ICH Courier
Intangible Cultural Heritage Courier of Asia and the Pacific

Block Printing on Textiles
On behalf of ICHCAP, I wish all our readers, collaborators, and partners a comfortable and safe season as we approach the summer months. We also look forward to celebrating the tenth anniversary of the ICH Courier later this year with an extended volume, and we appreciate your support for all these years.

In this volume, we will be presenting birthing traditions in Windows to ICH. As a celebration of new life, cultures around the world hold a number of symbolic events to usher in a new life into their community. At the same time, many activities also extend to helping the mother recuperate from the arduous task of giving birth. In this volume, we highlight some birthing rituals of Palau, India, the Philippines, and the Republic of Korea so we can show the myriad ways communities and cultures celebrate the birth of a child in the Asia-Pacific region.

Museums have long been a part of communicating cultural history. However, some critics claim that museums fossilize intangible cultural heritage. An additional issue is related to massive increases in diverse peoples moving into and out of culturally different areas; it is thought that museums could help bridge some of the cultural divides seen in some communities by incorporating ICH into museums. These issues are examined in our Expert Remarks and Field Report sections. Our expert contributor focuses on the work of organizations working to combine ICH into museum experiences. The contributor in the field reports on the ways technology is influencing museology by introducing immersive experiences for museumgoers.

Our Safeguarding Activities section looks at climate change’s effect on Pacific ICH as well as the importance of storytelling as a safeguarding tool, particularly though the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning. The Minister of Culture of Uzbekistan shares his thoughts about ICH festivals and safeguarding through an interview of our Safeguarding Pioneers section. Finally, Safeguarding Communities looks into a modern cultural phenomenon of Singapore—namely, community dining centers also known as hawker culture.

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation for your support with the ICH Courier, and I encourage all readers to visit ichcourier.ichcap.org to download previous issues and to look at the new submissions section, where we have an open call for papers for select sections of the publication.

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Summarized Special Lecture by Ki-Moon Ban, the 8th Secretary-General of the United Nations, at the 2019 World Forum for Intangible Cultural Heritage

Humanity has enjoyed the benefits of nature while also destroying it to a large extent in the process of pursuing their desires. Since the inception of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987, we have endeavored to be conscious of our common future and secure resources to be used by our future generations for millions of years to come, while at the same time asking ourselves how the current generation could live in prosperity. These efforts developed into the concept of sustainable development.

Unlike the Industrial Age in the early twentieth century where people pursued rapid economic growth, sustainable development promotes the simultaneous achievement of economic growth, social integration, and environmental preservation in each area, leading to synergy effects. In 2015, the UN announced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which present 17 goals to be achieved by 2030. While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a developmental plan for developing countries, the SDGs are a highly ambitious plan that allows the Earth to survive alongside humanity and, more importantly, governments, businesses, and civil society to create a cooperative partnership for mutual contribution.

The SDGs do not include culture as one of its goals. Still, it is incontestably true that the elements of culture and cultural heritage are diversely reflected in each of the goals, such as inclusive economic growth, environmental sustainability, and peace and safety. Also, the close cooperation between the UN and the UNESCO in the process of adopting the SDGs demonstrates the extent to which humankind regards culture as important and the significant contribution that culture makes to achieving the SDGs.

In particular, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) largely contributes to the following four SDGs:

**Inclusive Society**
The first keyword of sustainable development is “poverty,” and the second and third keywords are “food” and “health,” respectively. This shows that food security is one of the core challenges of sustainable development. ICH largely contributes to this very area. ICH’s various traditional knowledge pertaining to dietary life, such as culinary arts, farming techniques, and hunter-gathering and food collection methods, is linked to sustainable food security, both directly and indirectly. Moreover, ICH is related to gender equality. Women play an important role in the transmission of ICH, and they are related to achieving SDG 6 “Clean Water and Sanitation.” As our ancestors responded to natural and climate challenges before us, their traditional knowledge can be very useful information for our current strategies to mitigate climate change.

**Inclusive Economic Growth**
ICH largely affects the maintenance of livelihoods of groups and communities. I believe that ICH will help create jobs, and, more importantly, lay the foundation for economic growth by offering decent jobs to people from all walks of life, including the poor and the weak. Moreover, ICH can be excellent resources for tourism. Boosting tourism with ICH can contribute to revitalizing the economy of the community.

**Peace and Safety**
ICH pertains to understanding the past through cultural heritage. We occasionally witness horrible massacres arising from ethnic differences all over the world. But if people share their traditional knowledge and way of life with each other, they will be able to understand each other and achieve reconciliation and co-existence. This way, I believe that culture can help ensure Peace and safety.

As shown in many examples, ICH is contributing to society in various ways. To ensure this, governments, businesses, and civil society should work together. Governments should protect ICH through policies and programs; businesses should sponsor ICH as part of their social contribution; and civil society should take the lead in maintaining their unique culture as a member of the community. Civil society is a spontaneous community. However, modern civil society sadly tends to serve the interests of individuals rather than the community. Inclusive social development pursued under sustainable development will be an effort to restore our civil society as a spontaneous community. I believe that ICH focused on communities will play a significant role in reviving such civil society.
Practical Documentation Approaches for Safeguarding ICH

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The Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador’s Intangible Cultural Strategy has four broad goals: documentation, that work of inventorying ICH; celebration, where we honor our tradition bearers; transmission, where we ensure that skills are passed from person to person and community to community; and finally cultural industry, where we can build sustainable communities using intangible cultural heritage as a tool.

The typical methodology used by Heritage NL is fairly simple: a topic or community is identified, background research is conducted, and then fieldwork is undertaken to document living knowledge. Then, some sort of event or community engagement project is organized, using the information collected, which allows for public participation in and/or celebration of the tradition under study. The entire process is documented, and then made accessible in ways the community decides is appropriate.

Identifying and documenting ICH is an important part of maintaining tradition. Often, ICH practices and knowledge have not been documented in print or digital collections, and documenting that knowledge is one way to assist with its survival and transmission. To ensure the continued transmission of ICH, it is extremely important for the practitioners themselves to be involved, and to be aware of and to identify endangered elements of ICH for study. Where possible, community members should be trained in the inventorying and documentary process, giving them the ability to document their own ICH.

Documentation is important in that it forms a knowledge base for future work. It is the first step in the process of safeguarding this heritage. Safeguarding measures must be developed with a deep understanding of the element under threat, or else they will not be effective. In other words, documentation should be undertaken with the understanding that the records produced are to be used in some way to strengthen the tradition, and are not just an observation of fading practices.

HeritageNL regularly runs workshops on ethnographic collection techniques and cultural documentation and regularly works with Memorial University’s Department of Folklore in training graduate students in the work of cultural documentation, proper documentation procedures, and issues surrounding copyright and ownership.

In our work, we are interested in the processes behind the transmission of skills and knowledge, not just historical data. The model we use for training cultural workers reflects this, and is based on a series of six themes around which we develop questions while doing ethnographic interviews.

1. In The Beginning...

Here, the researcher asks questions about where and when the interviewee started their involvement in the tradition. This helps ease the interviewee into deeper questions. Questions might include, “How did you start?” or “Who did you learn this tradition from?” or “What was your introduction to this tradition?” This serves two basic functions: it provides good contextual and historical information at the start of the interview, while also easing or relaxing the tradition bearer into the interview. After the person is comfortable in the interview, the researcher can start to ask more detailed or personal questions.
2. Learning, Past, and Future
This topic is intended to uncover information about the learning process in a bit more detail and, in particular, to help you understand the situation or conditions needed for the transmission of the element. This topic is a bit more reflective, and digs a bit deeper than the “Beginnings” questions. Sample questions might include “What allowed you to learn this skill?” or “What help did you get early on?” Questions here should also not focus just on the past, but also the future with such questions as “What needs to be in place so that future generations can also learn this tradition?”

The goal here is to ask questions to help you understand the process of transmission and to assist later in the development of a safeguarding plan. Sometimes these questions flow naturally out of the “Beginnings” questions, or questions about the future of the tradition, or the element in question may just as well fit at the end of an interview session. Ultimately, future safeguarding plans must address the complex issues of transmission, teaching, and learning. Documentation that focuses on the “what” of the tradition while ignoring the “how” will be less useful for developing safeguarding measures.

3. Community Context
These questions focus on how one person connects to another, and how the community is organized around the element in question. This helps the researcher measure the health of communication and transmission within the community as well as the cohesiveness or porosity of the community itself. It examines whether membership in the community of practitioners is restricted tightly, or if its membership is fluid. “Community” here may refer to several levels of community: the community of elder tradition bearers as well as their interactions with younger learners and their interactions with the community of watchers, purchasers, and or users of the element. This is important to understand when developing plans for the future transmission of knowledge or the development of audiences or markets for that element.

4. Aesthetic Concerns
Questions here will help you understand the aesthetic choices the bearer makes about the tradition or element and about how the tradition is perceived. It also poses questions about what is acceptable in terms of design or performance of the tradition or element. Questions that start with, “What makes a good...” are excellent here. Asking what differentiates “good” and “bad” in the tradition also gives interesting information.

5. The Process of Creation
This is where you get detailed information on the mechanics of the element, or how a particular craft or performance is created or made. These are “How do you...?” questions, as in “How do you organize this festival?” or “Can you walk me through the process of making this object, from start to finish?” Depending on the time spent on this topic, you can collect a basic synopsis of the process, or very detailed, step-by-step instructions. The process of creation is often far more detailed than even the practitioner or bearer may initially perceive seeing as much of the very intricate knowledge required is sometimes taken for granted.

6. The Evolution of Tradition
Asking questions about the evolution of an element can provide a fascinating window into its history and function within a community. And, like topics 2 and 5, it can provide good information for later use in developing a safeguarding plan for the element. Questions here focus on what the individual does within a larger tradition, the balance and interplay between what is carried forward from the past, and how the interviewee interprets or re-imagines the tradition. These may include changes to construction materials, new tools, or the incorporation of novel ideals. Questions might include things like “How has the tradition changed over time?” or “What new things have you seen incorporated into the element?” or “What are its challenges and opportunities?”

At the end of an interview, it is always valuable to ask the tradition bearer to comment on the interview process, and perhaps ask a question like “What have I forgotten to ask?” or “What do you think it is most important that people know about this tradition?” The important thing for the researcher to remember is that the best documentation is that which results in practical, useful, and applicable information for the community.
Block Printing on Textiles

Block printing is a representative handicraft, one of the oldest methods in the history of pattern dyeing for mass production. The block printing patterns reflect the culture of each country, and the carving craft for making blocks is also a highly valued intangible cultural heritage itself. While block printing has flourished for a long time, in some countries, this heritage has almost disappeared. However, we can see the efforts to revive this traditional craft skill through educational institutions. In this volume, we will look at block printings of India, Uzbekistan, the Philippines, and Tonga. We also can see the prosperity, decline, and revival efforts of this specific topic through the articles.
Block printing is a traditional technique of textile design holding pride of place in the rich repository of Indian craft. Some scholars hold the view that it originated in China, and it came to India only in the twelfth century. Others cite fragments of printed cloth from Mohenjo-Daro or references in the Ramayana as evidence that it has existed in India since ancient times. The technique is unique in its ability to reflect both the creative ability of the designer and the sensibility of the printer-craftsmen. The creations of such bespoke production uniquely manifest the tiny imperfections that make it so highly prized. This singularity may never be achieved using automated machines.

As a traditional craft, the skill is hereditary but poor wages/benefits and working conditions, health problems (because of constant exposure to water and chemicals), makes it less appealing to the current generation. Yet the craft has seen a revival with the growing interest in sustainable crafts and natural dyes, and a compulsion to leave a smaller carbon footprint.

As a labor intensive craft, it offers a livelihood to a large number of people. However, dyeing and printing cloth requires large amounts of water and safe filtration to clean wastewater before discharge to further reduce its impact on the environment.

In India, the craft originated in the state of Gujarat. Since then Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh have all become important centers of block printing. Each center and even individual cities within these centers exhibit unique traditions. They differ in their motifs, color sensibilities and the manner of resist. The sanghaner (intricate floral jaal designs) and daboo prints (using natural dyes and mud resist) of Rajasthan, the vibrant colors and designs of Serampore, West Bengal, the Kalamkari with its idols and temple prints from Shrikalahasti, Andhra Pradesh and the intricately processed fabric using natural dye from Bagh in Madhya Pradesh are some varieties.

Block Printing in India

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Block-Printing Process

1. A block of sisham (teak) or sagwan wood is cut, and sanded for surface evenness. Once the designer/artist has created the design, either as a set of motifs (boota or buti) or a floral or geometric repeat (jaul) or an asymmetric pattern, the design is inverted and traced onto the block. The negative space is carefully chipped away to create the design, the depth of the carving varies from two to three to a deeper eight to twelve for wax resist blocks. A few fine holes are drilled into the block to prevent formation of air pockets. Also ‘pins’ (guide points) are created to ensure perfect alignment of the blocks while printing. A handle is fixed to the upper side.

2. The fabric to be used is washed to remove starch/gum, impurities before being bleached and if required, dyed.

3. The printing table is covered with base fabric (achara) to absorb excess print color. The prepared fabric is now stretched on tables that vary from 6.5 to 7 meters in length and pinned firmly in place with small pins.

4. A master printer or color master mixes the dye to be used. This can be of four types, pigment (direct), discharge (allowing bright, lighter colors to be printed on darker backgrounds), rapid (limited color range but brilliant fast color) or napthol (cold water dyes for resisted fabrics. A small amount of color is poured into the color tray, a jute/wooden fabric is placed within it. A fine net or fabric is placed above and the color is repeatedly evened out by a flat rectangular piece of wood, to prevent excess color from being caught up in the block.

5. The printer prints from left to right, pulling his color tray with him. He presses the block firmly into the fabric thumping the handle with his hands to ensure a deep print. This process is repeated along the length of the fabric, allowing the first color to dry before adding a second or third color. Once the printing is complete the fabric is left on the table to partially dry, then hung up on wires to fully dry.

The quality of print can be affected by the weather (not enough sun, too much moisture, etc) or even the type of water and the minerals it contains.

The designer is only limited by his imagination as the blocks can be used in a multitude of combinations and color-ways to create new and exciting designs.
Textile Block Printing of Uzbekistan

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Textile printing is the process of printing flowers, ornaments on cotton or silk fabric (chitgarlik) by hand using carved wooden stamps.

This applied art has existed in Central Asia since ancient times and stems from the region’s cultural and commercial interaction.

The art of textile block printing traveled along the Silk Road and flourished in the villages and towns of Central Asia.

A piece of calico fabric exhibited in the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan was found among archaeological excavations in Old Termez of the Surkhandarya region. Its pattern and thombus-like shape on red cotton fabric dates back to the tenth and eleventh centuries and includes legendary animals typical of Central Asian handicrafts of that period like ceramics, metal, or fabrics.

In Central Asia people use textile printing products such as tablecloths, blankets, scarves, curtains, and wall hangings in their daily life. Although the production is very slow and takes time, the art is unique and cannot be compared with other types of crafts. The designer produces a variety of shapes by matching the mold flowers to the fabric during his working process.

Printed ornaments, which are mainly made of flowers and plants, remain unchanged to this day. The flower chitgar decorations printed on the hard-woven cloth are almost indistinct from those found in the fourteenth century fabrics found in the tomb of Amir Temur’s wife, Bibikhanum. Black images with a dark purple border still echo the mastery of the craftsmen of that time. Although there was a wide variety of colors and images in that period, the most popular fabric decorated with dark blue colors.

According to Russian scientist P. N. Nebolsin, Central Asian block printed products were also known in Russia for their quality and design of decorative items and floral fabrics of Bukhara and Khiva were exported as clothing until the fourteenth century.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, Central Asian block printed fabric was not able to compete with the factory-made fabrics. Subsequently, cheap Russian-made fabrics flooded Central Asia and squeezed hand-printed fabrics out of local markets and artificial colors degraded the quality of fabrics.

For block printing, mainly cotton fabric called buz or calico was used and was white as well as black and red. The black printing molds are made in a unique way. A part of a pear tree is soaked with lamb fat, dried throughout the year, and carved in the form of a flower pattern. Most of the molds stored in the museums of Uzbekistan made from pear tree are a shining example of not only printing, but also of ancient wood carving art.

Usually a master boils a white fabric in a liquid prepared from fruit and pistachio leaves and spreads it on a large table for printing flowers. Next, three liters of cotton oil is heated in a one hundred-liter boiler with three kilograms of wheat flour, ten kilograms of rusty iron, five kilograms of animal bone (usually beef) and finally five kilograms of water. This mixture is boiled for two hours and lasts for eighteen to twenty days until the hundred liters is reduced to seven to eight liters of black liquid. Finally, a line is scratched in a piece of boiled fabric, and if it is black, it means the color is ready, but if it is gray, the master adds another ten liters of water to the boiler and boils it two or three times more.

The finished black paint becomes dark with the help of apricot glue. This mixture is absorbed into a wooden sponge and applied to the wooden mold, which is then pressed by hand to white fabric and struck with a wooden knife. After being stamped, the fabric is dried in the open air for a while until the fabric is rinsed in running water to remove excess paint and glue.

The base color of the fabric used in block printing is prepared with the help of bright colors. Before printing the fabric is usually colored with pomegranate skin and indigo.

The preparation of yellow uses only the flowers of the egg tree (Japanese sakura) and red is usually derived from jasmine (Rubia Tinctorum).

Thankfully, since independence, many types of handicrafts in Uzbekistan are being restored with the support of the government and a number of international organizations Soljon Ahmadaliiev, Rasuljon Mirzaakhmedov and Nematiulokh Mirzaakhmedov, tenth generation masters, have been striving to preserve the traditional skills of block printing at the Margilan Craft Development Center and through international grants, the center is restoring block printing wooden molds. Today, young professionals are learning the secrets of block printing in training sessions organized by UNESCO Tashkent in Uzbekistan. Furthermore master bearers, Abdurashid Rakhimov (Tashkent), Valodia Ahatbekov (Samarkand), and Malika Habibova (Bukhara) are transmitting their skills and producing block printed fabrics using their own techniques and colors.
The art of tapa making is and has been practiced in a number of Pacific islands such as Hawaii, Samoa, and Niue to name a few. However, Fiji and Tonga are the main producers of this cloth to date. Tapa cloth or ngatu as it is called in Tonga, is made from the bark of the paper mulberry tree, hiapo. This article will examine the art of tapa making in Tonga, focusing on the stories behind some of the kupesi (stencils) embossed and then printed on the tapa cloth.

Ngatu is an essential component of a Tongan woman’s koloa (treasured possessions). It is necessary for ceremonial gift exchanges in celebrations, marking significant life events such as births, graduations, weddings, and funerals. It is said that a Tongan woman without a piece of ngatu stored under her bed, is a poor woman. Ngatu symbolizes wealth and prosperity in the Tongan context, it tells of a woman who is not idle but is productive and worthy. A ngatu is produced for a purpose, it is common for women of high social status to plan beforehand when to produce/manufacture a piece. This would be in anticipation of an upcoming marking of an important life event or an event of religious importance, such as the annual church conference, or an important national event, such as the coronation of a monarchy. It is not possible for one woman to complete the whole process of ngatu production alone, a group of women must come together to piece together feta’aki or beaten bark cloth in a manufacturing process known as koka’anga.

Ngatu production today is mainly done by women making up koka’anga groups, who work on their own to beat, patch, and piece together pieces of feta’aki, to meet prescribed lengths and widths set by the group according to the size and type of ngatu that they plan to make. And on set days, say about once a week or biweekly, a koka’anga is held. The ngatu produced on that day will be for one of the women in the group, so each woman in the group will have a turn, in having a ngatu produced for her thus the term koka’anga – working co-operatively by providing a langanga (prescribed width and length of feta’aki) to make a whole (piece of ngatu). On the day of the koka’anga, women gather at the venue, usually a village or church hall with their prescribed lengths of feta’aki, set to make one piece of ngatu. The woman whose ngatu is to be produced on the day, gets to have a choice on the kupesi to be used for her ngatu. The kupesi are the stencils pasted onto the koka’anga board to be embossed into the plain feta’aki. There are varieties of traditional kupesi to choose from, or one can be creative and design a new kupesi according to preference.

According to Fielakepa (2014: 300), there are thirteen traditional kupesi for ngatu, each with a history, naming its maker and meaning behind the lines and angles making up the kupesi, not to mention its name. Two of these kupesi are the vē’e tuli – which according to Fielakepa (ibid) is a designed to depict the sand imprints of the feet of the Tu’i bird, an active and rare bird seen on the shores of the island seasonally. This kupesi is from the island of Tongatapu and is the highest ranked kupesi. So with this in mind, this kupesi is used in a ngatu produced and destined for a royal occasion or to a person of chiefly status. The second example of traditional kupesi is one called, Fata ‘o Tu’i Tonga. This is said to one of the oldest known kupesi, derived from the patterns shown by the ornamental coconut sennit lashings of the Tu’i’s Tonga (king) house. To have this particular kupesi printed into one’s piece of ngatu, elevates it in status and worthiness for presentation in any celebratory event fulfilling one’s custom ary obligations. On the other hand, ngatu is produced now commonly made without the embossed kupesi that are pasted onto the koka’anga board. The feta’aki are pieced together to make a whole/complete ngatu but is plain, leaving the maker or owner to draw/print freehand any kupesi (be it some of the traditional ones or newly created designs marking occasions) to the ngatu. This gives the maker the freedom to express their creativity when marking designs into their ngatu.

Ngatu production is a living art in Tonga with non-stop production due to high demand from both locals and Tongans in the diaspora. Knowledge is shared, reshared and revolving.

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Not much is known about the history of block printing on textiles in the Philippines. Although one could safely assume that this craft found its way to the Philippines through the Sino-Philippine trade beginning in the tenth century or earlier. Or it could have been the Philippines’ pre-Hispanic interactions with the Hindu-influenced, pre-Islamic civilizations of neighboring Malaysia and Indonesia that block printing as a craft was introduced in the archipelago.

This practice in the country pales in comparison to the rich block printing traditions of China, India, and other Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia. Consequently, there is little material evidence of block printing on fabric in the history of the Philippines as this art custom did not thrive alongside the more celebrated indigenous crafts like jewelry making, pottery, and basket making and, as mentioned earlier, cloth weaving. Some of these traditions have been preserved and are still extensively practiced today. Relics that bear proof of this Asian art tradition are limited or virtually non-existent.

While hard to come by, this is not to posit that block printing art is completely lost in the country. In one school in Bacolod, a laid back yet booming and vigorous city in the Visayan region in Central Philippines, art students in college have been working on block printing in one of their subjects as a course requirement.

It involves rubber (guma, in the local dialect) carved into a motif or pattern with a sharp knife, covered in paint and pressed against fabric or canvass. The textile is placed on a flat surface, usually a table and is stretched across the four sides before printing is done. Sometimes, a block of wood is used. The typical pattern is Christmas designs.

On some occasions, the students use potato as substitute for rubber and the technique is quite simple and pretty much the same principle as rubber stamp methods. Potatoes are carefully cut in half, and a design is drawn in the flat edge of the potato, after which it is cut around the outline with a sharp knife and painted to potato stamp perfection.

I got the opportunity to sit down with Professor Mary Anne Manganti, a faculty member in La Consolacion College (LCC), a revered art school in Bacolod. She said that this process of block printing is somewhat similar to the letter press printing. She is at the helm of block printing classes in LCC and showed me a design that communicates ornately of the intricately twined Western and Oriental traditions of the Philippines.

This design featured repetitive patterns of advent candles printed alongside a Babayin; an Indic indigenous script in the Philippines that was widely used by the early Tagalog people before it was supplanted by the usage of the Latin alphabet following the Spanish colonization of the islands.

Each block was individually inked or painted before being pressed against the textile. And to further achieve the ‘indigenous’ Christmas effect are the colors red and green applied on the carved designs. Other designs include flowers and regular objects like a coffee cup, sports items and fruits. How I ended up in an art school in my quest to gather evidence of block printing on textiles in the city was my determined, yet fruitless effort to dig up information on commercial printing hubs. Sadly, today there are hardly any printing shops in Bacolod and the Philippines that offer block printing on textile services, as this form of art is no longer popular largely due to the tedious and painstaking process in the preparation of a manually manipulated block print on fabric. Moreover, the dawn of commercial digital printing, which by the way is a lucrative business in the Philippines, has virtually rendered block printing obsolete, outdated, and henceforth commercially unmarketable.

There were some printing shops that used to offer block printing services but eventually ditched the practice. And we go back to academia to learn about an art practice that has been around the country for quite a while but regrettably did not find its way into the portico of renowned Philippine arts and crafts. It is my fervent wish that schools will keep reminding us that there is more to indigenous arts and crafts than weaving and pottery.
In many cultures, there is a concept of expected gendered roles where people perform certain functions, parts, or kinds of a cultural or social activity according to their gender. Men are expected to be strong and masculine and employ the roles that are more related to hard labor, leadership, and literacy. Women, traditionally, assume feminine and maternal characteristics and roles in supporting men in their social events. Although these notions of gender qualities and roles differ from culture to culture, it is often found that traditional customs dictate who can and cannot participate in specific parts of the culture are often bounded by gender stereotypes and taboos.

What if a woman or a man would like to take up a role that has traditionally been associated with the opposite gender, would it be acceptable by their group of people? Would this change be allowed and respected? What impacts would it bring to the community and the intangible cultural heritage, and what would this change mean in terms of social development? The case study of Salak Yom Festival in Lamphun Province in Thailand provides some insights on this topic.

UNESCO’s 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage highlights the fact that intangible cultural heritage or ICH is constantly recreated in response to the changing social and environmental contexts of the communities (Article 2, 2003 Convention). These changes vary from the kinds of materials and tools used, the meanings and purposes of the actions, the temporal and spatial settings, and—most importantly—the people within the communities who practice and transmit it. The 2018 Operational Directives for the Implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage also signify the important roles of genders in safeguarding and advocates for the elimination of gender discrimination.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs include Gender Equality as one of its seventeen goals. It promotes respect, equal rights and opportunities, as well as empowerment for all genders. But the question is—rights and opportunities in what?

The more popular answers are related to education, social services, health care, economic resources, and employment. But people often forget that men, women, and those who belonging to other genders are also endowed with their rights to participate in political, social, and cultural events. In other words, they should be able to speak their mind and take up the role that they want in their cultural and social activity. The more challenging question in this regard asks whether they would be allowed to do so by their community if it would mean going against their social norms or customs of gendered roles.

In Lamphun Province in the northern Thailand, the Salak Yom Festival is practiced by the Yong Tai-Lue ethnic group. It is one of the most significant merit-making Buddhist events that takes place around September or October each year. People donate offerings in many forms to the monks and temples, including tall colorful bamboo trees decorated with objects are called Salak Yom trees. Historically, it was a cultural norm for single young women to commit themselves in offering a Salak Yom tree when they turned 19—the normative and ideal age of marriageability. The making of the offering required an enormous amount of effort, time, and money, so the merit earned was deemed as equivalent to that of the man’s tradition of temporary monkhood—something in which Buddhist women...
Thailand have not been allowed to take part. Other community members gathered to support the young woman and her family in the tedious making and donating processes. There was a clear division of roles by gender. Women gathered to cook, sew, weave textiles, carve fruits and vegetables, and make other light handicrafts. Men helped by cutting, sharpening, and assembling wooden pieces. They also played musical instruments and sang a lengthy poem depicting the biography of the woman donor. This long poem is called kalong or kamham. Back in the old days, only men could sing this song. There had never been woman assuming the role before. These strict rules were never broken until a few years ago when something new happened.

In 2016, Wat Phrathat Hariphunchai—the province’s primary temple—resonated with the powerful female voices singing a kalong through the microphones. A group of four 40-to-50-year-old women competed at the kalong competition. When asked why they, as ladies, could participate in the singing of kalong now, they replied, “Why can’t we? The reason that there was no female singer back then was because women were illiterate. Only men who wanted to become a monk could go to school while women were expected to take care of their home. Today’s world has changed. Women also go to school. We can read now, that means we can sing the kalong, too. Men and women are not different.” Hence this was their reason for joining the competition. The local men fully supported the female kalong singers for the same reason, and even helped train them.

In this case, the change was accepted and even welcomed. The change was based on the community’s recognition and respect for women as empowered members who can decide their own role in this important tradition.

However, there are still many other aspects and elements of the local community that are still strictly maintained. For example, the restriction of females entering certain parts of the Buddhist temples or in specific parts of Buddhist ceremonies where only monks and males are allowed. Based on the author’s observation, changes in gendered roles in the ICH that are not directly related to the religious customs receive more room for flexibility.

Another change related to the normative gender roles in this festival was that, in olden times, only individual females could be the donors of the Salak Yom tree. There is no evidence of a male donor. However, nowadays, socio-economic changes have influenced women’s values and financial ability to make such time-consuming and expensive offerings like the Salak Yom trees, which cost, on average, about THB50,000 to 100,000 each. Many women now go to school and work outside of their home instead of fulfilling old jobs like farming and home making. It is nearly impossible to find individual women to make and donate a Salak Yom tree in the traditional way. Therefore, the trees are prepared and donated by a community instead.

This means that men can now take part in this collective donor role. The men shared that the removal of gender restriction has empowered and allowed them to pour their hearts out in these annual Buddhist merit-making events which they identify as an important part of their cultural identity. Other genders can also proudly and openly participate, because the modern meaning of this ICH focuses on the community’s solidarity and spirituality. The Salak Yom Festival members have been supportive of all genders’ participation.

We can see from this case study that expected gender roles in traditions can change. ICH, by definition, embraces these changes. The festival’s original function has partially changed from primarily as a young women’s rite of passage and empowerment to an annual religious, cultural, and social event though tourism has become a large part of the force behind the funding and management of the festival. Many changes have been observed, including those in gendered roles. Some past roles have weakened, at the same time, new ones have emerged. In their own way, the communities are also observing and evolving with all of these socio-economic changes, but they seem to remain resolute in their respect for all genders. This respect has, in turn, provided them many benefits such as the widened scope of their practitioners, bearers, and secondary participants which has led to an even stronger foundation in the continuity for the Salak Yom Festival.
My name is Mousumi Chowdhury. I am a female chau dancer—chau is a male-dominated form of traditional martial arts-based dance from the eastern reaches of the Indian subcontinent and, as such, there are many burdens that I bear on my shoulders.

As a girl who hails from a village, many people have been extremely cynical toward my choice of profession. Many have said that women are incapable of achieving their goals. They have said that as a woman, I must abandon such high aspirations, for I shall surely be unable to meet those. But my vision is different. I believe that women are not only capable of accomplishing daunting tasks but can also excel in them. However, to reach these heights, they must be provided with the proper opportunities that would enable them to tap into their true inner strength, which, as a woman, I think is immense.

My father is a renowned chau dancer. I am lucky to find in him a constant source of strength, support and inspiration. My parents have been beside me through thick and thin, and I have reached where I am today owing to them.

Having said that, it is also true that I have faced countless obstacles along my journey as a woman chau dancer. Many have tried to shatter my morale and confidence, but I have never given up. What I have in me is a ‘never say die’ attitude and an indomitable spirit towards pursuing my passion to excel as a chau dancer. In times of crises, I have found my father and my other Gurus beside me. I have found strength, support and solidarity from so many sources—from my family, my teachers, friends, and, last, but by no means the least, from banglanatak dot com. They have been like pillars of support for me, holding me up and enabling me in my quest for carving a niche as a woman chau dancer.

Many other great people, including, though not limited to, stalwarts from among chau dancers of Purulia, have been like beacons of light for me. Their blessings have played an immense role in stoking the fire of determination in me— the determination to excel as a chau dancer despite being a woman.

My father always says to me rings on in my ears, motivating me to push myself further and further towards excelling in my art. He says kono shomoy haar maanbe na which means never ever accept defeat. He tells me to aspire to work in such a way that everyone will remember me for my contribution. I am indebted for all the blessings that he and my other wishers have always showered upon me.

To reiterate, I am a women from Purulia, West Bengal, India. I am a Chau dancer. Traditionally, it is mostly men who have been chau dancers, which is a martial arts based dance form. So, what I am up against is years of patriarchal hegemony and I earnestly wish to carry on my pursuit, my fight. I want to make my village, my district, my state and, above all, my country, proud of my achievements and accomplishments.

Despite all odds, I have been lucky to find the support from and blessings of many good people, my father included. With all their kind words and teachings giving me strength, I shall strive fervently to make my village, my state and my country proud of my work. I sincerely thank the organizers of the Asia Pacific storytelling contest for considering me worthy enough to bestow their prestigious award upon me. It has been a crucial landmark that shall propel me in my journey forward as a chau dancer.
My name is Anh Quan. I am sophomore at The Ho Chi Minh City University of Culture in Vietnam. When I started in junior high school, I had opportunity to study and enjoy hat boi. The images, stage, eyes, and gestures of hat boi was so exciting. But I was strongly impressed by artists’ faces. This emotion is always with me in my thoughts. Hat boi is a Vietnamese intangible traditional performing art that has taken shape and developed during Vietnam’s history and is still safeguarded. It is form of traditional opera which has a five-hundred-year-old history. It contains features close to the cultures of many other countries in Asia. Hat boi relies on the principles of symbolization and stylization. These principles profoundly influenced typical hat boi dance and gestures and makeup, which hat boi distinguished from other traditional performing arts.

Being the essences of hat boi, gestures and dance are performed based on several symbolic and stylized rules with the aim of expressing the feeling and emotion of the characters and other implications of the plays. Artists of hat boi have to understand the generally and responsibility of building a camp symbolization and stylization and when they makeup and. Makeup is definitely the outward essence hat boi indicate the specific and personality of every character. The artificial materials for making up a disguise includes as followings: Multi-colors-lipsticks, powder in multi-colors, the blackening-wax or the ash-like-black powder, the zinc-powder in golden-red — a mixture of the deep-red and golden powder, powder in blue, in green, and in yellow. With many special kinds of professional tools, such tool sticks and fingernail-like knives that look like spoons—flat and made of wood. I observed artists’ makeup, I dreamt that I could do makeup like them. I want to pursue my dream of being a character of hat boi. With the help of a thanh bịnh artist, I fulfilled my dream. I feel the virtuosity, sophistication, and passion of the thanh bịnh artist when he made me up. The face painting is an original feature in hat boi and other forms of opera in Southeast Asia. The makeup in hat boi (chiefly for males, rarely for females) includes three main parts: painting the complexion, drawing lines on the face, and pasting false beards. There is nothing called the realistic things to identify but absolutely living—symbols in the art of the hat boi with its special ways of distinguishing for whole characters.

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Traditional Dance and Artificial Intelligence:

Kim Mi-sook
Professor of Ethnic Dance, Gyeongsang National University

The Asia Dance Culture Institute, under the Department of Ethnic Dance at Gyeongsang National University, staged a Korean traditional dance performance on November 11, 2019, which consisted of taepyeongmu (dance of great peace; Korean National Intangible Cultural Heritage No. 92), salpurichum (exorcism dance; Korean National Intangible Cultural Heritage No. 46), Dongnagae hallyangchum (playboy dance of Dongnagae, Busan Intangible Cultural Heritage No. 14) and Jindo buchum (drum dance of Jindo; Jeollanam-do Intangible Cultural Heritage No. 18). The conceptual theme of the performance was to envisage the prestige of Korean traditional dance and facilitate its encounter with artificial intelligence (AI) robots in the coming era of the 4th Industrial Revolution.

It was regarded in dance circles as the first experimental performance of a traditional dance involving an AI robot in Korea. Dance critic Gyeong-ae Kim commented that the dancers showed a great rapport with the robots on stage, adding that the robots did not appear as objects, and instead, the dancers and robots each represented their own form of dance on the same stage, which raised the question of how robots will be introduced into dance and further developed in the future.

There were many concerns and struggles in the process of preparing for this performance. How could we truly establish a rapport with robots? What should we feel and pursue through this performance? We were deeply perplexed at having to dance with industrial robots that only have a single arm seemingly made of cold scrap metal. We programmed the robots with every single part of our traditional dance techniques, and then we created a collaborative work together as if I danced my own dance and the robots danced theirs on stage. The robots may have seemed like mere objects visually, but they were anything but that in reality. I was in rapport with the robots as co-performers sharing the stage, which opened the door to infinite artistic expansion.

I became overwhelmed by a surge of fear that someday human beings may be technologically replaced by robots. Professor Tae-hee Kim of the Department of Robotic Engineering at Youngsan University, who collaborated on this performance, remarked that his dream was to manufacture a dancing robot that was capable of possessing sentiments. Could a robot reproduce the beauty of human dance? If a dance performed by a robot can be beautiful, where does such beauty come from? What exactly is the beauty of human dance? If we can make a robot dance so splendidly, then could we come to find another form of beauty from it? With these questions in mind, he strove passionately for our performance.

However, we believe that robots are not capable of possessing emotions at all, even if they might eventually come to rule the world, as though we are flaunting the superiority of human beings. In particular, we think that the eternal nature of our movements and the greatness of our minds will always surpass our imagination. The aesthetic release and enjoyment that are revealed by such belief are said to be the greatest source of happiness for human beings. I once believed so as well, but these ideas began to falter in the course of preparing for our performance with robots. I was perhaps somewhat frightened in advance at the thought of the fourth industrial revolution in addition to the apprehension that even the transmission of intangible heritage might be handed over to robots someday.

“Dialogue Between Dance and Robots” did not happen overnight. Inspired by the Cambodian Apsara dance at the ninth One Asia In Dance event in 2016, each Asian country has been experimenting with merging its traditional dance with AI technology every year.

“One Asia In Dance” is an Asian folk dance festival organized by the Asia Dance Culture Institute since 2010. It is a platform intended to identify traditional and artistic sensibilities across the Asian region and anticipate the future of Asian dance alongside numerous countries through a variety of activities, such as Asian dance performances, international dance competitions and forums, street performances, cultural lectures, expert workshops and documentary film making. The festival is designed to showcase each Asian country’s unique cultural hues through various forms of dance choreography.

Since its launch in 2007, the Asia Dance Culture Institute has identified, inherited and developed Asian dance, and furthermore, disseminated it widely in Korea and abroad with the aim to promote the greatness of Asian choreographed arts. It also endeavors to develop cultural contents for Asian dance through academic conferences and education projects. This year, we ventured to perform “Dialogue Between Dance and Robots” as a regular performance of the Asian Traditional Dance Company. Our time-honored dance that has been inherited from the distant past through the lasting accumulation of time is said to be a product into which the past and the present have been condensed and converged. The moment such traditional dance encounters engineering science, we can cautiously begin to anticipate the upcoming future. In the not-so-distant future, perhaps we will feel that AI and robots are our close companions in life, as opposed to simple tools, as we enter into the era of the fourth industrial revolution. It would not be an exaggeration to speculate that this work of collaboration between humans and robots on stage represents a new world that awaits us. The Asia Dance Culture Institute will continue its efforts to create new content that will be born from the convergence of intangible cultural heritage and artificial intelligence.

Tae Sung Hye is dancing Hallyangchum with kinetic fans © Mi-sook Kim

VOLUME 41 ICH COURIER
ICHCAP's 2020 Work Plan Confirmed

The 2019 Governing Board Meeting of ICHCAP took place October 23, 2019 at the Stanford Hotel, Seoul. The meeting was attended by over 30 participants, including ICHCAP governing board members and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Cultural Heritage Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and UNESCO ICH category 2 centers from China and Japan. ICHCAP reported the progress and current issues of its 2019 projects. The modification of ICHCAP’s articles of association and future projects were also reviewed and approved. In addition, ICHCAP reported the result of the renewal of the UNESCO-ROK agreement regarding the center’s establishment, which was signed October 11, 2019. ICHCAP’s projects for 2020 were confirmed based on the 2020 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2001 Convention and its Operational Directives. ICHCAP developed the 2020 projects with a focus on enhancing the quality of its 2019 projects. After 2019, ICHCAP will continue to expand information-collection channels and distribute information in various forms, as well as expand its networks by diversifying participants from government bodies to experts, communities, and NGOs. ICHCAP also plans to expand the implementation of an education network that is given priority in the field of ICH. ICHCAP has been concentrating on projects related to education, youth, NGOs, and ICH activity information, based on UNESCO strategies and the major functions of the center for ICH safeguarding. The new project that will build an ICH information-sharing platform, in particular, is aimed at ICH information sharing and utilization with the engagement of member states.

Living Heritage Series Traditional Food Book Published

ICHCAP published the book Living Heritage Series—Traditional Food Sharing Experiences from the Field in collaboration with the ICHNGO Forum’s #HeritageAlive in November. As traditional food contains traditional knowledge, sustainability, community, and humanity as a whole, the topic fits well with the UN’s sustainable development goals. ICHCAP hopes to promote cultural diversity as well as the value of intangible cultural heritage and practices by presenting information on traditional food from various regions. This book is the fruit of efforts made to that end by ICHCAP, related specialist organizations and expert groups. Living Heritage Series—Traditional Food Sharing Experiences from the Field showcases creative and historical traditional food from around the world through contributions from 16 writers in various countries. Food is the most fundamental element of human life, closely connected to the history and identity of individuals and communities. The unique traditional food and food customs of a community, region and nation are formed through complex interactions with the natural environment, social environment, politics, economy and culture. Such traditional food and food customs are also passed down, evolved and reinvented through generations, as an integral part of the life of the community. Thus, traditional food is an essential part of the community, and the source of life itself. Readers will find a rich collection of information on the intangible heritage contained in traditional food in this volume, as it leads them through a journey exploring the history and stories held within the most basic forms of human sustenance #HeritageAlive and ICHCAP held a book launching ceremony in Bogota, Columbia, during the latest intergovernmental committee of the 2003 Convention (9-14 December 2019) in Bogota. The exhibition will take visitors on a journey through indigenous languages from around the world. From the deserts of the Kalahari in Southern Africa, to the islands of the Pacific, and the bustling market of Jemaa el-Fna Square in Morocco, the exhibition will highlight indigenous languages as important vehicles for transmitting cultural practices and expressions from generation to generation and connecting indigenous communities to their land and environment. Their disappearance threatens the continued practice of living heritage; invariably leading to the loss of vital social, cultural and ecological knowledge. This exhibition is therefore a reminder of how vital indigenous languages are in maintaining the world’s cultural diversity.

UNESCO Exhibition Sounds of Living Heritage, a Journey through Indigenous Languages, Launched in Bogotá

The 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages is a time to reflect on the importance of safeguarding indigenous peoples’ living heritage by recognizing the vital role that indigenous languages play in ensuring the continued transmission of their heritage to future generations. To celebrate the rich diversity of indigenous languages, UNESCO is presenting the exhibition Sounds of Living Heritage, a journey through the indigenous languages at the 14th session of the Intergovernmental Committee of the 2003 Convention (9-14 December 2019) in Bogotá. The exhibition will take visitors on a journey through indigenous languages from around the world. From the deserts of the Kalahari in Southern Africa, to the islands of the Pacific, and the bustling market of Jemaa el-Fna Square in Morocco, the exhibition will highlight indigenous languages as important vehicles for transmitting cultural practices and expressions from generation to generation and connecting indigenous communities to their land and environment. Their disappearance threatens the continued practice of living heritage; invariably leading to the loss of vital social, cultural and ecological knowledge. This exhibition is therefore a reminder of how vital indigenous languages are in maintaining the world’s cultural diversity.

2019 Expert Workshop on ICH Video Production Project in Southeast Asia Held in Kuching, Malaysia

The 2019 Expert Workshop for ICH Video Production Project in Southeast Asia was successfully held from 21 to 23 October 2019 at Damai Beach Resort, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. ICHCAP has been collaborating with eight countries in Southeast Asia for the ICH video production and has organized several expert workshops since 2017. This year’s workshop was the last one to wrap up the three-year project by sharing experiences, progress and outcome of each country’s project and to provide a chance to discuss the future utilization of the produced videos together. The workshop was co-organized by ICHCAP, the Department of National Heritage of Malaysia (DNH) and the Arts and Culture Association of Malaysia (PPSKMK). The participating countries were eight in total, including Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar. Two participants from above countries attended the workshop, and two special guests from Singapore National Heritage Board (NHB) and Korean Educational Broadcasting System (EBS) also joined the workshop to share their experiences and expertise in the field of ICH video production.

The three-day workshop was successfully completed with sharing the project result and outcome videos of each state, exchanging fruitful discussions and comments, and providing suggestions for the future collaboration especially for the use of the outcome videos.
Call for Papers

ICHCAP now has an open call for papers for various sections of the ICH Courier.

Topics for Windows to ICH

• Volume 42: ICH Festivals in Central Asia (2020.01–2020.03)
• Volume 43: Mask Dances (2020.04–2020.06)
• Volume 44: ICH in Traditional Building (2020.06–2020.09)

Further information about submissions is available on our website https://ichcourier.ichcap.org/submissions/