

## Shifting to Online Activities:

### Digital Divide among the NGOs and ICH Communities in Korea

Hanhee Hahm, CICS

The profound difficulties international ICH community faces during the Corona pandemic is truly worrisome. Often times many of the municipalities of our regions neglect our most dire ICH that needs the foundation for outreaching their respected communities. The cases of Korea bring similar difficulties in reaching out to our ICH communities. Those in the field of performance art were hit the hardest in Korea, as many of their much-needed cultural performances were canceled. This meant loss of income and most importantly the spotlight of the public. The cultural related recognitions that fuel the economy of our practices all of a sudden came to a halt with many cancellations to events and symposiums. In the brink of the Corona pandemic prolonging, staying indoors and extinction of large events or festivals have become the norm. For the NGOs of Korea, the common factor in dealing with the Corona pandemic was for the ICH communities to absorb online activities and become fluent in online platforms for ICH safeguarding. Yet, we are facing a serious problem. ICH communities in Korea are divided into two groups, those having digital skills and money and those having few. Bridging the digital gap is our challenge.

On behalf of UNAK (UNESCO accredited NGO Association in Korea) I will present you our experiences of COVID-19 and our engagement with the ICH Community and counter measures against the pandemic society.

The Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation (CHF), World Martial Arts Union (WoMAU), International Mask Arts and Culture Organization (IMACO), and (Center for Intangible Culture Studies (CICS) worked with our surrounding network of ICH bearers, groups, and communities to support them throughout the pandemic.

The usual gathering activities of Korea's NGOs were deterred with many cancellations and delay. The WoMAU's Martial Arts annual performances and international symposium in Singapore was canceled. So many of their activities moved online, UNESCO accredited Martial Arts NGOs were contacted online and had discussions regarding the safeguarding of Martial Arts of their respected regions. WoMAU hired people through the 'Youth Tourism Coordinator Project' to help with the low employment rate in Korea. Many of WoMAU's attention now is about inventorying and archiving their records as well as Official Development Assistance (ODA) educational projects geared for 2021.

Most of activates moving online means more time for the NGOs of Korea for capacity building through their previous works and projects. Many books were published throughout this year for many of us. The CHF created a book catalogue of their activities. The title 'In Search of Living Heritage' catalogues the CHF's vision and work in the past to present for

## Cultural Heritage of Korea.

All this time advised from our governments to stay indoors had allowed many of our work to be archived and recorded. This was the case for IMACO reaching through their International members through SNS, email, and online meetings. IMACO concentrated on archiving their work digitally as well as creating an online membership for the promotion of Masks.

The spotlight that many ICH communities around the world needed, CICS used the online platform to give the spotlight to the ICH community. The second annual JIAPICH (Jeonju International Awards for Promoting Intangible Cultural Heritage) ceremony was held online. The JIAPICH gave our three finalists their deserved recognition as well as prize and plaque from Jeonju City. CICS was the secretariat for Jeonju City and received many applications from international ICH bearers, practitioners, and groups. In the midst of a pandemic, the event gave hope to the finalists and held the online ceremony to promote their ICH safeguarding practices.

The cases of UNAK, UNESCO accredited NGOs of Korea show our post corona activities. The Corona pandemic becoming long term is a possibility. As many in our ICH community face difficult tasks of post corona society, it was important for UNAK to move forward with the best available solution. UNAK all had many in-house projects, such as cataloguing inventory, uploading to database, and reaching out to our communities. It also became clear that activities of safeguarding ICH would inevitably move to the online setting.

We will continue to promote the importance of all cultural heritage through differing venues and prepare for the changing society. In particular online activities and platforms are often not available among ICH holders, groups and communities. Realizing this reality, we are trying to give them a helping hand. The universal value of safeguarding our intangible cultural heritage engages with the shifting to a new method of safeguarding in the midst of pandemic.