

Sharing, Sustaining, and Safeguarding to the ICH of East Asian

Seasonal Festival¹

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Based on a common geographical environment, the people of East Asia share a similar sense of the seasons and have been sharing the seasonal festival traditions for many years, which to a certain degree has brought commonality to their experience of heritage. The seasonal festival traditions in East Asia have a localized form of expression and common features². They all attach importance to seasonal nodes such as the Mid-Autumn Festival, Half of July, April Eight, and the Twenty-four Solar Terms. They value family ethics in the practice of festivals and share Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist cultural traditions, with emphasis on “red-hot sociality.” As they collectively enjoy seasonal festivities, they continue creating arts-related activities around these festivals and transmitting their heritage values to the younger generation. East Asia's practices of seasonal festival traditions are both a manifestation of cultural diversity and cultural sharing. This presentation will discuss the sharing, sustaining, and collaborative safeguarding of East Asian Seasonal Festivals as ICH.

1. Why do East Asians value and sustain their seasonal festival folk cultures?

The importance attached by East Asian countries to the folk culture of the seasonal festivals is based on the similar geographical and climatic environment, as well as the characteristics of farming culture in the wider East Asian region, notwithstanding the historical application of the common traditional calendar. Based

¹ The original script is co-written by Professor Xiao Fang, P.H.D. candidates Huo Wen and Xu Qian.

² Yuan Jin, Xiao Fang, *The Twenty-Four Solar Terms in Jiangnan*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Wenyi Publishing House, 2020, pp. 1- 9.

on this, the common seasonal festivals system has been formed. For example, the twenty-four solar terms are over a thousand-year old, vividly reflecting the East Asian people's understanding of natural time, timing sequence, as well as natural philosophical concepts. The Korean people celebrate the Beginning of Spring (Li Chun) by posting "Beginning of Spring Posters" while the Japanese people celebrate the Spring and Autumn Equinoxes in the form of holidays, reflecting the importance they attach to the solar terms. The folk culture of the seasonal festivals has the functional value of promoting cultural identity. It carries the traditional time system and concept, representing a cultural belonging. In each of these festive celebrations, East Asian people participate in collective rituals, share seasonal foods and objects, and get similar material and spiritual experiences with similar feelings, which can unite the cultural identity of East Asian people.

Based on the common seasonal festivals, different regions of East Asia have localized forms of festival cultural expression. Local economic arrangements, social adjustments and cultural designs are made within the framework of a common chronology, reflecting the regional characteristics and humanities that are nurtured and mapped by the different Terroirs. For example, in China, the Half of July is dedicated to the memory of the deceased and to the reincarnation of the wandering ghost while in Korea it lays emphasis on the celebration of the autumn harvest and in Japan it has a more pronounced Buddhist influence. This localization is shaped by the production and living needs of the local people, presenting the philosophy of life, the concept of nature, and the diversified cultural forms of the local people. It is an important reason why the folk culture of the seasonal festivals has been sustained to this day.

2. Common cultural orientation of East Asian countries in the practice of similar seasonal festival folklore transmission.

East Asian people share common cultural orientation in our seasonal festive practices, which is a spiritual connection between people in East Asia. The festival culture shared in East Asia includes the spiritual culture of ideals, ethics, morals, and

aesthetics, which are transmitted through oral literature, auspicious motifs, rituals, and ceremonies. It also includes material culture in the form of festive foods, costumes, ritual objects and crafts, as well as behavioral culture in the form of rituals, ceremonies, performances, and skills. They all emphasize the values of family happiness, interpersonal harmony, “red-hot sociality”, harvest and prosperity, health and longevity, and the harmony of nature and man³. Everything that can be felt in the festivals, such as the everyday life associated with them, is the spiritual, material, and behavioral culture that can be exchanged between the countries of East Asia.

3. Suggestions for collaborative safeguarding of East Asian Seasonal Festivals

As previously stated, East Asia has many common seasonal festival cultural foundations and can exchange distinct aspects of seasonal festivals as a central heritage component to form a standing sharing mechanism.

3.1 Establishing standing sharing mechanism

We may choose the grand festivals in four seasons, such as the New Year in spring, the Dragon Boat Festival in summer, the Mid-Autumn Festival in autumn, and the Winter Solstice in winter, and use these festival days as our shared time nodes. A yearly cycle of appreciation and exchange events can be held. The sharing activities are combined with different focuses of the countries in East Asia to form a standing sharing and exchange mechanism. For example, through documentaries, films, live TV, and web-casts about the festivals, and offline festival events and festival tourism, we can share the festival culture in daily life with local distinctiveness. For example, the twenty-four solar terms are related not only to farming and health, but also to food, certain kinds of plants and flowers, and the aesthetics of life. These types of culture are all highly local, and

³ Huang Tao, “Safeguarding traditional festive cultural heritage and building a harmonious society”, *Journal of the People's University of China*, Vol. 1, 2007, p. 70.

there is even a rich diversity between different regions in one country⁴. The seasonal festival culture is not just a legacy of the past. Sharing this festival culture can enrich the spiritual and material cultural life of East Asian people, bringing them closer together, and improving understanding to create something new.

3.2 Collaborative safeguarding of the common seasonal festivals as ICH of East Asia

In Korea, for example, the Lotus Lantern Festival on April 8 (of the Lunar Calendar), which was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List in 2020, shows the Buddhist cultural traditions shared by the entire East Asian region. In China, a grand Buddhist festival is celebrated on April 8, too, and in some parts of the country, it is a festival related to minority legends and agricultural production, which is celebrated in different and rich ways. Importantly, such festival can serve as a platform to share vicissitudinous cultural similarities and differences of heritage performances and practices in the region. Culture is fluid, not immutable. ICH is the common heritage of mankind, and sharing and collaborative safeguarding should be valued. It is a source of pride and a shared responsibility for East Asian cultures, such as common seasonal festivals. This is an opportunity to promote the ICH safeguarding practices of East Asian countries.

⁴ Xiao Fang, "The Twenty-Four Solar Terms" is a cultural resource that is constantly being reproduced", *The News Daily*, 5 January 2021.