ICH Courier
Intangible Cultural Heritage Courier of Asia and the Pacific

ICH and City Festivals
Editorial Remarks

Kwon Huh Director-General of ICHCAP

The keywords of ICHCAP’s projects this year are education and youth. Focusing on the great potential of young people as leaders for sustainable development, ICHCAP will host the Young ICH Practitioners Network Meeting in Honiara, Solomon Islands, on 9 and 10 July 2018. This year’s meeting will be held under the theme “We, the Safeguarding Actors for Pacific ICH.” Young practitioners will attend the meeting to share their experiences and thoughts as well as their opinions as the main actors for ICH safeguarding and transmission.

In previous volumes of the ICH Courier, we looked at ICH and education in the context of formal, non-formal, and informal education. Keeping with this theme, in July, ICHCAP will jointly host the 2018 ICH Tertiary Education Network Forum in Seoul with the UNESCO Office in Bangkok to build a network among tertiary education institutions in the Asia-Pacific region in the ICH field.

In August, the 2018 Sub-regional Meeting for ICH Safeguarding in Northeast Asia will be held in Mongolia under the theme “ICH in Education: Toward Joint Collaboration for Promoting ICH Safeguarding in Formal and Non-formal Education.” Representatives from China, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea, and South Korea are expected to attend. The meeting is drawing high expectations, given the current peaceful state of affairs on the peninsula. On the sidelines of the event, video and photo exhibitions on Central Asian ICH will be held for the third time, following the previous showings in Kyrgyzstan and Jeju in 2017. We hope that we can introduce the videos and photos to North Korean people as well, through a collaborative initiative between the two Koreas.

During the seventh General Assembly for the 2003 Convention, three NGOs (Public Association Kuhhoi Pomir in Tajikistan, THAAP in Pakistan, and Many Hands International in Australia) were accredited. They are the first UNESCO-accredited NGOs in their respective countries. We would like to welcome them and express our anticipation for them to be engaged in ICH safeguarding.

The main subject of this volume is ICH and urban regeneration. We have an expert contributor with years of field experience, who presents issues regarding ICH-based urban regeneration. The article explores the revitalization of an old urban center in Jeonju where ICHCAP is located. It explains why Jeonju is home to ICHCAP and the places one should look around in the city. We also look at ICH-related festivals of Kyrgyzstan, Singapore, Thailand, and New Zealand. The festivals aim to enhance solidarity among communities and generate income from tourism. Also in this volume, we examine the safeguarding activities for metal casting in Dhamrai, Bangladesh, among other topics.
ICH and Regeneration

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Heritage is not only our inheritance from the past but also an important factor shaping our present and future. Every human settlement with a history of social, political, and cultural activity is characterized by distinct tangible and intangible cultural assets creating identity, a sense of belonging, and cohesion among the dwellers. Intangible cultural heritage or ICH thrives through a dynamic process of transmission through generations. It is an ongoing dialogue with the present, connecting generations through a bond of shared traditional values.

The term ‘regeneration’ has been largely used in the context of transformation of urban settlements in recent decades. Dominant discourse on heritage and regeneration has been more around built heritage, material culture, memories, and representation. Heritage conservation, place making, and adaptive reuse are some of the important considerations in architecture, planning, heritage management policies and processes. Regeneration strategies in Europe or North America for example have been concerned with rehabilitation or renewal of declining industrial areas (UNESCO 2016). When we reflect on ICH and regeneration we observe that there is a paradigm shift from place to people. The shift in cognition of culture and its attributes is manifested in the UNESCO conventions on cultural heritage. The UNESCO World Heritage Convention 1972 focuses on preservation of historic sites and conservation of nature. The convention talks of universal value of outstanding examples of natural wealth and cultural diversity. Cultural heritage categories defined by the convention include monuments, groups of buildings, and sites including the archaeological ones. The approach has been rather top down with an international community recognizing universal value. The UNESCO 2003 Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage on the other hand focuses on living heritage manifested in practices, presentations, expressions, knowledge, and skills as well as objects, artifacts, and spaces associated therewith and recognized by communities, groups, and individuals as their cultural heritage. We need to recognize this shift in understanding cultural heritage from universality to community and individuals when reflecting on ICH and regeneration in both rural as well as urban contexts (Williams and Humphrys 2015).

In a globalized and digitally connected world there is a spread of culture at a greater speed. At the same time, there are greater concerns of dominant cultures and disappearing minority cultures. The UNESCO 2005 Convention of Promotion of Cultural Diversity aims to protect the diversity of cultural expressions and nurture cultural creativity. The focus is now clearly on people-centric policies and practices and the involvement of communities. All the three conventions are now addressing the sustainable development agenda. The 2015 Policy Document adopted by the 1972 World Heritage Convention and the Operational Directives of the 2003 Convention adopted in 2016 highlight the interdependence between cultural heritage and the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of sustainable development as well as peace and security. The 2005 Convention Global Report in 2015 analyzes how countries like Burkina Faso, Malawi, Serbia, Kenya, Germany, or France have explicitly identified culture as a sector to contribute to sustainability. International development assistance of several developed countries also gives priority to the cultural sector and creative industries (UNESCO 2015). The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 11 of building sustainable cities and communities sets a clear target of strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. In these changing contexts, ICH has growing significance and relevance in regeneration.

Indeed regeneration has emerged as a metaphor with a range of meanings in different contexts. ICH is a wellspring of creativity and is constantly recreated. The resulting innovation builds new futures. Worldwide, there has been emergence of a new generation of cultural entrepreneurs. ICH-based cultural industries and creative enterprise provide income and employment opportunities. Economic empowerment leads to improved quality of life and general well being. Cultural tourism centering on heritage sites and monuments and promoting local traditions, food, arts, and crafts attract visitors. The economic context of regeneration is a key priority in situations of poverty-struck areas. Urban design led regeneration has targeted new investments through new visitor constituency, new retail cultures, and businesses centering spaces for creative engagement. Role of ICH in this process of renewal has been more in terms of increasing performance or production capacities and development of arts constituencies encouraging more visitors.

Regeneration centering specific physical spaces or locations has had negative effects like over commercialization, gentrification, and the loss of authenticity and intrinsic value. Increased tourism has led to commodification and overt simplification. There are examples of gentrification with displacement of low income populations in several cities in Asia (UNESCO 2016). Effective participation of the communities in planning and decision making is a critical measure to mitigate these challenges. Local communities are not only vital sources of information on resources and ideas for revitalization, their participation and ownership are also critical conditions for sustainability. Their participation from the formative stages of planning to implementation strengthens the process of regeneration.

ICH has played a significant role in regeneration directed towards local needs especially in the contexts of the vulnerability of indigenous communities to the forces of modernization and globalization. Vibrant living heritage strengthens community identity and pride and sense of belonging resulting in social renewal and engagement of people in local development. Community festivals are promoted to build on social dynamics. Culture has been used to nurture a sense of belonging in cities. In African cities marked by inequalities rooted in colonial patterns of segregations, good practices include inclusive, accessible and versatile cultural heritage spaces are used as performance venues © banglanatak dot com
Intangible cultural heritage bridges social divisions © banglanatak dot com

Expanding the notion of cultural landscapes, today superdiversity resulting from large-scale migration in the past decade poses new challenges in culture-based regeneration aiming at creating new futures and sustainable development through improved resource management, social inclusion and cohesion.

The cultural drivers used are cultural spaces and festivals where artistic collaborations and exchanges foster bonds of friendship and harmony (ICHCAP 2017; UNESCO 2016). ICH and regeneration also find a new context in a world characterized by the destruction and conflicts between man and nature. There are close relationships between tangible and intangible cultural heritage and natural systems. Regeneration can happen through strengthening and nurturing of these co-relations. In 1992, the World Heritage Convention recognized the importance of protecting cultural landscapes that illustrate how nature influences human society and settlements socially, culturally, and economically. The protection of cultural landscapes can contribute to modern techniques of sustainable land use and can maintain or enhance natural values in the landscape. The continued existence of traditional forms of land use supports biological diversity in many regions of the world. The rice terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras survived through the dedicated efforts of many generations of the Ifugao community. They were getting destroyed with onset of inappropriate development and were placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2012 (IUCN 2017). The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is doing pioneering work with indigenous communities to support use of their rich knowledge of nature and culture to improve community livelihood, well being and eco system resilience (IFAD 2016). The gamut of regeneration through ICH is thus huge. It paves the path of new futures and sustainable development through improved resource management, social inclusion and cohesion.

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Traditional agricultural knowledge builds eco resilience © Sevalanka, Sri Lanka
Intangible Cultural Heritage and Urban Regeneration—the Case of Jeonju City, Korea

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History and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Jeonju

Jeonju is the most popular city in Korea for its traditional culture. Jeonju is ranked number one in terms of the number of living human treasures, the cultural heritage index, and the traditional cultural and art performance index, indicating that traditional culture is more actively practiced and performed in the city than any other city in the country. Against this backdrop, the Korean government designated Jeonju a traditional cultural city, and traditional culture has been at the cradle of the urban-development strategies of Jeonju. The city’s rich traditional culture dates far back in history.

It is presumed that the area of present-day Jeonju has been inhabited since the prehistoric era, as paleolithic relics and dolmens were discovered in the area. But, the geographical name first appeared in historical records in 685. Jeonju was the seat of the provincial government as it is now. Records of living human treasures, the cultural heritage index, and the importance of reflecting on one’s actions.

Seong-gye Yi (1335-1408), the founder of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) suppressed Buddhism and adopted Confucianism as the state religion. Confucianism emerged in many regions, including Jeonju, while Buddhist culture waned. As such, Jeonju became the national center of pansori. The provincial government carried out various cultural projects in the city, including distributing books that were made through woodblock printing on hanji (traditional mulberry paper). The main subjects were related to Confucianism, ethics, agriculture, and medicine. Jeonju played an important role in book publishing, as the abundance of clear water and mulberry trees in the area enabled quality paper production. In the late Joseon period, large volumes of books were published and sold nationwide. Quality paper production also led to stimulating relevant activities such as publication, painting, and hanji crafts. Hapjukseon (folding fans) or taegukseon (fans with the yin-yang symbol), made from locally produced paper, were offered to the king.

During the Joseon Dynasty, Jeonju was the most vibrant local city for music performances. The provincial governor, also acting as the regional commander, brought soldiers from around Jeolla Province to conduct a large-scale military drill every winter. On the last day, to entertain soldiers, a large feast was held with various musical performances and plays that continued throughout the night. In Jeolla Province, shamanic rituals were widely performed, from which shamanic songs naturally developed. Over time, the narratives of gods were replaced by ordinary stories, which led to the development of pansori (a genre of musical storytelling). The provincial governor and the city mayor called in the best pansori singers in the city to perform at government events, birthday celebrations for district magistrates, events related to state examinations, village rituals, and rites for rain, and, in exchange, the performers were exempt from taxation, military duty, and forced labor. They also performed at civilian birthday parties and wedding ceremonies and received money or grain in return.

On a market day, pansori singers appeared on a temporary stage in the marketplace and sang “Chunhyangga,” one of the most popular pansori songs, which drew massive audiences. As such, Jeonju became the national center of pansori.

memorial rites for him were, and are still, conducted at the shrine. In 1475, a repository was established at the shrine to archive daily accounts on the words and acts of all the Joseon king as well as state affairs. The records were kept to guide the kings down the right path. Daily accounts on the governors’ activities were also recorded. Such documentation practices were influenced by Confucianism, which emphasized the importance of reflecting on one’s actions.

The influence of Confucian culture is also evident in Confucian schools. The Jeonju Confucian School (JCS) in Jeonju Hanok Village endorses tablets of Confucian scholars of China and Joseon, including Confucius, Mencius, and Zengzi. Confucian schools were official educational institutions where students commemorated great scholars through memorial rituals and learned the teachings from the scholars’ books. At JCS, rites for Confucius and other Confucian scholars is still held every spring and fall. A Western-style school system was introduced during the late Joseon period, and today JCS provides classes on traditional manners, calligraphy, and Confucianism. Confucian ethics and thoughts are still relevant in Jeonju.

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Urban development in Korea had focused on developing new towns, including the provincial office, the police, and various government offices. Having deep clear urban centers turning into ghettos. Urban centers' populations dwindle, however, as residents, food, and drinks. In parallel, various performances and plays, such as traditional wrestling and swing, took place.

Regenerating the Old Inner City and Intangible Cultural Heritage

Urban development in Korea had focused on developing new towns on the outskirts of cities, as suburban areas were less inhabited, and thus developers were less likely to face stiff resistance from residents over development issues. The old urban centers' populations dwindle, however, as residents, commercial facilities, and government offices moved from existing urban centers to new towns, which resulted in old urban centers turning into ghettos.

That was also the case of Jeonju. In the 1980s, the city successfully expanded with a large-scale development of new suburban towns. In the 1990s, people, especially high-income earners and young generations, moved to apartment complexes in the new towns. Major government offices of Jeollabuk Province, including the provincial office, the police agency, and the office of education, were relocated to the new towns. All this accelerated the decline of the inner city. Consequently, the inner city was mostly occupied by elderly people living in shabby hanok (traditional houses). The inner city continued to face an increasing number of empty houses and worsening environments.

To address the situation, the city government took advantage of the 2002 FIFA World Cup as Jeonju was one of the host cities. The efforts involved transforming the old urban center (Jeonju Hanok Village) into a place that could offer attractions and experiences related to traditional culture for World Cup visitors. The focus was put on traditional culture, as Jeonju was the most traditional city in the country. Main programs initiated were designed to allow visitors to learn traditional music; experience making traditional paper, fans, and crafts; learn traditional manners and customs while wearing traditional attire; stay overnight in traditional houses; and make or eat popular local foods. Traditional cultural festivals, such as Dano-je (renamed to Pungnam-je) and the Jeonju International Sori Festival, were directed to move their venues to the old urban center. Stages were established for traditional cultural performances, and street performances and events were also organized for weekends. Simply put, the city remodeled Jeonju Hanok Village into a place where one can enjoy and learn traditional culture, performances, and cuisine all at once.

The city government opened the doors of Gyeonggijeon Shrine and Jeonju Confucian School, which had been closed for conservation, and significantly expanded traditional culture programs. It also encouraged various traditional culture events in the village. The city and private entities built several facilities to offer diverse experience programs related to traditional culture. These included various experience centers, museums, and performance halls.

On the other hand, the city government made efforts to ensure that diverse contents on traditional culture were concentrated on the village. Traditional cultural festivals and programs were primarily held in the village. People were given support when they were planning to start new programs related to traditional culture in the village. Traditional house construction was supported with up to KRW 50 million while construction of any other types of structures was prohibited. Information panels were put up to explain the history and culture of each tourist site. Traditional gardens, pavilions, and water channels were built along the main road. Tour guides were put on standby to provide visitors with explanations about the history and culture of each site.

As the result of the efforts, Jeonju Hanok Village has become the richest center of traditional culture in Korea. The city government requested the central government to designate the city as a traditional cultural city and provide support for development. The request was accepted, and in the process, the National Intangible Heritage Center and the Korean Traditional Culture Center were established close to the village to provide various traditional cultural performances and crafts programs. There are also night tour programs to allow visitors to explore and experience traditional culture under the moonlight. Meanwhile, Jeonju was designated as a UNESCO City of Gastronomy and a Slow City. It was also selected as a must-visit Asian city.

Jeonju Hanok Village has now become the best traditional tourist destination among tourist attractions developed since the 2000s. The number of visitors increased from almost none in 2000 to over ten million in 2018. With a significant increase in visitors, however, there are concerns that the village might lose its core elements of traditional culture that has enabled visitors to enjoy and experience traditional intangible culture of Korea, as performances and foods that feature a mix of tradition and modern or a fusion of indigenous and foreign cultures are increasingly taking holding. If the village fails to maintain authenticity of traditional intangible culture, it might not be as attractive as it is now.

Jeonju’s Identity and Intangible Cultural Heritage

As Jeonju was the home of Seon-gye Yi, the Joseon Dynasty founder, there are shrines that hold portraits of the king and memorial tablets for the Jeonju Yi family. The city also takes pride in its distinguished publication culture and Confucian traditions. A traditional music context, which started during the Joseon Dynasty, attracted the best traditional singers from across the country to perform in Jeonju. Jeonju naturally became the home to several renowned singers and appreciators of traditional music. Such legacies made Jeonju the most prominent Korean city with intangible cultural heritage.

As such, Jeonju shows the highest rate of attendance and participation in traditional culture. Traditional culture is like air to the residents. Traditional culture can be found in every aspect of life. Jeonju indeed is regarded as the best representation of traditional Korean culture. The critical role of traditional culture is also reflected in urban development strategies. Jeonju successfully transformed the once barren inner-city area into a national tourist destination. The experience suggests the possibility of urban development based on traditional culture. It is now believed that we can move forward, not backward, by transmitting and practicing traditional culture.

The city government is about to take steps to develop the city as an international cultural city with more diverse cultural contents. It aims to make the entire city a place that allows visitors to experience both traditional and modern culture and arts by enhancing the image of the city as the best cultural and art city in Korea, promoting the city as a traditional center for future tourism; fostering the city as a traditional cultural heritage city where the past and the future coexist; and forming a sustainable premium hanok village. In this way, the rich intangible cultural heritage of the city can reflect a unique blend of tradition and modernity. The operation of various cultural facilities, such as cultural houses and living culture centers, is more active than in any other city in the country, which is to ensure that culture and arts can be enjoyed by the residents in their daily lives. The city will encourage greater voluntary participation of residents in cultural and art activities to further promote tourism and industry.
Cities that have experienced growth since the Industrial Revolution have inherited traditional festivals and created new festivals reflecting the new urban cultures.

City festivals help build a sense of belonging to a community, which reinforces group cohesiveness and attracts tourist. In this volume, we examine city festivals in Kyrgyzstan, New Zealand, Singapore, and Thailand to better understand the relationship among the festivals, the communities, and the cities.
Wan Phayawan
Wan Phayawan, the third day of the New Year festival, officially marks the start of the New Year. Merit-making and religious ceremonies begin early in the morning. These ceremonies include veneration rituals for deceased relatives and ancestors, food-offering rituals, Lanna mantra readings, the placement of tung, embroidered flags, into sand pagodas; and listening to readings and addresses wishing for good luck and virtue in the New Year.

Wan Paak Bpee
The fourth day of the New Year festival and first day of the New Year is Wan Paak Bpee. This is an important day on which the Lanna people gather to pay respect, bring merit to their homes, and remove negative energy. A traditional ritual involves asking elders for forgiveness for any past wrongdoings and is usually followed by a life-prolonging ceremony in the evening, which is conducted at a local temple by village elders and community leaders and includes candle lighting, prayer, and worship to bring good fortune and auspiciousness to family homes.

Yor Suay Wai Sa Phraya Mangrai or Homage to Phraya Mangrai Ceremonies of Chiang Mai
Yor Suay Wai Sa Phraya Mangrai or Homage to Phraya Mangrai Ceremonies of Chiang Mai is held on 12 April to commemorate the city’s establishment and its founder, Phraya Mangrai. Families pay respect to the great king for prosperity and a safe and happy new year. The event is organized with the collaboration of the Chiang Mai Community Network, official representatives of Chiang Mai City, and other relevant agencies, exemplifying the culture of mutual generosity and cooperation that Chiang Mai is known for.

Served at the event is a traditional dessert believed to have originated during the Phraya Mangrai era. It is used symbolically to pay homage. The main purpose of the homage is to inspire a sense of ancestry and connection with the ancient founders, including the great king who conceived the city, ensured protection and peace for all on the land, and deeply instilled Lanna pride within its people.

The main ceremony consists of dedication and worship rituals, including offerings of sweet and savory foods, traditional dances, drumming, and ornate bowls of flowers, an offering unique to Lanna culture. A procession of over 700 people from different communities moves from the downtown area to the Three Kings Monument to demonstrate harmony and unity. The homage is a celebration of the city’s 722-year history, Lanna traditions, and, of course, Phraya Mangrai. The occasion is one on which individuals come to pay respect, receive blessings for themselves and their families, and to be inspired by their inherited a culture and faith that was founded on collective goodwill, universal respect, and social harmony.
Oimo, International Festival in Kyrgyzstan for Traditional Crafts and Culture

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The festival demonstrates a dialogue between a dynamic nomadic world and the ancient Central Asian cities as cultural centers, a meeting of written and oral tangible and intangible cultures. At present, the idea of cultural partnership and dialogue among representatives of different countries and peoples has acquired special significance as a stabilizing factor in the world, including the Central Asian region. Oimo is held by public funds through the Resource Center in Kyrgyzstan of Central Asia Crafts Support Association (CACSARC-kg) in partnership with the Craft Council of Kyrgyzstan and other public organizations interested in developing culture and tourism. Every year, the festival starts in the capital of Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek) on the last Thursday of July and lasts until the first week of August, during the peak tourist season in Cholpon-Ata on the shore of Lake Issyk-Kul.

The event is held under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, Information and Tourism of the Kyrgyz Republic with the support of the Bishkek and Cholpon-Ata cities’ administrations.

The festival objectives are as follows:

- Preserve Central Asian peoples’ intangible cultural heritage: crafts, clothing, cuisine, traditions, and customs
- Promote the idea of a dialogue of cultures, peace, and mutual understanding among the people of the region
- Develop and expand the handicraft market in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia
- Develop cultural and craft tourism in Kyrgyzstan
- Promote Kyrgyzstan as a country of ecological and cultural tourism
- Form a positive image of Kyrgyzstan internationally

The festival participants are artisans, designers, musicians, singers, epic narrators, and other carriers of intangible cultural heritage of Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia, and other countries. The festival attracts all kinds of visitors—urban and rural residents, tourists, collectors, representatives of businesses and culture organizations, and youth.

The festival traditionally opens with a solemn parade of craftsmen and guests of the festival, who wear national costumes. The parade moves along the central Chui Prospect of Bishkek to the venue of the festival in central Bishkek in Kurmanjani Dutky Square. More than 150 artisans from different countries display their products on the shelves of the craft fair, which is set up with a spread of tents reminiscent of the traditions during the Great Silk Road period.

In the festival program, various workshops take place: handicraft master classes for children and adults; demonstrations of traditions, customs, and folk games within the program framework; “Heritage of Ancestors;” and the tasting of traditional Central Asian dishes. In addition, exhibitions, competitions, art, and environmental actions are included. On stage, designers demonstrate their models in an “ethno” style, and artists and amateur groups of the Assembly of Peoples of Kyrgyzstan perform.

At the conferences and roundtables, participants and international experts discuss issues related to the current state of culture in Kyrgyzstan and the region. Topics include the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, intellectual property rights, regional cooperation in developing the craft market, and cultural tourism.

Over the past twelve years, representatives of Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries as well as Afghanistan, Turkey, China, India, Russia, the United States, Mexico, Iran, Mongolia, Sweden, and Great Britain have taken part in Oimo. The festival has become a significant and attractive event in the cultural life of the region. Many Central Asia travel companies include it on the calendar of regional events, and this attracts an additional flow of tourists to Kyrgyzstan.

Oimo participants, the number of which is growing every year, come to the festival with family members, replenishing the tourist flow and, thus, contribute to the growth of the local population’s incomes.

Oimo, which carries the idea of cultural and economic cooperation, peace, and tolerance, contributes not only to developing the cultural and ecological tourism industry in the region but also to the stabilizing the situation in the country and forming a positive image of Kyrgyzstan in the international arena.
A Procession through the City: Festival of Thaipusam in Singapore
Nalina Gopal

Singapore as a secular, multi-cultural, and multi-religious city state has had processions as part of its socio-religious fabric since the nineteenth century. Thaipusam, observed in Singapore since the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, is one of the most vibrant and longest surviving festivals in Singapore’s history. From a religious observance of significance to the diasporic Tamil community, the festival has grown to be an important and widely celebrated aspect of Singapore’s intangible cultural heritage, a rare, uninterrupted, and surviving tradition since colonial times. It is also one of the most visible religious public activities and provides the greatest opportunity for contact with secular activities and religious practices of other faiths. In fact, the religious procession has become an annual attraction for both locals and tourists, and it has been drawing huge audiences (both Indian and non-Indian) since the 1930s. This year, the festival witnessed “10,000 Hindus walk in annual procession, cheered on by nearly 40,000 spectators.”

Thaipusam: History, Tradition, and Change

The history of Thaipusam in Singapore is closely linked to Sri Thendayuthapani Temple, which was established in 1859. The temple is dedicated to the Hindu deity Murugan, the son of Lord Shiva. It was constructed by members of the Nattukottai Chettiar, a diasporic community of money lenders from Chettinad in Tamil Nadu, South India. One of the most public displays of devotion to Murugan popular among the Tamil community in Singapore and the Tamil diaspora worldwide is the festival of Thaipusam. The festival is a celebration of Parvati, the mother of Murugan, giving him the sakti ved (cosmic spear) and blessing him with victory in his battle against the demon Surapadman. It includes acts of devotion such as carrying the kavadi and pal kudam (milk pot) or body piercing. Held annually in the Tamil month of Thai (January–February), the festival is a three-day celebration. On the eve of Thaipusam, the processional Murugan image, placed in a silver statue (chariot), is taken on a procession through the city to the Sri Layan Sithi Vinayagar Temple, and then back to Sri Thendayuthapani Temple in the evening.

This opening procession, known as Punar Pusam or Chettiy Pusam, usually involves a predominant Chettiar gathering. A more magnificent procession takes place the following day and involves the participation of other Hindus and non-Hindus in a procession commencing at Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple on Serangoon Road and ending around three kilometers away, at Sri Thendayuthapani Temple. The devotee is regarded as emulating Ittappan, who mythology credits with lifting two hills bestowed on the sage Agasty by Lord Shiva. Another popular belief is that the devotee is the processional vehicle and the kavadi, a representation of Murugan’s shrine. Bearing kavadis is undoubtedly one of the most dominant motifs of Thaipusam, and that which invariably receives the greatest attention. During the procession, male devotees carry the kavadi, traditionally consisting of two semi-circular pieces of bent wood or steel attached to a horizontal structure. These devotees are typically accompanied by a group of supporters to urge them onward in their procession of penance.

In 2016, live music was permitted at three designated spots along the procession route as music was recognized as an integral aspect of the festival. In keeping with the changes in scale and festival practices, the Hindu Endowments Board also worked with government agencies on issues such as applying for police permits, setting up barricades along roads, ensuring sufficient security presence, and other tasks to ensure safe conduct of the procession.

Following the procession’s completion is a reception for the devotees at the Sri Thendayuthapani Temple. The final ritual of the Thaipusam festival is itampan puja, observed in the devotees’ homes, held up to a week after the day of procession, and concludes the strict penance and fast observed by the devotees in the days preceding the festival.

Conclusion

Over time, the Thaipusam Festival has become an important signifier of Singapore Indian cultural identity. Today, the diaspora celebrates the festival to acknowledge their roots. It has also assumed an important role as a negotiation space between old and new diasporas and helped build solidarity across boundaries of class, caste, ethnicity, language, citizenship, and religion. More importantly, the Thaipusam Festival expresses Singapore’s multiculturalism and is a good example of the city state’s open policy regarding freedom of worship. It continues to retain authenticity in practice despite rapid urban development, and it has become a popular tourist attraction promoted by the Singapore Tourism Board as one of the Visit Singapore events.

Notes
1 For more details on annual arrangements for the Thaipusam Festival in Singapore, please visit the organizer’s website: www.thaipusam.sg
2 Thaipusam is listed in Singapore’s first ICH inventory, which was launched in April 2018.
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Dean Wilson
Media Liaison, ASB Polyfest

ASB Polyfest is an iconic Auckland festival filled with color and culture. It celebrated its 43rd anniversary in 2018, with more than 12,000 secondary school students from across the Auckland region performing on six stages and a record 241 performing groups from 68 schools. The event began in 1976 when two college students challenged three Auckland schools to a performance competition to celebrate their different cultures. It was a small event but a huge success, and the competition has continued to grow while maintaining its purpose and vision.

The festival celebrates Auckland’s diverse cultures and attracts over 100,000 people each year with visiting schools and organizations from around New Zealand and the world. The level of performance through speech, song, and dance is of a high standard, and it is the world’s biggest event of this kind. Through non-competitive and competitive sections, Auckland secondary school students prepare traditional performances choreographed to the annual event theme and composed to fit aspects of their respective culture.

ASB Polyfest 2018 Themes

- Tuia te muka tangata (Thread the fibers of humanity)
- Tuia te muka wairua (Thread the fibers of spiritual well-being)
- Whiria te ahuara tauikiriki (Bind together the essence of cultural identity)
- Whiria te ahuara tuamanomono (Weave together the diverseness of cultural awareness)

Students prepare and perform speeches and dances across six stages—Cook Islands, Maori, Niue, Samoan, Tongan, and a Diversity stage, which comprises cultures from China, Fiji, Tokelau, India, Korea, countries in Africa, and many others. Students perform on these stages with pride and passion and the honor of being the top school in their respective culture. A leader from a Central Auckland College says, “I’m looking forward to seeing everyone getting together as one big Polynesian nation [to celebrate] our culture. It’s my last year this year…I can’t escape it whether I try to or not, it’s a part of me, like I’m never gonna lose it. Home is where the heart is.”

Some acknowledge their past like one leader from a South Auckland College who stated, “Just finishing it off with a big bang since it’s my last year. This one’s dedicated to my grandpa because he just passed away end of last year and he was all about culture.”

And similarly many affirm their identity by saying, “Culture to me is everything, it’s like a part of my world, and without it, I wouldn’t know who I am today.” The success and survival of the festival is due to the understanding and recognition students and their community gain from being a part of it. Everyone involved would agree that they do all of this for the kids and for the culture.

Associate Minister for Pacific Peoples, Hon. Carmel Sepuloni, said of this year’s event,

ASB Polyfest, being the largest Pacific youth festival in the world, celebrates and showcases the diversity of our cultures, our languages, and importantly our youth of today. Pacific cultures are unique, a point of difference, and our voice and it is important to nurture cultures and keep that identity alive to ensure our youth thrive on any stage they take on. It is important that youth are confident in their cultural identity, as this will serve as a platform for future success.

ASB Polyfest Festival Director, Seiuli Terri Leo-Mauu, this year described ASB Polyfest as more than four days of competition, speech and performances. It’s a place our children can express themselves, it’s an avenue that creates time with our Mamas and Papas and learning the old ways of how to weave and make your costumes, how to sing or chant the way they do back in the homelands, how to articulate and pronounce words properly, how to be respectful and be disciplined, how to be a leader. All these attributes, characteristics, skills our children take back to school and our hope is that they apply these to their studies and future career aspirations.

The festival fosters many values, particularly celebrating diversity, pursuing excellence, and strengthening community engagement. It creates an opportunity and place for young people to affirm their identity and express themselves by learning and understanding where they’ve come from, in order to know where they are going.

Auckland, New Zealand, celebrates this festival every year in March and welcomes all visitors to join us and experience the food, the people, and the vibrant expression of culture and language that makes up the diverse tapestry of ASB Polyfest.

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Dhamrai, the main center of metal casting in Bangladesh, is located about thirty-nine kilometers northwest of Dhaka, the capital city. A visitor to the quiet rural setting was once greeted by natural sounds and bustles of sounds, the clanging of metals, which made a wonderful rhythm of working melodies. This transpires the existence of metal crafts being an important part of Bengal’s rich artistic tradition that dates to before 2000 BCE on the Indian peninsula. History suggests that some of the greatest metal craft masterpieces of all times, made here by skilled artisans and sculptors, were magnificent in design, exclusivity of details, and workmanship. But over time, the cultural heritage, exceptionally rich in aesthetics and artistry, has fallen from its glory and only a few artisans are toiling to revive this millennium-old art form.

Bangladesh was a land of mixed religion and culture in the past. For thousands of years, there was a large concentration of Hindus. Buddhism is still prevalent here in the hill tracts bordering Myanmar. After 1947, the Hindus’ exodus to India and the repetition of the same after the Bangladesh War of Independence in 1971 has left the community here a minority with a presence of below 10 percent of the total population.

Traditionally Hindus and in lesser proportion Buddhists were the main takers of this craft. They gave shape to their religious and social imaginations, beliefs, and messages through these artifacts: ranging from everyday use items to religious idols of both Buddhism and Hinduism. Dhamrai had been the epicenter of this traditional craft for centuries due to the quality, workmanship, and aesthetic appeal of the artifacts. In the early 1950s about thirty villages in the Dhamrai-Shimulia region were in this trade but now only around ten to twelve families, against all adversity, are trying their best to keep this tradition alive. Over and above, the aristocracy, who were once attached to using metal crafts, had in most instances faded out of the culture. These factors are at the roots of the craft’s dwindling market.

But as a kindle of hope, an organization named the Initiative for the Preservation of Dhamrai Metal Casting (IPDMC), headed by me, has taken up the task of reviving the lost glory of the metal crafts of Dhamrai. The craft started with the late Lal Mohan Banik, and the family has been in this trade for the last two hundred years. The Banik mansion in Rothkhola of Dhamrai, a century-old eye-catching palatial edifice, was once a primary supply point of metal crafts for other parts of the land. The family suffered huge losses during the Bangladesh liberation war, and their trade almost halted. Then with only five members left, I took over the receding family business in 2000. The rekindling journey of Dhamrai Metal Crafts (DMC), with me at the helm and with assistance from my uncle the late Shakhi Gopal Banik and my parents, Phani Bhushan and Tara Rani, began.

The craft has found its admirers in the diplomatic community and the foreigners who had been frequenting Dhamrai in search of metal artifacts and antiques. There is a wide market for oriental metal artifacts, especially of religious images in India, the USA, and Europe. Through these links, I met Matthew S. Friedman, an international health advisor with USAID. He had a keen interest in traditional arts. The relationship brought IPDMC an aid of US$14,500 under the US Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP). Documenting the craft process, training of the artisans under skill exchange programs with Nepal, holding training workshops in Dhamrai, and having a workshop with two hundred school children in a bid to make them aware of their heritage were the activities undertaken with the
in all its richness inculcates a sense of pride in the diverse cultural scene and the traditions handed down through generations and develops a sense of appreciation for the traditional arts and crafts. But an indispensable element of Bangladesh’s heritage and artistic tradition, the centuries-old metal art of Dhamrai, is now on the verge of being lost forever. It is a collective responsibility to help revive and revitalize this rich art that forms an integral part of Bengal’s and well as the sub-continent’s identity. Economically, metal crafts add to the repertoire of non-traditional export items and is of significant value in the international market.

In comparison to today’s mass-produced, machine-made uniform products, Dhamrai’s metal wares are marked by the uniqueness of every piece since they are purely handcrafted—a new and different mold is used for making every piece. The intricate designs and the spirit of every piece is the result of the creative intellect and artistic capability of the creative craftspeople—the more aesthetic value they add to their creations that satisfies the eyes and hearts of connoisseurs.

Among the metal workshops in Dhamrai, DMC has a distinct place for its variety, design, finishing, and quality. The works strike a balance in the production of metal statuary with religious fervor for the sacred, and profane or those for tourists. These delicate and eye-catching pieces highlight creative ideas, extraordinary skill, highest precision, passion, dedication, and the time that is put in making. The sensuality, spirituality, and beauty of these images emphasize that as if they have been created for eternity that radiate a sense of immortality and reflect the fascination and mystery of our ancient cultures. It is due to the commendable effort of DMC that Bangladesh now is one of the few countries where this ancient tradition has been preserved in modern times.

The need of the hour is to take up the task of revival and conservation so that future generations can witness and appreciate the aesthetic values of these magnificent artworks. Preserving and safeguarding such cultural elements that timelessly reflect a region’s heritage is a necessity, as losing such traditions would be a loss for humanity. Apart from local initiatives, international bodies like UNESCO may assist to preserve and keep this legacy alive. There are several obstacles to sustaining the craft: scarcity of capital, absence of stability in the source and prices of raw materials, negligible market exposure, non-availability of institutional finance, and bureaucratic hassles for export initiates. Generating social awareness—patronizing such form of art, publicity by the missions abroad, training and exposure of the artisans, ensuring the availability of raw materials, frequent expositions, both at home and abroad, product diversification, maintenance of standards, and product quality can be initiated to safeguard this tradition of humanity.

The artistic pieces pass through the ages, becoming part of the owner’s heritage and survives through generations. While accepting that metal art of Dhamrai is almost on the verge of fading out, one cannot ignore the fact that there is still a chance of reviving this rich heritage of Bangladesh. As the craft is a very ancient one, the artifacts tell the tale of past cultures, religion, and social structures. It can be an interesting subject for social scientists and archaeologists to study the social context of traditional metal casters. The craft bears religious, social, and ethnic values can be taken as topics for ethnographical research into this art form. It would involve studying and analyzing contemporary cultures with the aim to understand the behavioral relationships that underlie the production of material culture and outline the role of metal crafts in the social evolution of the societies in this region.

fund. There were expositions at the Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts that drew many art lovers from home and abroad. The documentary on the craft was screened and acclaimed in Switzerland in 2007.

At present, the artisans of Dhamrai Metal Crafts continue to produce lost wax castings using the same age-old method. They have been using a variety of different techniques to make metal objects of outstanding artistic brilliance. There are five different casting techniques practiced here: the lost wax method, the clay casting method, the sand casting method, the spoon casting method, and the plate casting method. Traditionally metals like copper, tin, zinc, iron, mercury, lead, gold, and silver are the primary raw materials used in the process. But as a rule, three basic alloys are mostly used here: brass, bell-metal or white brass, and bronze.

The lost wax method as used by artisans of Dhamrai. Bees’ wax is mixed with Paraffin and is used to make statues or solid images. At first, the basic figure is made with wax and then decorated. Subsequently, three layers of clay are put on the figure. The first layer is a very fine clay solution applied with a brush. The second layer is clay mixed with jute fiber and sand that works as binder. The third layer is clay with rice husk. Then the mold is dried for a few days at room temperature. The next step is casting the mold. After the metal is put into a crucible, the mold and the crucible are placed for firing. The crucible melts, it is poured into the mold for the desired form. The molten metal then solidifies and leaves the mold empty. Also, as the metal in the crucible melts, it is poured into the mold for the desired form. The crucible melts, it is poured into the mold for the desired form. The molten metal then solidifies and leaves the mold empty. Also, as the metal in the crucible melts, it is poured into the mold for the desired form.
Thundukuna Community—Mat Weaving Artisans in Maldives

Aminath Abdulla
Chairperson, Maldives Authentic Crafts Cooperative Society

Thundukuna is a special mat woven from reeds indigenous to the marshlands of Maldives. The reed is locally known as hau. Mat weaving from hau dates back some two hundred years, and this long history is mostly associated with the southernmost atolls.

Thundukuna is a genuine Maldivian product, as everything that goes into producing the mat is indigenous and locally procured from our natural habitat. In this respect, the most basic things like the threads holding the reeds in place are made from the sea hibiscus bark. The eye-catching, environmentally friendly, nonfading mats are made from the local flora’s bark and roots.

Before the introduction of cheap factory-made nylon mats into Maldives in early 1970s, thundukuna enjoyed a special place in most Maldivian households. These mats adorned the coir rope stringed beds, swings, and boduashi. Gaddhoo kuna, a superior quality mat woven by Gaddhoo islanders, is a favorite of the rich.

Most island communities in GA, GDh, GN, and S Atoll\(^1\) weave mats as an essential activity or as a hobby. The art of weaving is passed from generation to generation. The basic designs and motifs on these mats are mostly triangular or square with occasional variations. The three primary colors make up the entire color scheme. All mats are designed, colored, and sized for specific uses. For example, mats for sleeping cots, easy chairs, guest settees, and divans have a distinctive design, and artisans do not change the design except for a specific purpose or at special request.

Since the 1970s, imported cheap plastic mats have flooded the limited market, sidelining environmentally friendly but more expensive home-produced mats. The fall in demand greatly affected the home-based industry, which slowed production, and mat weaving died slowly. The problem was so acute that by late 1980 production was nonexistent on many islands. Today, only two islands from the twenty-seven inhabited islands of the southern atolls have a noteworthy mat weaving culture. GDh. Gaddhoo and GDh. Rathafandoo still practice this dying art, with Gaddhoo mats being renowned for their intricate designs and weaving quality. On these two islands, the number of practicing artisans has been falling, and today there are fewer than twenty. The diminishing demand for natural fiber mats for cheap imports has compelled the many artisans to change trades to survive and to take up mat weaving as a hobby. Some now weave on demand, especially for the longer and larger mats.

The demise of this once productive industry is also due to the unwillingness of the educated youth to learn and carry on the family trade. The youth feel the remuneration is not on par with the hard work required to produce these works of art. The looms that were once the pride and joy of their parents have largely vanished, and some children don’t even know what mat weaving is or that their native island once had a thriving home-based mat weaving industry.

\(^1\) Code letters assigned to the administrative divisions of the Maldives.

Traditional hand-woven reed mats © Aishath Aima Musthafa

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The production of small souvenir mats is fares much better than for the large versions. The reeds from which these masterpiece mats are woven are found on many islands, but the reeds from GDH. Fiyoaree are of superior quality. The mats woven from these reeds have long usage life and are resilient to color fading. These reeds have more luster and a brighter coloration, making them highly valued in the market.

Traditionally, women in the Fiyoaree community were involved in weaving mats, but with the advent of modernization, their involvement diminished. The community recognized the need to revive this traditional craft to preserve their cultural heritage and maintain their identity.

To address this, the Maldives Authentic Crafts Cooperative Society (MACCS) was established. MACCS is a nonprofit organization that aims to promote and revive traditional arts and crafts. They identified the Fiyoaree marshland as a suitable area for reed growing, which is essential for mat weaving.

MACCS initiated a project to produce small souvenir mats, known as Fiyoaree mats. These mats are made from local reeds, ensuring the sustainability of the craft.

The production of small souvenir mats has been highly successful. The mats fetch good prices in the market, and the demand for them has increased significantly. This has led to the revival of the mat weaving industry, with many women from the community involved in the process.

The artisans at Fiyoaree are skilled in their craft, and the quality of the mats they produce is highly appreciated. The mats are also admired for their durability and resistance to color fading, making them a valuable addition to any collection.

In conclusion, the revival of the mat weaving industry in Fiyoaree has not only provided economic benefits to the community but has also helped in preserving their cultural heritage. The community is proud of their work, and the mats are a symbol of their rich tradition.
We, the Safeguarding Actors for Pacific ICH

ICHCAP will host the Young ICH Practitioners Network Meeting in Honiara, Solomon Islands, on 9 and 10 July 2018.

The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted by the General Assembly of the States Party to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was held in Paris. The seventh session of the Assembly will take place from 4 to 6 June 2018 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. The seventh session of the Assembly will be held under the theme of “We, the Safeguarding Actors for Pacific ICH”.

Young practitioners will attend the meeting as presenters and debaters to share their experiences and thoughts and voice their opinions as main actors for ICH safeguarding and transmission.

The meeting will allow young practitioners to engage in greater communication and cooperation to play leading roles in ICH safeguarding activities, and it will also encourage more youth to join ICH safeguarding activities. To achieve these aims, it is important to garner support and participation. Online registration for the meeting is open from 10 May to 22 June. For more information, please contact ICHCAP’s Cooperation & Networking Section (soyoung@ichcap.org).

The Seventh General Assembly for the 2003 Convention Held at the UNESCO Headquarters from 4 to 6 June 2018

The seventh session of the General Assembly of the States Party to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was held from 4 to 6 June 2018 at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. The seventh session of the Assembly examined important issues and challenges for the implementation of the Convention, such as the monitoring and periodic reporting mechanisms for implementing the Convention.

The highlight was the adoption of the Overall Results Framework, which is widely regarded as an effective instrument to diagnose and improve the implementation of the Convention in the States Party. The Operational Directives for the Implementation of the Convention was partially amended to allow States Party to submit their periodic reports on a regional basis every six years from 2010. In parallel, Form ICH-10 would be aligned to the Overall Results Framework, so it could be used for periodic reporting, which is to minimize reporting burdens of the States Party.

Discussions are ongoing over how the complicated framework can successfully be settled in each State Party, and additional work also remains to be done to define the baselines and targets considering country-specific environments of intangible cultural heritage.

The Assembly also touched upon the dialogue process between the Evaluation Body and the submitting State. Where the eleventh session of the Intergovernmental Committee overturned seventeen out of twenty-four referrals (71.4%) recommended by the Evaluation Body, the States Party recognized the importance of dialogue process to enhance efficiency of the evaluation process. However, the Evaluation Body requested to extend the decision of its application by the fourteenth session of the Committee in 2019, citing the possibilities of excessive control and politicization by States Party.

Lastly, half of the Member States of the Committee were replaced at the Assembly. Twelve new members were elected for a four-year term from 2018 to 2021, including Netherlands from Group I (Western Europe, North America); Azerbaijan and Poland from Group II (Eastern Europe); Jamaica from Group III (South America, Caribbean); China, Sri Lanka, Japan, and Kazakhstan from Group IV (Asia, Pacific); Cameroon, Djibouti, and Togo from Group VIA (Africa); and Kuwait from Group VIB (Arab).

The First Accredited NGOs in Australia, Tajikistan, and Pakistan


The Assembly approved the accreditation of twenty-nine NGOs recommended by the Intergovernmental Committee at its twelfth session in South Korea in December 2017. UNESCO-accredited NGOs provide advisory services to the Committee based on their expertise in the ICH field. The recent accreditation has led to a total of 176 accredited NGOs.

In the Asia-Pacific region, there are now twenty-seven accredited NGOs, including the three recently accredited—Many Hands International in Australia, Public Association Pamir Mountains in Tajikistan, and THAAP in Pakistan. As the first UNESCO-accredited NGOs in their respective countries, they are expected to engage in various ICH safeguarding activities.

Many Hands International is helping rebuild communities recovering from armed conflicts or suffering poverty, by providing support for various cultural activities to enhance the identity of such communities and assisting in their economic independence. Public Association Pamir Mountains primarily works in the Pamirs, which is known as the roof of the world. Its activities focus on safeguarding the traditional knowledge of local communities and researching and publishing information about traditional knowledge, including traditional hunting essential for locals to adapt to the mountain environments. THAAP is involved in ICH safeguarding activities, such as meetings, publications, and crafts markets as well as community-based ICH inventory making.

ICHCAP Will Host an International Forum on ICH and Tertiary Education

ICHCAP will host an international forum, “Unlocking the Potential of Tertiary Education for ICH Safeguarding,” on 17 July at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, in cooperation with UNESCO Bangkok Office and with support from the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea.

ICH education experts from twelve Asia-Pacific countries will attend the forum to discuss the main subjects of ICH education in universities in the Asia-Pacific region and community-based approaches for ICH safeguarding. Participating experts will share ICH-related curricula of regional universities and discuss the roles and importance of tertiary education institutions in the safeguarding of ICH through community-based curriculums.

Professor Amareswar Galla will open the forum with a keynote speech on the roles and importance of tertiary education for ICH. It will be followed by themed presentations on ICH-related education and ICH.

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Discussions are ongoing over how the complicated framework can successfully be settled in each State Party, and additional work also remains to be done to define the baselines and targets considering country-specific environments of intangible cultural heritage.

The Assembly also touched upon the dialogue process between the Evaluation Body and the submitting State. Where the eleventh session of the Intergovernmental Committee overturned seventeen out of twenty-four referrals (71.4%) recommended by the Evaluation Body, the States Party recognized the importance of dialogue process to enhance efficiency of the evaluation process. However, the Evaluation Body requested to extend the decision of its application by the fourteenth session of the Committee in 2019, citing the possibilities of excessive control and politicization by States Party.

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