

Shifting to Online Activities: Digital Divide among the NGOs and ICH Communities in Korea

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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.

1. Introduction

The profound difficulties international ICH community faces during the Corona pandemic are 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 faced many difficulties in Korea, as many of their much-needed cultural performances postponed or 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. 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. Yet, we are facing a serious problem. ICH communities in Korea divided into two groups, those having digital skills and money against those having few. Bridging the digital gap is our challenge. On behalf of UNAK (UNESCO accredited NGO Association in Korea) I will present unprecedented experiences of NGOs under the COVID-19 and limited engagement with the ICH Communities and counter measures against the pandemic society.

2. About UNAK

The UNESCO Accredited NGO Association in Korea (UANAK) established in Nov. 4, 2016. In Korea, there are four NGOs accredited by UNESCO ICH section: International Mask Arts and Culture Organization, The Center for Intangible Culture Studies, World Marshal Arts Union and Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation. The member organizations of UANAK have agreed to seek a collaborative work for enhancing NGO activities concentrating on the safeguarding of ICH at home and abroad in alignment with the spirit of the 2003 Convention. The main activities of UANAK are as follows: (1) Networking and information sharing on the domestic and overseas activities of each member organization (2) Collaboration for finding sustainable development goals using ICH (3) Mutual cooperation with ICH communities to enhance cultural diversity in national and international arenas.

In July and November of 2020, in the midst of COVID 19, UNAK held two workshops: one held in Jeju Islands and the other was through online. All the members of UNAK shared their difficulties because of the pandemic, often expressing each NGO's particular circumstances that they had to improvise through previous experiences, all the while making swift reactions to their new reality. The following is a presentation based on the discussions from the two workshops of UNAK.

The first workshop held by KCF (Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation) in Jeju Island on July 23, to commemorate the inscription of 'Culture of Jeju Haenyeo (Women divers in Jeju)' that successfully placed in the representative list of UNESCO in 2016. The workshop reduced to a smaller meeting because of the pandemic so the number of usual participants in attendance cut in half. The attendance of the workshop expected the new member of haenyeo who recently joined the community along with the veteran haenyeos. Majority of the dialogue was about the culture of haenyeos and their community especially focusing on the sustainability of haenyeo culture. This topic was the main agenda of the workshop and all participants were satisfied to have an opportunity to share their own issues and challenges of the haenyeo community. Why do some young women become haenyeo? To what extent are their efforts sustainable under the pressure of hardship of diving without any gears? Is it compatible to do housework and dive? Can they keep their self-esteem and/or identity as haenyeo?

The dialogue circled around about taking pride in the fact that haenyeo is a good way to make a living while protecting the marine ecosystem. Due to the pandemic, many haenyeos were not able to attend, but they expressed their gratitude to the KCF for providing sufficient opportunities to talk and a place to listen to other haenyeo. For the sustainable development of

the haenyeo community, the role of NGOs is strongly expected. One concern while leaving the workshop is the fact that many restaurants still closed due to the COVID 19, therefore seafood consumptions have declined. The income of haenyeo is expected to decline as well.

The usual gathering activities of Korea's NGOs deterred with many cancellations and delay. The WoMAU's Martial Arts annual performances and international symposium in Singapore canceled. So many of their activities moved online, UNESCO accredited Martial Arts NGOs contacted their networks online and had discussions regarding the safeguarding of Martial Arts of their respected regions. WoMAU also reached out to embassies of each country and UNESCO National Committee to expand international cooperation network. Many of WoMAU's attention now about inventorying and archiving their records as well as Official Development Assistance (ODA) educational projects geared for 2021. WoMAU hired people through the 'Youth Tourism Coordinator Project' to help with the low employment rate in Korea. WoMAU is preparing for the mid-to-long term plans for the future, implementing the electronic administration system (ERP) for efficient work. The homepage of WoMAU as well as SNS (Facebook, Instagram) outlets established.

All this time advised from our governments to stay indoors had allowed documents 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. IMACO nominated the Korean Tal-chum (mask dance) for the inscriptions to the ICH list of UNESCO in March, 2020. IMACO participated in three online forums and festivals throughout the year. The International Mask Festival of Indonesia held online in August and IMACO was part of the opening speech. IMACO participated online for the SIPA (Solo International Performing arts of Indonesia) held in September. Most recently in October, IMACO participated in online UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage and ICH NGO Forum. IMACO plans to further help in the nomination process for UNESCO inscription of mask dance in Korea by having board of expertise meet regularly, by working closely to the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea and keeping a strong bond between the preservation society members.

The difficulties that the cultural heritage sector, particularly in the field of ICH face in the midst of a pandemic is concerning. As many in the ICH community around the world face similar problems with funding, 2020 is turning out to be worst-case scenarios for ICH performer, bearers, and practitioners alike that need the accessibility of the public to the art form. Without the close proximity of the population, many in the field of ICH fail to make a living, transmission process affected, and the attention to the past commemorations left behind. CICS was eager to use the online platform to give the spotlight to the ICH community.

The annual awards ceremony, Jeonju International Awards for Promoting Intangible Cultural Heritage (JIAPICH), held online this year. The JIAPICH organically started in 2019 and this was the second year in existence. The purpose of the JIAPICH is to encourage safeguarding practices of ICH in the global community regardless of nationality, ethnicity, religion, race, age, gender, political, social, economic or cultural orientation. The safeguarding practices of ICH include any effective method or approach. It gave three finalists their deserved recognition as well as prize and plaque from Jeonju City. By the local government, Jeonju City actively sharing the value of

safeguarding ICH and lifting the spirits of the bearers and practitioners, the JIAPICH served to benefit the international ICH community. JIAPICH online ceremony was a local initiative, tasked by the Jeonju City government and CICS acted as the secretariat.

Having received many applications from international ICH bearers, practitioners, and groups, it was the hope of the organizers and Jeonju City, that the event can give hope to the finalists. The JIAPICH online ceremony held successfully, with three finalists taking home the 2020 JIAPICH Plaque. Although an event like the JIAPICH could not change the difficult circumstances of all ICH community in the pandemic world, the online ceremony was a small beam of hope for ICH community and it was a positive local initiative fulfilled by Jeonju City.

3. The Effect of COVID 19 on the Activities of UNAK

The cases of UNAK, UNESCO accredited NGOs of Korea show our enthusiasm even in difficult conditions. The Corona pandemic becoming long term is a possibility. As many in our ICH community face difficult tasks of the on-going pandemic, 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 heritages through differing venues and prepare for the changing society. Online activities and platforms in particular are often not available among ICH holders, groups and communities. To bridge the digital gap between the ICH holders is the immediate goal. Most ICH bearers find it difficult to work online, therefore having the younger generations in helping the ICH preservation society, groups and communities, to build up the capacity of digital skills and techniques is necessary. It is important to recognize that under the pandemic, the safeguarding measures of ICH should also improvise and find solutions from our experiences.