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# *Intangible Heritage*

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# Foreword

Kim Jong-dae



The establishment of the "International Journal of Intangible Heritage" in 2006 by the National Folk Museum of Korea with the support of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) was a response to the "2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" adopted at the 32nd UNESCO General Assembly in Paris. Since then, the journal has grown into a platform for communication, promoting global understanding of intangible heritage, professional research, and academic exchange.

In 2021, the IJIH began joint publication with ICOM and ICOM Korea, making it a recognized professional academic journal in global intellectual community.

For this issue, a total of 66 papers were submitted and underwent a rigorous three-stage peer review process according to the publication policy. Among 12 papers selected for publication, some interesting topics include **"Craftsmanship in virtual reality: Digital development and evaluation of traditional South African beer brewing"** and **"Supporting ethnic craftswomen in Chiang Mai digital media: Acknowledging the possibilities and challenges"**, which discuss the use of digital technology in the context of cultural heritage. Additionally, other papers cover various topics related to the utilization of intangible heritage and field investigations. The editors express gratitude to all the contributors who submitted quality articles, even if not included in this issue.

Special thanks are extended to Dr. Roslyn Russell, the editor-in-chief, and the Editorial Committee members for their hard work ensuring the quality of the journal. Appreciation is also expressed to the 45 external reviewers and text editor Danielle Carter for their meticulous proofreading of the papers. The Secretariat members are also acknowledged for their contributions to the publication of this volume.

Director General
National Folk Museum of Korea



# Editorial

Roslyn Russell, PhD



This volume of the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* contains twelve articles that explore four themes that relate to a range of issues in intangible cultural heritage. The first theme concerns broad aspects of intangible cultural heritage, including the intersection of the 2003 Convention criteria with human rights concerns; intangible cultural heritage and memory; and the potential for intangible cultural heritage to play a role in reconciling societal divisions in a post-conflict region. The second theme concerns performance, its place in reinforcing identity, but also in challenging gender roles, and its capacity to assist in sustainable development. Craft and craftsmanship constitute the third thematic area, which includes case studies of the ways in which digital technology can promote and sustain craft practice. The last thematic grouping deals with language, both spoken and written, and explores a range of linguistic expressions that sustain community life in different settings.

**UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 'Goodness criteria'** is examined in this article. The interpretation of article 2 of the Convention and its practical implementation has proven to be challenging. Specifically, the question as to how to deal human rights considerations within the framework of the Convention is an unresolved issue. A traditional practice may, for many people, appear to be discriminatory. This raises contentions when these practices fall within a 'grey area': the issue of discrimination tends to be easier to avoid than to address. The notion of heritage as inherently 'good' is another dimension of this problem. In contrast to the World Heritage Convention, the 2003 Convention does not recognise so-called negative, contested or difficult heritage. The inclusion of the 'goodness criteria' in the Convention can be construed as ensuring that due attention is given to human rights considerations and that discriminatory practices are not to be included. Nevertheless, the 'goodness criteria' have not been strictly applied, for example in dealing with gender relations in an intangible cultural heritage setting. The article discusses problems related to the current approach to the 'goodness criteria', and posits four alternative scenarios.

**Heritage, the Illusion of Inheritance, and the Volatility of Memory: A Reflection on the Procession of Our Lord the Good Jesus, Macau**, delves into collective memory and the mutability of a religious practice. This article examines the notions of 'collective memory' and 'inheritance' behind heritage. Based on archival studies of the Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus (Procissão de Nosso Senhor Bom Jesus dos Passos) in Macau, the author postulates that such an event, for its capacity to accommodate different significations, its distinct relationships with multiple groups of people and its continued survival into the present, can shed new light on our understanding of heritage. The article proposes that any 'heritagised' item exists as a medium that can be related to, and imprinted with distinctive meanings by, diverse groups. This, in turn, renders the idea of 'passing down' heritage as a viable possibility.

**Intangible Cultural Heritage as a resource: Fieldwork among politically active civil society stakeholders in the province of Vojvodina, Serbia** seeks to demonstrate the effectiveness of stakeholder inclusion in preserving cultural values and identity, as embodied in intangible cultural heritage, without reigniting inter-ethnic rivalries that contributed to war and social disaster in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Anthropological fieldwork in the province

of Vojvodina, Serbia – a region with 32 recognised nationalities, ethnic and religious communities – has yielded promising results for intangible cultural heritage specialists who had been concerned that safeguarding intangible cultural heritage could exacerbate social conflicts. A possibly unintended consequence of the implementation of safeguarding protocols was observed in the course of the fieldwork. Cultural entrepreneurship has been identified through the mechanism of 'self-stakeholderisation' – a phenomenon of bottom-up agency by various actors who pursue developmental opportunities despite standard heritagisation practices dominated by cultural policies designed for the inclusion of stakeholders coming from dominant ethnic and religious populations. This research can provide a starting point for the development of an applicable model of intangible cultural heritage stakeholder involvement in post-conflict societies.

**Between Representation and Performance: Celebrating Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Longji Ancient Zhuang Village, Longji Terraces, China** investigates the representation and performance of intangible cultural heritage within and beyond official heritage discourse, by drawing on the Longji Ancient Zhuang Village as a case study. It argues that intangible cultural heritage-making that community members participate in or control is not only for cultural representation and tourism consumption, but also a means for self-expression and for engaging a sense of place. Intangible cultural heritage serves as a powerful tool for representing cultural diversity and fostering local development in China. The state-led administrative system of intangible cultural heritage conveys the shift from immaterial cultural manifestations to an essential resource for cultural production and national identity construction in ethnic minority areas. However, for ethnic minority communities, intangible cultural heritage is part of their everyday lives, even though it might not be recognised, staged and celebrated using this term. Contextualised within the dimension of performance, intangible cultural heritage is also related to emotion and experience.

**Portraying Feminist Beliefs and Transcending Cultural Norms: Korean Women Artists' Reinterpretation of Traditional Male Songs** explores how contemporary women artists in the field of traditional Korean music have recently expressed their feminist beliefs on stage. At a concert titled 'The Songs Once Used for Men', two South Korean women artists completely transformed Korean court music called Jongmyo jeryeak (Royal Ancestral Shrine Music). This has rarely been adapted by contemporary performers because of the desire to preserve the original form of cultural heritage. The artists sang, played musical instruments and danced, all practices originally performed by male performers according to Confucian traditions. Beyond the artists' androgynous looks, their low-pitched voices, the use of electronic music and newly manufactured musical instruments indicated their resistance to traditional gender roles in the Korean music scene and, more generally, contemporary Korean society. The unconventional performance formats and styles exemplify today's women artists in the field of fusion gugak, a contemporary form of traditional Korean music, which portrays ideas on gender issues through stage performances. The findings expand our understanding of feminist music criticism, which argues that music does not solely reflect passive societal views but serves as a public forum within which various modes of gender organisation are asserted, adopted, contested and negotiated.

**Heritage Preservation versus Adaptation to Achieve Sustainability: A case study of the Fishermen's Dances, Rizhao City, Shandong Province, China** asserts that the importance of heritage preservation for economic development is now recognised, although this is subject to debate. For cultural assets that have survived threats and perils, the key may lie in adaptation to changed circumstances as much as in the preservation of traditions. The question then arises as to whether such adaptation compromises the goal of sustainability of intangible cultural heritage. In this case study of Fishermen's Dances in Rizhao City, adaptation has resulted in the loss of some long-held traditions, but it has gained a measure of sustainability. Given the strong role of the Chinese state, its vision for and capacity to transform its cultural assets for income-generating activities will be decisive for intangible cultural heritage in the future. From the perspective of the Fishermen's Dances, the enhanced role of the government as a major stakeholder offers both costs and benefits.

**An Experiment to Functionalise Living Human Treasures Systems and Revive Craftsmanship: Flemish Experience** draws on the way in which the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage places individuals, groups and communities at the heart of safeguarding. Living Human Treasures, although discontinued as a UNESCO programme in 2006, was an earlier model of this approach and is still prevalent in various national and regional contexts, albeit often used to grant honours and draw public attention to the excellence of masters, performers and other artists. Nevertheless, it is important to revisit practices that have put emphasis on human agency in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. The subsidy regulation for apprenticeship to craftsmanship in Flanders (Belgium), where there is no official Living Human Treasures system, provides a relevant case that serves to align the human-centred approach of the system with the 2003 Convention. An experimental practice commenced by the Flemish Ministry of Culture in 2018 in Belgium, it is a remarkable initiative that addresses crafts communities in Flanders. This article argues that this experience devoted to a contemporary interpretation of crafts and craftsmanship can inspire others to mobilise and accommodate Living Human Treasure systems into national and regional contexts with connections not only to culture but also to education, design, entrepreneurship and the economy.

**Supporting Ethnic Craftswomen in Chiang Mai through Digital Media: Acknowledging the Possibilities and Challenges** has as its focus the Women E-nspire Culture project, a pilot initiative launched by UNESCO Bangkok, with the support of Samsung Electronics, aimed at safeguarding traditional crafts by providing digital entrepreneurial skills for ethnic craftswomen, including Hmong, Akha and Karen ethnic groups. Since becoming a member of the Creative Cities Network in 2017, Chiang Mai has implemented a range of projects aimed at protecting and promoting the city's craft heritage. The Social Research Institute at Chiang Mai University became a partner in the second phase of the project in July 2020, when a community-based workshop was organised in collaboration with UNESCO Bangkok to further develop and strengthen the digital skills of Hmong craftswomen and youth in Doi Pui village. This article discusses the sociocultural background to the project, as well as key lessons learned and the challenges of using digital technologies to support craftswomen in Chiang Mai's ethnic communities.

**Craftsmanship in Virtual Reality: Digital Development and Evaluation of Traditional South African Brewing** presents a case study in the application of digital technology to maintain and sustain craft traditions, an increasingly difficult task due to the effects of globalisation, combined with the fleeting nature of intangible cultural heritage. The continuation of intangible cultural heritage relies on the awareness and interest of young people, as it is passed from generation to generation. This study aims to protect knowledge and skills – specifically traditional craftsmanship, in the case of South African beer (umqombothi) brewing – by exploring how to digitally represent and disseminate intangible cultural heritage using virtual reality. The study has shown that short-term use of the virtual reality prototype enables novice participants to learn essential aspects of community intangible cultural heritage and beer-brewing practice. The article emphasises the importance of evaluating the dissemination potential of safeguarding solutions by assessing their transfer back to everyday life.

**Safeguarding Language as Intangible Cultural Heritage** claims that the United Kingdom currently lacks a national framework for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. The article makes the case that language, including dialects, accents and lexicons of United Kingdom communities, must be included within approaches which aim to safeguard intangible cultural heritage. As a 'repository' of community practices, language is central to individual and shared identities and feelings of 'belonging'. The article challenges perceptions that the United Kingdom has no intangible cultural heritage through a case study of 'pit talk' in the East Midlands, and draws on approaches being taken at local or regional levels to preserve and revitalise language heritage. It also explores the potential benefits, disadvantages and limitations of the United Kingdom ratifying UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003. Although this would be a positive step towards protecting intangible cultural heritage in the United Kingdom, the article suggests that a nationwide

framework that places community needs at its heart is key to safeguarding language heritage for future generations.

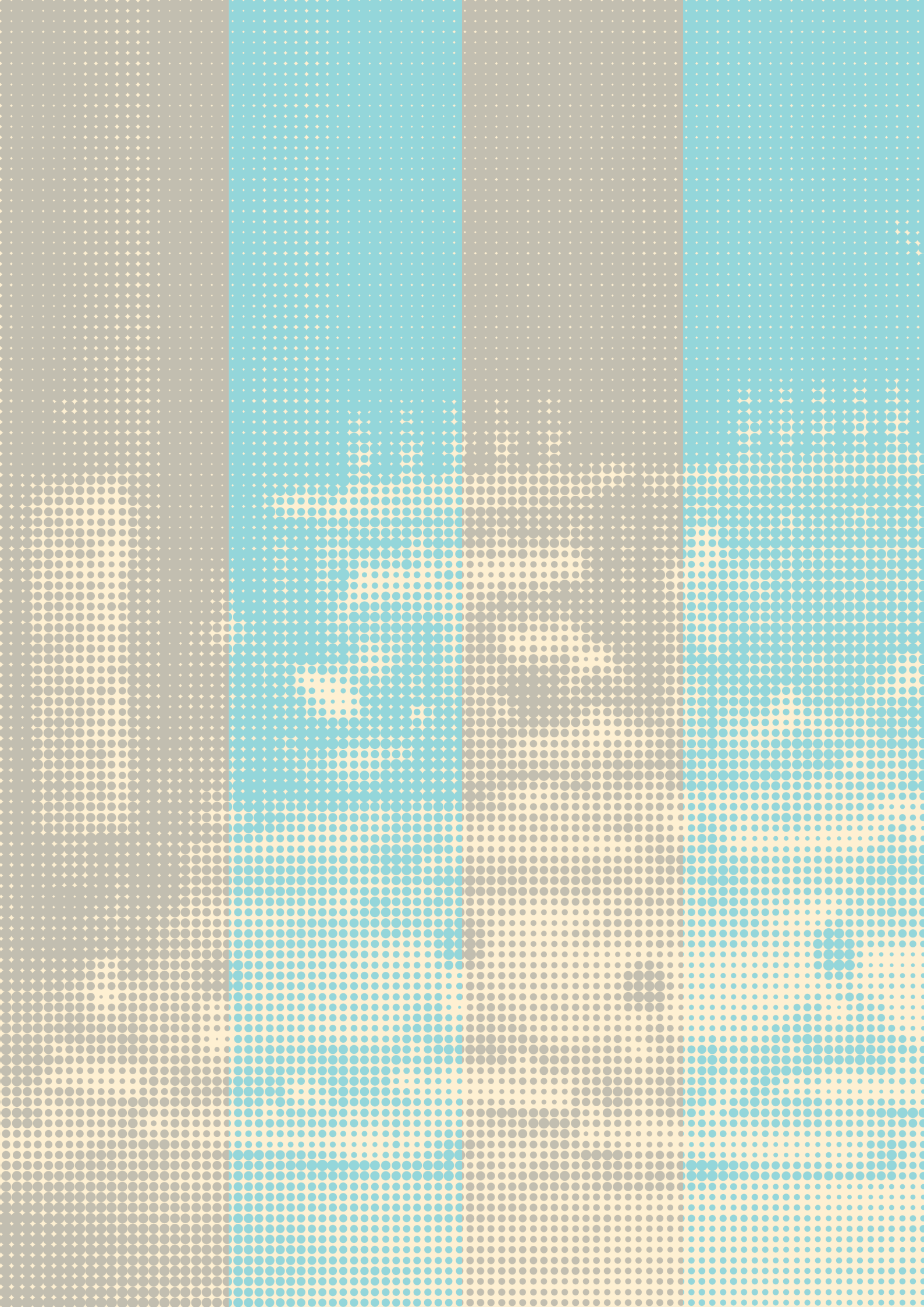
**Safeguarding Intangible Heritage through 'Living Manuscript': Mocoan Tradition of an Osing Family in Banyuwangi, Indonesia** explains how the manuscript-reading tradition in Indonesia can be maintained and preserved as a living heritage. The manuscript-reading tradition in Indonesia has received little scholarly attention, while in fact it is still practised by communities in various rituals which may be described as 'living manuscripts'. This study focuses on a manuscript-reading session related to a ritual – namely, the mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang – supported by only one Osing family in Banyuwangi, East Java, Indonesia. The findings of the study indicate that the living manuscript – a tradition of manuscript reading maintained and preserved by a ritual – can be a living heritage and play a role in safeguarding another intangible cultural heritage contained in these traditions.

**Intangible Cultural Heritage Values in the Sunda Wiwitan Ritual and Ancient Sundanese Manuscripts as Basic Concepts of Traditional Building Architecture, Sundanese Peoples, Indonesia** aims to reveal the values contained in the Sunda Wiwitan ritual and the old Sundanese manuscript as the basic concepts informing the architecture of traditional buildings. The focus of the research is on traditional houses located in Baduy Tangtu village, Leuwidamar district, Lebak regency, Banten Province, Indonesia. The research outcomes articulate three main values as basic principles: (1) The conception of cosmology in the form of three world classification values, namely 'buana tilu' namely 'buana nyungcung', 'buana panca tengah', 'buna larang'. The principles of 'rohangan tilu' namely 'tepas imah', 'tengah imah', 'pawon' and the principles of 'ngadegkeun wangunan' namely 'memehna', 'salila, 'sanggeusna; (2) Conception of the basic form of the building, namely 'tangtungan jelema': 'hulu', 'awak', 'suku'; (3) The concept of site selection for building, namely 'warugan lemah' so that the occupants are safe and avoid disaster. The values contained in the three findings can be used as guidelines by the Sundanese people in establishing their homes.

The Editor-in-Chief wishes to express her appreciation to the Editorial Board, the Editorial Committee and the Secretariat of the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* for the consistent support and encouragement they have provided in the course of the production of this volume. She would also like to thank the peer reviewers of the papers submitted to the Journal, copy editor Danielle Carter, and all those who have submitted their scholarly work for review and publication.

**Editor-in-Chief, *International Journal of Intangible Heritage***





# MAIN PAPERS

# UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 'goodness criteria'

**Helga Janse**

**Helga Janse** holds a doctorate from the University of Tsukuba, Japan, and specialises in intangible cultural heritage (ICH). She has a background in heritage management and governance and has previously worked for the Swedish National Heritage Board, where she was the agency's representative in the national working group tasked with developing a master plan for the implementation of UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Sweden. She has also served as the secretary of ICOMOS Sweden.

# UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 'goodness criteria'

**Helga Janse, PhD**
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## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and specifically the challenges connected to article 2 and the 'goodness criteria' included in the Convention's definition of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The interpretation of these criteria and the practical implementation of them has proven challenging, and the question of how to handle human rights considerations within the framework of the Convention is an unresolved problem. As the question whether a traditional practice is, for example, discriminatory is often a contentious matter, and as traditional practices sometimes fall within a 'grey area', the topic of discrimination tends to be easier to avoid than to address. Another important factor in this is the notion of heritage as 'good'. In contrast to the World Heritage Convention, the 2003 Convention does not recognise so-called negative, contested or difficult heritage. The inclusion of the goodness criteria can be seen as a fundamentally important statement, assuring that due attention is given to human rights considerations and that discriminatory practices are not to be included. At the same time, the goodness criteria have not been strictly applied, which can be seen, for example, in the handling of gender. In this paper, the author discusses problems related to the current approach to the 'goodness criteria', and as a hypothetical exercise, draws up four alternative scenarios.

## Keywords

heritage, human rights, discrimination, tradition, equality, UNESCO, gender, convention

## Introduction

This paper discusses intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and considerations pertaining to human rights; mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals; and to sustainable development. The author analyses and discusses UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, specifically the challenges connected to article 2. The 2003 Convention sets out to safeguard ICH while upholding standards of existing human rights instruments. Article 2 of the Convention, which defines intangible cultural heritage, also contains a number of criteria limiting the scope of what can be considered ICH for the purposes of the Convention. These criteria, which the author refers to as the 'goodness criteria', state that 'consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development' (Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, article 2.1). Arguably, this should mean that, for example, discriminatory practices should not be recognised within the framework of the Convention and should consequently not be inscribed on any of the Convention's lists.

However, the interpretation of these criteria and the practical implementation of them has proven challenging. As the question whether a traditional practice is, for example, discriminatory is often a contentious matter, and as traditional practices sometimes fall within a 'grey area', the topic of discrimination tends to be easier to avoid than to address. While standards of non-discrimination are easy to agree on in principle, the practical implementation can be less straightforward, evident in the number of State Parties that have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), while the practical implementation of gender equality standards is often a matter of contention. Underlying this dilemma is also the ideological conflict between two different approaches to human rights – universalism and cultural relativism. While the universalist approach calls for the human rights of every person to be recognised under any circumstances, the cultural relativist approach calls for a consideration and understanding of the cultural and social context. A point in question is who should have the power to decide what is deemed as discriminatory. Also, a case in point is whose voices are being heard in these considerations. Against the background of the ideological conflict between these two approaches to human rights, Blake writes that it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a traditional practice falls inside or outside the 'human rights line' (2015, 286).

Blake also urges caution in applying a 'non-discrimination filter' lest it lead to either overly strict or simplistic approaches (Blake 2018, 216); Blake writes that a traditional practice being, for example, segregated by gender is not in itself a reason for discounting said practice. Instead, Blake argues that in applying a human rights–based approach to ICH, matters of discrimination must be determined by the members of the groups being discriminated against (Blake 2018, 216f). In such an approach, the emphasis is on the choice of the individual. In taking a human rights–based approach to culture, Donnelly (2003) emphasises individuals' freedom to choose



**Figure 1**
Keitoku Inari Shrine rice plantation festival in Kitakata, Fukushima Prefecture, Japan, 2 July 2022. Photographer: Helga Janse.

how to live their lives. Whether to adhere to traditional gender roles or to challenge them is a choice that is to be left to the individual in question (Donnelly 2003, 119-123).

However, in practice, there are obstacles to exercising such a choice (see 'Acknowledging and handling negative cultural practices' below). It cannot be assumed that such choices can always be made freely or that these choices are free from serious negative consequences for the individual. Furthermore, within the context of the 2003 Convention, limitations in the nomination and reporting system are making it hard for voices of discriminated or otherwise marginalised groups to be heard (see 'Current situation' below).

Furthermore, it could be argued that gender segregation and the room to make a choice as an individual appear to be contradictory. Here, it is relevant to make a distinction between tendencies and rules. That a lion dance is mainly performed by men and that women are restricted from participating are different. It might also be relevant to make a distinction between gender-coded roles and the gender or sex of the participants. For example, the role of *saotome* ('rice maiden') featuring in many rice cultivation rituals in Japan is in some places performed by men and in other places performed by women. In both cases, the role itself is coded as female.

## The 2003 Convention's approach to heritage as 'good'

Blake (2018) discusses the problem of gender equality within the context of the Convention in terms of a conflict between an anthropological approach, focused on the reality of gender dynamics, and a human rights approach, focused on equality and freedom from discrimination. This conflict between different approaches can explain some of the problems relating to the wording and 'nature' of the Convention, as an anthropological approach focusing on realities and a human rights approach focusing on ideals will have different aims. It might also be interesting to note that, as Hafstein (2009) writes, the 2003 Convention – and specifically the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (RL) – is the result of a compromise between three different agendas, as some State Parties wanted a list of masterpieces, some sought a more neutral inventory and others preferred no list at all. Arguably, the three different approaches allow for differences in terms of what ought to be considered as ICH within the scope of the Convention. An important factor in this is the notion of heritage as 'good'.

Challenging the idea of heritage as innately valuable, Smith (2006) has emphasised the performativeness of heritage and its values as associative rather than innate. Heritage can be seen as socially constructed by people associating and ascribing values and meanings to places, objects and actions. From this follows that there is no such thing as inherently 'good' heritage. As values are associated with and attributed to places, objects and actions by people, the values and meanings will differ depending on person, time, place and context.

However, the authorised heritage discourse is typically focused on heritage as grand, 'good' and monumental, and Smith notes that '[e]ven when it is the "bad" that is being preserved, it is very often the exceptionally "tragic" event that is commemorated, rather than unpleasantness that is more mundane or reflective of the general inequalities of human experiences' (Smith 2006, 23).

By the inclusion of the 'goodness criteria', the Convention is bound to recognise only practices that are consistent with standards of human rights instruments, sustainable development and mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals. As such, and in contrast to the World Heritage Convention (1972), the 2003 Convention does not recognise so-called negative, dissonant, difficult, dark or contested heritage. This point signifies an important difference between the 2003 Convention and the World Heritage Convention. Another key difference from the 1972 Convention is that the 2003 Convention only recognises traditions that are practised today and furthermore strives to uphold those traditions. As such, there is less room for, as in the case of the 1972 Convention, recognising painful memories, with the goal not to repeat the same mistakes.

However, the inscription of World Heritage Sites associated with painful and negative histories, using criterion (vi) of the World Heritage Convention operational guidelines, has not been without controversy and discussion. As the 'outstanding universal value' of the 1972 Convention is primarily associated with positive connotations, the nomination of Auschwitz in 1979 presented a difficulty for the Committee and prompted a restrictive change in the wording of criteria (vi) (Beazley and Deacon 2007). Criteria (vi) has been subject to several changes over the

years, reflecting contemporary domestic and international political interests (Beazley and Deacon 2007).

Yet another key difference between the two conventions is relevant to point out. While some inscriptions on the World Heritage List have caused controversy and drawn criticism on the basis of discrimination (see, for example, Okinoshima, Mount Athos, and the Kii Mountain Range, all of which are sites where women are prohibited access[1]), the 1972 Convention does not have a set of 'goodness criteria' of the same type as the 2003 Convention. In the 2003 Convention, these criteria are included in the very definition of ICH. As such, the scrutiny could arguably be expected to be even more strict in the 2003 Convention compared to the 1972 Convention.

The inclusion of the goodness criteria can be seen as a symbolically and fundamentally important statement, assuring that due attention is given to human rights considerations and that discriminatory practices are not included. At the same time, the goodness criteria have arguably not been strictly applied, which can be seen, for example, in the handling of gender. An evaluation of the Convention, conducted by the UNESCO Internal Oversight Service and published in 2013, described the unresolved and unaddressed matters relating to gender equality within the Convention as 'the elephant is the room' (paragraph 72). Blake suggests that the reluctance to address gender equality may stem from a nervousness on behalf of the State Parties and other stakeholders of the Convention, pointing to a concern that too strict testing of adherence with the standards of the Convention might render many traditional practices ineligible – including already inscribed elements – as 'much traditional culture, in one way or another, would seem to undermine human rights notions of gender equality' (Blake 2015, 182-183). However, the topic of gender as well as social inclusion in general has received increased attention in recent years. This is reflected in, for example, committee meeting summary records and in updates and additions to the tools of the Convention, such as the Operational Directives. At the General Assembly in 2016, a new chapter dedicated to sustainable development – including gender equality, social cohesion and equity, as well as lasting peace – was added to the Operational Directives (UNESCO 2016). In connection to this, it is also interesting to note that the Aalst carnival, criticised on the basis on racism and anti-Semitism, was removed from the RL in 2019 (see 'Hypothetical scenarios').

At present, the goodness criteria are in place while arguably not being regularly and thoroughly enforced. Nevertheless, regardless of their enforcement, the existence of the goodness criteria means that all elements that are inscribed or in other ways recognised within the framework of the Convention can be expected to have 'passed the test'. As such, they formally fulfil the criteria. Arguably, this lends validity in the sense of a 'goodness certification' to the elements in question.

## Acknowledging and handling negative cultural practices

Discussions on negative, dissonant, difficult, dark or contested heritage typically centre on the remembrance of painful memories and events, often focusing on physical traces or manifestations thereof. Within the realm of ICH, there are also ample examples of customs relating to painful memories and events, both past (such as the observation of Good Friday) and more recent (memorial services for the dead, funerary rites, etc.),[2] as well as customs relating to handling unpleasantness (such as ritual purification and avoidance of ceremonial pollution). However, within the ICH discourse, there is a lack of addressing customs that can in themselves be considered harmful.

At the same time, negative cultural practices can be found addressed outside of the realm of heritage management. For example, at the international level, CEDAW aims to 'modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women', addressing 'prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women' (The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979, article 5(a)), with a view of eliminating such practices.

At the same time, rights pertaining to gender, such as sexual rights, are still facing opposition in discussions at the global level (Ali, Kowalski and Silva 2015). Ali, Kowalski and Silva write that this opposition is commonly focused on two key points – namely, 'the rights of people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI); and the rights of adolescents, particularly girls, to be able to control their bodies, sexualities and ultimately their lives' (Ali, Kowalski and Silva 2015, 32). Such rights connect to freedom from harmful cultural practices, such as child

marriages and female genital mutilation, as well as to the ability of all individuals to participate in public life. While discussions have accelerated following two landmark UN conferences in the 1990s, and significant gains have been made for the global sexual rights movement, Ali, Kowalski and Silva point out that while many aspects of sexual rights have been agreed by consensus since then, the term 'sexual rights' itself continues to be contentious, as the term has systematically been removed in global agreements, with these interventions often coming at a late stage in the negotiations (Ali, Kowalski and Silva 2015).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), was adopted in 2015, with one of the targets of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) explicitly addressing the elimination of harmful practices – namely, child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. At the same time, Brolan's (2017) analysis examines how the SDGs fail to encompass sexual and reproductive health and *rights* (SRHR). In the examination of the reasons for not fully including SRHR in the SDGs, one of the six identified reasons pertains to anxiety from a number of Member States in formulating SRHR as *rights*. Furthermore, a linkage between SRHR and LGBTQI rights appeared to make the inclusion of SRHR more difficult. Brolan observes that the tension between cultural relativism and universal human rights 'remains an ongoing and real point of contention influencing and impacting member state decision-making consensus in the development field' and points out that this tension is particularly visible in issues relating to the health of women, girls and LGBTQI individuals (Brolan 2017, 315).

Negative cultural practices are also handled by governments at the national level, for example, through legislation. Deacon (2018) discusses examples of how constitutions can place restrictions on customary practices considered harmful and contrary to human rights. In this, individuals are given the right to 'opt out' of participation in cultural practices they do not wish to take part in. However, while individuals are given that option in theory, ensuring the ability to exercise that power to negotiate participation remains a significant challenge (Deacon 2018).

## Current situation

The current approach presents several problems. One problem is that, since the inscription of an element on the RL may be perceived by some as a 'stamp of approval' of the practice in question, the inscription of an element containing discriminatory features also lends validity to those discriminatory practices. If the Convention text has a goodness criterion, it should follow that all inscribed elements have cleared those criteria and can thereby be argued to be non-problematic. As such, if a traditional practice involving, for example, gender-restricted access to participation is inscribed on the RL, and a discussion began in the local community on allowing more inclusive participation, the inscription could potentially be used as an argument to prevent increased inclusion.[3]

Another problem is the risk of 'sanitising' the nominated elements in official descriptions.[4] While the act of inscribing a practice as an element on a list already itemises the practice (Hafstein 2009), and the local context where the practice is de facto practised is already separated from the context of the list, and the active performance of individuals is often rendered a collective transmission of bearers (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004), a non-enforced goodness criteria risks increasing the existing gaps further. New nominations are evaluated based only on the information provided in the nomination file, which emphasises the importance of the official description in the nomination file. As such, there is a presumption of veracity where the information provided by the State Parties in the nomination files is taken at face value (Smeets and Deacon 2017). As noted in a recent Category VI expert meeting on the listing mechanisms of the Convention, this limitation was identified as a difficulty by members of the Evaluation Body (UNESCO 2021a, paragraphs 63 and 67). A majority of the experts agreed that the Evaluation Body should have the ability to 'consult information outside the file', and it was furthermore suggested that this option should primarily be used when 'there is strong evidence that the information in the file is inaccurate or contradictory' (UNESCO 2021b, paragraph 27).

A related issue pertains to the 2003 Convention's approach to the local communities. While the importance of the local communities is emphasised in the Convention text, a point in question is the practical handling – for example, in the inventorying and nomination processes. One could argue that a key concern is whose voices are being heard. When nominating an element for inscription, free, prior and informed consent is needed from the community. But who represents the community? In the

above-mentioned Category VI expert meeting, it was pointed out that the matter of active participation of the community and the acquisition of consent were problem-laden areas, as well as culturally sensitive topics (UNESCO 2021a, paragraph 46). It was suggested that it would be useful with '**[a] guidance note for obtaining free, prior and informed consent approached from** different **cultural perspectives**, particularly non-European ones, as well as guidance on **the right measure of community participation and gender balance**' (UNESCO 2021a, paragraph 47).

The inscription of the 'Yama, Hoko, Yatai, float festivals in Japan' can be used as an example to illustrate some of the difficulties in connection to this. In this nomination, written consent was obtained from the preservation associations connected to these festivals, as well as from the local mayors. However, as the author's previous research shows, these preservation associations are male-dominated, and many of them only have male members (Janse 2019, 2020). Furthermore, a large number of the festivals have restrictions in place, partially or completely preventing women from participating (in centre-stage roles). However, the gender-restrictive rules being upheld in many of these festivals are and have been challenged, debated and changed in some places.[5] It can be noted that existing gender restrictions and occurring debates about gender rules are not mentioned in the nomination file. While the nomination file represents a group nomination – 33 festivals are inscribed as a group – and the descriptions are therefore by necessity general rather than specific, it is nevertheless interesting to note that the description of the participants conveys an inclusive image.

The nomination file states that 'community members including men, women, the young and the elders share their tasks and responsibilities all year around preparing for the float festivals, the most important event of the year for them' (Nomination File for the Inscription of 'Yama, Hoko, Yatai, Float Festivals in Japan' on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, 4), and it describes an age-based system where tasks are assigned based on age groups. The community members start performing as children, often as musicians, and then move on to other tasks and responsibilities with growing age. Is it, however, not mentioned how these organisational structures of the festivals and the assignment of tasks traditionally not



**Figure 2**
Sawara float festival in Katori, Chiba Prefecture, Japan, 13 October 2018. Photographer: Helga Janse.

only rely on age but also on gender. As such, men are able to move between different centre-stage roles and advance in the festival organisation, while women are often restricted to supporting roles in the background or in the house, related to food, caretaking and service (Janse 2020). The nomination file mentions that 'in order to successfully prepare for and celebrate the festivals, each member of the communities takes charge of his/her specific role and works together. Such cooperation creates bonds within the communities that transcend age, status and gender' (Nomination File for the Inscription of 'Yama, Hoko, Yatai, Float Festivals in Japan' on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, 5), without mentioning the power hierarchies in the organisational structure, that role divisions are dependent on gender and that there are women who are being prevented from participation solely on the basis of gender despite expressing a wish to participate (Janse 2020).

Neither is it mentioned in the nomination file that the restrictions preventing women from participating in front stage roles in many of the festivals stem from a custom harbouring the religious idea of ceremonial blood pollution, conveying the notion that blood from menstruation and childbirth is defiling, thus rendering female bodies (innately) polluted.

The consent forms (67 in total) included in the nomination of this element have been issued by the 33 local preservation associations, the local mayors and the national preservation association. It may be noted that all signatories of these consent letters are men. Considering that the preservation associations are male-dominated and that many of them have only male members, it is relevant to pose the question of how well the expressed consent represents the consent of the members of the local communities. Are all relevant voices being heard? How are the voices of those persons being restricted from participation – in this case, women – being heard? How can the mechanism to assure consent be improved?

A related issue is the periodic reporting. Under the periodic reporting system, the State Parties periodically report on the implementation of the Convention and on the status of inscribed elements. The current version of the periodic reporting form, which has been aligned with the overall results framework, includes questions about inclusiveness in the inventory and the inventorying process, policies and measures for inclusive social development and environmental sustainability, as well as inclusive plans and programmes that foster self-respect and mutual respect. The impact of this revised reporting system can be expected to be assessed in the coming years. Regardless, similar to the evaluation of new nominations, the periodic reporting system still suffers from a question of credibility, as independent reviews of the information provided by the State Parties are lacking (Smeets and Deacon 2017). As such, the lack of monitoring presents a problem in terms of assessing and enforcing the stipulated 'goodness criteria'. However, regarding nominations, it should also be noted that the public and other concerned parties have the ability to send correspondence about the nominations, which will be posted on the website of the Convention together with comments from the concerned State Parties, if the correspondence arrives at least four weeks before the meeting of the Evaluation Body (UNESCO 2012).

As discussed above, the current situation (where the goodness criteria are valid but not strictly enforced) entails a number of problems. As addressed above, an inscription on any of the international lists signals that the element in question has 'passed the test' and has as such been verified to be 'good'. In other words, it can be argued that the inscription functions as a 'goodness certification'. The risk entailed in the current scenario is that this goodness certification is awarded also to discriminatory and otherwise problematic practices. A related risk pertains to how the 'goodness certification' might be used.

## Hypothetical scenarios

Against this background, in which future direction should the 2003 Convention proceed? As a hypothetical exercise, the author will envision four scenarios: a stricter enforcement of the goodness criteria, a removal of the goodness criteria, an altering of the wording of the goodness criteria and an expansion of the goodness criteria. The primary purpose of drawing up these four hypothetical scenarios is to illuminate some of the challenges pertaining to the current wording of the Convention. More practically implementable and politically acceptable solutions than modifications to the basic texts of the Convention will be discussed in future research papers (see section 'Final remarks and the way forward'). The primary purpose of this paper is to serve as a problem introduction.

- Baseline scenario: keeping the goodness criteria while not taking measures to strictly enforce them (current situation)
- Scenario 1: keeping the goodness criteria and adhering to them
- Scenario 2: removing the goodness criteria
- Scenario 3: altering the goodness criteria to make them less strict
- Scenario 4: expanding the goodness criteria to accommodate inclusive social development

### *Scenario 1: keeping the goodness criteria and adhering to them*

Are the purposes of the Convention best served by keeping the Convention text intact and by starting to implement the goodness criteria more strictly? In that case, the character of the RL might arguably be expected to change somewhat – becoming more of a list of good examples. However, this scenario would require that the State Parties could agree and decide upon practical guidelines as to how to interpret the goodness criteria. This would include deciding on a clear line between what is to be seen as acceptable and what is not. Given the contentiousness of the topic of gender roles and gender equality, there is reason to assume that the discussions would not be easy. Furthermore, this scenario would arguably require a more thorough evaluation process than the current one. An issue connected to this is what would happen to already inscribed elements.

It could be argued that the Convention is already moving in the direction of increased focus on the goodness criteria. For example, the current version of the amended Operational Directives states that State Parties 'shall direct their safeguarding efforts solely on such intangible cultural heritage that is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development' (UNESCO 2022, paragraph 170). As such, an argument might be made that the goodness criteria have already been extended to the State Parties' activities on the national level. However, a counterargument might be made that the inclusion of the goodness criteria in the very definition of ICH in the Convention indicates an assumption that only such traditions are to be acknowledged, let alone safeguarded, in the first place.[6] Here, a distinction between the documentation of traditions on the one hand and measures to uphold the actual practice of traditions on the other hand might have been relevant (see also Scenario 2 below). In that case, we could envision a scenario where the inventories drawn up by the State Parties could document all kinds of existing traditions and practices – without any criteria on adherence with human rights, mutual respect and sustainable development – and where the goodness criteria come into play only in the case of nominations and safeguarding efforts aiming to uphold the practice of said tradition. However, as the goodness criteria are included in the very definition of ICH, such a scenario is arguably currently not feasible.

A potential drawback of only acknowledging 'good' traditions is that the lists of the Convention would risk conveying an arguably skewed picture of what ICH is and what societal role it plays. This also prompts the question whether the RL could still be called representative. As argued in the introduction, ICH is not innately good. Furthermore, discriminatory traditional practices do exist and directly and indirectly affect the lives of people.[7] By only focusing on 'good traditions', could this scenario risk serving to hide away problematic practices and thereby suppressing discussions on difficult topics? Or, contrarily, could a strictly enforced 'goodness criteria' serve to put focus on those difficult topics?

Regarding this scenario, the removal of the Aalst carnival (Belgium) from the RL in 2019 serves as an interesting case. The carnival was subject to criticism on the basis of racism and anti-Semitism and was subsequently removed from the RL. The decision to remove the element from the list is phrased as follows:

> 7. Considers, based on the elements brought to its attention by the Bureau and the Secretariat, that the 'Aalst carnival' no longer satisfies criteria for inscription R.1 as well as R.2 of the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as follows:
>
> R.1: Since its inscription, the Aalst carnival has on several occasions displayed messages, images and representations that can be considered within and outside of the community as encouraging stereotypes, mocking certain groups and insulting the memories of painful historical experiences including genocide, slavery and racial segregation. These acts, whether or not intentional, contradict the requirements of mutual respect among

communities, groups and individuals. The Aalst carnival no longer satisfies criterion R.1.

R.2: Offensive representations have been used on several occasions during the Aalst carnival since its inscription on the Representative List. The inscription does not appear to have encouraged dialogue among communities and has even fostered mistrust between and among communities. The Aalst carnival no longer satisfies criterion R.2. (UNESCO 2020a, DECISION 14.COM 12)

The Committee deemed that the element no longer fulfilled the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals and that it had not encouraged dialogue among communities. A decision was made to remove the element from the RL.

In seeking the removal of this element from the list, the Secretary stressed a distinction between the state of an element's inscription on the RL on the one hand and the local meaning and practice of a tradition on the other hand. In the summary records of the fourteenth session of the Committee in 2019, 'the Secretary underlined that this was not an attempt to determine what constitutes intangible cultural heritage for the communities of Aalst nor to prescribe whether and how these communities shall practise their own living heritage' (UNESCO 2020b, paragraph 891). Instead, stress was placed on the seeking of conformity with UNESCO's values, the definition of ICH in the Convention text and with the stated criteria of the RL. Concerning the former, the Secretary stressed the link between the principles of UNESCO and the object and purpose of the Convention, saying that 'the display of representations that overtly contradict some of the core values underpinning the existence of UNESCO, affected not only the credibility of the Convention and of the Committee, but also of the Organization as a whole' (UNESCO 2020b, paragraph 891). In other words, seen against this background, adhering to the goodness criteria is not about trying to force the communities to adapt or trying to change a certain tradition, but instead a matter of a certifying whether the tradition in question is suitable for inscription on a list with a certain set of criteria.

Are some types of discrimination easier to condemn than others, and in that case, why is that? As mentioned above, this scenario requires practical guidelines on how to interpret and implement the goodness criteria – including clear definitions on what is to count as acceptable and what is not. This includes definitions on what is to be considered discrimination and what is not.

### *Scenario 2: removing the goodness criteria*

Are the purposes of the Convention best served by removing the goodness criteria and focusing on displaying the diversity of traditional practices existing around the world – both 'good' and 'bad' – thereby also opening up discussions on complex topics such as power structures, discrimination and social norms? In that case, the goal could arguably no longer be to safeguard the continuation and transmission of the practices, but rather to document their existence.

An important point in question is what is to be safeguarded. Safeguarding the knowledge of a practice and safeguarding the continuation of the practice are different. While the documentation of knowledge of or information about the existence of a practice in most cases is arguably non-problematic, measures to uphold a practice may, depending on the practice in question, risk being problematic. Arguably, such a change in focus would require a shift in the goals of the Convention – from aiming to safeguard the continuation and transmission of traditional practices to simply documenting their existence.

However, this scenario is unlikely. It would indeed be inconsistent with UNESCO's commitment to human rights to remove an existing requirement of adhering to human rights in one of its cultural conventions (see discussion in Scenario 3). Furthermore, it would not be aligned with the overall aims of the Convention, centred on safeguarding the continuity and transmission of traditional practices and ensuring appreciation of the importance of ICH by virtue of its good aspects. This scenario would instead imply a focus on illuminating the functions and various roles that ICH play in society, thereby encouraging reflection and discussion.

Furthermore, removing the goodness criteria without purposely addressing that the new definition includes also potentially problematic traditions might involve risks, as the Convention is already well established and arguably already has a set 'image'. As Scenario 2 would bring change in the very character of the Convention, it might be warranted to think of this scenario as an entirely different Convention.

### *Scenario 3: altering the goodness criteria to make them less strict*

A third option would be to alter the current wording of the goodness criteria – from a set of criteria to more of a guiding principle. For example, a statement along the lines of the following could bring the text closer to the current implementation practice: 'in the implementation of this Convention, particular consideration should be given to existing international human rights instruments, as well as to the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development'. This change would still keep the 'spirit' of the criteria but reduce the rigidity of the requirements.

However, such a change would also highlight the failure, or at least the difficulty, in sufficiently addressing and adhering to the original criteria thus far. Since it is a UNESCO Convention, a case could be made that removing the goodness criteria would be unacceptable. Particularly the requirements in regard to human rights could be expected to be non-negotiable, and this scenario would bring UNESCO's commitment to human rights into question. Indeed, in the UNESCO framework, gender equality itself is considered a fundamental human right (UNESCO 2014).

Still, even in this scenario, the question of how to interpret the requirements, including deciding what is to be considered discriminatory and what is not, will not go away. This scenario (as well as the following scenario) also prompts the question whether there is a distinction to be made between implementing the Convention in a *way* that adheres to a goodness standard and recognising only elements that adhere to the goodness criteria. Or is the important distinction to draw the one between what exists and what is good – between preserving information about a practice and encouraging continuation of that practice?

### *Scenario 4: expanding the goodness criteria to accommodate inclusive social development*

A fourth option would be to expand the 'goodness criteria' to accommodate for and even encourage change in the direction of increased social cohesion and equity and inclusive social development. The criteria could be rephrased along the lines of the following: 'consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development or, alternatively, such intangible cultural heritage as demonstrably signifies a step in such a direction'. This would move the emphasis of the goodness criteria from a question whether a tradition or practice is 'already good' to whether it is changing 'in the direction of good'.

It would remove the pressure of being 'solely good' and allow for grey areas and change. At the same time, it would pronounce a requirement of social development in the direction of increased inclusion. As such, this scenario would potentially bring the Convention closer to its overarching goals, where ICH is seen as a positive force in society.

A potential downside of this scenario is that it might offer a loophole for State Parties interested in pushing nominations of discriminatory or otherwise problematic traditions by 'painting them in a good light'. On the other hand, as long as the Evaluation Body lacks the ability to verify and procure additional information outside of the nomination file, the same concern is valid for Scenarios 1 and 3 as well. Another downside is that such a rephrasing would, as in Scenario 3, mean compromising on the requirements to adhere to human rights standards, albeit perhaps to a lesser degree than in the previous scenario. Similar to the previous scenario, this scenario would likewise mean that the 'spirit' of the criteria is kept intact.

A benefit that this scenario offers is that it would allow for and encourage social development. ICH can arguably be seen as reflections of societal norms and structures, and societies are not free from discrimination, and neither are they 'fully developed' nor stagnant. ICH plays a role in validating, reiterating and renegotiating societal norms and structures. In this scenario, the 'goodness criteria' can potentially be used to facilitate and encourage discussions on social dynamics in the communities. However, a potential downside to this approach is the aspect of 'social engineering', as the political and dynamic aspects of ICH are more pronounced in this scenario. ICH and social dynamics are linked, and the Convention in this case uses the potential for inscription as a tool to encourage inclusive social development. It is also highlighted that ICH is not something that is to be preserved in the sense of being frozen. It would instead embrace the stance that people change their traditions and societies continuously.

## Conclusions

The 2003 Convention sets out to safeguard ICH while upholding standards of existing human rights instruments as well as requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals and those of sustainable development. In this paper, the author has discussed some of the problems pertaining to this. An underlying difficulty is that while heritage is in no way innately 'good', the Convention is formulated in such a way that only 'good' heritage can be recognised for the purposes of the Convention. This highlights the potential discrepancy between contemporary standards of human rights and the freedom from discrimination on the one hand and the rules and social power structures reflected in some traditional practices on the other. It also poses practical problems in terms of implementing the Convention in a way that adheres to its own criteria. These problems are coupled with a lack of monitoring, which further complicates any assessment and enforcement of the stipulated criteria.

In the four hypothetical scenarios discussed above, Scenario 1 would appear to be the most easily justifiable one, as it is a matter of only following already agreed-upon rules. Furthermore, in this scenario UNESCO's commitment to human rights is kept intact. Nevertheless, the necessary discussions in such a scenario would not be easy, as they will have to include the recognition of certain traditional practices as discriminatory. The criticism of a traditional practice is likely to be perceived as a criticism of the society in question in a wider context.[8] Next, Scenario 2 is highly unlikely and would require a fundamental change in the direction and character of the Convention. As such, it might be thought of as a different convention. Scenario 3, while it could bring the Convention closer to its current implementation, is also highly unlikely and difficult to justify. Also, it would not remove the need for a discussion on what constitutes discrimination. Scenario 4, while also highly unlikely as it would require an altering of the Convention text, could presumably bring the Convention closer to its overarching goals. While the need for a discussion on what is discriminatory or not would not disappear in this scenario either, it would arguably take the edge off those discussions. The question would no longer be whether a traditional practice is 'non-offensive enough' to list, but whether said practice bears witness to positive (for example, defined as contributing to the attainment of the SDGs) change, which arguably ought to be easier for the State Parties to agree on. The discussions would presumably also be more positive than in Scenario 1, both on local, national and international levels. Presumably, a discussion focusing on positive change is more encouraging than scrutinising traditions for flaws.

In addition to Scenarios 1, 3 or 4, and as mentioned in the discussion on Scenarios 1 and 2, a distinction between the documentation of ICH and the safeguarding efforts to uphold the practice of ICH might prove useful. Arguably, a goodness criterion is relevant in the latter, but problematic in the former. In practice, this could mean a distinction between the national inventories on the one hand and the international lists and national safeguarding efforts on the other hand in terms of (rigidity of) adherence to any goodness criteria. However, such a distinction would also require altering the basic texts of the Convention, as the goodness criteria are included in the very definition of ICH.

## Final remarks and the way forwards

The discussion in this paper has focused on the aspect of gender in particular. A reason for this is that gender discrimination is a type of discrimination that tends to be commonly overlooked or defended, usually by explaining it in terms of culture, religion or tradition (Shaheed 2014). As such, focusing on gender can hopefully highlight the problems relating to agreeing on how to define and handle discriminatory practices within the framework of the Convention.

While this paper has focused mainly on the problems pertaining to the 'goodness criteria', without offering much in terms of practical solutions, the author intends to contribute to a difficult but necessary discussion that can hopefully lead to continued improvements of the tools and implementation of the 2003 Convention. As mentioned in the section on hypothetical scenarios, the purpose of this paper is to illustrate some of the problems that the goodness criteria pose, rather than proposing that the basic texts of the Convention be altered. The question of more plausible ways forwards will be addressed by the author in future papers, including as part of a currently ongoing research project. In said research project, the author will address the question of how a gender aspect can be meaningfully mainstreamed into the tools of the Convention. In this, the author will also address the point of making a distinction between the gendered coding of tasks and roles and the participants' ascribed gender labels.

The author would like to already now suggest some key points to be considered, namely: 1) Whose voices are being heard? 2) What is the underlying purpose or background of the problematic aspect of the tradition in question? (For example, what is the underlying purpose of the gender-based restriction?) 3) What contemporary power structures or relations are at play?

The matter of discrimination within traditional practices is indeed a sensitive topic to address. The inclusion of the goodness criteria in the definition of ICH in the 2003 Convention, however, necessitates the consideration of such difficult aspects. However uncomfortable, a (continuous) discussion on what is to be deemed acceptable and not in terms of practices recognised within the framework of the Convention is needed.

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## ENDNOTES

1. For an analysis of the discourses surrounding the two Japanese sites, see for example DeWitt (2020).
2. Kubota (2019) writes about how ICH played an important part in the post-disaster revival of the communities hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.
3. As a note on the significance of the mentioning or non-mentioning of gender in the official descriptions, the discussion surrounding whether or not to allow female musicians to participate in the Kyoto Gion festival might be used as an illustration. In the decision to allow female musicians, the non-mentioning of gender in the official description of the festival at the time it was designated as a protected heritage property under the Japanese heritage legislation system played a part (Inoue 2005, 64).
4. Regarding over-emphasizing women's centrality or gender neutrality in attempts to suit UNESCO standards, see Ceribašić (2014).
5. See for example Janse (2020), Brumann (2012, 198), Lancashire (2016, 179), and Nishi Nippon (2017, 2018).
6. A similar type of discrepancy was highlighted by the delegation of Hungary at the twelfth session of the Committee. In commenting on the Evaluation Body's report which read that some 'intangible cultural heritage practices may in fact be seen as reinforcing gender inequalities and thus not in the spirit of the Convention' (UNESCO 2017, paragraph 33), the delegation of Hungary pointed out that strictly speaking, due to the wording of the convention, such practices are not ICH under the convention in the first place (UNESCO 2018, paragraph 362).
7. As Shaheed (2016) has noted, on the topic of gender-based restrictions to heritage sites, the restrictions do not stop at the physical location – they have ramifications outside of the site as well, affecting for example a person's access to knowledge and therefor limiting their opportunities in life. Shaheed suggests that such practices need to be revisited 'in the light of contemporary realities and international human rights standards. For this, internal discourses are needed with communities using human rights standards as a reference point' (2016, 51).
8. Janse (2021) discusses a connection between gender structures in ICH and gender structures in wider society.

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# Heritage, the illusion of inheritance and the volatility of memory: A reflection on the Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus, Macau

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# Heritage, the illusion of inheritance and the volatility of memory: A reflection on the Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus, Macau

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## ABSTRACT

'Heritage', in our daily usage of the word, refers to those items that we inherit from our ancestors and that best represent our collective memory and cultural identity. While heritage and collective memory are allegedly entangled, such a correlation may not be so straightforward when we situate a modern-day 'heritagised' item in the *longue durée* of time to see how it becomes signified as such, and when we look closer at how collective memory can differ across time. In addition, how must one take into account the malleability of memory when relating it to the fixating notion of heritage? This article returns to the ideas of 'collective memory' and 'inheritance' behind heritage. Based on the archival studies of the Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus (*Procissão de Nosso Senhor Bom Jesus dos Passos*, 苦難善耶穌聖像出遊) in Macau, the author postulates that such an event, for its capacity to accommodate different significations, its distinct relationships with multiple people groups and its continued survival into the present, can shed new light on our understanding of heritage. This brief paper, in the end, proposes that any 'heritagised' item exists like a medium that can be related to, and imprinted with distinctive meanings by, diverse groups, which, in turn, renders the idea of 'passing down' possible.

## Keywords

collective memory, individual memory, inheritance, Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus, Macau

## Introduction

Since the dawn of culture, humankind has always been busy recovering traces of foregone times in order to preserve their existence. Lineage and genealogy, where facts have constantly been blurred with fantasies, have been formed and revised so that a given community can sustain itself by claiming to be an 'orthodox inheritor' of a piece of history. For this reason, to propagate a specific identity and authority, individuals or groups would maniacally search for their past and retrieve what 'heritage' they should have inherited. As David Lowenthal (1998) and David Harvey (2001) demonstrate in their studies of historical cases, this has been an ever-present human phenomenon. Eelco Runia (2007) also expresses that we have an increasing desire to commemorate the past so that we can always be reminded of our cultural identity and patrimony. We are ardently establishing ever more heritage and linkage with the past in modern days.

From the outset, 'heritage' seems to be always related to one's interpretation of history and one's memory of the past. These *lieux de mémoire* are where a community crystallises and realises their communal

memory and identity (Nora 1989), and they are the virtual gathering point where an 'imagined community' can be formed (Anderson 2006). Eventually, they have also become the tools and weapons for nationalism and nation-building (Nora 1989; Smith 2006). Heritage serves to give a community a sense of space where its members imbue it with meanings and emotions (Rose 1995; Kuusisto 1999; McDowell 2016; Smith 2021). Yet heritage is never inert. It can be a place of resistance, a 'bastion' to guard one's identity and culture (Nora 1989, 12) or a contested place (Bender 1993; Pantazatos 2015). Its institutionalisation also serves to propagate a specific authority, in line with Smith's Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) (2006, 29). Besides the politics of heritage, many studies have also elucidated the relationship between heritage and economic and tourism management, among others (McKercher and Du Cros 2002; Smith 2006; Pine II and Gilmore 2007; MacCannell 2011; Monterroso Montero 2021).

As seen from the aforementioned theses on the instrumentalisation and discourses of heritage, the idea of heritage has been politicised with various connotations. While it appears that they all build upon the same presumption – that heritage and the memory of its community are related (so that pieces of heritage can subsequently be treasured, propagated, contested, preserved, destroyed, or be unique enough to manifest a surplus on the market) – the linkage between heritage and memory has become gradually taken for granted and debased in the arguments presented above, where the *subsequences* of heritage are rather stressed and delineated. At the same time, in our daily usage of the term 'heritage', everyone would readily accept these connotations, transforming the notion of heritage into a platitude altogether (Choay 2014; Monterroso Montero 2021). What is fundamentally the relationship between memory – individual, unstable and nevertheless imposing – and heritage – fixating, commanding and nevertheless narratable? And how does this relationship render the phenomenon of 'inheritance' possible?

Taking a step back from looking into what a piece of heritage should be and how it could be of use, this article re-examines the relationship between two of the most important ideas behind cultural heritage – memory and inheritance. First, a theoretical framework will be presented, which deals with (1) the existing discourses of the relationship between heritage and memory, and (2) the arguments on collective and individual memory. Building on this foundation, by investigating the case of the Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus in Macau, which, as will be shown in the following archival studies, itself has accommodated different individual memories and has been connected to different communities of different stances, this paper proposes how heritage *per se* can be understood in terms of memory. It allows us to rethink how heritage can be conserved, at the same time being re-created by, and continuously interact with, the surrounding communities that are also concurrently evolving.

## Theoretical framework

To present a well-grounded case study and to reach a novel and sound proposition of a relationship between heritage and memory, it is helpful to first review the theories discussed therein. Of particular help are Françoise Chaoy's delineation of the origin of *patrimoine* ('heritage'), *monument* ('monument') and *monument historique* ('historical monument'); Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire* ('site of memory'); Maurice Halbwachs's arguments on collective memory; and Jan and Aleida Assmann's further exploration of Halbwachs's idea.

### *I. Heritage: to inherit, to remind or to be remembered?*

In her historical account where she traces the emergence of cultural heritage, Françoise Choay (2014) highlights how the word 'heritage' – *patrimoine* – has shifted from its original signification to take up new meanings, from the familial, economic and legal level to any connotation that is determined by the adjective that precedes the word. Thus, we have notions like 'cultural heritage', 'natural heritage' and 'intangible heritage'. Concurrently, the idea of 'inheritance' seems to be shared as much as confounded among these various uses. For one, the original meaning of 'heritage' lends to the word's subsequent usage as items that a group has 'inherited' from preceding generations, which make a group how it is now. In this sense, heritage is further vested with the ideas of culture and collective identity, for a group would find in its heritage the essence that best represents the values and beliefs the group holds, and that makes every individual member of the group cohere. This thus explicates the desire and fever to institute lineage with the past and to claim different items as one's heritage, as portrayed in the introduction.

Laurajane Smith (2006) reflects that during the nineteenth century, when nationalism prevailed, buildings and sites that are deemed historically, aesthetically or religiously significant began to be labelled as 'monuments', for their grandeur and beauty remind their beholders of the nationhood they represent. Citing Choay and Peter Carrier, she also asserts that 'the monument became "a witness to history and a work of art" that took on a commemorative role in triggering certain public memories and values' (Smith 2006, 19). The idea of 'monument' – and 'monumentality', for their greatness, pompousness and intricacy that are judged to uphold certain essence or ideals possessed by a specific group and culture – becomes yet another layer of signification 'heritage' entails. Eventually, monument *as* heritage is also institutionalised, being, for instance, one of the principal definitions in UNESCO's Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972). In this definition, monuments, as well as other categories of cultural heritage, are valued for their 'monumentality', besides their being 'passed down'. But how can we account for this shift of meaning of heritage from collectively inherited objects to monumental items? Choay again offers a possible answer in her exposition of the word's etymology.

Referring to Alois Riegl, Choay differentiates 'monument' from 'historical monument'. Monument, according to Choay, derives from the Latin root *monere*, which means to advise, to recall or to evoke. Thus, far from being a neutral item, a monument elicits a living memory through emotions. It is an affective aide-mémoire. It is established such that the later generations can remember the present events, personage or beliefs, and it is constructed such that the past can reverberate with the present. It manifests the here-and-now, and it is created to preserve the present identity of a community. A monument is therefore defined by its relationship with the living memory (Choay 2014, 17–18).

It is not hard to see a parallel between Choay's delineation of the idea of 'monument' and Pierre Nora's thesis on *lieux de mémoire*. Echoing Choay's presumption that one creates monuments to counter the disquieting present, Nora portrays that our felt time is accelerating, that we sense that the present starts to slowly look 'different' according to our memory and that we are no longer living in '*milieux de mémoire*', real environments of memory (1989, 7) Therefore, we create *lieux de mémoire* – sites of memory – so that our memory can be externalised, crystallised and preserved.

While both Choay and Nora relate memory with materiality, they also address the volatility of memory. Nora asserts that memory is in 'permanent evolution' and is 'open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting' (1989, 8). Choay, on the other hand, asserts that a monument, for its primary aim to remind the people of a piece of memory, is exposed to the assault of time: 'forgetfulness, disaffection and disuse' renders a particular monument forgotten and makes it fall (2014, 25). Therefore, once a monument cannot be related to any living memory of any living person, it will shed its value. But does this not reveal a contradiction between her understanding and UNESCO's promotion of 'monument'? Besides, Choay's 'monument' does not stress any 'monumentality' as implied in our current understanding of the word. A monument can be a building or a statue, but it can also just be a festival, a tool, a painting or a diary.

Such a contradiction is, as Choay highlights, the consequence of the blurring between 'monument' and 'historical monument'. From the 17th century, Europeans tended to use the word 'monument' to refer to something other than its mnemonic value. Monument became illustrative of something 'magnificent, durable and glorious'; it denotes 'power, grandeur and beauty' and promotes 'grand designs' and 'an aesthetic sensibility' (Choay 2014, 18–20). The ideal to evoke memory has, therefore, been gradually substituted by the ideal of beauty. Simultaneously, while we no longer create *ex nihilo* monuments that serve to remind us of our memory, we designate existing items as containers of our past. We 'select' and 'convert' items surrounding us into 'witnesses of history', removing or ignoring their original purposes (Choay 2014, 24–25). Monuments of our ancestors become historical monuments of our time. The idea of 'monumentality' that we know today is thus conditioned by this historical background, joining hand in hand with the ideal of heritage in the 19th century as depicted by Smith (2006). Therefore, UNESCO's monuments are truly Choay's historical monuments.

Nora's concept *lieux de mémoire*, on the other hand, also encompasses the reuse of items to be accommodated with new memories and meanings. She contends that right because their 'capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning

and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications', allows *lieux de mémoire* as a phenomenon to exist. That an item can persist as a *lieux de mémoire* is precisely due to its continuous 'failure to have become what its founder hoped' (1989, 19–20), because only then can such an item be always selectively bestowed with new meanings and memories, converting it to new witness of one's memory (Chan 2022).

From being inherited in a familial sense to being treasured for its cultural and historic relevance, from being an aesthetically pleasing item demanded to be remembered to being an emotive item capable of being vested with ever-newer memories, the notion of heritage, parallel to and overlapping with the ideas of '*monument historique*' and '*lieux de mémoire*', always implies some memory works performed by the community surrounding the piece of heritage in concern. Yet such a relationship between memory and heritage will be problematised when related to the second idea behind our understanding of heritage – inheritance.

### *II. Memory, inheritance or inheritance of memory?*

UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), as well as the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, better known as the Faro Convention (2005), which are seen by many as a response to the older Convention, intends to divert the interpretation of heritage from an imposing, aesthetic and historical perspective and place it back among the living people who really perform and are connected with specific pieces of heritage. These conventions emphasise the heritage's capacity of being passed down and continuously attended to (but not solely in its scientific, historical and artistic significance), in how heritage and its surrounding groups can be engaged in a respectful and responsible dialogue (but not in how one must unconditionally care for and remember specific heritagised items), and in how heritage can be continuously be related to a generation's memory and its idea of the past. The idea as well as the action of being passed down and received – 'inheritance' – is reinstated.

But while one may still talk about the 'inheritance' of heritage, is it sensible to assert that through the passing down of heritage the memory from our ancestors can also be passed down? If memory is ultimately an individual if not a generational phenomenon, how can it be inherited from one person to another, and how can it be shared among generations?

One may think of Maurice Halbwachs's thesis on collective memory (1992) in resolving this problematic. According to Halbwachs, every individual memory can only function in social situations; individual memory is first and foremost embedded in a collective framework, thus collective memory. Such a collective memory pretends to be a reservoir of cultural and social symbols and tools that everyone from within that culture or community may relate to and utilise, such that every individual event can be narrated and made sense of, becoming therefore individual memories. In this way, living the collective memory, one does not need to relive a historical event to have that imprinted in one's individual memory – through education, communication, artistic expression or cultural interaction, one can fathom the past. In the same vein, even though no one from a community necessarily shares the same memory, since they are gathered precisely because they share the same collective memory, they are able to acknowledge the same set of cultural symbols and, using these symbols, can reflect on which items best represent their culture and cultural identity. Thus, drawing from a 'common past' through a collective memory, they claim certain items as their heritage, and thus they assume the position of 'inheritors' of this common past.

While Halbwachs's argument provides the *condition* from which a common past and a collective memory can possibly arise, in tracing how the memory of an individual event can be shared and eventually 'collectivised', Aleida Assmann reasons that when individuals of the same age witness the same 'incisive historical events', they then tend to have 'generational memory', which is a form of 'social memory'. They still have a direct memory of a particular event, yet when the memory is no longer 'embodied' but 'mediated', when not every individual possesses a living memory of an event, it becomes 'political', in the sense that it homogenises a specific group in periodic rituals and commemorations, and 'cultural', in the sense that it becomes rather performative, open for 'reinterpretation' and 'reassessment' (Assmann 2006, 213–215, 221). On the other hand, Jan Assmann differentiates 'cultural memory' from 'communicative memory', where the former is distant from everyday life, 'exteriorised and objectified', provides relatively stable symbols to one's culture and identity, and serves for a 'concretion of identity', whereas the latter acts as a reserve of symbols

that are more malleable in our daily life's interlocution, vernacular and eventually individually gestured (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995, 126–130; Assmann 2011, 110–111, 117).

While the above scholars have expounded on how individual memory can eventually be shared and subsumed collectively, Halbwachs (1992), for one, recognises that under the same collective framework, there can be multiple individual ways to adapt to and make use of the framework. But he has little to say about the phenomena where different, even contradictory, significations of the same piece of heritage can be observed within the same community (e.g. this may be most remarkable in the postcolonial context, where some from an ex-colony would view a person as a bringer of modernisation while others would view the same person as a war criminal), how collective memory can evolve across time, and where individuals from allegedly different cultural groups and communities with different collective memories can understand the same item.

Intriguingly, Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka relate cultural memory with cultural heritage:

> Through its cultural heritage a society becomes visible to itself and to others. Which past becomes evident in that heritage and which values emerge in its identificatory appropriation tells us much about the constitution and tendencies of a society. (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995, 133)

In comparison to Halbwachs, Assmann and Czaplicka appear to be more prudential in placing the evolution of collective memory onto the ecology of its society, thus implying that cultural memory can see influences from the myriad and volatile individual memories therein. Aleida Assmann, on the other hand, asserts that memory is fundamentally individualistic, 'perspectival and idiosyncratic', 'fragmentary' and 'transient', where 'every living individual occupies a specific place in the world which is not interchangeable', and the narrating of individual memory eventually employs 'emplotment' (2006, 212–213), which hinges on individual reasoning and experiences.

Nevertheless, none of them argues for an 'inheritance' of memory: they at most provide frameworks and conditions where one's memory can possibly 'influence' and 'mingle' with the other's memory through *first* being disembodied, mediated and intervened by some sort of symbols and gestures. Such a reading of the dynamics of memory, together with the phenomenon that heritage can be designated with different memories, emotions and significations, will be further supported by the following case study. Despite the limited space of this article, a concise archival portrayal of this centuries-old procession will be shown.

## The Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus: from a Spanish cult to Macau's heritage

After the Portuguese navigators had secured their settlement in Macau around 1557, besides their primary preoccupation to further expand their trading routes to the mainland of China, Japan and other Southeast Asian nations, they diligently mapped out their missionary work in the Far East. This was the result of an earlier event: in 1494, the Portuguese and the Spanish empires resolved to divide the world into two missionary hemispheres according to the Treaty of Tordesillas (Stock 2015). As early as 1561, the first Jesuits arrived in Macau. From then on, missionaries from various orders began to found churches and be stationed in Macau, which also acted as a jumping-off point to further their trips to other places in Asia. On 23 January 1576, the Diocese of Macau, which was the first diocese established in the Far East, was created, confirmed by Pope Gregory XIII and decreed by King Sebastian of Portugal (Lach 1994; Serrão 1985).

Although both expanding their commercial status and carrying out their missionary 'duties' can be seen as the reasons why the Portuguese would have first set sail to Macau, the religious life of the Portuguese proved to be way more vibrant and enduring than their mercantile endeavours. The interdiction of the Macau–Nagasaki trade route in the 1640s, the rise of other colonial powers such as the Dutch and the English, as well as the establishment of Hong Kong as a British colony in 1841, contributed to the downturn of Macau's position as a commercial hub as early as the 18th century. At the same time, the presence of the Portuguese and their administration was never acknowledged (not to mention the long-standing ambiguous Portuguese and Chinese stances over in whose possession Macau was) until the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Trade (1862) and the Sino-Portuguese Treaty of Peking (1887).

On the contrary, the 'public expressions of Catholic religious piety have been a constant feature of life in Macau' (Morgan 2021, 1). When, in 1832, Ljungstedt made his observations of Macau, he noted that, besides significant Catholic festivities such as Christmas, Easter and Sundays, there were numerous festivals dedicated to the Virgin Mary and different saints, multiple 'holy days' commanded by the Holy See and some 30 days where the devout believers can hear a Mass (Ljungstedt 1836, 12–13). Even during the last century, new celebrations and processions were created, such as the Procession of Our Lady Help of Christians and the Procession of Our Lady of Fátima (Morgan 2021). Churches, chapels and *confrarias* – 'brotherhoods' or 'confraternities' that supervised specific festivities and administration of particular churches – were continually founded.

The Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus, or simply the *Passos* as it is known by the Catholics, is one of these religious events that survive today. We do not know when the first instance of the Passos took place in Macau, but the description of the procession itself first appears in 1708 in the archives (Cultural Heritage of Macau n.d.a). However, various sources suggest that as early as 1586, the Spanish Augustine friars, who travelled from the Philippines to Macau and founded Saint Augustine's Covent near today's Saint Augustine's Church, had already introduced the cult of the Passion of Jesus and practised it since then (Anonymous 1965; Ljungstedt 1836).

Although the cult of the Passion of Jesus may be a Spanish one, the fact that it could take root in Macau and eventually be taken up by the Portuguese might not be surprising. In 1580, there was a crisis of succession in mainland Portugal. King Philip II of Spain, a grandson of King Manuel I of Portugal, seized the opportunity to claim the Portuguese throne. The two crowns were, therefore, united, and the Iberian Union was thus established, until it was dissolved in 1640. During these 60 years, Spanish influence affected Portugal as well as its overseas holdings, including Macau. In terms of trading, Macau welcomed one of its prosperous eras for being the link between the two hemispheres, receiving trading groups from both Goa and Manila. In terms of missionary work, Macau began to accommodate a diversity of religious orders, such as the Augustinians and the Dominicans from Spain, allowing them to establish churches and practise their faiths. It is for this reason that the Spanish could first disembark in Macau, rendering the eventual assimilation of the Passos into Macau's culturescape possible.

Be it as it may, the Augustinian friars were expelled from Macau in 1717, and the Passos ceased to take place. In the following years, there was a scarcity of food in Macau. According to the records at the Senate of Macau, in 1721, there were groups of Chinese locals who urged the Senate to continue the Passos, for they attributed the cause of the famine to the cancellation of the Passos. They pleaded to the government:

> To make that man with the stick behind his back walk through the streets, [while the Chinese would be] offering the expenses. (Anonymous 1965, 138, my translation)[1]

In the same year, the Passos was once again carried out and, miraculously, the calamities in Macau improved. Since then, the Passos has not skipped a single year.

In the 19th century, after the Portuguese kingdom had abolished all religious orders within its territories, the Confraternity of Our Lord the Good Jesus of the Passion was created to continue the respective rituals and to manage Saint Augustine's Church (Anonymous 1873; 1884; Teixeira 1975; 1976). Even in 1911, when the Portuguese Republic decreed that all religious practice should be confined within designated religious buildings, intending to minimise the ecclesial influence in the newly formed secular state, the Passos as well as other processions in Macau appeared to be little affected. This is because, for a long time, the processions in Macau were largely sponsored and organised by prominent individuals and the confraternities rather than the churches or the clergy themselves. They were not 'created by or in response to encouragement from either ecclesial or civil authorities' (Morgan 2021, 7). Apparently, by that time, many of the processions in Macau had long since lost some of their religious implications, taking up instead a popular significance.

From the bulletin published by the diocese in the 1960s to the video clip taken by Rádio e Televisão de Portugal in 1972 and my own observations in 2023, the route of the Passos and the rituals therein have remained much the same. It always entails a two-day procession – except that it was reduced to a one-day ritual between 2020 and 2022 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It always takes



**Figure 1**
The Passos before the Covid-19 pandemic. Photo from the official website of Cultural Heritage of Macau. https://www.culturalheritage.mo/en/detail/2464/1.

place on the first weekend of Lent, the period of 40 days before Good Friday. A *Novena*, where Mass is held for nine successive days in Saint Augustine's Church, antecedes the procession on Saturday. During this period, the image of the Passion of Jesus, in which Jesus, wearing the crown of thorns and half kneeling, carries a cross on his back, is removed from behind the altar and placed in the transept so that he can be venerated by the public within their reach. On Saturday evening, a Mass and a sermon take place, and the bier on which the image, now veiled by purple curtains with golden fleece, is installed will depart from the church, carried by six friars from the Confraternity of Our Lord the Good Jesus of the Passion. This marks the beginning of the *Procissão da Luz* (the Procession of the Light, because the cortège held torches that shone through the city centre before the installation of electric light). The police band accompanies the cortège, and the procession slowly proceeds through the city centre of Macau until the image reaches the cathedral. Another sermon is held, and the image stays there overnight.

| | DESPESA | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Subscrição do *Boletim Oficial* ..... | $ | 10,00 |
| 2 | Festividade de Nosso Senhor Bom Jesus dos Passos ... | ,, | 130,00 |
| 3 | Dito, de Nosso Senhora das Dôres..... | ,, | 32,00 |
| 4 | Dito, da Santa Mónica ..... | ,, | 24,00 |
| 5 | Dito, de Santo Agostinho..... | ,, | 41,00 |
| 6 | Cantores na festividade de Nosso Senhor Bom Jesus dos Passos ..... | ,, | 95,00 |
| 7 | Orquestra para a Missa solene, dito, dito ..... | ,, | 35,00 |
| 8 | Música nas procissões de Sábado e Domingo, dito ..... | ,, | 75,00 |
| 9 | Gradificação aos serventes. ..... | ,, | 27,00 |
| 10 | Missas durante o ano económico..... | ,, | 58,00 |
| 11 | Velas para serem bentas e para a festividade ..... | ,, | 250,00 |

**Figure 2**
An excerpt from the Confraternity's budget plan for the year 1924–1925. It shows that, besides the Passos (item number 2), which costs comparatively more than the other items, the Confraternity was also responsible for other processions such as that for Our Lady of Sorrows, for Saint Monica and for Saint Augustine. None of these three exists today (Teixeira 1975; 179).

On Sunday morning, after a Mass is held in the cathedral, a girl in white, acting as Veronica who, according to tradition, helped Jesus on his way to Calvary and wiped the blood and sweat off his face, will appear, singing a solemn tune. The image of the Passion of Jesus is now unveiled. Together with Veronica, the image leaves the cathedral and returns to Saint Augustine's Church. The route, however, is longer than the way of the procession to the cathedral. The cortège stops at seven places, representing seven of the 14 stations of *Via Dolorosa*. The Bishop of Macau, the clergy from different religious orders and the devotees, children and youths in white and purple holding standards, candles, flags and other symbols of the Passion also join the image. At each stop, the leading priest reads a prayer. Veronica then faces the image and sings

a verse, slowly revealing the contours of Jesus's face on her scroll. Concurrently, the friars and the believers kneel before Jesus. This process is repeated at every stop, until the image arrives at Saint Augustine's Church. The whole Passos is concluded with a sermon.

As the historical documents show, there were always 'fine-tunes' in terms of the route of the Passos. For example, in 1708, the procession on Saturday evening proceeded from Saint Augustine's Church to Saint Dominic's Church, situated some five hundred metres from the cathedral. In 1712, the procession started from Saint Lawrence's Church, passing by Saint Augustine's Church, and reached the cathedral on Saturday night. On the next day, having departed from the cathedral, the ritual was concluded at Saint Dominic's Church. From then on, the trajectory of the Passos became stabilised (Ljungstedt 1836; Anonymous 1965; 1974), except when Saint Augustine's Church was undergoing renovation and during the pandemic the last few years.

While such bigger frameworks – when and where to celebrate the Passos – have been relatively constant, many finer features of the Passos do not survive today. For instance, Ljungstedt reports:

> The Redeemer [was] supported by eight of the most distinguished citizens. The bishop with the secular and regular clergy, the governor, ministers, nobility, the military, and the whole Roman Catholic population, it may be said, assist, deeply affected by the scene. (1836, 154)

The Passos before the Covid-19 pandemic had at least two differences compared to the description above. First, the cortège has shrunk in both the number of participants and the diversity of roles. Since 1910, when Portugal became a republic, no nobility has been present, and since some years before the transfer of sovereignty of Macau in 1999, the military hasn't participated either. Besides, as delineated, many religious practices have become largely popular in nature. As *Religião e Pátria* reported in 1965, there was already no involvement from the colonial government. Also taking into account the political uncertainty in both Portugal and China from the 1960s to the 1980s, the disconnection of the Passos from




**Figure 3**
Map showing the route of the Passos as well as the churches alongside. The blue line traces the route taken on Saturday evening, from Saint Augustine's Church to the cathedral. The red one depicts the returning route on Sunday. Picture created by author.

authority increased. To this day, it can be said that the Passos engages solely those who are believers.

Second, the image of Jesus has also changed. Specifically, the image in Ljungstedt's time required *eight* bier-bearers, while, in 1972 as well as now, *six* men carry the image (Rádio e Televisão de Portugal n.d.). Indeed, the archives reveal that there were at least three different images used from Ljungstedt's time until 1911: in 1876, a new one was brought from Paris to replace the preceding one, which 'had already existed in Saint Augustine's Church for a century'. Concurrently, there was also a smaller one, which was not used in the Passos but was stored in the chapter room of the Confraternity. In 1911, because the new one had been used for more than 30 years, the Confraternity resolved to use the smaller one instead, 'since the one that has been carried until now would not be appropriate, both because of its exaggerated proportions and of its excessive weight, that it greatly exhausts the friars to the point that they want to evade the work, as seen from experience'. However, the Macanese friars in Hong Kong objected to the plan furiously and, in a lengthy letter to the Confraternity, they wrote that 'the old traditions should always be conserved and respected, as was done by our forefathers [...] and that the friars from Hong Kong will always be ready to carry the heavier platform if you provide this devout privilege to them'. Yet the Confraternity in Macau rejected this proposal, and the image was once again replaced (Teixeira 1976, 194–197, my translation).

In addition to these changes, many practices which could be seen as an expression of devotion have also disappeared. For instance, believers, presumably Macanese, would light candles, spread petals and burn incense in front of their houses when the cortège passed by – these rituals could have been forgotten by today's generation. Certain Macanese families would also have the privilege to light up petroleum lanterns along the route on Saturday night, while other designated individuals would hold *tochas orodíficas* – 'fragrant torches' – which were, in reality, sulphur torches, surrounding the image along the procession. To manifest extreme dedication, some devotees would also be seen lingering 'barefoot under the platform', while 'one or other woman [...] takes off her shoes to fulfil the vow in moments of extreme affliction' (Anonymous 1974, 30, my translation). Besides, the election of Veronica would have been a huge annual event among the Macanese and Portuguese communities.



**Figure 4**
The Passos in 1972. Six friars are seen carrying the image. Photo from 'Noticiário Nacional: Procissão Do Senhor Dos Passos Em Macau', Rádio e Televisão de Portugal. 26 February 1972. https://arquivos.rtp.pt/conteudos/procissaoem-macau/.

Every young girl, particularly those from prominent families, would see such a position as a trophy, and for this reason, they would work hard and build up a reputation among their circles to win the post. However, as time goes by, while various Macanese families have emigrated to other places, and while some of the practices have been simplified due to the lack of manpower or even banned due to safety reasons, the aforementioned practices are almost no longer observed (Anonymous 1974; 2017; 2021; Teixeira 1976).

The involvement of the Portuguese in the Passos has also decreased. Today, the Macanese and the Chinese Catholics are largely the one participating in and organising the Passos. Even those Macanese – but not necessarily the Portuguese – who are now dispersed globally will also return to Macau to participate in this annual procession, as long as they are available. The Passos, according to many Macanese, is a symbol for them, in which they can feel united. It is through the Passos, as well as other processions, that the Macanese are assured of each other's presence and their culture.

Though it has been an event in which Catholics of different ethnic and cultural origins actively participate, there was not much reflection on the Passos coming from the Chinese community until the turn of the millennium. Approaching 20 December 1999, the destined day when the sovereignty of Macau would be transferred from Portugal to China, the Passos as well as other Portuguese



**Figure 5**
A devotee seen burning candles and laying petals as the cortège passes by. Photo from 'Senhor Bom Jesus dos Passos', Revista Macau, February 2017. https://www.revistamacau.com.mo/2017/02/07/senhor-bom-jesus-dos-passos/.



**Figure 6**
Children of predominantly Macanese origin carrying different instruments symbolic of the Passion of Jesus during the Passos in the 1970s (Anonymous 1974, 30).

legacies started to be seen instead as witnesses of history, and thus 'heritage', as the government and the public would have it.

One of the scarce Chinese sources on the reflection of the Passos comes from Father Pedro Chung Chi Kin (鐘志堅). Sharing how he witnessed the Passos in his childhood and how it has constantly made impressions in his mind, he states:

> Though the Passos can be seen to be a folkloric tradition, after all, such a religious practice entails a history of more than a hundred years. It still retains its religious appeal. It not only touches the individual on the three levels of emotion, mind and spirit but also through a long-term collective experience, a call for a collective identity is also formed. This allows the devotees in Macau to bear a uniqueness. (Chung 2004, my translation)[2]

It is not hard to see how he converges the ideas of the Passos being 'folkloric', being a religious practice and being localised after its long history. It is also interesting to read how he, without mentioning 'heritage' a single time, asserts that the Passos is a place where he and other believers share a common value and that he will continue to interact with it.

In 2005, the Historic Centre of Macau was enlisted as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. From then on, the legislation concerning Macau's own cultural heritage as well as the inventorisation of intangible cultural heritage has been debated, consulted and reviewed. In 2014, the Cultural Heritage Protection Law took effect, and in 2017, an inventory of 15 intangible cultural heritage items, including the Passos, was prepared (Cultural Heritage of Macau n.d.b). The public consultation in 2019 to officially enlist the Passos as one of the items of intangible cultural heritage is worth a closer look.

In the official consultation document, the following appears in the section that describes the Passos:

> Macau holds the oldest Catholic Diocese in the area of East Asia, conserving a lot of rituals that are valued for their longevity and specificity to the place. The Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus, having a history of more than three hundred years, is representative of these rituals. It is also the largest traditional religious practice that is still carried out today in Macau. This religious festivity contains a richness of characteristics that is specific to Macau; it is an important embodiment of the

> multiplicity of the religious and cultural essence of Macau. The abundance and the representativeness of the cultural qualities inherent to the Procession are a witness of the cultural exchange between the East and the West. The Procession gains the participation of the general public [...] Every year, a large number of tourists are attracted to participate in and experience this Procession, which also reveals Macau's liveliness as a hub of cultural exchange. (Cultural Institute 2019a, my translation)[3]

During the consultation period, 1,168 opinions were received, 1,023 of which concerned the Passos. Of these, 790 (77.2 per cent) were in favour of the inclusion of the Passos in the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, while the others (22.8 per cent) were not. To summarise, the proponents thought that the Passos could be seen as the embodiment of Eastern and Western cultures and religions, that it can attract many people and tourists to participate, that it accords with their personal beliefs, that it is a significant annual event, that it can be seen as a demonstration of respect to diverse beliefs in Macau, and that it forms a part of the citizens' memory. On the other hand, the opponents reflected that religions should not be categorised as heritage, that the Passos is not special at all, that it does not correspond to their personal beliefs, that it is not popular in society, and that it is not relevant to Macau.[4]

In the end, the Passos was officially enlisted as one of the 12 intangible cultural heritage items of Macau.[5] In the following years, however, the Passos was greatly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, which altered the layout of the ritual. In 2023, the Passos returned with its full itinerary and contents. Many citizens and tourists were attracted to this event and walked along with the procession. Yet shopkeepers who have not seen such a pompous event for the last three years, friends of the helpers who walked the Passos, legislators, journalists, photographers and even a few practitioners of other beliefs were all drawn to this event. Who knows whether the Passos is for them an occasion to practise their faith, to meet somebody they know, to experience the uniqueness Macau offers or to stay close to those who appear in the same occasion?

## Towards an organic understanding of heritage

Now that a historical portrayal of the Passos has been presented through the above archival studies, some nuances may allow us to rethink the notion of heritage. Precisely, we can see that multiple groups have engaged



**Figure 7**
The Passos in 2023. Veronica is showing Jesus's image on her scroll before Saint Augustine's Church, the last of the seven stops of the Passos. Photo taken by author.

with the Passos: the Confraternity which manages the organisation of the Passos; the Chinese Catholics who predominate as the participants of the Passos today; the Macanese who perceive the Passos as a cultural symbol; the people of Macau who vote for, or against, the inclusion of the Passos as the official cultural heritage; the government that views the Passos as an embodiment of Macau's history and special identity, even the Chinese locals in the 1720s who believed that the image and the Passos were related to the famine; and the Hong Kong Macanese who asserted that the older, heavier image was the true tradition that the friars should have respected. If we follow Halbwachs's idea of collective memory, can we say that they are all of the same community, because, regardless of their different views, they can all refer to the common Passos? But how, then, can we explicate these differences if they are all living the same collective memory? If, indeed, they are of different communities with different collective memories, does it not mean that they could have their own ways of understanding the same Passos, which is in reality not completely the same among their views?

The Passos can be vested with different meanings: as a religious cult; as a religious expression and, eventually, national identity by the Portuguese (Morgan 2021); as a symbol of unity; as an event to practise one's faith, even as a 'folkloric' and 'naively popular custom' (Anonymous 1974, 31); as a unique stage where different people are brought together; and ultimately as a piece of heritage. The case shows that the memory works the Passos entails is, in the end, an individual and individualistic phenomenon, and everyone has their own ways of interpreting the event, though different interpreters may share a more or less similar set of cultural symbols (Assmann 2006). The Passos, in addition, for it has manifested different significations by different individuals, is a result of 'its identificatory appropriation' with its surrounding individuals, whose individual memories, in turn, exhibit 'the constitution and tendencies of a society' (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995, 133).

But the case of the Passos does not merely elucidate that memory is individual: it appears to reflect a sort of paradox. On the one hand, though the Passos has formed different relationships with different communities, they all have the memory of *a* Passos in their minds; on the other hand, though the appearances and the meanings of the Passos are evolving, the Passos still appears to be 'passed down'. I contend that it is but a paradox in appearance, for there are fundamentally as *many* Passos as there are beholders of the Passos, and there is fundamentally no 'passing down' of any item *as* heritage.

To begin with, a signification for the Passos must first be yielded by any individuals for them to be able to relate to the Passos. Such a relation, in turn, allows the individuals to 'receive' the Passos so that they can eventually make sense of and practise it. Since individuals will 'emplot' in their own way to narrate their own signification for the Passos (Assmann 2006, 212), every signification, and thus every relationship with the Passos, will be different. In continuously practising and making sense of the Passos, a feedback loop between the Passos and the individuals forms. Subsequently, their relationship with the Passos is enhanced in specific ways, and only in continuously practising it and relating it with oneself can the Passos survive today. For the very same reason, because such a hermeneutical relationship can be formed between any individual and the Passos, there are fundamentally as *many* Passos as there are beholders of the Passos, though there is *ontically* only one Passos – the one that exists in front of every individual's eyes.

If indeed such a hermeneutic cycle is formed between any individual and the Passos, and if any community is formed by such individuals who relate with the Passos in specific ways, then it is safe to say that the constitution of any given community's memory is porous: two individual memories may overlap in some parts (Assmann's delineation of generational or social memory) and, *ad infinitum*, if the overlapping parts of a specific number of individual memories are expansive, chances are that they may come close and form a community. Thus, collective memory is truly this 'collection' of the overlapping parts of all the individual memories concerning a specific event or item (Figure 8). In the same vein, two communities, though possibly having exclusive perspectives of the Passos, may also share some overlapping significations towards the Passos: the Spanish and the Portuguese overlap in that they are Catholics; the Portuguese and the Macanese understand each other in that they attend the same procession; the public and the government of Macau are both inhabitants of Macau who witness the Passos annually, and so on.

For the same reason – for the communities' commonness and exclusiveness among each other

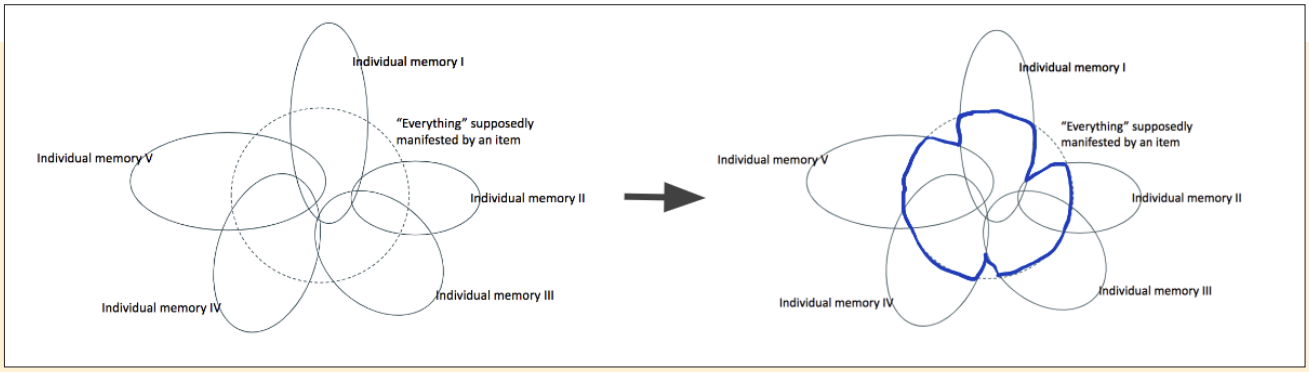



**Figure 8**
The dotted line includes 'everything' supposedly entailed by an item, while the other five solid circles show how, for example, five individual memories, in yielding significations for the item, may overlap with each other. Only those areas where the dotted circle overlaps with a solid circle – in other words, the part where signification can be given by being related to an individual – are truly constituent of the individual's memory of the item. The 'collective' memory of the item, thus, is truly the 'collection' of the overlapping parts of all the individual memories concerning the item– the part enclosed by the blue line.

– when one 'inherits' the Passos from the other, one must *remember* and *not remember* some aspects of the Passos so that they can claim the Passos as theirs, ignoring concurrently some of its original intentions (Nora 1989). In Danièle Hervieu-Léger's words, the Portuguese memory must first be 'readjusted' so that the Passos can resonate in their memories and they can align with the Passos (2000, 145). In other words, the Portuguese must first have 'left' their own exclusive memory and, thanks to their memory's overlapping with the Spanish, they could understand the Passos. Thus, readjusting their individual memories collectively, they eventually formed a relationship with the Passos, assimilating it and practising it. The Passos's 'Catholicness', which is common among the two groups, undermined its 'Spanishness'. Applying such a reading of the dynamics of memory to the above case study, the Passos can thus be recycled, reused and re-signified by different communities (Nora 1989; Hervieu-Léger 2000), shedding its original connotation and taking up new attributions. It also provides an explanation of the

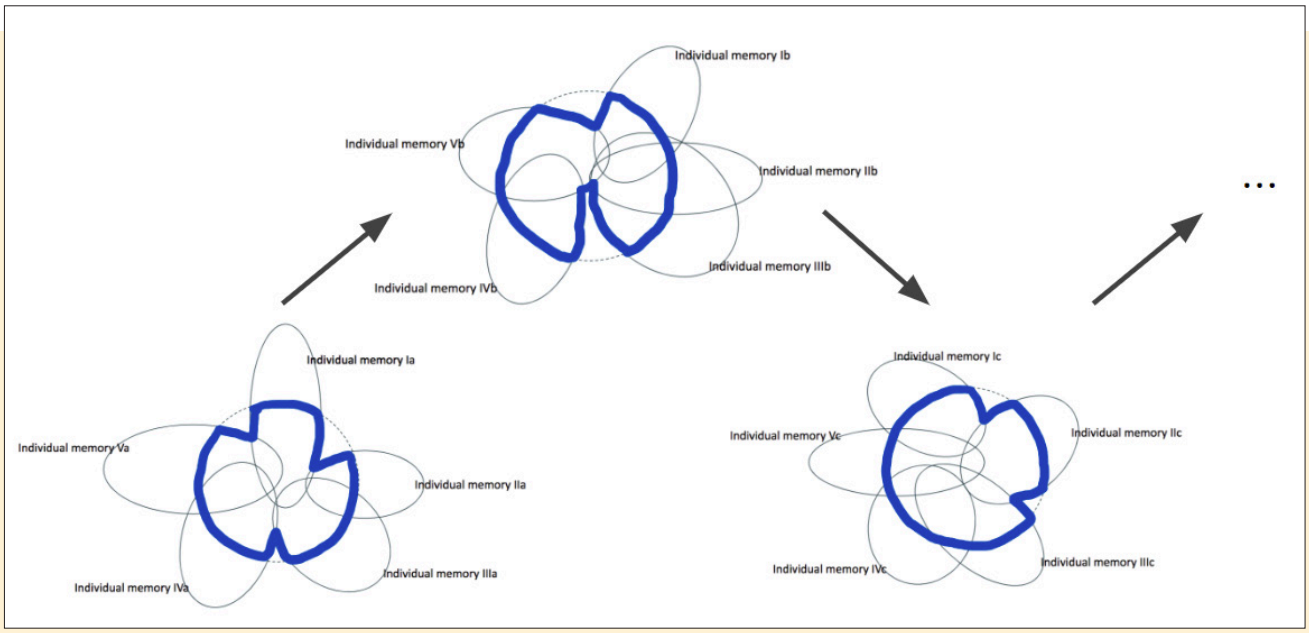



**Figure 9**
While individual memories can evolve, and while different people have different individual memories, their relationship with the item also evolves, so the 'collection' of those individual memories changes. Nevertheless, in that individual, memories can always relate to the item collectively, an illusion of 'inheritance' is manifested. 'Heritage', on the other hand, is the name given to the result this succession of the blue area.

possibility of the shifting from 'monument' to 'historical monument', where the mnemonic devices of a foregone time can be reinvested with contemporary values, converting it to a piece of 'heritage' judged to be processed by a specific group (Choay 2014).

This leads to the resolution of the second part of the paradox portrayed above: there is fundamentally no 'passing down' of any item *as* heritage. 'Inheritance' – in the context of heritage – is illusory, for no item really passes down to us (Figure 9). Rather, by dint of a delve into, and a reworking of, our memory, we have the agency to relate ourselves with an item, giving it significations and values, and engaging ourselves in an intimate relationship with it, 'claiming it as if it were our belonging' (Chan 2022, 142).

## Conclusion

Memory remains an individual phenomenon and experience. Collective memory is the overlaps of various individual memories, the 'collection' of all those individual memories concerning a specific item. Simultaneously, as the case of the Passos shows, precisely because of the existence of the mismatching parts and the changeability of individual memory, such a collection of individual memories can evolve, different communities can understand the same item and a community can still understand an item though it is altered. All these lead back to the fact that it is precisely the individual memory, not *a* collective memory, that is manifesting itself in yielding significations for an item in any seemingly 'collective' situation. The Passos – I mean the significations of the Passos – is where these individual memories meet.

'Heritage', therefore, is the phenomenon where the volatility of memory can successfully create the illusion of inheritance. A community does not passively 'inherit' an item, but every individual from the said community, in their own way, relates their own individual memory to the item, renders this item narratable in accordance to their own historical world view and eventually claims it as theirs in their individual ways collectively, and 'heritage' is the name given to this result. Any item given the name 'heritage', in the end, is but the temporary 'container' of the collection of all those 'disembodied' individual memories at a specific time. It is a symbolic and gestured medium, consisting of a 'mediated' face – where the beholders cast their individual ideas in relation to it – and a 'mediating' face – where the 'heritagised' item intervenes and 'mingles with' the beholders' individual memory.

The Passos is metaphorical in allowing us to understand heritage in novel ways: just like how the Passos awaits the spectators to relate it to their own memories so as to make sense of it, the signification of heritage lies in the people. The whole pomp – the idea of heritage – would be senseless if no one actively attempted to understand it, and it would disperse before it actually exited the beholders' eyes.

## ENDNOTES

1. 'Para que fizesse andar pelas ruas aquele homem do pau às costas, oferecendo-se para (os) gastos.' (Anonymous 1965)
2. '若視苦難善耶穌敬禮是一種民間習俗，畢竟這項宗教習俗有過百年的歷史，他是有其宗教的感召力，不單令個人在情、意、靈三層面上有所觸動，而且透過長期的集體經歷，就形成一種身份認同的作用，為澳門教會的教友塑造一個特性。' The complete document, which is in Traditional Chinese, can be viewed in this link: http://archive.hsscol.org.hk/Archive/periodical/spirit/s063g.htm.
3. '澳門擁有東亞地區歷史最悠久的天主教區，保留了很多具時代意義及地方特色的禮儀，苦難善耶穌聖像出遊就是當中的代表之一，具有超過三百年的歷史，是澳門現存最大規模的傳統宗教實踐之一。該活動保留了具有濃厚地方特色的宗教實踐，是澳門本地多元的宗教文化精髓的重要體現，其豐富並具有代表性的文化內涵，是澳門東西方文化交流的見證。活動得到市民普遍的參與[...]每年都吸引大批旅客來澳參與體驗，亦充分表現澳門作為多元文化交匯兼容城市的活力。' The complete document, which is in Traditional Chinese, can be viewed in this link: https://www.gov.mo/zh-hant/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/03/%E9%A0%85%E7%9B%AE%E5%88%97%E5%85%A5%E3%80%8A%E9%9D%9E%E7%89%A9%E8%B3%AA%E6%96%87%E5%8C%96%E9%81%BA%E7%94%A2%E5%90%8D%E9%8C%84%E3%80%8B%E5%85%AC%E9%96%8B%E8%AB%AE%E8%A9%A2_%E4%B8%AD%E6%96%87%E7%89%88.pdf.
4. The complete result, which is in both Traditional Chinese and in Portuguese, can be viewed in the document through the link: https://www.gov.mo/zh-hant/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/10/ICM-Intangible-Report-_final-1003.pdf.
5. They are: Cantonese Opera, Cantonese Naamyam (Narrative Songs), Taoist Ritual Music, Belief and Customs of A-Ma, Belief and customs of Na Tcha, Festival of the Drunken Dragon, Herbal Tea Brewing, Religious Woodcarving Figures, Patuá Theatre, Macanese Gastronomy, Procession of Our Lady of Fátima, and the Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus.

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# Intangible cultural heritage as a resource for 'self-stakeholderisation': fieldwork among politically active civil society stakeholders in the province of Vojvodina, Serbia

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# Intangible cultural heritage as a resource for 'self-stakeholderisation': fieldwork among politically active civil society stakeholders in the province of Vojvodina, Serbia

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## ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to demonstrate the effectiveness of stakeholder inclusion in preserving cultural values and identity, as embodied in intangible cultural heritage (ICH), without reigniting interethnic rivalries that contributed to war and social dismay in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Despite widespread fears, particularly among anthropology and critical heritage scholars, that ICH is counter-indicative and has the potential to exacerbate social conflicts rather than contribute to peace and reconciliation efforts in post-conflict regions, anthropological fieldwork in the province of Vojvodina, Serbia – a region with 32 recognised nationalities, ethnic and religious communities – yielded promising results for ICH enthusiasts. The context of our research is a reflection on possible solutions to a critical sociopolitical issue – improving the somewhat unsuccessful implementation of the international policy framework aimed at the instrumentalisation of ICH safeguarding for peace building and reconciliation in post-conflict regions, such as our own (Western Balkans). During the fieldwork we observed a possibly unintended consequence of the implementation of the safeguarding protocols. Cultural entrepreneurship has been identified through the idiom of 'self-stakeholderisation' – a phenomenon of bottom-up agency by various actors who pursue developmental opportunities despite standard heritagisation practices dominated by cultural policies designed for the inclusion of stakeholders coming from dominant ethnic and religious populations. This research could serve as a starting point for the development of a comparatively applicable model of ICH stakeholder involvement in post-conflict societies, based on their self-stakeholderisation.

## Keywords

identity politics, intercultural relations, south-eastern Europe, Vojvodina province, stakeholder inclusion, heritage management, post-conflict regions, UNESCO, anthropology

## Introduction

The goal of our multi-year project is to contribute to a research-based solution to a critical sociopolitical issue: how to improve the somewhat unsuccessful implementation of the international policy framework aimed at the instrumentalisation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) safeguarding for peace building and reconciliation in post-conflict regions. We investigated the feasibility of establishing a truly inclusive ICH register in Vojvodina, a province in northern Serbia and the state successor of former Yugoslavia (Ćuković and Milenković 2020).[1] As Grün (2009) explains it, Yugoslavia was a multinational federation with a tripartite system of national rights. The first category was composed of Yugoslavia's nations (Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Montenegrins and Muslims), which were separated into their 'home republics', with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was the home republic for three nations: Serbs, Croats and Muslims (now mostly referred to as Bosniaks). The second category encompassed Yugoslavia's nationalities (*narodnosti*), which had legal warranty to their own language and cultural assertion and had their 'home republic' outside Yugoslavia. In total, there were 10 such nationalities, including Albanians and Hungarians. The third category encompassed 'other nationalities and ethnic minorities' (Jewish people, Vlachs, Greeks and those who declared themselves as 'Yugoslavs') (Grün 2009, 6).

Vojvodina is a province located in northern Serbia, and it is known for its ethnic and cultural diversity. According to the 2011 census, Vojvodina is home to 32 ethnic groups, with Serbs being the largest group (66.76 per cent of the population), followed by Hungarians (13.28 per cent), Roma (2.47 per cent), Slovaks (2.21 per cent), Croats (2.10 per cent) and others. The province has a long history of multiculturalism, with different ethnic groups living together and influencing each other's cultures for centuries. For over two hundred years, Vojvodina was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which brought a diverse mix of cultures and traditions to the region. This legacy can still be seen in the architecture, food and customs of today. The region has also seen tensions between various groups in the past. However, there have been recent efforts to promote interethnic dialogue, tolerance and cooperation. Cultural festivals, language classes and youth exchanges are examples of initiatives that aim to promote understanding and respect among different ethnic groups. Given its ethnic and cultural diversity, intercultural and inclusive heritage preservation policies are critical in Vojvodina. This means that heritage preservation efforts raise awareness among the general public about the needs and perspectives of all ethnic groups in the province, and they work to promote understanding and respect among different cultures. In this region, inclusive policies include involving representatives from various ethnic groups in heritage preservation decision-making processes, providing funding and resources for heritage preservation initiatives that reflect the region's diversity, and promoting cultural events and festivals that celebrate the various cultures. By doing so, heritage preservation efforts hope to foster pride and unity among the province's ethnic groups while also promoting social cohesion and intercultural understanding.

However, this representation, viewed through rose-coloured glasses, is far from universal. Different ethnic groups may view heritage preservation differently and prioritise different aspects of their cultural heritage. As a result, it is critical to engage in dialogue and collaboration with all stakeholders in heritage preservation efforts, as well as to strive for a balanced and inclusive approach that reflects the region's diversity. Not recognising a community as a legitimate stakeholder in the heritage preservation process can lead to a variety of problems. This lack of recognition can happen as a result of factors like political marginalisation, discrimination or a lack of resources or representation. In such cases, it is critical to advocate for the inclusion of the marginalised community in decision-making processes, as well as to raise awareness about their cultural heritage and the importance of preserving it. Working with community leaders, civil society organisations and other stakeholders to form coalitions and advocate for change is one example. It is also critical to address any underlying political or social issues that may be contributing to certain communities' exclusion from the heritage safeguarding process. Working with government officials, international organisations or other actors to address issues such as discrimination, a lack of resources or unequal representation may be part of this. Finally, the goal should be to promote an inclusive and participatory approach to heritage preservation that values all cultural traditions and identities. This can help foster social cohesion, intercultural understanding and a sense of shared heritage among all members of a community, regardless of background or socio-economic status. Serbian anthropology has made some strides in this regard, particularly in the inclusion of minority

communities in the UNESCO framework for the protection of ICH, balancing the need for their recognition with the need to ensure that protection does not become an essentialisation of identity, which would harm individuals who do not wish to preserve their heritage through ethnic or religious collectives.

In that regard, standard stakeholder inclusion strategies may be essentialising and preventive of grassroots agency. The standard anthropological approach, as advocated by critical heritage studies, holds that academics should not enter the field of heritage preservation for any reason other than to research and criticise. It claims that safeguarding is neither natural nor objective. Although clearly justified by economic, educational and cultural considerations, heritage processes are primarily hidden national homogenisation projects based on the exclusion of minorities by a nexus of the school system, the media, academia, bureaucracy, political parties and major denominations. Because of UNESCO's unwilling legitimisation of mythologising majority or dominant cultures through the implementation of its conventions, anthropology and critical heritage studies' approach to ICH has been predominantly critical (Kurin 2007; Weller and Wolff 2008; Milenković, Antonijević and Spremo 2019; Seglow 2019, Brumman 2021).

Rather than taking the default position on the inherently negative nature of essentialisation, on which heritage safeguarding is based, we took a proactive stance and attempted to include ICH stakeholders in the process – primarily representatives of ethnic and religious minorities, of which there are officially 32 in Vojvodina alone (Stojšin 2015). Our previous research findings (Milenković 2014, 2016; Ćuković 2019) suggest that deconstructing the ICH, which is symbolic of collective identities, tends to confuse non-academic actors in heritagisation processes, turning academic-based ICH safeguarding into a counter-indicative instrument, unwittingly contributing to the re-weaponisation of identity and the rise of culture-based extremism. Instead, we investigated the possibilities of the more common, publicly acceptable ethnological approach to cultural identity, cultural memory, folklore and cultural traditions in search of an academic-based, unoffensive – in other words, effective – approach to post-conflict societies' heritage stakeholders. Our approach involves the intentional facilitation of stakeholder consultation in all phases of the safeguarding process, in line with UNESCO's Operational Guidelines.[2] We were especially dedicated to involving minority-group stakeholders who are currently 'missing' from heritagisation processes due to the more technical and professional character of safeguarding processes while maintaining research ethics standards. Such an intervention through research, however, proved unnecessary. UNESCO raised a concern that the state and institutions for ICH protection would force communities to define practice and transmit their ICH in ways that are unacceptable to them, or to safeguard aspects of their intangible heritage which they do not wish to continue practising and transmitting, in the document 'Roles of stakeholders in implementing the Intangible Heritage Convention'. This is not the case with the interlocutors in Vojvodina, because they are willingly adapting their cultural representation in order for it to be suitable to be protected and financed. They see it as a way to help their community in economic terms and to ensure international importance and visibility. What is most intriguing is that during the field research, we discovered that the academic incentive may not be as necessary as we thought, and our interlocutors are working hard to impose themselves as the stakeholders.

## Do 32 ethnicities require 32 safeguarding practices?

> There are funds that actually finance you for being yourself?!.... To stay what you are and what you were... I will gladly use that...

An increasing number of ICH studies are concerned with cultural representation and cultural identity through the prism of political and social activism.[3] Since the ratification of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage by the Republic of Serbia in 2010, the competent administrative bodies have been established through which Serbia has become part of the global system for the preservation of the ICH.[4] In recent decades, the sporadic interests of various formal and informal non-governmental organisations have emerged, mostly composed of the bearers of the ICH elements, who have become interested in protecting them through the regulations of the Convention. The research was conducted in Vojvodina, an autonomous province of the Republic of Serbia, which has suffered repeated administrative, political, economic and cultural turmoil. Vojvodina in the present day is a multicultural autonomous province, a fertile ground for researching the construction

of identity based on the elements of intangible culture in the heritage of minority communities, as well as the consequences of multicultural policies. The research included interviews with individuals working in the context of cultural management; these interviews aimed to examine the reasons why and ways in which the interested parties in this multiethnic province have decided to deal with the protection of the ICH.

The field research was conducted between September 2015 and March 2019. For this particular article, 26 interviews were considered. The research included interviews with members of predefined minority groups (Macedonians, Hungarians, Slovaks, Romanians, Roma, Croats, Ruthenians, Bunjevci, Bosniaks, Albanians), but also with individuals whose identities are not easily or necessarily placed in any one of the categories, in accordance with their complex self-representation. In that sense, it is important to note that the research is dedicated to individuals who do not share the identity of the majority of the population of the Republic of Serbia – and the official knowledge of and attitude towards cultural heritage. Also significant is that any determination of identity was made by the respondents themselves, so some elements of cultural heritage, such as language, were not considered identity determinants if the respondent did not want them to be.[5]

It turned out that the respondents view their cultural identity as a resource that is worth cultivating in the right place and in the right way As Ana Góral noted, discussions about local development and the resources used to enhance it increasingly revolve around the multitude of so-called interest groups connected with such resources. When analysing the structure of the space in which ICH resources operate, it can be seen that its essential part includes people or groups who perceive these resources as an opportunity to meet their own individual needs or to develop the whole community. This development can be interpreted in different dimensions: social, economic, political and cultural. Thus, stakeholders, when they meet their needs by using cultural heritage resources, have a significant impact on their preservation and growth, and at the same time, these resources significantly affect the actors themselves as well as their development and relations with the environment. In this way, the interaction between cultural heritage resources and their users becomes bilateral (Góral 2018, 2). We developed this approach in a complex multi-ethnic region to suggest the need to incorporate a multilateral stakeholder interest model in further ICH research and management practices. By questioning whether each community requires the contextual calibration of safeguarding practice to meet its peculiarity, and thus legitimise the whole ICH safeguarding system, we argue for a multilateral stakeholder inclusion model to be further considered as a ground-breaking solution to the increased politicisation of heritagisation processes in post-conflict societies, and in the Western Balkans in particular. Cultural policies need to be understood not simply as administrative matters, but as a world view that defines the character of a society and how its citizenry define themselves (Mulcahy 2017, 8).

UNESCO's knowledge-to-policy materials[6] point out that culture has worth not only because of its inherent value but also because of its instrumental value. Culture is thus essential in addressing global challenges, through its role in economic growth, in human development, as a storehouse of environmental knowledge and as a symbolic force to bring stability and meaning to communities worldwide. It produces principles of inclusiveness and global ethics, enabling even the most marginalised individuals and groups to participate in development processes and benefit from them. Culture provides solutions that respond to local specificities, as a driver of development in its own right as well as a desirable outcome of development efforts. Culture is a powerful global economic engine generating jobs and income. Heritage, especially UNESCO World Heritage sites, produces revenue from visits and sale of local crafts, music and cultural products, for example, which in turn generate employment for communities. Culture also bears a reconstructive force: intercultural dialogue brings peace and possibilities of reconciliation in the event of conflict; following a disaster, culture in all its forms helps communities reconstruct their disrupted lives and restore psychological well-being. The symbolic force of cultural heritage is a further feature: culture is a wellspring of hope, enabling a deep sense of belonging. Social cohesion can also arise from cultural tourism: cultural heritage not only generates income but also builds social cohesion, mobilising communities around its care and management. Cultural festivals enhance dialogue. Traditional systems of environmental management are of special concern: accumulated traditional knowledge and the community practices of environmental management are fundamental to sustainability and essential for the survival of the place and people. Development approaches and programmes have often failed to recognise that societies categorised as

'underdeveloped' have in fact been living sustainably for generations.[7]

As Baxter has already pointed out, cultural heritage can be understood within a business context, in terms of an industrial sector comprising organisations working to supply products or services associated with the understanding, protection and promotion of objects, sites, monuments and other forms of tangible and intangible cultural heritage (2014, 2). In this case, informants regard their identity as a product and their behaviour as a service, which our fieldwork corroborates. This is most apparent in the context of tourism based on the heritage of humankind. The majority of global travel entails some element of the cultural past, as hundreds of millions of people visit cultural attractions, heritage festivals and historic places each year (Timothy 2011). Parts of the communities' inherited social constructs are being transformed into cultural heritage resources – commodities for exchange and exploitation through modern tourism development (George 2016, 15). Intangible heritage protection is more convenient for the exploitation of cultural identity as a resource, since it supports the value of 'carriers' and 'transmitters' of cultural heritage – not only the masterpieces but also the masters, the owners and successors of skills and knowledge (Abu Bakar, Osman and Bachok 2011, 3).

For anthropology there is another – not so bright – side of culture, perceived by many as oppressive and violent towards the human species, or some groups or individuals in a given time.[8] In addition, cultural identity refers to the cognitive and affective appreciation of group membership. Depending on personal and social circumstances, cultural identity can either be an asset or a danger (Vedder and Geel 2017, 1).

## Stakeholders in the province of Vojvodina

Throughout the cities and villages of Vojvodina, entities that are considered (by the community) as the most competent in interpreting, preserving and representing cultural heritage are local museums, cultural and artistic associations, tourist organisations and various NGOs. Members of the local community are not generally regarded, either by the general public or by themselves, as knowledgeable in the field of their own heritage.

When our interlocutor, who is in his 50s and declares himself a member of the Romanian community, was asked to interpret an ICH element, he responded with the following indicative statement:

> If you're interested in cultural heritage, I don't know what to tell you... You have traditional dance groups over there – they know it best... They make their own costumes and everything... Don't ask me...

There are many associations in parts of Vojvodina that deal with the promotion of cultural heritage. For them, it is an important resource and part of the entrepreneurial potential of the community. Some associations – for example, Vardar in the village of Kačarevov (which is actually a wider association based in Pančevo, covering the entire South Banat district), or Ethno Corner – have a museological and performative approach to culture, based on engaging concepts such as 'traditional', 'old' and 'aesthetic'. Many respondents refer to the 'protection of traditional values' as the main goal. In such associations, which are usually closely related to cultural and artistic societies in a given place, it is most convenient to connect with individuals who are in various ways related to cultural management. There, one can also find an individual who has a certain authority in the local administration and to whom everyone refers when it comes to large projects. Such an individual holds a sort of monopoly over cultural resources. Conversation can develop in several directions, depending on multiple parameters. One of them is the nature of the interviewee's job – whether the interviewee is employed in a state institution or is part of the non-governmental sector. The second is whether the interviewee feels any enthusiasm for cultural heritage or whether the interviewee's commitment is formal. This, of course, cannot be determined with precision, but there are respondents who admit that they are not interested, or at least were not initially motivated by interest in heritage and its protection:

> We had an idea about starting to do something... and what are we going to do... We are good managers; we were trained for that... We spotted the call for applications and we decided to get involved in cultural heritage.

Quite frequently, specialists from state institutions that are part of the network do not find the motivation to protect everything that is considered cultural heritage. A recent exploration of the bureaucratisation of heritage safeguarding (Bortolotto et al. 2020) pointed to not only

the promises but also the perils of a 'creative' approach to heritagisation. Our findings support the argument that bureaucratic creativity sometimes involves the power to re-create, exclude and use. For instance, an archaeologist from the town of Novi Sad noted in the interview that there is a 'great pomp about cultural heritage' and that 'today everything is considered to be cultural heritage [...] therefore, it is important to establish clear criteria'. However, there are many activists in the field of cultural heritage protection who show great enthusiasm and evident concern for the fate of cultural heritage. A member of the Romanian national minority considers himself a fighter for Romanian rights in Vojvodina and is dedicated to fighting for the preservation of cultural heritage elements that are recognised at the state level. He also viewed the ethnographic interview as an arena in which to fight to find something that would help him reach his goal.

> But wait, we can do everything together... You can help; I'll make connections... It's a noble job! I can see that you're interested.

There are not many young people who hold leadership positions in organisations and associations dealing with minority heritage. For an interlocutor from Petrovaradin, who is a 24-year-old member of one of the largest Hungarian associations in the province of Vojvodina, this is the real perspective:

> We [young people] do not want to be locked into ethnicity. We have friends of different nationalities, and we don't want ethnicity to matter. We would like to work... and have same opportunities, despite our differences.

'Being equal', however, is not always possible according not only to the testimonies of older members of minority groups but also to younger ones who live in other places:

> It's good to stick together with your people... Not everyone is the same here; they don't have the same level of [political] representation in places where it is important, and they are not recognised and appreciated in the same way.

Instead of conversation about ICH elements, there are inexhaustible narratives about projects, funds, organisations and associations. Self-identity becomes a resource for supporting everyday living and a strategy for survival in bureaucratic discourse. The words with which we began, highlighting 'funds that finance you for being yourself' are from a 28-year-old considering starting her own NGO. Her narrative is formed around the idea that the cultural heritage of minorities is not overshadowed by the heritage of the majority population of a country, but by the global heritage of the so-called developed world (which was among the founding narratives of the whole approach that led to the Convention).[9]

Interviewees of Roma ethnicity who are active in the field of protection of cultural heritage are primarily concerned about the existential problems of members of their community. They are culturally heterogeneous and not well organised because of differing identity markers such as language and religion. The narrative of an older Roma man from Novi Sad was formed around the excommunication he experienced within the Roma community because he speaks both Hungarian and Serbian, and because he is Catholic not Orthodox. The first step for the Roma, according to an activist in a Roma organisation in Novi Sad, the capital of the province, is to recognise the distinctive elements of the Roma minority. He sees cultural heritage, especially ICH, as a resource of cultural entrepreneurship. This is the prevailing narrative among respondents coming from identity-centred political parties and movements:

> Cultural heritage is our opportunity and future. One should be maximally involved in the flow of funds and know how to write a project application.

> When I found out about the intangible cultural heritage, I realised that someone had finally seen the real thing. Because people have rich cultural heritage... It is necessary to shed light on that... It is necessary to help... How we treat the heritage is the heritage we leave [to our children].

When asked how they see ICH, our interlocutors usually point to definitions which are extracts from the Convention. They consider ICH an important part of the cultural community, an identity creator and a powerful recreator, a 'gift from the past', a 'gift of our ancestors'. The notion of diversity was a dominant value for this group of interviewees:

> Intangible cultural heritage, for me, is primarily

> nurturing the tradition and cultural diversity that was formed in the past... The basic principle of oral culture is to preserve and pass tradition from older to younger generations and thus create a sense of identity and authenticity.

The interlocutor who gave this definition is currently living in Novi Sad. What he stated largely coincides with how the UNESCO Convention defines ICH, yet he adds an emotional connotation to it. As a history student, he is interested in the processes of the construction of national identities, but he is also one of the few individuals in cultural management who is emotionally invested in and culturally and ethically burdened by his actions. It turned out to be very important to ask additional questions about what it really means to 'do something' for your community. Respondents were highly motivated to help the community, both the minority to which they belong and the wider local community. There are answers regarding the connection of the community to the place as well as ones based on the symbolic elements of culture. These are the answers from an interlocutor from Kačarevo village, a mixture of many ethnicities, including members of former Yugoslav-recognised 'peoples' such as Macedonians:

> Some of our problems go beyond the problems of the community... I mean, we need finances for the village, to be nicer, better, to make it more pleasant for all of us to be there... It's for everyone, not just for Macedonians... Secondly, gender problems are universal, and we need to fight together... I want to tell you that we need to fight with every means provided to us.

One way to 'do something' for the community, respondents agree, is to protect the elements of ICH and to get involved in the protection system. And many are already working on it:

> We are collecting that documentation for one of our festivals, but it is certainly not easy. Sometimes enthusiasm alone is not enough, and that way is a little foreign to us... how to put it together, but, yes, we try... We have instructions... We are in contact with people. I think it's all good for us.

They also spoke about the importance of having a community interested in their intangible heritage:

> I think that identification with the intangible cultural heritage is important, and that it is something that is alive and that is transmitted and important for the members of that community.

A portion of the research was devoted to the interlocutors' daily lives outside of work and possible political engagement (some of them are members of the political parties of their minorities). Every word of the activist and cultural manager is carefully planned to serve the purpose of self-promotion and cultural representation. Questions about socialising and leisure were reduced in their answers either to authentic dinners with tambourines and wine, 'which is part of the mentality', or to the Exit[10] festival, which is a symbolic witness to the 'international' character of the residents of Novi Sad and its supranational competencies. Their lives are declaratively cosmopolitan, but they also have a deep awareness of the cultural heritage of the minority group to which they belong. When a Slovak girl spoke about naive painting (which is very valuable for the Slovak community because it is their only element included in the National Register of ICH elements),[11] she said that the motifs in the paintings depict the everyday life of the Slovak community. However, this cannot be completely true, because it is clear that painting portrays everyday life in a pastoral ideal, an imagined life in the past, which has little in common with the modern life of the Slovak community. Young Slovaks in Vojvodina do not frequently meet on rural estates, nor are agricultural techniques the same, nor are their national costumes worn on all occasions. However, only painting and the technique itself are part of the heritage, which is accepted by younger painters, and the creation of these narratives and their maintenance is an important part of preserving the Slovak identity.

Many interlocutors in cultural management are torn between the identity of the promoter of the UNESCO system for the protection of the ICH and European projects and the identity of the critic. There is always awareness about how regulations and project ideas are inapplicable to the domestic field, Vojvodina. Finally, it is important to consider the ambivalent attitude of the research participants, which we classified as a group of activists, towards the state and provincial administration, as evident in their statements. Some respondents, who work in the non-governmental sector, believe that the state is insufficiently active in matters of preserving minority heritage, that the means allocated for this particular activity are insignificant and symbolic and that they serve only 'to perpetuate

bureaucratic formalities'. However, this form provided by law can serve as a framework for political machinations, since before the parliamentary elections, mass minority parties were established in Vojvodina, which do not need to pass the general census to be part of the parliament, but use the principle of 'natural threshold'.[12] Therefore, there is a well-founded suspicion among our interlocutors, as well as among the general public, that some of these parties were established to represent minorities, but are in fact used by the ruling party:

> I believe that it is part of the plan of our ruling party[13] ... and in such an atmosphere, I am really not convinced that anyone really cares about either our lives or our cultural heritage. Because those in power use some of our minority privileges to gain even more power... I don't trust the state.

Whether such a suspicion is justified, it is not uncommon. It is expressed by almost all informants, except for a few individuals employed in the public sector, who are themselves members of the ruling party. The current political situation in Serbia, in relation to cultural heritage, identities and minority groups, deserves a separate and thorough analysis,[14] but it is an important factor in considering the possibility of creating an inclusive register. What is crucial in this case, as one of my respondents noted, is that

> people in Serbia who deal with cultural heritage are experts... archaeologists, you ethnologists, art historians... But they are not so much politicians yet. Even though they use it, they are not yet in decision-making positions because they do not see so much interest, you understand.

## Analysis

Cultural identity is an individual sense of self derived from formal or informal membership of groups that transmit and inculcate knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, traditions and ways of life (Lee 2016, 2). Let us start by stressing that not all the interviewees are in the same situation. Vojvodina's minorities differ in number, and they differ in cultural and demographic characteristics, such as average age and educational structure (Stojšin 2015, 35). Also, national minorities are not equally represented when promoting their values. Although there are many nationalities living in Vojvodina, the tourist product mostly covers the Hungarian and Slovak nationalities (Pivac et al. 2014, 38).

There are, then, evident differences within the same group of stakeholders. According to UNESCO's document 'Capacity building for stakeholders involved in safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage in Burkina Faso', there are at least five groups of stakeholders involved in implementing the Intangible Heritage Convention:

1) central government and regional and local administrations;
2) communities, groups and individuals who practise and transmit their ICH;
3) organisations designed or created by the state to oversee the implementation of the Convention;
4) NGOs and community-based organisations; and
5) experts, centres of expertise and research institutions.

While our interlocutors are drawn from all these stakeholder groups, most of them are active in some kind of NGO or community-based organisation. Even if some of these groups are intertwined and dependent on funds from outside the Republic of Serbia,[15] it was important for each of our interviewees to show respect for the regional coordinator in Serbia, the opinion of the Centre for Intangible Heritage of Serbia and the other groups so that cooperation on the whole can set an example of cultural heritage management, involving all stakeholders, especially the local community as a bearer of these resources.

This is the key to understanding why cultural identity is perceived as a resource. Once someone enters the bureaucratic arena of 'right' and 'positive' culture, they become intimidated by not being 'adequate' and therefore not financed. Some interlocutors were willing to admit that they are adjusting their cultural identity and elements of ICH to make them 'financeable'. Although the bearers of the heritage are also marked as stakeholders by UNESCO, if they decide to take their part in safeguarding activities, they either have to look for professional help or equip themselves to operate within the system.

What are the reasons for our interlocutors to participate in the management of their own ICH? The most common goals are to increase the tourist potential and attractiveness of the place where certain community

lives, to influence political mapping and to obtain greater participation in decision-making. These people insist on inclusion, first at the individual level and then at the community level. They are attempting to carve a path to administrative and political positions, as well as a place in the country's decision-making structure. Such activism should be encouraged because it is the foundation for establishing a valid basis for true minority participation in matters of public importance, especially since it is set by the minorities themselves, with the state providing support but not initiating the process, and by developing an overall strategy to include minorities (Grewe 2011, 66). In other words, the state should take advantage of any situation in which minority representatives wish to participate in state structures, because doing so demonstrates that minority groups respect the state and see it as a legitimate actor and a structure within which they can gain their rights. Protests, riots, turning to home or third countries, avoiding the government and other actions are possible alternatives (Gillion 2013, 58–64). To summarise, when the bearers of ICH elements from various communities in Vojvodina begin to participate in the safeguarding system, they are not only 'just bearers' but activists operating in the domain of identity politics through strategic self-essentialisation.

As Baxter has already pointed out, cultural heritage can be understood within a business context, in terms of an industrial sector comprising organisations working to supply products or services associated with the understanding, protection and promotion of objects, sites, monuments and other forms of tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Baxter 2014, 2). In this case, informants regard their identity as a product and their behaviour as a service, which our fieldwork corroborates. This is most apparent in the context of tourism based on the heritage of humankind. The majority of all global travel entails some element of the cultural past, as hundreds of millions of people visit cultural attractions, heritage festivals and historic places each year (Timothy 2011). Parts of the communities' inherited social constructs are now being transformed into cultural heritage resources – commodities for exchange and exploitation through modern tourism development (George 2016, 15). Intangible heritage protection is more convenient for the exploitation of cultural identity as a resource, since it supports the value of 'carriers' and 'transmitters' of cultural heritage – not only the masterpieces but also the masters, the owners and successors of the skills and knowledge (Abu Bakar, Osman and Bachok 2011, 3).

## Conclusion: on the relevance of the phenomenon of 'self-stakeholderisation' of ICH bearers

We discovered that, according to UNESCO's definition of stakeholders' 'division of labor', informants who belong to the second group (communities, groups and individuals who practise and transmit their ICH) are strategically and voluntarily shifting to the third (organisations designed or created by the state to oversee the implementation of the Convention, such as NGOs and community-based organisations). As a result, our research shows that 32 ethnicities do not require 32 safeguarding practices because they were discovered to stakeholderise themselves in a unified manner. Individuals or groups are recognising their own status as stakeholders in a particular context, rather than being defined as stakeholders by external parties. This could potentially involve asserting their rights or interests, or advocating for their perspectives to be taken into account in decision-making processes. In the context of bottom-up initiatives, 'self-stakeholderisation' could refer to the process of individuals or communities identifying themselves as stakeholders in a particular issue or project and taking ownership of their role in effecting change.

The concept of 'self-stakeholderisation' could be useful in explaining heritage safeguarding practices by minorities, especially if the focus is on bottom-up approaches to cultural heritage preservation. For example, if a minority group is at risk of losing their cultural heritage as a result of external pressures or neglect from mainstream institutions, they may need to take proactive measures to safeguard their heritage and take ownership of the process through initiatives such as community-led conservation, documentation and advocacy. The minority group can assert their agency and stakeholder status in the heritage preservation process by 'self-stakeholderising', rather than relying solely on external actors to take action. This can help ensure that their perspectives, values and practices are considered and that their ICH is protected in a meaningful and relevant way to their community. In this sense, 'self-stakeholderisation' can be viewed as a way for minority groups to shape the narrative surrounding their heritage in ways that reflect their own experiences and perspectives, thereby strengthening their sense of cultural identity and preserving their heritage for future generations. Unlike standard anthropology and critical heritage studies' approach, which sees the system as inherently and systemically violent towards minorities,

during the fieldwork we encountered the ICH safeguarding system as a way for people or movements to assert their agency and stakeholder status in situations where their cultural heritage is neglected or threatened.

'Self-stakeholderisation' can also be a powerful tool for preserving minority heritage, particularly in situations where external actors may not prioritise the needs and perspectives of minority communities. Minority communities may not need to invent new ways to protect their heritage in some cases, but rather to self-stakeholderise themselves within existing systems or structures. Advocating for their interests and perspectives within established institutions, such as government agencies or cultural heritage organisations, can be part of this. Collaboration with external actors to promote minority heritage preservation may also be part of this approach. Minority communities, for example, could collaborate with cultural heritage organisations or academic institutions to conduct research, devise conservation strategies or raise awareness about the importance of their heritage. This is what we discovered as well: by becoming self-stakeholders within larger heritage preservation networks, minority communities can leverage their own expertise and perspectives to help shape how heritage is safeguarded and promoted.

When communities feel excluded, they can position themselves as stakeholders in the heritage safeguarding process by accepting the existing UNESCO-based system. By doing so, they can advocate for the inclusion of their cultural heritage in the heritage safeguarding process and promote their own vision of cultural heritage preservation within the existing framework. This approach can be especially effective when there is a lack of resources or support for the preservation of minority cultural heritage, or when there are political or social barriers to participation. At the same time, it is critical to acknowledge that the existing UNESCO-based system in any given country is not always fully inclusive or representative of all cultural traditions and identities. The Vojvodina province may serve as a positive policymaking example, as well as an area of interest for future modelling of a globally applicable self-stakeholderisation model.

In general, communities must continue to advocate for their rights and promote their cultural heritage, as well as engage in dialogue and collaboration with other stakeholders, to ensure that the heritage safeguarding process is inclusive and representative of all voices. However, it is frequently difficult. Political marginalisation, discrimination, a lack of resources, unequal representation or a failure to recognise certain cultural traditions and identities are all common barriers to inclusion. A minority community's ability to self-stakeholderise in the heritage safeguarding system will be determined by a variety of factors, including the local context, political climate, available resources and the community's specific needs and priorities.

Strategies that communities can use to self-stakeholderise themselves in the heritage safeguarding system include the following: building alliances and networks with other minority communities and civil society organisations that share similar goals and values; developing partnerships with academic institutions and heritage experts to increase the visibility and recognition of the community's cultural heritage; engaging in advocacy and outreach to government authorities, policymakers and the general public; conducting self-initiated research and documentation on the community's cultural heritage and sharing this knowledge with other stakeholders; developing innovative and inclusive approaches to heritage preservation that reflect the community's values and priorities. We conclude that self-stakeholderisation, which allows for a collaborative approach to safeguarding cultural heritage, can be an effective post-conflict strategy for minority heritage preservation. In situations where there has been conflict or tension between minority communities and the state apparatus, dialogue and collaboration may be more productive than confrontation. Minority communities can work towards a shared goal of heritage preservation while also building relationships and fostering understanding between different groups by self-stakeholderising within existing systems or collaborating with external actors. This can aid in conflict resolution and social cohesion. In this sense, self-stakeholderisation can be viewed as a constructive and non-violent approach to post-conflict heritage preservation that can aid in the promotion of healing and reconciliation among various groups.

More comparative research is needed to determine whether what seem to be significant findings in this research are inherent, unintended consequences of the implementation of the ICH safeguarding system in general, or a contextual specificity of our fieldwork.

## ENDNOTES

1. This article resulted from the research programmes financed by the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy (451-03-47/2023-01/ 200163) and by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (SICHWEB Identities grant no. 1534).
2. The Operational directives raise a number of possibilities and suggestions regarding the need for increased sensitivity to minority heritage by state parties. They significantly modify the heritagization process in terms of stakeholder inclusion and are important, yet under researched, extension of the Convention itself. https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ICH-Operational_Directives-7.GA-PDF-EN.pdf
3. Some of the most influential are Lixinski (2011), Aykan (2014), Mozaffari and Jones (2020).
4. As stated in a periodic report on the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage submitted to UNESCO: 'The National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia passed the Law on Ratification of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage on 5 May 2010, thereby initiating the process of safeguarding ICH in accordance with the standards set out in the Convention. Establishment of the legislative and institutional framework began with the formation of competent bodies and adoption of implementing regulations which define the powers and procedures for the systemic safeguarding of ICH. The network of institutions and competent bodies in charge of implementing the Convention was put in place in 2011 and 2012 and includes: the National Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage, the Commission on Inscription of ICH in the National Registry, the Network of Regional Coordinators (for Vojvodina, Belgrade, Central Serbia, Western Serbia, Eastern Serbia, Southern Serbia and Kosovo and Metohija), as well as the Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia operating within the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade.' https://ich.unesco.org/en-state/serbia-RS?info=periodic-reporting.
5. All of the interlocutors suggested that anonymisation techniques, which are common in ethnographic research, be avoided. They insisted on having their voices heard, but we strictly adhered to the ethical guidelines that govern our research and removed data that could potentially harm them.
6. These leaflets, recommendations, guidelines and handbooks can be found in the open online library: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/.
7. These examples are extracted from the UNESCO programme and meeting document 'The Power of culture for development', 2010.
8. Useful introductions are Giles (1987) and Hall (1980).
9. One of the goals of 2003 Convention was 'maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalisation'. https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003.
10. EXIT is a world-renowned music festival, founded in 2000 as a symbol of democratic changes, celebrating democracy and human rights. The festival has become a symbol of Novi Sad and Vojvodina and a cornerstone of contemporary Serbian popular culture. It has twice won the Best Major Festival award at the European Festivals Awards, in 2013 and 2017. EXIT also won the 'Best European Festival' award at the UK Festival Awards in 2007. https://www.exitfest.org/en/exit-family/.
11. Naive Slovak painting encompasses the painting knowledge and skills of painters – members of the Slovak ethnic community in Serbia, primarily in Kovačica, but also in other villages and towns in Vojvodina predominantly inhabited by Slovaks. More information available on the link http://nkns.rs/en/popis-nkns/slovak-naive-art-painting-naivno-slikarstvo-slovaka.
12. Here is a more elaborate observation of minority 'natural threshold' usage: 'The electoral law of the RS states that "[n]ational minority political parties are all those parties whose primary objective is to represent the interests of a national minority and to protect and improve the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, in accordance with international legal standards", and also minority parties are not subject to the threshold of 5 (or, under the new proposal, 3) percent of the vote to enter parliament – just reaching the natural threshold is enough to get one or more MPs from the list of a national minority political party into parliament. According to the ministry of public administration and local self-government, a total of 115 parties are registered in Serbia. Out of these, almost two-thirds are national minority parties. The group contains a wide variety, from a supposedly Slovak national party called the War Veterans of Serbia to the European Green party, which is declaratively a Russian minority organisation. No one has ever heard a word spoken in Hungarian by Nikola Sandulović, the president of the Republican Party, even though his organisation is registered as a political party of the Hungarian national community'. (The official website of this party uses only Serbian language and Cyrillic script). Similar examples are too numerous to count. https://pescanik.net/one-off-tool-to-eliminate-rivals/.

13. The Serbian Progressive Party has been the ruling party in the Republic of Serbia since 2012.
14. There are already a significant number of papers concerning this subject: Milenković (2014; 2016), Ćuković (2017), Ćuković and Milenković (2020), Gavrilović (2010), Krstanović and Divac (2012) and Vrdoljak (2005).
15. Participants in our research were willing to share the information on their use of funding from the EU, United States and so on. Vojvodina Hungarians look to make alliances with foreign actors, including the Hungarian government, the US government, EU institutions and assorted other media outlets and NGOs (Hagan 2009, 614).

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# Between representation and performance: celebrating intangible cultural heritage in the Longji Ancient Zhuang Village, Longji Terraces, China

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# Between representation and performance: celebrating intangible cultural heritage in the Longji Ancient Zhuang Village, Longji Terraces, China[1]

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## ABSTRACT

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) serves as a powerful tool for representing cultural diversity and fostering local development in China. The state-led administrative system of ICH conveys the shift from immaterial cultural manifestations to an essential resource for cultural production and national identity construction in ethnic minority areas. Heritage tourism brings about ICH-making occurring at the national, regional and local levels, contributing to the creation of official heritage discourses. However, for ethnic minority communities, ICH is part of their everyday lives, even though it might not be recognised, staged and celebrated as an authorised ICH. Contextualised within the dimension of performance, ICH is also related to emotion and experience. Thus, this paper investigates the representation and performance of ICH within and beyond official heritage discourse, by drawing on the Longji Ancient Zhuang Village in China as a case study. It argues that ICH-making that community members participate in or control is not only for cultural representation and tourism consumption but also a means for self-expression and engaging a sense of place.

## Keywords

intangible cultural heritage, representation, performance, official heritage discourse

## Introduction

ICH is a locally empowering approach for the local community and people to represent and express themselves. Entangled with issues of representation and performance, this research sheds light on how community members conduct ICH-making and sustain their traditions onstage and behind the scenes within the context of China's ICH safeguarding and tourism. Drawing upon the UNESCO framework of safeguarding ICH, China established a top-down and multilayered administration of ICH by developing policies and enacting legislation. The state published the ICH lists, thereby selectively safeguarding and representing ICH items and inheritors. The institutionalisation of ICH theoretically presents a systematic and comprehensive approach to identifying, documenting, protecting and promoting ICH at multiple levels. This ICH safeguarding structure empowers officials and experts to formulate and implement policies but easily discounts local conditions and structural tensions among heritage agencies at different levels (Xu et al. 2022), as local authorities can also manipulate and shape policies that accommodate their developmental goals and needs.

Grounded in the state's policy efforts to combine ICH safeguarding and economic development, local ICH

initiatives have been driven by governmental agencies to address poverty alleviation and promote cultural tourism. As a key development strategy, heritage tourism is an integral component of the state-led heritage-making process (Light 2015, 145). ICH accordingly becomes a sustainable resource for tourist activities, which is selected, represented and leveraged by tourism industry players (Su 2019; Zhu and Liu 2021). The safeguarding process of ICH at the local level has always been in the control of regional and local authorities and external heritage professionals – meaning that the local ICH process is in the hands of those who are not embedded in the ICH itself. ICH as a living cultural manifestation of humanity seems to be recontextualised as an 'experts' discursive game' (Yu 2015).

Local communities and people are the core players to maintain the viability of cultural traditions and expressions, yet their perceptions have regularly been glossed over in the official actions of safeguarding and representing their cultural traditions (Gilman 2022). Officially recognised ICH has been authenticated and assigned symbolic meanings by outsiders. Official ICH discourses centring on the protection and utilisation of cultural traditions place community members who practise them in a secondary position, potentially disempowering them (Beardslee 2015). From another point of view, Yu (2015) reflected on a vernacular way of safeguarding and transmitting ICH; Yu then unearthed that the local villagers can exercise their authority over the ritual by resisting dominant tourism discourses. In light of this, official ICH-making has an impact on the local ICH safeguarding attempts while official ICH discourses can also be marginalised in the everyday lives of most local community members (You 2015).

Some of the literature drawn from critical heritage studies have already incorporated critiques regarding the neglect of the perspective of local community members into their discussions. They accentuate community members' subjectivity in determining what constitutes ICH, what is authentic, its cultural value and the worthiness of safeguarding ICH and representing it to others (Beardslee 2015; Su 2018). ICH can be a resource of power for unofficial actors in dialogue and contestation with official heritage discourses (Smith 2006). Local community members' construction of ICH occurs in their daily lives, which capitalises on or ignores ICH values set by official institutions and other stakeholders (Crouch 2015).

This research, affected by these perceptions, critically – and in a nuanced way – examines ICH practices and performances conducted by community members from the Longji Ancient Zhuang Village (Longji Village). It acknowledges the impact of official ICH safeguarding efforts and tourism development on ICH-making and delves into the nature and experiences of community members' engagement with official ICH discourses. Simultaneously, it discusses how community members make ICH as performance, offering a further understanding of their ways of preserving it. Their feelings, emotions and memories evoked by their ICH determine whether they make it sustainable, as a form of alternative heritage discourse.

The Longji Village is located in the Longsheng Autonomous County (Longsheng County) of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China. It can be regarded as a geographically and culturally defined community of Zhuang people.[2] The terms 'community members' and 'villagers' are used interchangeably in this research to refer to people who live in the Longji Village. The Longji Village officially consists of four villages, or three lineage villages: the Liao Family Village (廖家寨), Hou Family Village (侯家寨), and Pan Family Village (潘家寨), which includes the Pingduan and Ping Villages (平段和平寨). Because of Longji Village's terraced landscape, it also belongs to the Longji Terraced Fields Scenic Area (龙脊梯田风景区) as Longji Cultural Terraced Ancient Zhuang Village (龙脊古壮寨梯田文化观景区), which is in combination with Pingan Zhuang Terraced Fields Scenic Spot (平安壮族梯田景观区) and the Jingkeng Red Yao Terraced Fields Scenic Spot (金坑红瑶梯田景观区).

## Making ICH as representation and performance

Related to the economy, the official framework for ICH safeguarding has bolstered its marketisation. The convergence of ICH discourse and tourism development domestically not only has a powerful impact on local ICH-making processes but also motivates local communities and people to practise and commodify their cultural forms and yield economic returns. At the local level, heritage authorities endow ICH with representational meanings and, as shown in this study, interweave it with the idea of ethnicity, which displays the varied cultural identities of people from ethnic minority groups who create and possess it. Thus, cultural practices officially identified as

ICH become a 'marker[s] of identity' and representations of locality and cultural diversity within unity instead of communities' own self-expressions and collective memories (Maags 2018, 139).

On the other hand, heritage tourism serves as the 'major intersection of authenticity and heritage' (Silverman 2015, 80). Community members' participation in official ICH-making allows them to represent themselves and negotiate cultural meanings. Moreover, ICH construction is not only a representational practice but also an unpredictable and dynamic practice that can destabilise narratives and identities predetermined by heritage authorities. People are always at the heart of representing and performing practices, skills, memories, knowledge and other facets of ICH. Importantly, community members' ICH safeguarding initiatives can be independent of official ICH discourses. Local communities and people might be not interested in heritage protection actions or concerned about the authorised recognition of cultural traditions they practise. As Kuah and Liu (2017, 4) noted, 'they continue to live their life around them'.

The emotions and memories that community members experience can affect their construction of heritage value and change their attitudes towards heritage stewardship, no matter whether official heritage discourses manoeuvre their engagement with heritage or not (Crouch 2015; Svensson and Maags 2018). As Smith (2006, 70) suggested, emotion is a critical issue in considering the performativity of heritage. To initiate a thorough consideration or rethinking of community members' construction of ICH values and their motivations, it is necessary to scrutinise ICH as performance and its ability to present alternative ICH stories.

The concept of performance in the domain of heritage studies dissects how heritage offers embodied and affective experiences that engage communication between performers and spectators. Within the field of heritage tourism, the idea of heritage as performance has been proposed and endorsed as a cultural process of heritage construction that allows the audience to negotiate or re-create heritage meanings (Haldrup and Bærenholdt 2015; Smith 2015). Haldrup and Bærenholdt (2015) also focus on visitors' affective engagement with heritage by distinguishing performances of, at and with heritage. Advancing Nigel Thrift's non-representational theory, they note that 'heritage meanings are practiced in processes involving people experiencing heritage' (Haldrup and Bærenholdt 2015, 52).

Situating the notion of performance within the exploration of community members' ICH-making, this study accentuates the powerful and symbolic agency of ICH performances (McKerrell and Pfeiffer 2020, 26). As Tolia-Kelly, Waterton and Watson (2016, 2) note, making heritage as performances moves beyond representational issues, underscoring terms of affect, memory, emotion and feeling. Understanding ICH as performance can begin with two aspects: one considers performance of or with ICH as 'an embodied practice and an act of communication' (McKerrell and Pfeiffer 2020, 22); the other states that 'this embodied practice has a function in the present' (McKerrell and Pfeiffer 2020, 22; Smith 2006). In other words, ICH performances are physical and emotional experiences in which multiple layers of meanings and values have been created, remade and practised to transmit sense of place and assist the manifestation of identities (Smith 2015).

Community members and outsiders all engage in encounters through experiencing the past constructed for the present, and their divergent responses to ICH-based performances can create affective atmospheres or spaces exuding powerful expressions of heritage. Certainly, the interaction between performers and spectators is not one-sided and rigid (Wulf 2015). It is intricate: cultural practitioners from the community as performers not only produce but also experience and embrace the variety of experiences offered by spectators. The audience – including other community members and outsiders – can also be viewed as performers who actively make sense of the past and develop diverse ways of interpreting and experiencing heritage.

Community members' beings, embodiments and feelings emerge from the process of practising ICH. Acting as performers and audience, they stage and practise ICH to communicate with each other and share symbolic knowledge, which brings about communal integration, local identities and cultural reproduction (Wulf 2015). Further, according to Herman (2017, 318), 'places, place-based practices, and material constructs' are integral components of ICH values. Community members assert their subjectivity in the production and transmission of tacit and embodied knowledge, in which their bodies serve as the medium that makes the meaning of a place (Ruggles and Silverman 2009; Wulf 2015). The correlation among

ICH, place and identity facilitates the dissemination of community members' emotional attachment to a location and how they continue to tell their own stories in their daily acts and experiences (Herman 2017).

This paper was developed from a part of my doctoral study on heritage-making, including research on an ethnic ecomuseum project launched in the Longji Zhuang Ancient Village. It employed an ethnographic approach by interviewing villagers and engaging in participant observation in the Longji Zhuang Ancient Village. Collecting data for this research primarily took place from May to July 2018. For the preliminary purpose of uncovering complicated power relations among official and unofficial actors embedded in the local heritage construction, interviewing villagers and observing their cultural activities facilitated a comprehensive exploration of their ICH-making process. Nevertheless, after communicating with and living with villagers, I noticed that the sustainability of some local cultural lifeways, to a large extent, rests on community members' work for tourism revenues and personal interests.

## Safeguarding ICH in the Longji Ancient Zhuang Village

A great deal of domestic and international research has focused on the Longji Terraces, particularly in the domains of heritage tourism and ecomuseology (Chio 2013). Within such studies, the tension between ICH safeguarding and tourism development has been an ongoing issue that demands addressing. The fluidity of cultural heritage means it is 'not a legacy in any part already complete' (Holtorf 2018, 644). Rather than salvaging ICH as endangered, a dynamic and sustainable approach enhances its practitioners' and their communities' ability to adapt to its changing nature and harness it for economic well-being (Holtorf 2018). Heritage recognition and practices of community members are co-opted by official heritage discourses, which are manipulated and governed by political authorities or influential stakeholders. Community members can be actively or passively involved in the official heritage discourses.

In the Longji Village, the official ICH safeguarding framework encompasses the recognition and designation of ICH in the listings, as well as ecomuseological approaches and practices that sustain the tourism. For instance, the Anthropology Museum of Guangxi (AMGX) in Nanning (the capital city of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region) conducted a heritage preservation practice at the Longji Village as a part of the museum's '1+10 ethnic ecomuseums project', in conjunction with regional and local heritage authorities and heritage professionals. The ecomuseum's exhibition centre opened to the public in 2010 and, since then, the Longji Village has been considered as an ethnic ecomuseum. In 2018, the Longsheng government's application to the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation was successfully approved. The 'heritagisation' of the Longji Terraced Fields Scenic Area has allowed the Longsheng government to publicise the Longji area as an internationally renowned heritage site.

According to empirical research, many villagers did not express a firm commitment to transmitting traditions and histories, even though they realised their heritage was 'at risk'. These villagers are all local Zhuang people and belong to different lineage villages of the Longji village. Almost half of them are elders, and the rest are between 30 and 50. Most of the villagers actively participated in tourist activities, such as operating restaurants and family hotels or acting in performances to increase family income. When I communicated with them, they hardly expressed a desire to preserve cultural traditions, but they were willing to share their interests on folk songs, embroidery making, alcohol making and other cultural activities.



**Figure 1**
The terraced fields of the Longji Ancient Zhuang Village.
Photograph taken by the author.

Oakes (2013, 383) points out that cultural heritage is 'a knowledge of culture that emerges not from villagers themselves, but which nevertheless claims to represent them'. A few villagers delineate their conceptions of ICH:

> It is hard to express what cultural heritage is. Intangible cultural heritage represents our Zhuang history and lifestyles without literary inscriptions. For example, ploughing fields is also an expression of our culture. Our Wan folk songs as well.[3]

> Intangible cultural heritage is *yuanshengtai,* including singing and dancing [...] but [I] do not entirely understand it [...] It seems to be a simple part of our lives, but it is intangible cultural heritage. What elders did in the past can be the heritage of this culture now.[4]

As their words indicate, ICH is part of their everyday lives. Thus, for them, ICH represents traditional craft or skill possessed by elders, and *yuanshengtai* (原生态), an original way of life. To some extent, the notion of *yuanshengtai* reflects their problematic and exoticised depiction of cultural traditions, pandering to others' stereotypical imagination of them and the claim to local uniqueness compared with other scenic spots (Luo 2017).

The imbalanced tourism development and financial return among three Longji scenic spots and the migration of younger generations have exacerbated the crisis of sustaining the cultural landscape. Agricultural production is no longer the primary source of livelihood for some people in the villages, and many rice terraces have fallen into disuse. To guarantee the continual safeguarding of intangible agricultural practices and landscapes, the tourism company of the Longji Scenic Area offered the Longji Village rice seeds. These seeds can grow in up to five colours, and the company suggested cultivating this type of rice to create five-colour paddies. This new eye-catching spectacle was designed to attract more tourists and romanticise this ethnic community (Blum 2001). However, some villagers appreciated that it maintained their terraced fields as a tourism-based commodity.

An ideal of ecomuseum provides a holistic and sustainable approach that safeguards ICH, highlighting community participation and empowerment to enhance the connection between the community and its ICH (Nitzky 2012). Furthermore, the ethnic ecomuseum project launched in the Longji Village prioritises the expertise and authority of community members in heritage preservation. In the setting of the ecomuseum, professionals from the AMGX have undertaken a series of actions contributing to heritage preservation, such as establishing an exhibition centre in the Pan Family Village, an ICH transmission centre in the Hou Family Village and recording heritage. The cultural memory project is one of the principal ecomuseological practices, which encourage community members to use cultural mapping techniques to engage with their cultural practices.

This community-based participatory approach serves as a practical tool for the community to 'capture more symbolic and intangible aspects of place' (Duxbury 2015, 1) from their insights. For instance, Mr Hou filmed a short video named 'Yeast for making alcohol', which recorded the making of water liquor (水酒). His interpretation demonstrated his ability to pursue, convey and appreciate the value of their heritage as knowledge instead of iconography or symbolism. A few community members who were also invested to share local knowledge and identity found approaches to present and celebrate their cultural heritage in their own way.

The ecomuseum ultimately has not embraced a holistic or useful approach that encourages villagers to recognise and participate in its ICH safeguarding, which remains an unfamiliar academic concept for these villagers. Some cultural traditions, such as the costumes of northern Zhuang people, water liquor, embroidery and agricultural skills related to terraces that villagers share with Zhuang communities who live in other scenic spots, are hardly selling points for cultural distinctiveness. The ecomuseological approach and tourism discourse perform a limited function in reinforcing the enthusiasm of community members for ICH safeguarding.

## Performing ICH for tourism

On the morning of 27 July 2018, most Longji villagers took the earliest bus from their village to Longsheng County. They were required to wear their traditional white Zhuang costumes, and they gathered at a square in Longsheng County where the opening ceremony of the 7th Longji Terraced Fields Cultural Festival was held. A splendid parade, including participants from local areas, took place there. When the parade passed by, residents and tourists could distinguish where these

performers came from and which ethnic groups they belonged to simply from the flags they held and the outfits they wore.

Various members of ethnic minorities from distant villages, dressed in colourful costumes, were treated as tourist attractions to demonstrate the modern and romantic image of cultural diversity. Apart from the parade, the Longsheng Cultural Bureau carried out a range of events, such as the ICH programmes. Some villagers from Longji Village sold bamboo rice during the festival, and two sang folk songs, representing traditional music in the Longji Scenic Area. Other Zhuang villages showcased other ICH practices, such as water liquor distillation and embroidery. The heritage that the Longji villagers presented to tourists did not embody the 'representativeness' of its Zhuang culture, which made it difficult for them to assert their unique cultural identity through shared cultural heritage. Under this circumstance, ICH cannot be identified as a competitive advantage that supports the Longji Village's heritage tourism.

Chhabra (2019, 2) described ICH as a 'distinct selling asset for host communities', which is critical in the competition among heritage destinations and can contribute to sustainable tourism development. However, cultural practices in the Longji Village, governed by Longsheng County, have been selected and framed as shared ICH to serve a political agenda for integrating ethnic minority cultures with tourism. Unfortunately, these shared ICH practices have led to the homogenisation of tourism resources and have intensified the competition between these communities. Community members in the Longji Village are hardly driven by shared resources to safeguard ICH for tourism.

Since 2012, Longsheng County has held the Longji Terraces Cultural Festival (龙脊梯田文化节) every year. This spectacular festival is tied to the Longsheng government's marketing strategy to transform cultural heritage into cultural and tourism products, and it promotes this location as a culture-rich tourism destination. The Longsheng government created this festival to showcase the diversity of ethnic minority cultures in the county and increase the ability of the Longji Terraced Fields to raise local revenue. The 'festivalisation' of culture pertaining to the Longji Terraced Fields indicates that the formation of the local tourism discourse heavily relies on the cultural landscape of the terraced fields.

Having branded itself as the 'County of Hundreds of Festivals' (百节之县), the Longsheng government structured a marketing framework for festivalising the ICH practices of ethnic groups in the county and legitimising the heritagisation of their traditional festivals as one aspect of folklorisation (Hafstein 2018).[5] In this sense, the festival created and reinvented for tourism is 'a genre of display characteristic of intangible heritage' (Hafstein, 2018, 148), enabling official and unofficial heritage stakeholders to stage their expressions of identity and cultural authenticity. ICH performance in the festival is tasked with attaching meaning to a destination, fuelling a series of promotional activities linked with it that are carried out by stakeholders such as the Longsheng government, travel agents, local entrepreneurs and ethnic communities.

Performing ICH is not merely a channel through which community members in the Longji Village communicate their knowledge and expertise; it embroils them in a political task of cultural production. The official heritage discourse is 'in theory, positive processes in which cultural sites and practices are recognised as being of value' (Zhu and Maags, 2020, 146). While community members' heritage mobilisation and representation barely depart from the 'the upper scale of heritage' (Lähdesmäki, Zhu and Thomas 2019, 11), they passionately participate in the tourism industry because of their distinct motivations and interests (Svensson and Maags 2018).

Collaborating with community members, the Longsheng government and tourism company have purposely revived and repackaged the traditional festivals of ethnic communities living in the Longji area. These festivals have been manipulated and legitimised as one of the significant vehicles for agricultural tourism and heritage entertainment to thrive beyond their original 'superstitious' and spiritual meanings to generate tourism revenue. Throughout the year, more than five festivals are held in different ethnic communities in the Longji Scenic Area, including the Long Hair Festival in March, the Kaigeng Festival (开耕) of the Longji Village in May, the Shuyang (梳秧) Festival of the Pingan Village in June, the Shaiyi (晒衣) Festival in July and the Kailian (开镰) Festival in October.

As some villagers mentioned, these festivals are not inscribed as valuable ICH or respected as meaningful rituals or ceremonies. Their names and historical backgrounds became the new cultural economy with a

collective title: 'Longji Terraced Cultural Festivals'. The tourism company and community members negotiated to create some new events for this festival, such as a greeting ceremony and a fish-catching competition to entertain tourists. Every village had to encourage a certain number of villagers to join and perform how they celebrate these festivals.

The Kaigeng Festival, held in the Longji Village every spring, signifies the start of the ploughing season. This festival used to be full of religious rituals associated with the local communities' agricultural production and worship of nature. In the past, the elder chiefs (寨老) in the Longji Village would invite Daoist priests (道师) to enshrine and commemorate the gods of land and pray for a good harvest, sacrificing livestock at the edge of the terraced fields. Currently, community members dress up and visit the terraced fields to show how they use their traditional instruments or buffalos to plough their fields. Female villagers are supposed to welcome tourists at the welcoming reception of the Longji Village. At night, they sing and dance in official performances. However, this festival has been instrumentalised as a symbol of the cultural authenticity of the locals to pander to tourist interests in experiencing the 'original' lifestyles of the village. Indeed, the appropriation of this festival has deviated from its original cultural meanings and the local identities embedded in it (Maags 2018, 124). From community members' perceptions, the transformation of the Kaigeng Festival is acceptable, as its original meaning and functions are no longer significant in their lives.

## Celebrating ICH beyond representation

The section above delineates the impact of heritage tourism on the festivalisation of heritage. This section, based on three sub-cases, yields another dimension to the understanding of community members' ICH-making. Crucially, the line between villagers' tourism activities and their lives behind the scenes is becoming blurred. Without demonstrating a strong commitment to living traditions, they sustain and celebrate some ICH organically.

### 1. 'The doubling of the world'

An elder of the Hou Family Village passed away during my fieldwork. The three-day funeral ceremony held in front of the visitor centre was under the gaze of tourists at all times. The ICH transmission centre constructed by ecomuseum practitioners had also temporarily become the extended reception area for people who attended the rite. The local Daoist priests had been invited to perform the religious rite, which was part of the folklore in the Longji Village and inevitably became a special experience for tourists who witnessed this rite. Villagers' daily lives blended with what villagers presented to tourists. Residents in Longji treated their village as a tourist destination by mobilising their heritage and ethnicity, but it also continued to be a space where they spent their daily lives. This 'condition of drifting back and forth between the two worlds', proposed by Ogino (2016, 25), is 'the doubling of the world'. Experiencing 'the doubling of the world', they could not clearly differentiate what they staged for tourists from their everyday experiences – the two had grown inseparable. Due to the impact of tourism, their performances gave them new forms of identity that intertwined with their original ones, instead of generating a loss of local identity (Tapp 2008).

### 2. The worship of Moyi Dawang

If the Kaigeng Festival in the Longji Village resulted from the interference of local authorities and markets, the She Festivals (社节) and the Wugumiao (五谷庙节) Festival are locals' dynamic and independent expressions of belief, and they represent their contemporary demands. Every February and August of the lunar calendar, there are celebrations of the She Festivals held at two family



**Figure 2**
The funeral rite in front of the visitor centre (Hou Family Village). Photograph taken by the author.

temples in the Longji Village – Moyi Dawang Temple (莫一大王) and the temple of the Hou Family Village (侯家寨庙) – by Liao and Hou Family Villages. The Moyi Dawang Temple is always locked to avoid tourists visiting. Both villages enshrine Moyi Dawang, but for residents, these festivals are family rituals rather than ceremonies for the entire village. The Wugumiao Festival in June commemorates the birthday of Moyi Dawang, as villagers from the Liao family believe that Moyi Dawang saved their ancestors. It has now been transformed to replicate the She Festivals.

Historically, Moyi Dawang was the hero of the Zhuang people in the northern Guangxi area and gradually became the God of Land of some Zhuang communities. During the She Festivals and the Wugumiao Festival, villagers invite the divine (师公) to perform the ritual, and they slaughter chickens, ducks, goats and pigs at temples. Pig jaws would hang at temples to prove that attendees had already finished the ritual. Consequently, villagers believed that Moyi Dawang would bless the safety of the whole village and relieve people of suffering, and they could anticipate a bumper harvest. This tradition is evolving and adapts to current social and cultural circumstances.

The meaning of the She Festivals has been expanded from Moyi Dawang worship to a voluntary day of roads, bridge or pavilion reconstruction, and it represents a family gathering day. Notwithstanding that the villagers' faith in Moyi Dawang tends to be diluted, these festivals are more compatible with their current situation and new conditions of time and place. Labourers in cities return home and help construct or reconstruct roads in their family villages. Notably, less tourists can be found at these festivals. Villagers' donations provide funding for the festivals. In sum, even though their 'original' culture changed, the village continues Moyi Dawang worship, which maintains strong family ties and provokes local nostalgia (Chhabra, Healy and Sills 2003).



**Figure 3**
Moyi Dawang Temple in the Liao Family Village.
Photograph taken by the author.

## 3. Making quilted embroidery

Quilted embroidery is deeply rooted in Zhuang tradition; when daughters get married, their mothers express their love and best wishes by sending quilts as gifts. They have intricate patterns – such as dragons, phoenix, flowers or the sun – invented by the makers. These patterns can also be sewn onto baby carriers or infant hats to bless newborns. The creation of embroidered hats with tails sprang from the cultural tradition of the Yao community in the Longji area. Yao people have acquired embroidered hats from the Longji Village for many years, and they provide the Zhuang community with braces for baby carriers. To this day, quilted embroidery makers have also made their own braces. Liao Yunjin and Liao Yulan are two renowned quilted embroidery makers from the Liao Family Village. These two female elders have developed an excellent collaborative relationship with the director of the ecomuseum following his efforts. They unofficially gained opportunities from the director and government work units to put on demonstrations at the AMGX and the Guilin Museum in Guangxi and to sell their products.

Currently, fewer female villagers have learned to make quilted embroidery compared with prior generations. Quilted embroidery makers (all female) in Longji mostly came from the Liao family and learned this skill from these two makers. Their average age is 40 years old. Making quilted embroidery is time-consuming and challenging to learn, so most women who make embroidery regard it as a hobby or part-time work instead of devoting all their time to it. When they have spare time after agricultural production or other business activities, they usually choose to make these items as leisure activities in front of their houses, at pavilions or at the elder activity centre. They make baby carriers or infants' hats as souvenirs for friends or relatives or sell their handicrafts in Heping or the wider county. Tourism does not make the quilted embroidery economically viable, and at the same time, villagers make no effort to combine their production of embroidered handicrafts with the officially sanctioned



**Figure 4**
Making quilted embroidery.
Photograph taken by the author.

ICH projects. It has survived by virtue of these villagers' interests and its cultural and economic value as a place-based experience.

## Discussion and conclusion

How do official ICH and tourism discourses shape community members' ICH-making? Crucially, how and why do they celebrate ICH beyond the goals of protection and representation? Centring on the Longji Village, the sections above present three dimensions encompassing the influence of ICH protection measures taken, the creation and reconstruction of festivals for the tourism and community members' ICH practices behind the scenes to address these questions. They demonstrate how cultural traditions were staged and performed by community members to suit the interests of different actors and reinforce ICH's cultural and socio-economic values. By regarding ICH as performance, this study has provided a lens to reflect on the marginalised position of community members in the representation of their own ICH and their motivations for 'safeguarding' ICH.

As depicted above, through selecting and identifying ICH from cultural practices and performances of Longji Village, ecomuseum practitioners and tourism authorities seek to represent local Zhuang culture and display their power over ICH management. Villagers selectively participated in cultural preservation led by the ecomuseum project and commercialisation for practical expediencies, which resulted in the dissonance between two ICH discourses. With decreased villager participation, ecomuseum practitioners have been alienated from local heritage management. While villagers engaging in official ICH discourses seemingly become a 'method' to manage ICH, heritage authorities and agencies carry out ICH work heavily depending on their participation.

Gilman (2022) questioned the blurred boundaries between ICH safeguarding efforts and ICH commercialisation, which have been given considerable attention in ICH development. Nevertheless, heritage tourism functions as a means of heritage consumption and cultural display, which is intrinsically political and not the polar opposite of cultural traditions and heritage preservation (Salazar 2009). Rather than excessively concentrating on the shortcomings of ICH tourism and commodification, existing research affirms their positive effect on the empowerment of cultural practitioners who actively participate in the development and representation of ICH (Kim et al. 2019; Su 2019). The case of the Longji Village indicates the decentralisation of heritage preservation and the significant role of tourism-driven production (Yu 2015).

In the view of Kim et al. (2019), cultural preservation and ICH tourism undertake distinct roles but complement each other, potentially developing in parallel. In fact, apart from benefitting from tourists visiting, villagers acquired less profit from safeguarding terraced fields and participating in events held by tourism and heritage agencies, such as performing in festivals. Involvement in ethnic tourism development is also not a task for villagers given by outsiders; instead, the villagers are the ones who initiated these activities and called on the tourism company and local authorities for help to increase revenues. However, local heritage and tourism discourses are mainly constructed around the cultural landscape of Longji Terraces and diverse ethnic cultures in this area.

A critical problem raised there was that the exploitation of ICH overemphasised its representational value. Most cultural traditions of the Longji Village are manifested and protected as a shared Zhuang culture and as resources for villagers to participate in tourism. Villagers may find it difficult to stake a claim to them, as the representations of their communities and Zhuang culture and transform them into sustainable commercial products.

Evidently, it is impossible to entirely ascribe the continuity of their ICH to practices and endeavours of safeguarding and representation within the authorised ICH discourses. When moving the focus to community members' ways of understanding and making ICH, we can find out whether ICH development benefits them and their internal impetus to work on it (Yu 2015). This research argues that the sustainability of a local community's ICH is not always tightly bound with safeguarding work and economic activities, which can be enhanced by community members' communication and experiences in practices of cultural traditions. The longevity of the ICH depends their experiences and feelings, and how they create a local identity through celebrating ICH. This case study has shown that people from the Longji Village perform and practise ICH for various purposes, including attracting visitors, commodifying it for income, representing their cultural uniqueness, as leisure activities and as entertainment. These divergent intentions stimulate distinct experiences and emotions, which are always concealed in the preoccupation with the issues such as heritage transformation, cultural loss and disempowerment.

ICH performance is a toolkit for community members to re-create the past in the present and experience it in response to varied heritage discourses. As a social and emotional bond, it supports people's affirmation or construction of place-based identity and demonstrates their sense of belonging (Kuah and Liu 2017; McKerrell and Pfeiffer 2020). What is illustrated above reiterates the critical positions of community members as cultural practitioners, performers and audiences of a 'living past'. Their affective experiences, emerging from the construction of embodied knowledge, inextricably connect them to a sense of community and belonging. Furthermore, the continuity and transformation of local cultural heritage, such as making quilted embroidery, can occur independently of the representational meanings attached to it, highlighting community members' innermost thoughts and emotional responses (Svensson and Maags 2018, 22).

The scrutinisation of community members' ICH-making turns the spotlight on their practices of cultural traditions beyond the intervention and gaze of outsiders. Not all ICH practices and performances were typified and celebrated as representative ICH in the Longji Village that demand more attention and valuable economic capital. However, scholars have acknowledged that distinct cultural heritage can be defined as 'different things being valued or being valued differently' (Holtorf and Fairclough 2013, 500). For example, the Kaigeng Festival, funeral rites and festivals for the worship of Moyi Dawang are not valued as major cultural representations, which are shaped and reformed to echo changing social and cultural circumstances. Nonetheless, they are responsible for bonding community members together. These festivals as performances through which people communicate their ways of feeling contribute to engaging a sense of place, evoking collective memories and creating a collective identity. Cai (2022, 16) argues that the communication between cultural practitioners and place during the process of embodied performances renders the construction of a local identity, while a local cultural identity prompts the sustainable development of ICH. Villagers' nostalgic motivations, interactions and emotional bonding with a place can act as the catalyst for their actions to steward ICH and revitalise their community.

Various actors have been involved in the construction and capitalisation of ICH as a sustainable resource, which is built upon the significant role ICH practitioners played in ICH transmission (Lenzerini 2011). Their consciousness and practices concerning cultural conservation are shaped by official ICH initiatives (Zhang 2020). A comprehensive and democratic understanding of ICH-making in an ethnic community cannot ignore the motives and experiences of community members and their ability to turn living pasts into a process of production, which is equally important. 'Safeguarding' ICH, to some villagers, is a part of their life – between the representation and performance of it.

## ENDNOTES

1. This paper is adapted from the author's PhD thesis.
2. China has 56 ethnic groups. Zhuang people are one of ethnic minority groups in China. Villagers living in the Longji Village belong to a subgroup of Zhuang people (White Zhuang).
3. This interview was held on 23 June 2018 in the Longji Village. Interviewee is a villager from Pan Family Village of the Longji Village.
4. This interview was held on 23 June 2018 in the Longji Village. Interviewee is a villager from Liao Family Village of the Longji Village.
5. For more information about the Longsheng government's current cultural policies related to ethnic cultures, see http://www.glls.gov.cn/xwzx/jrls/202112/t20211222_2190315.html (accessed 15 June 2022).

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# Portraying feminist beliefs and transcending cultural norms: Korean women artists' reinterpretation of songs traditionally performed by men

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# Portraying feminist beliefs and transcending cultural norms: Korean women artists' reinterpretation of songs traditionally performed by men

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores how contemporary women artists in the field of traditional Korean music have recently portrayed feminist beliefs on stage. At the concert titled *The Songs Once Used for Men*, two South Korean women artists completely transformed Korean court music called *Jongmyo jeryeak* (Royal Ancestral Shrine Music, which has rarely been adapted by contemporary performers because of the desire to preserve the original form of cultural heritage. Women artists sang songs, played musical instruments and danced – all these practices were originally performed by male performers in accordance with Confucian traditions. Beyond their androgynous looks, low-pitched voices, the use of electronic music sounds and newly manufactured musical instruments indicate the resistance against traditional gender roles in the Korean music scene and, more generally, contemporary Korean society. The unconventional performance formats and styles exemplify today's women artists in the field of fusion *gugak*, a contemporary form of the traditional Korean music, which portrays ideas on gender issues through stage performances. The findings expand our understanding of feminist music criticism, which argues that music does not solely reflect passive societal views but serves as a public forum within which various modes of gender organisation are asserted, adopted, contested and negotiated.

## Keywords

*Jongmyo jerye*, *Jongmyo jeryeak*, *gagok*, contemporary performing arts, feminist music criticism, fusion *gugak*, electronic sounds, women artists

## Introduction

On 27 April 2020 at 5:00 p.m., two women musicians performed a concert titled *The Songs Once Used for Men* (*Namchang gagok*) at the Seoul Namsan Gukakdang, situated in Namsangol Hanok Village on the northern side of Namsan Mountain in Seoul, South Korea (hereafter Korea).[1] The concert was streamed live on Naver TV (2021), a free video streaming service in Korea, due to the Covid-19 crisis, providing an opportunity for people all over the world to see how the performance work of contemporary artists has broken new ground in the field of Korean traditional music. Throughout the performance, one woman standing on the left side of the stage sang a series of songs. Meanwhile, the other woman, standing on the right, was mainly in charge of making electric percussive sounds. Both occasionally played newly manufactured musical instruments. The women performers, with short hair, wore loose-fitting suit jackets, matching pants, a denim skirt and casual sneakers. They kept moving their bodies freely to their music and changing their position to play different musical instruments.

The concert subverted existing cultural norms in traditional Korean music. The women artists broke away from the songs' original practice, which includes singing in a seated position, wearing traditional costumes and accompanying singing with traditional Korean musical instruments played by instrumentalists. Above all, as the concert title implies, the performance has traditionally – for hundreds of years – been sung by male vocalists.

Focusing on the first part of the concert, where the women artists transformed Korean court music called *Jongmyo jeryeak* (Music for Royal Ancestral Shrine), this paper examines what motivated the women to produce such an innovative performance and what messages they sought to deliver to the audience. The main focus of this research is on gender issues underlying such newer approaches to promoting traditional Korean music.

This study expands our knowledge and understanding of fusion *gugak*, a contemporary genre of traditional Korean music designed to appeal to the general public.[2] Fusion *gugak* has been dominated by women performers. Many female students are engaged in fusion *gugak* as full-time or part-time fusion *gugak* team members. Almost 90 per cent of the population in the Korean music departments (*gugakgwa*) at colleges and universities in Korea are women. Many of them begin their careers in fusion *gugak* groups because of the limited job market; 180 active *gugak* fusion groups, out of approximately one thousand university graduates majoring in *gugak*, are produced every year in Korea (Kim Jungwon 2012, 35; So 2015, 31). Only a modest number of graduates enter government-sponsored arts organisations upon graduation. Most of the rest, predominantly women, choose to organise teams to present a new performance using Korean traditional musical instruments or musical idioms under the project of popularising g*ugak* – fusion *gugak* can be understood as a generic term for various art forms created by such a group. Discourses on fusion *gugak* have been concentrated on its musical style. They have focused on new ensemble music pieces combining traditional Korean instruments with foreign instruments, traditional Korean music played by Western classical musical instruments, or collaborative performance deftly grafting traditional Korean music onto other performing arts such as dance, drama and the visual arts. Only recently have scholars in ethnomusicology discussed gender-based perspectives.

There have been several studies investigating the roles and activities of women in the Korean music field. Kim Jungwon (2012) performed a case study of three performing groups composed of young women. She demonstrated that fusion *gugak* teams have been involved in forming Korean national identity, promoted new styles of music and expressed their sexual identity in their performances. Mueller (2013) furthered Kim's study by focusing on different genres of traditional Korean music divided by gender. As Mueller (2013, 18) argued, men perform well-respected traditional genres such as *aak* because they are required to pursue work that will enable them to support a family, while the ratio of women in fusion music tends to be higher. Choi Yoonjah (2014) examined women's participation in Korean drumming, which was once a field dominated by men. According to her findings, women drummers' presentation of 'femininity' as a way of differentiating themselves from male drummers exemplifies a cultural phenomenon in capitalist societies emphasising femininity and sexuality to survive consumer culture.

This article builds upon these recent studies and further specifies contemporary Korean women musicians' new attempt to challenge existing gendered power in the field of traditional Korean music. An analysis of *The Songs Once Used for Men* reveals that the concert was characterised by musical uses of reiteration, recycling, fragmentation and hybridisation, which I view as strategies for subverting the conventions of gender roles. I argue that the radical transformation of the Korean court music, to which preserving its original form has been of great importance, exemplifies women's access to and use of music performances to portray feminist beliefs.

The theoretical framework I employ in this study derives from the lineage of Susan McClary's theory on feminist music criticism. As McClary (1991, 8) stressed, music does not just passively reflect society but serves as a public forum where various models of gender organisation are asserted, adopted, contested and negotiated. She also noted that music is often used as a tool to manifest music-making participants' desire through the channel of sound that resembles the sounds of sexuality. Based on Stephen Heath's (1982) research on the construction of sexuality through a set of representations, McClary particularly focused on women producers who made music, through which women can engage in an important political position and strategy. A study of Negus (1997) on Sinéad O'Connor, an Irish singer who achieved worldwide success in the early years of 1990s, is an exemplary study demonstrating McClary's argument. Negus stressed that the words (lyrics), sounds and images that O'Connor formulated in her music articulated her ideology of gender roles. This study explores the two Korean women artists' manifestation of feminist beliefs by using the lyrics, sounds and images on stage in illustration of McClary's theory.

## Two women artists of *The Songs Once Used for Men*

Two women artists who performed the concert *The Songs Once Used for Men* have been trained at key educational and cultural institutions established to preserve traditional Korean music. They have worked as a duo named HAEPAARY since late 2020.[3] They are leading artists in fusion *gugak*, even though they insisted that the performance be called 'ambient *gagok*' not merely fusion *gugak* (*All That Art* 2020).[4]

Choi Hyewon, a graduate of the Korean Traditional Performing Arts High School (Kungnip gugak godeung hakgyo) and Seoul National University (Seoul daehakgyo), is a percussionist and sound artist. Choi has been working as a member of various Korean music teams such as Kinetic Korean classical music group YIEN, Kwon Song Hee Pansori Epic Chant Lab and Taru. She has honed her skills in performing Korean traditional music and has continuously expanded her music through collaborative works with artists in other fields. As shown in *The Songs Once Used for Men*, her interests extend to learning electronic music production and creating the soundscape for a variety of needs. Her recent activity as a sound director or sound artist attests to her boundless enthusiasm for music (Elektronmusikstudion 2019).

The popularity of electro-acoustic music in Korea today is enormous, so much so that Korea is not merely 'a receiver or consumer but a maker of not only music but also instruments' (Kye and Yim 2018). The emergence of this music in Korea began in the late 1960s after *The Feast of ID* (*Wonsaek ui hyangyeon*), produced by Kang Sukhi at the Korea Broadcasting System radio studio. The electro-acoustic music's popularity resulted from the socio-economic backdrop in the late 1980s, when 'relatively affluent and media-driven consumerist society emerged', as Korean society accommodated 'global cultural imageries and forms' (Lee Keehyeung 2000, 477). The quick appropriation of international music trends was crystallised in the late 1990s (Lee Jung-yup 2009, 491). Electro-acoustic music, which produces danceable electric sounds with the latest technology and production techniques, is one of the factors behind the development of the K-pop industry (Yang 2017, 104). In the history of electro-acoustic music in Korea, women are almost invisible.

The invisibility of women in electro-acoustic music holds true for fusion *gugak*. The electro-acoustic music scene in Korea has greatly influenced musical activities of young *gugak* musicians. A significant number of them have become interested in sound arts and collaborated with artists producing electronic sounds. There have been many attempts to reinvent certain genres of age-old Korean music by blending it with electronic and electro-acoustic music. The 21st-century Korean Music Project (*Isibil-segi hanguk eumak peurojekteu*) in 2020 aptly demonstrates this.[5] It is an annual government-sponsored music contest to discover talented young *gugak* musicians and creative traditional music with contemporary influences. Three of the ten teams who qualified for the finals employed the bass guitar, electronic guitar, synthesiser keyboard or Musical Instrument Digital Interface controller – that is, electronic sounds (for information on these instruments, see Holmes 2002). Those who produced such electronic sounds were predominantly men. In this regard, Choi's visibility in the field of sound arts is in itself significant.

Park Minhee, a vocalist trained in the Korean intangible cultural heritage property of *gagok*, graduated from the leading educational institutions in traditional Korean music as Choi did. *Gagok* is widely believed to have originated in Joseon Korea in the 15th century and become popular in salons in the 18th century. As a contemporary *gagok* singer, Park has been producing innovative live performances by adapting the traditional vocal music. For example, the performance entitled *No Longer Gagok* (*Gagok silgyeok*) was the product of her unceasing efforts to help the public appreciate the *gagok* sound in a new stage setting. Audiences were supposed to move around small rooms where an individual *gagok* singer presented a piece of vocal music on a particular subject. The performance was to formulate a new kind of expression in the limited space using the traditional song. The new format, as Park noted, was intended to arrange 'equal relationship' between the performer and the audience on a rotating one-to-one basis (THE aPRO 2018). Park also founded a group called Parkpark to create and perform such a new performance. Her recent performance works in the group are indicative of her wishes to break down existing stereotypes of traditional music: 'boring', 'profound' or 'far from the reality of modern life'.

Both Choi and Park have been participating in various kinds of events and concerts to present this time-honoured tradition in music, receiving government aid in many cases. At the same time, both promoted a new

type of music that varies significantly from what they had performed at the government-affiliated institutions. With respect to their bidirectional musical activities, one thing seems sure: their continued attempts to revive traditional culture in contemporary society. The 2020 concert, where they completely transformed the format of *gugak* pieces, was a more radical experiment. The concert is significantly different from their previous performances – and surely from other musicians' performances labelled as fusion *gugak*.

## Traditional Korean music emblematic of Confucianism: *Jongmyo jeryeak*

For the first part of *The Songs Once Used for Men*, Choi and Park transformed a genre of Korean court music called *aak*, a collective term referring to many forms of music performed at the royal palace until the fall of the Joseon dynasty. Historical references of the music genre and *Jongmyo jeryeak* in particular would help understand the implications of the performance.

As part of official rituals and political events, Korean court music was performed on various occasions, such as state sacrificial rites, ancestral rituals, formal banquets and royal ceremonies (Kim Hee-sun 2012). Accordingly, its audiences were originally limited to royalty and elite aristocrats. *Jongmyo jeryeak* is a piece of Korean court music representing Confucian traditions of Joseon Korea. King Sejong (r. 1418–1450) composed new pieces of music for the ritual based largely on Korea's native, indigenous music (*hyangak*). The music consists of singing, instrumental music playing and dancing in honour of the kings of the Joseon dynasty. Today, the ritual, *Jongmyo jerye*, is held every year at the Jongmyo Shrine on the first Sunday of May. Members of the National Gugak Center (*Kungnip gugagweon*) play its music, and the National Korean Traditional Performing Arts High School students dance to the music. *Jongmyo jeryeak* became an Important Intangible Cultural Asset (*Jungyo muhyeong munhwajae*) in Korea in 1975. Both the ancestral rite and ritual music were designated as the first Korea's Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2001.

The core of the ritual's music and dance is *Botaepyeong* and *Jeongdaeeop*, meaning 'Maintaining the Great Peace' and 'Founding a Great Dynasty', respectively (Yi 1967, 211–212). The two musical suites and accompanying dances were created during the reign of King Sejong for court banquet ceremonies. King Sejo (r. 1455–1468), the self-claimed heir of King Sejong's musical tradition, modified the existing *Botaepyeong* and *Jeongdaeeop* pieces for the royal ancestral ritual (Chang 1985, 373). According to the original ritual practice, when the court music ensemble and singers present *Botaepyeong* praising the ancestor kings' civil achievements, a dance called *munmu*, symbolising the exploits, is performed. Likewise, *Jeongdaeeop*, the music about the king's military achievements, is accompanied by a dance called *mumu*. For the former, dancers hold *yak* (a flute-shaped prop with three holes) in their left hand and *jeok* (a stick with three parts of pheasant feathers hanging from the top, decorated with red and green silk ornaments at one end) in their right hand, while dancers for the latter hold *gan* (a wooden sword) and *cheok* (a wooden spear).

The inclusion of music and dance in the ritual came from a belief that musical performances would bring about harmony between human beings and non-physical souls (Geum 2000, 225). The total art form is performed by a group of musical instrumentalists, singers and dancers, thus needing a much larger space than other orchestral and ensemble music (Shim 2014). The National Gugak Center has focused on the artistry of the ritual music when re-creating *Jongmyo jeryak* as performing arts for the 21st-century theatre scene (see fig. 1).[6]

The importance of *Jongmyo jeryeak* lies in its symbolic meaning not only for Koreans but also for East Asians (Shim 2014). Court music reflects the unique modes of traditional north-east Asian thought highlighting the harmony between heaven and earth, the balance between yin and yang, and the unity between gods and humans. Performers for the ritual are assumed to adhere to detailed rules, ranging from their costumes to the arrangement of musical instruments. Their performance styles have been somewhat 'distorted' and changed over the vast reaches of time particularly in varied note values, rhythmic cycles and *bak* (a wooden clapper used in Korean court music) cues (Nam 2007). The ritual music, like other Korean traditional music genres, was recontextualised as it became open to the public during the Japanese colonial period through concerts, broadcasts, recordings and staged performances (Han et al. 2001; Kim Eun-young 2008; Robinson 1988). Despite these contextual and musical changes, *Jongmyo jeryeak* has never lost its original framework.



**Figure 1**
Staged performance of *Jongmyo jerye*.
Photo: The National Gugak Center, 20 March 2014.

Music was germane to politics in most ancient societies. In Korea, as in all East Asian countries, 'such a heightened sensitivity to music's social, spiritual properties and energies' has existed much longer than it has in the West (Hesselink 2007, 8). As mentioned earlier, the continued presence of the music resulted from a government project to preserve a wealth of priceless cultural heritage – that is, the designation of *Jongmyo jeryeak* as an Intangible Cultural Heritage under the 1962 Cultural Property Protection Law (*Munhwajae bohobeop*). The law, modelled on the Japanese laws for the protection of cultural properties, aimed to uncover Korea's most precious treasures and preserve them for posterity (Pai 2001). *Jongmyo jeryeak*, under the protection and auspices of the government, is arguably one of the 'least' adapted repertoires in Korean music.

The project of preserving the original form of *Jongmyo jeryeak* was conducted by men according to its Confucian tradition. The association between Confucian ritual and men, in contrast to the one between Buddhism or shamanism and women, directly relates to the greater acceptance of women in musical genres derived from the latter practices; the unique Confucian culture has remained largely male-dominated despite the overall feminisation of the role of musicians in Korean society. Different from general women in Confucian society, women entertainers who performed Buddhist and shamanistic music were allowed to display the expression of emotionality through performances. Expressing a range of emotional states would be permissible for *gisaeng* because they already existed 'outside of the social norms of respectable Confucian womanhood' (Mueller 2013, 13–15). In the same vein, women's participation in *Jongmyo jeryeak*, which was an emblem of the Confucian culture, remained taboo for a long time. From its birth until 1945, only members from the male-dominated royal music institute could participate in the ritual.

It is true, though, that today's *Jongmyo jeryeak* is performed both by men and women. Male and female musicians of the National Gugak Center play the music alongside the National Korean Traditional Performing Arts High School students who dance to the music. The inclusion of women musicians and dancers was an inevitable consequence of the phenomenon where the Korean music scene was statistically dominated by women. It was by no means an intentional change. At the National Gugak Center and the National Korean Traditional Performing Arts High School, which were established in the post-colonial period under the auspices of the Korean government initiative for the preservation and revival of Korean culture, women have far outnumbered men since the mid-1970s, so it became inevitable to include women in the ritual. Besides, the change did not make a big difference on the surface; because of the red costume and headdress covering performers' entire body and hair, it is hard to determine whether the performers are men or women. Herein lies

the reason why *The Songs Once Used for Men* deserves attention. In transforming this Confucianism-based Korean musical heritage, the women artists did not hide their gender identity. Rather, they highlighted their presentation of the music as *women* artists.

## Portrayal of feminist beliefs onstage

As described above, the composition of *Jongmyo jeryeak* includes orchestration, singing and dancing, all strictly established in accordance with its symbolic meanings. Choi and Park transformed all these elements of the ritual music to portray feminist beliefs. Below are the results of analyses of the concert, which are divided into three parts: lyrics, sounds and images.

## Lyrics

The most important feature to note here is that the ritual's vocal part has never been replaced by women singers. Male vocalists' singing in a deep bass voice to accompany the court music ensemble's grand and sublime sound is a salient feature of the age-old court music in Korea. In this sense, the women's presentation of *Jongmyo jeryeak*, including the vocal parts at the concert *The Songs Once Used for Men*, can be seen as an epoch-making event.

The lyrics of Park's singing began with '*O hwang seong ik, ji bok gwol byeok*' 於皇聖翼 祗服厥辟, consisting of eight Chinese characters. This part, meaning 'Alas, the Great King Ikjo, he honoured and obeyed his forefather!', is a line from *Botaepyeong*. In this way, Park extracted several short lines from *Botaepyeong* and *Jeongdaeeop*, both of which are about the virtues of the Joseon kings as discussed above. Park, just as *male* vocalists of the ritual music had been doing, sang in a relaxed and confident mood. When asked about the implications of the concert and meanings of the concert title, Choi and Park put the greatest emphasis on the content of the lyrics in Korean traditional music as follows:

> We have noticed that lyrics in women's vocal music are about a sad love story like waiting, parting or getting stood up. By contrast, those of men are completely different. Relaxed and independent attitudes, like enjoying their lives to the fullest by reciting a poem with a drink, are often described in lyrics only for male vocalists' songs. [...] We feel like they [male vocalists] express themselves freely. We have always wanted to do music that makes us feel refreshed and comfortable rather than presenting beautiful melodies [and images] in the eyes of others. (*Chosun Ilbo* 2020, translated by the author)

The remarks above manifest the women artists' desire to break down perceived gender stereotypes around the field of Korean traditional music by, first and foremost, transcending cultural norms about the use of gender-specific lyrics. They wanted to express the self and individuality. As they highlighted, songs for women vocalists tend to express 'passive' attitudes – in sharp contrast to men's songs. As the title of the performance indicates, they wanted to reject the diagram linking women to passivity.

## Sounds

Choi and Park entirely changed the format of the original performance while not forgoing key elements in Korean court music. One of the elements was the original style of singing. Male singers at the ritual usually create a resonant, low-pitched voice that sounds much lower than their natural voice range. As a female *gagok* singer, Park has been accustomed to singing in a high-pitched falsetto voice. At the concert, however, she followed the ways the male vocalists have sung. She did not intend to make 'beautiful' sounds; her low-pitched voice at the concert not only preserved the inner essence of the music but also expressed feminist ideas.

Choi and Park produced a totally different soundscape by incorporating newly manufactured musical instruments, Korean folk music instruments and the electronic percussive sounds into the original *Jongmyo jeryeak* vocal melodies. Firstly, their use of newly manufactured musical instruments is a noteworthy sign of their commitment to reinventing traditional Korean music. They began and ended the performance by playing musical instruments for Korean court music like *bak*, *chuk* (wooden box played by hitting a stick on the inside) and *eo* (tiger-shaped wooden scraper). These percussion instruments play an important role in announcing the beginning, ending and transition points of the ritual. Choi and Park reproduced the beginning and ending parts of *Jongmyo jeryeak* played by these percussion instruments. However, they manufactured new *chuk* and *eo* that are well suited to the performance theme and stage settings.

In addition, Park played the xylophone-like percussion instrument consisting of brass bars to Choi's electronic beats. The melodic percussion instrument represented the musical instruments like *pyeonjong* (a set of 16 bronze bells) and *pyeongyeong* (a set of 16 stone chimes) used in the original *Jongmyo jeryeak*. The use of their own musical instruments did not result from their inability to borrow the traditional ones – they used *bak* as it is with no adaptations – rather, making the simpler, white-coloured musical instruments was a strategy intended to show women artists' challenging and experimental spirit or the pursuit of 'unselfconscious' pleasure. Playing the original ritual's important musical parts with their *self-made* musical instruments was in keeping with the women's performance agendas: re-creating traditional Korean music without losing its core elements and showing the images of empowered women.

The inclusion of a folk musical instrument is another interesting feature alluding to their intentional transformation of the ritual. Choi played *jabara* (a pair of large brass cymbals) in the middle of the performance. It is a Korean musical instrument mainly used for Buddhist music, shamanistic music and traditional military band music. There are no musical instruments for court music comparable to *jabara* in sound, shape or playing technique. Thus, the use of the musical instrument at the concert indicates a deviation from the previously accepted norms in Korean music.

## Images

Visual elements are an essential aspect of any live musical performances (Bergeron and Lopes 2009; Cook 2008). What visual elements were used by Choi and Park to portray feminist beliefs? The different roles of the women artists naturally led to their continuous shifting in performing spots. They freely used the stage space. Also, the act of moving their bodies freely to the electronic rhythm exuded a relaxed atmosphere. The huge transformation of traditional male-oriented music was illustrative of the women performers' critical views on women singers' sedentary posture and the relevant passive images in the original form of their musical performances. Such radical changes in their postures and body movements demonstrate that the women artists paid careful attention to the visual presentation elements



**Figure 2**
Performance of *The Songs Once Used for Men.*
Photo: Naver TV, 26 April 2020.

as well; Park stressed that 'women are supposed to sing with their hands on the top of their knees, while men usually sing in a more comfortable posture' (*Chosun Ilbo* 2020). She added that male *gagok* singers' less constrained hand gestures portray the impression that the male singers 'can say what they want to say' in singing (*Chosun Ilbo* 2020). Choi and Park's rhythmic body movement in *The Songs Once Used for Men*, which is aligned with relaxed and independent attitudes, was an act of rebelling against the cultural norms and arguing for women's equality.

Their unconventional stage costumes and hairstyles are another visual medium Choi and Park used to deliver feminist messages. As mentioned earlier, they wore loose-fitting suit jackets, matching pants, jean skirts and sneakers, all of which provided unrestricted movement and comfort. The women artists showed a sort of androgynous appeal not merely for practical reasons; they purposefully used the look for a symbolic expression of empowered women. The strategic stage costumes symbolising their independent attitudes held true for the concert promotional materials. As seen in fig. 3, the women artists wear trouser suits and sneakers in their promotional materials. No visual images indicating styles or genres of the traditional performance are presented in their posters. Such simple character-oriented images obviously differ from images of the royal palace or performers in traditional costumes that the National Gugak Center has illustrated in their *Jongmyo jeryeak* concert promotional materials.

The visual elements of *The Songs Once Used for Men*, both on stage and in advertising materials, show a striking contrast with those of other women musicians in the field of fusion *gugak*. Most, albeit not all, have emphasised femininity. Women performers often wear 'Western-style cocktail dresses' or 'the clothes showing the bare skin of the women's shoulders, arms, and legs' as a marketing strategy (Kim Jungwon 2012, 2–3). Some are encouraged to present a 'classy' and 'sexy' look, reminiscent of a K-pop girl group that general viewers are used to (So 2015, 27). Women artists' feminine presenting in fusion *gugak* performances – whether pressed by a team producer makes to do so or they do it on their own – is not found in *The Songs Once Used for Men*. The visual elements of the 2020 performance were thus a huge challenge against the deep-rooted feminine images of women entertainers in Korea.




**Figure 3**
Promotional posters for *The Songs Once Used for Men*.
Photo: Seoul Namsan Gukakdang, 7 April 2020.

## Conclusion

This study investigated how contemporary women artists in the field of traditional Korean music have recently presented feminist beliefs on stage, with particular focus on the concert titled *The Songs Once Used for Men* performed by Choi Hyewon and Park Minhee. For the first part of the concert, Choi and Park completely transformed Korean court music called *Jongmyo jeryeak*, which has rarely been adapted by contemporary performers because of a desire to preserve the original form of the cultural heritage. Their androgynous looks and low-pitched voice, the use of electronic music sound and newly manufactured musical instruments, their unrestricted body movements and, mostly importantly, the transformation of traditional Korean music once sung by and used for men indicate their resistance against the status quo in the world of traditional Korean music.

Breaking barriers of male-dominated performance of Joseon Korea's high-class music through visual and aural stimuli, Choi and Park intended to challenge the perceptions of women musicians occupying the field of fusion *gugak* and, by extension, women's attitude towards life. *The Songs Once Used for Men* should not be seen merely as a new turn of traditional Korean music in pursuit of popularising lesser-known cultural heritages; the stage performance was a tool for women artists to present their views on social issues – more specifically, gender equity and the empowerment of women.

Choi and Park were not just the performers but

the producers for *The Songs Once Used for Men*. They were empowered to control their performance content. The women artists were no longer passive performers who complacently followed the rules of the musical performance established in the Joseon dynasty. Conversely, they completely transformed the time-honoured tradition. By using unconventionally transforming the lyrics, sounds and images of the court music, they asserted, adopted, contested and negotiated models of gender organisation in the Korean music fields. Simply put, the concert exemplifies new moves by today's women artists, who present their critical perspectives on feminist issues through experimental performing arts – that is, feminist music criticism.

It is premature to argue that gender equality has been or could be achieved solely by two women artists simply singing and playing male-centred court music. However, *The Songs Once Used for Men* allowed for Choi and Park to express their own interpretation of traditional music, unencumbered by the task they had been assigned: inheriting traditional heritage and preserving cultural traditions. In addition, audiences who left comments and reviews on the Naver TV broadcast site noted that they enjoyed the relaxed and cheerful performance. Many of them also became interested in the way Choi and Park performed and dressed in a more comfortable manner, in connection to the fact that the women artists were singing songs once used for male singers. Such responses show that some audiences became intrigued by these feminist signals, although they perhaps did not fully grasp the nuanced feminist messages behind the performance.

Further research may be needed to identify social factors contributing to how the two women artists created such unconventional performances and whether their feminist messages were adequately delivered to the audience – especially with age, gender, education and occupation in mind. These studies can continue to enrich our understanding of music through the lens of gender. In conclusion, this study provides evidence demonstrating shifting cultural perspectives prompted by performances such as *The Songs Once Used for Men*, questioning musical traditions beyond accepted performance norms of gender and social structures.

## ENDNOTES

1. In Korean, *nam* means men and *chang* means songs. Thus, *namchang* means songs for/by men. *Gagok* refers to a genre of Korean vocal music professional vocalists sang to a chamber ensemble accompaniment. The Seoul Namsan Gukakdang was established in 2007 to spread the excellence of Korean traditional music and promote traditional performing arts.
2. *Gugak*, literally meaning 'national music' in Korean, includes traditional music of the upper and lower classes both in a historical context and in performance at present through the system of preservation.
3. To find their activities, see the official webpage: http://haepaary.com/. The author wrote this paper before Park Minhee and Choi Hyewon officially formed the group named HAEPAARY. For this reason, the names of the respective artists are used, instead of the group name, in this paper.
4. The women artists defined 'ambient *gagok*' as a new form of musical performance combining *gagok* singing and electronic music sounds.
5. The 21st-century Korean Music Project, sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and Gugak FM Broadcasting System, has launched teams into the performance sphere to present a new direction for 21st-century Korean music since 2007. The contest is usually held on the stage of the Yeakdang, the main hall of the National Gugak Centre, lasting two and a half hours on the designated day. For more detailed information on the 21st-century Korean Music Project, see Stephanie Choi (2012) and Kwon (2014).
6. Fig. 1 shows the staged performance of *Jongmyo jerye* in 2014 at the National Gugak Centre. *Jongmyo jerye* consists of procedures to welcome the royal spirits, to make offerings of gifts, food and wine (three times), and to see the spirits off. The ritual has been passed down as an art form and ceremony meticulously observing *yeaksasang* principles, the Confucian ideal and the governing ideology of the Joseon dynasty, as the instrumental music, song and dance are performed together in each step of the rite. See https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/j ong myo-jereak-national-gugak-center-gugakwon/KQJirFAyrTjlKg?hl=en.

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# Heritage preservation vs. adaptation to achieve sustainability – A case study of the Fishermen's Dances, Rizhao city, Shandong province, China

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# Heritage preservation vs. adaptation to achieve sustainability – A case study of the Fishermen's Dances, Rizhao city, Shandong province, China


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## ABSTRACT

The importance of heritage preservation for economic development is now recognised, although not without debate. For cultural assets that have survived threats and perils, the key may lie in adaptation to changed circumstances as much as preservation of traditions. The question then arises whether such adaptation compromises the goal of sustainability. In the present case study of Fishermen's Dances in Rizhao city, adaptation has resulted in the loss of some long-held traditions. But it has gained a measure of sustainability. Given the strong role of the state, its vision and capability to transform its cultural assets for income-generation activities will be decisive.



## Keywords

heritage preservation, cultural assets, historical preservation, culture development


## Introduction

Far from being viewed as an alternative to modernisation and economic development, heritage preservation is nowadays seen as an essential ingredient of economic development. Thus Rypkema (1999) referred to historical preservation as becoming a uniquely effective vehicle for economic growth.Historical preservation was said to confer benefits such as job creation and training, import substitution, infrastructure rehabilitation, production diversification and opportunities for tourism. In a similar vein, a British Council report (2018, 3) concluded that 'a peopled-centred approach to heritage, that benefits all levels of society, will bring social cohesion and economic growth to emerging economies and developing countries'. Equally effusive about the benefits of heritage on the economy is Childs (n.d.).

But awareness of these benefits has not prevented the widespread destruction of heritage assets. A prime example is China, with its substantial reservoir of heritage assets, both tangible and intangible, facing the challenge that 'improper development throughout the countryside has damaged the structure, environment and features of some historical villages in China [...] accelerated

urbanization has also put historical cities and towns under the great pressure of hosting a large population' (*China Daily* 2012).

Against these odds, the country has nevertheless made steady progress. China's history of heritage conservation was said to date to the 1930s (Wang 2008). Tong (2016) notes that

> the number of registered immovable cultural properties soared from 300,000 to 760,000, while the number of state priority protected sites increased from 750 in 2000 to 4,296 today. In addition, the number of priority protected sites at regional and local levels also increased significantly(see pp.10).

In addition to large-scale surveys, China has organised numerous conferences to tap new ideas, advance theory development and facilitate international exchange of knowledge (Tong 2016).

Legal protection represents another key instrument of heritage protection. In 1982, shortly after liberalisation in 1978, China passed the Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics, which established a conservation system and a list defining famous cities of historical and cultural value. In 1986, a second group of famous cities was added to the first. In 2002, the 1982 law was revised to define historic areas as 'small towns, neighbourhoods with an unusual wealth of cultural relics of important historical value or high revolutionary memorial significance. Thus, for the first time, small urban centres were covered under the law.

Despite this, as a measure of the country's wealth of historical capital, only a fraction of historical heritage sites have been recorded, with many others lost to posterity (Shen and Chen 2010, 73). Yet other assets have fallen victim to the pace of new construction during the decades of rapid economic development. Iossifova (2014, 34) notes that 'the speed of development, lack of knowledge at all levels of governance and a lack of appropriate skills for the implementation of cultural heritage have led to a number of disasters with local, regional, national and even global consequences'. Xie (2016) also points to 'a profit-driven society and rapid changes in public life' and '(the lack of professional educational institutions and professionals in relevant areas also hinder the development of Chinese intangible cultural heritage'.

Amid these challenges, the passage of the 2003 UNESCO International Convention for the Safeguard of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, of which China was a signatory, represented a major fillip to China's heritage preservation efforts (Rees 2017). Shortly after, in 2005, the State Council issued the *Circular on Strengthening the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, which distinguished between tangible and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) for the first time. Following the *Circular*, in 2006 and 2008, the first two groups of national ICH were listed and published. More recently, the government has maintained its focus on the country's ICH by adding three traditional holidays – Tomb-Sweeping Day, Dragon Boat Day and Mid-Autumn Day – as public holidays. As part of its 'Rural Rejuvenation' policy to arrest rural-to-urban migration and reduce urban–rural economic inequality, China has also promoted heritage tourism.

National recognition, which has translated into financial resources, has not, however, been an unmitigated blessing for ICH sites. Commentators complain of legislative deficiencies (Huo 2015), inadequate attention at the subnational levels to viewing cultural heritage as an integral part of development and even less attention for sustainable development (Petronela 2015).

The present case study is about the Fishermen's Dances in Rizhao, Shandong province, China. Rizhao distinguishes itself because it is located in an ancient part of the country, with historical and cultural sites in abundance located in the city's vicinity. The Fishermen's Dances, which also date back centuries, distinguish themselves as having been disrupted and then revived by the state. Resources placed in the hands of the state render them powerful stakeholders that can have a say in shaping the organisation and conduct of the ICH. To the extent that their views are not consonant with those of the custodians of the ICH, contestations between stakeholders may have consequences for the sustainability of the ICH itself.

## Rizhao and the Fishermen's Festival and Dances

The area of study is the region of Shandong province around the Huang Hai (Yellow Sea). This geographical area also defines its cultural practices. For instance, the worship of the dragon god is common in this area. In the heart of the above region is Rizhao, a coastal city located in southern Shandong province of China (fig. 1). The name

'Rizhao' means 'bright sunshine', but the city is known for more than its fine weather. The *Oxford Handbook of World History* accredits the Rizhao Liangchengzhen site as the first established city in Asia from 3500 BCE to 2000 BCE. Rizhao town itself was steeped in antiquity, having been established in 1184 and upgraded to a prefecture-level city in 1989.

Due to the influence of the ocean, Rizhao has a more favourable climate than other Chinese cities. It is hot and rainy during the summer and cold and less rainy during the winter; the brightness of the sunshine is higher than the average for China the whole year; the day and night temperatures differ little; the seasons are distinctive; the annual precipitation is adequate – all rendering the city ideal for tourism.

The Rizhao coastline is connected by many capes and bays, and its coastline is blessed by the presence of natural harbours. Offshore, the currents, water quality and temperature are all favourable for the nurturing and cultivation of aquatic products. Approximately 150 fishing villages along the coast and 11 million people are involved in the fishing industry. The livelihood of the seaside villagers depends on fishing and aquaculture activities.

The community's reliance on maritime activities as a source of livelihood has produced, among the fishermen especially, a symbiotic relationship with the natural environment. The ocean was for the fishermen and their families both a source of sustenance and wealth as well as a source of calamity when bad weather or storms struck. Ancient mariners and fishermen lacked the technology to predict the conditions when setting out to sea. They had little choice but to rely on prayers to spirits that were parts of local beliefs and folklore. Typical among these beliefs is the legend of a Dragon King, exemplified by the local saying: 'Only if there is the sea is there a Dragon King'.[1] Villagers in Rizhao and surrounding areas believed that the ocean has a mysterious power that they were unable to control, so they were in awe of the ocean. They also believe that the Dragon King and his marine 'army' had the authority to take control of the ocean and protect the Rizhao fishermen. This is why the villagers around Rizhao had such strong faith in the Dragon King and his marine army to the point of creating rituals of worship.

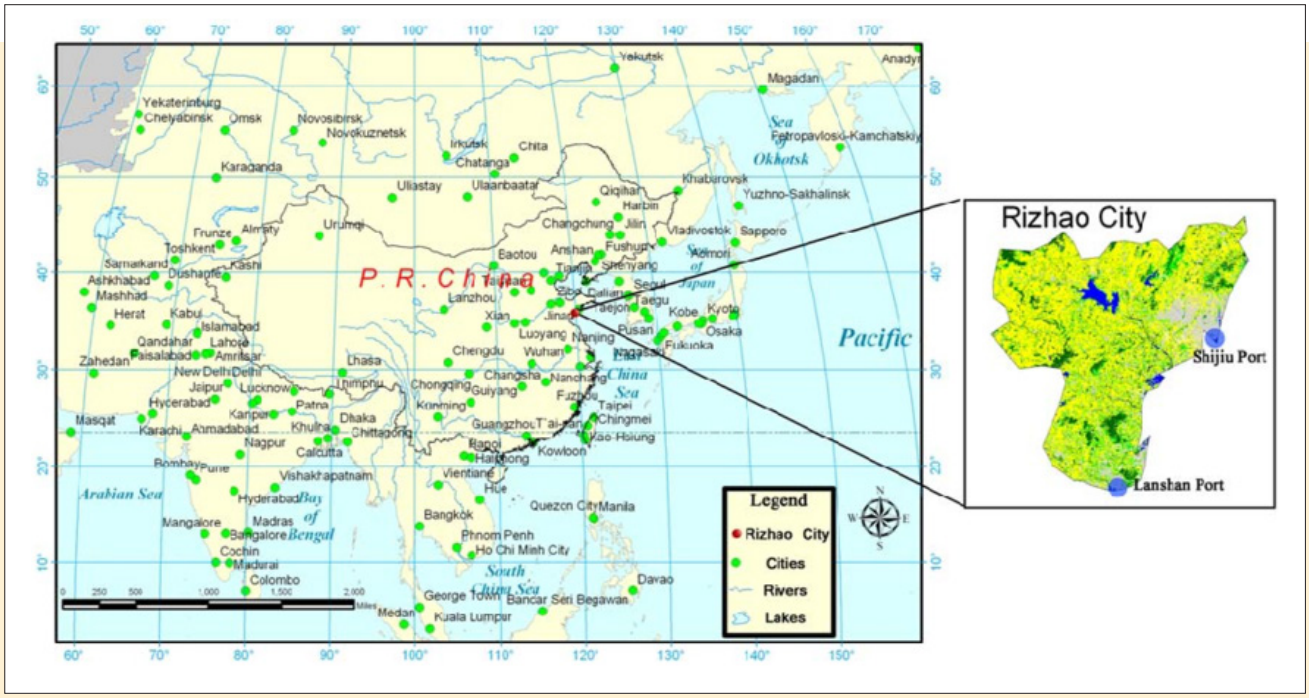



**Figure 1**
Rizhao city, Shandong province, China
Source: Wang et al. (2009, 1173)

The Fishermen's Festival dates to the ancient dynasties of Xia (2100 to 1600 BCE),[2] Shang (1600 to 1050 BCE) and Zhou (1046 to 256 BCE), but it became most popular during the Tang (618 to 906 CE) and Sung (960 to 1279 CE) dynasties. Today, the festival is held on the 13th day of the sixth month of the Chinese lunar calendar. It is hosted by a 'skipper', a boat captain of noble character and high prestige, who announces the beginning of the festival at the seaside early in the morning, with offerings and prayers to the spirits of the sea led by the Dragon King.

Legends about the Dragon King as overlord of the ocean abound; although a number of Dragon King temples dotted the region around Rizhao, few survived the turmoil of the early years of the Republic. The Dragon Dance, one of a suite of dances in the festival, is dedicated to the worship of the Dragon King, and its survival is testimony to the residents' strong faith in the worship of the Dragon King. This strong faith also saw the government authorising the reconstruction of the partially destroyed temple in 1995.

The Dragon Dance is accompanied by the Shui ('water') or Aquatic Dance. Performers of the Shui Dance dress up as marine creatures – fish, turtle, shrimp, crab, etc. – to symbolise the pantheon of marine spirits under the Dragon King. But the dances not only serve a worship function but also celebrate the daily lives of the fishermen as they go about their daily chores. The Han Boats Dance tells of the fishermen's life at sea as well as their yearning for a better life on land. The Stilts Dance mimics the fishermen's use of stilts to catch shrimp close to shore.

Thus, up to the founding of the People's Republic, the suite of folklore performances – namely, the Dragon Dance, Shui Dance, the Han Boats Dance and the Stilts Dance – was an integral part of the festival, creating a much merrier and more joyful atmosphere than during the Lunar (Chinese) New Year. All the performers are amateurs from the fishing industry. Thus, over the course of its history, the Fishermen's Festival has been developed from a simple ceremony of worshipping the sea to a major ceremony for the fishermen's key activities, such as setting off to the sea, celebrating the harvest from the sea and so on.

Despite its local importance, literature on the festival and its dances is not plentiful. There is hardly any academic literature in English on Shandong's Fishermen's Festival and dances. Accounts of these festivities are found mainly, although rather briefly, in the media (e.g. China.org.cn 2012; Chinadaily.com.cn 2017). Much of existing academic discussion of this festival is in Chinese. Among these are Ye (2000; 2002), Yi (2009) and Song and He (2015). Several studies have covered specific dances. For the Shui Dance, there is Song (2015), Ge (2012) and Zheng and Zhang (2015). Only two sources recorded the inclusion of the Dragon Dance in Rizhao's ICH in 2008 and 2014. Other studies on the Dragon Dance did not reference Rizhao. There has been no research on Rizhao's Stilts Dance or on the Han Boats Dance.

While various aspects of the dances have been addressed, there is scant discussion on what is arguably the pivotal issue relating to the change in the substance of the dances, and the consequences for the sustainability of the heritage have not been addressed. Filling this research lacuna is made difficult by the break in the practice of this tradition, which required interviews with festival and dance 'insiders' to recall and narrate. In the next section, thanks to these recollections, the evolution of the dances, the outcome of major political ideological changes and rethinking of these changes are briefly described.

## The evolution of the Fishermen's Dances

The Fishermen's Festival and its dances had survived major historical upheavals over the many centuries of its existence; however, it fell victim to the 'new' socialism that the country in the years immediately after the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This disruption transformed a primarily ritual event into four independent Fishermen's Dances. The transformation of this ritual began well before the establishment of the People's Republic. From the beginning of the 20th century, traditional Confucianist values were seen as regressive and as obstructing progress. Led by neo-Confucianists like Liang Qichao, traditional Confucianism was discredited and some folk cultures were labelled 'superstitions', and their continued practice was either prohibited in Chinese society or became tools of political propaganda.

From the perspective of the devotees of the Fishermen's Festival and those who held this tradition so dearly, the cancellation of the Fishermen's Festival was a major blow. In the early 1950s, the statues in the Dragon King Temple were destroyed, the temple was changed into a school and Rizhao's Fishermen's Dances were no longer held. The Han Boats Dance and Shui Dance were

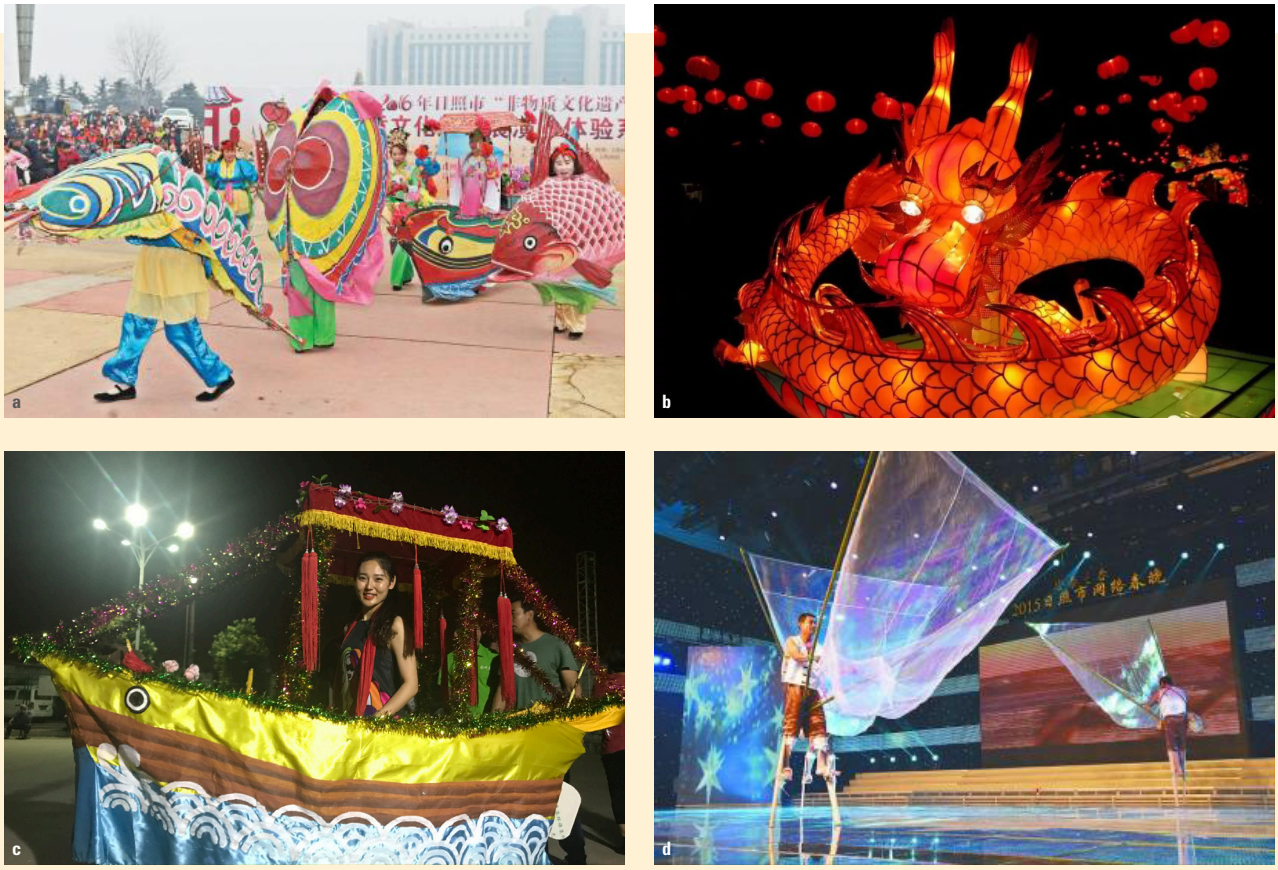


**Figure 2**
The Dances in the Fishermen's Festival. (a) The 'Shui' (Aquatic) Dance, (b) The Dragon Boat Dance, (c) The Han Boats Dance, (d) The Stilts Dance.
Notes: The Fishermen's Festival contains diverse dances, including the Shui Dance, Dragon Dance, Han Boat Dance and the Stilts Dance. The pictures were captured by the author in May 2019, Rizhao.

cancelled, followed by the cancellation of Fishermen's Festival. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the Fishermen's Dances were subject to the draconian national ideology.

Whatever dances survived had their choreography and content changed under the authority of the state. While they often physically satisfied the people's need to perpetuate the dances, they ignored people's demands for preserving tradition and emotional needs. The blessing functions of the Fishermen's Dances to ensure the fishermen's safety at sea, good weather and good harvest were lost, which is why so many of the Rizhao fishermen did not accept the changes the government made to the Fishermen's Dances.

After the 1980s, interest in traditional cultures in China was revived, and the region's Fishermen's Dance culture was once again recognised. China itself has become aware of the presence of a considerable pool of cultural heritage in the country, both tangible and intangible. In 2004, China joined and was one of the early signatories of UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The four Fishermen's Dances were included in China's ICH list. The listing of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Declaration shows that China values its ICH as much as its tangible assets. Hence, the history of the Fishermen's Dances is valued once again by the government. Even before, in 1995, the Dragon King Temple was rebuilt by donations from overseas Chinese with the approval of the government. During the Fishermen's Festival, the Dragon Dance and the Han Boats Dance gradually began to be performed in the festival again and are now recognised as part of Rizhao's regional culture.

## The Fishermen's Dances today

Rizhao's reversal of fortunes is the consequence of two sets of factors, both related to policy. The first is the

availability of resources for cities with ICH assets. The more ICHs a city is able to identify, the more monetary resources it is able to acquire from the central government.

*Recognising distinct ICHs.* With each dance eligible to be classified as an ICH, together with the festival itself, detaching the dances from the festival would seem a natural solution for the city to maximise its resources from the central government. But this involved a series of steps.

With specific reference to the Fishermen's Dances, the city government assisted the fishermen artists to develop the four Fishermen's Dances. In registering the dances as ICH, the basic information of the project had to be filled out – geographical location, historical evolution, main values, area and geographic environment, distribution areas, specific manifestations, main characteristics, status of existence, related products or works, lineages, main inheritors and other information. With such detailed information, the Fishermen's Festival was listed in the Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Shandong province in 2007, while it was listed in the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2018. In 2018, the Shui Dance and Dragon Dance were included in the first batch of Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Rizhao. Rizhao's local Han Boats Dance and Stilts Dance were also performed during the 'Rizhao Intangible Cultural Heritage Month'. Through these steps, the dances and the festival became separate ICHs. Thus, with official sponsorship, the reputation of the dances has been enhanced.

*Rural Rejuvenation.* A second set of factors is related to China's newly announced policy of Rural Rejuvenation to slow the flow of migrants from rural to urban areas. In China, rural property restrictions imposed by China's central government inhibited rural–urban migration, but still saw migrants from rural areas leaving their rural homes unoccupied, creating 'Vacant Villages' (*Kongxin Cun*). To correct this state of affairs, the central government put forward the land-intensive 'Increasing Urban Land and Decreasing Rural Residential Land Scheme' policy in 2006 to demolish rural vacant houses and consolidate rural land use. Dubbed 'new rural construction', the focus was on urbanisation, but the approach was top-down, without much regard for the feelings of those affected by this consolidation. For their part, local governments saw this as their opportunity to acquire rural land through relocating rural residents into high-rise apartments without regard for their willingness and lifestyle preferences (Wang, Zhang and Cheong 2014; Yep and Forrest 2016).

Together with approaches more relevant to local conditions, rural development reform that began in 2014 came to be known as 'New Urbanisation', which aimed to urbanise China through a more 'people-oriented approach' that takes into consideration the welfare of stakeholders (Chen, Liu, Lu, Chen and Ye 2018). This policy was a breakthrough in bottom-up policymaking based on local stakeholders' preferences (Chen, Gong, Lu and Ye 2019), and it provided the conceptual framework for the current comprehensive approach of 'Rural Rejuvenation' centred on 'people development' (Chen, Zinda and Yeh 2017).

Rural Rejuvenation is based on the promise of reverse flows from urban to rural locations. Connected to this, Yang and Zhang (2018) advanced their 'Rural Socialization Theory', which posits that China's expanding middle class, characterised by high income and high education, and accounting for over a third of the total population, require personalised consumption that can be met partially from rural activities. Thus, rural socialisation, through the interaction of both rural and urban stakeholders, grants benefits to rural residents while also attracting urban capital to rural areas and promoting urban–rural integration (Cheng, Xu, Zhou, He and Zhang 2019; Zhang, Cao and Bai 2019).

One important policy recommendation for Rural Rejuvenation is to leverage heritage tourism as a means of income generation for rural locations. How do these developments impact Rizhao and the city's Fishermen's Festival? The festival and its dances would seem primed to take advantage of China's strategy of Rural Rejuvenation. The area has been inhabited since ancient times. History has given the community strong traditions and a way of life dependent on maritime activities. The community has embraced the festival, which celebrates the community's folklore, customs and way of life. The community readily identifies itself with the festival and its suite of dances. Given the wealth of cultural assets both tangible and intangible in the locality, and with its reputation as a sunshine city, tourism would seem to be a natural activity. This would appear to give the festival a head start in heritage tourism, which fits well with the government's Rural Rejuvenation strategy.

To maximise this tourism potential, the city undertook to replace the traditional amateur groups of dancers with professional dancers and actors. Thus two groups of performers. The first consists of 'inheritors', defined as those who, by tradition, had 'inherited' the organisation and performance of the dances as members of the village or fishermen elites, familiar with the Fishermen's Dances' cultural connotations and significances, ritual process and structure, origin, evolution process. These inheritors must have certain influence and representativeness in the fishing villages of Rizhao, and they are responsible for training budding 'inheritors'. The second consists of performers who are recruited purely for their dancing skills and who receive monetary compensation. They have no other ties to the festival.

## Comparing the traditional to the current model

Although the current model of Fishermen's Dances represents a continuation of the traditional model that had been in existence for centuries, there are major differences in the roles of major stakeholders and in the external opportunities and challenges facing the continuation of the Fishermen's Dances. Table 1 shows the major differences between the traditional model and the current model of the Fishermen's Dances.

The first major difference is the severance of the dances from the Fishermen's Festival, of which they were an inseparable part when they began. While the spin-off of each dance from each other and from the Fishermen's Festival offers opportunities for generating tourist dollars, the coherence that characterised the festival and dances can no longer be engineered. Thus, compared to the traditional Fishermen's Dances as a pure and natural cultural inheritance model devoted to prayer to the Spirits of the Ocean, the modern version is a culturally guided model approved – if not dictated – by the government. The modern model is more standardised than the traditional model and, according to the government, it is able to complement and develop into a model that is more in tune with contemporary tastes and hence able to bring benefits to the fishermen's community around Rizhao. However, the negative aspect of the modern model of Fishermen's Dances is that it has deviated from the traditional model based on worship and anchored in the Fishermen's Festival. From the perspective of heritage preservation, it can no longer lay claim to the centuries-old tradition that the Fishermen's Festival was able to claim.

A second difference lies in who has the responsibility for orchestrating the performances. Under the traditional inheritance model, the Fishermen's Dances were exclusively the responsibility of the fishermen community.

**Table 1**
Features of Fishermen's Dances

| Major feature | Traditional model | Current model |
|---|---|---|
| Relationship with Fishermen's Festival | An integral part of Fishermen's Festival | Not related to Fishermen's Festival |
| 'Heritage' role of dances | Linked to Fishermen's Festival over centuries | No link. Mainly entertainment value |
| Objective of dances | Prayer to sea spirits, stress unity between man, gods and nature | Earn tourist revenue |
| Dominant stakeholder | Fishermen community | City government, assisted by fishermen community |
| Organisers and performances | Fishermen community ('inheritors'). Inheritors chosen among fishermen community, by consensus | Fishermen community ('inheritors') + professional performers. Inheritors approved by state, selected competitively, have official status recognised by government. Led to reduced |
| Role of 'inheritors' | Repository of traditional practices, nurture, train next generation of 'inheritors' | Much reduced by modern media, and hired, non-inheritor performers |
| Fishermen Community members not chosen to perform | No such situation | Small troupes formed to perform for tourists |

There is a relationship of learning and cooperation between people in the community. The leader chosen to lead the prayers was agreed to by all. Participants learned the skills from each other and showcased their talents. These dances enriched the quality of the life of the residents. In contrast, the modern inheritance model shows a competitive relationship between people. The inheritor has a position from the government which has clarified the responsibilities and tasks of the inheritor in the modern inheritance model. Such competition is conducive to the inheritance and development of the Fishermen's Dances, but it has led to a decline in the enthusiasm of traditional cultural inheritors. It is more focused on the characters of inheritors and activities conducted by the government, which interferes in the inheritance of Fishermen's Dances traditions.

As for the 'non-inheritor' performers, their motivation is primarily economic. With the development of modernisation, the fishermen's mindsets of going out to the sea safely are gradually diminished, as there are other fishermen who willingly go out to work for others and are ready to shoulder the risks of going out to sea. Hence, making money became their main objective. With payments institutionalised by the state, the remuneration from the Fishermen's Dance performances is regarded as an alternative source of income for the community.

A second consequence of the employment of 'non-inheritors' is the diminution of the potential pool of 'inheritors' for future performances. Already, the development of modern media has diminished the traditional role of the inheritor as trainer of future inheritors. Modern media such as the internet, television and video are able to record the movements of Fishermen's Dances from which learners of the performances can learn. This approach has been used by performance groups. While modern media permit the adaptation and combination of traditional dance forms, the inheritor's role as trainer and mentor has been diminished.

Third, under the current system, fishermen who were not chosen by the state to perform had formed their own groups of performers to provide performances for tourists. Any hope that these groups would be gatekeepers of heritage would be dashed – cast adrift from the traditional system that nurtured a core of 'inheritors', these groups were more interested in earning revenue from tourists than in showcasing their crafts and skills.

Reviewing these changes shows that the disruption and revival of the Fishermen's Dances resulted not so much in heritage preservation but rather in heritage adaptation. The disruption from the radicalised socialism with the establishment of the People's Republic deepened the scepticism among intellectuals of the May Fourth Movement, who questioned the relevance of traditional Confucianism in moving China forward. Prohibition of traditional 'superstitions' saw the loss of essential elements of the Fishermen's Dances, while the passage of time and the ageing of performance artistes and organisers further dimmed memories. When the state saw fit to revive the tradition, what was revived was not the traditional system of Fishermen's Dances but a mixed state–community system in which the state retains substantial control that leaves the traditional stakeholders, the 'inheritors', with a diminished role. These changes mean that the current Fishermen's Dances no longer represent heritage preservation but are more akin to heritage adaptation in response to both external (policy) factors and internal (environmental) factors.

## Conclusion: sustainability of cultural heritage – preservation or adaptation?

While it has been argued that sustainability may not be compatible with heritage preservation (Cooper 2010), an alternative view is that heritage preservation represents the first step to ensuring sustainability of cultural assets (Plaza 2016; Rypkema 2006; Tong 2016). Between these extremes is the argument that an exclusive focus on heritage preservation is not necessarily an optimal strategy in the absence of sustainability. However, an exclusive focus on heritage preservation has been labelled by McShea (2010, 57) as a 'curatorial approach' that, by ignoring such criteria as financial solvency and public access, has not been helpful to heritage tourism development.

For ICH that has survived over a long time, it is seldom possible for heritage to be 'preserved' in its original state without being impacted by transformative factors. This is also the case with the centuries-old Fishermen's Dances, which survived many political changes until the arrival of the People's Republic. Once revived, the ICH experienced adaptation rather than preservation. The question that arises is whether heritage adaptation qualifies an ICH as sustainable.

From the perspective of the Fishermen's Dances, the

enhanced role of the government as a major stakeholder offers both costs and benefits. As is clear from the earlier discussion, the injection of the government as a source of funding as well as a decision maker has transformed the ICH into what is only superficially similar to the traditional event, with government input into substance and orchestration sometimes decisive. The ability of the fishermen community to lay claim to ownership of the festival and dances is no more and, together with that, its control of the conduct of the festival. In that sense, the casualty of the dances' revival is preservation of heritage, together with traditions that have been lost.

At the same time, some decisions by the city government may yield short-term benefits but longer-term pains. For example, the 'professionalisation' of heritage tourism seems a quick fix in terms of increasing tourist arrivals in the short term, but it is a double-edged sword in the longer term. For one thing, heritage tourists are different from average tourists in that they are particularly interested in the heritage – the story behind the location or activity – visited. Changes from traditional practices affect the 'authenticity' (McShea 2010, 81) of a heritage location and may well detract from its attractiveness. The replacement of amateur performers with professional actors also may make for better entertainment but would damage the 'authenticity' of the performance in the eyes of the heritage tourist. The transition from heritage preservation to heritage tourism is a major step that many ICH hosts have failed to acknowledge.

At the same time, ceding control to city governments has some benefits. The most obvious is the ability to take advantage of pooling resources to achieve economies of scale. Thus, the Fishermen's Dances have traded financial and decision-making dependence on the government of Rizhao for marketing and branding to reach a larger tourist audience. The pooling of resources has allowed the city to organise many cost-effective activities for the marketing, promotion and protection of ICH as a group, keeping manageable operating expenses of individual activities while maximising the impact of these activities. For example, an effort is made to build a brand of ICH folk activities based upon the traditional festival as the centrepiece and the scenic locations as the platform. The strategy is to create a brand that symbolises the development of tourism in the whole region of Rizhao, helping alleviate poverty and actively promote the revitalisation of rural culture. This is akin to the 'ecomuseum' projects that serve both heritage preservation and rural development in parts of China (Nitsky 2012).

All things considered, a greater role for the city government would certainly have ensured the financial sustainability of the Fishermen's Dances and the Fishermen's Festival, although, given several courses of action, such as detaching the dances from the festival and employing professional performers, the heritage sustainability remains a more open question. Still, having the dances sheltered under the protection of the city government affords a degree of protection from unforeseen external impacts. These influences aside, much depends on the city administration's capability in moving towards a sustainable heritage tourism model.

A final question the above discussion raises is the possibility of objective conflicts. While the debate balancing heritage preservation with heritage sustainability is situated squarely within the broad strategy of Rural Rejuvenation – either approach represents alternatives to attract tourists – a different overall strategy, say of accelerating non-farm employment, may see goal conflict that de-emphasises the preservation-sustainability debate. Even within the context of Rural Rejuvenation, the broad objective of reviving rural areas is indifferent to the approach needed. Indeed, the dominant role of the state in orchestrating the dances did not help preservation and may also not be 'people friendly' or 'bottom-up'. The above case highlights the danger that important issues can be submerged in larger strategic debates.

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## ENDNOTES

1. What is often referred to as Chinese folk religion combines elements of many religions and religious practices, which are difficult to define (Globalsecurity.org, n.d.). References to many 'gods' supervising different aspects of people's lives and a hierarchy of gods are central parts of this complexity.
2. Timeline from 'Timeline of Chinese history and other key events': http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/timelines/china_timeline.htm.

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# Adapting the Living Human Treasures idea in Flanders (Belgium): The case of craftsmanship

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# Adapting the Living Human Treasures idea in Flanders (Belgium): The case of craftsmanship

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## ABSTRACT

The UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage places individuals, groups and communities at the heart of safeguarding. The Living Human Treasures (LHT), although discontinued as a UNESCO programme in 2006, introduced an earlier model of this approach and is prevalent in various national and regional contexts. However, it has often been treated with a limited view to grant honours and draw public attention to the excellence of masters, performers and other artists. On the other hand, as many actions try to find ways to integrate intangible cultural heritage (ICH) into education, it is important to revisit alternative practices that have put emphasis on human agency in the safeguarding of ICH. Therefore, the subsidy regulation for apprenticeship to craftsmanship in Flanders (Belgium), where there is no official LHT system, provides a relevant case that serves to align the human-centred approach of LHT with the Convention. An experimental practice that has been started by the Flemish Ministry of Culture in 2018 in Belgium, it is a remarkable initiative that addresses crafts communities in Flanders. Notwithstanding the problems such as the application process, the limited involvement of NGOs, the lack of a monitoring system and the absence of links to formal education, I argue that this experience devoted to a contemporary interpretation of crafts and craftsmanship can inspire others to mobilise and accommodate LHT systems into national and regional contexts with connections not only to culture but also to education, design, entrepreneurship and economy.

## Keywords

crafts, apprenticeship, UNESCO, Living Human Treasures, nonformal education, cultural transmission, Flanders

## Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage (hereafter ICH) has gradually become one of the important topics in the cultural policies of many countries and regions since the adoption of the UNESCO 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereafter the Convention).[1] In the European context, this tendency is supported by some policy instruments such as the inspiring Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (the Faro Convention). On the other hand, in a wider context, the *Creative Economy Report* (2013) points to the significance of crafts for local development. In addition, the 'Flemish Cultural Heritage Decree' (2017) and *The Government of Flanders' Policy on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*[2] outline relevant actions to be taken, also emphasising the term 'heritage communities.' This term is defined in the Faro Convention as the 'people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations' (2005, 2). As a further step, in Flanders, policymakers have added the words 'and organisations' after the word 'people' in Flemish Heritage Decree, changing the potential of the text (Jacobs 2020, 287).

With reference to the developments outlined above suggesting the human agency in safeguarding, it is necessary to mention the brief chronology that led to the creation of Living Human Treasures (LHT) programmes in numerous countries and its reflections in Flanders. The legal regulations dedicated to the safeguarding of the domains related to ICH extend back to the Japanese Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties (1950). On the other hand, the Republic of Korea's Cultural Property Protection Law of 1962 paved the way for accumulation of experience to submit a proposal to UNESCO Executive Board to establish Living Human Treasures programme in 1993 (Aikawa-Faure 2014, 38–39, 47), notwithstanding some problems (Yim 2004, 11; Jongsung 2004, 187). However, while there is a certain trend in ICH literature to emphasise Japan and the Republic of Korea as the first promoters of the topic, it should be noted that similar efforts to support craftsmanship were also present in Hungary (Csonka-Takács and Illés 2017, 132–138) and Czechia (Šimša 2017, 150) from the 1950 and 1960s. Today, LHT continues to influence and inspire cultural policies in many countries in different ways (Gauthier 2021).[3]

This research investigates one of the promising initiatives that can encourage decision makers, experts, NGOs and researchers to rethink the function of LHT systems and mobilise them as an integral driving force of cultural policies on the future of crafts. The pilot project in the form of a subsidy regulation (grants for passing on craftsmanship) was started in 2018. Facilitated by the UNESCO-accredited NGO Workshop Intangible Heritage Flanders, it represents a pertinent case not only to question the meaning and functions of LHT systems today but also to reflect on nonformal education and modalities for master–apprentice relations in order to search for ways to adjust and accommodate LHT systems' logic of recognition into the broader context of the Convention. The Flemish initiative employs a 'not reactive but proactive' (personal communication, 2 March 2022) approach that corresponds to the contemporary economic, cultural, educational and social needs and resources, as emphasised by Jorijn Neyrinck, the director of the above-mentioned NGO.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce and analyse the safeguarding vision presented in this pilot project and how nonformal learning in crafts has taken place in community settings in Flanders. Can this case help rethink what crafts and craftsmanship mean today and, more importantly, find ways to insert LHT programmes in nonformal education? In other words, can it help functionalise LHT programmes, which are usually seen as limited to official titles and recognition to tradition bearers and practitioners in many countries? Can it be more? Besides, the perspective in Flanders can also be considered a call to realise true potential in LHT programmes by tweaking them and connecting them to Article 14 of the Convention. It serves better when taken with reference to 'specific educational and training programmes within the communities and groups concerned.' Based on the problems identified, this study also includes some minor suggestions on how to develop from this pilot project into a successful programme in the coming years.

## Method and data

This article is based on a literature review and the results of interviews that took place between January and June 2022. [4] The literature review explores field reports, vision papers, regulations and guidebooks produced or supported by the Flemish government since 2018 in relation to the subsidy regulation. The information and experiences extracted from these resources have been incorporated into the paper in a way that reveals distinctive characteristics of this pilot project. The aim is to evaluate a specific and dynamic interpretation of LHT system that is not limited to the cultural sector but also seeks for contact points in education, economy, design and entrepreneurship. As mentioned by Sophie Muyllaert of the Flemish Ministry of Culture, the Department of Culture, Youth and Media, 'it is not just knowledge to be transmitted but also giving people incentives and become an entrepreneur to make money out of it' (personal communication, 4 February 2022).

Online and face-to-face interviews with 10 informants from January to June 2022 gave me a good grasp of the project, especially about the background of the project and current experiences, challenges and insights that are not reflected in written sources. The semi-structured, open-ended and in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives from the Flemish Ministry of Culture (Sophie Muyllaert) and two prominent heritage NGOs with decisive roles – that is, the Workshop Intangible Heritage Flanders (Jorijn Neyrinck) and the Center for Industrial Heritage Flanders (Joeri Januarius) – one expert in the field of heritage studies at the University of Antwerp (Marc Jacobs) and five masters and one apprentice who received grants for their projects between January 2019 and June 2022.[5]

This paper first addresses the introduction, main characteristics and significance of the project, followed by an evaluation of the relevance of the Convention's approach to safeguarding ICH through education and the structure and implementation of the subsidy regulation as a form of nonformal education. Next, the interview materials are analysed in terms of the problems between masters and apprentices, challenges arising from unmonitored autonomy of the participants and the involvement of NGOs as mediators in the application and implementation process. The article concludes by drawing attention to the need to reconsider the meaning and functions of LHT systems, which leads me to assert that, compared to formal education, context-specific actions in nonformal education equally serves to interpret and align the logic of LHT systems with the Convention and expand the possibilities to connect these systems to other policy frameworks.

## Crafts revisited through the exploration of new forms of transmission: an innovative cultural subsidy regulation for craftsmanship in Flanders

To support the transmission and viability of crafts in Flanders, a grant system for passing on craftsmanship was started by the Flemish Ministry of Culture, the Department of Culture, Youth and Media in 2018 and facilitated, among others, mainly by the NGO Workshop Intangible Heritage Flanders in close cooperation with other NGOs with specific thematic expertise.[6] Although considered a pilot project at this stage, it is a well-thought-out initiative developed based on a particular vision of transmission extending over a period of time. As can be read between the lines of the vision note *Government of Flanders' policy on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage*, its preliminary conception and preparatory work from 2010 onwards have directly been related to the policy domains of culture, economy and work, while the focus of policy is on the master–apprentice modes of transmission in the field of ICH (Government of Flanders Arts and Heritage 2010, 171–177). To take this vision to the next level in the following years, the policy report *Virtuoos Vlaanderen* was published in 2014 with the cooperation of the NGOs such as Tapis Plein (the predecessor of the current Workshop Intangible Heritage Flanders), the Center for Industrial Heritage Flanders (ETWIE), FARO Flemish Interface for Cultural Heritage, the Flemish UNESCO Commission and the Flemish government. This report is an important source to understand the foundations of the project, as the findings of *Virtuoos Vlaanderen* helped convince the Minister for Culture, Sven Gatz, and his cabinet, as well as the Flemish Ministry of Culture, to give initial shape to the pilot project. For Neyrinck, it was also a major step to start to 'build a network of NGOs' (personal communication, 2 March 2022) around living heritage and future initiatives on apprenticeship in crafts. In addition, another strategically constructed report *A Future for Crafts* (Vandenbulcke 2015), which is the product of field research in Flanders in 2012–2015, has also contributed to recognising the need to establish a system on apprenticeship in crafts.

The outcome of the search for ways LHT can serve as a lever for ICH policy in Flanders and also for a contemporary heritage policy that establishes links to other policy domains and existing social initiatives launched from other perspectives (2014, 10–11, 66), *Virtuoos Vlaanderen* builds upon the results of in-depth interviews with craftspeople and experts between 2012 and 2014 in Flanders to discover the feasibility and methods to invest in a specific, cross-border project, unearth the opportunities to expand the reach of craftsmanship in various areas of policy, and eventually contribute to the design of a tailored interpretation of LHT. Designed as an experimental subsidy regulation and pilot project that is funded by the Ministry as a public intervention in the form of 'direct public expenditure' (Klamer et al. 2013, 44), the aim of the project is to reinterpret and functionalise the Flemish variant of LHT programme in Flanders and transmit craftsmanship to future generations, connecting it to innovative, contemporary economic, social and cultural interpretations of crafts. The reference in the report to Article 18 of the Convention on programmes and projects and the recognition that the domains of 'work', 'education' and 'amateur arts' are significant for transmitting knowledge and skills (2014, 56, 59) not only reinforces this ambition but also indicates the desire to use apprenticeship, thus 'education', to increase the relevancy of both the logic of LHT programmes around the world and the Convention. Even though Flanders currently does not have an official LHT programme, it is remarkable that the subsidy regulation on craftsmanship stands as a distinctive approach to LHT, concentrating on 'transmission' in a flexible and occasionally non-traditional mode of master–apprentice relations through a network of regional stakeholders rather than primarily selecting or recognising 'outstanding' representatives in various domains of ICH.

Based on the joint application and mutual agreement of one master and up to four or five apprentices as 'equal' partners to work out the course of training (method, aim, budget, location and time of training, purchase of materials, use of skills and knowledge afterwards, etc.) for a maximum period of 24 months, the Flemish government has awarded 2,750,000 euros of project grants in total (the upper limit is currently 30,000 euros for each partnership) for 231 masters and apprentices in three cycles since 2018. This is a significant investment in transmission and appreciation of crafts in Flanders.[7] This investment seems to be a part of the recent Flemish policy to allocate relatively higher financial resources for organisations operating in the cultural heritage sector (Vermeersch and Havermans 2021, 37). As mentioned in Belgium's latest periodic report submitted to UNESCO, one of the distinctive aspects of this pilot project is the broad interpretation of craftsmanship, not only addressing 'traditional' crafts but also 'applied arts or performing arts about intangible cultural heritage' (2021, 92), varying from tattoo making, artisanal beer brewing, gin and liquor distilling to bread-baking techniques, processing of local medicinal plants, industrial knitting, beekeeping, martial arts, historical clown entrances and so on. However, Januarius has expressed that the suggestion that some priorities in favour of some endangered crafts should be made, and the funding should not be open to every form of ICH at least in the first cycle, but this was not followed by the Flemish Ministry of Culture (personal communication, 25 January 2022). On the other hand, Neyrinck states that the 'current model does not really focus on "crafts crafts", but it concentrates on craftsmanship in all domains of living heritage, which was one of our suggestions to keep it open and support other types of living heritage' (personal communication, 2 March 2022). It therefore seems that there was no full consensus on the degree of inclusiveness or better zones of 'exclusion' in the planning of the project.

Although it is relatively early to discuss its overall influence on craftsmanship and other policy domains, the project seems to introduce a vision to transform and expand the concept of crafts, relations between and profiles of masters and apprentices, and one-to-one, unidirectional teaching methods, which might stimulate innovative techniques and production processes through 'mutual' planning and learning. In addition, the broader perception of crafts and the framework of partnership mentioned above have been complemented by the engagement of the ICH network and communities in Flanders. As stated in Belgium's latest periodic report, Workshop Intangible Heritage Flanders is the main body that facilitates the implementation of this pilot project, in close cooperation with other competent bodies such as ETWIE and Bokrijk Craftsmanship & Heritage as well as regional and local heritage cells or units which foster participation of communities, groups and individuals through providing international knowledge and practices in the field of ICH and co-developing toolkits for future policy (2021, 39–41, 62); these regional and local NGOs and groups also help applicants with application files and procedures, help them find partners and assist in conflict resolution when needed. In this regard, the role of NGOs suggests the term 'systems conveners' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015), in the sense that they bring different people from different locations together across traditional boundaries to work on something, facilitate interactions and translate where necessary so that people understand each other. As expressed by Klamer, Mignosa and Petrova, the involvement of NGOs might be beneficial to help diminish any kinds of control on cultural policies to ensure 'socially preferable outcome' (2013, 39). Therefore, concerning its vision and the involvement of ICH network in its design and execution, the subsidy regulation seems to differentiate from other LHT systems, with a concrete desire to render LHT functional and integrate it not just into cultural policies but also into social, economic and educational plans in a feasible way that is coherent with regional and local experiences and needs. That this is done through nonformal education also enables the project to expand its reach, taking advantage of the relatively flexible and adaptive character of this type of education, compared to the less dynamic, more structured and rather strict nature of formal education. Besides, it highlights the equally important role of nonformal education in safeguarding ICH, in which formal education has been predominantly employed by the State Parties, as can be observed in the periodic reports submitted to UNESCO.[8]

## Economic relevance and the emphasis on mutual learning

The project aspires to pave the way for a productive and consistent cooperation between masters and apprentices. As expressed by Januarius, a new system in crafts 'might have some added value compared to formal education systems that are already in place'. This same

logic proposes that projects by masters and apprentices should not be available, or should only be offered in a limited way, in Flemish formal education systems. In Januarius's opinion, this attitude is also important 'to prevent that there is some unhealthy competition between formal and nonformal educational systems.' Everyone he interviewed in 2012–2014 agreed that 'it is very important to give enough space and time and also financial support to masters and apprentices in order to get a real cooperation between them, a real transmission of knowledge' (personal communication, 25 January 2022). As Januarius states, realising the drawback in the rather one-way relationship in the 'Master of Art' (Maîtres d'Art) system in France, the masters who were interviewed have been said to underscore that 'it should not be a one-way relationship, not necessarily one to one. It could be a small group, with maximum four students' (personal communication, 25 January 2022). On the other hand, as reiterated by Neyrinck from the Workshop Intangible Heritage Flanders, this perspective on the relationship between masters and apprentices has not been regarded as something hierarchical and one learns from the other. Now it is more like a 'dialogical approach' (personal communication, 2 March 2022). As for the complementary role assigned to the project that stands for filling the gaps in crafts education where schools fail to satisfy, one of the masters thinks that the subsidy represents a remarkable opportunity as a tool of nonformal education that works for the viability of crafts:

> First, it was possible to teach crafts in the context of conservation-restoration. But over the years, the scope has shifted from manual handling to analytical conservation and restoration. So, it lost its craftsmanship aspects which have advantages and disadvantages. This project enabled to teach crafts in a private way and teach the fading aspects of craftsmanship that we cannot teach in such education programmes. (personal communication, 5 May 2022)

Looking at the opinions and aspirations of the NGOs in charge, two particular aspects of the project need to be elaborated. First, it is important to see the masters' experience on the ground and examine how the approach to 'economic aspects' and 'mutual learning' mentioned above is interpreted. While stressing the significance of the Flemish government's support for up to two years, one of the masters said that

> It is a life-changing event for me to win a scholarship. It enabled me to work full-time as woodworker, craftsman. I had a busy day job and worked less to create some time for carving and teaching. The grant was enough that I could take a risk, so I quit my job and worked really hard. This money was a steady income for my next two years, and that was the push I needed to start what I love [...] I used to do spoon carving and woodworking, but now I am spoon carver and green woodworker. (personal communication, 2 June 2022)

As can be seen from this viewpoint, economic relevance is regarded as one of the key issues for the viability of crafts, and the project is a valuable response to encourage craftspeople to concentrate on producing and transmitting their knowledge and skills. A similar view is shared by one of the apprentices as well:

> I think they are paying for your time in a way, especially for teachers and the time they invest in teaching us and not in their work. As long as you do the project, the money is not necessarily going to the project. It is going to compensate for the time. (personal communication, 17 June 2022)

As another master emphasises, 'when you do not make enough money while you learn the craft, there is a tension between "learning process" and "staying alive"' (personal communication, 5 May 2022). Enabling masters to provide funds also for their apprentices, the project can therefore be said to set and reveal a contemporary example of relations between masters and apprentices. As expressed by one of the masters, '[a] trainee is not an employee and not a volunteer. They would be somewhere between them.' (personal communication, 2 June 2022), so it is reasonable that they receive fair compensation for their role.

Second, the effort to encourage a two-way relationship in learning and teaching between masters and apprentices is another topic of examination, especially on the part of the masters. While the relationship between the two sides has usually been one-sided, with the role of masters having absolute authority over apprentices, the subsidy regulation aims to put a spotlight on the importance of building a reciprocal dialogue to stimulate new teaching and learning techniques, explore multiple ways of making things and bolster inventive designs to form a kind of

learning network. Notwithstanding its challenges, this contemporary vision is shared by the masters, as one clearly expressed: 'I think in the past the master was the master. [Today] We started to work as equals, even when I know more about the instrument. You can learn more when you are equals and have respect for each other' (personal communication, 3 June 2022). This also has to do with the fact that learning has become less norm-affirming and more self-critical (Vermeersch and Havermans 2021, 91–92). Besides, this new experience born out of the project's context seems to help the masters reflect on their teaching skills as craftspeople:

> I learn a lot from them. I learn from their questions, insights, suggestions. On a standard workshop as a day course with 10 people, I just focus on 10 people, making sure that everybody knows what they have to know at the end of the day. But only with two trainees in the project, I see them every week and you can go much deeper. It actually makes me a better teacher. I can focus on my teaching and explain things. Every day I have the chance to think about what I did and how I can improve. Most importantly, I learn how to be a good teacher. (personal communication, 2 June 2022)

As observed by one of the masters who participated in the project, the experience gained in some training seems to be relatively more in harmony with the Ministry's approach:

> What we did was ask questions: Why do we do this? Is there any other way of doing it? Try something else [...] They ask a lot of questions, and they were very critical about what we were doing. [The] instrument was unknown to them, but they had their own experience with their instruments. They applied their own perspectives. I learned from them too. (personal communication, 3 June 2022)

The words of another master with similar views affirm the reflexive sense among craftspeople: 'I did not learn anything from him on lettering, but I learned a lot on a personal level. I tried to reformulate everything in my discussions with him and learned about teaching' (personal communication, 6 June 2022). However, the ideal of mutual learning has not always been experienced during the training:

> We felt that time was short. My apprentice was slow in learning. I tried to give him basics in that respect [...] Not every apprentice is a super apprentice. They are human beings, so there is a human aspect which I value a lot. Within the limitations, it is important to try to maximise the possibilities and talents. (personal communication, 6 June 2022)

In the light of these views, it seems that 'expected' mutual exchanges between masters and apprentices depend on some variables, two of which are 'apprentices' background, certain skills and capacities' required on a higher level by some crafts, on the one hand, and 'length of training', on the other, as expressed by one of the masters:

> It was not so much mutual. I had hoped for that. Chasing technique [a difficult technique used in jewellery to decorate the front surface of a metal object by indenting] is really difficult. I had to make a lot of efforts to learn key points in chasing. Learning was slow. It has something to do with the length of the training and also the background of trainees [...] It was important to select students who already have some experience in metalworking. (personal communication, 5 May 2022)

In addition, Januarius thinks that there are some other problems that turn these partnerships into a challenge over time:

> During the first cycle, we saw that working with masters can be exhausting. They have a lot of expectations of students. It is human to have disagreements, problems. But sometimes it gets to the point where masters do not want to work with students or vice versa. That's something we did not anticipate enough in the two rounds, so in the third round, we asked them to fill in the form saying that they really got to know each other before starting and signing the form (personal communication, 25 January 2022).

It should also be noted that the insistence by the Ministry and NGOs on 'knowing each other' beforehand might 'risk people who want to learn and people who want to teach not finding each other' as mentioned by one of the apprentices (personal communication, 17 June 2022). Considering these experiences, the project's

overall aspiration to provide a basis for mutual learning and enable masters to learn from their apprentices is a difficult task – even resulting in a dilemma in some cases. Because some masters share the concern that they do not always have many options when it comes to find the right apprentice with needed skill sets and motivation, even when they think they got on with each other well:

> The apprentice I finally had, I met him on a course, we got along very well personally [...] After a month [in the training], I felt that he was not really putting very much enthusiasm into that. He was not very good; I felt too much frustration. I felt that we were losing time in something secondary. But I thought that it was an important thing for people who funded us, so for me it did not feel okay; I felt like I should do this. For me, it is part of the thing that something happening between two people. Me as a teacher, him as an apprentice. I am not only working with the best students – I try to work with everyone, feel from each student's possibilities and advantages and try to bring them one or two steps higher. (personal communication, 6 June 2022)

Even though this might not be the kind of mutual exchange envisioned by the Flemish Ministry of Culture, and such cases might not be desirable considering the limited financial resources, these trainings still seem to provide enough space for the masters to discover their role as agents engaging with the current regional policy in crafts and work with apprentices from various backgrounds, not necessarily with the ones with high potential and a relevant background. Apart from these examples, one of the funded trainings that is based on vocal performance can be said to have relatively unusual characteristics with a focus on heritage communities, as it falls outside the boundaries of master–apprentice relations and the one-to-one basis:

> In our group, I am not a master. I am not the one teaching the YouYou[9]. I know it very well. But I also try to work with the fact that this group needs to be collective in order for people to learn YouYou. It is always multiple. It is not one to one; it is a group dynamic, so we tried to stretch modalities of this grant as much as we could and introduce some new terminology. Then I decided to be the coach in dialogue with pupils. We called our grant 'a collective pedagogic environment'. (personal communication, 9 June 2022)

As can be seen, the vision attached to the project does not limit its scope to crafts and master–apprentice relations. However, the interpretation that brings together masters, apprentices and heritage communities under the same funding mechanism might not be very useful. As stated by Neyrinck, the government still tries to 'find balance between 'more budget, less people and less budget, more people.' Assuming that the inclusion of heritage communities will require more and outlasting financial resources and a different logic in funding allocations compared to a master–apprentice category, it is important to be flexible and not to limit the future design of the project to the duality of budget and people.

Although derived from a new initiative with an experimental basis, the perspective outlined in the last example not only serves to enhance the limited use of LHT systems but also increases the value, function and framework of this system, employing it as a tool of cultural policies. In addition, although being another story outside the primary purpose of this paper, it helps rethink the definition, function and interpretation of the term 'crafts' and 'master–apprentice relationships' in the context of the Convention and relevant communities in other parts of the world as well. Nonetheless, while the Flemish government tries to avoid possible confusion about the meaning and boundaries of ICH (Department of Culture, Youth & Media 2022, 18), the broad interpretation of crafts incites objections from some of the masters, who tend to attach great importance to the policies that prioritise crafts' economic relevance and value in the society:

> It was surprising to see how many different things were encompassed within this project. You have crafts like mine which is proper crafts; you also have bakery, which is also a craft – I do not deny that. You have projects like Moroccan female singers. Is that a craft or folklore? I do not think it is a craft. For me it is very difficult to judge. They should differentiate or limit the kinds of crafts and define what is crafts and what is folklore. They are different [...] It is important to define what is what and what is valuable to society. I do not judge but what kind of value? How is it evaluated? Economical value? These are difficult things. Interpretation of crafts is too broad, which is a problem in my experience. (personal communication, 5 May 2022)

In the light of the participants' views and the perspective

of the programme, LHT systems around the world should be operationalised as tools of education and crafts should be valorised employing a proactive approach not only in the cultural sector but also in education, design, entrepreneurship and economy. In other words, the LHT systems need to be rethought and designed with a focus on transmission of crafts knowledge and skills in the form of trainings based on a mutual exchange between master and apprentice. Although it is not easy, encouraging an equal relationship between two sides would not only help reduce hierarchy implied in such an exchange in LHT systems, but it would also motivate apprentices to learn, blend, contextualise and apply relevant knowledge and skills, thus increase the relevancy and function of LHT systems. On the other hand, it is equally important that the economic relevancy of existing and future LHT systems be extended with links to entrepreneurship, design and product development through joint efforts of competent ministries, NGOs, universities and the private sector. Closely related to this is the establishment of complementary financial and administrative mechanisms that will (following the completion of training) encourage apprentices to start businesses or develop new initiatives using crafts knowledge, skills and techniques.

## The problems faced in the project and the way forward

The success of the experimental subsidy regulation to attract attention among craftspeople in Flanders and the emergence of some problems have proceeded simultaneously. Therefore, the problems encountered in various stages are worthy of investigation. Besides, as the Flemish government seeks for ways to turn it into a sustainable programme in its policy (Department of Culture, Youth & Media 2022, 27), it is essential to address some of the challenges faced through the eyes of the masters who participated in the projects. The main problems with the preparation of application files, the masters' concern about possible rivalries between masters and apprentices, the lack of a monitoring and assessment mechanism, and the integration of this initiative into formal education need to be highlighted as some of the major points of concern.

The first issue is about the applications submitted to the Ministry, which screen these proposals to make a final decision to select the projects that will receive a subsidy. Despite the administration's previous attempts to simplify the questions in the forms, some of the masters find it difficult to fill in some parts of the application forms:

> The application for the grant was too complicated for technical and administrational possibilities. It was complicated and I felt that it was too formal. Maybe a person-to-person interview would better clarify than all the paperwork putting a programme from day to day, week to week, which is very superficial. That makes no sense. (personal communication, 6 June 2022)

However, the facilitation role of the NGOs across Flanders to help masters and apprentices prepare quality application files seems to work as expected:

> I asked for some help from CEMPER [Centre for Music and Performing Arts Heritage in Flanders]. I had somebody there. She said 'do not say that – it is negative – you better write it like that, then they understand' etc., so she was a go-between between me and the jury. That was necessary. A craftsperson is a person who works with their hands, not always thinking about how to fill in that form and answer difficult questions. It was a negative experience for me making up the dossier. The paperwork is the most difficult to do. (personal communication, 3 June 2022)

One of the masters suggested a good question to include in the form: 'what are basics masters would like to pass on to make it possible for the apprentice to develop on their own after the apprenticeship?' This question would be better for a focused, resource-friendly and fair evaluation of proposals in future cycles, because, he adds, 'It is not just about gaining skills, making things or building knowledge on know-how. It is also about infusing into that craft. The project can also encourage masters to go in this direction' (personal communication, 6 June 2022). Having shared the difficulties encountered during this process, apprentices also had ideas, especially stemming from the difference in educational background between masters and apprentices:

> Probably the application process is the weakest part of the project. Because the task is heavy. I worry [that there are] a lot of craftspeople who not like to do it in that way. Evaluation might be better on an oral basis, by face-to-face visits [...] Being a good craftsperson does not make you a good writer of application files,

> and it is a different skill. If you have never done it before, it is intimidating. I can imagine a lot of applicants would stop applying because of a big application form, even though I think it is also a comparatively small effort to write a big file if you are getting a lot of chances and money in return, so it is not a bad trade, but it excludes people that have not done academic things. So, I think especially for those people, it is valuable that they can ask for help from NGOs. (personal communication, 17 June 2022)

At this point, it could be good to touch upon the 'perception' of NGOs among some of the craftspeople. As indicated by Neyrinck from the NGO Workshop Intangible Heritage Flanders, while the Flemish government provides funding and screens the applications, 'they [the administration] need to have a kind of neutrality, so that's where we [the NGO] comes in' (personal communication, 2 March 2022). In addition, the new ICH policy recently shared by the Flemish government underlines that mediation is best done by the cultural heritage organisations that are 'close to the heritage communities involved' (Department of Culture, Youth & Media 2022, 39). However, the view of one of the masters shows that, despite the emphasis above, the role assigned to the NGOs in this initiative is not fully compatible with the intended collaborative strategy, which suggests the need to facilitate a stronger dialogue beforehand between NGOs and masters: 'For me I see them [NGOs] a little bit closer to the government. They are middle people but they are subsidised. They work closely to politics, so they already bring you closer to governmental logic' (personal communication, 9 June 2022).

As a relevant issue following the process mentioned above, the evaluation of applications by the Flemish Ministry of Culture seems to raise some concerns about the transparency of final decisions to declare beneficiaries of the subsidy. Although there are limitations due to time constraints, staff shortage and difficulties in arranging juries, the decisions are solely taken by the internal selection committee and the minister. The nature of the selection process raises some questions about the nature of the judgements of the applications, because it impossible to see the extent to which selection criteria have been applied:

> How far it is done by administration and how far is the political influence? Whether administrators are already taking into account the preferences of politicians. I guess it is more like that way. They try to present it like a good mixture of applications, diverse. Decisions which politicians will be happy with. Of course, that is all okay, but it would be preferable to make it more transparent so that people know which kind of criteria are used for the selection of grants. (personal communication, 2 March 2022)

Although the subsidy regulation has been customised to better satisfy the needs among craftspeople and it has managed to attract much attention in the region, there is an obvious need to establish a follow-up and assessment mechanism in collaboration with the NGOs during and after the subsidised projects. While noting the extraordinary circumstances during the Covid-19 pandemic and the experimental nature of the action, the lack of monitoring should be addressed as one of the critical points of concern for the consistency, customisation and overall success of this initiative. In addition, since the Ministry provides a subsidy of 30,000 euros for each project, it is important to keep track of how it evolves on the ground, not because of issues of trust, but to increase the efficiency of the subsidies and also strengthen the dialogue between the Ministry, NGOs, masters and apprentices:

> The Ministry should have contact with us and know how it is developing. They should see the difficulties themselves. I have a feeling that 'you are free to do what you want'. You get your money, etc. For me, the final report is more important than what I think doing with it. It is serious. It is very easy to prepare a final report and that's it. Nobody asks something about results. There is no judgement on the projects, results and effect of trajectories. I expect a proper evaluation from administration. It is possible that they do not spend enough time to judge final reports; it is too quick. I expect the selection committee to speak about the project to raise the quality of trajectories. There is a lot of space for a possible 'take-it-easy' situation now. (personal communication, 3 June 2022)

While similar thoughts by other masters also underscore the significance of receiving feedback after the submission of final reports following the end of projects, a remarkable suggestion from one of the masters might be complementary to the views shared above. It might help the Ministry rethink the way the subsidies are delivered in order to increase the productivity of the projects and also serve as an instructive insight for relevant initiatives

in other parts of the world, although that would also mean a heavier workload:

> What I do not like is that Ministry gives 80 per cent of the money from the start. Some people forget two years later that they got the money. What I say is that it is good to have advance money; we honour your engagement. All money is well spent. In psychology, it is very nice that when people feel 'ok, I get some money because I will commit', 'I get some more money because I am committing', and 'I get money afterwards because I have done everything'. That's the psychology to do timing when you give money: beginning, middle, end. (personal communication, 9 June 2022)

Although most of the problems identified so far naturally occur in different phases of relations between masters and the Ministry, there are interesting issues about the characteristics of some partnerships between masters and apprentices, such as the masters' anticipation of future rivalry and possible tensions. One of the main goals of the subsidy regulation is to ensure the viability of crafts in Flanders through mutual learning between masters and apprentices. In addition, the plan is to encourage people to pursue a future career as professionals in crafts. In this context, the apprentices are expected to make progress in their domains and use, in the near future, knowledge and skills they learn in their interaction with the masters. However, as reflected by Sophie Muyllaert from the Ministry, some masters look for apprentices who live far away from them to avoid a potential future rivalry. This is especially the case when masters get the impression that the apprentice learns quickly and is able to combine all past and new knowledge and skills easily to create something original, even in a different context. Some of the apprentices are well educated, have their own network and clients, and can make use of social media, whereas some masters have more stable, classical backgrounds with traditional set of skills.

While this is an overall observation based on the Ministry's experience up till now and cannot hold true for all the beneficiaries, it is an important point of attention that needs to be addressed to ensure better outcomes. Because the subsidy regulation is primarily aimed at crafts communities in Flanders, it is important to deal with such concerns among craftspeople to raise the relevancy of this initiative in the region:

> I made it clear to him from the beginning: I do not want you to be an immediate competitor next door, which was obvious. He was living far away. I would not teach the depths of my knowledge to someone next door who will be competing with me next year on the market. It is a general idea I would avoid. (personal communication, 6 June 2022)

On the other hand, one of the masters shared opposing views, paying no mind to the worry about rivalry:

> I do not care. Copying would not be a good idea. I always refuse the idea that I educate my future competitors. I am not concerned about that. Anyone can be a baker. We have different bakeries here. People looking at others and complaining about competition and copying have to look at their own work. (personal communication, 2 June 2022)

As shown here, there is no uniform view among craftspeople on the issue of rivalry, and it is not easy to identify to what extent the masters' concerns about rivalry (implicitly or explicitly) affect their relationships with apprentices and the quality and integrity of the learning process. Nevertheless, this aspect of the subsidy regulation needs to be taken into account in the consideration of applications, as masters seeing it as first steps of a possible rivalry limit the potential of such exchanges, thus meaning waste of limited resources. It should also be noted that possible problems regarding intellectual property rights is another point of concern that seems to be connected to the issue of rivalry. As Januarius from the Center for Industrial Heritage Flanders says, it is sometimes the case that the apprentices who adapt the design of master during training and sell it afterwards without permission give rise to problems that can lead to breakup of their partnership (personal communication, 25 January 2022). While the Ministry tries to avoid such problems by encouraging applicants to prepare and sign a kind of agreement which specifies the responsibilities of both parties, it seems that masters and apprentices deem it unnecessary and rely on mutual trust. However, if the intention is to improve the subsidy regulation in crafts and turn the experiment into a sustainable programme, the creation of a legal framework aimed at these partnerships might be more helpful, as the words of a craftsman reveal: 'If you have a very good relation between two people, they make it work. Rules and law are there when they do not get along anymore' (personal communication, 2 June 2022).

As a final remark in this section, formal education aspects of this initiative require specific attention to address possible strategies for a wider and deeper impact. The updated version of the *Government of Flanders' Policy on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*, which was published in May 2022 refers to Culture Education Days, digital platforms, professional qualifications and adult education as potential points of engagement with ICH (Department of Culture, Youth & Media 2022, 44). As it has been just five years since the apprenticeship initiative started, in addition to more time and inter-ministerial collaboration, public demand is a key factor to integrate the subsidy regulation into formal education. For the time being, the masters' thoughts can provide a suitable ground to contribute to the way forward in education sector. One of the masters highlighted the need for crafts education in comparison with already existing mechanism in arts education in schools:

> We have a system in place for arts. We have high schools with proper workshops, teachers. But all these schools focus on arts. Some of the skills you learn for sculpture is similar to carve wood. We need an equal place for crafts in arts. Some of the arts people devalue crafts. In a way, I can understand that. For arts you need real talent; for crafts you need hard work and a bit of talent. Sustainability of the project in long term is related to formal education. They have to empower crafts in formal education. (personal communication, 2 June 2022)

While it is no easy task to promote craftsmanship in the wider system of formal education and establish a dialogue mechanism between the ministries of culture and education, there should be space for the inclusion of craftspeople at such intersections of arts and crafts, particularly in terms of 'techniques', through which a group of craftspeople form a community. If, as suggested by Januarius, a new area of focus can be developed around teaching of smaller techniques as part of the subsidy regulation in the future, integration of craftspeople into arts education in formal settings can be preliminarily feasible to complement the teaching of some art techniques that are closely related to the ones in crafts, as is the case, for instance, between sculpture and woodcarving (personal communication, 25 January 2022). The view by one of the masters that 'techniques travel, survive and make new articulations' (personal communication, 9 June 2022) seems to corroborate the significance of the proposed approach. This way, a certain amount of freedom can be enjoyed which helps avoid some disadvantageous characteristics of formal education, such as a fixed curriculum focused on learning objectives to be achieved. Last but not least, the logic of the master–apprentice relationship and school education is different. One master's perspective in this regard is noteworthy:

> Of course, day-to-day things are essential but they are what people see. To give decent grounding to the visible day-to-day things and do it well, you need to go deeper. That's more study side of things. So, apprenticeship is like working but working without study feels empty to me. (personal communication, 6 June 2022).

Therefore, it might be taken as a call to also think in the long term about the ways to foster apprentices' further development in higher education institutions (e.g. schools of art or applied sciences) upon the completion of trainings.

To summarise, the problems and experiences introduced in Flanders' case can help question and transform the logic of LHT systems and help attach contemporary functions that serve to align it with the objectives of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, on the one hand, and the increase its value and relevancy within communities, on the other. In relation to the issues raised in this section, future applications related to LHT systems should follow simple application procedures to attract craftspeople better. It is of equal importance that masters be included in such systems should be required to clarify what basic knowledge and skills they would like to transmit that would enable apprentices to build their own insights and sets of skills. Involvement of competent NGOs as facilitators between government and craftspeople not only in the application process but also in monitoring and follow-up mechanisms could contribute to connecting LHT systems to the Convention (Articles 14 and 15) and engaging with crafts communities efficiently. Most importantly, monitoring and assessment of implementation is crucial for future LHT systems, as it is necessary to see how the programme evolves on the ground and to make sure resources are used efficiently.

## Conclusion

The subsidy regulation is a notable attempt in Flanders

where there is currently no official LHT system. The absence of an LHT system in the region seems to enable relevant authorities to experiment in craftsmanship and fine-tune when necessary, which highlights the region's context-specific characteristics. While the involvement of NGOs as contact points between masters, apprentices and the Ministry of Culture makes it a distinctive initiative, some of the masters (although in the minority) complain that they do not feel the support of the Ministry and NGOs when needed, especially at the start and end of the project. Based on the framework outlined by Cashman and others, then, I argue that the 'reflecting' and 'coaching' roles (2015, 145) of the NGOs involved might not be functioning. The absence of a monitoring and follow-up mechanism in this experimental initiative led to some complaints, but the tension also has to do with masters' relatively low tendency to work with NGOs and their level of awareness on the role of NGOs in the subsidy regulation. Some introductory meetings to inform masters better about the various roles of the NGOs might be beneficial for all LHT systems designed under a similar mechanism. Moreover, the inclusion of NGOs in the monitoring and follow-up of LHT systems would enhance their visibility and functions throughout the implementation. It is not enough to speak of bottom-up approaches, and it is equally significant to bring all relevant actors into play and develop awareness and willingness to cooperate 'within communities' – that is, between NGOs, masters and apprentices.

In conclusion, the subsidy regulation in Flanders is a noteworthy example that serves to functionalise LHT systems around the world through the adaptation of its logic into regional or national contexts. In this respect, education should be the main transformative motivation to improve LHT systems – not only as part of cultural policies but also as an integral part of economic, industrial and educational tools. Therefore, the scope of LHT should be extended to be a part of inter-sectoral dialogue which would increase the influence of craftsmanship, and thus ICH, in policymaking. An integral aspect of this process is the mobilisation of nonformal education as a complementary experience in the ICH context, where formal education is mostly considered the first option. Positioning crafts and craftsmanship as part of a contemporary apprenticeship model at the intersection of the Convention and LHT systems not only contributes to functionalise the concept of LHT but also enriches the repertoire of ICH education, also helping to turn the attention to community-led safeguarding initiatives.

## ENDNOTES

1. As expressed clearly in Article 2, the viability of ICH can be strengthened by safeguarding measures. Among those, different forms of education plays a key role to contribute to the harmony and efficiency of other actions including documentation, research, promotion and enhancement. In this regard, it is not surprising to observe that the number of publications, projects and programs that link ICH to education and various policies in recent years has increased and a growing number of initiatives have been put into practice in accordance with local, regional and national experiences, needs, and resources.
2. For the latest version of the Flanders policy paper on ICH (in Dutch), please visit https://www.vlaanderen.be/cjm/nl/cultuur/cultureel-erfgoed/beleidskader/het-vlaamse-beleid-voor-het-borgen-van-immaterieel-erfgoed.
3. Some of the national and regional applications of LHT are not used as tools of a 'transmission' vision, but rather serve to 'honor and draw public attention to the diversity and excellence of folk and traditional artists' (National Endowment for the Arts 2019, 15) as is the case in the United States. To explore the potential of that practice, FARO, the Flemish Interface for Cultural Heritage, initiated a dialogue for exchange of experiences in LHT with the cooperation of the NGO Documentary Arts (United States). The dialogue with the United States led to a series of exhibitions in 2010–2014 in the UNESCO Headquarters and then later in Belgium. https://ich.unesco.org/en/recognizing-our-cultural-heritage-2010-00178. In the report that helped form the basis of the subsidy regulation in Flanders, the perspective in the United States was viewed as a drawback due to fellowships being a one-time event that pays tribute to individual artists without assigning them any responsibilities for the future of crafts and transmission (Januarius et al. 2014, 63). Nonetheless, as noted by Prof. Marc Jacobs from the University of Antwerp during a personal communication on 11 January 2022, the American experience should not be overlooked, as it had some advantages as well, such as the ceremony around it, the choice for crafts and, more importantly, the fact of providing special documentation about the person and the craft. Therefore, it was taken as not something to just copy but as a formula to be explored and enriched in the design of the future LHT initiative in Flanders.
4. Based on free, prior and informed consent, the names and affiliations of the interviewees from NGOs and the Ministry are used without any change. However, masters' and apprentices' personal information is kept anonymous and referred to in the main text as 'personal communication' to maintain confidentiality and comply with privacy legislation.
5. While the interview questions revolve around the preliminary examination of the situation in Flanders before the project, general information on the subsidy regulation, contribution of this project to the safeguarding of ICH through nonformal education, its links to policy framework, schallenges on the ground, the dialogue between masters and apprentices, the profile of participants and the overall perspective of the Ministry and relevant NGOs on the implementation of the project.
6. Please visit the website of the Department of Culture, Youth and Media for detailed information (in Dutch) on the subsidy regulation: https://www.vlaanderen.be/cjm/nl/cultuur/cultureel-erfgoed/subsidies/beurzen-voor-het-doorgeven-van-vakmanschap-een-meester-leerlingtraject.
7. It should be noted that the Ministry provided grants up to 48,000 euros for each project in the first two cycles of the subsidy regulation. Detailed information on the result of the latest call in December 2021 can be accessed via https://www.vlaanderen.be/cjm/nl/nieuws/600000-euro-voor-ondersteuning-van-vakmanschap?mc_cid=638a47512f&mc_eid=46ed84fa7f.
8. ITH/15/10.COM/6.a: 15–16.
9. You is the French word for what is called 'zaghareed' in Arabic, an ancient vocal practice with roots in Africa and Middle East to express intense emotions.

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# Supporting ethnic craftswomen in Chiang Mai through digital media: acknowledging the possibilities and challenges

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# Supporting ethnic craftswomen in Chiang Mai through digital media: acknowledging the possibilities and challenges

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## ABSTRACT

Since becoming a member of the Creative Cities Network (UCCN) in 2017, Chiang Mai has implemented a range of projects aimed at protecting and promoting the city's craft heritage. This article focuses on one project – the Women E-nspire Culture project – which was a pilot initiative launched by UNESCO Bangkok, with the support of Samsung Electronics, aimed at safeguarding traditional crafts by providing digital entrepreneurial skills for ethnic craftswomen, including Hmong, Akha and Karen ethnic groups. The Social Research Institute (SRI) at Chiang Mai University became a partner in the second phase of this project in July 2020, when a community-based workshop was organised in collaboration with UNESCO Bangkok to further develop and strengthen the digital skills of Hmong craftswomen and youth in Doi Pui village. This article discusses the sociocultural background leading to the project as well as key lessons learned and the challenges of using digital technologies to support craftswomen in Chiang Mai's ethnic communities.

## Keywords

handicrafts, heritage, Chiang Mai, digital technologies, gender

## Introduction

Founded in 1296 CE as the capital of the Lanna Kingdom, Chiang Mai is widely known as a city of rich and diverse cultural heritage. Over the centuries, craft communities living in and around the capital have played an integral role in establishing the city's wealth and status as a trade centre. Crafts such as lacquerware, pottery, silverware and silk textiles have been traded along numerous routes, including the Ping River and overland through present-day Myanmar and Laos. Craftsmanship was also fundamental to creating the distinctive culture of the city, as crafts skills contributed to vernacular and religious architecture, as well as ritual practices, festivals and traditions (Boonyasurat 2020).

In addition to the crafts communities in and around the old city, which are predominantly ethnic Thai,[1] there are also numerous ethnic minority communities living in the mountainous areas surrounding Chiang Mai city who have their own craft traditions. These include groups of Akha, Hmong, Lisu, Karen, Lahu and Palaung. These ethnic minorities speak non-Tai languages (Mon-Khmer and Sino-Tibetan) and have cultures that are distinct from the lowland Tai. Prior to the 20th century, these groups lived autonomously beyond the direct rule of states in the lowland regions. However, with the drawing of political borders and state-building during the 20th century, many of these ethnic minorities faced discrimination due to negative perceptions of their swidden agricultural

practices and the production of opium (Gillogy 2004). Since the 1960s, state development agendas have sought to integrate upland ethnic minorities in various ways – namely, through formal education and infrastructural expansion as well as through initiatives supporting the crafts and cultures of these groups (Cohen 1989). Indeed, the promotion of cultural tourism and crafts has played a significant role in changing the negative perceptions of upland ethnic minorities, and today, they are widely represented as possessing distinctive cultures and unparalleled craft skills.

Despite the more positive representations of upland ethnic minorities as culturally diverse and skilled artisans, these groups still face many significant social and economic challenges due to their long-standing marginal status. For the purposes of this article, the authors will examine some of the issues that ethnic Hmong women have faced in safeguarding and marketing their crafts using digital platforms, which was the focus of the Women E-nspire Culture project, implemented by UNESCO Bangkok and the SRI at Chiang Mai University.

## Hack culture: defining the challenges to sustainable craft transmission and marketing among ethnic minority women

In keeping with its broad mission to support the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and the Sustainable Development Goals, in 2019 UNESCO Bangkok undertook a field survey among several of Chiang Mai's Hmong, Karen and Akha communities. The aim of this initial survey was to better understand the issues that craftswomen were facing in terms of the intergenerational transmission of craft skills and knowledge, as well as the challenges they faced in terms of marketing and selling their crafts. The survey was also intended to explore the possibility of using digital media to document and promote their crafts products.

During this preliminary survey, the UNESCO team identified several key issues. Firstly, in terms of the transmission of craft skills and knowledge, most of the older women artisans interviewed said that they had never documented their skills and knowledge related to textiles in any way. Rather, they relied solely on a person-to-person transfer of their knowledge to younger generations. In recent years, this traditional mode of transmission had been interrupted by various factors, including formal education and the impetus for younger generations to seek employment opportunities outside their natal communities. While some younger ethnic women were interested in learning craft skills, it was impractical for them to learn directly from their elders. In the absence of any documentation of their craft knowledge, it was likely to disappear with the more senior artisans.

A second set of issues related to marketing and storytelling about crafts. The craftswomen who were interviewed indicated that they all produced crafts for their own use in daily life and rituals, and many also produced crafts to sell in local markets to supplement their income. However, the local textile crafts market was becoming increasingly competitive, particularly with the cheaper, machine-made crafts that were replacing hand-made products. When asked about using digital media to document their textile knowledge and to promote their hand-made crafts to broader markets, many women expressed a keen interest in this possibility.

With the objective of addressing these issues, in August 2019 UNESCO Bangkok, with the support of Samsung Electronics and participation of Samsung volunteers, launched a hackathon to support women artisans through providing training in digital and entrepreneurship skills that would give them the tools to document their own traditional craft knowledge for the purposes of transmission to younger generations and for marketing to wider audiences. This initial pilot phase of the project aimed to generate IT solutions that would be easy and accessible for the craftswomen, taking into consideration concerns about language and limited digital and entrepreneurial literacy. Over the course of a four-day workshop in Chiang Mai, the first phase of the project produced preliminary web resources about the crafts – including documentation of designs and the craft production process – as well as Facebook platforms for marketing the crafts of the participating artisans.[2]

## Doi Pui village: safeguarding Hmong crafts and culture through digitisation

In the second phase of the project, the Social Research Institute (SRI) at Chiang Mai University was invited to join UNESCO Bangkok as a partner institution, and the Hmong village of Doi Pui was chosen as the site for the project implementation. Doi Pui was selected because 25 of the participants from the previous hackathon held

in Chiang Mai in 2019 had come from this village, and the UNESCO Samsung team had helped produce some preliminary website content and launch a Hmong Doi Pui Facebook group. The SRI was invited to join as a partner based on its previous experience working with women artisans from Doi Pui under the auspices of the Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Arts UNESCO Creative Cities initiative.

As part of the preparation for the second capacity-building workshop with the Hmong craftswomen, a research team from SRI conducted a survey in Doi Pui in June 2020 to learn more about the history of the village, the role of textiles in everyday life and ritual practice, the threats to continued transmission, and the production, sale and marketing of textiles. The team also consulted with craftswomen about the potential use of digital media to document their traditional knowledge and promote their textile products.

As mentioned in the introduction, upland ethnic minorities in Thailand have historically been the target of state development agendas aimed at the eradication of opium and the elimination of swidden agriculture, and Doi Pui was one of the first ethnic villages where the Thai state introduced commercial crops and tourism as alternative models of economic development. In 1969, following the visit of King Rama IX, Doi Pui was declared a Royal Project village, and by the 1980s, it was generating more income from the sale of goods (including textiles) to tourists than from the sale of agricultural produce (Evrard and Leepreecha 2009). The SRI survey in June 2020 confirmed that Hmong villagers in Doi Pui were heavily reliant on income from tourism and the sale of their handicrafts, which had been severely disrupted by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Through interviews with numerous Hmong women and the former headman of the village, the team learned that, despite the commercialisation of Hmong crafts for the tourist market described by Cohen (1989), the indigo-dyed hemp batik textiles and colourful appliqué embroidery called *paj ntaub* were still considered central features of Hmong ethnic identity in Doi Pui. While only the older generation of women in the village wore their hand-made garments daily, men and women of all generations would wear their textiles for community events and rites of passage, including weddings, death rites and the New Year festival. Moreover, hemp textiles were also used by shamans in rituals to communicate with the spirits of the ancestors.

The SRI team also learned that Hmong batik textile production is an extremely complex and time-consuming process, which involves the planting and harvesting of hemp, the preparation of hemp fibres, the weaving of fibres into lengths of cloth, the application of elaborate wax patterns, the dyeing of the cloth with indigo and the embroidery of textiles with traditional motifs. From a survey with 82 artisans, the team found that less than 10 per cent of the artisans were engaged in the full process of textile production, and those who were involved in all steps were 50 years old or above. Another 20 per cent of the artisans – also 50 years and older – were able to draw the intricate wax patterns and do embroidery, while most younger artisans (15–40 years) were only able to embroider and sew products for daily life and for sale.

All the women surveyed were involved in the production of crafts for their own use and for supplemental income, but only a few had design and digital media marketing skills. Many of the women who were consulted expressed an interest in acquiring these skills to promote their crafts. Digital promotion was considered particularly important in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, as tourists had stopped coming to visit Doi Pui, and many women had lost this source of income from selling their crafts at the local market.

Based on these findings and the consultations with artisans, the SRI team and UNESCO Bangkok organised the Community-based Workshop to Strengthen ICH Safeguarding and Digital Entrepreneurship Skills for Hmong Women. Held on 11–12 July 2020, the workshop aimed to address the dual concerns of transmission of skills and knowledge about Hmong batik textiles to the next generation and the design and marketing of textile craft products.

On the first day of the workshop, the team from UNESCO Bangkok began by reviewing the objectives and lessons learned from the first Samsung hackathon in 2019. They pointed out that one of the objectives of the first hackathon had been to explore how digital platforms could be used to safeguard intangible culture by creating a digital archive of the skills, techniques and meanings of textiles, which could then be accessed by younger generations seeking to learn about their heritage. A



**Figure 1**
Photos from the July field visit to Doi Pui by the Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University.

second objective had been to develop digital platforms for the marketing of craft products, where artisans could also share stories about their lives and their textile craft practices. The UNESCO team explained that the current workshop aimed to build on the knowledge and resources that had already been developed with Doi Pui artisans as part of the hackathon as follows: 1) by further strengthening the IT and marketing skills of women artisans, 2) by raising awareness about how documentation and digital platforms can contribute to the safeguarding of ICH, and 3) by facilitating the transfer of the administration of the IT resources to local groups or institutions (i.e. the Chao Pho Luang Uppatham Primary School).

The authors of this article, Woralun Boonyasurat and Alexandra Denes, led a session on the first day of the workshop focusing on the importance of safeguarding the meanings and values associated with Hmong craft textiles, as these are the aspects which contribute to the sense of history and continuity for the Hmong community. As the survey and field research had shown, textiles were not only a marker of Hmong identity, but they were also part of Hmong rituals from birth to death. Boonyasurat discussed how digital platforms – including the development of the Hmong Doi Pui website[3] – could support the transmission of this traditional knowledge by showcasing textile craft traditions and the stories of individual craftswomen. This was followed by Alexandra Denes's presentation about how digital resources could contribute to safeguarding with a case study from the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre (TAEC) of Laos – a cultural centre which promotes awareness and learning about Laos's crafts and supports the livelihoods of ethnic communities through the sale of craft products. One unique aspect of TAEC's approach is the training of ethnic youth in ICH research, documentation and curatorial skills to create a young generation of Indigenous leaders and advocates for the protection of intangible culture. The example of TAEC demonstrates that it is possible to balance the safeguarding of traditional

meanings and uses of crafts with the promotion and marketing of crafts as products, and that income from crafts can also contribute to their sustainability.[4]

For the following session, the workshop facilitator presented a range of design ideas from craft-based brands in Thailand which had established niche markets, like the brand Thorr.[5] This session offered tips to participants about how to innovate and create new products using their traditional textiles, such as the technique of resizing motifs and patterns to create new products.

The workshop then shifted to a presentation and discussion of the Hmong Doi Pui website. The aim of the session was to gather feedback from participants about the existing content and what they wanted to add. The Hmong Doi Pui website had incorporated content that was developed in the previous hackathon in 2019 and covered a range of topics. Under the 'Identity and Culture' tab, there were links to pages on history, religion, animism and shamanism, Hmong housing and Hmong clothing. This section provided an overview of the historical, religious and architectural context of the village and images of the different textile patterns and costumes worn for everyday and ritual purposes. The 'Artisans and Handicrafts' tab provided links to the individual artisans, the process of hemp fabric production and online craft classes, which were intended to be a step-by-step guide to produce a Hmong batik hemp textile. The last tab, 'Seek Doi Pui', included a link to the Facebook page of the project, as well as a map of the Doi Pui community indicating important sites in the village, such as the location of the school, the waterfall and the museum.

The workshop participants were divided into three groups to review and discuss the accuracy of the content and identify additional areas of content that should be added. The craftswomen had many suggestions on how they would like to improve the site. For instance, one group recommended that the website should include



**Figure 2**
Discussing textile design in the July workshop organised by UNESCO Bangkok and the Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University.



**Figure 3**
Learning how to post images of products to social media in the July workshop.

the house locations of the artisans, as well as links to handicraft products on online marketing channels. The second group suggested adding more information about the traditional clothing and handicrafts, while the third group recommended adding a cultural events calendar.

The second day of the workshop was dedicated to strengthening digital technology and business marketing skills for social media. Presented by experts from the Lanna Digital Innovation Center at SRI, this session covered a range of topics, including how to take photos of handicrafts using a mobile phone, how to use props and lighting to create an interesting composition and how to create and edit videos.

This hands-on session was followed by a session led by experts from the College of Arts, Media and Technology at Chiang Mai University that focused on brand creation and marketing promotion using online media. This session highlighted the importance of showcasing Hmong local identity, landmarks and attractions together with Hmong batik and how to incorporate storytelling about the history, meanings and production process behind handicrafts. Lastly, the team discussed branding using local symbols and motifs for logo creation.

## Challenges and future steps

In the final session of the workshop, participants were invited to share some of their concerns about the challenges of using digital platforms for safeguarding



**Figure 4**
Learning to take photos of craft design products in the July workshop.

and marketing their traditional Hmong crafts. Many of the participants had shown interest and enthusiasm about gaining new digital skills for marketing, but it was clear that these platforms were not as accessible to older generations of Hmong women (40 years and older) who were not fluent in the Thai language. For these women, language was still a significant barrier to accessing web-based platforms, whether to document their heritage or promote their crafts. The participants acknowledged that this meant that it was mostly the younger generation of Hmong artisans who were able to use social media to promote their crafts, although some of the younger women also helped promote the crafts made by their elder family members. This discussion also led to the question of how social media or the web platform could support the collective interests of artisans, when most of the artisans sold their crafts individually, either in shops in the village or online. Three younger Hmong artisans agreed to manage the administration of the Doi Pui Facebook page, but no clear decision was made about the purpose of the page, and as a result, there has been limited activity and few posts since it was originally launched.

A second discussion focused on the role of the website. Participants agreed that the website should serve as a living archive of Hmong handicraft knowledge, which could also be used to engage and educate younger generations of Hmong and promote sustainable cultural tourism to the village. There was some uncertainty, however, about who would be able to manage the administration of the website once it was turned over to the community. One of the teachers at Chao Pho Luang Uppatham Primary School had been involved in the previous hackathon in 2019 and had organised Hmong batik activities in the school, and he had nominally agreed that the school could take over the website administration. However, the teacher had not been able to attend the workshop, and therefore there was still no firm commitment about the future administration of the website to ensure that it would continue to be updated.

In terms of next steps, the team from SRI and UNESCO Bangkok proposed several activities to follow up the research and workshop findings. Firstly, they recommended organising activities involving youth as a means of supporting continued transmission of Hmong batik knowledge and skills, such as handicraft workshops with youth in Doi Pui, a crafts-based curriculum and youth visual media training for ICH documentation. The SRI also recommended the development of cultural tourism focused on Doi Pui's crafts and its rituals and traditions, organised in collaboration with tourism agencies.

## Conclusion

This article discusses how digital platforms can transform the representation and marketing of ethnic crafts, which can generate income for artisans and support the transmission of craft knowledge across generations. The Women E-nspire project was presented as an example of how upland ethnic women acquired digital skills to design and market their crafts, and how these skills can raise the visibility of crafts and enhance the livelihoods of ethnic women. The project also aimed to document the history, meanings, production process, and cultural functions of textiles in Hmong rituals and belief systems, and to create a digital archive of craft knowledge.

The article also highlights two significant challenges associated with using digital platforms to promote and safeguard ethnic crafts. Firstly, there is the linguistic barrier, as the older generation of ethnic craftswomen are not fully literate in Thai, which makes it challenging to produce digital media about Hmong textiles in Thai. Secondly, there is the issue of transfer of ownership to community stakeholders, which requires long-term community engagement, institutional support, and capacity building. The Hmong Doi Pui project stalled because there were no concrete plans or resources allocated to ensure the younger generation of Hmong artisans would participate actively in documenting and translating the stories and skills of senior women textile artisans. Furthermore, not enough time and resources were dedicated to ensuring that primary school staff could take over the maintenance of the web project. In conclusion, the article emphasizes the importance of establishing understanding and rapport with the community about the objectives of a community-based digital media project and earmarking resources to address the challenges that may arise.

## ENDNOTES

1. Thai speakers are the dominant ethnic group of Thailand. The Thai of northern Thailand speak a dialect of Thai known as *kam muang*.
2. Background about the Hack Culture project can be found at the following links: https://bangkok.unesco.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/HackCulture%20info_EN_2July2019.pdf; https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/digital-solutions-empower-women-and-safeguard-traditional-crafts
3. The website developed during the project can be found at the following link: https://hmongdoipui.com/
4. Located in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR, the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre is a social enterprise committed to the preservation of cultural diversity and ethnic heritage. Further information about TAEC can be found at the following link: https://www.taeclaos.org/
5. *Thorr* is a Thai craft brand dedicated to design innovation and sustainable livelihoods for artisans. Information can be found at the following link: https//www.thorrliving.com/

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# Craftsmanship in virtual reality: digital development and evaluation of traditional South African beer brewing

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## ABSTRACT

Maintaining unique traditions and cultures is becoming increasingly difficult due to the effects of globalisation, combined with the fleeting nature of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The continuation of ICH traditions relies on the awareness and interest of young people, as it is passed from generation to generation. This study aims to protect knowledge and skills – specifically traditional craftsmanship (TC), in the use case of South African beer (umqombothi) brewing – by exploring how to digitally represent and disseminate ICH using virtual reality (VR). In the beer-brewing prototype, participants become fully immersed in a digital South African community to learn the practice of brewing and experience the ICH contextual elements such as rituals and togetherness. The results show that short-term use of the VR prototype enables novice participants to learn essential aspects of community ICH and the beer-brewing practice. Furthermore, we emphasise the importance of evaluating the dissemination potential of safeguarding solutions by assessing their transfer back to everyday life. For this reason, this study also captures and successfully demonstrates an evaluation in which the participants re-enact what they recall from the VR playthrough using real lo-fi props used for brewing.



## Keywords

traditional craftsmanship, virtual reality, beer brewing, South Africa, re-enactment, evaluation, immersion, embodied learning

## Introduction

The legacy of our cultural past is defined by UNESCO (2003b) as our cultural heritage. Cultural heritage includes concepts known as tangible cultural heritage (TCH) and intangible cultural heritage (ICH). TCH is primarily oriented to physical artefacts and sites, whereas ICH reflects the non-physical elements of cultural heritage. Although seemingly different concepts, they are often complementary. Kurin (2004) describes this balancing act intertwined with the concepts as follows: 'Tools are tangible, but plans, if thought are not, but if drawn are'. One of the categories that falls under ICH is traditional craftsmanship (TC), defined by UNESCO (2003c) as 'perhaps the most "tangible" manifestation of ICH'. The focus on tangible craft products can lead to the disregard of the craft process itself and of an essential aspect of TC for many communities – the contexts in which TC becomes manifested.

The performance of TC and its passage from generation to generation supplies communities with a sense of identity and continuity while also encouraging respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. Today, there are several conditions endangering the survival of TC as we know it. One of them is globalisation, which supports mass production and thus poses a threat because of the availability of low-cost alternatives and fast production requirements.

Another major problem is the migration of young people to bigger cities and the rising disinterest in community traditions. For example, South Africa battles with the effects of rural–urban migration as it becomes increasingly frequent (Mlambo 2018). This migration is not only caused by the marginalisation and stigmatisation of many Indigenous communities (Ossai 2010) but also the fact that, for many young people, mastering crafts is too demanding compared to other alternatives. Consequently, they seek work in factories or the service industry, where the work is less challenging and the pay is often better (UNESCO 2003c), breaking the line of passage and increasing the risk of extinction for these crafts (Kennedy 2010; UNESCO 2003c).

For TC to be protected, it needs to be practised (UNESCO 2003a). Thus, the goal of safeguarding is to ensure that the knowledge and skills linked with TC are passed on to future generations, particularly through formal and informal education (UNESCO 2003b, 2003c). Moreover, it is also important to include the cultural, religious, creative and social context when presenting the process of the crafts (Donkin 2001).

Currently, there exist several safeguarding solutions, such as workshops, written media, exhibitions, databases or inventories and conferences, with the living museum as perhaps the closest experience to the real TC practice. Some of these ways of dissemination benefit from the direct inclusion of craftspeople, but they are also often disadvantaged by being place-specific, time-restricted, resource-inefficient or because they do not provide any essential hands-on experience (for a recent review, see Rossau et al. 2019).

## Challenges of digital safeguarding of traditional craftsmanship

Many of these disadvantages of TC transfer have been approached from a technological perspective. Recent advances have been made with computing applications (Isa et al. 2019; Partarakis, Patsiouras et al. 2020; Karuzaki et al. 2021), mixed reality (Carre et al. 2022), mobile applications (Ringas et al. 2022), motion capture (Ringas et al. 2022) and virtual reality (VR) (Rossau et al. 2019; Karuzaki et al. 2021) – all of which have been explored as options for safeguarding TC.

The topic of how to digitally capture, represent and disseminate TC through technological solutions has been discussed in many papers (Rodil and Rehm 2015; Zabulis et al. 2022; Partarakis, Zabulis et al. 2020), yet there exists little research on how to evaluate these solutions.

The current evaluations have mostly focused on the technologies themselves – for instance, usability and user experience (Carre et al. 2022; Karuzaki et al. 2021; Ringas et al. 2022; Rossau et al. 2019) – but also more promising examples of exploring the knowledge gain. A trend, however, is that these attempts have mostly been through questionnaires (Selmanovic et al. 2020), while some completely omit any evaluation on expanding knowledge from the view of the participants (Partarakis, Patsiouras et al. 2020; Schofield et al. 2018; Skovfoged et al. 2018; Isa et al. 2019).

These types of evaluations unfortunately tell us little to nothing about how well the craft skills and knowledge learned can be replicated and performed in real life. As

we have reported before in this journal, human skills and human values must be rightfully embedded into any technology responsible for making human culture a digital representation (Rodil and Rehm 2015; Rodil and Winschiers-Theophilus 2018). Afterall, TC is not only the process and knowledge of how to perform it but also the underlying cultural values and world views that have shaped and continuously shape TC in the minds of performers. We would claim that one should not assess the theoretical, digital knowledge transfer in isolation, but seek ways to understand more holistically how a mind-body performance transfers meaningfully from the TC practice through a digital medium and back into the physical world. Any safeguarding technology in this case is a means to bypass disadvantages previously mentioned – not to remove their end manifestation in the physical world.

In the following section, we place emphasis on the opportunities of VR as the technology responsible for this transfer.

### VR as a technology to facilitate situated learning

In recent years, the general interest and use of VR has greatly increased (XRToday 2022), also in education and skills training. This is most likely because the majority of research in this field has shown that VR has major advantages compared to traditional learning methods (Dede 2009; Allcoat and Muhlenen 2018; Christou 2010; Kavanagh et al. 2017; Durlach, Mavor and Newby 1996).

These advantages include the ability of VR to produce a highly immersive and embodied experience by allowing for multisensory interaction and active learning. This supports students' ability to retain information and transfer the learned skill and knowledge to different contexts (Dede 2009; Allcoat and Muhlenen 2018; Christou 2010; Kavanagh et al. 2017; Durlach, Mavor and Newby 1996; Johnson-Glenberg 2018). Furthermore, requiring interaction and encouraging active participation rather than passivity improves user engagement (Dede 2009; Allcoat and Muhlenen 2018) and motivation (Kavanagh et al. 2017); VR education has also been shown to induce positive emotions and decrease negative emotions (Allcoat and Muhlenen 2018; Kavanagh et al. 2017).

Additionally, transfer is also improved by enabling situated learning, the digital mimicking of authentic contexts and activities, which provides a tight coupling between symbolic and experiential information (Dede 2009; Bowman et al. 1999; Durlach, Mavor and Newby 1996; Mei and Sheng 2011).

VR can be an efficient learning tool, as it is a commercially viable and a safe alternative to situations that would be hard, if not impossible, to stage in the real world (Christou 2010). Furthermore, the use of VR often saves resources, such as money, time and materials, since the experience can be repeated any number of times without much additional cost. These advantages have resulted in the increasing popularity of VR in classroom education (Christou 2010).

Overall, VR is a promising tool for representing and disseminating TC. Not only does it provide the option for embodiment and immersion (Dede 2009; Johnson-Glenberg 2018), it can enable situated learning which leads to better transfer of skills to real life (Dede 2009; Durlach, Mavor and Newby 1996; Mei and Sheng 2011).

## Invigorating the South African STEM curriculum with intangible cultural heritage

Zooming in from this broader discourse, the following sections will report from a larger international project on how safeguarding ICH can invigorate formal disciplines, helping ICH, TC and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education enable one another.

In a recent review in this journal, Labrador (2022) distinguishes how the current landscape of heritage in education has been integrated into STEM learning and how 'teaching through heritage has increased, as educators turn toward non-didactic methods in a broader epistemological context that positions culture as an undercurrent flowing through all subjects' (23). Labrador's notion of 'education through heritage' accurately captures our approach in a bidirectional sense, whereby young South African learners find relevance in both the heritage and STEM content.

The lack of culturally relevant resources for STEM learning means school learners in South Africa and other African countries are disadvantaged in their learning experiences (Ramnarain 2021). The use of VR simulations that are anchored in local culture can support cultural diversity and preserve the traditional knowledge of

Indigenous peoples through place-based learning that immerses learning experiences in local cultures. The application of such culturally anchored simulations adopts an embodied, situated, distributed cognition perspective to learning (Hardy-Vallee and Payette 2008) that affords learners an experience that is socioculturally situated in indigenous cultural practices and physiologically embodied in VR experiences.

Young South African learners struggle to see the relevance in periodic tables, laws of physics and so on. Therefore, the premise of the project is how to transfer ICH from remote rural communities to the urban young population and make learners aware that ICH has application in most STEM fields. TC is not some romantic past – it has been performed, tuned and validated through generations, also nowadays, and whether the focus is on the community practices of leather tanning or the Xhosa tradition of beer brewing, it has an explanation and place, also in the STEM fields.

## An Umqombothi beer-brewing VR prototype

For the sake of both explaining the TC and the technical and graphic details of the VR prototype, the following text will describe how the TC was embedded into the VR prototype. For this article, we leave out the STEM elements, but it is important to note that the TC relates to the ICH of brewing and the STEM element is the beer brewing as a formal understanding of the chemical processes. One literally dives into the beer in VR and becomes embedded in chemical bonds. The overarching vision is to show how cultural practices and beliefs are viewable from a natural science or STEM perspective as well as to show that no explanation triumphs over the other – as both perspectives have a place in understanding the subject.

The sources of information for mapping out and designing the TC experience were gathered through South African collaborators, literature and community interactions. This section focuses on how an example of TC, specifically umqombothi beer brewing, was brought to digital life and subsequently evaluated from the perspective of participants in a physical re-enactment set-up.

Umqombothi is a traditional Xhosa craft beer. In the past, the beer was traditionally brewed by older women, though mostly consumed by men. These crafters used an age-old method of beer brewing, with diverse techniques handed down by their forebears; sometimes they were self-taught (Konfo et al. 2021; Lues et al. 2009). The beer plays an important role in cultural, social and spiritual events – such as contacting ancestors (*amadlozi*) and celebrating the homecoming of young men (known in Xhosa culture as *abakwetha*) after initiation and circumcision rituals – as well as in funerals, traditional meetings, weddings and other life celebrations (Hlangwani et al. 2020; Lyumugabe et al. 2012).

Beer brewing itself is a craft, as it requires a special skill in the brewing techniques used and a lot of patience. Unlike cooking, this brewing process does not just require a recipe but needs an understanding of the fermentation processes, colour changes, brew consistencies, catalysts, dealing residues, hygiene and time frames for process completion. In fact, it is believed to be a craft as it is not only a hand but also a process skill.

The brewing of home-made sorghum beer is practised throughout the continent of Africa, but the VR prototype discussed here specifically portrays the Xhosa community in South Africa. This was reflected in the environment building, the architecture, voice lines uttered by animated characters and the clothing of the community.

The VR application development has been based on the real context and processes of brewing umqombothi beer for the occasion of the harvest. The brewing process is split up into four days, where the user is supplied with the equipment needed on each day. The 3D equipment was modelled after the equipment traditionally used during umqombothi brewing; see Figure 1 showing all the models and their real-life reference.

Besides educating the users about the TC, the goal was also to provide the users with the context, which is essential for the community. By showing the TC and context through the use of a narrative, the users would get a better understanding of the life and customs of the community and emphasise its relevance, instead of reducing the TC to a sequential process alone. The experience is split into two parts: the outside brewing scene taking place in the community and the inside scene, where the user takes part in the drinking ritual in the hut.

The prototype was implemented in Unity, using two VR packages: OVR and Unity XR. The application was

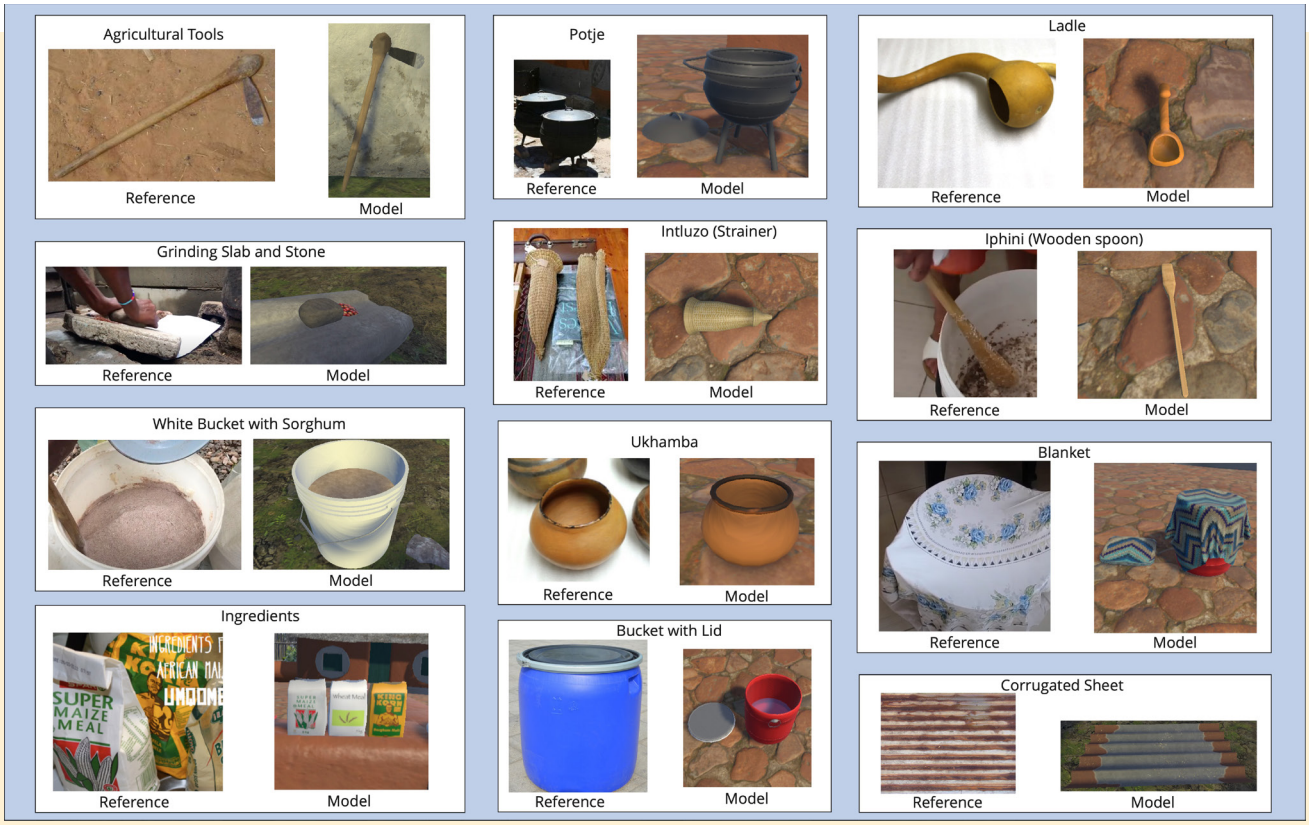



**Figure 1**
The figure shows a side-by-side comparison of the reference objects and the produced 3D objects.

developed for the Oculus Quest 2 headset. The majority of the 3D models were created in Blender or Maya and from freely available packages on the Unity asset store.

## The brewing of Umqombothi made interactive

The first scene takes place in the community in open air. The reference for the buildings, vegetation and other landscape features represents a real Xhosa community. Additionally, the environment was brought to life through the inclusion of virtual community members. They were present in the application both visually and through animation, as well as from an audio perspective. During the brewing, the player can see and hear members of the Xhosa community of all ages going about their daily lives: conversing with each other in Xhosa, working in the fields, playing or just relaxing in front of their huts. The environment hints at the reason behind the celebration – the end of the harvest season – by including the field workers harvesting the sorghum crops. Each day more crops are gathered and more collection baskets are visible in the scene to give a sense of progression; see Figure 2 showing the outside scene view.

Besides the life in the background, direct interactions with the community are also implemented. As the user is brewing, two members of the community visit the player. In the first case, a local woman comes and brings ingredients, which she gives to the player, along with wishes of good luck. This experience provides the users



**Figure 2**
The figure shows an outside scene from the prototype.

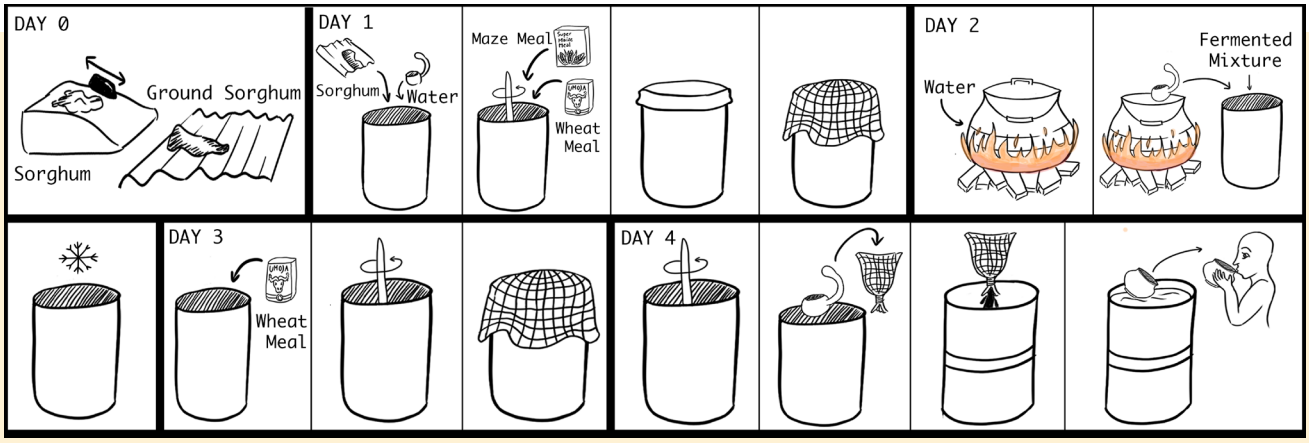



**Figure 3**
The figure visualizes the brewing process.

with a sense of community and accurately represents the fact that, during the communal brewing, neighbours often encourage and aid the brewer (McAllister 2003). The user continues to brew beer over a period of four days, aided by signifiers, such as a semi-transparent ladle scooping water and pouring it into a bucket, that show each step of the process. The whole brewing process can be seen in Figure 3.

After the beer is made, the user interacts with another member of the community. This time, an Elder comes to collect the beer after it has been brewed. He offers thanks to the player and moves to the hut to start the ceremony, then the second scene begins.

The second scene takes place inside of the hut and represents the ceremony itself. This scene was added to portray the Xhosa beer-brewing customs accurately and further increase the feeling of community as well as explain the occasion of the ceremony. As the scene starts, the user is situated inside of the hut, sitting in a circle alongside other male members of the community, as per tradition. The elder makes a short speech about the event and gives thanks to the ancestors (McAllister 2004). He then drinks from an ukhamba, a traditional drinking container, and proceeds to pass it to his right. Each man takes a sip of the beer and passes it on. The player waits until they receive the ukhamba from the man sitting to the left. The player takes a sip and puts down the ukhamba on a table, ending the playthrough; see Figure 4 showing the inside scene.



**Figure 4**
The figure shows the second scene with the drinking ritual inside the hut.

## Evaluation of VR prototype

An evaluation of the prototype was conducted to ensure transferability of the TC into a digital, experiential context and explore users' impressions, attitudes and insights after the VR experience in isolation. More specifically, the goal was to achieve a deeper level of understanding of the contextual aspects of the community, its members, the rituals and habits surrounding the brewing process. This evaluation is labelled below as 'Day one'.

The day after this evaluation, we gathered the participants again to investigate to what degree they could re-enact in real life what might have been transferred from the VR playthrough. This evaluation is labelled below as 'Day two'.

In an effort to increase readability, both evaluations are treated independently, complete with results, rationales and supplementary details. The set of participants was

consistent throughout.

Before the evaluation was realised, usability and technical testing were performed to remove potential errors.

### Participants

A total of 10 participants, five women and five men in their 20s, were invited to the evaluation. Seven out of 10 participants had previous experience with VR. However, their experience was usually very little, and most of them mentioned trying VR only one time before this test. The participants were all students of Aalborg University in Denmark, some from the Architecture and Design and the Urban Design studies programmes, with the purpose of gathering participants with little to no VR experience and no knowledge of the TC.

The reason for not evaluating South African learners yet, although these learners would also originate from a range of different cultural settings, was to get as unbiased data as possible to better unravel to what degree VR contributed to a potential improved understanding of both the community ICH and brewing practice.

### Day one: VR playthrough and experience sharing (evaluating contextual experiences)

#### *Procedure*

On the first day of the evaluation, the participants were asked to perform a VR playthrough of the prototype. Following the playthrough, we interviewed the participants on their new TC experience and organised a paired collaborative review. This was done to get insights into how participants perceived their experience and what kind of impact it had.

After the participants gave consent, the procedure of the experiment was explained to the participants, and they were handed the VR headset and controllers and were directed to a specific part of the room. The application was started and they were taken inside of the virtual environment. No further instructions were given to the participants unless a problem occurred that prevented them from continuing the playthrough. During the VR playthrough the participants' interactions were videorecorded inside and outside of the simulation. See Figure 5 showing recordings from outside and inside VR.

After finishing the playthrough, the participants were asked to sit down and participate in a semi-structured interview, which was videorecorded. The participants were presented with questions regarding their contextual and emotional experience as well as their perception of the narrative.

Following the interview, a collaborative review was conducted to allow participants to more easily share and brainstorm their experiences with their friends or colleagues who had also participated. After the participants were gathered into pairs, they were given a list of topics on



**Figure 5**
The figure shows; left: the video recording of a participants interacting in the prototype, and the right side shows the in-game recording synchronized.

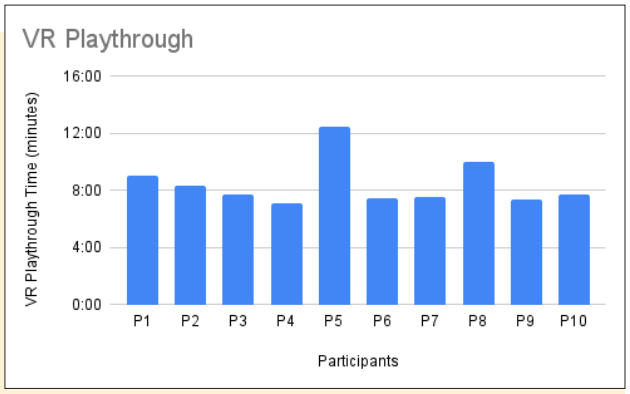



**Figure 6**
The figure shows the simulation completion times per participant.

different aspects of the VR experience to talk about with each other while being videorecorded. If the researcher noticed any interesting comments, they further prompted the participants for an improved understanding.

### *Data analysis*

The qualitative data was analysed using a thematic analysis approach, described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 79) as a method for 'identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data'. These themes present important findings in regard to the research question by showing a patterned response or meaning within the data. Thematic analysis goes beyond the surface meaning of the data, recognising and examining underlying ideas and assumptions. This method was used to analyse and code interview data on a deeper level as well as to extract relevant information and hidden meanings.

## Results

In general, all participants were able to complete the playthrough without need for assistance. The completion times per participant are visible in Figure 6 below, showing that the playthrough lasted an average of eight and a half minutes and with no major outliers.

In the following section, quotes are used to support our findings and show insight into participants' personal experience. Each quote belong to a specific participant (P1–P10) and is taken either from their post-interview (denoted by a '-p') or their collaborative review (denoted by a '-c'). For example, (P2-p) is a quote from the second participant's post-interview, whereas (P2-c) is a quote from the same participant's collaborative review.

### *Interaction with VR*

Despite participants' absence of experience with VR gameplay and lack of knowledge on the topic of this specific ICH, participants had no issue progressing through the playthrough on their own. During the playthrough, participants understood the tasks and quickly picked up the affordances of VR and the application.

> I have never brewed beer and I've never tried VR before, and I was confused as to what I had to do [...] But then eventually I saw the green lights [signifiers], and then I was like, that's what's going on [...] Once you get the hang of it, it's actually quite easy. (P1-p)

The interactions during the beer brewing highly engaged the participants, resulting in deeper immersion and embodiment:

> My favourite scene [was] the brewing beer part because you have to interact with all these kinds of materials and you have to understand, okay, what am I doing next? (P3-c)

On the other hand, having high engagement during the outside scene resulted in a lack of focus on details within the environment, where participants could not recall their surroundings while brewing:

> When I got the hang of it, I was so immersed; everything around me was blurred. [...] I wanted to spend more time taking it in but also I was curious what would happen when I finished the task. (P8-c)

### *Experiences of community and ICH*

In general, participants expressed a positive attitude towards the experience as a whole. The environment was associated with positive emotions, such as peace and calmness:

> I liked the outside the most, children playing, it was very peaceful and you felt calm. (P7-c)

The participants enjoyed the brief interactions with the community so much that they often wanted more of them, expressing the need for a brewing companion:

> Felt kinda on my own; also, in real life I would like someone to guide me, have the experience with me. (P10-p)

The inside scene provided the sought-after interactions with the community, which in turn made the participants feel a stronger connection to the community:

> Drinking with, I suppose, the elders of the community. In that way I felt connected. (P3-p)

This community aspect also increased their interest:

> In the end there was a closer reference to how they perceive life and I suppose religion too and that was thought provoking. (P8-p)

This connection was also further strengthened when the participants identified as part of the community, taking on specific roles in the community, such as brewer or new tribe member:

> I was a part of a tribe [...] It made me feel special that I was part of something bigger for the community. (P7-p)

By taking on this role and contributing to the community, the participants felt special and that their actions meaningful:

> I definitely felt like I was contributing to something. Taking part in a tradition. (P1-p).

It seemed the participants grasped the importance of safeguarding ICH and supported it, without being introduced to it beforehand:

> So, you're doing this really important thing for your community [brewing beer] to keep the tradition going [...] It seemed like something that they had been doing for hundreds of years, and now you got to be a part of it. And that was really special, I guess you, you were chosen to do this. (P2-p)

In general, participants associated positive emotions with the community members, leading them to perceive the community as friendly and supportive:

> They all seem friendly. There was a good atmosphere. (P3-c)

> I just got to this village. I didn't have a home, but they were kind enough to welcome me in the village. (P5-p)

This led to participants' increased interest in the community and encouraged them to explore further:

> I wanted to explore more, look around more, [see] what they did on the field, the ox, the kids playing. (P8-p)

Without receiving any explicit explanations, participants correctly perceived a hierarchy during the inside scene, from the seating arrangements and order of drinking.

> I think maybe a feeling of mutual respect. If the man who took the first sip of the beer is more important than the others [...] because he took the first sip [...] and then I was the last person. (P1-c)

Furthermore, the participants got a deeper understanding of the culture, as they correctly perceived the hut as a privileged location and the ceremony itself as a sacred or special event. The participants accredited this to the presence of only a few, male, members of the community and the separation from the rest of the community, as well as sharing the drink. Two participants assessed this hierarchy:

> Maybe also celebration, which you said, but maybe only the higher-ups actually. 'Cause we were only what? Six people. (P4-c)

> And we all drank from the same cup, yeah. We weren't drinking from different cups. So it was obviously something of a ritual. (P3-c)

### Reflections on the collaborative review

During the collaborative review, participants felt nervous at first, but after a while, a productive conversation began. Participants expressed their opinions more freely and could compare and discuss their different points of view. They were often surprised by the difference in their interpretations of the experience and proceeded to explain their stance to their partner. Participants were also not afraid to agree with each other and helped each other reach conclusions. The collaborative review gave participants reassurance and understanding to express themselves fully and connect over their experience. Multiple opinions were uncovered during the reviews that the participants did not mention during the individual interviews.

## Day two: evaluating processual learning transfer through a physical re-enactment of beer brewing

The following day the participants were asked to re-create their VR experience in real life, which we term 're-enactment'. The participants were unaware of this succeeding evaluation day so that it would not influence them to place emphasis on the processual aspects. We were fortunate to recruit all the same participants again.

We were inspired by a study by Lohre et al. (2020), who studied how a VR surgical simulator was compared to a traditional learning method by having participants complete the surgical task in real life. During this process, the skill-transfer success was measured by a developed laboratory metric, verbal answers and time of task completion. We also clearly were inspired by the works on developing hands-on master–apprentice workshops by Karakul (2015), in which the author states that

> the aim of conservation is to sustain both the physical and intangible aspects of historical buildings and to transfer them to the future [...] Unfortunately, they have not hitherto been able to find an appropriate forum for the transmission of their skills to the current generation. (141)

Therefore, the method of re-enactment was chosen to evaluate the skill transfer of the VR application to a real-life scenario.

### Re-enactment method and procedure

In our context, we are mostly interested in the qualitative outcomes of the re-enactment; it was not expected that users would memorise the procedure completely after one playthrough. Therefore, the overall comprehension of the process was more important, and in learning settings the playthrough can always be repeated, if needed. This meant asking the participants to use the 'thinking-out-loud' method to get a better understanding of their thought process. The thinking-out-loud method is where the participant is asked to explain the thought process behind their actions while performing them. The participants were observed and prompted to explain their actions in case they did not provide enough verbal information.

During this re-enactment evaluation, participants were given physical equipment representing the 3D objects they interacted with during the simulation. All tools were accessible at all times during the re-enactment, as opposed to being available depending on the day, as in the application. See Figure 7 for an annotated photo from the re-enactment set-up.

Furthermore, it was important to focus on whether

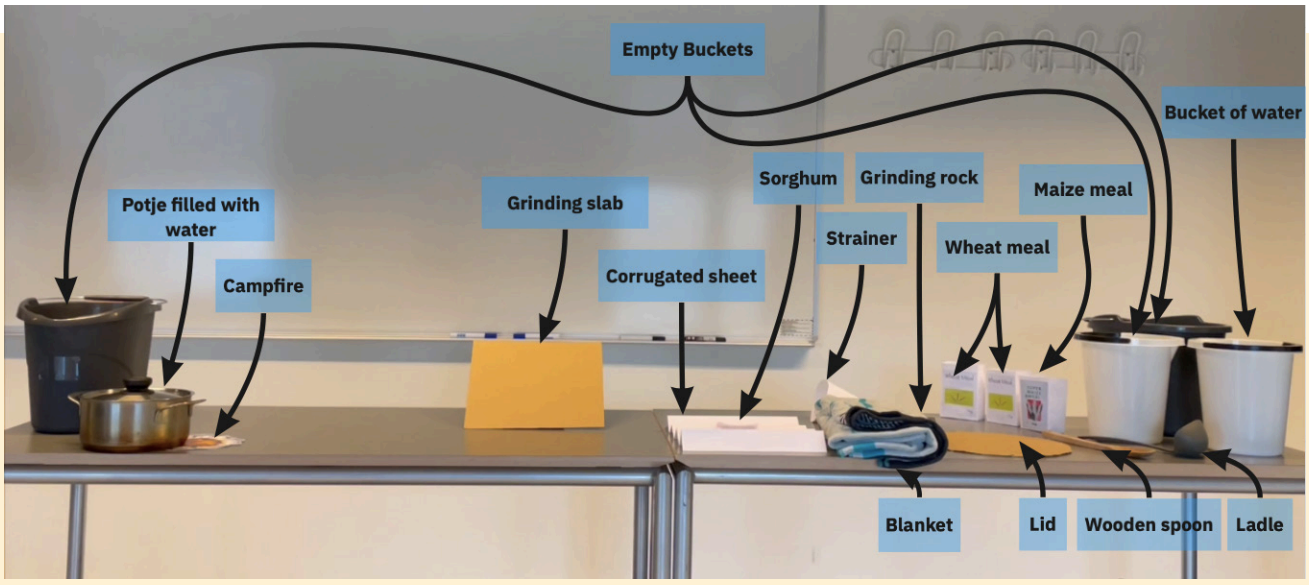



**Figure 7**
The figure shows the reenactment setup with annotation.

the learners could transfer the concepts of brewing, rather than merely visually recollecting the quantifiable procedural steps. For that reason, all objects – besides the maize meal, wheat meal and the wooden spoon – differed from their VR counterparts and therefore further evaluated the participants' ability to transfer the functionality of the equipment from VR to a real setting in the context of the TC as a practice.

Consequently, participants had to rely more on an understanding gained through the VR experience than just remember the order of tool usage. The participants were videorecorded as they attempted to re-enact the procedure from the day before; they did not receive help from the researchers.

## Data analysis

The video footage from the re-enactment was viewed and analysed by splitting the whole brewing process into individual steps and comparing the different phases across participants, especially their performance and verbal comments.

## Results

In terms of the re-enactment of the brewing, the participants were performing really well.

Figure 8 shows the completion times for the re-enactment per participant, which is quite short given the many pieces of equipment available and the fact that the majority of the participants demonstrated knowing about *all* the actions that needed to be performed.

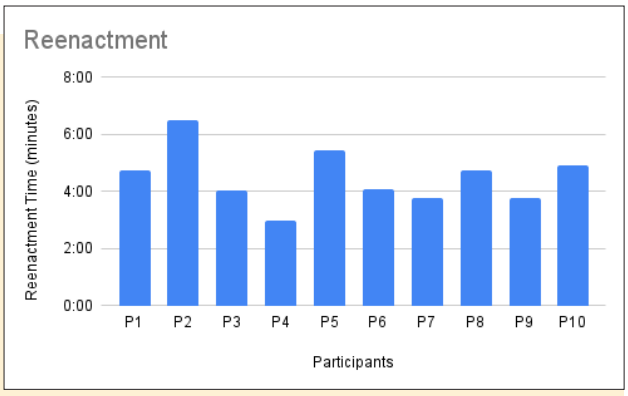



**Figure 8**
The figure shows the reenactment completion times per participant.

While some got confused by the order at a certain phase, they also in many cases corrected themselves. They added the correct ingredients, covered up the mixture and filtered it in the end, only sometimes forgetting to stir the mixture when necessary, which might be easier to remember when working with real-life ingredients.

Furthermore, it must be emphasised that most of the participants were novel users of VR, without any knowledge of sorghum beer brewing, and they only had a single playthrough of the procedure, which lasted on average only eight and a half minutes (including the hut scene). The participants did not know about the re-enactment beforehand, meaning they went through the experience without focusing on having to re-create it the next day. Additionally, during the re-enactment, the users had access to all the equipment and ingredients at once. This way, the re-enactment was based more on what participants remembered – for example, participants not noticing the water inside one of the buckets and consequently asking for it – instead of them automatically using everything accessible to them during each day. As some of the equipment had to be reused during the brewing process, users had to remember not only the correct order of the steps but also what the steps consisted of. Often, when participants made a mistake, they pondered about the correct step but ultimately opted for a different, incorrect one. In this way the method itself was useful to isolate gaps of understanding, and reviewing the video material made these phases very clear.

During the re-enactment, it was clear that the participants drew from the VR experience when re-creating the brewing steps. This was observed through participants' verbal reflection on the VR playthrough, for example, remembering the addition of the ingredients through the interaction with the virtual woman or describing the events that happened in VR:

> The lady came over and gave me two of these [ingredients], one wheat and one maize. (P3)

> Yesterday I put this [metal sheet] on the ground. (P8)

> I remember this part very well from the first step. (P7)

Often, participants stopped and wondered about the correct way to proceed, trying to recall their memories of the playthrough while also showing genuine care about

getting it right:

> I will take my time. (P6)

Similarly, one of participant performed hand gestures of the steps, with eyes closed, to remember better. This also suggests participants learned the procedure through the embodied interactions that VR enables.

Transfer was achieved as participants were able to map the process learned in VR into a real-life context, often adapting their knowledge appropriately – for example, boiling the mixture itself instead of adding boiling water or grinding the sorghum straight into the bucket instead of onto a sheet and then adding it in.

Overall, participants remembered the main principles of beer brewing – that is, making sure the mixture is boiled, the beer is left to ferment overnight and strained before it is served. Therefore, even if the participants did not manage to remember the entire procedure correctly, they still would have ended up with some kind of beer mixture in the end, as they understood the main concepts.

## Discussion

Our results point to users having a high level of engagement, which corresponds with the previous findings of VR being an engaging medium (Dede 2009; Allcoat and Muhlenen 2018). This was caused not only by the VR interactions but also the content within the VR experience, since the users mentioned enjoying the brewing process itself. Participants described the experience as fun, as it was embodied and immersive:

> It was fun to actually do it.I (P4)

> It was a different kind of experience [...] not like a computer. (P8)

The finding that embodiment and immersion increased enjoyment supports the findings from previous studies (Allcoat and Muhlenen 2018; Kavanagh et al. 2017).

Surprisingly, albeit being novice users of VR and having little to no knowledge about beer brewing in general (and none about umqombothi), the participants had few problems playing through the prototype. They understood the signifiers, which guided them through the brewing process, and managed to finish the entire playthrough in a relatively short amount of time. This suggests the efforts to create a simple, easy-to-comprehend application that even novel VR users can understand was successful.

An increase in positive emotions was observed after the playthrough, which corresponds with the current findings (Allcoat and Muhlenen 2018; Kavanagh et al. 2017). Participants described the experience as 'fun' and the environment as 'happy' and 'peaceful'. During the post-interview, the participants seemed excited and enthusiastic when talking about their experience. They also mentioned perceiving the community members as 'helpful' or 'friendly', even describing the drinking ritual as 'the equivalent of having a beer with the boys'. This was a result of the combination of the use of VR as a medium and the virtual environment and the atmosphere of the virtual community. These findings suggest users associated the positive feelings experienced during the VR playthrough with the TC and the community members. Consequently, these gratifying emotions connected with the culture could lead to thinking more creatively, flexibly and in a more integrated way, leading users become more open to information, which is beneficial for learning (Fredrickson 2003).

### Sparking an interest in ICH

One of the most interesting findings of our study was how much users' curiosity increased following the VR experience. Unlike studies that conducted their research on museum visitors (Schofield et al. 2018; Ringas et al. 2022; Hauser et al. 2022), who came to the experiment with the motivation to learn and had a learning experience before the VR playthrough, our participants were students with little to no previous knowledge and no specific interest on the topic. This is why it was surprising when the majority of the participants mentioned wanting to 'know more' when talking about the environment, the brewing process, the ceremony and the inhabitants. The experience sparked interest in the culture, as participants talked about interacting more with the community and the desire to know more. When asked about experiencing the event in real life, again, most participants enthusiastically expressed their desire to do so. The increased interest in the process as well as the community is a good indicator that the VR experience has the potential to safeguard these traditions as suggested by UNESCO (b, 2003).

## Conclusion

The study contributes to the research agenda of digitally safeguarding ICH and the TC of umqombothi beer brewing by designing and implementing a fully functional VR prototype as well as evaluating it on inexperienced VR users, unfamiliar with the specific ICH. Furthermore, this article acknowledges the lack of evaluation methods for assessing the transfer from digital TC solutions into the physical reality and addresses this issue by proposing a re-enactment style evaluation, which explores participants' ability to re-create TC practice in real-life context.

TC is a unique category of ICH, as it not only consists of a specific procedure but also depends heavily on the context and tradition surrounding it. One cannot be without the other: if either the craft or the cultural importance would be disregarded, we would lose a piece of the heritage. Therefore, the evaluation was carefully planned to look at not only the cultural understanding of the participants (Day 1 of the evaluation) but also the interpretation and recollection of the procedure of the TC (Day 2).

Through the evaluation of the contextual experiences, we found an increased interest in the community and their traditions, a connection established with the community members, a positive perception of the craft and the experience in general and the desire to undergo the experience in real life. The re-enactment evaluation also served as evidence for skill transfer from VR to real life, as even novice users of VR successfully re-created the majority of the beer-brewing procedure correctly after one short playthrough.

By designing, implementing and evaluating ICH and procedural aspects of TC, specifically umqombothi beer brewing, we hope to inspire further research into how VR can serve as a strong educational medium for ICH, especially TC. In the case of this project, the future holds two aspects: how it is received by South African learners, and how ICH can promote an interest in – or even an 'enrichment' of – STEM education.

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# Safeguarding language as intangible cultural heritage

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# Safeguarding language as intangible cultural heritage

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## ABSTRACT

The UK currently lacks a national framework for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH). ICH represents 'living cultural expressions and practices, which are recognised by communities as distinct aspects of identity' (Alivizatou-Barakou et al. 2017, 129). We argue that language, including dialects, accents and lexicons of UK communities, must be included within approaches which aim to safeguard ICH. As a 'repository' (Bialostocka 2017) of community practices, language is central to individual and shared identities and feelings of 'belonging' (Sarma 2015). This paper challenges perceptions that the UK has no ICH (see Waterton and Smith 2009) through a case study of 'pit talk' in the East Midlands. It draws on approaches being taken on local or regional levels to preserve and revitalise language heritage (e.g. Howell 2013; ICH Scotland n.d.). We explore the potential benefits, disadvantages and limitations of the UK ratifying UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003. Although we argue that this would be a positive step towards protecting ICH in the UK, we propose that a UK-wide framework, which places community needs at its heart, is key to safeguarding language heritage for future generations.

## Keywords

dialect, pit talk, UNESCO, lexicon

## Introduction

Despite its central importance to culture and identities, language is rarely included in state-sponsored measures intended to safeguard intangible cultural heritage (ICH). In this article, we explore contemporary approaches to ICH and UNESCO's conceptualisation of language as a 'vehicle' of ICH as enacted through UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003 ('the UNESCO Convention'). Consideration is given to the reasons for including language within measures intended to safeguard ICH, before we examine the status of language heritage in the UK. Through a case study of 'pit talk' (Braber 2022), we illustrate some of the richness of the UK's language heritage to underline the applicability of language as ICH in Western cultures. Finally, we argue that the UK, which is not a signatory of the UNESCO Convention, ought to re-examine its position and give serious consideration to signing the UNESCO Convention and/or adopting a more robust approach which would be beneficial to safeguarding language as ICH.

## Background

The historical development of the concept and definition of ICH and the shift away from viewing heritage as solely tangible, including the ratification of the UNESCO Convention, has been well documented, and we do not propose to revisit this in the present article. Blake (2020), for example, provides a thorough and recent discussion of 'the inception to young adulthood' of the UNESCO Convention. Most notably, the UNESCO Convention represented what Blake has referred to as a 'recalibration' of our understanding of the concept of 'heritage' and the 'paradigm' for its protection. Indeed, Munjeri (2009, 131) considers that the UNESCO Convention marked a turning point in the approach to heritage encapsulated in international instruments, recognising the status of ICH and elevating the status of intangible heritage, which some had argued was seen as the 'poor relation of culture'. This occurred in an international context which increasingly recognised the need for sustainable development and the preservation of global cultural diversity (Blake 2020, 3–4).

Recent research and practices to safeguard[1] ICH have largely been driven by an increasing awareness of the need to challenge what Smith (2006) has referred to as Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD). AHD represents the dominant hegemonic, usually Western (and especially Western European) discourse about heritage, which 'acts to constitute the way we think, talk and write about heritage' (Smith 2006, 11) and attempts to render the intangible tangible. Harrison and Linkman (2010) have argued that we need to develop skills to allow us to analyse heritage and its role within social contexts. Sensitivity to safeguarding ICH reflects a growing awareness of the impact of globalisation on a whole host of minority and otherwise non-dominant cultures and traditions.

According to Alivizatou-Barakou and others (2017, 129), ICH represents 'living cultural expressions and practices, which are recognised by communities as distinct aspects of identity' (see also e.g. Akagawa 2015). The importance of ICH to identities is well established, and countries such as Japan and Korea (through programmes such as Living National Treasures) have attempted to 'create mechanisms and institutions that would record, sustain and perpetuate' practices that are threatened by economic trends in the West and might otherwise lead 'to the abandonment of traditional ways of life and ceremonies and disrupt the local sense of continuity and identity' (Alivizatou 2012, 9). The UNESCO Convention promotes an international approach to accepting culture and traditions as aspects of heritage and recognising the roles of communities, especially Indigenous communities, in safeguarding ICH and 'helping to enrich cultural diversity and human creativity' (UNESCO 2003). UNESCO (2011) also acknowledges that the importance of ICH is not the cultural manifestation itself, but the wealth of knowledge and skills transmitted through generations. (For a fuller discussion of the development of international measures to safeguard ICH, see e.g. Ahmad 2006). Furthermore, UNESCO stresses in the Convention the importance of communities as bearers of traditional or cultural expression. As such, all safeguarding actions must be community led (WSP 2020, 9). To allow for safeguarding, UNESCO put in place a Representative List of the ICH of Humanity, which simultaneously documents ICH, recognises its status and encourages states to take further action to preserve and revitalise it.

Alivizatou (2012, 9) has commented that UNESCO was instrumental in ensuring the prominence of ICH in the global setting and that its plans and programmes aimed at safeguarding this heritage have reached around the world and ensured it is seen as a universal aspect of humanity, although implementation is often highly localised (see Berger, Dicks and Fontaine 2020, 325). However, protecting ICH is particularly difficult, as it is not 'owned' in the same way that buildings and monuments can be more easily rebuilt or preserved (Graham and Howard 2008, 4). Furthermore, the UK has not ratified the UNESCO Convention nor have, at the time of writing, Australia, Canada, Liechtenstein, the US, Niue, New Zealand, Russia, San Marino, Sierra Leone and South Africa. However, the issue of ratification has been raised by Members of the UK's Houses of Commons and Lords to the UK government and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). There have been at least 12 written questions on the matter since 2015. In response to a written question answered in the House of Lords on 15 June 2020, Baroness Barran, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for DCMS, stated that 'we have not seen any compelling business case for ratifying the UNESCO Convention, nor is it clear that the benefits of doing so would outweigh the costs' (UK Parliament, UIN HL5059, 15 June 2020). However, her latest response, more hopefully, stated that the government was 'exploring the merits' of ratification (UK Parliament, UIN HL33, 11 May 2021).

In the light of this UK government interest in exploring

ratification, we now turn to consider the importance of safeguarding language heritage and how the UNESCO Convention might, at least partially, help achieve this.

## Why safeguard language heritage?

Language heritage plays a crucial role in individual and community identities, as well as in feelings of belonging and well-being, yet it lacks structured, systematic frameworks to ensure that it is safeguarded and revitalised for future generations. Researchers agree that languages and identities are inextricably linked, and Sarma (2015, 62) quotes UNESCO in stating that language 'carries an individual's or a community's identity and mediates value systems, social codes, world views and the sense of belonging'. Harrison (2010, 9) observes that, 'language is an important aspect of who we understand ourselves to be, and it is learned and passed from adult to child, from generation to generation'. He argues that intangible practices of heritage are as significant as the physical objects and buildings that are normally considered heritage in helping us understand who we are, and he draws attention to the need for communities, researchers and practitioners to consider ways language can be recognised as such. Other researchers recognise the role of language in encapsulating local heritage and cultures. Bialostocka (2017, 18) argues that language represents 'living heritage', as a 'repository and an organic inventory system [...] contained in the linguistic interactions of the people who produce it'. Nic Craith (2010, 54) similarly portrays traditional languages as 'reservoirs' which collect Indigenous knowledge, particularly of ecology and environment, where 'modernity' has yet to catch up.

There can be serious consequences associated with rupturing individual and community feelings of belonging. Gibson et al. (2021) investigated the significance of language as a cultural practice among young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Queensland, Australia. They found that, 'within remote and regional areas, higher levels of community language use was associated with 26% lower suicide rates', indicating that 'cultural factors may be protective' in First People populations that are at risk of suffering transgenerational harms stemming from historical injustices and discrimination (Gibson et al. 2021, 1). Although Gibson et al.' s research concerned communities disadvantaged by colonisation, whose experience arguably differs from many communities in the UK, it suggests that engagement with aspects of cultural practices and feelings of belonging to a cultural group may have a considerable positive impact on well-being.

Nevertheless, concepts of language (and cultural) loss are widespread, and Berliner (2013, 71) has referred to 'discourses of the vanishing' and has focused on the languages which are being lost every year throughout the world. Although Berliner suggests that language nostalgia comes mainly from outside communities, researchers have supported the notion that disappearing languages can negatively impact communities. For example, Sarma (2015, 63) cites Crystal who commented that 'the death of a language inevitably means the permanent loss of oral traditions and expressions' and stated that linguistic vitality is essential for cultural diversity. Smeets (2004, 157) affirms that local groups and communities need assistance from local or national authorities to help preserve their languages which are under threat as a result of globalisation (160), and in the next section, we consider the extent to which the UNESCO Convention might offer this assistance to ICH and language heritage in particular.

## The UNESCO Convention

The UNESCO Convention defines ICH in Article 2(1) to include:

> practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. (UNESCO Convention, Art.2(1))

Article 2(2)(a) recognises 'oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage' as one domain in which ICH is manifested, and Article 2(3) includes documentation to support languages. We will return to this approach to language after first considering UNESCO's approach to ICH more broadly.

Although instances of ICH are inventoried on a series of registers, UNESCO positions ICH as something which is 'constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history' (Article 2(1)). Logan (2008) comments that UNESCO encourages local-level initiatives from the bottom up to safeguard ICH as well as the top-

down approach of the UNESCO registers (see Kral, Green and Ellis (2019) and Rowan (2017) for examples of bottom-up initiatives to safeguard Indigenous languages in Australia and the Nubian Nile respectively). Top-down approaches without public engagement, which lack community involvement in determining what becomes part of public memory, can be less effective. For example, van Eijnatten and de Nood (2018) have illustrated how essential it is that museums consider their audiences to ensure understanding and engagement, 'since the making of public meaning and memory is so central to the way museums operate, it is essential for them to seek new ways of interacting with the publics they serve' (2018, 95). Not doing so can lead to disconnection between visitors and heritage.

However, the UNESCO approach is limited in several ways. Firstly, it brings a global, standard method for safeguarding local traditions. Alivizatou (2012) has pointed out the paradox of an international organisation establishing criteria, guidelines and standards that are implemented across the world in totally different cultural settings. She has questioned strategies which involve 'local, site-specific and community-related expressions' being expected to 'meet the same global and vague criteria in the name of cultural diversity and anti-standardisation' (Alivizatou 2012, 10). Coşkun (2019) has also suggested that the UNESCO Convention might paradoxically facilitate standardisation:

> Despite the fact that UNESCO policies aim to tame the far-reaching impacts of globalization (Bortolotto 2012; Turtinen 2000), by way of producing a global norm, it paradoxically enables the very process to penetrate into the most peripheral locations where the impacts of globalizations would otherwise have the least foot-hold. (Coşkun 2019, 228)

Similarly, in listing ICH on the UNESCO register, states are exposing cultural practices to the world stage, potentially triggering them to crystallise over time or otherwise adapt to suit tourists and other observers rather than those to whom they belong. Berliner (2013, 76) has stated that UNESCO may actually transform culture through its efforts to preserve it, a process he names as 'UNESCOization'. Coşkun (2019, 220) has added that 'safeguarding of ICH as part of living cultures is not only redundant, but simply not feasible without introducing irreversible changes to local cultural expressions'. As language is always undergoing change, this may not be of as much concern as to other cultural practices.

Secondly, researchers such as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) and Kockel (2007) have argued that the inventory-style list of ICH produced by the UNESCO Convention creates a metacultural, rather than cultural, outcome, and it renders living traditions into static forms frozen in the past, which Leimbruger (2010) refers to as 'museumification'. Coşkun (2019, 228) has added that such heritage lists actually endanger the most peripheral locations, where otherwise globalisation would have the least foothold. Beyond the UNESCO Convention, Alivizatou (2012) has indicated concerns about US-dominated cultural homogenisation and the threat this poses to global cultural diversity. Nic Craith, Kockel and Lloyd (2019) similarly view globalisation and standardisation, together with tourism and migration, as threats to ICH. As such, it is important to think of sensitive, appropriate ways language can be approached as heritage.

The UNESCO Convention seeks to build new machinery around safeguarding ICH, establishing processes and tools for 'national governments to proclaim the richness of their cultural heritage', rather than focus on 'the culture bearers themselves' (James Early cited in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, 56). While preserving heritage, it must crucially be kept alive and allowed to change and adapt over time.

Thirdly, the UNESCO Convention only safeguards language to the extent that it is a 'vehicle' for the transmission of aspects of culture including traditions, skills and crafts (see e.g. Smeets 2004); language is not captured, nor is it treated as a valuable dimension of heritage to be valued in and of itself (Nic Craith, Kockel and Lloyd 2019, 121). Ubertazzi (2020) documents some of the compromises made in the UNESCO Convention that explain why language was not included specifically, noting in particular that minority languages are fraught with political sensitivities, particularly around the relationships between Indigenous, official and minority languages. The UNESCO approach reflects 'long-standing resistance of States to any external interference in national cultural policies and the codification of protection for intangible heritage, especially languages, at the international level' (Vrdoljak 2014, 10). Thus, the UNESCO Convention focuses on oral traditions and expressions themselves and their performance in public, which provide the 'best help to

safeguard a language rather than dictionaries, grammars and databases' (UNESCO 'Oral traditions and expressions' (n.34) cited in Ubertazzi 2020). In the next section, we critically examine UNESCO's practice-based approach to 'language as a vehicle' of ICH.

## UNESCO's concept of 'language as a vehicle' (UNESCO, Art.2(1))

Exclusion of language in its own right from the UNESCO Convention means a systematic international approach to safeguarding language as ICH is lacking. This is despite recognition that it plays a crucial role in individual and community identities and well-being (outlined in section 3, and see also e.g. Nic Craith 2010; Berger 2020), particularly in cases of language revitalisation where language may be seen as a marker of nationalism and identity (see Graham and Howard 2008, 6) and must logically be at risk from the same forces that threaten ICH more broadly.

In some instances of ICH listed on the UNESCO registers, language is linked to a safeguarded practice; these are primarily minority, Indigenous languages, rather than dialects and distinct lexicons associated with variations of official languages.[2] For example, Chamame, a form of cultural expression involving close-embrace dancing and celebratory acts in Argentina, was inscribed in 2020 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Its listing includes the Yopara dialect as the vehicle of oral traditions. In a similar vein, a whistled language is listed in La Gomera and the Makgkaxtlawana Centre for Indigenous Arts (Mexico), entered on the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices in 2012, with the aim to revitalise Totonac cultural practices, including through using the Totonac language as the vehicle for teaching.

Language rights under international conventions and national laws tend to focus on protecting individual speakers of minority languages from discrimination, rather than active promotion of those languages or community rights (see e.g. Smeets 2004). Furthermore, international agreements which protect minority language speakers, such as the Council of Europe's European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages, exclude dialects of official languages and recent migratory languages as well as particular specialised vocabularies associated with particular industries. This raises important questions about the sufficiency of existing protection. The exclusion of language in itself from the UNESCO Convention means that this vital aspect of ICH lacks a safeguarding framework. Furthermore, it seems that the UNESCO literature focuses solely on non-Western cultures (see e.g. https://ich.unesco.org/en/kit). One of the reasons for the UNESCO Convention was the frustration felt in countries of the southern hemisphere who protested that the World Heritage List criteria were unsuitable for southern countries (Aikawa-Faure 2009, 15). Although ICH was seen as a way of combatting focus on buildings and monuments, which featured mainly in Western societies, there is now a danger of insinuating that Western countries do not have ICH that needs to be preserved. Similarly, research has tended to focus on how to safeguard minority languages. Studies such as Sarma (2015) have documented how raising the use and prestige of varieties is crucial. For example, there have been attempts to develop a written script with Idu elders to safeguard the Idu-Mishmi language in India, and others in the community have been working to teach local communities the spoken language through rhymes and song to help expand vocabulary (Sarma 2015).

In the next section, we explore practical examples of safeguarding language as ICH in the UK.

## Language as ICH: safeguarding in practice in the UK

We turn now to focus on measures intended to safeguard local dialects and lexicons (primarily English in the UK context) that have been associated with occupation-based communities in the UK, particularly mining communities, rather than the minority languages, which form the nexus of the scholarship discussed above (see also Smeets 2004; Fernandez Del Pozo 2017; Gibson 2019). With the rapid processes of deindustrialisation, there are many ways of living which will change beyond recognition, and that includes the lexicons used by those people. Whole ways of life and work are at risk without the knowledge of these specialised registers. Much current research on language focuses on endangered and minority languages, but specialised lexicons are frequently overlooked (see e.g. Donnachie 2010, 135). Local community heritage preservation also requires further investigation to be able to understand how lives were lived. Especially recent industrial history is often not seen as worthy of preservation (see Lu, Liu and Wang

2020, 506 for similar thoughts in China), but it is important to preserve diverse heritage of local and industrial communities and not just focus on the AHD. The UK should consider rationalising its approach to safeguarding ICH, and particularly language as ICH, and we will explore how this could be achieved. This is particularly important to contest views that 'white Westerners apparently have no intangible heritage' (Graham and Howard 2008, 9). We note that the principle of 'cultural connectedness' as protective against some impacts of threats to minoritised communities is a key area of interest and requires further attention. As Smeets (2004, 162) has commented, not all cases of language planning require action, but it may be needed for 'the specialized lexicon that is in use among practitioners, especially in the domains of traditional knowledge and handicrafts [...] in order to preserve the knowledge concerned and to favour its transmission'.

In the case of the distinct 'pit talk' lexicon and dialect of East Midlands miners (see e.g. Braber, Ashmore and Harrison 2017), Braber (2018) has shown that this language forms a large part of the identity and camaraderie of the miners and should be preserved for future generations to understand. The Dialect and Heritage Project based at the University of Leeds in England (funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and which will be discussed in the next section) focuses on language and identity by opening up the Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture to the public and linking museums and their collections with community events and engagement.

The language of coal miners is particularly interesting because it represents an aspect of heritage which is often overlooked in AHD. During an interview surrounding the Draft Heritage Protection Bill in 2005, the interviewee stated that 'the UK has no intangible heritage' (Smith and Waterton 2009, 297) and that within the English Heritage organisation 'nobody deals with intangibles' (Smith and Waterton 2009, 298). Hassard (2009, 270) has commented that the impact of ICH in the UK is limited because of the vision of cultural inheritance as being tangible and having a material construction. Other researchers have also said that England is more focused on tangible and natural heritage (Smith and Waterton 2009, 289).

Smith (2006) and Coupland and Coupland (2014) have argued that acknowledging a range of heritage discourses hands over space to otherwise silenced voices and identities. Berger (2020, 1) citing Shackel and Palus, has noted that 'narratives of labour and of the working class are particularly in danger of being silenced and downplayed in official heritage discourses'. As coal mining and the language of pit talk are closely related to working-class, occupation-based practices, it is particularly important to preserve pit talk as ICH to allow communities to access and explore their own identities and cultural inheritance. Coupland and Coupland (2014) have noted that linguistic features including banter and dialect are indexical of class and region within speech. They have commented that 'these are very small indexical elements of a more generally vernacular construction of local experience linked to mining in south Wales' (Coupland and Coupland 2014, 509). Thus, language is established as integral to accessing local identities and ICH of communities. Cave (2001) has studied the use of language as a way to strengthen community bonds. This study looked at different dialect jokes, name-calling and narratives in a Yorkshire coal community, which not only celebrated the distinctiveness of the local coal-mining jargon but also promoted feelings of insiderness and created a socio-occupational boundary for these communities.

How, then, should language such as pit talk be safeguarded? Deuchmert and Storch (2019) have cautioned that current practices which tend to lean towards documenting and archiving language in effect fossilise linguistic practices and colonise them, divorcing them from the communities to which they belong. They have criticised linguists' attempts to record and 'preserve' language for 'social good', arguing that, 'if we wish to understand language as heritage more fully, we need to look beyond language archives and towards the everyday practices of people' (103). Like Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) (discussed above), they have argued that language archives move intangible language into materiality, losing many linguistic features in the process of documentation, becoming 'documentary heritage' rather than 'living heritage' (Deumert and Storch 2019, 104). Furthermore, access to such archives can be limited for people from those communities, and some communities may feel that their language does not belong to the whole world (108). These are important points to consider when we question how best to safeguard language as ICH. We do need to consider that all efforts to support language usage, including making whole or partial records, can be beneficial. The aim and effect of frameworks must be to safeguard language and practices, not as static artefacts of history, but to protect and promote the ways in which

local communities engage with, revisit and revise their linguistic practices. More broadly, Logan (2008, 439) has argued that local communities need to have a sense of 'ownership of their heritage'; this reaffirms their worth as a community, their ways of going about things, their 'culture'. Interventions to safeguard language as ICH must therefore place local communities at the heart of their approach.

This was the case in the study mentioned above, which examined the lexical variation of East Midlands mining communities (for full details, see Braber 2022 – 'pit talk' does vary from region to region, and there has been some research on 'pitmatic' in the North East of England. As such this case study could also be applied to other regions, as well as other occupational languages). In July 2015, the last deep coal mine in the East Midlands of England closed. Although the industry was in decline for many years, this final contraction was rapid. Coal mining had been a crucial aspect of the local economy for many years, and many communities relied on coal for their economic survival. Mining gave these communities a sense of identity and belonging. Miners used specific words in their daily work, 'pit talk', which varied from region to region, and many of these words were part of their everyday lives. However, now that all these mines have closed, and the former mining generation are ageing, there was only a short window of opportunity to preserve and investigate these words. With changing industry and the resulting effects on landscaping (many former mining sites were landscaped as country parks or had housing and retail built over them), people realised that almost nothing would be left to remember the industry in the region unless some significant structures were listed and preserved. Different mining heritage groups have been set up to preserve tangible heritage and memorabilia, with a wish to educate younger generations. However, language was rarely considered part of this heritage and tended to be taken for granted. Particularly in the East Midlands, pit talk had received very little interest. So, what could be saved of this important aspect of local culture and heritage in the region? The documentation of pit talk and other language can be used as a means of accessing the cultural heritage of speakers and their families; otherwise, the lexis and paths into understanding tools and skills could become lost when this generation of miners pass away. The mining communities have been keen to share their language with academics in these projects. Furthermore, they have been delighted by how intrigued their families are by the language. Such community partnerships emphasise that safeguarding by documentation should be collaborative with communities to whom it belongs.

This project scrutinised East Midlands pit talk in order to identify, classify and record the words used and to examine the contribution of this language to regional and local identity. It took account of the movement of miners to determine how and where its influence spread. It also analysed data gathered in the East Midlands and compared this to data from other regions to investigate similarities and differences between different coal-mining areas. Language is seen as important, as a miner's language expressed their culture and lives below and above ground. Examining such a specialised register can enable us to inspect local language variation more generally. When Braber started recording people from around the East Midlands, there were several references to coal mining and to their 'distinctive' language. One interviewee, whose grandfather was a miner, said that the researcher should speak to miners, as they had a language 'all of their own'. When Braber made contacts with miners and former miners, pit talk was often taken for granted rather than celebrated. They were surprised initially that their language could be considered valuable and thought it was 'ordinary' and 'everyday'. At the same time, they increasingly recognised that with the cessation of mining, there was no economic need for the language to be carried forward by future generations and was therefore under threat. Using this language can allow people to link to a particular community and place, and this could give them greater legitimacy in the present (Harrison 2010, 243). Over time, people will know less about the objects involved in the industry, and the knowledge about how these work will be lost; projects which preserve intangible heritage such as language can encourage 'active engagement' and 'collective activity' with the past and its associated culture (Douglas 2017, 133).

Following funding, we were able to carry out interviews and surveys with miners throughout the region. The project has resulted in non-academic publications (Braber et al. 2017; Braber 2018a), as well as academic publications (Braber 2018b; 2022). There was extensive outreach work with heritage groups and coal-mining heritage groups. We also held a celebration event, which was attended by many of the miners who took part in the interviews. We also constructed a website (https://coalanddialect.wixsite.com/coaldialect), which included the 'word of the week'

feature that focused on words used in the interviews as well as thematically structured extracts from interviews. The non-academic book included a short dictionary-style list of words used by coal miners as well as some extracts from interviews about some of the most prominent subjects of the interviews, such as the life of miners, mining camaraderie, danger and working conditions, and tools and equipment. These descriptions allowed us to present the words in actual context and show how they were used by miners.

The interviews took place in different stages. Initially, miners from around the region were interviewed to examine local differences. In additional interviews, the most experienced miners, those who had worked for many years in the industry and were often involved in mining heritage groups, were interviewed in pairs by a former miner to facilitate in-depth discussion of language. These interviews were based around the usage of Sense Relation Networks (Llamas 1999) to facilitate discussion. The final round of interviews had to be curtailed due to the Covid-19 pandemic; instead, questionnaires were mailed to a final group of miners to complete data collection. These interviews and surveys allowed for analysis to compare with other mining regions around the UK. We were able to examine the level of knowledge of particular lexical items of the coal-mining industry, and this can also be used by future studies. Interviews with a variety of miners from different mining communities around the East Midlands were needed to examine the extent that there were local differences between Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire, as well as to investigate the differences between these regions. Large public interest through local media and word of mouth, as well as close collaboration with four main coal-mining heritage groups, helped us recruit individuals to take part. Having an extended network was helpful in guiding us to interested individuals.

We can use such oral histories and testimonies and combine them with tangible objects to bring them to life and stop them from becoming static (Douglas 2017, 131–132). In a similar way to preserving disappearing dialects, we can ensure we work with community groups and members to ensure that language is documented and can raise awareness within the community groups (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1995, 717). The loss of cultural identity and associated language is typical of many post-industrial communities, and engaging with this can empower communities to work with their own heritage and identity.

## The status of language as ICH in the UK

We turn now to the UK's current approach to safeguarding language as ICH. In the absence of ratification of the UNESCO Convention or other official instruments, action is left to stakeholders such as museums and heritage groups. Although ratification would have to take place at the UK level, responsibility for heritage policy largely lies with the UK's devolved administrations, meaning that alternative positions regarding ICH can still be taken (WSP 2020). The effect is, unsurprisingly, that there is no unified approach across the UK, although there are some initiatives that operate at the national level, and we will discuss examples in Scotland and Wales. It should be flagged that issues around language policies can be contentious and political and, particularly in Northern Ireland, also relate to issues of sectarianism (WSP 2020, 7). In Northern Ireland, there is currently a proposed bill in very early stages around issues of language and identity (see https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3168 for more information).

Waterton and Smith (2008, 297) suggest there is a systemic lack of comprehension of ICH, and they presented interview data which indicate a belief that the UK has no ICH and that ICH is something more appropriate to other, particularly non-Western cultures. This is not a problem that hampers only the UK. Grandjean (n.d.) has used maps to visualise the location of ICH listed on the UNESCO Convention's registers and demonstrated the relative under-representation of Western cultures. This lack of a framework for conceptualising ICH in Western contexts means that effective safeguarding is impossible: 'if it cannot be conceived, and recognised, within the structural, social and discursive relationships of the management process it simply cannot be managed' (Grandjean n.d., 298).

The Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA), together with the British Council and Heritage Fund, have created the RSA Heritage Index. This is a UK-wide index of ICH, ranking local authorities and their heritage across different domains. Although it includes intangible heritage within the definition of 'heritage' (see Heritage Index 2020 and Antink 2019), it privileges tangible heritage. The concept of quantifying,

scoring and ranking heritage is potentially subjective and problematic. A search of the 2020 Index returns no details of language-related ICH (other than a brief mention of the Welsh language in Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (RSA 2020, 8)). This would suggest that dialects and Indigenous languages of the UK do not feature in the RSA's Heritage Index.

However, despite these criticisms of the UK's approach to safeguarding language as ICH, there are recent initiatives which recognise its value. At the time of writing, researchers from the University of Leeds are working with a selection of museums to carry out extensive research funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund into dialects across England (see https://dialectandheritage.org.uk). Jersey, a self-governing British Crown Dependency, has recently launched a new language policy which provides government-run schools with a framework for supporting multilingual learners and encourages learning of additional languages, including Jèrriais, Jersey's traditional language (Government of Jersey 2022). *ICH Scotland* is a website, which was handed over to Museums Galleries Scotland in 2011, developed by Edinburgh Napier University with Arts and Humanities Research Council funding. The project presents a wiki database, which is updated on an ad hoc basis and accepts contributions from members of the public and organisations. It includes an open-access, searchable register of ICH in Scotland and aims to 'be a reflection of "living" practices and knowledge rather than a record of purely historical ICH' (McCleery et al. 2008, 7). Entries include a range of ICH, including dance, crafts, beliefs and storytelling. The Shetland dialect, which ICH Scotland refers to as a branch of Scots, is included on the register, which notes distinct linguistic features including vocabulary and vowel sounds derived from Scandinavian languages. Nic Craith, Kockel and Lloyd (2019) have noted that the project encountered several problems, primarily rooted in its costs, which limited its success. However, the *ICH Scotland* website is now a live, accessible and user-friendly inventory of Scotland's ICH, and it is notable that Museums and Galleries Scotland was, in 2012, accredited as an expert NGO adviser to UNESCO on the UNESCO Convention.

The Scottish government protects and promotes Gaelic and Scots languages and sees heritage as including both the tangible and intangible (WSP 2020, 7). The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 confers the language with protection and prominence as an official language of Scotland. It provides, among other measures, for a Gaelic language plan, states that Gaelic must be available as an education medium upon request and provides for organisations and broadcasting of the Gaelic language. Similar provisions have been enacted in relation to the Scots language. Scotland is unable to ratify the Convention; ratification must take place at UK level, and there is pressure from Members of the Scottish Parliament from across political parties for the UK to do so (see e.g. Scottish Parliament S5M-11347, 29 March 2018). Furthermore, Kate Forbes, a Member of the Scottish Parliament and chair of the cross-party committee on Gaelic in the Scottish Parliament, has specifically called for Gaelic to be recorded as UNESCO ICH.

Howell (2013) has been critical of the Westminster government's failure to sign the UNESCO Convention and has debunked any suggestion that the UK, and Wales in particular, lacks ICH. He has identified the Welsh language festival, Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru (National Eisteddfod of Wales) as an example of ICH, citing the Eisteddfod's mission 'to promote the Welsh language and our culture'. He has noted that despite the success of the Eisteddfod, there are problems, including declining participation in some activities, such as folk music and dancing, and tensions between preserving traditions as they were and adapting them to attract more people. However, he argues that 'evolution is a natural process within the ICH spectrum' (Howell 2013, 113). Howell has advocated for the ratification of the UNESCO Convention, asserting that this would increase prestige and awareness of ICH in Wales, contributing to safeguarding efforts. Interestingly, although Wales has considered management of ICH in a recent heritage bill, this bill neglects the Welsh language entirely and a recent report produced for Historic England states that 'considering the rich oral traditions and vibrant life of the Welsh language, the formal governmental engagement with ICH can therefore be summarised as being somewhat neglected' (WSP 2020, 6).

These examples discredit assertions that ICH is not relevant in the UK context and illustrate a range of initiatives to safeguard language as ICH. The ICH Scotland wiki could be considered similar to the UNESCO Convention register, albeit a more interactive, bottom-up version, as it is open to contributions from individuals and communities. The Eisteddfod, first convened in the 19th century, is an example of living ICH, but one which Howell (2013) believes would reap benefits should the UK ratify

the UNESCO Convention. The RSA Index, the only UK-wide register that includes ICH, does not reflect the approach of the UNESCO Convention's registers. Rather than itemising community heritage, it ranks local authorities on the basis of the amount of heritage (principally tangible, environmental and natural) they have; it is not designed for the public or other interested parties to seek out particular communities' heritage. These instances also highlight the lack of a consistent approach to ICH in the UK.

Of course, there are more examples of museums and heritage groups in the UK safeguarding language ICH (and the ways this is done will be examined elsewhere), including the National Coal Mining Museum, Big Pit National Mining Museum of Wales and the Black Country Living Museum, which all seek to preserve dialects, vocabulary and accents associated with occupations and local communities. However, some of these are short-term projects, or exhibitions and resources are not always easy to locate nor promoted prominently on websites. There are also language corpora which can be used to safeguard language, and the Newcastle Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English has interviews with Tyneside people in the late 1960s and early 1990s which can be accessed to examine language as a vehicle of ICH (see Allen et al. 2006).

## Conclusion

In this article, we argue that the UK must properly consider how best to safeguard ICH, including language, and that ratifying the UNESCO Convention could be one part of the puzzle. As Nic Craith, Kockel and Lloyd (2019, 127) have argued, non-signatories miss out on a great deal of international collaboration on ICH, and there is a crucial 'moral argument' that 'the more nation-states that ratify the Convention, the greater the standing of ICH as a resource for humanity on a global scale'. This echoes the arguments of Howell (2013) that ratification would boost prestige and awareness around ICH. Nic Craith, Kockel and Lloyd (2019) have adopted a 'change from within stance', arguing that states such as the UK should ratify the UNESCO Convention and then seek to work towards more 'holistic' approaches to heritage.

Signing the UNESCO Convention will not fully resolve the protection and promotion of language associated with industries such as coal mining (particularly as no funding is offered to ensure such safeguarding, so it can be seen as a status-enhancing framework rather than an actual method for safeguarding), but if no national and official initiatives are taken, the UK risks a fragmented approach to the safeguarding of ICH, in which local communities lose access to their heritage and associated identities. Of course, a major obstacle to safeguarding language as ICH is its omission from the UNESCO Convention, although it is possible to list language as a vehicle for the transmission of skills or oral traditions, such as storytelling or singing. Considering language as ICH may encourage museums and heritage organisations which currently focus on tangible heritage to include ICH within their policy objectives, address the perception that the UK has no ICH and consider language as ICH. Safeguarding heritage does not have to mean making it static and not allowing for change; evolution is part of the process.

Drawing attention to the cultural practices of local communities may be a double-edged sword, bringing awareness, funding and prestige at the same time as exposing pockets of cultural heritage to the demands of tourism. This underlines the need for a carefully designed, national-scale framework which places local communities and identities at the heart of ICH safeguarding measures, to ensure that ownership remains with them and that ICH evolves according to their needs, rather than remaining frozen in time. These communities and groups must have support from local, regional and national authorities to enable them to preserve their languages and develop their ICH (Smeets 2004, 160).

The authors of this article have recently interviewed museum professionals to find out how museums and heritage organisations are currently treating dialects, accents and lexicons associated with industries and occupations. This project will provide examples of current and best practice that will feed into the discussions about how frameworks for safeguarding language as ICH should take form in the UK.

## ENDNOTES

1. In Article 2(3) of the Convention, UNESCO states that by 'safeguarding' they mean measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage.
2. The distinction between 'language' and 'dialect' is not always straightforward and can be political in terms of nationhood. From a linguistic point of view, 'accent' refers to pronunciation language, 'dialect' refers to word choice, syntax and other discourse features (see for example Trudgill 1999). When we refer to lexicon, we refer to specific vocabularies which can be linked to particular occupational or other groups.

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# Safeguarding manuscript-reading tradition as living heritage through ritual: mocoan tradition of an Osing family in Banyuwangi, Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

Manuscript-reading tradition in Indonesia has recevied little attention by scholars, while in fact this tradition is still practised by communities, in various rituals which may be called 'living manuscripts'. This study explains how the manuscript-reading tradition can be maintained and preserved as a living heritage. This study focuses on a manuscript-reading session related to a ritual – namely, the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* – supported only by one Osing family in Banyuwangi, East Java, Indonesia. The study was conducted based on the manuscript, manuscript-reading tradition and the associated ritual, thus requiring an interdisciplinary approach of manuscript studies, tradition studies and community studies. The findings indicate that – a tradition of manuscript reading maintained and preserved by a ritual – can be a living heritage and plays a role in safeguarding another intangible cultural heritage contained in these traditions. The ritual and manuscript-reading tradition, however, are under threat because the family members can no longer perform the manuscript-reading tradition, even though they support the tradition.



## Keywords

living manuscript, manuscript-reading tradition, safeguarding, living heritage, *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang*, Banyuwangi, Indonesia

## Introduction

Oral transmission and performing traditions complement and enrich ancient manuscripts as written traditions (Ong 2002). Traditional Indonesians used to, and some still do, live in an environment where manuscripts are read on various occasions (Florida 1995, 11–12; Ricci 2011, 2). For example, Reid (2014, 270–271) cites the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, which states that when the sultan of Melaka asked Hang Jebat to read the Saga, but what was actually being told was the performance of the stunning beauty of Hang Jebat's voice, not the content of the Saga that was read and hummed, which in the Javanese tradition is called the *macapatan* tradition. This shows that in Indonesian society in the past, at least before print culture grew and developed, the written tradition was related to other traditions, such as performances and rituals. However, there has not been much research on the manuscript-reading tradition, which has persisted in several areas of Indonesia that are said to be rich in various manuscript cultural heritages. Research has mostly been conducted on the study of texts and manuscript contexts, but researchers often pay little attention to the context of the living manuscripts lived by the people (Christomy and Ayu 2021, 225).

Manuscript research in Indonesia is still dominated by text studies, both in the form of studies that produce text editions as well as those that examine the manuscripts' contents and contexts. There are a few studies of manuscripts used in a live performances or rituals, such as the *Basimalin* (Suryadi 1998) and the *lontar Yusup* reading-session ritual in the Osing community of Banyuwangi (Arps 1990; Indiarti 2018); the *mebasan*, the manuscript-reading session in Bali (Creese 2009); the *kayiak betereng* and *begadisan* rituals in Bengkulu (Sarwono 2020); the tradition of manuscript reading among the Madurese community, called the *mamaca* (Bouvier 2002; Dana and Hermien 2018; Hidayatullah 2020); the Sasak community reading session, called *mamacan* or *bekayat* (Saharudin 2012; Suyasa 2012); and the reading performance of *La Ga Ligo* in the *Massure'* tradition in Wajo, South Sulawesi (Hamsiati, Hamid and Mustolehudin 2021).

One form of the use of manuscripts or living manuscripts is manuscript-reading tradition. The tradition still exists today in various parts of Indonesia, such as in Bali, which is rich in manuscript-based traditions as part of people's religious rites. It can be found in Javanese palaces as well, both in Surakarta and Yogyakarta. However, there are also similar traditions carried out by ordinary people; the majority, in fact all of them, are Muslims, and are embedded in the rituals carried out by the community. The tradition, carried out by the Indigenous people of Banyuwangi in East Java, the Osing people, is called *mocoan*.

Studies on *mocoan* have been carried out, both on the aspects of the tradition and ritual as well as on the manuscripts, especially the *mocoan lontar Yusup* (Arps 1990; 1992; Bouvier 2002; Hidayatullah 2018; 2020; Indiarti 2018; Indiarti and Hasibin 2018; Khoiriyah and Syarif 2019; Rifa'i 2021). An aspect that has not been seen in these studies is the role of manuscript-reading tradition as the guardian of the living heritage contained in these traditions. In addition, the existing studies on *mocoan*, as stated previously, focus more on the *mocoan lontar Yusup*, whereas there is another *mocoan* tradition that is only carried out by one family in Banyuwangi.

This study explains how a manuscript-reading tradition called the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* was supported by one family of the Osing community and how they maintained and preserved the ritual so that it became a living heritage, as well as the challenges to the sustainability of this tradition. This study argues that the manuscript-reading tradition acts as a safeguard for living heritage and the values contained in the tradition, as well as securing the manuscripts and rituals. *Mocoan* is a mechanism to preserve cultural heritage that is passed down orally and in written form from parents to children. However, this mechanism faces several obstacles, the most urgent of which is the tradition's successors.

### *Living manuscript*

The concept of living manuscript is an important basis for understanding manuscripts and their relationship to the traditions of the communities supporting the manuscripts, both as performing arts and rituals. Living manuscript is a phenomenon in which text and manuscript – two different concepts: the text shows the substance of the information, while the manuscript is the container for that content – are actualised in society through accompanying narrative strategy. This narrative strategy can be manifested in the act of copying the manuscript for the community's needs, as well as in the form of art and ritual. This concept can actually be seen ontologically in various traditions of manuscript reading in Indonesia, such as the *beluk* tradition, *wawacan* in Sunda, *mabasen* in Bali, *masura* in Bugis and *mocoan*, *mamaca* and *macapatan* in Java. With the construction of living manuscripts, texts

and manuscripts related to this performance, richer description and explanation of the text and context of the manuscript being studied are required. The context here is not only the past of the text but also the context within the current supporting community (Christomy and Ayu 2021, 233–235).

### *Intangible cultural heritage*

An important concept of this research is 'intangible cultural heritage' (hereafter ICH). It is a practice, representation, expression, knowledge and skill that is recognised by communities, groups and individuals, or parties involved with their heritage (UNESCO 2020). ICH is passed down from one generation to the next, reinvented by communities or groups in response to their environment, and giving them a sense of identity and sustainability. ICH is a cultural work that is still alive today (living heritage), and it is recognised by the community or society as their cultural heritage. If the ICH is only mentioned and no longer lives in the community, no longer exists, is no longer practised and demonstrated, then it is only said to be cultural history. ICH can be seen with various characteristics – namely, in form, content and function. The characteristics can take the form of motion, speech, ceremony, knowledge, games and technology. The contents can be seen from the meaning, value and local wisdom. Meanwhile, ICH functions as identity strengthening, communication, teaching, rituals, medication, social control and entertainment. ICH functions as the ideological resistance of its community (Pudentia 2021).

UNESCO conceptualises ICH as something that is traditional as well as contemporary, inclusive and representative, and based in community. ICH represents not only traditional heritage from the past but also contemporary rural and urban practices in which cultural groups are diverse. It can be passed down from one generation to another, contributes to social cohesion, encourages a sense of identity and responsibility that helps individuals feel part of one or a different community and feel part of society in general. ICH develops on a community basis and depends on those whose knowledge of traditions, skills and customs are passed down throughout the community, from generation to generation, or to other communities. ICH can only become heritage when it is recognised by the community, group or individual who creates, maintains and transmits it, since without their acknowledgement, no one else can decide for them that certain expressions or practices are theirs (UNESCO 2022).

### *Safeguarding*

Manuscripts as cultural assets and values contained in them need to be preserved over generations (UNESCO 2015, 2), in addition to being developed for various purposes in human life (UNESCO 2020). Therefore, preservation efforts are needed. Safeguarding is an action aimed at ensuring the survival of the ICH, including identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, especially through formal and non-formal education, and cultural revitalisation of its various aspects.

Safeguarding is sometimes equated with 'preservation', but the two have different connotations. 'Preservation' is a word with static and passive implications, observing culture as an object to preserve. Meanwhile, 'safeguarding' focuses on a holistic, human-based understanding. After almost 20 years of using the term *preservation*, the heritage community has moved towards using the term *safeguarding* in terms of 'preserving' ICH (Jung-Shim 2021, 27). Safeguarding prioritises human activities in preserving an ICH that belongs to them. This activity involves human and community aspects. Therefore, it can also be asserted that safeguarding involvesthe preservation of cultural heritage through a combined top-down and bottom-up approach.

## Research methods

This research was conducted especially on an Osing family in Banyuwangi. Data were collected by means of in-depth interviews, observation and reading the manuscripts used in the tradition. The tradition of the manuscript-reading session is carried out in connection with certain rituals and uses the same manuscript, which is called the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang*. The research participants are family figures and their members in the practice of this tradition. These characters can be people who are directly involved in the tradition or have been involved and are no longer involved. Each tradition studied is taken by one figure and one member to be a research participant.

Questions asked in the in-depth interviews with participants included: Why do you participate in the *mocoan* tradition? Since when has the tradition taken place? What is needed to carry out the tradition? What is needed to carry out the tradition? How is the process of carrying out the tradition? What manuscript(s) are read? What is the content of the manuscript being read? These

questions were asked to clarify elements or domains of ICH contained in the *mocoan* tradition. The observed aspects are also the same as some of the questions given in the interviews, especially related to the process, elements and the manuscript used in the tradition.

## An Osing family who supports *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang*

*Mocoan* means 'reading (recitation) tradition'; it is derived from Osingnese (the local language in Banyuwangi, East Java, Indonesia). *Lontar* means, in the context of the Osing community, 'manuscript'. *Hadis Dagang* is a manuscript which contains a narration of the Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dadang* means the reading tradition of a manuscript entitled *Hadis Dagang*. As it has been previously stated, the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* is only practised by one family. Therefore, it is said to be rare, unlike another well-known type of *mocoan* – namely, the *mocoan lontar Yusup*. Besides, it is also, as far as the observation goes, conducted once a year. However, what is interesting about the existence of this tradition is that the manuscript has remained intact until this research is done.

This family discussed is Bu Kasri's family in Dusun Delik II, Jambesari Village, Giri District, Banyuwangi Regency of East Java, Indonesia. The manuscript has been inherited from Bu Kasri's husband, Pak Untung. The late Pak Untung inherited this manuscript from his father, Pak Musyawaroh, and his grandfather Mbah Aminah. Mbah Aminah is an elder (the most elder and respected person) in Dusun Delik II. Thus, it can be said that Mbah Aminah's family has preserved the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* through generations to this day. This tradition is carried out in connection with the farm ritual (*nyelameti kebon*), which is held every 10th of Zulhijjah after the Eid al-Adha prayer.

Bu Kasri said, 'The descendants of *Mbah* [grandmother] Aminah have no courage to neglect the ancestral legacy in safeguarding the tradition of *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* in every month of Hajj' (interview with Ibu Kasri, 12 November 2021).

*Mocoan*, as has been previously stated, is a tradition of reading or reciting manuscript usually done by the Osing community. No one knows exactly when the tradition began, but a Dutchman, J. W. de Stoppelaar, said that in the early 20th century, there was a reading tradition of *lontar Sri Tanjung* (De Stoppelaar 1927, 63). *Sri Tanjung* is a manuscript which tells about the loyalty of a wife named Sri Tanjung (Indiarti and Anasrullah 2020). Although De Stoppelaar's account does not explicitly mention the term *mocoan*, it indicates a manuscript-reading tradition, which the Osing people refer to as *'mocoan'* or *'lontaran'* (Arps 1990, 37). After that, it is no longer traceable to the origin of the emergence of *mocoan*. However, it is clear that Osing people now call it *mocoan,* and this is also what Ibu Kasri's family said.

The *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* ritual supported and conducted by Bu Kasri's family has not been mentioned by previous researchers. Unlike the *mocoan lontar Yusup*, which is popular and is conducted for many rituals by Osing people, the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* is not well known. It is performed once a year, and the only support comes from Ibu Kasri's family circle. This tradition is done by reciting or singing to a manuscript entitled *Hadis Dagang.*

The *lontar Hadis Dagang* has been made into a text edition by Wiwin Indiarti and Anasrullah (2021). It contains two texts. The first text, which consists of 10 cantos, tells the story of Prophet Muhammad's journey while trading, and the second text, which consists of one canto, contains a dialogue of a character named Samud ibn Salam with Prophet Muhammad about the nature of Allah. The part being read in the *mocoan* is the first text, about the story of the Prophet's journey while trading.

## ICH domains in the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang*

### *Oral tradition and manuscript*

*Mocoan* has two elements: the oral tradition and the manuscript as a written tradition – namely, an object that is read, because it remains centred on the text being read. The domain of tradition and oral expression in *mocoan* includes legends, myths, epic poems, prayers and songs (*tembang*).1 The main features of the oral tradition domains in *mocoan* are epic poetry, prayers and songs, since *mocoan* also means singing a poem that is read. Although it is centred on the text, it is not called a *mocoan* if it is not sung. This is plays an important role for the text to come alive. This epic poem is a poem that narrates the story of a character becoming an important figure in a ritual. In addition, epic poetry in *mocoan* is a hope and prayer to achieve the ideals as the figures read in it.

For example, the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* is recited when the farm ritual is carried out, or it is called *nyelameti kebonan*. This is a ritual for environmental safety. The family of Mbah Aminah and Bu Kasri believe that if this ritual is not carried out, they will be met with disaster. In addition, the ritual is a way of thanking God for the blessings that have been received by their family and the environment in which they live. Based on the story of the parents of Mbah Aminah's descendants, the neighbourhood where their family lived was a farm, so they named it *nyelameti kebonan*. At present, the field has become a dense settlement of the Osing people of Mbah Aminah's descendants.

The *lontar Hadis Dagang* as an oral expression can be seen in the lyrics of the song in the form of an epic poem that is sung and read at the same time, to show that the ritual is both an oral expression and a written one, as the manuscript is also read. The manuscript here is ICH as well as tangible heritage because, in addition to the content in the form of intangibles, the physical manuscript is also in the form of manuscript object or codex. There is a relationship between the manuscript content and its oral activities in the form of epic poetry.

The *lontar Hadis Dagang* states something that relates this manuscript to the ritual carried out in *mocoan*, especially in *Pupuh Kasmaran* I: 6, as follows:

> *Wong kundanga puniki, padha gawaha tasemak punika, dimané terang tingalé, yèn rika maca ika, badhé selametan, selametan kebunan wahu, kang tetep silahé ika.*
>
> The invited readers [the manuscript readers] bring their glasses so that their vision is clear; if you want to read, want to be safe, be safe in the garden, sit down with full reverence.

From this quote, it appears that this manuscript is indeed a copy of an earlier manuscript. This can be seen from the term *tasemak* ('glasses'), which was probably only became popularised in the 20th century. This means that this writing is not actually the core text of the *lontar Hadis Dagang*, but a text that was written later to start the main story text. This indication was later strengthened by the manuscript colophon, which inidcates when the text was copied: the copying of the manuscript was begun on the month of Muharram on the 13th year 1350 H, which



**Figure 1**
The *lontar Hadis Dagang*.
(Source: Author's collection)

would be 29 May 1931. It is therefore possible that the manuscript which belongs to Bu Kasri's family is a copy. If this conclusion is accepted, then the age of this manuscript is approximately 91 years. Indications that this manuscript is indeed a later copy were added by the copyist in a description at the beginning of the text, especially in the tune called *Pupuh Kasmaran* I:1, which reads *marmané ginurit mangko*, which means 'which was written later'. This indicates that this manuscript is a copy from 1931.

Physically, this manuscript has antique characteristics, since it was written in a Pegon (Perso-Arabic) script, which is rarely used by the Indonesian public. It was also written on European paper from the 19th century. Although called a *lontar*, the material is not *lontar*, or *rontal*, a manuscript material made from tal leaves (Meij 2017, 153). *Lontar* here means referred to as, for example, the *Lontar Yusup*, *Lontar Tawangalun* or *Lontar Ahmad* (Indiarti and Anasrullah 2021, 21). Manuscripts made from *lontar* are widely known in the Hindu-Buddhist tradition of manuscripts, but in Banyuwangi, this term is used for manuscripts with Islamic nuances. This shows harmonisation, sustainability and change in terms of culture in the Osing community.

The manuscript has been digitised by the Digital Repository of Endangered and Affected Manuscripts in Southeast Asia (DREAMSEA), with code number DS 0041 00001. The digitised manuscript can be accessed freely on the DREAMSEA page in the Banyuwangi manuscript collection section. Bu Kasri's family uses the physical manuscript as the 'object' of reading during the ritual of

saving the bounty. It is saved and reopened to be read and developed for certain rituals. Therefore, there is a connection between the manuscript both as a physical object and as an ICH, with oral expression.

### *Performing arts*

The *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang*, to a certain degree, is also related to the performing arts. The performing arts range from vocal and instrumental music, dance and theatre to pantomime, sung poetry and so on. They include many cultural expressions reflecting human creativity and which are also found, to some extent, in many other domains of ICH. In the context of the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang*, vocal art and sung poetry are performing arts.

The *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* relies on voice skills and creativity. Without a voice, there is no actualisation in this tradition. This art is the implication of the rules of poetry and song in the text that is read. The *lontar Hadis Dagang* is a manuscript in the form of Javanese traditional poetry, which is tied to the *macapat* meter. This type of song is called *pupuh* ('canto'). *Pupuh* is a song in the Javanese poetry tradition called *macapat*. There are 11 *pupuh* and 151 stanzas in total. There are six types of *pupuh* in the manuscript – namely, *Kasmaran*, *Artati*, *Durma*, *Pangkur*, *Kinanthi* and *Sinom*. The most frequently used pupuh is *Artati*, a type which is not found in the *lontar Yusup*.

Types of *pupuh* in *mocoan*, either in the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* or the *mocoan lontar Yusup*, are the same, though there are variations both in rhythm and tone; for example, Kemiren dan Mondoluko have a little variation with others because of the readers' improvisation. Therefore, tone or rhythm variations of *pupuh* can vary based on hamlet (like Mondoluko) or village (like Kemiren), though the names of *pupuh* in the manuscript are not different.



**Figure 2**
The *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang.*
(Source: Author's collection)

Each *pupuh*, as previously stated, has a different tone and rhythm. Since the text is bound by the rules (metrum) of the poetry song, the person who reads it must follow the tone and rhythm of the *tembang* or poetry line that is read. In the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang*, the reading performance by singing the lines of the manuscript is usually performed by two to four readers (singers) of the song. Not all the texts in the manuscript are recited. Of the 11 *pupuh*, only 10 are sung. One last pupuh, *Sinom*, which contains the obligatory attributes of Allah and the Messenger, is not recited.

Although *mocoan* can be categorised as a profane performing art, in fact the sacred dimension is far more important. 'Profane aesthetics' considers something as 'beautiful' if it can satisfy the eyes or ears. Judgement of a certain object as beautiful relies only on sensual pleasures. Meanwhile, 'sacred aesthetics' considers something to be 'beautiful' not because of its own existence, but since it exists to serve the highest purpose, devotion to the divine (Hidayat 2022, 48). This sacred value is believed by the Osing people regarding *mocoan*. Therefore, *mocoan* as a sacred performing art does not depend on the presence of the audience. *Mocoan* will be conducted whether or not there are spectators watching. This is what distinguishes it from profane performing arts, where the presence of an audience is an important factor. *Mocoan* is carried out as a form of worship to the divine to receive blessings. Although *mocoan* is generally performed as a ritual, it is also used in the profane realm, as a performing art or entertainment. This is manifested in the art of *Pacul Gowang*. As a performance art that is purely profane and not sacred, the chanting of the *lontar Yusup* song in the *Pacul Gowang* is done only the introduction or opening of the show. After presenting the *mocoan lontar Yusup* for only a few stanzas, the players use *wangsalan* and *basanan* (Osing language games) or jokes to entertain the audience with humour.

### *Social and ritual practices*

The *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* is not only related to the domain of oral expression, manuscripts and performing arts but also to social practices and rituals. They are customary activities inherent in the life of communities and groups, and they are shared by and relevant to many

of its members. They are important because they reaffirm the identity of the practitioners as a group or society, whether they are done in public or private space, and they are closely related to important events. Social practices and rituals help mark the passing of seasons, events in the agricultural calendar or a person's life cycle. They are closely linked to the community's world view and perception of their own history and memory. These social practices and rituals vary from small gatherings to large-scale social celebrations and anniversaries.

The *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* is not only a practice of reading, or a performing art, but also a ritual that is practised jointly by community members. In this case, it is a ritual practice that is carried out together at certain times in the family of Bu Kasri. This ritual is practised to pray for family members' environmental safety. It is associated with an event in the agricultural calendar that initiates an agricultural activity. This ritual is carried out as a marker of their family members. In this ritual, the manuscript, which contains the story of the Prophet Muhammad on a trade trip, is read to take the blessings of the glory and intercession of the Prophet, as is the *mocoan lontar Yusup* (Arps 1992, 134). This reflects a world view that is both Islamic and pre-Islamic.

Unlike other rituals performed by Osing people related to religion, such as *slametan* or marriage, the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* as a ritual is specifically carried out through the tradition of reading a manuscript. The ritual lasts for approximately two to three hours and usually begins around eight in the morning. A group of readers sits cross-legged with several people who are the hosts, lined up in a semicircle on a mat, and they take turns singing the lines of the manuscript in a variety of Osing songs, which have a different pattern of *tembang* tones from Javanese songs in general.

A pillow is placed at the end of the semicircle. On the pillow is placed the manuscript. Nearby are various kinds of ritual instruments known as accompaniments, such as a jug of water, a set of *wanci kinangan* in the form of a set of copper betel utensils and their contents (betel, gambir, *enjet2* and *sisig3)*, two cups of coffee, two cups of tea, *toya arum* (fragrance water), a plate of traditional snacks and two plates of rice with side dishes as well as *pengasepan* (a small brazier for burning incense).

When the reading session is about to begin, incense is burned. The leader of the *mocoan* ritual takes the manuscript from the pillow. He then opens the manuscript to the first page to be ready, carries it above the incense burned in the brazier, and mutters a prayer. The incense-smoked pages are the first two pages of the first *pupuh*.

The leader of the ritual then places the manuscript on the pillow and begins chanting the first two stanzas using a special pupuh called *Kasmaran Samudana*, which is only specifically used for the first two stanzas of the *Kasmaran*'s opening chant. As with other types of *mocoan*, in the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang*, there is also a procession of drinking *banyu arum* – water mixed with various types of flowers that are considered to have certain properties, keeping blessings for those who drink it or use it to wash their face.

In the ritual, the *banyu arum* procession occurs when the story in the manuscript enters *Pupuh Kinanthi* X, the last *pupuh* sung in the manuscript's first text. The chanting of this song begins with a fragment when the Prophet Muhammad, by the will of Allah, revives a dead date tree until it immediately flowers and bears fruit, and clear water comes out of a well that had long been dried up (*Kinanthi* X: 1–2).

*Woten dene Kangjeng Rasul, eca denira alinggih, angahubing kurma pajah, gedhong sirna empang aking, irika anuleya kembang, umateng wohira dadi.*

While His Majesty the Messenger, so beautiful he sat,



**Figure 3**
Ritual equipment for the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang*.
(Source: Author's collection)

under a dead palm tree, the leaves were destroyed and the branches were dry. [Because of the blessings] of the Prophet, then the tree blossomed, the fruit ripened and spread.

*Sumur asat nuli metu, toya wahening sang badri ngaksi, sembur gesang kurma kembang, anyana kelamun Nabi, sang badri agé tah sira, asujud padéng ngastuti.*

The dry well immediately emitted clear water that was witnessed by the priest, [water] spraying the living and flowering dates; it would not have been possible if it weren't for the Prophet; the priest immediately prostrated while worshipping.

This quote on *Pupuh Kinanthi* X: 1–2 shows that the reading or tradition of the manuscript is carried out as a means of ritual prayer and gratitude for the fertility of plantation or agricultural land. This is shown by the scene about the Prophet Muhammad and the release of water, creating fertility for the surrounding environment. This means that this ritual also invokes the fertility of land and settlements.

This ritual reflects the relationship between Islam and culture in the Osing community, or Javanese society in general. This is also related to the history of how Islam came and was accepted by the people of Banyuwangi. The existence of an oral tradition of chanting songs based on ancient manuscripts that is still ongoing today shows the important role of ancient manuscripts in shaping the local traditions and culture of the people who own the ancient manuscript heritage (Indiarti and Anasrullah 2021, 6).

The change of Blambangan to Banyuwangi in the mid-17th century became the starting point for the extinction of Hindu-Balinese dominance and the arrival of Islamic influences, although this happened gradually, as well as the power of the Dutch East India Company, continued by Dutch colonials. Nevertheless, Banyuwangi has been inhabited by various ethnic groups: Osing (Using), Madura, *Wong kulonan* (Java), Balinese, Bugis, Mandar, Chinese, Arab (Moors) and European. It is this diversity that imbues Banyuwangi with its multicultural identity, which is represented in the variety of cultures, arts and traditions in Banyuwangi today. However, *Wong* Osing in Banyuwangi, who is believed to be the cultural heir of the past Blambangan, is an important actor in shaping the identity of present-day Banyuwangi. The chanting of these manuscripts called *lontar* was then widely practised by the Osing people.

In the context of local Islamic discourse, the above-mentioned manuscripts related to the story of the Prophet Muhammad are interesting and important to study. As a form of adaptation from source texts, these manuscripts are not uniform in their interpretation and explanation of certain doctrines, concepts or discourses (Ricci 2010; 2011). The writers and copyists of the manuscripts adapted to the social, cultural and religious environment they encountered. This shows contextual efforts and the Indigenisation of Islam without sacrificing the basic principles of Islam, especially in the fields of *aqidah* (theology) and even *fiqh* (Islamic law). Thus, a study of the texts that are closely related to the various stories of the Prophet Muhammad can make an important contribution in the disclosure and dynamics of the discourse on the story of the Prophet Muhammad related to its history and intellectual traditions wrapped in local aesthetics (Indiarti and Anasrullah 2021, 5). This shows that Islam has been adapted to the language and culture of the local community, in this case, the Osing people of Banyuwangi.

In Banyuwangi, there are at least four ancient manuscripts in the tembang style about the Prophet Muhammad: *lontar Hadis*, *lontar Hadis Dagang*, *lontar Ahmad* and *lontar Sipat Nabi* (Indiarti et al. 2021). All four manuscripts – as well as the *lontar Yusup*, which has been widely discussed by researchers – are still alive in the ritual of chanting songs in the Osing community.

## Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage

The existence of the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* is directly related to the elements that make up the tradition of chanting the Osing song – namely, manuscripts, variations of tembang and rituals. The tradition is a living manuscript practice in the family of Bu Kasri. This manuscript is 'alive' because it is lived by members of Bu Kasri's family. The practice of living manuscripts is not only focused on the manuscripts but also various other ICH domains inherent in this practice. It is true that manuscripts are an important tool in rituals, but manuscripts are not the main purpose of carrying out traditions, and their main purposes are to pray and give thanks. The practice has been inherited from past generations and continues to be practised today.

Thus, the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* is both traditional and contemporary. It has crossed the ages and is still practised today, even when the supporters come from only one family. It can be called a family-based tradition because it is carried out independently by a family that is part of the Osing people in Banyuwangi. It is certainly a tradition that is still widely practised only by this family in Osing community. Therefore, it is a representation of the identity of the people who practise it. On a smaller scale, it has become an 'identity' for Mbah Aminah's extended family; They inherited the practice and carry it out every year.

The most visible element of 'safeguarding' in this tradition is about actions aimed at ensuring the survival of ICH, although not in the form of identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement or transmission; instead, Bu Kasri's family plays a role in revitalising traditions and aspects or domains of ICH inherent in that heritage. The *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* has for years guaranteed the survival of the ICH in the form of rituals inherent in the tradition. Indeed, this preservation does not take place formally through education in schools, but the family becomes a informal route in the preservation of ICH in the form of tradition. This tradition also transmits values that are believed by all members of Bu Kasri's extended family and are conceived in the tradition.

With this tradition, this family directly protects the physical existence of the manuscript, which is a means of ritual. Because the physical manuscripts are protected, the scripts and languages in them are also protected. Thus, if script and language store discourse, then this tradition also protect the discourses contained in it, be it a cultural or religious one. Scripts and languages that are no longer used or are rarely used by modern society today live on in printed culture. These manuscript-reading traditions are also identities for the community or their supporting audiences; therefore, this tradition also helps to preserve the unique characters and languages that form their identities, contributing to their long-term sustainability.

The continuation of this tradition will likely affect the copying of manuscripts in the future. Learning from other types of *mocoan*, such as the *mocoan lontar Yusup* tradition, copying is still ongoing. Senari is the copyist who has produced the most manuscripts, especially the *lontar Yusup*, since the late 1970s. He also in an orderly manner always writes down the copy number of the *lontar* Yusup manuscript in the colophon (the copyist's note at the end of the manuscript). Senari has produced at least 220 manuscripts of the *lontar Yusup*. He also copied the manuscript of the *lontar Hadis Dagang* at the request of Mbah Aminah's family. Unfortunately, the regeneration process in copying manuscripts did not go well. In his advanced age, Senari is the only person who is still actively copying the *lontar Yusup* manuscript today, and it is his copy that is most often used for various *mocoan*. This indicates that manuscript culture will continue if manuscript copying continues. The problem is precisely people who can copy the characters that have been used in the manuscripts as a means of ritual.

The *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* has an important value related to the legacy of its singing tradition. The two *pupuh* contained in the *lontar Hadis Dagang* – namely, *Artati* and *Kinanthi* – have rarely been mastered among *lontar* readers in the tone of the chanting of the song. Because what is popular is the *mocoan lontar Yusup*, only the *pupuh* in the *lontar Yusup* (*Kasmaran*, *Durma*, *Pangkur* and *Sinom*) have been well mastered by the way and tone of chanting the song. Most readers do not master the tone of chanting songs outside of the four *pupuh* contained in the *lontar Yusup*.

The existence of the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* is valuable in enriching the variety of *pupuh* and the tone of the Osing song as one of the ICHs. It is also one of the Osing communities in Banyuwangi who has a sacred role. This institution is related to the way of thinking and way of life of the Osing people, in the cycle of life from birth to death. The institution is realised in the form of a ceremony to seek safety and maintain harmony with the universe. Efforts to preserve and inherit the *lontar Hadis Dagang* are important, not only related to the text and manuscripts but also related to the inheritance of the tone of the tembang and the sacred rituals that accompany it as a complete cultural heritage.

The natural conservation efforts that have been carried out by Bu Kasri certainly have several challenges. Among these challenges are the loss of generations and the contestation of religious ideologies. The loss of generations means that the manuscript, as explained above, is only read in the ritual of a family in Banyuwangi. The people who usually have 'tasks' as readers are not

from Bu Kasri's family, but residents of neighbouring villages: Kemiren and Tamansuruh (of Mondoluko Hamlet). In these two villages, the *mocoan* tradition is still ongoing and quite a few are able to read manuscripts, especially *lontar Yusup* (Indiarti 2018). Since the *mocoan lontar Yusup* is functional for many rituals in those two villages, the *mocoan* skill transmission from the elders to the younger generation who feel the importance of the continuation of the tradition. Besides, there is also a new strategy of transmission done by a group of activists at Pesinauan (an Osing Indigenous school).

While the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* is still supported and preserved by a family, it is not members of the family who can read it. Ibu Kasri said:

> There is no one in our family who is able to do *mocoan* [performing the *lontar* recitation]. If the ritual *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* should be conducted, then we have to ask the services of *lontar* readers [*mocoan* players] from nearby villages, like Kemiren and Taman Suruh (Mandaluko) (interview with Ibu Kasri, 12 November 2021).

This is a challenge in itself for the continuation of this tradition because it is possible that if this family no longer takes care of the traditions and rituals, the readers of the *lontar Hadis Dagang* will no longer read the manuscript because no one is invited to carry out the traditions and rituals of the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang*.

This challenge has been realised by activists of Pesinaunan. They try to conduct the tradition of *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang* every year at Pesinauan, a learning space established by Pengurus Daerah Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (PD AMAN) Osing (Regional Board of the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago-Osing), aimed at transmitting media and strengthening identity, mindset, way of life and knowledge systems of the Osing Indigenous people. They hope that the successors of the tradition will emerge to ensure its sustainability.

In addition to the issue of generational challenges, equally important is the contestation of religious ideology. This is related to views and debates about the substance of the story contained in *mocoan* tradition and the ritual practices associated with it. On one occasion, we captured a debate about one substance of the story contained in the story of the Prophet Yusuf. According to one view, the stories contained in the manuscripts read in the *mocoan* tradition 'deviate' from the actual stories contained in the Holy Qur'an, which can actually mislead the reader (interview with one of the religious leaders on 3 August 2020). In addition, if readers take for granted the stories of the Prophet Muhammad in the *lontar Hadis Dagang*, of course they will say that they are rituals that are not true according to Islamic teachings, because other nuanced rituals also include aspects that are not true to Islamic teachings, such as the presence of incense and ritual devices that accompany it. There is a ritual of drinking flower water which is considered to have certain virtues. Formally, these practices – according to some people's religious thinking – will not be accepted, because they will not practise them, and when they do not practise this tradition, it will slowly disappear. A clear thinking strategy is needed to look at this problem so that *mocoan* as an ICH remains sustainable but also pays attention to this issue of religious ideology.

## Conclusion

This article has shown that the *mocoan lontar Hadis Dagang*, as a manuscript-reading tradition, is preserved and maintained by the ritual. The tradition can safeguard other ICH domains as well. These domains include oral traditions, performing arts and social-ritual practices. This tradition is still supported by only one family in the Osing community of Banyuwangi. The implementation of this tradition shows a living heritage.

This study concludes that ritual has become a means to preserve living heritage in the form of a manuscript-reading tradition. In addition, the manuscript-reading tradition has contributed to the preservation of various ICH domains. This *mocoan* tradition is a mechanism for grassroots communities in preserving ICH from their ancestors, but this mechanism faces several obstacles, among which the most urgent are the issue of the next generation of tradition and ideological challenges. For this reason, efforts are needed for transmission of this tradition by training family members and younger generations in the village to recite manuscripts.

The fact that Bu Kasri's family supports the ritual and manuscript-reading tradition because it is based on the belief to carry on the traditions from their ancestors, but no family members are able to read manuscripts needs to be further explored.

## ENDNOTES

1. Tembang (Javanese) means song. In the Javanese tradition, there are various types of tembang, which are called pupuhs.
2. Limestone
3. Chewing tobacco

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# Intangible cultural heritage values in the *Sunda Wiwitan* ritual and ancient Sundanese manuscripts as basic concepts of traditional building in Indonesia

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# Intangible cultural heritage values in the *Sunda Wiwitan* ritual and ancient Sundanese manuscripts as basic concepts of traditional building in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

There are few studies on religion and Sundanese manuscripts, so not many people know about them, because they are considered outdated, more personal-- and require high reading skills (philology expert). This study aims to reveal the values contained in the *Sunda Wiwitan* ritual and the old Sundanese manuscript as the basic concepts in the architecture of traditional buildings. The focus of the research is on traditional houses with locus in Baduy *Tangtu* village, Leuwidamar district, Lebak regency, Banten Province, Indonesia. The research method uses qualitative descriptive ve on with an ethno-architectural approach. The research findings are in the form of three main values as basic principles: (1) The conception of cosmology in the form of three world classification values, namely '*buana tilu*' namely '*buana nyungcung*', '*buana panca tengah*', '*buana larang*'. The principles of '*rohangan tilu*' namely '*tepas imah*', '*tengah imah*', '*pawon*' and the principles of '*ngadegkeun wangunan*' namely '*memehna*', '*salila*, '*sanggeusna*; (2) Conception of the basic form of the building, namely '*tangtungan jelema*': '*hulu*', '*awak*', '*suku*'; (3) The concept of site selection for building, namely '*warugan lemah*' so that the occupants are safe and avoid disaster. The values contained in the three findings can be used as guidelines by the Sundanese people in establishing their homes universally.

## Keywords

*Sunda Wiwitan*, *imah panggung*, *buana*, *ngadegkeun*, *Warugan Lemah*, *tangtungan jelema*, *Sanghyang Siksakanda-ng Karesyan*, ritual

## 1. Introduction

Religion and old texts as ancestral heritage have a very close relationship, like two sides of a coin. In the view of the Sundanese people, the relationship between the two things is stated in the sentence '*ageman keur tetekon hirup, ari titinggalan keur cecekelan hirup jeung kahirupan*', meaning that religion is a belief in life, while the ancestral heritage is a guide for life (Nuryanto et al. 2021). Thus, religion is a source of values that are used as guidelines (norms) in life. The Sundanese believe that, without religion, humans would not be able to act properly.

The Sundanese people are very religious and faithfully practise the doctrine of their ancestors. This can be proven from the ancient Sundanese era, the Tarumanagara Kingdom ca. 358 CE to the *Pakwan* Pajajaran Kingdom ca. 1030 CE (Munandar 2010). The ritual media at that time were in the form of archaeological objects made of stone, found in Bandung, Karawang, Garut, Ciamis, Kuningan and elsewhere (Munandar 2010). Furthermore, Munandar also mentioned, the sacred building as a place of worship at that time was likely different from those of the Singhasari and Majapahit Kingdoms in the form of temples or *petirthaan*.

The difference is based on the belief system of the Sundanese people, who are not Hindus or Buddhists, but *Sunda Wiwitan* (Garna 1984). Although they are familiar with Hindu and Buddhist doctrines, *Sunda Wiwitan* pre exists these religions and has become their belief (Munandar 2010). In terms of rituals, the *Pantun Bogor* relates that the ancient Sundanese people of the *Pakwan* Pajajaran period held a ceremony once a year at the main sacred building in the form of a staircase at *Bale Pamunjungan Kihara Hyang*, to the south-east of the capital (Djatisunda 2008).

*Sunda Wiwitan*'s doctrines contain the concept of divinity, human social relations and the universe (*Hyang, manusa, buana*). The values of these doctrines are widely contained in old Sundanese manuscripts, such as *Sewaka Darma*, *Warugan Lemah* and *Sanghyang Siksakanda-ng Karesyan* (Darsa and Ekadjati 2006).

Many of the contents of the manuscripts of *Warugan Lemah* and *Sanghyang Siksakanda-ng Karesyan* relate to buildings. Although the manuscripts are not very detailed, they provides an overview of the site conditions, cosmological orientation, materials, forms, and ceremonies (Nuryanto et al. 2021). How do *Sunda Wiwitan* values manifest as the basic concept of their building architecture?

The manifestations of the *Sunda Wiwitan* values and ancient Sundanese manuscripts are clearly seen in the Baduy *Tangtu* village, the prototype of Sundanese society in Indonesia. The architecture reflects adherence to the *Tatali Paranti Karuhun* (ancestral custom) from the past and has not changed. In this articlepaper, I will explore this so that the wider community knows about it.

## 2. Research Methods

The method used in this research is a qualitative descriptive with ethno-architecture (ethnography architecture) approach, meaning that observe the artefacts or physical remains of the architecture through human activity as a whole. To help researchers collect data in the field in strengthening their qualitative descriptive arguments, an ethnographic architecture (ethno-architecture) approach is needed (see Figure 1). The ethno-architecture approach is often referred to as field research (Creswell 2003) or participant observation (Neuman 2006). The scheme of the observation process was adapted from Spradley (2016) with three steps: descriptive observation, focused observation and selective observation (see Figure 1 and 2). Considerations of ethno-architecture strategies include the following: (1) the emphasis is not only on process but also on material aspects; (2) a deep understanding that the intangible cultural heritage values in the *Sunda Wiwitan* ritual and ancient Sundanese manuscripts in the context of architecture is not only technical (concrete) but also mystical (abstract); (3) information is obtained directly from primary sources; (4) the research process is fun because they interact directly with each other. The six research steps of the ethno-architecture approach are listed below and shown visually in this case can be seen in Figure 1 and 2 below:

**First**: The research project must be determined with the topic '*intangible cultural heritage values in the Sunda Wiwitan ritual and ancient Sundanese manuscripts as basic concepts of traditional building architecture of the Sundanese Peoples, Indonesia*'.

**Second**: Three questions are designed to guide the focus of the research in the Baduy community (1) How does the cosmological conception of the Baduy people originate from the Sundanese *Wiwitan* religion, and how does it manifest in the spatial layout of buildings and the principles of constructing traditional buildings?; (2) How are *Sunda Wiwitan* values manifested in the basic form of the building?; (3) What is the concept and embodiment of *Sunda Wiwitan* values in the selection of building sites?

**Third**: I collected ethnographic data obtained from the field about *Sunda Wiwitan* religion, especially the cultural, social, ritual and sacred activities in the process of constructing traditional buildings in Baduy village from start to finish. Data were collected in three ways namely: direct interviews with informants or respondents; photographic documentation of the activities of the Baduy people. The informants who became the focus of the interview were: *puun* (traditional leaders), *tukang wangunan* (local builder) and *warga* (society).

**Fourth**: I recorded and built social-ritual relations with the local community, especially during the *ngadegkeun imah* procession (building construction). This activity includes preparation, implementation and ceremonies (rituals) from start to finish. I recorded datee through interviews, sketches and photographs.

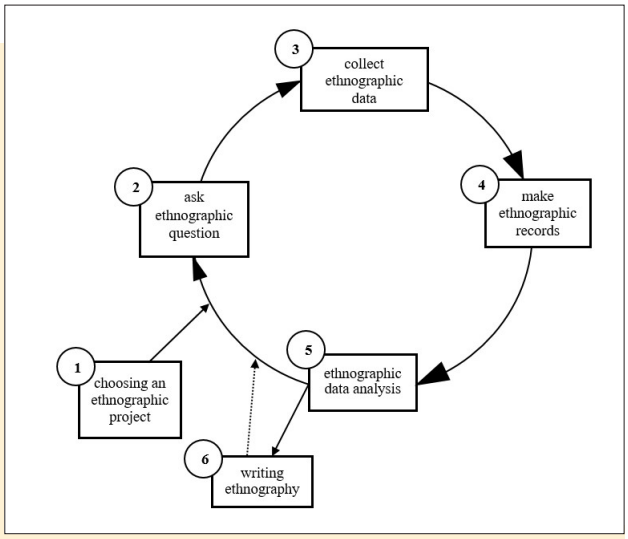



**Figure 1**
Step for implementing ethno-architecture research on intangible cultural heritage values
Source: Nuryanto 2021

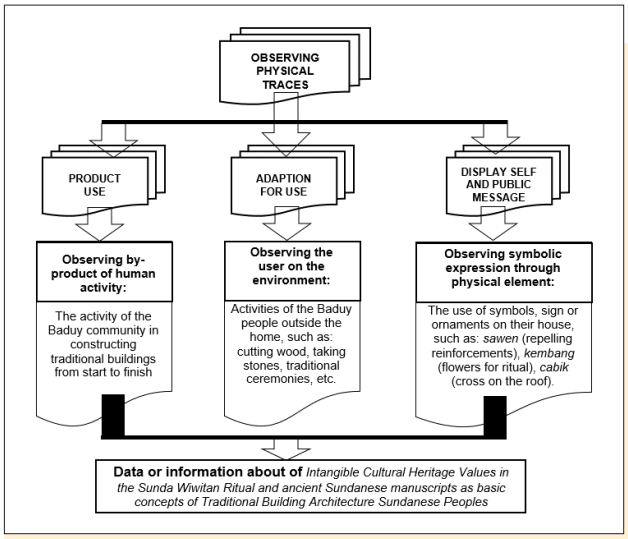



**Figure 2**
How to observe the physique of wasps and the activities of Sundanese people in Baduy
Source: Nuryanto 2021

**Fifth**: I analysed and generalised the data obtained from the field in four ways: domain, taxonomy, componential, and themes. At this point, the values contained in the *Sunda Wiwitan* religion and its manifestations in the process of building Baduy society are described.

**Sixth**: I wrote an ethnographic report based on the data collected. The report is presented in descriptive form or a detailed description of the Sundanese community in Baduy village, especially about the relation between intangible cultural heritage values in the *Sunda Wiwitan* ritual and ancient Sundanese manuscripts as basic concepts for their traditional building architecture. In this report, I describe: (a) cosmology and values; (b) cultural and social activities (humans and the universe); (c) ritual activities related to God and his ancestors during the building process. This report is then discussed using relevant theories to make it more objective. After that, the next step is to draw conclusions and outline limitations of the research as a final note for further research.

## 3. Research Results

### 3.1. *Overview of the Baduy Tribe*

The Baduy community is a Sundanese ethnic group living in Kanekes Village, Leuwidamar district, Lebak Regency, Banten province, Indonesia (see Figure 3). There are several names for this tribe, such as *urang Kanekes*, *urang Rawayan*, *urang Baduy* and *urang Banten Kidul*. According to (Nuryanto et al. 2021), these names are based on the location of their residence, the name of the village (*kanekes*), the name of the bridge connecting the village (*rawayan*), the name of the river (*cibaduy*), or the name of the area of origin (*banten*), which is located in the south (*kidul*).

Historical records on the origins of the Baduy people written by van Tricht (1932), Adimihardja (1976), Sam (1986), Danasasmita and Djatisunda (1986), Garna (1987), Danasasmita (2015), have stated that they came from the local area (Indigenous people) who were given a special task by the King of Sunda 13 *Rakreyan Darmasiksa* to guard and manage the *Mandala* in *Kabuyutan* (holy place). According to Nuryanto et al. (2021), it could be that the Baduy people are actually descendants of the ancient Sunda Kingdom before *Rakreyan Darmasiksa*.

The map below (see Figure 3) shows the research locations in three Baduy *Tangtu* villages, namely: Cikeusik, Cibeo, and Cikartawana. These three villages belong to the Baduy *Tangtu* group who are obedient to the orders of their ancestors (sacred villages). Meanwhile, *Panamping* and *Dangka* villages are included in the outer Baduy areas, which have been affected by the influence of modernisation. According to Saputra (1950), the Baduy *Tangtu* community has an ancestor named *Batara Patanjala*, who was passed down by *Batara Tunggal*

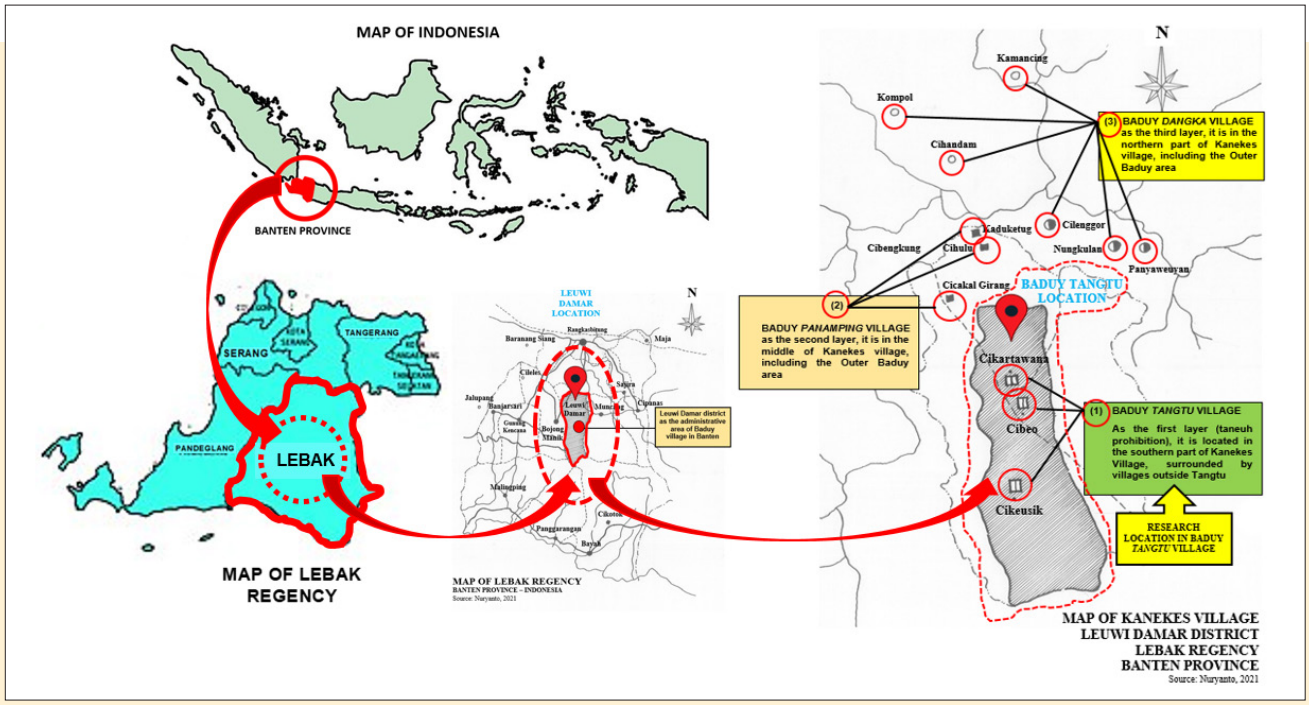



**Figure 3**
Map of research location in Baduy *Tangtu,* Banten-Indonesia
Source: Nuryanto 2022

from *kahyangan* ('heaven'). The location where *Batara Patanjala* was dropped off, named *Mandala*, is located in the southern part, close to Mount Kendeng. There are also *Sasaka Domas* or *Sasaka Pusaka Buana* (sacred objects) for their rituals. That is why, these very sacred places are forbidden to anyone (Garna 1984).

The location of Baduy village is at the foot of Mount Kendeng, which has a height of about 300-_600 metres above sea level. The Indigenous community that lives there is a native Sundanese tribe that has existed for thousands of years. The majority of the population live from farming by planting rice in *huma*. They are untouched by modernisation, and their lives depend according to the rules of their ancestors [Nuryanto 2019].

According to Garna (1984) and Permana (2006), the name *'Baduy'* is taken from the name of the *'Cibaduy'* River in their area. Even so, they prefer to be called *Kanekes* according to the name of their village. Meanwhile, the term *Tangtu* comes from the word *tantu* which means 'principal',' core', or 'provisions' that cannot be changed. While *Panamping* comes from the word *tamping* which means thrown away, while *Dangka* means 'dirty'. *Tamping* and *dangka* both have the meaning of being a dumping ground for *tangtu* people who violate ancestral customs. The exiled person may return to the *tangtu* area on the condition that they carry out a ritual procession in the form of *panyapuan*, meaning cleansing the soul led by a *Pu'un* or traditional leader (Permana 2006).

Nuryanto et al. (2021) states that the tradition of the Baduy *Tangtu* community is (always) changing places of residence according to the orders of their ancestors. According to their belief, one day, the villages of Cikeusik, Cibeo, and Cikartawana will meet to fulfil the promise of their ancestors at a predetermined place. Currently, they are just biding their time while continuing *ngalalakon* ('wandering') looking for that place. The order to move places will be received by the traditional leaders in the three villages. Cikeusik occupies the highest position at the southernmost tip (owner of power), Cibeo is in the middle (executive power) and Cikartawana is located at the bottom (guardian of power).

The Baduy community as a prototype of the Sundanese people refers to the understanding of *urang Sunda* which according to Rosidi (2010) means people who live and use Sundanese cultural values in their lives. Warnaen (1987) states that *urang Sunda* or Sundanese people are defined



**Figure 4**
Natural scenery and hills in Kampung Baduy
Source: Yusuf (2016)



**Figure 5**
Baduy people
Source: Asriyati (2019)

as people who claim to be themselves and are recognised by others as Sundanese. There are two main criteria that can be used as a guide to refer to someone as Sundanese or not. The first is based on ancestry or blood relations. The second is based on socio-cultural context, meaning that if you are raised in a Sundanese socio-cultural environment and you live and use Sundanese cultural norms and values, you can be consiedered Sundanese. Thus, lineage and place of birth are not a requirement for someone to be called *urang Sunda*.

### 2.2. *The Values of Sunda Wiwitan Rituals*

Etymologically, *Sunda Wiwitan* means the first or the beginning. *Sunda Wiwitan* can be interpreted simply as a religion (see Figure 2) that was first embraced by the ancient Sundanese people, who have existed since the time of the Tarumanagara Kingdom or even earlier (Munandar 2010). This belief system relates to the universe which is divided into three levels: (1) *Sakala*, the supernatural essence that manifests itself in real terms; (2) *Sakala-Niskala*, a supernatural substance that can appear but can also be invisible or virtual; (3) *Niskala*, the supernatural essence never appears in the real form at all.

The supernatural powers that fill nature are based on the' *Hyang'* called *Guriang Tujuh* or *Tujuh Guriang* (see Figure 6), which is the incarnation of *Sang Hyang Niskala*, the highest superhuman being in the religion of the ancient Sundanese people (Munandar 2010). *Guriang Tujuh* is *Sang Hyang Tujuh* who resides in *Sasaka Domas*, *Salaka Domas*, or *Sasaka Pusaka Buana* which is a place of worship of ancestral spirits for adherents of the *Sunda Wiwitan* religion of the Sundanese tribal community in Baduy (Nuryanto 2019).

The *Sunda Wiwitan* religion which comes from the *Guriang Tujuh* concept emphasises that the position of gods in Hindu and Buddhist religions is lower than *Hyang* (see Figure 6). So it can't be said that *Sang Hyang Tunggal* is Shiva, *Sang Hyang Wenang* is Brahma, and *Sang Hyang Wening* is Vishnu. The *Sunda Wiwitan* religion should not be confused with the pantheon of Indian spirituality, one must find an ancient Sundanese source that speaks of its own supernatural power (Munandar 2010). Figure 6 show the position of the Divine Essence in the conception of the *Sunda Wiwitan* religion adopted by the Baduy people.

The *Guriang Tujuh* (see Figure 6) in the ancient Sundanese religious conception include: (1) *Sang Hyang Ijuna Jati*; (2) *Sang Hyang Tunggal*; (3) *Sang Hyang Lenggang Buana*; (4) *Sang Hyang Aci Wisesa*; (5) *Sang Hyang Aci Larang*; (6) *Sang Hyang Aci Kumara*; (7) *Sang Hyang Manon*. The *Guriang Tujuh* are the embodiment of *Sang Hyang Niskala* or also called *Sang Hyang Jatinistemen* which in *Serat Dewabuda* is also called *Sang Hyang Taya* (Munandar 2012). In conclusion, *Sunda Wiwitan* is a religious concept of the ancient Sundanese community that essentially worships *Sang Hyang* which cannot be touched and seen in its form and cannot appear in real form. This means that the original religion of the Sunda Kuna people was not Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, or Christianity. The religion of the Sunda Kuna people existed before those religions existed [Munandar, 2010]. They do not worship the God embraced by Hindus, Buddhists, Islam, Judais, or Christians. They worship the

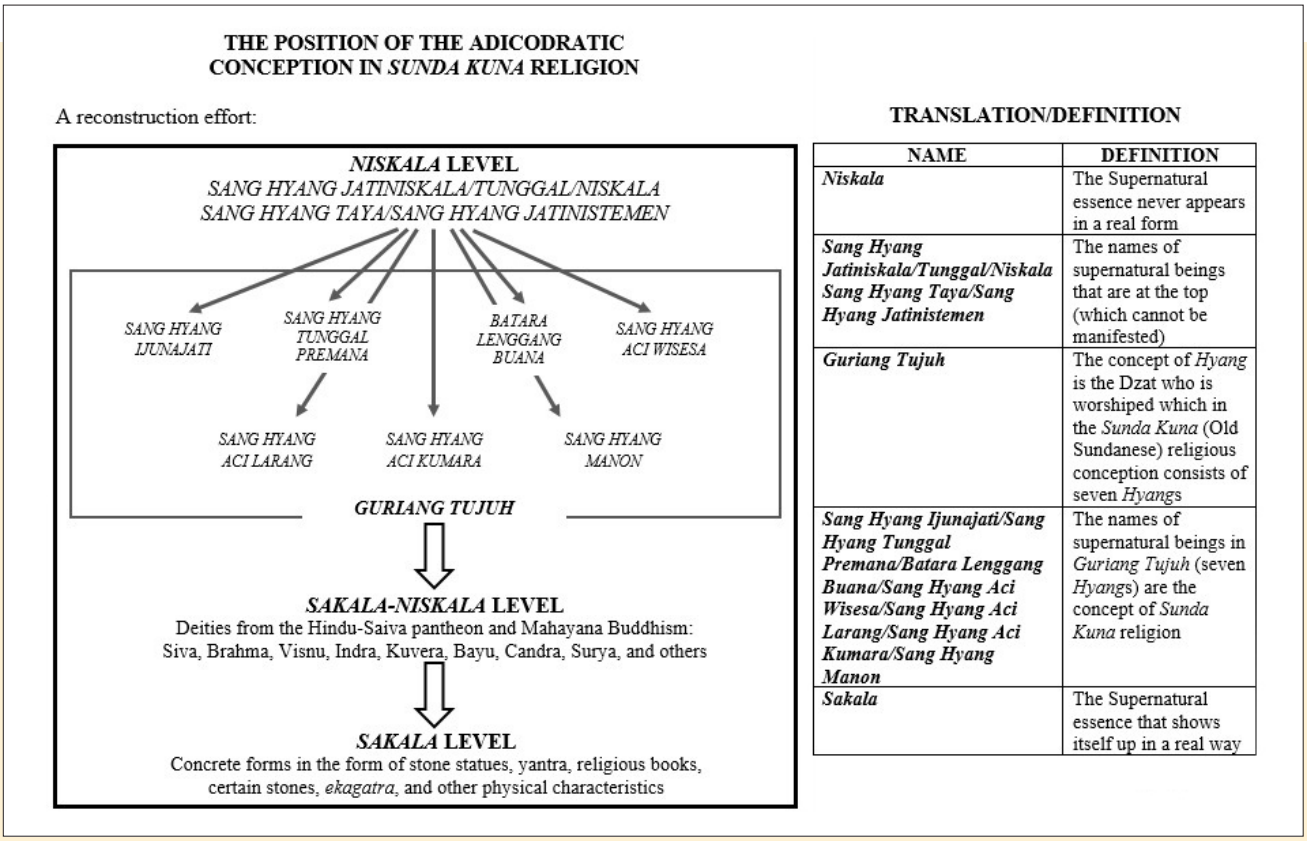



**Figure 6**
The conception of the Sunda Wiwitan religion in the Sundanese people (Baduy Tangtu)
Source: Munandar 2010

Holy Essence which is called *Sang Hyang* or *Sang Hyang Kresa* ('The Most Willing').

Munandar (2012) explains that *Sang Hyang* cannot be described, let alone made into a statue. Ordinary people, usually use natural stones that are erected like menhirs as '*ekagrata*' (real objects of worship). The *Sunda Wiwitan* ritual procession concentrates all its religious activities on the terraced *punden* called *Lalayang Sasaka Domas* as a holy place as well as a mecca for the ancient Sundanese people who are well guarded and cared for by the Baduy people. *Lalayang Sasaka Domas* or *Salaka Domas* means '*The Holy Scripture of Eight Hundred Verses*'. It contains teachings on the perfection of life from birth (*Sambawa*), adulthood to old age (*Sambada*), death, and life in heaven (*Winasa*) (Permana 2006).

The ritual values contained in *Sunda Wiwitan* are related to the Sundanese cosmological system of the universe. There are three important values: (1) *Niskala*'s position is *hirup*. The word *hirup* describes *Buana Nyungcung* or *Sunda Wiwitan*, which has a value as nature of all origins (*awang-uwung*), meaning the highest position in natural systematics; (2) the position of *Buana Larang* as a natural being (*pawenangan*), has a value as *Salaka*'s doctrines, whose contents are about *rasa* ('taste or form'), which is in the human body; (3) the position of *Buana Panca Tengah* as *Sunda Sambada*, has a value about events called *alam*. The meaning of this value is also referred to as *kuring* or *kurung*, which means *kurungna rasa*, meaning the womb as an intermediary realm that processes the human body (*waruga*) with its soul (*lelembutan*) (Darsa and Ekadjati 2006).

Thus, *Sunda Wiwitan* has a *Sa-Asal* value, meaning the process of the human journey from nothing to proceed in the natural origin through the intercession of the father and mother. *Sunda Sambada* has the value of *Sa-Tunggal*", which is the process through which the father and mother unite with the earth in the womb or the mother's love. While *Sunda Sawawa* is worth *Sa-Bakal*, which is a substance taken for the survival of the *waruga*

or body (Darsa and Ekadjati 2006). There are three layers of the universe: (1) *Buana Nyungcung* (upperworld/sacred value/the place of the gods or ancestors); (2) *Buana Panca Tengah* (middleworld/centre of balance/neutral values/man living; (3) *Buana Larang* (underworld/profane or dirty value/place for evil spirits and dead bodies) (Danasasmita and Djatisunda 1986).

Danasasmita and Djatisunda (1986) also mentioned that the three layers of nature are connected by a single axis called the '*axis mundi*'. This axis mundi is located at the centre of the world and connects one layer to another. Through the axis mundi, humans can communicate with the Upper World and the Underworld. Views of cosmology in various parts of the world do not in principle vary much by region. The three layers of nature above in the understanding of the Sundanese people are manifested in the form of their residential building: the *panggung*. *Imah panggung* ('stilt house') are arranged based on three world levels: the *Niskala* or *Buana Nyungcung* (Upper World) has sacred value, the *Sakala-Niskala* or *Buana Panca Tengah* (Middle World) has neutral value and the *Sakala* or *Buana Larang* (Underworld) is of profane value.

### 2.3. *The Values of Sundanese Manuscripts*

The general understanding of the script is discourse or handwritten text, usually bundled or recorded (not printed), or books containing handwritten discourse (Permana 2010). Old Sundanese manuscripts mean manuscripts compiled and written in the Sunda region (West Java) and manuscripts containing stories or descriptions relating to the region and the Sundanese people (West Java) as the core or main content of the manuscript (Permana 2010). The technique of making texts in the old Sundanese manuscript uses traditional media such as writing pads, including *daun lontar*, *gebang*, *daluang*, bamboo, coconut leaves and paper. It is possible that other types of materials were also used as a writing base for the manuscript. In this paper, the media used is *daun lontar*, a type of palm tree from the *borassus flabellifer* species, which usually grows in the lowlands (Darsa and Ekadjati 2006).

There are several ancient Sundanese manuscripts, including: *Sanghyang Siksakanda-ng Karesyan*, *Serat Dewabuda* or *Serat Sewakadarma*, *Warugan Lemah*, *Nagara Tengah*, *Carita Parahyangan* and *Amanat Galunggung* (Munandar 2010). Among the names of the texts above that contain content about the art of architecture are the *Sanghyang Siksakanda-ng Karesyan* manuscripts and *Warugan Lemah*. The two texts tell of ancient Sundanese sacred buildings related to religion and people's homes (Nuryanto 2019).

The *Sanghyang Siksakanda-ng Karesyan* lists the year of writing as 1440 *Saka* (1518 CE) and the place of writing as Galuh (the capital of the Sunda Kingdom) which is now located in Ciamis Regency, West Java province, Indonesia. This manuscript provides an overview of the moral guidelines for people's lives at that time, including various sciences that must be mastered, one of which is the art of architecture. Based on the contents of the text, the word *Siksakanda-ng Karesyan* can be interpreted as a rule or teaching about living wisely (*arif*) based on *darma* (Danasasmita et al. 1987). According to Nurwansah (2017), the content of the manuscript consists of three parts: (1) *Dasa Kreta* and *Dasa Prebakti* (opener, explaining ten rules); (2) *Karma Ning Hulun* (behaviour towards the king in the state); (3) *Pangimbuh Ning Twah* (complementary actions).

The values contained in the *Sanghyang Siksakanda-ng Karesyan* manuscript relate to the basic form of the Sundanese traditional house in the form of '*panggung*' or '*imah kolong*'. This is as in the *Pitutur Karuhun* (ancestral message) which reads in Sundanese language below:

> *— dijenengan Anggaraksa, karesepna moro bae, gawena ngan leuleuweungan, moro mencek reujeung uncal, anu ngudag beuki jauh, sasab ka Nagaratengah. Isuk-isuk tas ti cai, nenjo kai nu ngajajar, aki kula asa kaget, pager galede ngajajar, urut naon baheulana, aki ngajawabna bingung, sabab teu meunang rasiah. Eyang Anggawana sakti, nerangkeun asal mulana, sajarah nagara gede, Ratu Agung anu gagah, kabeh taya nu kaliwat, kai ngajajar jarangkung, eta urut kandang jaga —*

*Pitutur Karuhun* above describes the basic form of the building in the form of *panggung* using high *tihang kai* ('main pillars of wood') in the *kedhaton* (palace) in the Sunda Kingdom. This *panggung* form is then applied to the houses of the Sundanese people as the main building. Sundanese houses, in general, are *imah panggung*. Adimihardja (1992) describes that the shape of *panggung* as a characteristic of traditional Sundanese buildings is spread throughout the Tatar Sunda region with *umpak* as the foundation.

From *Pitutur Karuhun* it is also known that the basic form of the *imah panggung* plan is a *pasagi* ('box or rectangle') that extends from north to south. According to some sources, the *pasagi* form is based on the understanding system of the past Sundanese people about "*madhab papat kalima pancer*", meaning that the spatial orientation has four cardinal directions: *kidul* ('south'), *kaler* ('north'), *kulon* ('west'), *wetan* ('east'), plus a centre called *pancer* (Nuryanto 2019). The south direction has a sacred value because that is where the *Sasaka Domas*, the centre of worship or place of prayer is located, as well as the residence of the king (*Karaton Suradipati*) as the representative of *Hyang*. North, west and east are consiedered profane (Permana 2006).

Other important values found in the *Sanghyang Siksakanda-ng Karesyan* manuscript are the decorative forms of the house and various roof models. Danasasmita et al. (1987) mentions, there are various types of decoration, such as: (1) *Badawang sarat* (large fish decoration); (2) *Kawung* (a palm tree); (3) *Simbar* (leaf form); (4) *Wadasan* (symbol of Mount Meru). While the roof models include the following: (1) *Anjung meru* (a tapered shape like a mountain); (2) *Badak heuay* (the shape of an open rhinoceros mouth); (3) *Julang ngapak* (a shape resembling a bird in flight); (4) *Sulah nyanda* (similar to a pregnant woman reclining); (5) *Tagog anjing* (sitting dog attitude).

The second manuscript *Warugan Lemah* discusses depth site selection from what is permitted to what is forbidden by ancestral rules. This manuscript specifically provides guidance to the Sundanese people on how to determine the location of their homes. Errors that occur can be caused by the wrong position of the house facing it (*imah nu salah ngujurna*). As a result, homeowners can get *'malaweung'* disease, a form of daydreaming that eventually becomes *ngalanglayung* (a mild illness that is difficult to heal). To treat it, a traditional ceremony must be carried out according to ancestral rules (Nuryanto et al. 2021).

Gunawan (2010) mentions that the *Warugan Lemah* script was written or copied before the 17th century, or even before the collapse of the *Pakwan* Pajajaran Kingdom (ca. 1578 CE). *Warugan Lemah* comes from two words *warugan* and *lemah*. *Warugan* is a formation of the word *waruga* in the old Javanese language meaning 'type of building' (Zoetmulder and Robson 2006), while in Sundanese it means body and the suffix *an* forms a noun, as found in the Sundanese word *caritaan*, *cariosan*,. Wwhile the word *lemah* means land. Thus, *Warugan Lemah* can mean the 'form of the land', and the manuscript contents explain the pattern of land and residential areas, their good and bad influences, along with the means and spells to purify them (Gunawan 2010).

*Warugan Lemah* can be said to be the feng shui of the Sundanese people, which is a guide in constructing buildings, especially houses. The manuscript is made of palm leaves measuring 28.5 x 28 cm, containing four lines of writing on each *lempir* ('sheet'). The script used is old Sundanese, the same as written in other old Sundanese manuscripts. The text in the *Warugan Lemah* script is unique because it contains knowledge of the Sundanese people about settlement patterns in the past. A more detailed, complete and systematic description hints that the past Sundanese people had their own conception of their settlement patterns (Gunawan 2010).

The values contained in the *Warugan Lemah* manuscript refer to *mala ning lemah*, meaning thinking to avoid the evils of choosing a building site with the aim of safety. There are several location classifications that should be avoided, as listed in the sentence below:

> *— mala ning lemah ngara(n)na: sodong sarongge, cadas gantung, mu(ng)kal pategang, lebak, rancak, kebakan badak, catang nu(ng)gang, catang nonggeng, garunggungan, garenggengan, lemah sahar, dangdang wariyan, hunyur, lemah laki, pitunahan celeng, kalo(m)beran, jaryan, seuma, sawatek lemah kasingsal —*

Based on the contents of the text, the soils included in the dirty category are *sodong* (a location on the edge of a cliff), *sarongge* (a haunted place for evil creatures), *cadas gantung* (dependent rock), *mungkal pategang* (land surrounded by chunks of rock), *lebak* (surface of the cliff floor), *rancak* (land enclosed by large rocks), *kebakan badak* (rhinoceros puddle pond), *catang nunggang* (collapsed logs), *catang nonggeng* (located on a steep slope), *garunggungan* (small hill), *garenggengan* (muddy soil), *lemah sahar* (land where there was murder), *dangdang wariyan* (land that is flooded with water), *hunyur* (ant hill), *lemah laki* (barren land), *pitunahan celeng* (a place where pigs roam), *kolomberan* (puddled water), *jariyan* (garbage disposal), *seuma* (grave), *sawatek lemah kasingsal* (waste land).

Gunawan (2010) explains, that the types of soil above are not suitable for habitation, because they are home to terrible creatures, such as *raksasa*, *durgi*, *durga*, *kala*, and *buta*. Location selection is very important. If it is not possible to find another location, then there are certain customary rules to neutralise bad influences, such as landclearing rituals (*seba laksa/ngaruwat*).

Building on location that has good value and is suitable for building a house according to the contents of the *Warugan Lemah* script (Gunawan 2010) can bring *galudra ngupuk* (bringing wealth), *pancuran emas* (the owner will be rich and many wives), *satria lalaku* (never lack wealth and honour), *kancah nangkub* (healthy and prosperous), *gajah palisungan* (acquire a lot of wealth) and *bulan purnama* (life is full of fun and prosperity). The location that must be avoided the most is on the *jalan ngolecer* or *nyunduk sate*, which is the location of the house right at the end of the crossroads. A position like this will wreak havoc on the occupants of the house, such as getting sick easily, having bad luck, and having a hard life.

Thus, the values contained in the *Sanghyang Siksakanda-ng Karesyan* and *Warugan Lemah* scripts are aimed at safety in order to avoid danger. The Sundanese people of the past already had rules in planning and designing their homes according to the orders of their ancestors.

## 3. Discussion

### 3.1. *Basic Concepts of Traditional Building*

The basic concept of traditional Sundanese architecture refers to the ancestral rules that have been established in *Pikukuh Karuhun*. This rule must be implemented and must not be violated because it will be fatal in the form of *kabendon* or *kawalat* (ancestor's wrath). The main source of *Pikukuh Karuhun* is *Sunda Wiwitan*. In addition, some rules are in the form of ancestral sayings listed in the ancient manuscripts, whether related to architecture or not.

The term used in this paper is traditional, not vernacular, as they are very different. Indeed, there is still a debate between traditional and vernacular understanding. Even so, Rapoport's (1969) terminology states the word 'traditional' refers to the customary consensus that exists in a society and can be used as a reference compared to 'vernacular' which has a broad meaning. This explanation is reinforced by the statement of Nuryanto et al. (2021), that the difference between traditional and vernacular is *pakem,* namely rules or provisions that come from ancestors that must be obeyed.

Traditional architecture is part of vernacular architecture that is passed down from generation to generation. Studying traditional buildings means studying community traditions that are more than just physical building traditions (Rapoport 1969). Thus, it can be said that every traditional architecture is a vernacular group, but not all vernacular architecture can be called traditional, because of the ancestral standards, even though they are both made without an architect.

The basic concepts of the traditional Sundanese village and house architecture are generally the same, such as the conception of space and place, gender segregation spatial boundaries, time and orientation, symbolic classification and decoration or craftsmanship.

The first concept is about space. Sundanese people recognise two types of space: (1) *Nu ngawujud*, meaning a real space with a visible, sensory or tangible dimension. Examples of these spaces are: traditional ceremonial grounds, residential areas and spaces in the house; (2) *Teu ngawujud*, meaning spaces that cannot be seen with the senses, are not real or formless (intangible), but can be felt through *rasa* in the form of feelings that penetrate human logic. This type of space is inhabited by supernatural powers, such as ritual rooms, sacred spaces and graves. The boundaries of this space are physical, such as fences, walls, floors, and curtains. *Teu ngawujud* space forms an invisible boundary (Nuryanto et al. 2021).

The second is about place, which is interpreted by the Sundanese as *tempat* or *patempatan* which means a place to live (*netep/cicing*). The concept of place was born from the conception of *nu ngawujud* space which has physical boundaries. The form of a place in this context is a village (*kampung*) and a house (*imah*) as a shelter from various threats. Place is also interpreted differently, such as a container to store something and *pangkeng* to express a place to rest. Containers and *pangkeng* are physical places for human physical needs (Nuryanto et al. 2021).

The third is about gender segregation. Sundanese people recognise gender with the term *'kawanitaan'* which is interpreted as the division of tasks between men and

women. The inside of the house is taken care of by the women, while the outside is the responsibility of the men. Gender in Sundanese society is black and white, there is no room for emancipation or equality between the two. The way men position women in the house means protecting and respecting women. In the house is a special area in the form of *pawon* and *goah*, a space only for women (Nuryanto et al. 2021).

Fourth about the concept of spatial boundaries. This is related to paradoxical binary oppositions, such as *lemah-cai*, *luhur-handap*, *wadah-eusi* and *kaca-kaca*. Among the four, *kaca-kaca* is the concept of spatial boundaries. Salura (2008) states that *kaca-kaca* is the boundary of territory, including the boundary between the height of the place, differences in the material of the place, and objects placed in certain places as symbols of two different directions. The spaces in Sundanese villages and houses are arranged in three parts: *hareup* ('front'), *tengah* ('middle'), and *tukang* ('back'). In the village layout, between the three spaces, the middle is the *pancer* (centre) in the form of a traditional ceremony field. The *kaca-kaca* in the field is usually in the form of differences in ground height (contours). The *kaca-kaca* in the layout of the house is made of bamboo, namely the *bilik* ('bamboo wall').

The fifth is about time and orientation. Sundanese people understand time as *mangsa* or *waktos* which indicates the periods or era. They understand time in four meanings: sacred, safe, lucky and unlucky. The time measuring instrument used by the Sundanese people of the past is called the *lingga* ('stone') which is based on the trajectory of the sun. From here it is known the calculation for *poe* ('day'), *wuku* ('week'), *warsa* ('year') and so on. Sundanese believe that there are certain times that are considered to have special value. Tuesday and Friday nights are sacred, because they offer offerings to their ancestors. To find out the good and bad times, they used a tool called *kolenjer* made of bark. *Kolenjer* is full of symbols and codes that indicate the direction of a person journey (*ringkang*), value (*naptu*) and days (*poe*) to be safe (Nuryanto et al. 2021).

The orientation of the building determines the placement of the building mass on the site. This orientation has a cosmic-spiritual (sacred) value. As previously discussed, Sundanese people in the ancient Sunda Kingdom and now (Baduy) believe that the South direction is sacred. The roof ridge of the house is on the south-north axis (Garna 1984). The traditional leader (*Pu'un*) house is located in the south, because it is considered representative of the ancestors (sacred).

The sixth concept is about symbolic classification. Needham (1979), explains that the Sundanese people call this symbolic classification related to their belief system about *sasakalabuana* (the origin of the universe). Permana (2006) divides the symbolic classification of the Sundanese peoples into four parts: (1) There are three classifications on the vertical axis: *luhur*, *handap* and *tengah* as the centre. On the horizontal axis are *hareup*, *tukang* and *siger tengah* as the centre; (2) Four cClassification: *kaler-kidul-kulon-wetan*; (3) Five classifications: *kaler-kidul-kulon-wetan-pancer* or *puseur*; (4) The so called seven classification relates to the number of layers of the universe (seven layers up and seven layers down). This symbolic classification symbolises the structure of the human body and layers of supernatural powers. These four symbolic classifications are used in spatial planning and form, both of the village and the house.

The seventh concept is about craftsmanship, ornaments or decorations used in architectural forms, especially Sundanese houses. This craftsmanship is related to the belief system. The variety of ornaments or decorations in Sundanese houses is limited when compared to Balinese, Javanese, Batak, and Toraja houses. The variety of ornaments in Sundanese houses can be seen on the roof in the form of *capit gunting* and *cabik*. Sumardjo (2013) mentions *capit gunting* (sign X or V) as a paradoxical dualism between men and women. It means, that there are differences in character and division of tasks between men and women that are opposite to each other: (1) men work outside the home to earn a living, while women take care of the house, children, and husband in the house; (2) men are strong (protect), while women are weak (protected); (3) men have a tough character (firm), while women are soft (calm). *Cabik* (sign O) indicates a unity between speech and action (Nuryanto 2020). It means that every word is true is not lying but honest with everyone. Both of these ornaments are at the end or top of the roof ridge.

### 3.2. *Manifestation of the Sunda Wiwitan ritual and ancient Sundanese manuscript values in the architecture of traditional buildings*

The architecture of the *imah panggung* of the Sundanese people, especially the Baduy village is based

on the noble values of their ancestors. Local wisdom is seen in every behaviour of daily life, including in the architecture of the house. For them, the house is not only physical, but a soul for each owner. This means that there is a strong emotional connection between the Sundanese and the house. The Sundanese can never be away from home wherever they go, they know they will definitely return to their home. This is expressed in the saying *bali geusan ngajadi*, meaning 'home is a place to return to'. What is called soul in the sentence above is an emotional connection, so an empty house (without owner/abandoned) is the same as losing emotional ties. The house is a symbol of harmonisation, balance and social equality in the structure of society. Therefore, the shapes of the houses are the same, nothing is luxurious or looks exclusive. According to Sundanese, differences will lead to disharmony and imbalance, thereby destroying the social order of life.

The manifestation of the *Sunda Wiwitan* ritual values and ancient Sundanese manuscripts can be seen in the Baduy community as a prototype of a traditional Sundanese village in Indonesia which is hundreds of years old. Baduy are considered as the *pancer* (centre of the world) which is managed by *Batara* who was created by *Ambu Luhur*. If a person dies and is buried, this practice is not merely to bury the body but is considered a way to convey that person to *Ambu Luhur* through *Ambu Handap*, who controls the land (Garna 1984).

The grave is where the spirit of the dead maintain their body while facing *Ambu Handap*. When the spirit has faced *Ambu Luhur* in *Buana Nyungcung*, the body and spirit have disappeared from the ground. *Ambu Handap* is the ruler of the land or the earth which is very taboo. Hoeing the land is considered *pamali*, because it is considered an act of *buyut* (taboo), the same as turning *Ambu Handap* (earth) upside down. The use of building materials from bricks and tiles is the same as burying oneself alive, because tiles come from the ground, from dead bodies (Danasasmita and Djatisunda 1986).

*Ambu Luhur* and *Ambu Handap* are cosmological concepts originating from the *Sunda Wiwitan* and old Sundanese manuscripts about the universe. *Ambu Luhur* is sacred and *Ambu Handap* is profane or dirty, while between the two is *Ambu Tengah* as the central point of balance. Based on the results of this research, there are three main points of manifestation of the ritual values of *Sunda Wiwitan* and old Sundanese manuscripts in the architecture of the *imah panggung*.

**First**: Manifestation of the concept of the *imah panggung* as a symbol of *tangtungan jelema*, namely the human body which consists of three parts: (1) *Hulu* means the head which is embodied in the form of a roof (*suhunan*) as a symbol of *Buana Nyungcung*, the burial place of the Purified Essence; (2) *Awak* means the body is implemented in the form of a wall (*pangadeg*) and as a symbol of *Buana Panca Tengah* where humans and other living creatures live; (3) *Suku* means the foot which is manifested in the form of a foundation (*umpak* or *tatapakan*), a symbol of *Buana Larang* where spirits (Nuryanto 2020).

*Panggung* (see Figure 7) comes from the words *pang* and *agung* (Sundanese language), meaning the one who is seated at the highest or the top. So, *imah panggung* means a house whose floor is higher than the ground. For the Sundanese people who are very firm in carrying out their ancestral traditions, *imah panggung* is a non-negotiable choice, because it has become *pikukuh* (ancestral provisions). Breaking the *pikukuh* is the same as fighting the ancestors and will be *kabendon* or the wrath of the ancestors (Nuryanto 2022). While the word *tangtungan* comes from the word *nangtung* or *tangtung*, which means to stand upright. The word *jelema* means the human body which consists of two dimensions, namely the shell or body and *eusi* or soul. Making a house is to preparing a *cangkang* to accommodate *eusi*, which is to provide a place for Dewi Sri (rice goddess) as the real 'owner of the house'.

**Second**: Manifestation of the cosmological concept of vertical space about *Buana Tilu*, the *Buana Nyungcung* (Upper World), *Buana Panca Tengah* (Middle World), and *Buana Larang* (Underworld). The floor and pillars of the house should not be attached directly to the ground (Underworld), because soil is synonymous with death. The pole must be given a base that serves to separate it from the ground in the form of a stone called an *umpak* or *tatapakan* (Garna 1984). According to Adimihardja (1992) the form of *imah panggung* has both technical and symbolic functions. The technical functions are: (1) Do not disturb the water absorption field; (2) The pit becomes a space conditioning medium by means of cross-flowing air, either for warmth (at night) or coolness (during the day); (3) The pit is also used to store firewood supplies and poultry cages. The symbolic function of the *imah panggung* is to describe the belief system about the *Buana Tilu* concept.

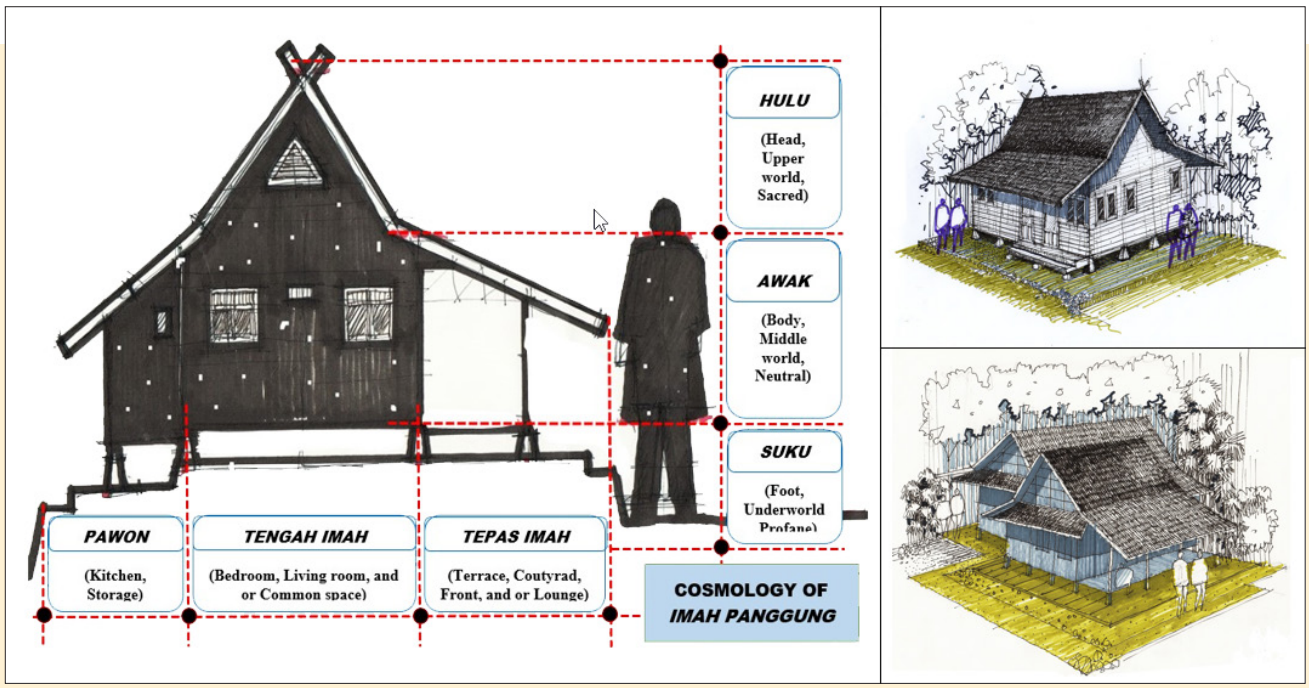


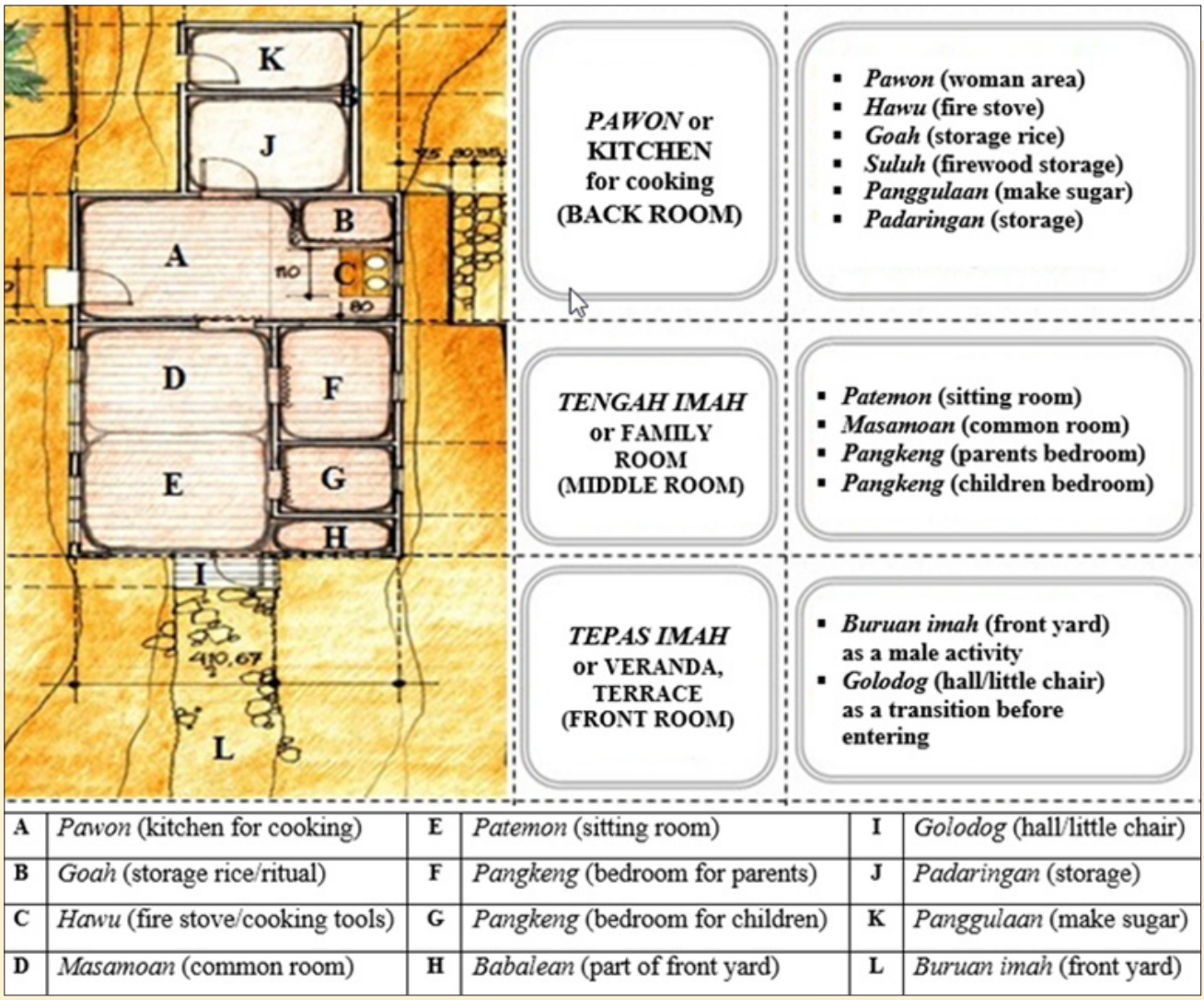

**Figure 7**
The conception and cosmology of imah panggung Sundanese people (Baduy Tangtu)
Source: Nuryanto, 2021

The manifestation of the concept of "*Buana Tilu*" can be seen in the form of *imah panggung*: roof (upper), walls and floors (middle), and foundation (under) (see Figure 7).

**Third**: Manifestation of the concept of horizontal spatial organisation originating from the concept of *Buana Tilu*, meaning that spatial arrangements are grouped based on three orientations: *tepas imah*, *tengah imah*, and *pawon* (see fig. 8). The division of these three spaces is closely related to gender, especially regarding the position of women, both cosmically and socially. The space for women and men is clear, showing the division of work activities and the personal nature of the space (public, private, service). *Tepas imah*, which means "outside" and "profane" is the front room. *Tengah imah* is the "outside-in" or "sacred-profane" space, which is the meeting place for *Buana Nyungcung* (Upper World) and *Buana Larang* (Underworld). The *pawon* is a space whose position at the back means "sacred" and "female", because of the *goah* as a transformation of the body of *Nyai Pohaci Sanghyang Sri* or Dewi Padi (rice goddes). *Goah* can only be entered by women, because men are prohibited by custom. Woman means "beginning of life" (to give birth), and man means "outside", adult, and "death" (Sumardjo 2003). Men are also prohibited from cooking, because it is considered not their job, men work outside the home (Nuryanto, 2021).

**Fourth**: Manifestation of the concept of the shape of the roof of the house which is inspired by human behavior and animal behavior. There are six types of roofs (Garna 1984), namely: (1) *Sulah nyanda*, meaning the roof resembles a pregnant woman sitting back; (2) *Jolopong*, meaning a roof that looks like a person sleeping on their back; (3) *Badak heuay*, meaning a roof that resembles the attitude of a yawning rhino; (4) *Julang ngapak*, meaning a roof that looks like a bird's wing in flight; (5) *Tagog anjing*, meaning a roof similar to the attitude of a sitting dog; (6) *Parahu kumureb*, meaning that the roof that resembles a boat is being overturned.

**Fifth**: Manifestation in the process of building a house (*ngadegkeun imah*), which consists of three steps, namely: *memehna* (before), *salila* (during), and *sanggeusna* (after completion). *Memehna* begins by looking for land that matches the criteria in the *Warugan Lemah* manuscript. *Salila* is the core stage which includes the process of installing the foundation (*umpak*) to roof construction (*suhunan*). While *sanggeusna* as the end of the entire procession which is marked by the implementation of a ritual ceremony (*ngaruwat imah*). There is a ban on leaving




| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | *Pawon* (kitchen for cooking) | E | *Patemon* (sitting room) | I | *Golodog* (hall/little chair) |
| B | *Goah* (storage rice/ritual) | F | *Pangkeng* (bedroom for parents) | J | *Padaringan* (storage) |
| C | *Hawu* (fire stove/cooking tools) | G | *Pangkeng* (bedroom for children) | K | *Panggulaan* (make sugar) |
| D | *Masamoan* (common room) | H | *Babalean* (part of front yard) | L | *Buruan imah* (front yard) |

**Figure 8**
Space (spatial) organization structure on imah panggung Sundanese people (Baduy Tangtu)
Source: Nuryanto, 2021

the village after forty days the house has been built. If it is violated, it will have fatal consequences in the form of *sial* (unlucky fate), *susah* (miserable life), *seret* (the luck is not smooth). Those who violate must be cleaned through the *panyapuan* ritual (Nuryanto 2022).

### 3.3. *Efforts to Preserve Intangible Cultural Heritage in Indonesia*

Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia number 106 of 2013 concerning *intangible cultural heritage* states that oral rites and traditions are part of the intangible cultural heritage that is protected by the state. This is reinforced by the Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia number 78 of 2007 based on the international convention in Paris-France dated October 17, 2003 which approved the protection of *intangible cultural heritage* (Perpres 2007 and Permendikbud RI, 2013). From these two provisions, it is concluded that the values of the *Sunda Wiwitan* ritual and the old Sundanese manuscript are part of the intangible cultural heritage that must be protected.

The Banten Provincial Government through the Cultural Affairs Department of Education and Culture (Dindikbud) of Banten Province has officially proposed 30 of "*Warisan Budaya Tak Benda*" (WBTB) or *intangible cultural heritage*. This proposal was submitted to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia in Jakarta. This is a follow-up

to the results of the Technical Meeting for the Preservation of Cultural Values at the Ministry of Education and Culture on 23-25 February 2022 at the Jayakarta Hotel, Bandung with other stakeholders (Dindikbud Banten 2022).

Presidential regulations, ministerial regulations, and government policies at the provincial, city and regency levels are an effort to protect the *intangible cultural heritage* from being lost. The government must select all the potentials that exist in each region so that their existence is protected. Therefore, there are six regulations and laws to protect WBTB: (1) Law number 5 of 1992 concerning *Cultural Conservation Objects*; (2) Presidential Decree number 78 of 2007 concerning the *Convention for the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*; (3) Law number 11 of 2010 concerning *Cultural Conservation*; (4) Permendikbud RI number 106 of 2013 concerning the *Intangible Cultural Heritage* of Indonesia; (5) PUPR Ministerial Decree number 19 of 2021 concerning *Technical Guidelines for the Implementation of Cultural Conservation Buildings*; (6) PP number 1 of 2022 concerning *National Registration and Preservation of Cultural Conservation*. The six most important regulations and laws above are their implementation.

The government's, especially in Banten Province and Lebak Regency, is very serious about protecting WBTB. In addition, the presence of the *Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara*" (AMAN) or *Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago*. Since 1999 has become the only independent institution that protects cultural values and traditions in Indonesia. There are four elements of ancestral heritage (Dalidjo 2021) which AMAN highly respects: (1) cultural identity; (2) value and knowledge system; (3) customary territory or living space; (4) customary law and customary institutions. Protection of the four non-objects in several regions in Indonesia, including Baduy by AMAN, has been carried out by each region. This means that they make efforts to preserve independently, because the government has not been able to provide assistance to care for it.

## 4. Conclusions

Many findings were obtained, but there are three main values as the basic concept of Sundanese traditional architecture as the embodiment of *Sunda Wiwitan* ritual values and old Sundanese texts, namely:

1) The cosmological conception in the form of three world classification values, namely *Buana Tilu*: *Buana Nyungcung, Buana Panca Tengah, Buana Larang*; Principles of *Rohangan Tilu*: *Tepas Imah, Middle Imah, Pawon*; and the Principles of *Ngadegkeun Wangunan*: *Memehna, Salila, Sanggeusna*;
2) Conception of the basic form of the traditional building, namely *Tangtungan Jelema* as symbol of the human body: *hulu* ('head'), *awak* ('body') and *suku* ('foot');
3) The concept of choosing the location of the building is *Warugan Lemah* which comes from the old Sundanese manuscript so that the occupants are safe and protected from disaster.

In closing, the embodiment of *Sunda Wiwitan* ritual values and Sundanese manuscript texts all converge on ancestral customary rules (*pikukuh karuhun*) which are embodied in the architecture of the *imah panggung* ('stilt house') of the Sundanese people, especially in Baduy *Tangtu*.

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# BOOK REVIEW

# *Practical considerations for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage*,

## Michelle L. Stefano, Routledge (2022), ISBN 978-0-367-47226-9




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Since its adoption by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2003, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has been steadily growing in popularity across the world, to date having been ratified by 93 per cent of the UNESCO Member States. Both praised and cursed for its impacts, the 2003 Convention has attracted the attention of not only professionals and practitioners but also heritage studies scholarship. Stefano's book adds to this growing body of knowledge by engaging with the safeguarding scheme promoted under this UNESCO Convention. Framing the discussion around the demand for 'community participation', Stefano reveals the obstacles inherent in the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage (ICH) safeguarding scheme while actively seeking means to overcome them. Written in an accessible manner for both researchers and professionals, the book should appeal to all those interested in heritage safeguarding and in what community participation really means in practice.

'As the 2003 Convention matures, how can we address its inherently challenging infrastructure and make it work – in practical terms – better? What theoretical framework and methodological approaches can be drawn on to ensure – as best as possible – that processes of safeguarding living cultural traditions, practices, and expressions are inclusive, ethical, and equitable and, thus, rewarding to all those involved?' (3) These are the core questions that animate Stefano's work, whose aim is to 'extend the scope of ICH safeguarding to bring in, examine, and synthetize the principles and practices of ecomuseology and U.S. public folklore' (11). This aim is pursued throughout seven chapters. Next to an introductory chapter, which sets the stage, and a concluding chapter in which the main points are brought together and strategies provided, the body of the book concentrates on three safeguarding schemes: the UNESCO-ICH framework, ecomuseology, and US public folklore. While the schemes are thoroughly analysed in the body of the work, Stefano introduces them briefly already in chapter 1, in which the author's personal tone and experience are weaved into a clear and concise explanation of key concepts and terminology.

Chapters 2 and 3, the latter consisting of two parts, explore the UNESCO-ICH framework in depth. The presentation of the framework in chapter 2 is structured around four challenges that present obstacles to community participation, as Stefano argues and skilfully demonstrates through various examples. The challenges concern the universalising aspects of UNESCO's international conventions, the communities' lack of decision-making power, the prioritisation of experts' knowledge over that of the practising communities and the commodification of ICH. While all have negative impacts on communities and their heritage, most troubling of all appears to be that communities lack decision-making power, which is

concentrated in the hands of state actors, referred to by Stefano as the 'pipeline of power' (41). How this relates to and what it means for community participation is shown in chapter 3, which goes deeper into analysing the UNESCO-ICH framework, in particular the role and place of communities (or rather lack thereof) in inventorying, nominating and reporting processes. These processes are illustrated with examples from the implementation of the 2003 Convention for almost 20 years across the world. The analysis further incorporates considerations of corrective measures, but the role of bottom-up approaches and of NGOs stand out. As an example of these, Stefano introduces the Batana Ecomuseum, inscribed on the UNESCO Register of Good Safeguarding Practices in 2016, rounding up the discussion and establishing a transition to the next chapter, dedicated to ecomuseology.

The alternative safeguarding frameworks – ecomuseology and US public folklore – are presented over three chapters. Stefano turns to these frameworks to identify solutions that relate directly to the obstacles to community participation described in the UNESCO-ICH framework. As she shows, these alternative frameworks are not free from challenges and can be appropriated for political and commercial purposes; however, they differ significantly in approaching participation as a community-initiated and community-led process. In chapter 4, Stefano shows how the principles of ecomuseology, anchored in linking heritage to people and territory, enable community resilience; however, she dedicates more space to public folklore, detailed in chapters 5 and 6, which is characterised by the interwoven principles of collaboration and reflexivity, including self-reflexivity. Stefano's expertise in public folklore allows her to enrich the discussion with examples from her own practice as well as from that of other folklorists, whom Stefano interviewed as part of her methodology. Inspired by the experience of alternative frameworks, in chapter 7, which closes the book, Stefano presents practical steps forwards as 'ethical and equitable interventions into ICH safeguarding [that] can improve the UNESCO-ICH framework' (209).

*Practical considerations for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage* is an important addition to heritage practice and scholarship, due to Stefano's approach to the 2003 Convention as not just a legal instrument but also a safeguarding framework. Her book is not the only one that intends to move beyond the UNESCO scheme. Comparable examples are the single-authored book *Intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development: the valorisation of heritage practices*, published under Springer's Heritage Studies Series 2021, and the co-edited volume *Intangible cultural heritage under national and international law: going beyond the 2003 UNESCO Convention*, released by Edward Elgar Publishing in 2020. However, no previous book intends to extend the scope of the UNESCO-ICH framework itself, as Stefano's book does. Despite this merit, the potential of US public folklore appears overtly positive; after all, just like the UNESCO-ICH framework, it relies on interventions by the same state actors. Yet the contrast between differing frameworks involving the same actors is valuable, since it shows how much the type of intervention matters. Additionally, by supporting her explanations with examples anchored in local realities, Stefano manages to make an abstract legal framework palpable and understandable enough also for those unfamiliar with UNESCO's normative instruments and language.

The merits of Michelle L. Stefano's book lie in providing practical considerations for how the UNESCO 2003 Convention as a safeguarding framework could work in a way that is ethical and equitable to the practising communities. The development of co-interventions, which integrate bottom-up and top-down approaches, might not be possible in all contexts. Yet her insights provide an excellent basis to understand the role of community participation in safeguarding measures and the conditions that have to be met to ensure inclusive, ethical and equitable practice. Logically structured, with creative transitions and 'views from the field' inserted between chapters, written accessibly for both researchers and professionals, this book will certainly make a lasting contribution to the field.

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# *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*
# HISTORY

**2004**

In December 2004, a publication plan for the IJIH was addressed to UNESCO in Paris, France. The plan proposed the creation of a new international journal focused on intangible cultural heritage, with the goal of promoting and advancing research and practices in this field.

The publication plan emphasized the need for an academic journal that could provide a platform for scholars and experts in the field of intangible cultural heritage to share their research and insights. The plan also highlighted the potential of the journal to contribute to the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage, which is often at risk of being lost or forgotten.

In October 2004, ICOM Korea held the ICOM 2004 Seoul: "Museums and intangible heritage" conference in Seoul, South Korea. This conference brought together scholars, experts, and practitioners in the fields of museums and intangible cultural heritage to discuss new approaches and strategies for preserving and promoting cultural heritage.

The conference featured a variety of sessions and workshops focused on topics such as community-based conservation, intangible cultural heritage and museums, and the role of museums in promoting cultural diversity. The conference also provided an opportunity for participants to share their research and insights and to learn from one another.

**2005**

In December 2005, ICOM officially supported the publication of the first volume of the IJIH. This support was important in providing recognition and credibility to the new journal, as ICOM is a respected international organization in the field of museums and cultural heritage.

The IJIH Publication Committee reported the publication to the 108th ICOM governing board. This report highlighted the potential of the journal to advance research and practices related to intangible cultural heritage. The report also outlined the future plans for IJIH, including expanding the range of topics covered and increasing international collaboration and readership. In July to October 2005, the IJIH Publication Committee was organized by the NFMK and ICOM Korea. This committee was responsible for overseeing the publication process of the IJIH, including reviewing submitted manuscripts, selecting articles for publication, and ensuring the quality and integrity of the journal. The committee was comprised of experts and scholars in the field of intangible cultural heritage from around the world, reflecting the international scope and significance of the journal. The establishment of the IJIH Publication Committee was a key step in the creation of the journal and its development into a leading academic publication in the field of intangible cultural heritage.

In June 2005, the IJIH Publication Agenda was introduced by the 107th ICOM governing board. This agenda proposed the creation of a new international journal focused on intangible cultural heritage, with the goal of advancing research and practices in this field.

The IJIH Publication Agenda called for the establishment of a new publication committee, the development of a publication policy, and the solicitation of manuscript submissions from scholars and experts in the field of intangible cultural heritage. The agenda also emphasized the need for international collaboration and the promotion of diversity and inclusivity in the journal.

**2006** In May 2006, the first volume of the IJIH was published. The publication of this first volume was commemorated at UNESCO in Paris, France, reflecting the global scope and significance of the journal. The first volume featured articles on various topics related to intangible cultural heritage, including traditional music, dance, storytelling, and festivals. Since its first publication, IJIH has become a leading academic journal in the field of intangible cultural heritage, and it continues to publish high-quality research articles and studies from around the world.

**2019** In September 2019, a three-party conference was held in Kyoto, Japan among NFMK, ICOM, and ICOM Korea to discuss their collaboration on the IJIH. The conference aimed to strengthen their partnership and to explore new opportunities to promote and advance intangible cultural heritage research and practices. The conference was attended by representatives from the three organizations, as well as scholars and experts in the field of intangible cultural heritage.

**2020** Between February and December 2020, a Memorandum of Understanding agreement was signed among NFMK, ICOM, and ICOM Korea to promote and advance ICH research and practices. As part of this agreement, there was a revision of the IJIH Publication Policy which aimed to improve the quality of the journal. The revised publication policy includes guidelines on manuscript submission, peer review, and ethical standards of authors and editors.

**2021** In April 2021, a joint publication partnership was established among the NFMK, ICOM, and ICOM Korea for the IJIH. This partnership aimed to strengthen the publication of IJIH and to promote intangible cultural heritage research and practices around the world

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