primeval Forest. It shows the sacred mountains in the background of the lawn called Tobihino, where one of the Deer of Nara protected as a National Natural Monument eats grass. These are the elements of ‘cultural landscape’ related to Shintoism, the ancient Japanese religious belief.

Traditional Shinto performing arts are undertaken at the Kasuga Taisha Shrine, around the area circled on the map (Figure 5). The Kasuga Wakamiya On-Matsuri Festival designated as a National Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property is a



**Figure 5** Scope of the Kasuga Taisha Shrine Compound and the Kasugayama Primeval Forest (Source: Based on Nara City, 1999)



unique traditional Shinto ritual held in December every year. The local people who are the members of the Preservation Society are making efforts to pass the traditional Shinto ritual on to the next generation.

At each of the Buddhist temples that have been selected as component parts of



**Figure 6** Shuni-e torches at Todai-ji Temple's Nigatsu-do Hall (©M. Motonaka, 2024)



**Figure 7** One of the Shuni-e torches at Todai-ji Temple's Nigatsu-do Hall (©M. Motonaka, 2023)



the World Heritage property, there are unique Buddhist rituals performed by only temple priests as religious activities, rather than being directly involving local residents such as preservation groups.

*Shuni-e* is an event held at the Hall of Nigatsu-do of Todai-ji Temple from February to March every year (Figures 6 and 7). Although this event is not designated as a cultural property, it is widely known both domestically and internationally as a tradition that tells us the arrival of spring in Nara. This event expresses the relationship between the place or space of the Buddhist temple and the human activity of the Buddhist rituals that take place there. In this sense, this event has the same characteristics as the Kasuga Wakamiya On-matsuri Festival.

## CONCLUSION

In Japan, the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties was revised in 2020, allowing local governments to develop regional plans for the preservation and utilization of cultural properties existing in the region as a whole. The group of cultural properties targeted by the plan includes not only human activities such as performing arts and festivals that are designated and protected as intangible folk cultural properties, but also places or spaces such as buildings, ruins, landscapes, and so on, where these activities are performed. In developing the plan, not only local governments but also local residents, university researchers and experts are encouraged to participate. With the participation of various stakeholders, a group of intangible and tangible cultural heritage properties can be positioned within a story unique to the region, and a framework can be created for them to be passed on to the next generation as mutually connected heritage properties. It can be said that the stage for the fusion of the intangible and the tangible is being created.

From a global perspective, it is important to demonstrate a synergistic effect between the safeguarding measures required by the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the protection measures required by the World Heritage Convention. On the one hand, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is about honoring and inheriting human activities, and on the other, the World Heritage Convention is about preserving and utilizing the places where those activities are carried out. It is important to have the perspective of handing down people's activities and their places as inseparable to the next generation.

A great synergistic effect that connects activity and its place can be expected in the 'cultural space' under the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention and the 'cultural landscape' under the World Heritage Convention. However, it may not be

necessary to emphasize that the fusion of intangible and tangible is important, because approaches to these two aspects have been already achieved in each of the heritage fields through the efforts being made under the two Conventions.

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# ICH AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE



# EVALUATION AND PRESERVATION OF THE UJI-CHA TEA CULTURAL LANDSCAPE: HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO PRESERVE LANDSCAPES THAT ARE ADAPTABLE TO CHANGE?

SHIMIZU Shigeatsu<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses cultural landscapes, a type of cultural heritage that possesses characteristics of both intangible and tangible heritage. Intangible and tangible cultural heritage within cultural heritage studies have been discussed separately, partly due to the different academic backgrounds that have supported research on each type. However, these two heritages are inherently continuous. Understanding both heritages integrally will contribute to create a rich world for the preservation and utilization of cultural heritage in the future.

The author specializes in architecture, which is mostly a study of tangible cultural heritage. However, for the past decade or so, the author has been involved in research works for the practical preservation and utilization of cultural landscapes. Through the works, the author gained new perspectives on how to understand and preserve the architecture and cities, at the same time, on the potentiality to integrally understand the intangible and tangible aspects of cultural heritage.

Within cultural landscape research, the author has been particularly focusing on the research and consensus-building activities for the nomination of the Uji-cha tea production landscape (Shimizu et al., 2021). Uji-cha tea is produced in the Yamashiro region of Kyoto, a leading tea production area in Japan, as a World Heritage site. The cultural landscape of Uji-cha tea is a living landscape where the production has been continued until now, although it is changing minutely every day in people's livelihoods, selection of cultivated plants affected by condition of climate and land. World Heritage sites basically compose of heritage, mostly tangible heritage, rooted in the land, but the selection requires to register a changing heritage, while maintaining its identity, rather than registering invariable tangible heritage. This may be more similar to the concept of intangible heritage

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than tangible heritage.

Applying the case of Uji-cha tea's cultural landscape, this paper explores the question how we can integrate tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage.

## **CULTURAL LANDSCAPES IN CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Cultural heritage forms cultural landscapes. Cultural landscapes are a concept that has been basically discussed in the field of geography, and they have been regarded as landscapes that are created by human intervention in contrast to natural heritage. This concept was first introduced into the field of cultural heritage by UNESCO's World Heritage Convention, and it was defined as a new category of World Cultural Heritage in 1992. Currently, many cultural landscapes have been registered as World Cultural Heritage sites in various countries around the world. Cultural landscapes are valued and protected through various methods such as cultural heritage nomination and protection. A typical example is a cultural landscape formed in connection with agricultural landscapes that have been created by people working on the land and continuing production, such as vineyards, terraced rice fields, stepped fields, and tea fields.

In the World Heritage Convention, cultural landscapes are defined as follows. First, they are broadly defined as 'the combined works of nature and of man.' This means that they are not simply natural, nor they are solely the result of human intervention, but rather a combined work created by the interaction of nature and humans. This definition encompasses not only agricultural landscapes but also in a broader scope. The following three types are listed in the Convention:

1. The clearly defined landscape designed and created intentionally by man.  
ex) gardens or planned cities
2. The organically evolved landscapes: those that have survived or fossilized, and those that are continuing. The former are landscapes that were once formed but have lost their original maintenance systems, while the latter are still actively managed, such as through agriculture or forestry.  
ex) vineyards and terraced rice fields
3. The associative cultural landscape. It is associated with sacred natural elements, like mountains or rivers, or natural landscapes that have acquired cultural significance.  
ex) Uluru (Ayers Rock) in Australia

Since the introduction of this category, over 50 cultural landscapes have been

inscribed on the World Heritage List, and this number is expected to increase.

Within the framework of World Heritage, cultural landscapes are often considered a midpoint between cultural and natural heritage, and they possess quite unique characteristics as cultural heritage. Essentially, they are formed through the interaction between nature and humans, combining the characteristics of both heritages. Landscapes are not created overnight; it takes a long time to form them. Therefore, they are constantly and slowly changing. This is quite different from the traditional approach to preserving tangible heritage, which emphasizes the importance of maintaining the status quo. Landscapes are rarely composed of a single element but are typically made up of a variety of components. These components interact with each other in dynamic ways. These characteristics of cultural landscapes can be seen as a combination of the physical aspects of tangible heritage and the phenomenal aspects of intangible heritage.

## TEA CULTURAL LANDSCAPES IN THE WORLD

Tea has had a profound impact on world history and is deeply rooted in the cultures of many countries and regions. However, since tea cultural landscapes had not yet been inscribed on the World Heritage List, a thematic study on Asian tea cultural landscapes was conducted by ICOMOS to explore the possibility of such inscriptions. The results of this study were compiled in 2021. This book highlighted the cultural landscape of Uji-cha tea in Japan. Based on this study, the ancient tea forest of Pu'er in Jingmai Mountain of China, was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2023.

Tea is primarily grown in Asia, Oceania, Africa, and the Americas, with some production in Africa and Europe (Figure 1).

Most tea plantations are open-air, and traditional tea plantations are often found in hilly areas. This is likely because tea plants thrive in well-drained soil and prefer areas with good ventilation and temperature differences.

Tea originated in southwestern China, and China has a long history of tea cultivation (Figure 2). Representative teas in China are Pu'er tea in Yunnan Province, Oolong tea in Wuyi mountain of Fujian, or Longjing tea in the west lake of



**Figure 1** Tea producing countries in the world  
(Source: Durighello et al., 2021)





**Figure 2** Traditional tea producing regions in China (Source: Durighello et al., 2021)

Zhejiang. This paper shows the landscapes of Pu'er tea plantation and Longjing tea plantation which the author visited ever before.

The Jingmai Mountain in Yunnan Province, located in southwestern China, is a significant region that preserves the traditional production methods of Pu'er tea. Pu'er tea is a type of dark tea made by fermenting tea leaves. There are two main types: raw tea, which is aged over time, and ripped tea, which is fermented by stacking and heating tea leaves in a humid environment. Tea plantations are managed advantageously at the mountainous terrain, and most of the cultivation methods have been modernized. However, traditional cultivation and processing techniques are remained in tea plantations of ethnic minority's villages.

Among the traditional tea plantations, the most typical types are ancient tea plantations (Figure 3). The cultivation is carried out in principle without pesticides or fertilizers. Here, tea trees are planted independently, one by one, and allowed them to grow naturally. Tea leaves are collected by hand-picking method from the trees. Within the tea plantation, there are traditional-style pavilions that are used for rest and festivals.

Processing is carried out in traditional villages where ethnic minorities live. In villages where traditional houses remain concentrated, each process of drying, kneading, and fermenting tea leaves is carried out by using the spaces inside the houses, under the floors, and in the gardens (Figure 4). Ethnic minorities have integrated a cycle of traditional living, tea plantation management that uses nature, and tea leaf processing, creating a magnificent cultural landscape in their livelihood. This cultural landscape with outstanding individuality deserves to be the first World Heritage Site for the tea culture.



**Figure 3** Ancient tea plantation in the Jingmai mountain (©S. Shimizu, 2019)



**Figure 4** Pu'er tea-producing traditional village (©S. Shimizu, 2019)

The production area of Longjing tea is located around West Lake in Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province. Longjing tea is a type of green tea from which is extracted by stopping the fermentation of tea leaves by heating them. The cultivation method is similar to that of Japanese Sencha tea, and the landscape closely resembles the open-air Sencha tea plantations (Figure 5). Green tea is made by heating tea leaves to stop fermentation before processing, but the difference from Japanese tea lies in the heating method. In Japan, tea leaves are steamed and heated, but Longjing tea is roasted in a pot. Therefore, large tea factories are not necessary, and it is sufficient with a small tea factory attached to the side of a house (Figure 6).

Tea plants, as a species, have little variation. However, the processing methods and environmental conditions significantly influence the final product. Depending on the processing method, the same tea plant can produce a wide variety of teas. Thus, cultural factors also strongly contribute to the diversity.



**Figure 5** Longjing tea plantations (©S. Shimizu, 2017)



**Figure 6** Longjing tea processing factory (©S. Shimizu, 2019)

## **HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTIC OF UJI-CHA TEA**

The Uji-cha tea is a beverage deeply ingrained in Japanese culture.

Uji-cha tea has made significant contributions to Chano-yu, a traditional tea ceremony. Since the 15th century, Chano-yu has evolved into a comprehensive cultural practice encompassing hospitality, food, clothing, and housing. Uji-grown Matcha tea, a premium green tea, has been the cornerstone of this practice. Although the number of people engaged in the Chano-yu has decreased, the cultural significance of this deeply rooted tradition in Japanese society is still profound.

Like the Chano-yu tea ceremony, there is another tea culture called Sencha-do, centred around the enjoyment of Sencha tea. Unlike Matcha tea, Sencha tea is enjoyed in a more relaxed setting, free from the confines of a tearoom. The culture of tea drinking is not merely a pursuit of high culture; it is deeply rooted

in everyday life of the Japanese people.

Japan has three primary types of tea: Matcha tea, Sencha tea, and Gyokuro tea. Matcha tea is a finely ground powder made from specially grown and shade-dried green tea leaves. It is whisked into hot water to create a frothy beverage. This unique tea is exclusive to Japan. Sencha tea, on the other hand, is made by infusing dried tea leaves in hot water, a method common to many teas worldwide. Gyokuro tea, a higher-grade tea, combines elements of both Matcha and Sencha tea production. The tea leaves are covered before harvesting to enhance their umami flavour, and then infused in hot water to create a distinctive taste.

Although these teas have different production methods, brewing styles, and cultural associations, they share a common characteristic: the process of steaming the tea leaves immediately after plucking to prevent fermentation. This steaming process, which is quite rare in tea production worldwide, is a hallmark of Japanese tea and unites these three distinct types of tea under a single category.

Over the past 15 years, there has been a growing global interest in Matcha tea, leading to a Matcha tea boom. While it was once considered a luxury drink for special occasions, in recent years it has become popular in casual beverages like tea lattes and is used as an ingredient in sweets, rapidly expanding its market.

On the other hand, Sencha tea consumption has been gradually declining. There is a growing trend towards convenience, seeking quick and easy ways to prepare tea, such as tea bottle. This is a significant shift from the traditional style.

The primary production area of Uji-cha tea is centred around Kyoto Prefecture, located near the geographic centre of the Japanese archipelago. The southern part of Kyoto Prefecture, including Uji City, is known as the Yamashiro region where is an origin of the Uji-cha tea.

Tea was first imported from China to Japan in the 8th century. At this time, tea was consumed by boiling an extract from the tea leaves. Later, in the 12th century, tea imported again from China (Song Dynasty) was Matcha tea, which was then repeatedly refined in Japan to become the Matcha tea today. The greatest innovation in Matcha tea production in Japan was the method of covered tea plantations, which was born in Uji City. In this method, the tea plantation is covered to block sunlight during the sprouting period of new buds. This method made it possible to produce Matcha tea with a deep green colour, no bitterness, and full of umami flavour. On the other hand, in China, Matcha tea has virtually vanished.



In the 17th century, tea was once again imported from China (Ming Dynasty), and this became the origin of today's Sencha tea. Initially, the tea was brownish, but a manufacturing method called the 'Uji method,' which can extract beautiful green tea, was invented in Ujitawara area, resulting in the green Sencha tea today.

In the 19th century, the cultivation of tea under shade and improved processing methods combined to create Gyokuro tea, a high-grade green tea. This development also took place around Uji City.

Through multiple introductions from China and subsequent cultivation and refinement in the Yamashiro region, centred around Uji City, tea evolved into unique Japanese varieties such as Matcha tea, Sencha tea, and Gyokuro tea.

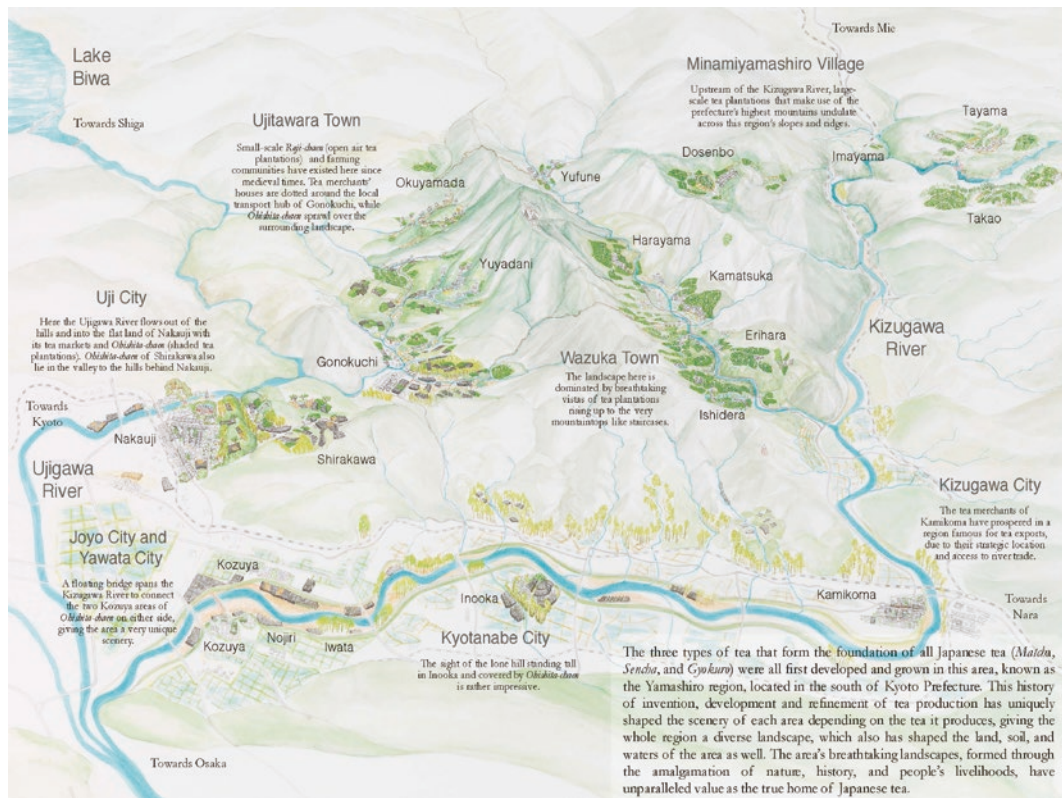
## LANDSCAPES OF UJI-CHA TEA

The Yamashiro region (Figure 7), the centre of Uji-cha tea production, is a hilly area with an altitude of about 10 to 680 metres. Two rivers, the Uji River and the Kizu River, and their tributaries, which flow through the area, have carved out valleys, forming several valley lines (Figure 8).

This area, includes famous tea-producing areas, such as Uji City and its neighbouring cities of Joyo and Yawata for Matcha tea production, as well as Wazuka Town and its surrounding valleys of Ujitawara and Minamiyamashiro Village for Sencha tea production. Additionally, the locations of tea wholesalers' settlements



**Figure 7** Location of Yamashiro region



**Figure 8** Illustration map of Uji-cha tea cultural landscape (Source: Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties)

are scattered in Uji City, Ujitawara Town, and Kizugawa City.

While the tea-producing areas of Uji City extend over a wide range, considering how the two rivers have carved valleys through the hills, and how these rivers converge into a single river, this region unifies whole natural geography.

The production landscape of Uji-cha tea can be broadly divided into the landscape of Matcha tea production and the landscape of Sencha tea production. These differ significantly in terms of the tea plantation landscape, and because the tea manufacturing process, the shape of the tea factor, and the form of the village are different.

The landscape of Matcha tea production is distinctive in both its tea plantations and tea factories. Tea gardens for Matcha tea production are covered to block sunlight during the period when new buds appear, from March to May. This is called 'Oishita tea plantation' (Figure 9). Its origin dates back to the 16th century, and traditionally, it was covered with reed screens and rice straw. Today, many have changed to synthetic fiber coverings, but some tea plantations that use this traditional method of covering are being maintained. The consumption of the highest quality Matcha tea is limited, and the area of the tea gardens is also very



**Figure 9** 'Oishita' shaded plantation for Matcha tea producing, outside (left) and inside (right)  
(©Kyoto Prefectural Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries)

small.

After tea picking, the tea leaves are immediately processed in tea factories owned individually by tea farmers. After steaming the tea leaves, they are dried in a brick drying furnace. Drying furnaces, reaching 15 metres in length, are installed within the houses of tea farmers, creating a unique scene inside and outside of the tea factories (Figure 10).

The landscape of Sencha tea production differs from that of Matcha tea production in both its tea plantations and tea factories. Tea plantations for Sencha tea production are not covered and are open-air (Figure 11). Traditionally, tea plantations were formed on the mountain slopes, and the tea plantations set up in the valleys had less sunlight hours, naturally creating the effect of a covered tea plantation (Figure 12). In the Uji-cha tea production area, there are many places where tea plantations are opened up to the top of the mountain on steep slopes, creating a spectacular landscape. In the past, tea leaves were picked by hand, but now machine harvesting is the mainstream. The shape of the cut of the



**Figure 10** Drying furnace for Matcha tea processing in Uji City  
(©Kyoto Prefectural Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries)





**Figure 11** Open-air plantation for Sencha tea producing in Wazuka Town (©Kyoto Prefectural Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries)

tea ridges differs between hand picking and machine harvesting, and the tea plantation landscape has its own individuality corresponding to each method.

After tea picking, Sencha tea is processed in tea factories individually owned by tea farmers, just like Matcha tea, but the processing method is different. After steaming the tea leaves, they undergo a complex process of hand-rolling and drying on a '*hoiro*,' which is a drying furnace. Currently, machine-made tea production, in which this process is individually replaced by machines, is the mainstream, but hand-rolling techniques are also being passed down.

The author has been working continuously to value, protect, and promote the nomination of Uji-cha tea production and its landscapes, with its rich history,



**Figure 12** Traditional open-air plantation in a valley in Ujitawara Town (©S. Shimizu, 2015)

scenic beauty, and cultural significance, as a Cultural Landscape on the World Heritage List. The Outstanding Universal Values are as follows:

1. Evidence for the Origin of Unique Cultural Tradition of Japanese Green Tea and the Succession of its Traditional Producing Methods
  - Introduction of Chinese Tea and Succession of Lost Method
  - Invention of Original Producing Method: Shaded Plantation and Uji Processing Method
  - Invention of 3 types of Japanese Green Tea and Spread to throughout Japan
2. Land Uses and Landscapes Reflecting the Production of Japanese Green Tea
  - Natural Environment + Producing Methods + Distribution, Consumption
  - Plantations, Farmers Villages, and Merchants' Towns
  - Organic Evolution through Rationalization and Mechanization
3. Contribution to the Formation of Tea Drinking Culture
  - Chano-yu with Matcha and Sencha-do with Sencha and Gyokuro
  - Spread and Generalization of Sencha Drinking

In points 1 and 3, the value is placed not on tangible cultural heritage but on intangible cultural heritage. While the physical aspect of a landscape is important, the system that creates it is even more crucial. Landscapes are constantly undergoing subtle changes, and their physical aspects are momentary reflections of the layers of human life and nature that have accumulated and evolved over time. In other words, this perspective treats tangible and intangible cultural heritage as a unified whole, suggesting a comprehensive approach to understanding cultural heritage.

## **PROBLEMS IN UJI-CHA TEA LANDSCAPES**

Lastly, let's consider the challenges involved in valuing and preserving the traditional cultural landscape of Uji-cha tea. Same as other cultural heritage criteria, it is crucial to maintain both authenticity and integrity in the protection of cultural landscapes. Given the strong connection between cultural landscapes and nature, biodiversity conservation is particularly important. Therefore, these perspectives are helpful when addressing the challenges related to the cultural landscape of Uji-cha tea. The challenges can be broadly categorized into four areas.

The first is the ongoing process of urbanization. Tea plantations are located in the outskirts of major cities like Kyoto, in areas where urban and rural areas intersect. While there was once a period of rapid development with residential and industrial complexes being built in these areas, the threat of new developments in current tea-growing regions is relatively low. However, with the construction of new expressways, there is a possibility of increased industrial development in the future, necessitating careful monitoring and control. In Japan, it has become

increasingly difficult to construct traditional wooden buildings due to changes in building regulations. This has led to challenges in controlling the design of new buildings.

The second major challenge is the decline in the demand for Japanese green tea. Specifically, there has been a significant decrease in the consumption of Sencha tea. The global Matcha tea boom and its increasing use as a food ingredient have driven up demand for Matcha tea. As a result, there has been a shift from Sencha tea to Matcha tea production, with many tea farms converting their Sencha tea fields into Matcha tea fields by simply adding shade covers. This has led to changes in the tea landscape. However, since this conversion only involves adding shade covers without altering the fundamental quality of the tea fields, it may not be a severe change, as it is possible to revert these fields back to Sencha tea production in the future.

The third issue is the shortage of successors, which is a problem common to agriculture in general, and it is not just a problem for Uji-cha tea or Japanese agriculture, but a global issue for agriculture. Regarding Uji-cha tea, the inheritance of traditional cultivation methods and processing methods will be greatly affected by the shortage of successors, but for the time being, generational change is taking place, and a path to inheriting authentic methods is being maintained.

The fourth is the alteration of the landscape due to the rationalization and mechanization of production. This is perhaps the most challenging aspect of preserving a cultural landscape. Cultural landscapes are inherently dynamic, evolving constantly and maintained through active farming. As such, they are inevitably subject to changes driven by the demands of the times. A prime example of this is the replacement of traditional coverings for tea plantations with synthetic fabric, the installation of frost proof fans to protect tea leaves, and the shift from manual to mechanized tea processing.

While traditionally, tea farmers have been keen on using natural materials like straw to cover their *Oishita* tea plantations, in recent years, many farms have switched to synthetic materials. This shift can be attributed to the decreasing availability of natural materials and the increased labor required to use them. Although synthetic materials may seem more convenient, they can potentially affect the quality of the tea, such as its colour and flavour. Despite these challenges, there are still tea farmers who continue to use traditional methods, believing in the superior quality of tea produced using natural materials.

Regarding frost proof fans, they are a unique feature of Japanese tea plantations that are not seen in tea plantations in other countries, and their significance is sometimes pointed out, especially by foreign experts. To prevent tea leaves from

discolouring due to frost before harvesting, tea has traditionally been cultivated in areas less susceptible to frost. However, frost remains an inevitable problem, leading to the widespread installation of electric fans in tea plantations since the 1970s to stir the air and mitigate the damage by frost. Some argue that these fans negatively impact the landscape, while others suggest that they allow for tea cultivation in areas previously unsuitable for tea production. Actually, the effects of these fans are quite limited, primarily adjusting local wind patterns, and do not significantly alter the tea production ecosystem. The implications of such rationalization in tea production and its effects on the landscape require further discussion.

From a tourism perspective, it is problematic that agricultural tourism is still underdeveloped in Uji-cha tea production areas, leading to an immature relationship between production and tourism. Cultural landscapes can be seen as a form of regional branding, and tourism is not necessarily at odds with production but can create a synergistic effect. However, due to the underdeveloped state of tourism, there remains a sense of aversion to tourists. Moreover, if the area is registered as a World Heritage Site, an increase in tourists is expected, potentially leading to overtourism. To address these anticipated issues, a more mature attitude toward tourism and a stronger reception system is required.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper summarizes that a cultural landscape is a mixed heritage with tangible and intangible cultural aspects, exhibiting characteristics of both. In the case of Uji-cha tea, physical elements manifest as the landscape, but the underlying processes are the unique tea production methods associated with Matcha tea, Sencha tea, and Gyokuro tea. Furthermore, when considering the entire process from distribution to consumption, the cultural preference for each type of tea guarantees its production volume, thus determining the scale of the tea plantations and the resulting landscape. The value of Uji-cha tea's cultural landscape is derived from the fusion of these tangible and intangible aspects.

The concept of 'allowing for change' lies at the intersection of tangible and intangible heritage. While the preservation of tangible heritage is often predicated on maintaining the status quo, making allowances for change is less common. However, cultural landscapes are inherently dynamic and require us to devise preservation methods that accommodate change. As the case of Uji-cha tea demonstrates, certain changes are necessary to sustain agricultural practices, but accepting all changes could undermine the values that have been traditionally formed. The key lies in determining the appropriate balance in allowing for change.

From the perspective of tangible heritage, this presents a new challenge to heritage preservation methods. From the perspective of intangible heritage, it provides a channel for understanding intangible heritage in relation to the culture rooted in the land. Cultural landscapes offer a methodological framework for comprehensively understanding cultural heritage, encompassing both tangible and intangible elements.

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# MARSHALLESE SEAFARING AND WEAVING HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

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## INTRODUCTION

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is an island nation located in the northeastern part of Micronesia in the western Pacific. It consists of 29 coral atolls and five islands, which are divided into two island chains, Ratak in the east and Ralik in the west. Its population was 42,418 in 2021 (RMI EPPSO & SPC, 2023, p. 3). The islands were frequently visited by American whaleships in the nineteenth century and underwent German (1885–1914), Japanese (1914–1945), and American (1945–1979) administrations before its independence in 1979.

The Marshallese people are known to have a great seafaring heritage, which was further developed as a result of the remoteness of the islands. Their canoes are reputed to be one of the fastest sailing canoes in the world, around 10 to 15 knots in a good wind (Mason, 1974, p. 53). This was proven in a pan-Pacific sailing canoe race held during the 6th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture in 1992, in which the Marshallese canoe won first place. They are one of a very few island groups that still practice traditional navigation in the Pacific. Despite the decline of canoe cultures in postwar Micronesia, the seafaring heritage has been successfully revived in the RMI largely due to long-term efforts made by a local NGO, Waan Aelōñ in Majel (WAM, literally ‘Canoes of the Marshall Islands’), since its establishment in 1989. Thus, the canoe culture became the national identity.

In addition, Marshallese women are known for their skillfulness in making handicrafts (*amimōño*, a loan word from Japanese *amimono* ‘knitting’) using traditional materials and techniques. Their handicrafts are considered the most elaborate and productive in Micronesia (Mulford, 2006, p. 6; LaBriola, 2013, p. 24). They have also succeeded in reviving their traditional woven clothes (*jaki-ed*) recently.

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This research project investigated how men's seafaring and women's weaving heritage elements have contributed to the communities' maintenance and development. The project focused on those two ancient traditions' cultural, social, and economic roles in contemporary Marshallese community, as well as those two traditions' positions in the core of Marshallese culture for respective genders. The goal of the project was to develop an understanding of the intangible cultural heritage's relation with seascape and the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11.4: 'Protect the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.' The study was conducted to investigate the role of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) for sustainable cities and communities and the management of cultural and historical landscapes.

## BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

### Targeted Tangible and ICH Elements

Tangible cultural heritage elements of the seafaring heritage under investigation include canoes (Figure 1), associated items (e.g., sails, masts, sail booms, ropes, bailers, paddles), building tools (e.g., adzes, axes, machetes, knives, hand planes, hand drills, hand saws, chisels, string-lines, paint brushes, sand papers, pencils), and other items (e.g., model canoes, stick charts).

Tangible cultural heritage elements of the weaving heritage include women's handicrafts (e.g., mats, ornaments, decorations) and associated tools, including pandanus leaf pounders (*drekein nin* [Figure 2]), splitting tools (*ar* or *jabwōd* [Figure 3]) for pandanus leaves, plaiting needles, and wooden molds (*monakjans*) for hats and baskets.

ICH under investigation includes the associated knowledge of those tangible cultural heritage elements. Boys and girls used to learn about canoe-building and handicraft-making respectively with other skills as members of the informal age groups in the community (Spoehr, 1949, p. 212). Knowledge and techniques of



**Figure 1** Sailing canoe (©T. Nagaoka, 2023)



**Figure 2** Pounding pandanus leaves with a pounder (*drekain nin*) to make them soft and pliable (Source: Spoehr, 1949, p. 135, Figure 24, right)



**Figure 3** Splitting tools (*ar* or *jabwōd*) for pandanus leaves (©T. Nagaoka, 2023)

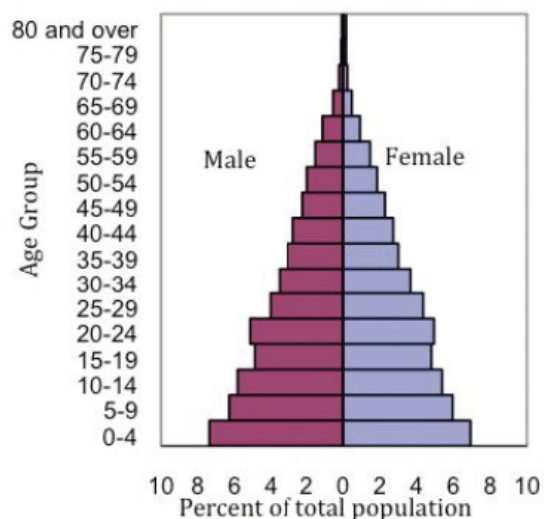
seafaring, such as canoe building and navigation, have been strictly guarded, and their transfer was regulated by each holder's governing chief (Gentz, 2018). In contrast, those of handicraft-making have been passed down freely, and generally acquired from mothers, aunties, and grandmothers without any restriction.

### Target Communities

This study focused on the Majuro community and outer island communities on Majuro Atoll (Figure 4), where the capital of the RMI is located. It is the most populous atoll in the country with a population of 23,156, which is approximately half (54.6 percent) of the country's population (42,418) as of 2021 (RMI EPPSO & SPC, 2023, pp. 3, 10, Table 3). Although there is no detailed statistical data, its population includes substantial numbers of outer islander populations from different atolls, especially in urban areas, due to the location of the political and commercial center of the country. In addition, we need to note that the RMI has around one-third of the total population (about 24,000) living in the USA (United States Census Bureau, 2019) due to its status of Free Association with the country for such motives as jobs, education, health, and climate change. The urban age-sex pyramid, which includes two urban atolls (Majuro and Kwajalein) due to the limited availability of specific statistical data, is shown in Figure 5. According to the 2021 census data, gender composition is largely equal (RMI EPPSO & SPC, 2023, p. 10, Table 3).



**Figure 4** Marshall Islands



**Figure 5** Urban atoll age-sex pyramid (Source: RMI EPPSO & SPC, 2012, p. 20, Figure 4.3)

## Methodologies used in Research

During Nagaoka's one-month of fieldwork on Majuro from November to December 2023, on Majuro, interviews, consultations, and related activities to

hear voices from community members, including elders, ICH practitioners, youth, and women, as well as experts and local administrators, were undertaken as part of the case study. The interviews were conducted in the English language, occasionally through translators, who were at the places, based on prepared questionnaires. In addition, archival research was conducted at the RMI Historic Preservation Office, Alele Museum and Library, and the College of the Marshall Islands Library. Statistical information was gathered both online and at the RMI Economic Policy, Planning and Statistics Office. The greatest challenge of the interviews was some informants' poor English proficiency, especially elders and women. In this regard, it was difficult to explain some concepts (e.g., cultural identity) to them.

Based on FY 2023 research activities, FY 2024's activities were focused on sharing last year's research findings with the local communities. We achieved this by organizing a workshop in a public venue in Majuro on September 23th during the Manit (Cultural) Week. Besides stakeholders, the general public was also invited (Figure 6). The workshop, which was organized by Pasifika Renaissance and WAM, consisted of the following presentations:

1. Alson Kelen (WAM), 'The traditional canoeing culture in the Marshall Island'
2. Tony Alik (WAM), 'Voyage of resilience: WAM's sustainable maritime solutions in the Pacific'
3. Takuya Nagaoka (Pasifika Renaissance), 'Marshallese canoe culture and community sustainability'
4. Kimberly Hafner (Public Education System, Ministry of Education), 'IQBE and WAM canoe project partnership'
5. Kimber Rilometo (Office of Commerce, Investment, and Tourism, RMI Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce), 'Tourism awareness'

This event was filmed and the video was shared on Pasifika Renaissance's YouTube channel (<https://youtu.be/2IsGjjsvFhg>) for those who could not participate in the workshop, including both local Marshallese people and those overseas. In this workshop, from different perspectives, the presenters stressed that this heritage remains the core of the Marshallese culture and has become increasingly important in such contexts as modernization, large-scale migration, and climate change. This workshop promoted public awareness of the significant role of Marshallese seafaring heritage: contributing to the community's sustainability and development.



**Figure 6** Workshop held in Majuro, 2024 (©T. Nagaoka, 2024)

## THE RESULTS OF THE CASE STUDY

### Decline and Revival of Marshallese Seafaring Heritage

Outrigger canoes were previously the only watercraft in the Marshalls that were used for fishing, transporting stuff, and voyaging. Seafaring is largely men's domain, although some women also understand canoe-building and sailing techniques (Spoehr, 1949, p. 139). Women mainly operate smaller paddling canoes and assist men's canoe building in such activities as weaving a sail with pandanus leaves traditionally and preparing helpers' food. In contrast to other Micronesian societies, where canoe houses were/are men's sacred domain, according to Marshallese contemporary elders, women have been allowed to access canoe houses, and canoes are for both men and women.

Traditional single outrigger canoes are divided into three categories: (1) large ocean-going sailing canoes (*walap*), measuring up to 30 metres and capable of carrying as many as 50 people; (2) mid-sized sailing canoes (*tipnol*), measuring 3.6 to 6 metres and capable of carrying up to 10 people; and (3) small paddling canoes (*korkor*), also rigged with a sail, measuring 1.8 to 3 metres and capable of carrying one or two people (Mason, 1947, p. 53; Alessio, 1993, p. 7). The materials for canoes were traditionally obtained from the local environment. The most important of these materials include breadfruit trees for a hull, other trees for different parts, pandanus leaves for a sail, and coconut fibers for different sizes of ropes. However, many foreign materials substituted local ones more recently due to their durability and easiness of preparation, depending on their availability. These include plywood, lumbars, copper screws, nails, bolts, nylon ropes, paint, cloth, and glue (Alessio, 1991c, pp. 10–12).

**Table 1** Private dwelling household by island by household goods owned in 2021 (Source: RMI EPPSO & SPC, 2023, p. 68, Table A16)

Island	Number of households	Paddling canoe	Sailing canoe	Island	Number of households	Paddling canoe	Sailing canoe
Ailinglaplap	224	35	15	Likiep	49	2	2
Ailuk	56	6	8	Majuro	3,896	40	21
Arno	217	8	3	Maloelap	83	2	2
Aur	66	0	0	Mejit	48	5	6
Ebon	105	16	9	Mili	105	2	7
Enewetak	64	0	0	Namdrik	70	17	6
Jabat	18	3	0	Namu	101	20	12
Jaluit	206	7	16	Ujae	51	0	1
Kili	82	0	0	Utirik	54	6	11
Kwajalein	1,421	2	6	Wotho	17	0	0
Lae	35	6	2	Wotje	133	1	0
Lib	22	0	0				

The prevalence of imported fiberglass and metal boats and outboard engines in the 1960s drove the canoe away from the mainstream. Young people also lost interest in their traditional culture due to the rapid Westernization after World War II. Thus, daily use of canoes largely declined on most islands, except for isolated atolls such as Namdrik and Ailuk (Miller, 2010, pp. 11–12; Genz, 2018). This situation is shown in recent statistical data (Table 1).

In 1989, WAM was initially established by American boat-builder, Dennis Alessio, who was inspired by the reconstructed Polynesian voyaging canoe, *Hōkūleʻa*'s canoe renaissance,<sup>3</sup> to document the major designs of traditional canoes and revive ocean sailing in the RMI (Genz, 2018), which was later joined by a Marshallese collaborator, Alson Kelen (e.g., Alessio, 1989, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c, 1993; Alessio & Kelen, 1995). Later, they developed canoe-building and sailing programs, both of which played a critical role in reviving the canoe tradition in the RMI. This revival released lineage-based knowledge of canoe building and sailing from strict chiefly regulations and opened the knowledge to the public (Genz, 2018). They included modern boat building, using power tools, and fiberglass technology in their training. By merging contemporary engineering with traditional elements, they sought to build canoes with new designs (single outrigger canoes based on traditional designs and foreign double canoes and

<sup>3</sup> *Hōkūleʻa*, a Polynesian double canoe reconstructed in 1975, successfully completed a number of experimental long distance voyages in Polynesia, using traditional navigational techniques, and became a symbol of Hawaiian cultural renaissance (Finney, 1994).





**Figure 7** Canoe-building by WAM (©T. Nagaoka, 2023)

a. WAM's main workshop building, b. Inside of WAM's main workshop building, c. WAM's workshop, d. WAM's trainer making a canoe model for fundraising, e. Single outrigger canoe, using modern materials, f. Double canoe, using modern materials.

began to use easily accessible modern materials (especially fiberglass for hulls) to make canoes more durable and to conserve breadfruit trees (for hulls), which are important food trees and are often not available (Figure 7).

WAM progressed by incorporating vocational education (e.g., boat building, fiberglass technology, carpentry, woodworking) and non-formal life skills education into its programs, in response to the youth's high unemployment rate and associated social problems (e.g., substance abuse, crimes, violence, sexually transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancy, depression, suicides) (Alessio, 2006). WAM actively engages in school outreach by bringing school children into their canoe-building workshops. Sailing canoe races promoted by WAM gathered considerable public attention and have become the most celebrated cultural events in the RMI today (Genz, 2018). Races are held on such occasions as Kwajalein Liberation Day (February), Majuro Liberation Day (February), Marshall Islands Development Bank Anniversary (March), National Constitution Day (May), World Health Day (May), Marshall Islands Resort Anniversary (August), Manit (Cultural) Week (October), and President's Day (November). Competitive spirit fostered in races strengthened a sense of collective cultural pride. In addition, those races are important because they are the only occasions for most young Majuro people to encounter canoes (Miller, 2010, p. 136).

More recently, as the survival of low-lying atoll communities of the RMI face an immediate threat due to climate change-induced sea level rising, WAM began a campaign to return to traditional sustainable sea transport, which uses wind power as alternative energy and lessens dependence on fossil fuels. In their



ongoing project, four participants from each island learn how to build a fiberglass double canoe over three months at WAM. Upon learning how to sail and maintain the canoes, those vessels are transported to participants' home islands for sailing training and communal use. In another project, 25 students, who are selected based on their necessity for assistance in areas like school education and mental health, build a traditional canoe in six months. This project incorporates basic and vocational education into the program. WAM's past programs achieved considerable success not only in bringing back canoes to practical use, but also in ensuring people's understanding of canoes' importance to the Marshallese identity.

In addition to these efforts of WAM, other factors also contributed to the revival of the canoe tradition. First, as discussed, the isolation of atoll communities certainly generated the necessity of canoes. Remote atolls are only connected to urban atolls by governmental cargo-passenger ships once every several months. The only other way of connection is expensive air service. Within individual atolls, communities are spread over huge lagoons. Additionally, petrol prices are higher on outer islands than on urban atolls. Second, chiefs, who possess the canoe knowledge and control over it, are said to have a role in making sure that the knowledge is passed down to the next generations. As discussed below, the practical and symbolic importance that the canoe tradition holds in contemporary Marshallese society is the key to the survival of this tradition.<sup>4</sup>

### **Development of Marshallese Weaving Heritage**

Handicrafts are culturally, socially, and economically much more important in the RMI than in other islands in Micronesia. For example, they are both casually and formally worn more often there. Further, their role as gifts (for family and community occasions) is socially more substantial. They have been a vital part of Marshallese culture for both daily (e.g., mats, ornaments) and ceremonial uses (e.g., gifts, contributions, tributes) on special celebrations for families (e.g., weddings, birthdays) or community events (e.g., church or school celebrations). Compared to residents of other Micronesian islands, much more Marshallese women engage in the handicraft production for the purpose of money income.

Weaving is generally a woman's job, while men commonly assist women's work in gathering and preparing materials (e.g., beating pandanus leaves with a heavy shell pounder). Some men also know how to weave a mat (Spoehr, 1949, p. 148) and make handicrafts themselves. Knowledgeable and skillful weavers are more than just artisans but are vessels of many important 'cultural values, skills, and knowledges, both traditional and contemporary' (LaBriola, 2013, p. 25).

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<sup>4</sup> The video of Nagaoka's interview to Kelen was shared on Pasifika Renaissance's YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/AQpxwTkFBal>



**Figure 8** Women's handicrafts (©T. Nagaoka, 2023)

a. Mat (*jaki*), b. Wall decoration (*obon*), c. Open basket (*iep*), d. Handbag (*iep*), e. Kili bag (*iep in Kili*), f. Purse, g. Fan (*deel*), h. Hat (*at*), i. 'Wotje's rose', j. Utrok/Majuro's 'set', k. Coaster, l. Headband (*wut*).

Women's handicraft items include mats (*jaki*), wall decorations (*obon*), open/covered baskets (*iep*), handbags (*iep*), white, finely woven so-called Kili bags (*iep in Kili*), as were originally woven on Kili Island by Bikini Islanders, who were relocated to Kili during the 1950s (Mulford, 2006, p. 22), purses, fans (*deel*), hats (*at*), ornaments of various shapes, headbands (*wut*), hair ornaments, and jewelry.<sup>5</sup> Kili bags and hats are known to be difficult ones to make and only a limited number of very skillful weavers can make them. Some islands are specialized in making particular kinds of handicrafts, such as Wotje Atoll's hair ornaments called 'Wotje's rose,' and Utrok and Majuro Atolls' jewelry sets (e.g., earrings, necklaces, arm rings) called 'set' (Figure 8).

<sup>5</sup> Since such handicrafts as canoe models and stick charts are predominantly made by men, they are excluded from the discussion in this study.

Marshalllese women typically gather materials for handicrafts locally. If they do not have access to them, they purchase from other people or stores. They include pandanus leaves (*maan*), young coconut leaves (*kimej*), midribs of the coconut fronds (*mālwe*), hibiscus fibers (*law*), and various types of sea shells, including popular money cowrie shells (*likajjir*), as well as imported ones such as dyes and yarns. Several types of foreign shells are also sold at a Chinese shop in Majuro. Some of them are preferred because they contain colours (e.g., purple) that local shells do not have. Those materials, which are prepared to weave or assemble into handicrafts (Mason, 1947, pp. 133–137), are also traded at stores and among weavers (Figure 9).

Handicraft making is an ancient art with modern applications. For example, since the nineteenth century, as a result of Christianization, some items such as clothing and ornaments have been largely replaced by Western goods. On the other hand, other items like mats and baskets continued to be produced for daily uses. New items, such as souvenirs and personal ornaments, were also developed for sale over time since the Second World War (Berta, 2025, p. 10, Table 1). Origins of handicraft sales likely go back to the nineteenth century when the products were sold to foreign visitors, missionaries, and artifact collectors (Figure 10) (Erdland, 1914, p. 108). Women are known to have incorporated new design patterns (e.g., German Iron Cross) (Figure 11) during the German administration (Erdland, 1914, Plate 7, cited in Berta, 2025, p. 10).

Handicraft production was promoted by colonial governments, especially Japanese and American, as part of their economic development schemes. Earlier



**Figure 9** Materials for handicrafts (©T. Nagaoka, 2023)

a. Heated, dried, and pounded pandanus leaves (*maan*), b. Boiled and dried young coconut leaves (*kimej*), c. Dried midribs of the coconut fronds (*mālwe*), d. Boiled and dried hibiscus inner bark fibers (*law*), e. Foreign shells sold at a Chinese store in Majuro, f. Foreign cowry shells sold at a Chinese store in Majuro.





**Figure 10** Handicrafts sold to foreign visitors, missionaries, and artifact collectors in the nineteenth century  
a. Traditional clothing (left: woman, right: man), b. Traditional shell and turtleshell ornaments, c. Handbag collected in 1910, d. Fans collected in 1910 (Source: Kramer & Nevermann, 1938), e. Canoe models, probably souvenirs (Source: Nanyo Kyokai Nanyo Gunto Shibu, 1925).



**Figure 11** *Jaki-ed* mat with the German Iron Cross design in the decorative band (Source: based on Erdland, 1914, Plate 7)

American Protestant missionaries and Germans may have made similar efforts, although the possible efforts were not well documented. During the Japanese administration, handicrafts were largely sold by the Japanese in its colonial center on Jaluit, or exported to Japan. On each atoll, local women were appointed by the administration to maintain standards of quality and quantity of production by the other women. These supervisors conferred with handicraft makers and taught them better techniques or new fashions as desired by the Japanese consumers (Mason, 1947, p. 132). This period is characterized by a shift in handicrafts'

orientation from cultural to commercial crafts (Berta, 2025, p. 5).

Today, Marshallese handicrafts are sold locally and globally. Since the number of foreign visitors has been small due to the RMI's remoteness, it is possible to assume that local Marshallese have always been the main consumers. Although there is no statistical data to support this, handicraft suppliers agree that the demand for handicrafts has been growing steadily, especially for overseas sales, particularly after the escalation of outmigration from the 2000s. Marshallese handicrafts are sent not only to other Pacific islands (including Pohnpei, Guam, Hawaii, New Zealand, and Australia), but also to the USA on a larger scale. This Marshallese-USA connection is mainly due to the Marshallese outmigration to the USA. A few handicraft shops sell their items to their customers in the USA online, simply by advertising their products through social media (e.g., Facebook), without using an e-commerce platform. In addition, many handicraft makers also advertise their products through social media and send them directly to their customers in the USA independently.

Berta (2025, p. 5) discusses that there are three meaningful categories of Marshallese, based on distinctive attitudes toward handicrafts: rural, urban, and diaspora Marshallese. Outer islanders (rural) make, sell, and use (e.g., wear, display, gift) handicrafts, but they do not usually buy them for money. Urban people also make, sell, and use them, but many also buy them due to limited access to raw materials, time constraints, lack of skills, and the availability of money. In diaspora communities, handicrafts are in high demand and serve as 'material expressions of cultural belonging more conspicuously than in the RMI itself.' The handicraft variety is expanding mainly to accommodate the needs and tastes of the main consumers: urban and diaspora Marshallese (Berta, 2025, p. 11).

In Majuro, there are five handicraft shops. Additionally, a few other stores and supermarkets also sell handicrafts. These shops buy products from Majuro residents. Some also have agents on outer islands to trade with local producers. Many Majuro women make handicrafts at their homes, while four handicraft shops employ a few women to make them at their shops. Since handicraft-making does not require large-scale cooperation, households are generally the unit of production. However, in the case of occasions such as government or aid-funded workshops, community members loosely form a work group. Marshall Islands Association of Handicraft Businesses, which consists of five handicraft shops, has occasionally organized handicraft-making workshops for girls in the past.

### ***Jaki-ed Revival***

Finely woven and intricately and symbolically designed mats (*jaki-ed* or *nieded*) are a masterpiece of Marshallese women's weaving (Figure 12). These mats of

pandanus leaves were used for clothing and ceremonial gifts. The production declined after trade cloth was introduced and stopped after World War II. Irene Taafaki, then Director of the University of the South Pacific (USP) Marshall Islands Campus, and traditional leader, Maria Kabua-Fowler, began to collaborate on the revival of *jaki-ed* with the patronage of Irooj (Paramount Chief) Michael Kabua in 2006 (Taafaki, 2013). Weavers learned detailed techniques by examining photos of nineteenth-century mats held at various overseas museums. New mats were woven for selling at annual auctions, which began in 2007. Then, the *jaki-ed* workshop programme began for ten young women at USP, not only teaching weaving but also giving the apprentices basic skills in finance and running a business in 2011. The two created a virtual museum in 2013 (Jaki-ed Revival Program, 2013) and published a book on *jaki-ed* in 2019 (Taafaki & Fowler, 2019). By now, the program has trained over 200 young weavers around the country, and continues at the College of the Marshall Islands, where a master *jaki-ed* weaver manages the weaving space, supervises weaving internships, and teaches weaving classes (Figure 13). This revival generally succeeded in elevating the cultural significance of weaving (Berta, 2025, p.11).



**Figure 12** Finely woven and intricately and symbolically designed mats (*jaki-ed* or *nieded*) (©T. Nagaoka)  
a. and b. *Jaki-ed* displayed at the Alele Museum.



**Figure 13** *Jaki-ed* weaving demonstrated by Resident Weaver of the College of the Marshall Islands, Susan Jieta (©T. Nagaoka, 2024)



## DISCUSSION

### Seafaring Heritage's Significance and Sustainability

Related to the basic question of the canoe heritage's contribution to community sustainability, seafaring heritage holds practical and symbolic significance in the contemporary Marshallese society. That is, canoes are used daily for subsistence activities on rural atolls, while they are connected to the symbolism of cultural heritage and maritime identity on urban atolls (Gentz, 2018). Generally, the Marshallese people and ICH practitioners, particularly canoe builders, emphasize the importance of canoes for their practical side, especially as petrol prices rise. Here, the continuity of the canoe-building tradition is threatened by several inter-related factors, such as the lack of interest among young people, the continuing outmigration trend, the lack of large trees suitable for canoe hulls, and climate change.

In contrast, WAM's staff and other government officials in the cultural sector stress canoes' meaning in the formation of cultural identity. In the three-decade process of the canoe tradition revival, this tradition firmly became the core of cultural revitalization and provides the people with the pride of seafaring people today. Some exemplify a proverb originated from the creation legends of the Marshalls, in which the canoe symbolizes community unity: *'Wa kuk, wa jimor. Waan kōjipañ koj, waan kōkkure kōj. Waan jokkwier'* ('Canoe to bring us together, canoe belonging to everyone. Canoe to help us, canoe to destroy us. Canoe to give meaning to our lives') (Miller, 2010, p.8).

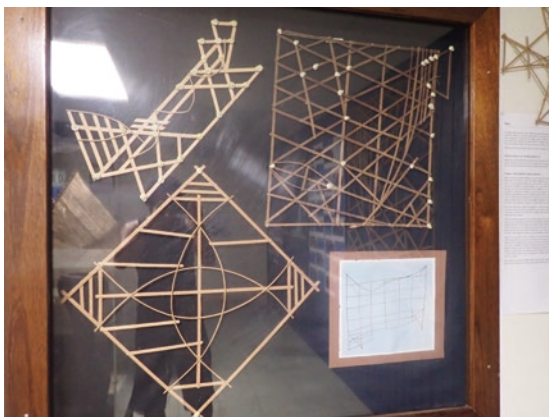
Similarly, wind-powered canoes reduce the country's reliance on fossil fuels to fight climate change. Further, the canoe tradition's symbolic importance is thought to become greater during this hardship of climate crisis. The canoes can be placed at the centre of awareness and campaign activities about climate threats within the country and toward the world.

RMI Public School System's (PSS) curriculums of Marshallese studies, Marshallese Language Arts, and Social Studies have been continuing to introduce aspects of traditional culture, including the canoe tradition. Recently, PSS started to develop a one-week curriculum to incorporate the canoe culture in school education in collaborate with WAM. While WAM firmly positions the traditional canoes in the center of their educational programs, it has flexibly modified canoe designs and adopted new technology in canoe building. They will continue to do this to ensure the sustainability of the canoe tradition in the future world.

## Revival of Voyaging Tradition and Seascape

In the pre-contact period, the Pacific Islanders interacted with other islands for purposes including obtaining resources not distributed on their home islands, ensuring a lifeline against disasters (e.g., typhoons, droughts), and securing marriage partners. The atoll communities in the Marshall Islands were interconnected through inter-island voyaging (Spennemann, 2005), which is seen in the homogeneity of the Marshallese language spoken on those atolls in a vast region. Indigenous perception of the seascape is understood as a living worldview with associated legends and stories of ancestors and spirits and geographical and environmental knowledge of seamarks (e.g., waves, currents, fishing areas, marine lives), which provide moral and cultural norms and utilitarian information (e.g., subsistence, seafaring) (Ahlgren, 2016, p. 79; Genz, 2018). For Marshallese seafarers, it is represented in stick charts (Figure 14), a navigational learning tool, which indicates ocean swell patterns (Krämer & Nevermann, 1938).

German and Japanese colonial administrations maintained regular steamer operations and banned inter-atoll voyages, which resumed after World War II (Mason, 1947, pp. 5, 58). Nuclear testing that took place in the country in 1946–1958 led to multiple dislocations, which affected the people's patterns of movement and settlement and changed the landscape and seascape (Ahlgren, 2016, p. 22). Currently, inter-island traveling almost exclusively relies on modern transportation, such as regular air services and infrequent governmental cargo-passenger ships. Outer islands are largely self-sufficient and their islanders mostly use cheaper ship services except for urgent cases. Voyaging tradition has largely declined in the postwar period but after a long gap, in 2015, this nearly lost esoteric art was revived with a successful WAM-facilitated voyage, which received considerable media attention. The revival of canoe building and sailing has reformed the Marshallese people's ancestral identity as the people of the sea (Genz, 2018). This also contributed to their maintenance of traditional seascape as part of their heritage.



**Figure 14** Various stick charts displayed at the Alele Museum (©T. Nagaoka, 2023)

## Weaving Heritage's Economic Importance and Sustainability

Contemporary handicraft practitioners all agree on handicrafts' economic benefits, cultural importance, and the importance of passing down this heritage to the younger generation in order to keep the culture alive in the future. In the Marshall Islands' economy, handicrafts are one of the only few possibilities for commercial development besides fishing and copra due to limited resources and remoteness, as pointed out by an early postwar American anthropologist (Mason, 1947, p. 4) as well as a recent statistical report (RMI EPSSO, 2018, p. 59). Among those industries, handicrafts and copra are two major commodities. Especially, handicraft making is women's main income, as half of the rural households engaged in it (Table 2). In 2000, an estimate of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for handicrafts was 396,000 US dollars (0.4 percent) and their amount of export was 10,000 dollars (RMI EPSSO, 2001, p. 68, Table 8.2; p. 88, Table 11.3). It is possible, however, to earn more money with handicrafts than with copra or other domestic products. For this reason, households involved in handicraft activities or receiving remittances tend to be at a low risk of food insecurity. In contrast, those involved in selling copra, fishing, or livestock activities tend to be at a high risk (Troubat & Sharp, 2021, p. xi), suggesting the stable income that comes with handicraft making.

Considerable efforts have been made to promote women's handicraft production. The revival of *jaki-ed* discussed above is such an excellent example of women's enthusiasm. RMI Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce and RMI Office of Commerce, Investment and Tourism have been supporting women's development in the handicraft industry through workshops and other opportunities. One of these includes a plan to create an e-commerce platform that outer island women can participate in. Some outer island communities held workshops to train young weavers in both weaving techniques and business skills, using funding from the RMI National Training Council. Weaving is officially incorporated into the Social Studies curriculum and is taught from the first grade at local elementary schools.

Due to its important social function, the art of handicrafts firmly continues despite threats such as modernization and outmigration trends. Additionally, climate change threatens the heritage, as hotness damages pandanus leaves and

**Table 2** Households by agriculture activities by rural and urban sectors in 2011 (Source: Based on RMI EPSSO & SPC, 2012, p. 77, Figure 11.15).

	Growing crops	Fishing	Raising livestock	Making copra	Handicrafts	Others
Rural sector	87.2%	88.7%	86.2%	65.3%	46.6%	1.2%
Urban sector	60.1%	51.1%	36.6%	5.1%	9.3%	1.1%

other plants. Further, the rising sea level is also a threat, as it changes the gathering locations of material shells. Marshallese women not only keep their traditional knowledge and skills but continually adopt new materials, techniques, and approaches as necessary and appropriate for changing needs, styles, and resources, using their creative ideas and elements (LaBriola, 2013, p. 26). Thus, handicraft-making actively contributes to the community's sustainability and development not only economically but also socially and culturally.

### **Seafaring and Weaving Heritage and Tourism**

After deducting transit and stopover passengers, the 2009–2017 true total annual average visitor count to RMI was 4,775.6, and 'holiday/vacation' visitors' annual average count was 1,495.8 (RMI EPSSO, 2018, p. 101). Although tourism is included in the RMI government's top development priorities, along with marine resources and agriculture (Asian Development Bank, 2001), its impact on the country's economy seems to be relatively small. However, buying local handicrafts at souvenir shops and adventuring on WAM sailing tours in the lagoon will contribute to local economy. For example, WAM sailing excursions earn around \$1,200 per month on average. The seafaring and weaving heritages also offer visitors positive cultural experiences and education. For example, in addition to those activities mentioned above, visitors can learn about Marshallese culture at the Alele Museum. Further, tourism activities build local pride towards the Marshallese culture and sustain traditional practices. Thus, these cultural heritage elements not only contribute directly to the local economic development but to the growing tourism industry of the RMI.

### **CONCLUSION**

Traditionally, in many Pacific Island cultures, seafaring heritage is the most important element for men, while weaving heritage is the most important for women. However, these practices have been eroding in most islands because of postwar modernization. This study clearly illustrates that those heritages remain the core of Marshallese culture, signifying the continuity of ancient heritage. It is important to note that these heritages were maintained through the Marshallese people's efforts and have contributed to SDG 11 ('Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'), by maintaining and developing the Marshallese community practically (economically) and symbolically. Those heritages also have been exerting positive influence on such contemporary social issues as youth problems, poverty, emigration trends, and climate change.

There is consensus among the contemporary Marshallese people that their traditions and indigenous practices need to be revived or retained, replacing some foreign elements of their lifestyle with traditional ones (Miller, 2010, p. 117). To

deepen our understanding of ICH's contribution toward SDGs, resulting from this study, we need further investigations about how the three categories of people (rural, urban, and diaspora Marshallese) hold different perceptions toward those heritages. We can do this by comparing rural people (the main ICH practitioners) with the other two categories (the majority of the population). In addition, follow-up studies on the relationship between those heritages and the community development will enrich our understanding of the importance of ICH.

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# LOCAL COMMUNITY STRATEGIES FOR SAFEGUARDING CULTURAL LANDSCAPES IN KYRGYZSTAN

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## INTRODUCTION

This article examines examples of initiatives undertaken by visionary local community leaders and activists in collaboration with traditional culture custodians, as well as local and international organizations, aimed at preserving both cultural and natural heritage.

An analysis of these strategies highlights the importance of integrating cultural heritage into contemporary socio-economic systems, contributing to the preservation of identity and continuity of traditions. These strategies strengthen local communities, promote leadership development among women and youth, and serve as a source of cultural and economic resilience, inspiration, and collective responsibility.

The initiatives undertaken demonstrate a balance between preserving cultural traditions and adapting to modern realities. They underscore the inseparable link between cultural heritage and environmental sustainability, helping to maintain equilibrium in both cultural and ecological systems. In the context of globalization and climate change, which lead to the loss of natural heritage and the erosion of cultural diversity, these strategies contribute to broader sustainable development goals and societal well-being.

The study of these local initiatives provides deeper insights into the mechanisms for preserving cultural landscapes amid rapid environmental and social changes. These findings offer valuable experience and perspectives not only for local initiatives but also for global efforts in heritage conservation and the achievement of sustainable development goals.

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## KYRGYZSTAN: BIODIVERSITY AND CULTURAL CROSSROADS

### Fostering Enduring Bonds with Nature

Kyrgyzstan is a country located in the north-eastern part of Central Asia, nestled within the massive mountain systems of the Tian Shan and Pamir-Alay ranges. Over 93 percent of its territory lies at elevations ranging from 1,000 to 7,400 metres above sea level, with 4 percent covered by glaciers. This creates a unique environment for diverse ecosystems. Kyrgyzstan is home to about 1 percent of all known rare, endemic, and endangered plant and animal species on the planet (UNCCD, 2014, pp. 10–13). The preservation of biodiversity is not only directly linked to the well-being of local communities and their access to natural resources but also ensures the continuation of traditional livelihood practices and the preservation of the distinctive culture of the Kyrgyz people.

Pastures are the most significant natural resource. Kyrgyz nomads referred to their lands as *‘mal kindiktüü jer,’* which literally means ‘land and livestock connected by an umbilical cord.’ This metaphor provides insight into the local context. The traditional worldview was holistic, perceiving the entire world as a single organism where all species (including humans) coexist and thrive. Sacred cultural symbols such as *Jer-Ene* (Mother Earth), *Ot-Ene* (Mother Fire), and *Bugu-Ene* (Mother Deer) reflect the inseparable bond between Kyrgyz nomads and Nature. At the core of the nomadic worldview lies the belief that all living beings share one father—the Sun, one mother—the Earth, one blood—Water, and one soul—Air.

In the process of adaptation to the natural and climatic conditions of the habitat, nomadic Kyrgyz have accumulated unique knowledge about natural phenomena and cycles, stars and phases of the moon. And also include pastoral knowledge, including and traditional classification of livestock, ways of their care and treatment; traditional classification of pastures, indicators of evaluation and measures for their improvement; behaviour of wild animals and birds of prey, technologies of processing wool, leather and much more (Doolbekova, 2017). This knowledge, tested by time and practice, became an integral part of their spiritual culture.

Along with this, the system of spiritual and moral values, norms of behaviour, beliefs, rituals and customs provided mechanisms of rigorous adherence, safeguarding and transmission of information. These served as a unifying core and a powerful source, strengthening their spirit and providing resilience and well-being for millennia. This vividly illustrates the concept of traditional ecological knowledge, which encompasses ‘knowledge, practices, and beliefs developed through adaptive processes and passed down through generations via cultural transmission’ (Berkes, 2012, p. 7).

During the Soviet Era, those who sought to promote Kyrgyz traditions were often accused of nationalism or separatism. Informal educational system, such as the master-apprentice model, were ignored or forgotten. Traditional ecological knowledge about the natural world—including soil diversity, plant seasons, pasture sustainability, medicinal herbs, and more—was dismissed as outdated and primitive.

## **Contemporary Challenges to Cultural and Natural Heritage**

The natural and cultural heritage of Kyrgyzstan is under significant pressure from numerous internal and external threats, driven by socio-economic problems, political instability, and deepening environmental and spiritual crises. The post-Soviet transition, accompanied by the shift to a market economy, has intensified the strain on ecosystems and traditional cultural practices, exacerbating their erosion, which began during the Soviet era.

One of the most pressing threats is the rise in poverty and labour migration, particularly in rural regions, where 65 percent of the population resides (National Statistical Committee, 2024). These trends negatively affect the preservation of traditional culture and the sustainable use of natural resources. Political instability, evidenced by three revolutions (2005, 2010, and 2020), has heightened social tensions and hindered the development of long-term strategies for managing cultural and natural heritage. The reduction of agricultural land is driven not only by soil degradation, salinization, and pasture depletion but also by the alienation of fertile lands for private commercial purposes.

Kyrgyzstan, as part of the Central Asian region, faces extensive environmental challenges, including:

- the reduction of wildlands and the loss of biodiversity, including endemic species of flora and fauna;
- accelerating climate change, manifesting in glacier retreat, deforestation, and desertification;
- the negative impact of extractive industries, particularly mining.

According to the Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting over the past 70 years, the area of glaciers in Kyrgyzstan has decreased by 16 percent.<sup>2</sup> According to the country's Fourth National Report on the Implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, about 40 percent of pastures under pressure (UNCCD, 2014, p.24). Moreover, the intensive exploitation of natural resources by both local and foreign companies poses significant threats to

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<sup>2</sup> <https://cabar.asia/en/kyrgyzstan-lost-over-16-per-cent-of-glaciers-in-the-last-50-years-drought-risk-gets-real-to-the-whole-region>

ecosystems and the access of local communities to their ancestral lands. A particularly pressing issue is the reclamation of radioactive sites left after the extraction of rare earth metals during the Soviet period.

Threats to cultural heritage are both internal and external. Key factors include the growing influence of radical Islamist ideologies, particularly among socially vulnerable and marginalized youth, and the spread of religious fundamentalism, which is often promoted as a solution to spiritual and economic challenges.

The collapse of the Soviet Union created an ideological vacuum that became a foundation for the revival of religious identity as a unifying factor. At the same time, globalization and the influence of mass and pop culture further intensify pressure on Kyrgyzstan's traditional cultural identity, leading to its gradual erosion.

Thus, preserving Kyrgyzstan's natural and cultural heritage requires a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach that considers socio-economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions. Long-term strategies are needed to promote sustainable resource management, support traditional practices, and address modern challenges, including climate change and social-economic instability.

### **The Significance of Cultural Landscapes**

The cultural landscapes of Kyrgyzstan reflect unique forms of human interaction with the natural environment, shaped by a traditional way of life rooted in centuries-old ancestral experience. This experience encompasses efficient land and natural resource management, the traditional social organization of communities, profound spiritual culture, and adherence to customs and beliefs. Such interaction not only fostered harmonious relationships with nature but also contributed to the development of sustainable practices for utilizing diverse landscapes, from semi-desert and steppe areas to high-altitude pastures and alpine meadows.

The practice of seasonal migration and adherence to principles of sustainable natural resource use ensured the preservation of biodiversity and ecological balance. Today, pastures and livestock farming continue to play a pivotal role in the national economy and culture, remaining a critical factor in the local and national socio-economic development of Kyrgyzstan.

The cultural landscapes of Kyrgyzstan hold not only ecological but also profound spiritual significance. The symbolism and sacredness of these places are embodied in features such as *mazars* ('*mazar*' from Arabic 'place that is visited'). In Kyrgyz the term has been 'applied broadly to sacred sites of all kinds including springs, trees and rock formations' (Aitpaeva, 2008, p.66). Long-term research

conducted by the Cultural Research Center 'Aigine' has documented 1,176 sacred sites and classified them according to traditional classification (Aigine, 2015).

These locations, where pilgrimages, rituals, and ceremonies are conducted, represent a living testimony to ancient spiritual practices that continue to play an important role in the cultural life of the Kyrgyz people. For example, the largest high-altitude lake, Issyk-Kul, holds special spiritual significance for local communities, who refer to it as the 'third eye of the planet' (Samakov & Berkes, 2016, pp. 213–214). This unique lake is fed by numerous mountain rivers, yet it remains endorheic and does not freeze in winter. Interestingly, the lake's shape resembles an eye, further enhancing its symbolic meaning. Surrounding the lake are many sacred sites, most of which are natural features such as springs, mountains, streams, and trees.

Cultural landscapes have also become spaces for the creation of masterpieces of Kyrgyz culture. These include *yurts*<sup>3</sup> (nomadic dwelling), *shyrdaks* and *ala-kiyiz*<sup>4</sup> (traditional felt rugs), musical instruments, oral epics such as *Manas*,<sup>5</sup> and many other cultural artifacts. These elements illustrate a unique harmony between functionality and aesthetics, rooted in an enduring connection with nature. For example, the *shyrdak* symbolized family well-being and prosperity. Through its ornamentation—comprising several hundred patterns, including zoomorphic, plant-based, and geometric designs—the craftswoman conveyed messages and blessings. *Shyrdaks* were crafted by artisans not for sale but for domestic use (as part of the interior decor of yurts) and were passed down from generation to generation as a family or clan heirloom (CACSARC-kg, 2015, p. 255).

The significance of Kyrgyzstan's cultural landscapes extends far beyond their natural and cultural diversity. They are an embodiment of the unique identity of the Kyrgyz people, reflected in traditional practices such as animal husbandry, hunting, crafts, and music. Their value lies in demonstrating to the world an example of a sustainable way of life, grounded in traditional ecological knowledge and harmonious coexistence with the environment.

With the advent of independence, Kyrgyzstan entered a new phase of recovering the lost meanings of its traditional culture, leading to its renewal and development. At the core of the Kyrgyz traditional culture is intangible cultural heritage (ICH) 'traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants' (UNESCO, 2003).

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<sup>3</sup> Traditional knowledge & skills in making Kyrgyz and Kazakh yurts inscribed in 2014 on the ICH List

<sup>4</sup> Art of Kyrgyz Traditional Carpets (knowledge, skills, diversity, the semantics of ornamentation, & the ceremonies of creating carpets) inscribed in 2012 on the ICH List in need of urgent safeguarding

<sup>5</sup> Kyrgyz Epic Trilogy inscribed in 2013 on the ICH List

Despite the rapid processes of globalization and political fluctuations, local communities in Kyrgyzstan have preserved their cultural identity and uniqueness. Today, there is a noticeable increase in the activity of local communities leading the revival of cultural and spiritual practices, values, and the wisdom of the nomadic heritage, even amidst the accelerating trends of globalization and cultural homogenization.

## **VISIONARY COMMUNITIES IN SAFEGUARDING ICH**

Local communities, their leaders, and active advocates, in alliance with cultural practitioners and traditional knowledge bearers, are revitalizing the profound meanings of their heritage. They weave together tradition and innovation, fostering intergenerational connections through collaborative efforts. These communities serve as hubs of cultural renewal, linking traditional practices with contemporary needs and creating a vibrant continuum of cultural expression.

By their nature, these communities are ‘visionary’ as they safeguard traditional knowledge and skills not in isolation but through collective action. They form community organizations, networks, and cooperatives, working closely with cultural practitioners, spiritual leaders, and local and international organizations to protect and enrich ICH in Kyrgyzstan (Taalim-Forum, 2021).

Visionary communities embody the core values of their ancestors, with a profound understanding that preserving and developing natural and cultural heritage remains a cornerstone of sustainable socio-economic development and community well-being. They view cultural heritage not just as a legacy to be preserved but as a dynamic and powerful economic and social resource. This heritage is a unifying force, utilized to drive local development, create employment, generate income and enhance environmental protection.

Local-level development, rooted in the interplay of social, economic, environmental, and cultural factors, significantly improves the well-being of communities by enabling individuals to realize their full potential. Visionary communities act as genuine leaders in safeguarding ICH, leveraging their deep understanding of the importance of continuity and unity to integrate cultural heritage into modern life in ways that align with principles of sustainability.

These communities not only cherish and take pride in their cultural heritage but also enrich it by preserving its profound meanings while discovering new forms of expression. They actively seek allies and garner support from local civil society organizations, drawing the attention of international donors to open new opportunities for income-generating activities. In doing so, visionary communities exemplify how cultural heritage can serve as a foundation for innovation and



sustainable development, ensuring the continuity and relevance of traditions in contemporary society.

### **Local Communities of the Southern Shore of Ysyk-Köl**

One of the striking examples of visionary communities in Kyrgyzstan is the local communities living along the southern shore of Lake Ysyk-Köl (translated from Kyrgyz as ‘hot lake’). The lake plays a crucial role in the region’s ecosystem, supporting biodiversity that includes rare species of animals, birds, fish, and plants. This region is rich in natural landmarks such as glaciers, canyons, waterfalls, hot springs, and alpine meadows. However, the growth of tourism and the impacts of climate change raise concerns about the need for environmental conservation and sustainable management of natural resources.

Local residents primarily engage in transhumant livestock farming, horticulture, traditional crafts, and ethno-tourism. For instance, the village of Kyzyl-Tuu is renowned for its artisanship, with over 100 craftsmen dedicated to producing traditional yurts. According to field research by the public foundation ‘Kiyiz Duino’, the number of *yurt-makers* in the village increased from 126 in 2013 to 167 in 2019. Of these artisans, 10 percent are from the older generation, 60 percent are middle-aged, and 30 percent are young craftsmen.

Field studies conducted by the Taalim-Forum Public Foundation (2020–2021) reveal that *yurt-makers* in the region continue to employ ancient techniques in their craft. Aspiring artisans often learn through workshops and training sessions. However, many still follow the traditional method of apprenticeship, living with a master (*ustat*) to gain comprehensive training and practical experience. Upon completing their training, the *ustats* bless their apprentices (*shakirt*) and ceremonially present them with a piece of the *yurt*’s wooden framework. This relic symbolizes the responsibility to preserve and pass on the heritage, craftsmanship, and traditions of *yurt-making* to future generations.

The artisans of Kyzyl-Tuu village have restored the region’s reputation as the home of the finest *yurt-makers* in Kyrgyzstan. In 2019, the World Crafts Council recognized Issyk-Kul as the ‘World Yurt Capital.’<sup>6</sup> Craftsmen from the region were honoured with the title ‘*Ysyk-Köl Region—Homeland of the Yurt*,’ and six women artisans of the region received UNESCO’s prestigious Seal of Excellence.

The communities of Issyk-Kul exemplify the seamless integration of tradition and modernity. Their work not only preserves an essential element of Kyrgyz cultural heritage but also supports sustainable economic development, ensuring that their

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wccinternational.org/craft-cities/craft-cities-asia-pacific>

unique knowledge and skills remain relevant and celebrated in a rapidly changing world.

The following case studies highlight innovative and community-driven strategies for safeguarding Kyrgyzstan's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and cultural landscapes. Each example illustrates how tradition and modern needs intersect to promote sustainable socio-economic development, environmental stewardship, and cultural continuity. Together, they demonstrate the profound potential of local initiatives in addressing global challenges, such as cultural erosion, economic marginalization, and ecological degradation.

### **Case Study 1: The Eagle People—Identity and Way of Life**

The Eagle People of Bokonbayev village preserve the traditional Kyrgyz practice of falconry, a centuries-old cultural tradition intertwined with the region's identity and natural heritage. This case study exemplifies how the community has transformed heritage conservation into a source of education, economic opportunity, and cultural pride.

*Salbuurun*<sup>7</sup>—traditional complex hunting system of Kyrgyz people, as a living model of coevolution and collaboration between people, hunting birds ('falconry', 'falconer' and 'falcon' covers the use of all species of birds of prey (raptors), such as falcons, eagles, hawks buzzards, etc.), hunting dogs (*taigan*) and horses on landscapes of the Northern and Inner Tien Shan. Today, around 30 families (approximately 50–60 people) in the village keep hunting birds and breed *taigans*. Of these, 85 percent are young people aged 12 to 26, while 15 percent are from the older generation aged 40–60 (Taalim-Forum, 2021).

The leader of this community is hereditary *bürkütchi* (*falconer*; *bürküt*—golden eagle) Almaz Akunov. He established the Salbuurun Ordo—*yurt* camp, which includes five *yurts*, an interactive museum of traditional hunting, a training ground, and the falconry school 'Salbuurunchu Mektebi.' The school employs traditional teaching methods that involve direct interaction between students and master hunters.

This approach helps young people not only master the techniques of traditional archery on horseback or on foot and learn to care for birds of prey but also gain a deeper understanding of the philosophy, worldview, and cultural values of their ancestors. Students at the school learn to observe nature and the behaviour of birds of prey and actively participate in traditional festivals. The training is

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<sup>7</sup> *Salbuurun* (Kyrgyz: Салбуурун) originates from the nomadic tradition of hunting and safeguarding herds from predators, including wolves.

enriched with fascinating stories from the masters, legends, live music, and cultural practices, fostering a sense of pride in their culture and identity.

More than 10 years ago, Almaz Akunov founded the Salbuurun Federation is an association of stewards of traditional falconry. Today, the Federation has over 200 members, including around 30 women from all corners of the country. Members actively revive forgotten traditions, organize festivals, including archery competition, *taigan* races and horse games, and engage youth through informal education to pass down their heritage.

At the initiative of Almaz Akunov, performances by hunters with birds of prey and *taigans*, as well as traditional archery techniques, were included in the program of the World Nomad Games<sup>8</sup> in 2014. Young members of the Federation have successfully represented Kyrgyzstan at these games held in the country, Turkey, and Kazakhstan, earned numerous awards.

The Federation actively collaborates with local and international tourism companies to organize annual festivals, which contribute to the development of ethno-tourism and increase the income of local communities. Support from government bodies, such as the Ministry of Culture, Information and Tourism and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology, plays a vital role in its activities. Additionally, the Federation has established ties with Central Asian unions of traditional hunting enthusiasts and international organizations like the International Association for Falconry (IAF).

The case study demonstrates how traditional practices can be revitalized to inspire young generations, foster community cohesion, and contribute to cultural tourism. Their efforts showcase the potential of cultural heritage to generate sustainable livelihoods while preserving ecological balance and cultural identity. The clear vision and successful strategies of the Salbuurun Federation significantly contribute to the preservation, development, and promotion of Kyrgyz intangible cultural heritage at local, national, and international levels.

## **Case Study 2: An Inspiring Ethno-Village ‘Almaluu’**

Almaluu Ethno-Village combines the preservation of traditional crafts with modern tourism, creating a unique model for cultural and economic development. This initiative highlights how Kyrgyz communities are leveraging their rich heritage to build resilient, self-sustaining economies.

Jyldyz Asanakunova, the founder of the ethno-village ‘Almaluu,’ leads a unique

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<sup>8</sup> *Salbuurun* is one of the World Nomads Games’ disciplines; <https://worldnomadgames.com/en/>

initiative to revive and promote traditional Kyrgyz crafts. The complex consists of 22 *yurts*, each decorated using ancient techniques and handmade materials. This *yurt* village has become a popular tourist destination for hiking and horseback tours, birdwatching, and masterclasses featuring guardians and practitioners of traditional knowledge. The ethno-village collaborates with 24 tourism companies, attracting 2,000 to 3,000 tourists annually. This generates income for local artisans, traditional music performers, and service staff.

One of the village's key endeavours is the development of a felt studio and workshop, which has established local production of felt products, including traditional Kyrgyz felt carpets known as *shyrdak* and *ala-kiyiz*. To support this production, 15–20 tons of wool are purchased annually and processed locally, benefiting local farmers. To improve the livelihoods of women in nearby villages, educational programs were launched, engaging 1,500 participants. As a result of these initiatives, trained women have created eight cooperatives, which not only preserve traditional crafts but also provide a stable income: 10–15 percent of participants receive regular orders while working from home.

For interested locals and tourists, the ethno-village offers educational programs encompassing fifteen thematic areas dedicated to elements of traditional culture inscribed on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Jyldyz Asanakunova is also actively engaged in preserving the natural heritage of the southern shore of Lake Ysyk-Köl. In partnership with local and international organizations, the National UNESCO Committee, and local authorities, she is developing the idea of creating the 'Teskei' Geopark.<sup>9</sup> This initiative brings together community members and youth leaders, fostering continuity in preserving natural and cultural heritage.

Traditional knowledge and practices passed down through generations, along with new forms of cultural expression, strengthen a sense of identity, pride in culture, and collective responsibility. These initiatives foster community cohesion, supporting resilience in a modern world. The development of ethno-tourism stimulates craftsmanship, encourages locals to learn hospitality and marketing skills, and strengthens the economic self-sufficiency and sustainability of local communities.

The Almaluu Ethno-Village exemplifies the transformative power of cultural heritage as an engine for innovation, empowerment, and environmental sustainability. By integrating traditional crafts into global tourism, it bridges cultural preservation with economic resilience.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://teskei-geopark.com/en>

## **ICH MATTERS TO COMMUNITY RESILIENCE**

### **Connection to SDG 11.4**

Strategies implemented by local communities serve as an effective tool for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11.4, which calls for strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. Successful examples of initiatives aimed at reviving and developing traditional crafts, ethno-tourism, and ecological practices demonstrate how local actions and initiatives contribute to addressing national goals and challenges in Kyrgyzstan while making significant contributions to global goals.

The initiatives not only help preserve cultural landscapes and intangible cultural heritage but also play a key role in enhancing community resilience in the face of changes such as globalization, climate challenges, and migration processes. Such approaches create models of sustainable development in which cultural heritage functions not only as a value of the past but also as an active tool for addressing contemporary issues. Engaging youth and women, enhancing their roles in decision-making and in creating sustainable economic models, shows that preserving traditions can be closely linked to empowering local communities.

Collective Impact of Case Studies of the Eagle People and the Almaluu Ethno-Village illustrate the dynamic relationship between cultural preservation, community empowerment, and sustainable development. By safeguarding Kyrgyzstan's intangible cultural heritage, these communities not only celebrate their traditions but also create adaptive models for addressing contemporary socio-economic and environmental challenges. Their work serves as an inspiring example of how grassroots initiatives can contribute to the global goals of cultural and natural heritage preservation, particularly in alignment with SDG 11.4.

### **Local Strategies for Safeguarding Cultural Landscapes**

Collective Impact of Case Studies Together, the case studies of the Eagle People and the Almaluu Ethno-Village illustrate the dynamic relationship between cultural preservation, community empowerment, and sustainable development. By safeguarding Kyrgyzstan's intangible cultural heritage, these communities not only celebrate their traditions but also create adaptive models for addressing contemporary socio-economic and environmental challenges. The cases 'demonstrate capacity to safeguard and promote local cultural values, become a cultural and educational centre and contributed to the well-being' (Osmonova & Doolbekova, 2022, pp.42–43).

Their work serves as an inspiring model of how grassroots initiatives can

**Table 1** Key strategies as models

Key strategies	Initiatives	Model potential
Revitalizing Traditional Practices	Case Study 1 showcases how communities can keep ancient practices alive while engaging youth and modern audiences.	Nations with heritage practices at risk of fading (e.g., indigenous hunting or craftsmanship) could replicate apprenticeship models and interactive educational programs that emphasize cultural pride and economic opportunities.
Blending Heritage with Economic Development	Case Study 2 demonstrates how cultural heritage can be integrated into tourism, creating sustainable income streams.	Developing countries could adapt this strategy by promoting community-led heritage tourism initiatives, focusing on empowering local artisans and small businesses.
Women's Empowerment in Heritage Preservation	Case Study 2 highlights the role of gender-inclusive strategies in safeguarding cultural heritage.	Similar programs can be implemented in other regions to involve women in heritage preservation, fostering social cohesion and economic resilience.
Community-Led Conservation	Case studies 1 and 2 exemplify the power of grassroots efforts in sustainable natural resource management.	This approach can inspire other nations to encourage local stewardship of natural landscapes, balancing traditional knowledge with modern conservation science.

contribute to the global goals of cultural and natural heritage preservation, particularly in alignment with SDG 11.4 (see Table 1).

The revival of traditional crafts, such as *yurt*-making and felt production, anchors cultural sustainability by preserving identity and ensuring the intergenerational transfer of knowledge. These practices, when integrated into local economic models, strengthen cultural landscapes and cultivate pride in heritage. Educational programs and cooperative initiatives, particularly for women, drive economic opportunities and empowerment, reducing poverty while fostering resilience. Similarly, engaging youth in environmental education and conservation nurtures future leaders committed to safeguarding both cultural and natural resources.

By inspiring collective responsibility, these initiatives unite communities to tackle shared challenges, adapt to changes, and sustain their unique traditions. Moreover, they serve as best practices and scalable model for other regions, showcasing how grassroots efforts can contribute to achieving national and global sustainable development goals. The findings of the research 'demonstrate that traditional knowledge, skills and experience help local communities survive today's rapidly changing world. ICH has become a source of cultural resilience, inspiration, consolidation, and collective responsibility' (Osmonova & Doolbekova, 2022, p.41).



The proactive strategies of Kyrgyz communities emphasise the indispensable role of cultural and natural heritage in sustainable development frameworks. By preserving traditions while innovating to meet modern demands, these communities pave the way for a future where heritage and progress coexist harmoniously, offering enduring sources of inspiration, resilience, and prosperity.

Visionary local communities in Kyrgyzstan play a crucial role in safeguarding cultural landscapes through innovative and sustainable strategies. By intertwining cultural heritage with economic development and social empowerment, they create resilient systems that address both contemporary challenges and the need to preserve traditions. These initiatives highlight the value of traditional knowledge, community cooperation, and environmental stewardship as key elements in fostering sustainable development.

Like Kyrgyzstan, many nations with significant cultural landscapes face the dual challenges of preserving their heritage while addressing contemporary socio-economic and environmental pressures. The strategies implemented by Kyrgyz communities offer adaptable frameworks for nations grappling with these issues. A robust approach to safeguarding Kyrgyzstan's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and cultural landscapes requires integration of cultural and ecological conservation strategies, along with strong support for local, national and international stakeholders.

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# RECONSTRUCTION OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TRADITIONAL AINU LIVING SPACES (*IWOR*)

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on recent efforts to reconstruct a traditional Ainu living space (*IWOR*) in Biratorichō, a village in the Hidaka Region of Hokkaido, with this initiative focused preserving and utilizing intangible cultural heritage. '*IWOR*' is an Ainu word that originally meant hunting ground or occupied place, area or space, but in recent years, it has been used as an administrative term to refer to 'traditional living space.' It is primarily used in this sense in this paper.

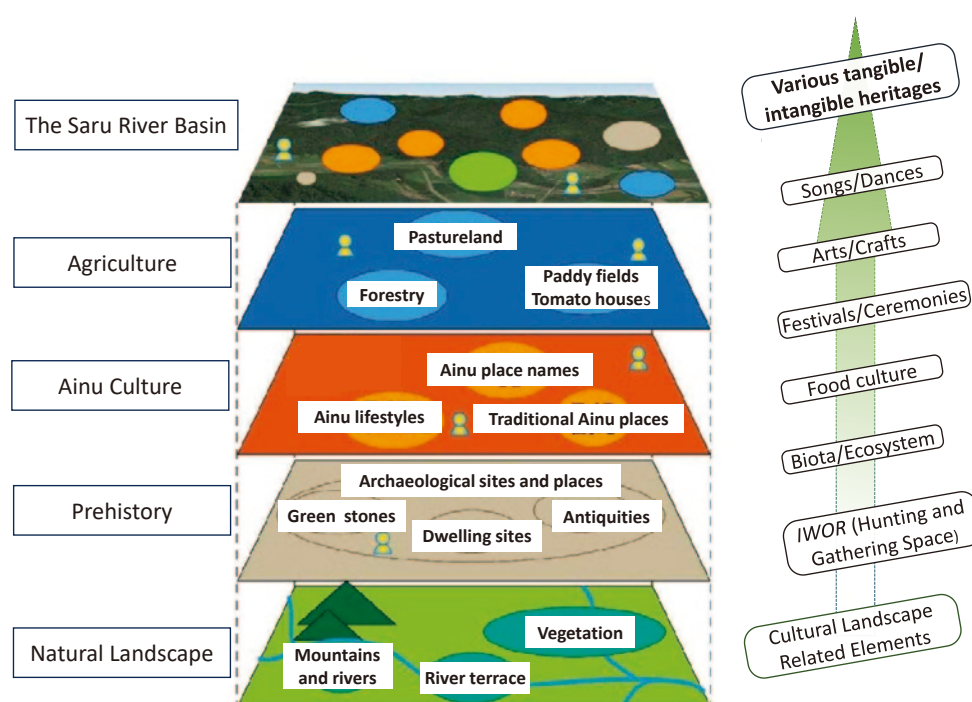
Ainu culture has a historically been neglected by the Japanese government and non-Ainu people. However, in recent years, the Ainu Culture Promotion Act (1997), Ainu Policy Promotion Act (2019) and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008) have led to a major reexamination of Ainu culture both at home and abroad. Thanks to the efforts of local governments and Ainu communities, this change is beginning to have a concrete impact on regional development.

The purpose of this paper is to examine and present, through a case study of Biratorichō, located in Hokkaido, the northernmost of the four major islands in the Japanese archipelago, the experiences of regional and ethnic communities affected by policies and development activities, who take these on with resilience, flexibility and creativity while increasing interest and pride in their own culture and linking this to community development. In particular, we focus on the fact that the contemporary revitalization and construction of traditional Ainu living spaces (*IWOR*) are tied to each generation of Ainu becoming aware of the value of such intangible cultural heritage as traditional dance, crafts and place names and to independent efforts to revitalize traditional Ainu culture (Figure 1). This is because we understand that intangible cultural heritage (ICH) can wipe

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<sup>2</sup> Ainu weaver, Japan



**Figure 1** Traditional living space of the Ainu

away negative history, encourage local residents to become more active and contribute to regional development, and we believe that it can also serve as a reference to other important information.

## CREATION OF AN AINU CULTURAL FACILITY CENTRED AROUND NIBUTANI VILLAGE

Over the past 30 years, Biratorichō has been developing a group of cultural facilities that also function as museums to serve as infrastructure for continuing and developing Ainu culture. These cultural facilities serve not only to preserve and exhibit materials, and for research, education and information dissemination purposes, but also to promote environmental and conservation projects as a part of infrastructure development for reviving and promoting Ainu culture.

Although these policies, projects and activities have received support from local agencies of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism and the Agency for Cultural Affairs, they have been largely established and implemented under the initiative and leadership of Biratorichō and the Ainu community.

In 2022, two new cultural facilities opened in Biratorichō. In July of the same year, the Nokapiraiworo Visitor Center opened in the Memu area and began full-scale operations. This is the first cultural facility affiliated with a national institution to bear the *IWOR* name (Yoshihara, 2020). Moreover, in November, the Ioru

Cultural Exchange Center was launched in the Nibutani Kotan area. The successive opening of these facilities bearing the *IWOR* name is deeply connected to the ‘Saru River Basin IWOR Concept’ proposed by Biratorichō and others, which will be discussed later.

A traditional Ainu ceremony called *chise-no-mi* (literally, ‘housewarming ceremony’) was held when the two facilities began operation. The custom of performing this ritual has been revived in recent years in the Biratori region and has become firmly entrenched. This can be seen as the result of efforts to revive and promote Ainu culture. Newspaper reports tend to emphasise that the facility is for disseminating Ainu culture, but the author (Yoshihara) believes that, prior to disseminating information, the facility was intended as a place for learning.

Then, how did these cultural facilities aimed at reviving and promoting Ainu culture come to be? Let us look back on the trends and developments surrounding Ainu culture—mainly in Biratorichō—over the past 50 years, from the 1970s to the present.

The 1970s saw a *renewed appreciation of the history and culture of the Ainu people*. This was a time when Ainu traditional culture was being re-evaluated in a positive light, with the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum opened thanks to the efforts of Ainu cultural researcher and Diet member Shigeru Kayano (1926–2006) and others. Soon after the museum began its activities, a documentary film recreating the long-extinct Ainu traditional event *iomante* (sending off the spirit of the bear) was created.

In the 1980s, the Ainu slogan ‘preserve traditions and pass them on to the future’ was formed. This slogan was actually utilized by an organization dedicated to preserving Ainu folk dance and was used on various occasions as an expression symbolizing this period. In 1984, Ainu traditional dance was designated as a National Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property, and during this period, efforts to pass on Ainu culture to future generations became prominent.

In the 1990s, the theme of *contemporary handing down of traditional Ainu culture* emerged. This theme became a fixture of this time when it was established as the operational mission of the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum in Biratorichō, which had its grand opening in April 1992.

In the early 2000s, projects related to the *IWOR* concept, which calls for *active participation of local residents, including the Ainu, and collaboration with experts*, were launched and became established in the region.

In the 2010s, progress was made in efforts to *develop and deepen the handing*

*down of Ainu culture.* An example of this can be seen in the Ainu Policy Promotion Act, enacted and implemented in 2019, and the Ainu-themed *UPOPOY (Symbolic Space for Ethnic Coexistence)* national park, which was opened in Shiraoichō.

Over the past half century, a trend of nurturing the foundation for the revival and promotion of Ainu culture has become evident—a direct result of the prevailing mood in the mid-20th century that considered the Ainu people and their culture as having no future.

## **SARU RIVER BASIN IWOR INITIATIVE AND RELATED PROJECTS**

Launched in Biratorichō in the late 1990s, the Saru River Basin IWOR Initiative began on the heels of a report issued by the Expert Panel on Utari Measures, an advisory body to the Chief Cabinet Secretary, in 1996, with the *IWOR* concept for the Biratori region continually updated over the next few years thereafter. The plan's concept involved the idea of *creating a model region for coexistence between nature and humans, and for multicultural and multiethnic coexistence.* The framework for this idea involved using the general ideas of *learning, experimenting, blessing, spreading, and living* that encompass spiritual and cultural aspects, with its apparent intention to present the desired image from a comprehensive, long-term perspective. These points have been distinctive features of the *IWOR* concept from the outset, demonstrating the vast spatial scale of the project, which covers the entire Saru River system, a nationally managed river with a total length of 104 kilometres. The important materials that came out first, such as a proposal document providing an overall snapshot of the plan in 2001, as well as its digest version and presentation video, were all released, with the basic principles, goals and framework that are still in place today largely solidified.

In reexamining this, *restoring traditional living spaces (ioru)* was one of the important measures proposed in the report of the aforementioned Expert Panel, which was compiled prior to the enactment of the *Ainu Culture Promotion Act* of 1997. Seven regions in Hokkaido (Sapporo, Asahikawa, Kushiro, Tokachi, Shizunai, Biratori and Shiraoi) announced their participation in the Ioru Revitalization Project and have continued to participate as observers in the Hokkaido Conference for Policies Promoting Ainu Culture, which was established by the Hokkaido Prefectural Government in 2000.

With the Hokkaido Utari Association headquarters at its centre, during this period, these seven regions formed the Ioru Network Promotion Council with the participation of respective Utari Association branches and local government officials. This Promotion Council held lively discussions, continued to lobby Hokkaido



and the national government, developed local concepts and plans, and advanced activities through competition and cooperation. A major turning point in the activities of the Promotion Council was when, at the Hokkaido Conference mentioned above in March 2002, Shiraoi was designated as the *pioneer loru*, which laid the groundwork for later realizing a *symbolic space for ethnic coexistence* in the same region.

With Shiraoichō selected as the first candidate site to begin work on a traditional living space (*loru*), Biratorichō's strategy needed to be reconsidered. Furthermore, even in Shiraoichō, which had taken the lead, the project did not make any progress because the national and prefectural governments were unable to decide on policies and plans for realizing *loru* for several years. In Shiraoichō, the *loru* Revitalization Project was officially launched in 2006 with national and prefectural budgets secured.

Biratorichō's strategic shift involved gradually implementing those measures, projects and activities within the Saru River Basin IWOR Initiative that were feasible to undertake, while making use of existing administrative frameworks at the national and prefectural levels. In particular, policies involving national and prefectural subsidies in the fields of culture and cultural assets have proven feasible if municipalities are keen to implement them and can provide some funding. In addition to the enactment of the Ainu Culture Promotion Act, the Sapporo District Court ruling in the Nibutani Dam case, which positioned the Ainu as an *indigenous people* and found the developer (defendant) guilty on the grounds of the *right of the Ainu to enjoy their own culture*, was finalized without

**Table 1** Major policies, projects and activities that Biratorichō has implemented since the 2000s

Year	Policies/projects/activities
2003	Ainu Cultural Environment Conservation Project launched
2006	Collection of traditional utensils used in daily life designated an important tangible folk-cultural property
2007	'Cultural Landscape along the Sarugawa River resulting from Ainu Tradition and Modern Settlement' designated as an Important Cultural Landscape
2008	The national government's 'Traditional Living Spaces ( <i>loru</i> ) Revitalization Project' launched in the Biratori region
2012	Launch of the 21st Century Ainu Cultural Heritage Forest Project
2013	Ainu handicrafts (Nibutani <i>Ita</i> /Nibutani <i>Attus</i> ) designated as a traditional handicraft industry
2014	Pirikanoka designated as a scenic spot (Poroshiri 2013 / Chashi of Okikurumi and Muy Noka)
2019	General expansion of Ainu policies, projects and activities in Biratorichō following the enactment of the 'Act on Promoting Measures to Achieve a Society where the Pride of the Ainu People is Respected'

any appeal from either the plaintiff or defendant. This was behind the national government's acceptance of local proposals regarding preparatory surveys and conservation measures prior to the start of river improvement work such as the Ainu Cultural Environment Conservation Project (Table 1).

## **EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION THROUGH ICH**

This section introduces three examples of community revitalization through ICH.

### **Example 1: The Handing Down and Propagation of Ainu Folk Dance**

Even into the 1970s, the fact that Ainu culture was to be spoken of as a 'lost culture' and the Ainu people themselves a 'diminished people' was taken for granted. An important turning point that brought about a change in this situation was the designation of *Ainu traditional dance* as an Important National Intangible Folk Cultural Asset in 1984. Presently, 17 groups in Hokkaido are registered as Important National Intangible Folk Cultural Asset Preservation Organizations for this dance.

In the early 1980s, Biratorichō faced a dwindling population of older adults able to pass down Ainu dance traditions. Given these circumstances, a performance commemorating the designation of Ainu dance as an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Asset in Hokkaido served as an opportunity to strengthen preservation activities by children. As these children's activities gained a foothold, mothers and other relatives became interested, and the activities grew in popularity. Looking at remaining footage of old documentaries, children assumed the role of dancers, performing in front of adults, reviving and even expanding the repertoire of dances that had long since ceased to be performed. Ainu culture was thought to be a thing of the past, something that had gradually faded away, but locals began to sense that it had a future.

Ainu folk dance was registered on the UNESCO *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* in 2009. In the Nibutani area alone, traditional dance has become a compulsory subject in almost all elementary schools, with many children becoming familiar with traditional dance and learning several sets. In this way, young people have contributed to spreading Ainu folk dance among different generations and regions.

### **Example 2: Techniques and Materials in the Handicrafts Field**

Handicraft objects themselves are often tangible personal property. However, even for the smallest workpiece, intangible knowledge, wisdom, techniques, ideas and the like are involved in every process, from securing materials to

completing the design, and the process of these elements becoming condensed into the workpiece can be described as ICH. Those involved in the production and sale of handicrafts in the region have reflected on the question of ‘what is tradition?’, actively exchanging ideas on this front. One result of continued trial and error regarding the future prospects of the industry is that Nibutani *ita* (wooden trays) and *attus* (woven fabrics) have been designated as traditional crafts by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. In 2013, this was the first such designation in Hokkaido.

Whether it be sculpture or weaving, the vexing dilemma of fewer people carrying on Ainu traditional culture, local industries disappearing, and handicrafts only having historical value as museum materials or cultural assets is seemingly now a thing of the past. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry’s system for promoting traditional handicraft industries has existed since before the 1970s, but we need to consider a sociocultural background in which sufficient efforts had not been made to include Ainu-related products.

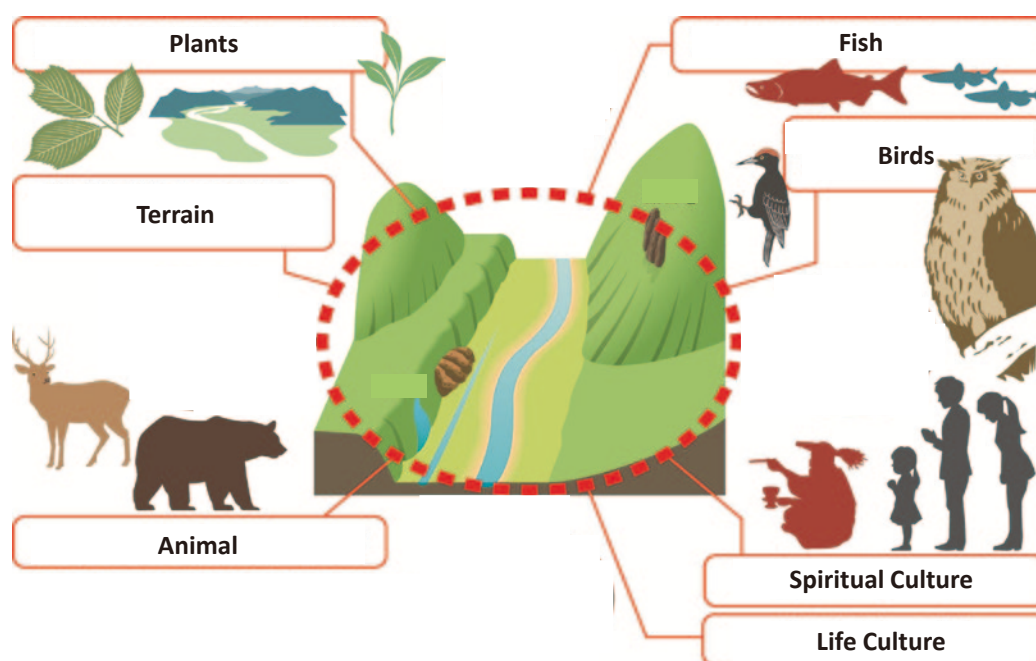
### **Example 3: Increasing Interest in Environmental and Landscape Conservation and Ainu Place Names**

In 2003, Biratorichō launched the Ainu Cultural Environment Conservation Project with the cooperation of the Hokkaido Regional Development Bureau and the Biratori Ainu Association, with one of the most important research topics being Ainu place names. This cultural environment conservation project was the catalyst for a series of ongoing efforts to select and utilize nationally important cultural landscapes in Biratorichō. In the process, place names came to be regarded as intangible landscape-related elements.

Above all, Ainu place names have been created and passed down by traditional Ainu society, which has a strong connection with the natural environment. Place names can be said to be a treasure trove of information that encompasses a region’s history and culture as well as the knowledge and wisdom of its ancestors. Place names can also be considered a part of ICH in that they can be linked to the formation of people’s ethnic and regional identity and may also influence cultural tourism.

## **CONCLUSION: ENVIRONMENT, LANDSCAPE AND SPACE AS CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

With the Ainu Cultural Environment Conservation Project of 2003, an assessment survey of living things and their environments, spiritual and living culture and cultural landscapes (Figure 2) was initiated along with conservation measures. The expectations were that NIVC would function as a base facility for future projects.



**Figure 2** Cultural landscape of the Ainu

Efforts that emphasize the environment and landscape, and comprehensive research and measures for tangible and intangible cultural heritage, are important features common to all *IWOR*-related projects, with research and measures in various fields conducted both independently and in parallel. Testimonies from older individuals about *chinomishiri* (places of prayer) and requests and proposals for their protection and preservation were unique and provided a foundation and depth to the project.

Twenty years of sustained efforts to survey and preserve the landscape from a cultural asset perspective are bringing about changes in the way local residents think and view the landscape as well as its history and traditions. Additionally, continued work on cultural landscapes deepens the understanding of traditional culture.

Riding around in a car on business related to research and preservation organizations with Shigeru Kayano, who founded the Nibutani Ainu Museum, and the local Ainu historical researcher Yuji Kawakami (1930–2004), the author (Yoshihara) said that when they passed by ruins or historical sites, the two would always talk about their origins and explain how important these places were to the local community. The knowledge and wisdom of times with no written language or when the transmission of information was not solely dependent on written language may have also been passed down from generation to generation through such conscious storytelling. The basis for passing on ICH lies in

people continuing to tell these stories.

At the same time, progress in linguistic and literary research is leading to a deeper understanding of traditional Ainu thinking, spiritual culture and outlook on nature. For example, Hiroshi Nakagawa, a leading expert on Ainu language studies and editor of the recent hit manga *Golden Kamuy*, has expressed the following view about the Ainu word *kamuy* as quoted below. Even basic vocabulary such as *kamuy* seems to have room for further consideration and investigation.

...If we say that *kamuy* refer to animals, plants, fire, and water, it might be tempting to translate it as 'nature,' but as I said earlier, man-made objects such as houses, boats, mortars, pestles, pots, and knives are also referred to as *kamuy*. This word refers to everything surrounding humankind and somehow related to human survival, so 'nature' doesn't really fit. It would probably be better to just refer to it as 'environment' (Nakagawa, 2019).

Shishirimuka-loru Cultural College (renamed Shishirimuka Cultural College in 2010), which Biratorichō began operating in conjunction with the launch of the Ainu Cultural Environment Conservation Project in 2003, held a symposium in 2018 to mark the 15th anniversary of the start of the project. The author (Yoshihara) summarized the features and significance of the project in the following six points:

1. Local Ainu residents, who have strong ties to cultural and environmental issues, are actively engaged in these issues.
2. New, highly unique data are constantly accumulated and verified through ongoing research and trials.
3. Multifaceted trials and demonstrations based on expert knowledge, including consideration and utilization of previous research, are conducted.
4. In addition to being researchers, individuals conducting the project also function as transmitters (successors) and practitioners (creators).
5. These individuals emphasize their own (local) skills and techniques and their ability to receive and transmit information, and strive to pass on, accumulate and develop it.
6. They emphasize problem-solving through teamwork (*ukouk power*) and collaboration based on respect and promotion of individuality.

As mentioned above, with regards to the important principles of project establishment, not only has the active participation of local residents and collaboration with experts been realized, but a new type of expert with practical knowledge of Ainu culture is being nurtured.

Preserving and utilizing tangible and intangible cultural heritage is steadily

bringing about changes in regions, communities and the lives of the people who call these places home.

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# THE STUDY OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE ASSOCIATED TO THE HISTORICAL-CULTURAL OBJECTS AND HOLY PLACES OF TAJIKISTAN

Dilshod RAHIMI<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Tajikistan is home to hundreds of historical, cultural, and natural monuments, which constitute an integral part of its national heritage and symbolize the ancient civilization of the Tajik people. The historical and cultural landmarks encompass fortresses, palaces, mosques, madrassas, towers, shrines of notable figures, cemeteries, sacred sites, imprints of 'holy steps,' and similar structures. In addition to these monuments, the country boasts numerous natural sites of cultural and spiritual significance, including caves, mountains, peaks, springs, monumental stones, ancient trees, and other objects. Each of these features preserves oral histories, legends, beliefs, customs, healing practices, and other traditions, making them of interest not only to local communities but also to scholars and tourists.

The primary objective of this article is to examine key characteristics of certain historical and natural sites in Tajikistan that hold sacred and cultural value for its people. This research aligns with the thematic focus of the ongoing project 'Study of Intangible Cultural Heritage Associated with Historical and Cultural Monuments and Sacred Places of Tajikistan' (2021–2025), conducted by the Research Institute of Culture and Information (RICI).

Under the initiative of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, H.E. Emomali Rahmon, the years 2019–2021 were declared the 'Years of Rural Development, Tourism, and Folk Crafts.' During this period, Tajikistan witnessed substantial growth in its tourism and folk craft sectors, alongside a notable increase in the number of tourists compared to previous years. Among the attractions drawing visitors are not only the country's picturesque landscapes and modern architectural landmarks but also its unique natural and cultural heritage sites.

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To effectively introduce and promote these historical and cultural sites to a wider audience, including tourists, a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach is essential. This involves studies in ethnography, architecture, history, art, cultural studies, and other related fields. To date, no comprehensive inventory of Tajikistan's natural landmarks and sacred sites has been compiled by any institution or researcher. Addressing this gap, the RICl initiated the scientific project 'Study of Intangible Cultural Heritage Associated with Cultural and Historical Sites and Sacred Places of Tajikistan.' This project, approved and funded by the Ministry of Economic and Industrial Development in 2020, is being implemented over a five-year period (2021–2025).

The project's overarching aim is to collect, analyse, and document the intangible cultural heritage associated with these sites. This work contributes to preserving intangible heritage, safeguarding ecosystems, and promoting sustainable tourism within Tajikistan. Furthermore, the project's objectives align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goals 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and 15 (Life on Land).

In addition to intangible cultural elements, the project examines the cultural and natural objects that play a significant role in the daily lives of local communities and the broader population. Through this research, the RICl aims to enhance awareness of Tajikistan's rich cultural legacy while fostering the development of sustainable tourism and the preservation of the nation's heritage.

## **SACRED NATURAL OBJECTS: INTERRELATION OF TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

### **Explanations of Terms**

Among the population of Tajikistan, as well as in many regions of Central Asia, various terms are used to denote sacred cultural and natural sites. These include terms such as *mazār*, *ziyāratgāh*, *qadamjāy*, *maqbara*, *āstāna*, *qabr*, *gour*, *shahid*, and *langar*. However, the most commonly used terms are *mazār*, *ziyāratgāh*, *qadamjāy*, and *āstāna*.

The term *mazār* originates from Arabic and refers to a place or object visited for pilgrimage. Among the Tajiks of Central Asia, *mazār* typically denotes the graves or shrines of notable religious figures, poets, or rulers. In contemporary usage, even local cemeteries are often referred to as *mazār*, which reflects a certain logic. People frequent these sites particularly on the eve of holidays or other significant occasions, as they visit the graves of their ancestors to recite verses from the Quran and offer prayers as a sign of respect for the deceased. Beyond serving as burial sites, *mazār* and *ziyāratgāh* are also believed to fulfill additional

functions, including providing spiritual healing, resolving personal issues, granting wishes, and offering psychological solace.

The term *qadamjāy* or *qadamgāh* derives from Tajik/Persian and translates to ‘the place where the foot of a blessed person, saint, or great figure stepped.’ Such sites are often associated with legends that the footprint of a revered individual was imprinted on a stone or mountain, or that their step caused a spring to emerge and flow. In some instances, it is believed that a tree sprouted at the spot where the sacred figure once stood, and this tree remains as a symbol of their presence. Similarly, marks attributed to the hooves of a saint’s horse on a stone or mountain are venerated as evidence of their arrival.

In the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), the term *ziyāratgāh* is referred to as *āstān*. In Tajik, *āstān* or *ostona* translates to ‘threshold’ or ‘entrance.’ It can also signify a place of residence, courtyard, or palace. In colloquial usage, *āstān* denotes the temporary dwelling of a revered figure. Linguistically, the term is associated with the Tajik/Persian words *istādan* (to stand or stay) and *ist* (to stop), as well as the suffix *-istān*, which denotes a place, land, or territory (e.g., *gouristān*—cemetery, *sangistān*—land of stones, *gulistān*—flower garden, *Tajikistan*—land of Tajiks) (Figure 1).

Interestingly, the term *āstān* is also found among Turkic-speaking peoples and other groups in Central Asia and Russia. For instance, it is plausible that the name of Kazakhstan’s capital, *Astana*, derives from the same linguistic root (Rakhimi, 2023).

The following sections provide an overview of the characteristics of each type of sacred cultural and natural site, highlighting their significance in the daily lives of local communities.



**Figure 1** Shāh-Qambari Āftāb, Rushan district, Tajikistan (© A. Alamshoev, 2008)

## Healing Springs

The faith and beliefs of people, deeply rooted in ancient worldviews and myths, emerge from fundamental human needs and desires. The necessity for health, the birth of healthy children, peaceful lives, happiness, abundance, and fertility in agricultural and artisanal activities underpins the formation of various ritual customs and the veneration of natural elements. These beliefs and rituals have also inspired a wealth of oral narratives and legends, which collectively constitute a significant part of the social institution of worship.

Among the natural elements, water plays a pivotal role in the traditional world-view and culture of the Tajik people. As one of the four fundamental elements of nature, water is revered as the source of life. This is encapsulated in Tajik wisdom expressions such as ‘Life is water, and without water, there is no life’ and ‘Water and well-being.’ The veneration of water, alongside fire, soil, and air, can be traced back to ancient Iranian civilizations, as reflected in the sacred text *Avesta* (circa 2700 years old), Middle Persian literature, Persian-Tajik literary works, artistic creations, and folklore.

In Tajikistan, many shrines and sacred sites are associated with springs that possess mineral and healing properties. Some springs, offering sweet drinking water, are considered sacred and are integral to daily life. Their abundant flow often feeds ponds, such as the Khāja Qaynar pond in the Vose district, the Qaynar-atā pond and Berinji spring in Panjakent, and Chiluchār-chashma in the Shahritus district. These springs attract pilgrims and are regarded as sources of physical and spiritual healing.

The mineral waters from these springs, enriched with various elements, are used for drinking, bathing, and treating ailments. Bowls and cups placed near the springs facilitate the pilgrims’ use of sacred water. The faith in the healing power of these springs is particularly strong. For instance, villagers in Porshinev, Shugnan district, believe that drinking water from the Shāh Nāsir spring cures a variety of illnesses, especially those affecting the nervous system. In some springs, sacred fish are found and consuming them is considered a grave sin (*ubāl*), believed to cause illness or even death.

They apply clay from the spring to the affected areas, believing it to be curative (Kamol, 2005, p. 137). Similarly, in the Gulchechak mausoleum of the Khorasan district, pilgrims prepare clay balls from the spring’s water and apply them to affected skin areas. The drying process is believed to correspond with the disappearance of ailments, an example of ‘sympathetic magic,’ as described by James George Frazer, based on the principle of ‘that like produces like’ (Frazer, 1986, pp. 19–20).

Fortune-telling rituals are another tradition tied to these springs. Pilgrims extract sand from the springs, searching for coins, beads, or other symbolic items as signs of favorable outcomes. If such items are not found, they repeat the process three times while maintaining hope for divine intervention. If no encouraging sign is observed, the prognosis for the patient is deemed uncertain, prompting the healers to say: 'God knows, and He heals; He will certainly grant healing.' Through methods such as fortune-telling or scooping sand, individuals seek reassurance and return home with renewed hope for recovery.

A modern custom involves throwing coins into the springs as an act of respect or in the hope of resolving personal difficulties. Some pilgrims bring the coins close to afflicted body parts before offering them to the spring as a symbolic plea for healing.

There are numerous legends regarding the origins of springs, many of which share a common narrative: a saintly figure arrives in a region, perceives the scarcity of water and the hardship it causes for the local population, and strikes the ground with a staff, prompting a fountain of water to emerge from the earth. For example, the Shāh Nāsir spring (Figure 2) is linked to the knowledge and blessings of Shāh Nāsir Khōsrav, whose wisdom is said to revive even dead trees. Similar legends surround Chiluchār-chashma in Shahritus district.

The sanctity of a spring often depends on its association with a spiritual figure. Springs created by ordinary farmers, though appreciated for their utility, lack the spiritual reverence afforded to those linked to religious leaders or saints. This distinction underscores the cultural importance of springs as both physical and spiritual sources of life, a tradition rooted in pre-Islamic Tajik history.



**Figure 2** Shāh Nāsir spring in Shughnan, Tajikistan (©D. Rahimi, 2023)

The Shāh Nāsir spring is seen as a symbol of the knowledge and wisdom that Shāh Nāsir Khōsrav brought to the mountains of Badakhshan. According to local beliefs, this knowledge is so profound that it is said to bring life even to a dead tree. Spring is thought to flow eternally, delighting all who encounter its purity. A similar narrative exists about Chiluchār-chashma in the Shahritus district. Such legends often link the healing properties of spring water to revered figures, such as saints or religious noble man, highlighting the water's sanctity and exceptional qualities. In contrast, springs or streams created by ordinary individuals, such as farmers, are not regarded as holy. While the water from these sources may be appreciated as drinkable, and the community may express gratitude to those who constructed them, they do not hold the same spiritual significance. However, when the origin of a spring is associated with the actions of a spiritual figure, it enhances the perceived sanctity of the water and elevates the status of the individual in the eyes of the community. The reverence for springs as sources of life-giving water has deep historical roots among the ancestors of the Tajiks, originating in the ancient pre-Islamic period.

### **Sacred Stones**

Throughout the territory of many sacred sites, stones of various shapes have become objects of reverence and faith over the centuries (Figure 3). These sacred stones are typically categorized into two types based on their size: large stones and small stones, both commonly associated with shrines in mountainous regions. For instance, in the Mountainous Badakhshan region, numerous shrines feature stones of various shapes and significance. The Persian-Tajik word *sang* (stone) frequently appears in the names of such shrines across the country, including Sangi Kabutak and Khāja<sup>2</sup> Sangvāti Vali (Hisar), Khāja Sang (Ayni district), Sangi Jumbān (Panjakent), Khāja Sangu Khāk (Rudaki district), Mazar Vali (Istaravshan), Teshuktāsh (Asht), and others.

In Tajikistan's Badakhshan region, smooth and uniquely shaped stones often serve as the central element of sacred sites. Tajik folklorist Nisor Shakarmamadov, in his study of Badakhshan's holy places and shrines, observed that many derive their names from the distinctive characteristics of these stones, including their shapes, colours, and the legends of transformations associated with them. Examples include Azhdahār-sang (Shirgin), Shutur-sang (Yamg), Nalayn (Vrang), Duldul (Sokhcharv), and Teghi Barahnagān (Khuf) (Shakarmamadov, 2015, p. 32).

Another category of stones, often found around graves or mausoleums, displays a wide variety of shapes and features. In northern Tajikistan, such stones, known

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<sup>2</sup> Khāja – from Persian/Tajik language means lord, possessor.



as *qairāq* or *qairāqsang*, are typically smooth and sometimes bear inscriptions. These stones are placed by the *mōttavali*, the caretaker of the shrine, and are notable for their unusual shapes and vibrant colours.

Some of the most distinctive stones resemble mushrooms, with slightly protruding upper and lower parts. These stones range in size, with heights varying from 5–8 centimetres to 70–80 centimetres. Scholars have observed such stones at shrines and cemeteries, likening them to elephant legs or describing them as mushrooms with faintly visible ‘caps’ (Kislyakov, 1970, p. 9).

Russian ethnographer Alexey A. Bobrinsky documented similar peculiar stones in the Muhammad Bāqir mausoleum in the village of Sardim. These stones, locally referred to as ‘camel’s leg,’ are accompanied by legends explaining their origins (Bobrinskiy, 1908, p. 116).

In general, stones resembling mushrooms are regarded as sacred by the local population. Bringing these stones to a shrine is considered a blessing, while removing them is seen as a sin. Their distinctive shapes and colours have inspired numerous legends and traditions, with names such as ‘camel’s leg,’ ‘elephant’s leg (Figure 4),’ ‘mushroom,’ ‘boot,’ and others being commonly used to describe them.

During pilgrimages, locals engage in rituals such as touching and kissing the stones, cleaning them with their hands or sleeves, walking around larger stones, and reciting prayers while seated nearby. Imitating the actions of elderly, experienced, and respected individuals is a vital aspect of these pilgrimages, reinforcing traditional customs and practices. For younger visitors, especially those making a pilgrimage for the first time, adhering to these established rituals is essential. Without proper knowledge of the rules and procedures, a pilgrimage may be



**Figure 3** Stones near the shrine Shing, Tajikabad district, Tajikistan (©D. Rahimi, 2022)



**Figure 4** Stone ‘elephant’s leg’, Khorasan district, Tajikistan (©D. Rahimi, 2022)

considered disrespectful to the sanctity of the site. Consequently, inexperienced pilgrims rely on the guidance of the *mōttavali* (caretaker of the shrine) or seasoned elders.

For example, the pilgrimage process typically begins with the recitation of *Bismillah*<sup>3</sup>, followed by approaching the sacred stone with both hands, stepping onto the holy site with the right foot, sitting down to drink the holy water, stepping back respectfully from the saint’s grave, bowing, and finally exiting the mausoleum in an orderly manner.

The unusual shapes of these stones often inspire individuals to create stories and legends about their origins and healing properties. Their irregular forms and colours are believed to be manifestations of divine power, leading to their veneration. While contemporary reverence for such stones is frequently associated with Islamic beliefs or significant religious figures, the roots of these practices trace back to antiquity, originating in the primitive belief system of fetishism.

### Sacred Trees

Trees are among the most significant elements in the beliefs and rituals of the Tajiks and other Iranian peoples. With their roots in the earth, trunks rising above the ground, and crowns reaching the heavens, trees have inspired numerous beliefs and myths. Legends often portray ancient and massive trees as symbolic links between three realms: the earth, the world above the earth, and the sky.

The presence of sacred trees near shrines and places of worship is a widely recognized and common feature of mausoleums. Among the tree species most frequently venerated are *čīnār* (plane tree), *tut* (mulberry tree), *burs* (cypress), *savda* / *sadda* (elm), and *savr* (pine). Other species, such as poplar, sandalwood, and willow, also become objects of reverence when located in the courtyards or

<sup>3</sup> *Bismillah* (from Arabic) is the abbreviated version of the phrase ‘Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim’ – In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.



**Figure 5** 1,300-year-old sypress tree, Istaravshan city, Tajikistan (©A. Aminzoda, 2024)

near mausoleums.

The reverence for sacred trees, particularly ancient ones, far surpasses that for younger trees. For instance, at the Sabristān mausoleum in the city of Istaravshan, a cypress tree over a thousand years old stands as a testament to enduring sanctity, its age confirmed by biologists. Similarly, in Panjakent's central park, a 700-year-old mulberry tree continues to thrive. In the village of Simiganj, located in Vahdat town, a venerable elm tree (*sadda*) is likewise considered sacred by locals (Rakhimov, 2012, p. 111).

Sacred trees are typically not pruned, and their wood is rarely used for practical purposes; only in cases of necessity might a branch be removed. Many folk legends narrate the origins of these ancient trees and their sanctity. For example, the cypress tree at the Sabristān shrine is said to have grown from a tent peg left behind by Arab missionaries spreading Islam in Istaravshan 1,300 years ago (Figure 5). According to the story, this wooden peg sprouted, eventually growing into the massive tree that stands today.

The perceived sacredness of trees, as detailed in legends, arises from various reasons, including:

- **Respected origins:** A sacred tree may have been planted by a revered figure or grown from his walking stick.
- **Longevity:** Trees that are ancient, often over a century old, are deemed sacred.
- **Unusual forms:** Trees with distinctive shapes often inspire legends and beliefs.
- **Mythological connections:** Sacred trees are believed to link the three planes of existence—underground, above ground, and the sky.
- **Religious associations:** Certain trees, such as fig and apple, carry religious significance as fruits of paradise.

- **Life cycle symbol:** Trees mirror the life cycle of humans and animals. From their seeds sprouting and maturing into fruit-bearing entities to their eventual decay and death, trees encapsulate the cycle of birth, growth, reproduction, and mortality. Additionally, the seasonal cycles of shedding leaves in the fall and rejuvenating in the spring evoke themes of death and rebirth, reinforcing their symbolic importance (Rakhimov, 2012, p. 143).

Among the traditions associated with sacred trees in Tajikistan and the wider region, several practices and beliefs highlight their deep cultural and spiritual significance. While we have outlined several reasons why local people regard trees as sacred, there may be other explanations as well. Some pilgrims believe trees serve as intermediaries between humans and God, providing a means to alleviate personal hardships. It is not coincidental that rituals aimed at relieving difficulties are often performed under sacred trees. The reverence for these trees is so profound that they are anthropomorphized and referred to as *Bābā Chinār* (Grandfather Plane Tree), *Chinorbābā* (Grandfather Plane Tree), *Bibi Savr* (Grandmother Elm), and similar names (Rakhimov, 2012, pp. 110–111).

### **Ritual of *Lattabandi* (Attaching Rags)**

One of the most distinctive rituals tied to sacred trees is *lattabandi*, or the tying of rags to tree branches (Figure 6). This custom is widespread in Tajikistan and other countries of the region. Pilgrims attach pieces of fabric—often taken from the clothing of the sick or those in need—to the branches of sacred trees as a symbolic act of transferring hardship and expressing hope for healing, fertility, or good fortune.

For instance, near the mausoleum of Khāja Muhammad Bashārā, about 180–200 metres south on a hill, there is a spring and a towering mulberry tree. Pilgrims seeking blessings, healing, or children tie rags to the branches of this tree. Similarly, at the underground mosque (*Er-Machit*) in Chashma, Khorāsān district, fabrics from newborns' clothes, older children's garments, or women's scarves are hung on the tree branches.

The origins and purpose of tying rags have been interpreted in various ways:

- **Expression of Wishes:** Hamza Kamol observed that the ritual symbolizes a wish or prayer made with respect for the shrine (Kamol, 2005, p. 134).
- **Travel Protection:** Nikolay A. Kislyakov noted that travelers embarking on dangerous journeys tied cloth to trees near mausoleums, seeking safe passage (Kislyakov, 1960, p. 115).
- **Symbolic Dedication:** According to Nikolay S. Terletsky, tying rags represents a symbolic offering to the spirit of the shrine or the revered individual associated with it. He described this as a magical act of establishing a connection between





**Figure 6** The custom of attaching rags, Sharitus districts, Tajikistan (@D. Rahimi, 2007)

the pilgrim and the sacred element (Terletsky, 2007, pp. 88-89, 119).

Despite these explanations, the primary purpose of the ritual remains a topic of debate. N.S. Terletsky's observations highlight the intricate relationship between individuals and sacred objects, particularly trees, though the deeper motivation behind such practices remain partially obscured. In our view, the ritual of tying rags to sacred trees (*latabandi*) has ancient origins, deeply rooted in mythological thought and principles of sympathetic magic. At its core, this ritual symbolizes the transfer of one's pain and hardships—be it disease, infertility, misfortune, or poverty—onto the tree, which acts as a sacred intermediary.

This act signifies both a spiritual and emotional release. Pilgrims believe that by transferring their afflictions to the tree, they will find healing and resolution for their struggles. The ritual not only provides solace but also fosters hope and strengthens faith in divine intervention.

This practice reflects a harmonious blend of Islamic teachings with ancient, pre-Islamic traditions. While the pilgrims invoke Allah for healing, the ritual itself embodies elements of animistic and magical thought, where the tree serves as both a divine conduit and a symbolic absorber of human suffering.

Another form of tree worship involves walking around them, typically three or seven times in a counterclockwise direction. For instance, at the mausoleum of Khoja Aqiqi Balkhi, located in the village of Sebistān in the Danghara district, women pilgrims, along with the sick and the needy, customarily walk around a small elm tree seven times. N.S. Terletsky drew parallels between such tree-walking rituals performed by shaman-healers and participants in ceremonies, and

the practice of walking around a pillar during Sufi rites, suggesting that this act is intended to invoke and gain the favor of spirits (Terletsy, 2009, p. 138).

It is possible that this practice among the other people, who continue to preserve shamanistic traditions and their remnants, serves as a means of summoning helper-spirits. However, we propose that walking around green trees may also be a symbolic act aimed at transferring pain and misfortune to the trees.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on examples, discussions, and scholarly research, several important conclusions can be drawn. Islam, which has been the predominant religion among Tajiks and other Central Asian peoples for over 1,300 years, has in various instances, merged with local traditions and, in others, reached compromises. Traces of ancient religious practices, such as animism, fetishism, sympathetic magic, and nature worship (e.g., reverence for the sun, fire, and water), as well as Zoroastrianism, Islam, and other belief systems, remain evident. The Islamization process in the early stages of the religion's spread often involved integration with pre-existing local religious and mythological frameworks. This syncretic approach facilitated the incorporation of Islamic beliefs into the cultural and spiritual practices of the region.

In contemporary times, remnants of these early religious forms are still observed in customs and practices, such as visiting tombs and sacred sites. Pilgrims commonly view shrines, graves, stones, trees, springs, and similar objects as mediators between themselves and the divine, using these symbols as channels to express their wishes and prayers. For pilgrims, the origin of specific beliefs or rituals is often secondary to the personal sense of solace and spiritual connection they seek.

During the Soviet era, many of these ancient shrines, springs, caves, mountains, large stones, and monumental trees were dismissed as sources of superstitions. However, in the post-independence period, these cultural and natural sites are increasingly recognized as significant elements of both material and spiritual heritage. They are now protected under national laws and cultural preservation programs, serving as historical, cultural, and natural landmarks that not only honor traditional beliefs but also promote cultural awareness, support tourism development, and enhance religious consciousness. Ethnographic studies and research into the intangible cultural heritage associated with these historical, cultural, and natural objects continue to be conducted by scholars from the Research Institute of Culture and Information, alongside other academic institutions.



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# THE ROLE OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN SUSTAINABLE HISTORIC CITIES: NEWAR TRADITIONAL CRAFTS AND THE DWELLING CULTURE OF CRAFTSMEN IN NEPAL

Lata SHAKYA<sup>1</sup>

## INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: TRADITIONAL SKILLS, TECHNIQUES AND KNOWLEDGE

In December 2020, 'Traditional skills, techniques and knowledge for the conservation and transmission of wooden architecture in Japan' was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. It covers 17 different skills, techniques and knowledge related to wooden architecture (Figure 1). This designation focuses on the inseparable relationship between tangible cultural heritage, including world heritage sites, and the intangible traditional techniques that have maintained it.

In Japan, traditional techniques or skills indispensable for preserving cultural properties are called 'cultural property conservation techniques.' Among these conservation techniques, those that require conservation measures are designated as 'selected conservation techniques,' and a system for certifying the technology holders and preservation organizations was established in 1975 with the revision of the Cultural Properties Protection Act. As of December 2022, there were 84 selected conservation techniques, of which 17 techniques and preservation organizations involved in the conservation and repair of wooden cultural property buildings were registered as UNESCO intangible cultural heritage. It is unique in that it includes not only the techniques themselves but also the Japanese customs that are linked with nature, such as the preservation of forests to nurture the materials, traditional skills of collecting the materials, methods for regular maintenance and repair of wooden structures and the restoration method of traditional buildings.

Each selected conservation technique is overseen by a responsible association that undertakes initiatives such as training successors, documentation, research, and promotional efforts to develop and implement safeguarding measures. One

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**Figure 1** The selected 17 techniques of traditional architectural crafts for inscription in UNESCO ICH (Source: Agency for Cultural Affairs, Japan)

such organization is the Association for the Preservation of National Temple and Shrine Roof Construction Techniques, Inc., which oversees four skills related to roofing. Established in 1959, the association currently has around 40 registered members, including skilled individuals and organizations. Since the 1980s, it has been organizing successor training programs and playing a pivotal role in documentation and fostering social cohesion. This is achieved through activities such as operating a small museum and hosting various awareness events for the local community.

The state plays a supporting and facilitating role, providing assistance with specific initiatives, such as annual fairs. One of the secrets behind the preservation of many wooden cultural assets in Japan lies in such conservation and repair techniques, which are highly recognized worldwide.

Many countries have their own unique traditional skills and techniques for the restoration of tangible cultural heritage. But unfortunately, the understanding or recognition of these skills and safeguarding these activities are not yet enhanced in many countries. And Nepal is no exception.

## NEWAR ART AND CRAFTS IN HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND MONUMENTS

The seven monumental sites of the Kathmandu Valley have been inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites since 1979. They include two Buddhist stupas, two Hindu temples, and three palaces from the Malla dynasty. Each of these World Heritage Sites comprises multiple historic buildings, numerous small-scale monuments, and open spaces. The structures were constructed using traditional techniques and showcases the rich 'art and crafts' created by skilled Newar

craftsmen. These sites date back to the Malla period (13th to 18th centuries), with some structures originating as far back as the Lichhavi period (5th to 9th centuries).

The Newars are the indigenous people of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal, known for their rich cultural heritage, artistic craftsmanship, and unique architectural traditions. They are a diverse community that has historically been at the center of Nepal's urban and cultural development. The Newars are recognized for their profound contributions to art, sculpture, music, dance, and festivals, blending Hindu and Buddhist traditions harmoniously in their daily lives.

Stone-carved monuments are among the distinct types of structures in Kathmandu (Figure 2). Shikhar-style temples and traditional water fountains, known as *hiti*, were built during the ancient and medieval periods, many of which remain functional to this day. Chaityas, another prominent example of stone craftsmanship in the Kathmandu Valley, are small Buddhist shrines. Over 2,000 chaityas can be found within the old residential areas of Patan. Rich stone carvings are also evident in temples. For example, the Golden Temple (*Kwa Baha*) in Patan and the Nyatapola Temple in Bhaktapur display exquisite stone carvings. Intricately carved deities and lions are often placed near archways, staircases, and gates.

Metal craftsmanship is another hallmark of the valley's artistic heritage, particularly in temples and monasteries (Figure 3). In the Golden Temple (*Kwa Baha*), a Buddhist monastery, the main shrine is gold-plated, and numerous metal sculptures of deities and animals adorn the interiors.

Woodcraft is equally significant, featuring prominently in temples, monasteries, and residential openings (Figure 4). Despite the use of different materials, the designs, deities, and motifs share a consistent aesthetic and deep religious significance in both Buddhism and Hinduism.

In addition to art and crafts, the traditional construction techniques of Newar architecture are remarkable for their uniqueness. The integration of brick masonry with mud mortar and timber, the skillful assembly of timber posts, lintels, and beams, and the expansive projecting roofs with traditional tiles are among the defining features. These construction techniques, dating back to the medieval period, have been passed down through generations and remain a vital part of Newar heritage.

Beyond tangible heritage, Newar art and crafts are integral to festivals and rituals, offering valuable insights into historical traditions. Festivals such as *Mataya* and *Samyak* are among the most historic and significant in Patan, closely





**Figure 2** Stone carvings: Chaitya from Lichhavi Period (left), the stone waterspout 'Hiti' (middle) and Shikhar style temple (right)



**Figure 3** The golden temple (Kwa Baha, Buddhist Monastery): Gold plated pagoda structure (left), stone carved entrance (middle) and metal crafted Sakyamuni Buddha statue (right)



**Figure 4** Kumbheshwor Temple, a five-tiered pagoda-style structure, is an exemplary piece of traditional Newar architecture, showcasing intricate wooden craftsmanship

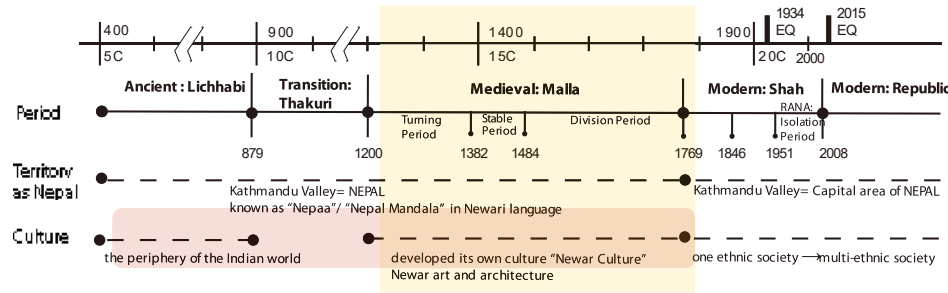


tied to Buddhism. The statues of Buddha, ritual accessories, and ceremonial utensils used during these festivals reflect the enduring craftsmanship of the Newar community. Many other festivals and rituals continue to incorporate these art forms, preserving their relevance and cultural importance to this day.

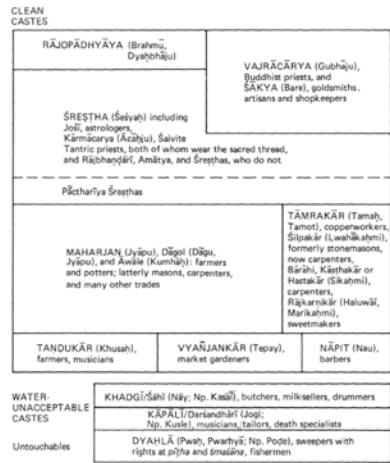
# THE HISTORY OF NEWAR CITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEWAR ART AND CRAFTS

When we look at the history of Nepal, until the 18th century, the term ‘Nepal’ referred specifically to the Kathmandu Valley, and in the Newar language, it was called ‘Nepa.’ Consequently, the history of Nepal largely corresponds to the history of the Kathmandu Valley (Figure 5).

Bronze, metal, silver crafts, and stone carvings are believed to have been well-developed as early as the Lichhavi period (5th century) and continued into the Thakuri period. However, most architectonic works from these periods were lost due to conflicts. Stability began only with the rise of the Malla rulers. During their reign, construction technologies advanced, and the architecture of both cities and villages acquired a distinctive character now defined as the Newar style. During the Malla period, the caste system was introduced, organizing society based on occupation. Figure 6 illustrates the caste hierarchy and their



**Figure 5** The history of Newars (Source: ©L. Shakya)



**Figure 6** Newar caste system based on occupation (Source: Gellner (1994))

corresponding professions. For instance, carpenters and masons were part of the Maharjan caste, while stone masons and copper workers belonged to the Tamrakar and Kansakar castes.

The Shakya caste is categorized here as craftsmen and goldsmiths. However, before the caste system, 'Shakya' referred to celibate monks who lived in Buddhist monasteries to study Buddhism. Anyone could become a Shakya and learn Buddhism before the caste system was formalized. Even after its implementation, the Shakyas continued to adhere to their religious devotion and craftsmanship, particularly in creating Buddhist art and artifacts. This is why most artists and craftsmen in Buddhist traditions are from the Sakya caste. In the 13th century, the renowned artist Araniko, believed to be from Patan, was invited to China and Tibet. He led a team of 80 artists to create the White Dagoba Stupa in Beijing and the Golden Stupa in Tibet, among other pagoda-style structures. During this period, trade with Tibet also flourished.

Over time, various clans specialized in specific arts and crafts, honing their skills and traditions. Knowledge was passed down orally from father to son, ensuring the continuation and refinement of these crafts. In the mid-18th century, the Gorkha Shah dynasty began its rule. This period saw the development of Hindu-Islamic architectural styles, marked by the reconstruction of new palaces and temples. By the 19th century, during the Rana period, British-influenced neo-classical architecture began to emerge.

After the 2015 earthquake, a new reconstruction guideline for cultural heritage was established to enhance seismic performance. However, the guideline's deficiency in providing explanations or examples of various sizes and types of cultural heritage has resulted in a negative impact, as traditional construction methods are often overlooked or disregarded. For example, in reconstruction of Buddhist monasteries in Patan, wooden frames have been integrated into brick walls, and timber columns have been introduced to reinforce the balcony for seismic performance. In addition, '*Iloham*,' a stone base of the column is totally differ-



**Figure 7** Changing restoration method of historic buildings: The columns with stone base '*Iloham*' (left), and columns newly installed without stone base and without utilizing original materials (right). Source: ©L. Shakya

ently used that ignores the traditional damp-proof technology (Figure 7).

Today, there is freedom in choosing occupations, and even non-Newar individuals are engaged in art and craft-related work. However, while the number of artists from the original craftsman families is gradually declining, some traditional craftsman groups continue to live collectively in the old town of Patan, preserving their crafts as family-run businesses.

## LIVING ENVIRONMENT OF CRAFTSMEN

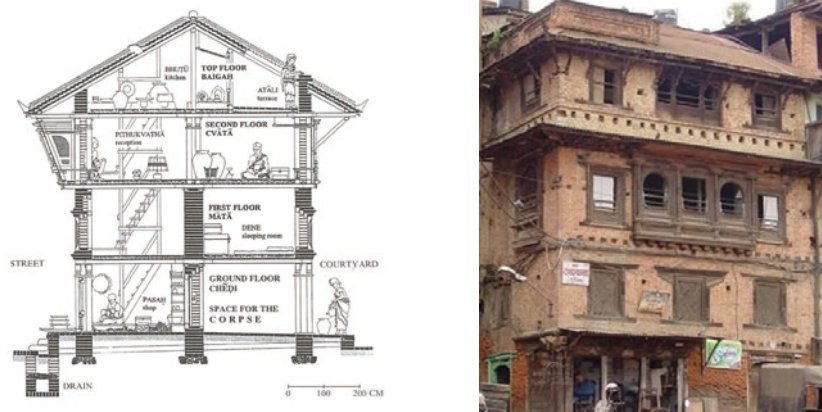
Newar houses in Patan are typically 4 to 5 stories tall and are built around enclosed courtyards, creating a harmonious living environment. Many of these courtyards serve as Buddhist monasteries, functioning as both religious and communal spaces. In some cases, the courtyards are surrounded by monastery buildings as well as individual residential houses. The majority of residents in these settlements are traditional craftsmen, who have continued their craftsmanship practices for generations. These vibrant communities reflect a blend of living heritage and cultural craftsmanship, deeply rooted in Newar traditions.

The figure 8 shows Patan old residential area with historical monuments (Buddhist monasteries and temples) in left and the craftsmen's settlement in right. To figure out the living environment of craftsmen, author has conducted a survey with Professor Mitsuo Takada (Kyoto Arts and Crafts University, Japan) and his team in 2014. Based on the survey, the detailed living environment of 5 craftsman families is illustrated in this chapter.

Based on the concept of purity, the living space of Newar house is divided on each floor, such as the ground floor is used for a toilet/storage room/working room/shops, the first floor is used for a bedroom/guest room, the second floor is used for a family room, and the third floor is a kitchen, a prayer room (Figure 9). However, most of the houses are extended the extra floors to create space for



**Figure 8** Patan old residential area with historical monuments (left, source: Slusser (1982)), and the surveyed house location of craftsmen (right, source: ©L. Shakya)



**Figure 9** Traditional spatial structure of Newar house (left, source: Gutschow 2011) and a traditional house picture in Patan (right, source: ©L. Shakya)

extended family. In the case of craftsmen, the later extended floor is used for working spaces.

The survey targeted five families from different craft works, such as wood, metal, stone and silver. Except the metal statue craftsman all are working at their own residence with family. They have been working as craftsmen for generations. Case study 1 (Figure 10) shows the working place of a silver craftsman, Mr Chaitya Bahadur Shakya. The craftsman specializes in creating traditional silver and copper items '*halī jawah*' used in significant rituals such as weddings and first-feeding ceremonies, continuing a generational trade. His residence, a historic multi-story house in Patan, seamlessly integrates living and working spaces. The ground floor is dedicated to crafting, where he independently handles the entire production process—from cutting and shaping silver sheets to assembling and polishing the final products—using traditional tools like gas cylinders and adhesives. Upper floors serve as living quarters for the family, while some engraving work occasionally extends to these spaces. The house's courtyard and proximity to shared communal areas reflect the deep interconnection between his craft, residence, and the surrounding craftsman neighborhood, preserving both the traditional art and the lifestyle of Patan's craftsman community.

Case study 2 (Figure 11) shows the working place of another silver craftsman, Mr Kul Ratna Shakya. The silver craftsman in Patan creates *chusyaa*, a unique accessory for Buddhist prayer beads, using silver plates, grains, yarn, glue, and gas. The production process involves cutting, processing, assembling, polishing, and stringing, with tasks distributed among family members based on their skills. Their multi-story home integrates work and living spaces, with a ground-floor shop, summer and winter workshops on the 4th and 5th floors, and other areas for family use. This setup ensures seamless blending of professional and domestic life while preserving traditional craftsmanship. Situated in a traditional craftsman neighborhood, the home connects to both private and shared courtyards,

fostering social ties and sustaining the legacy of Patan's cultural heritage.

Case study 3 (Figure 12) shows the working place of a stone craftsman, Mr Rajendra Bajracharya. The stone sculptor crafts intricate Buddhist statues from black, soft, and precious stones such as lapis and crystal, sourced locally and internationally. The work process begins with shaping the stone to the required size, followed by carving, sketching, and detailing, with special attention to the stone's grain to prevent breakage. Water is used during carving to minimize dust and soften the stone for precision. A single statue typically takes about 15 days to complete. The craftsman's multigenerational residence in Patan's Bhinchebahal courtyard integrates work and living spaces, with initial carving done on the ground floor due to dust concerns, while finer detailing occurs upstairs. The courtyard, shared with relatives and neighbors, serves as a communal access and workspace for materials like stones stored on-site, reflecting the intertwined nature of community, craft, and daily life in this traditional craftsman neighborhood.

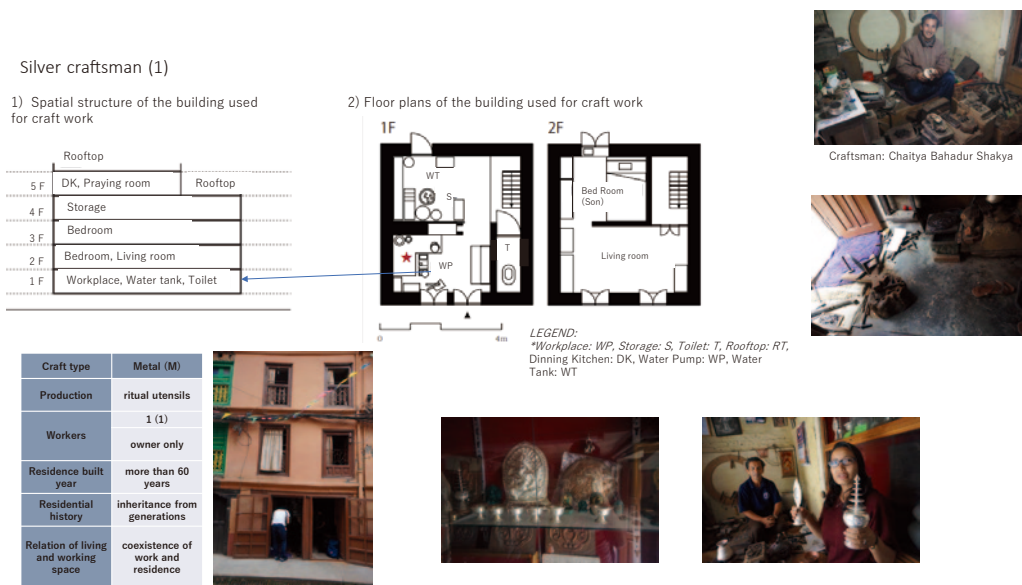
Case study 4 (Figure 13) shows the working place of wood craftsman, Mr Uttam Shakya. The woodcraft craftsman specializes in crafting intricate wooden fixtures and furniture, using materials like soft Champak wood from Nepal's southern regions and harder varieties for durable components like window frames. The process involves sketching designs, estimating materials, ordering wood, carving detailed patterns, and finishing with linseed oil and sanding. Operating from a multigenerational lineage spanning over ten generations, the craftsman currently employs a small team, adapting to challenges such as the scarcity of quality wood. The residence, built 22 years ago in Nabaha, integrates living and workspaces, with the ground floor dedicated to design and production. Upper floors serve as living quarters and rent rooms, while small-scale finishing work occasionally occurs in these spaces. This arrangement exemplifies the seamless integration of livelihood and domestic life, characteristic of traditional craftsman communities.

Case study 5 (Figure 14) shows the working place of a metal craftsman, Mr Santa Kumar Shakya. The craftsman specializes in creating cast metal Buddha statues used for prayers and as decorations. This craft involves a detailed multi-stage process, including wax modeling, applying special clay layers, metal casting with copper, cleaning, fine carving, and polishing with gold and mercury paste. The workshop employs 25 workers, including family members, and occasionally outsources specific tasks. The craft has evolved into a large-scale business over the past 20–25 years, transitioning from handmade gold accessories to a factory setup for mass production. The family home, inhabited for generations, has undergone two renovations. A five-story extension in the backyard now serves as a dedicated workspace, with specific floors allocated for different production

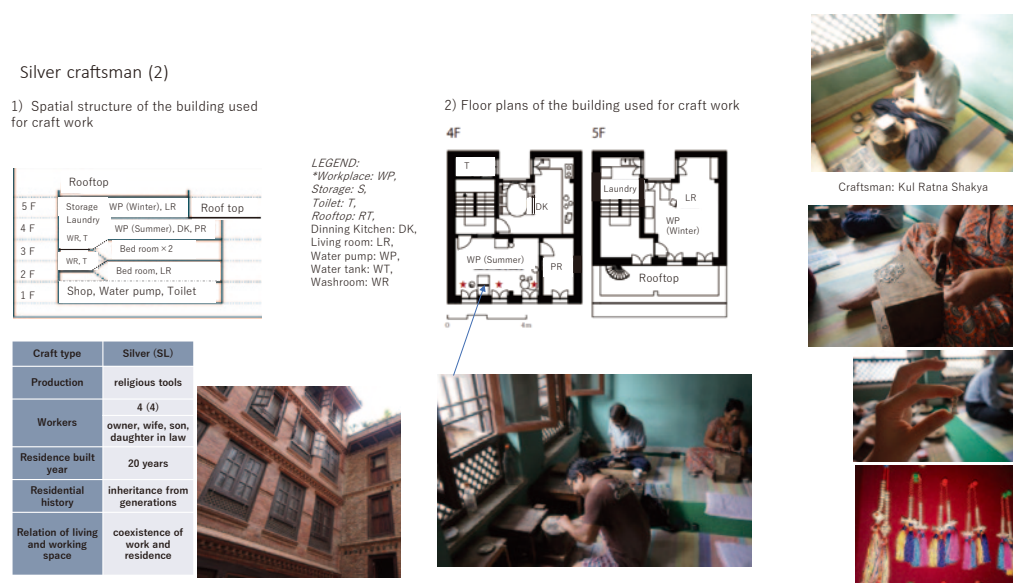


stages. The original building houses a showroom and residential areas, reflecting the integration of work and living spaces. This setup mirrors the neighborhood's identity, renowned for its metalwork craftsmen, while adapting to modern demands through business expansion.

Cases 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the typical working style of traditional craftsmen, where only family members are involved, utilizing both indoor and outdoor spaces of their own homes as work areas. In contrast, Cases 4 and 5 showcase craftsmen who have expanded their operations to accommodate larger-scale



**Figure 10** Case study 1: Living environment of silver craftsman (1)



**Figure 11** Case study 2: Living environment of silver craftsman (2)

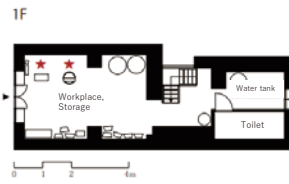


### Stone craftsman

1) Spatial structure of the residence used for craft work



2) Floor plan of the residence used for craft work



Craftsman: Rabindra Bajracharya



Picture Source: ECS Nepal

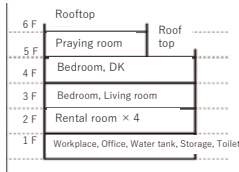
Craft type	Stone (S)
Production	buddha, statues
Workers	4 (4) owner, sister, cousins
Residence built year	30 years old
Residential history	inheritance from generations
Relation of living and working space	coexistence of work and residence



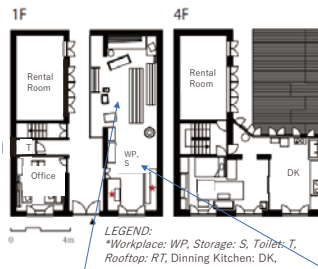
**Figure 12** Case study 3: Living environment of stone craftsman

### Wood Craftsman

1) Spatial structure of the residence used for craft work



2) Floor plans of the residence used for craft work



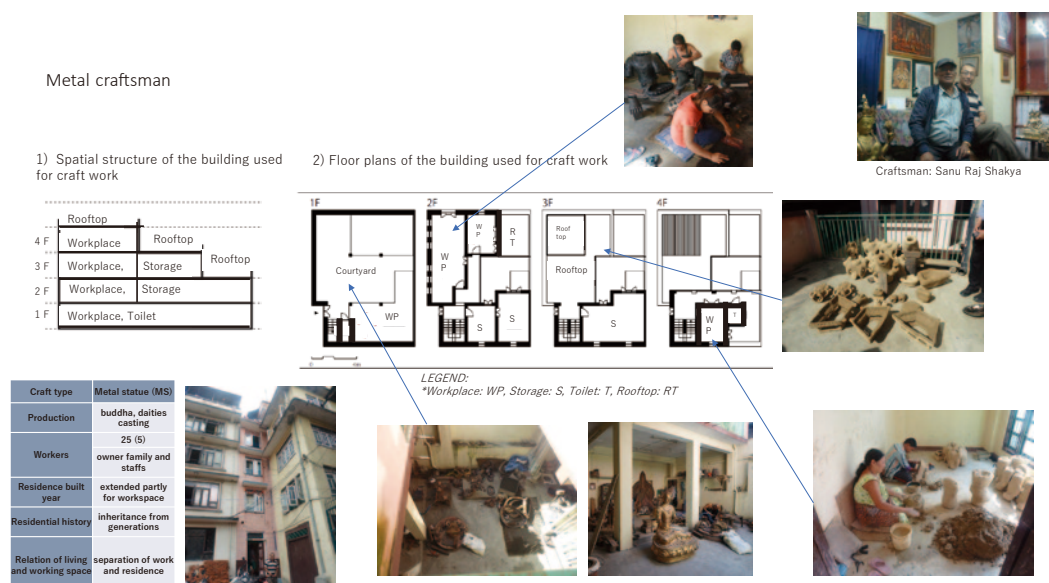
Craftsman: Uttam Shakya



Craft type	Wood (W)
Production	furniture, doors, windows 5 (1)
Workers	owner and staff
Residence built year	22 years old
Residential history	inheritance from generations
Relation of living and working space	coexistence of work and residence



**Figure 13** Case study 4: Living environment of wood craftsman



**Figure 14** Case study 5: Living environment of metal craftsman

projects by managing bigger workshop spaces. However, even in these cases, their workshops remain closely connected to their residential areas.

## CHALLENGES OF THE CRAFTSMANSHIP

Table 1 shows the relation with locals and challenges of craftsmanship. In Nepal, craftsmen face significant challenges in their trades, despite being members of the Federal of Handicraft Association Nepal (FHAN). For woodworkers, there is steady demand for doors, windows, and furniture, but they struggle with a lack of local business relationships and difficulty sourcing materials. Metal statue craftsmen primarily receive orders from Tibetan customers, with limited local demand, and face stiff competition from neighbors in the same trade. To address material procurement issues, they have formed a group within FHAN. Stone craftsmen mainly export their work, but face challenges in sourcing sufficient stones, leading to the creation of a small group to manage this issue. Metal (silver and bronze) craftsmen, though catering to local orders, are also in competition with their neighbors and lack networking opportunities to expand their business. Similarly, silver craftsmen, serving mainly Tibetan customers with little local interest, face the same challenges of limited networking and a lack of strong business relationships in their community. The lack of materials and local demand, combined with competition within the craftsman community, creates obstacles for these craftsmen to thrive and expand their businesses.

FHAN plays a significant role in promoting and supporting Nepal's handicraft sector by offering resources, advocacy, and networking opportunities for craftsmen. While FHAN's activities are integrated and focus on enhancing the

**Table 1** Challenges for craftsmen

Craft type	Wood (W)	Metal statue (MS)	Stone (S)	Metal (M)	Silver (SL)
<b>Trade/ Sales</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<u>demand from locals</u></li> <li>•doors/ windows/ furniture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•orders from Tibetan customers</li> <li>•very few demand from locals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•mainly exported to foreign country</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<u>orders from locals only</u></li> <li>•very few works</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•orders from Tibetan customers</li> <li>•very few demand from locals</li> </ul>
<b>Relation with the locals/ academia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•no relation</li> <li>•member of FHAN</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•most of neighbors are metal craftsman</li> <li>•member of FHAN</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•most of neighbors are stone craftsman</li> <li>•member of FHAN</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•most of neighbors are doing same work</li> <li>•member of FHAN</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•many neighbors are doing same work</li> <li>•member of FHAN</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges and activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•challenge to get material</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<u>established a metal craftsman's group</u> to deal with difficulties of getting materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•have challenges to get sufficient stones</li> <li>•<u>a small stone craftsman's group is established to deal with this problem</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•do not have any networks regarding the work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•do not have any networks regarding the work</li> </ul>

quality and marketability of Nepali handicrafts through training programs and market access, there are gaps in addressing the specific needs of different types of craftsmen. Based on case studies, key challenges for craftsmen include material shortages and limited networking opportunities. Craftsmen in wood, metal, stone, and silver crafts face difficulties in sourcing materials, while many lack strong networks for collaboration and business growth. Although FHAN facilitates some networking through general activities, there is a need for more tailored support for these specific issues, particularly material procurement and expanding local and international connections for diverse craftsmen.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Newar art and crafts, which developed during the Malla period, continue to thrive today in the Kathmandu Valley. It is important to note that most craftsmen work individually within their families, using their residence spaces as workspaces and focusing on small-scale production, rather than engaging in mass production. Despite facing several challenges, such as material shortages and lack of networking, the craftsmen in these areas continue to live in the same neighborhoods, inheriting and practicing their traditional skills. These settlements, along with the passing down of traditional knowledge, play a significant role in preserving tangible cultural heritage, restoring historical sites, and ensuring the continuity of local festivals, making historic cities vibrant and alive.

The safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and the traditional skills associated with it are crucial for the sustainable preservation of historic cities. In Japan, the development and promotion of traditional techniques for cultural property conservation, particularly for wooden architecture, has been a major success. Japan's system, which includes the certification of skilled craftsmen, training programs, documentation, and community engagement, has proven essential for preserving its cultural heritage. The state also plays a supporting role in ensuring the sustainability of these practices.

In contrast, Nepal lacks a system that fosters collaboration among craftsmen, and there is a need for a comprehensive approach to address the challenges they face. The existing issues—such as the lack of a network to support craftsmen, challenges in acquiring materials, and a lack of structured systems to promote traditional skills—hinder the long-term sustainability of Nepal's craftsmanship. There is an urgent need for a system that creates a support network, facilitates material access, and ensures that the skills of craftsmen are passed on to future generations.

By involving craftsmen and craftsmen in post-disaster restoration projects, fostering better communication and networks between academic institutions and craftsmen, and acknowledging the contributions of craftsmen, Nepal can lay the foundation for a sustainable system that promotes and preserves its traditional skills. Such efforts will not only help safeguard Nepal's cultural heritage but also ensure the vitality and continuity of its craftsmanship in the future, much like the practices seen in Japan.

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