

**Sub-Regional Experts Meeting in Asia on Intangible Cultural Heritage:
Safeguarding and Inventory-Making Methodologies**
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**The Government Mechanism
for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage and Inventory-Making
Methodologies in China**

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Chinese government has always attached great importance to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and has done a lot which achieve great results although the mechanism has not been established until recent years. As early as in 1979, the Ministry of Culture, together with the National Committee of Ethic Affairs and China Federation of Literature and Art Circles initiated the compilation of the Ten Collections of the China Ethnic and Folk Arts. 298 volumes of books have been completed by the end of 2004. In 1997, the State Council issued the Regulation on Safeguarding the Traditional Arts and Crafts. The national jury named more than 200 “Masters of Arts and Crafts” and thus a great number of traditional arts and crafts are preserved. The state has also established the Committee of Revitalizing Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera. After Kunqu was proclaimed as the Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, the central government began to set up a fund in 2005 to better protect Kunqu Opera. At the same time, towns with long history, ethnic characteristics and local art features are named as “Hometown of Folk Arts” and “Hometown of Arts with Distinctive Features”, which raises the awareness of the whole society to safeguard traditional and folk arts. In recent years, China has also been actively involved in the projects implemented by UNESCO in this regard, for instance, the Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. To date, four cultural expressions of China have been proclaimed by UNESCO as masterpieces. Besides, China also engaged in drawing up the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which was adopted by the People’s Congress in August of 2004.

In 2003, Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Finance has initiated the Project of Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage, thus begins the systematic protection mechanism in China. A special working group and an expert committee have been formed. So far, 39 cultural expressions have been inscribed in the State Protection List with the appraisal of the expert committee in the one-province one-program principle in order to promote the preservation of the intangible heritage in each area across the nation. For underdeveloped areas in the northwest part of the country, the central government has provided financial support for them. Local protection lists have also been set up at the provincial level.

In March 2005, the State Council promulgated The Proposal upon Promoting Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection. This is the first time that the highest administrative authority of

China issues such directive document on intangible cultural heritage protection. The Proposal made it clear that the inventory-making is the foundation of the protection work. Different inventory-making plans should be worked out for different regions and different categories so as to obtain a comprehensive knowledge of the category, quantity, location, survival environment, current protection situation and existing problems of the intangible cultural heritage in different regions and different ethnic groups. Meanwhile, all kinds of methods such as writing, filming, digital multi-media should be used to achieve true, systematic and all-round records and establish archives and data base of the intangible cultural heritage.

For further enhancing the intangible cultural heritage protection, “a liaison meeting system among ministries for protecting intangible cultural heritage is set up, the functions of which are to coordinate important issues concerning intangible cultural heritage protection, such as making policies, reviewing plans, approving the “state list of the masterpieces of the intangible cultural heritage” and carrying out other works assigned by the State Council. The institution is headed by the Ministry of Culture and the Minister of Culture is convener. Other members are the State Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Education, State Commission of Ethnic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Construction, State Bureau of Tourism and State Administration of Cultural Relics. The working office is in the Ministry of Culture. Regular meetings will be held and temporary meetings could be called upon if needed.

In order to improve the rescue, preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage and fulfill the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the lists of the masterpieces of intangible cultural heritage at respectively national, provincial and county levels are set up. The national one will be approved and announced by the State Council every two years. The ones at provincial and county levels will be approved by the government of the same level and then reported to its immediate higher government administration. The assessment of the state list of the masterpieces of intangible cultural heritage is in charge by the office of the liaison meeting among ministries. All individuals, organizations and social communities can submit applications to the cultural department of their administrative regions who report to the higher government administrations. Application will be accepted only if they are submitted by the authority of the applying individual (or community) or with the authorization of the applying individual (or community). The provincial cultural department, after collecting and selecting all the applications and with the approval of the local government, submits to the office of the liaison meeting among ministries. Those institutions direct under the central government, can make the submission directly to the office. The applicants should submit not only an application report and the detail files on its history, current situation, value, endangering situation but also a ten-year protection plan with the details of objectives, measures and administrative mechanism, including recording, preserving and transmitting. For those which have been inscribed in the state list, different measures should be applied, such as entitling with honors, supporting financially and encouraging the individuals and communities to conduct transmitting activities. For now, the appraisal of the first state list of the masterpieces of the intangible cultural heritage is under the way. There are altogether 1314 application files received nationwide and about 800 of them will be inscribed in the state list for the first time.

Although the intangible cultural heritage has, to certain extent, been protected and promoted, it cannot match the tangible heritage in terms of legal protection. Since 1998, the Ministry of Culture of China, together with other departments, has conducted researches, investigations and international symposiums. In November 2003, the draft of the Law on Ethnic and Folk Culture Protection of the People's Republic of China was completed. In August 2004, the People's Congress adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Based on the Convention, the Congress changed the name of the draft to the Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection of the People's Republic of China. Special working group has been set up to coordinate all parties concerned to step up the legal procession.

In order to strengthen the protection work, departments concerned are working hard to set up "Intangible Cultural Heritage Day" in China so as to conduct a series of activities to raise people's awareness of intangible cultural heritage.