

**Sub-Regional Experts Meeting in Asia on Intangible Cultural Heritage:
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**Government Mechanism for Safeguarding
Intangible Cultural Heritage**

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1. Introduction

Myanmar is a nation with high cultural standards and a long history. It has managed to retain its own identity and Myanmar is still endowed with its unique characteristics in cultures and national customs and traditions. It is commonly assumed that the endowment is attributable to the teaching of Buddhism, the main religion of the country; and also to the dynamic patriotic spirit of Myanmar people.

2. Historical Background of Myanmar Culture

Anthropologist, in defining the term “culture” of a certain race or people, have included in its denotation all manner of things that are an indispensable part of their lives; their mode of dress and fashion, their performing arts such as music, song and dance, their visual arts, their customs and traditions. In other words all these aspects of life of a people constitute their culture. Scholars have also made a distinction and classified culture into material and nonmaterial. All the material artifacts created and used by man belong to the class of material culture, whereas, the various creeds, traditions, world outlook and customs come under the non-material, conceptual form of culture. Moreover, scholars in general subscribe to the view that in study a culture it is important to analyze, example and evaluate it under the categories of product, behaviour and value system.

3. Myanmar Culture and Society

Myanmar Culture and Society since ancient times has placed high premium on moral conduct as well as on traditions and manners. Myanmar accepts that culture is a combination of both physical and spiritual cultures, the standard of culture can be measured not only by material development but also the morale and morality of its people. The existence of being a human being will have no meaning if the religion and literature of people are not fully developed. Intangible cultural heritage are all spiritual creations such as language and literature, all tradition customs and rituals, expression of life style of human relations in the social life, ancient ethics, proverbs, stories Niti, homilies, music all kinds of performing arts and traditional performing arts of national races within Myanmar Union.

Intangible cultural property is not works of Art, but it is the fruit of people’s actions and behaviour that have high historic and artistic vale.

4. Some Components of Myanmar Intangible Culture

Myanmar Intangible Culture can be briefly stated as six components. These are

- (a) Customs and Traditions
- (b) Religion and Religious Practices
- (c) Language and Literature
- (d) Art and Artistic Activities
- (e) Religious and Seasonal Festivals
- (f) Attires and Costumes

4.1 Customs and Traditions

The origin of some of Myanmar Cultural Value System

Myanmar Cultural value systems originated during the Bagan Era when Buddhist culture began to flourish and permeate all levels of society. Codes of conduct were clearly laid down for parent and offspring, teacher and student, ruler and ruled, elders and youths, monk and laymen, between friends and as well as towards one's impoverished relatives. The principal values that form the underpinnings for these moral codes are

- (a) generosity
- (b) compassion
- (c) forgiveness
- (d) propriety and decency
- (e) knowledge and wisdom and
- (f) peace and tranquility.

The Spirit of generosity and hospitality

The Spirit of generosity and hospitality has characterized the Myanmar personality since the Bagan Era of 11th century A.D. There are many stone inscriptions that record the religious donations as well as the religious monuments large and small, which testify to this spirit of generosity. Generosity and hospitality is a fact of daily life to this day. Myanmar people in groups, as a family or individually are ever ready to give donations for religions as well as social purposes.

Compassion

One of the tenets preached by the Lord Buddha is compassion towards all living beings and this spirit of compassion has been instilled in the Myanmar character.

Compassion is shown especially to those who are weak and dependent on others, both human and animal. Hence the reason why Myanmar children are cared for so lovingly and the old and infirm treated with great respect.

Myanmar people are thought from young to respect their elders and pay proper homage. The compassion is extended to all living beings. Compassion is an important part of the Myanmar Valuation system for it is based on respect for all forms of life.

Forgiveness

Forbearance and Forgiveness are also considered as moral virtues. The moral value placed on forbearance and forgiveness is also a legacy bestowed on us by our forbears of the Bagan Era.

4.2 Religion and Religious Practices

Religion as constituent of moral principles and religion as implied in ceremonies and ritualistic practices has influenced deeply the life of man from the beginning in human civilization.

Mangala is one of the most important fundamental concepts of Myanmar Theravada Buddhist Culture. It has played a central role in the formation of Myanmar culture and society. It is a social, moral and religious concept which had been significant in the shaping of the personality, attitudes and conducts of the Myanmar People. The concept of Mangla was first articulated in Myanmar society in the form of Twelve Secular Mnagla.

The Thirty - eight Blessing of the Mingala Sutta (38 ways of conduct to auspiciousness) is one of the most widely known of the Buddha's discourses. It is said to have been handed down by one of the Buddha's favourite disciples, Shin Ananda who heard the Buddha preach this sermon. It is always recited by monks at all auspicious occasions and religious functions in order to bring about the favorable effects suggested by its name. It is also one of the first lessons every Buddhist child has to learn either at home or at the monastic school. This sutta prescribes social and moral obligations of all human beings to observe and perform regardless of their religion, race, creed, birth and social status and civic duties to abide by. Thus Mangala Sutta is the very foundation of Myanmar Intangible Culture. Today the Sutta in the original Pali and Myanmar translations is being serialised in our daily news paper. But during the British Colonial regime due to the impact of English colonial education, monastic school declined and moral education was undermined by the so called modern education introduced by the British. Today monastic education is being revived at primary level for upcoming generations so as to catch them young in cultural heritage and thus protect them from the negative impact of globalization. The government supports the revival of monastic education.

4.3 Language and Literature

Pyu and Man languages are believed to be the earliest and original literature flourished in Myanmar. There are altogether five ancient literature in the history; Pyu, Mon, Rakhawunna, Myanmar and Pali. Pali is the language which was brought into the country from India after the Enlightenment of Buddha.

Stone inscription, Palm-leaf manuscript, Parabeik (Folded Paper), Bell inscription In writing, Palm-leaf inscription. Votive tablets are the origins of Myanmar literature which rooted in the Bagan period. Those earlier than Bagan period stone inscriptions are Pyu stone inscriptions, Mon stone inscriptions and Rakhine stone inscriptions. It is a form of writing prose on the stone very concise and short to the point. The stone

inscriptions are not only the origin of Myanmar literature but also the proof for the Myanmar History.

4.4 Art and Artistic Activities

A great majority of Myanmar indigenous races live a rural life which is peaceful stable traditional and static. Within the limit of their village environment these village folk devotes themselves full time to their daily domestic chores. Yet they find time to express their feeling of joy and sorrow, their beliefs and aesthetic as best they could. The art (both visual and performing) express the artist's thought mood and feeling and does not represent those of others.

Traditionally we classify our musical instruments into five categories (1) Kyi which means bronze, brass or any metallic instrument such as gong, cymbal bell (2) Kyo which means all instruments (harp of different sizes, shapes with different strings and violin etc. (3) Thayey which means instruments made of hide or leather such as drums of different types and sizes and shapes. (4) Lei which means all wind instruments such as flute and oboe of different shapes, types and sizes and (5) Let Khok which means clapper with hands, bamboo or wood.

Myanmar folk songs take different forms with different themes to be sung on different occasions. There are many Folk dances and some popular dances are Ouzi dance, Douba' dance, Bjo'(Byaw) dance, Boungyi dance, Naban-san dance, U showe yoe and Daw Moe dances.

The popular Folk drama is Myey Waing Zat. There are also many performing arts of Myanmar national races.

These Arts and Artistic Activities have been preserved by folk peoples by transmitting them from older generation to younger generation. There were no proper schools to teach them to the youngs, no library to record them in writing. Nowadays, the study of Arts and Artistic Activities have been promoted by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education.

4.5 Religions and Seasonal Festivals

The twelve festivals held every month through out the year are national legacies of the ancient Myanmar kings. In ancient times, the festivals involved the participation of the King and Queen, ministers and concilors, as well as the common people through out the country. At the present time, under the guidance of supervision of the government, the festivals are held through out the country and people from all walks of life participate in them with joy.

Myanmar traditional festivals indicate the inborn spirit and social characters of the Myanmar people. Most of the Myanmar festivals are based on the religions beliefs. Thingyan, Thadinjyut and Tazaungdaing Festivals are famous religious festivals. These festivals help keep people focused not only on fun and entertainment but also on religion and civilization. Folk festivals also help to preserve traditional culture by stemming the unwelcome effects of globalization such as loss of traditional values

and national identity.

4.6 Attire and Costumes

Myanmar are the people who prefer a simple way of dressing and aware of their traditional styles. The longyi- a Sarong -like nether garment is an integral parts of Myanmar national dress worn by men as well as women. Myanmar garment for men and women are usually made of cotton for every day wear and silk, satin or the better quality synthetic fabrics for normal wear. Myanmar people continue to wear own form of dress not only for conveniences but also for a symbol of identity.

5. National Policies and Objectives

As Myanmar is one of the culture richest regions in Asia who preserves its traditional cultural values and it has its cultural policy which follows the **Social Objects** of the State which are mentioned as follows:

- Uplift of the morale and morality of the entire nation
- Uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national character
- Uplift of dynamism of patriotic spirit
- Uplift of health, fitness and education standards of the entire nation

The thrust for the endeavours made for the development of the country is always based on the Three National Causes:

- non-disintegration of the union
- non-disintegration of the national unity
- perpetuation and sovereignty of the state.

It is believed that **Union Spirit** is to be cultivated and possessed by everyone of the nation wherever he lives. As Union Spirit is the true patriotism, all nationalities are committed to uphold and safeguard it. Cultural preservation and dissemination of Myanmar culture heritage, the annually performing arts competition are held to be participated by all works of life. Therefore, it calls for the participation and collaboration of the Myanmar people especially young generation to take interest in their own culture and fulfill the following objectives:

- to vitalize patriotism and nationalism
- to preserve and safeguard Myanmar cultural heritage
- to perpetuate genuine Myanmar music, dance and traditional fine arts
- to preserve Myanmar Character
- to nature spiritual development of the youths
- to prevent influence of alien culture
- to strengthen national unity and Union Spirit

Objectives for National Culture Heritage Preservation and Promotion have been laid down for the sake of preservation and dissemination of Myanmar cultural heritage as follows:

- to explore and preserve cultural heritages likes ancient pagodas, stone inscriptions, manuscripts and parabeiks, ancient monuments and its

decorative styles

- to sustain, disseminate and revive Myanmar literature, music, theatrical performances in Myanmar style
- to preserve, sustain and develop Myanmar arts and crafts in Myanmar traditional style
- to wear Myanmar dress in accordance with traditional culture
- to nurture the youths/ younger Myanmar generation to be well behaved bodily and verbally in accordance with the teachings of religions, teachers and parents

6. National level organisation dedicated to safeguard the Intangible Culture Heritage

Ministry of Culture was established on March 1952 and now it is comprised of the office of the Minister for Culture and following three departments.

- Department of Fine Arts
- Department of Archaeology
- Department of Cultural Institutes

The policy of the Ministry of Culture is **“To love and cherish the country and the people by taking pride on own good traditions as well as by preserving, exposing and propagating Myanmar Cultural Heritage.”** To implement the above mentioned policy the following work programmes have been laid down and being carried out.

- to preserve the culture heritage of Myanmar with a view to the emergence of Myanmar style and Culture
- to produce works of fine arts which support the progress of the state and public
- to enable the artists and artistes that works of fine arts are not for entertainment only, but to promote knowledge; to eliminate the idea that "a work of art is for the sake of both the artists and the public"
- to educate the public to be fully imbued with the prevalent ideas
- to help develop the unity, nationalistic spirit and patriotism among the people
- to help the elimination of decadent culture
- to support the promotion of the morale and morality of the public
- to help develop the union spirit in exposing culture
- to make endeavours in promoting the development and standard of culture

Department of Fine Arts

The policy of the Department of Fine Arts is to preserve and promote Myanmar fine arts such as music, Zat performance, painting and sculpture to carry out research Myanmar traditional, songs, dance, music, painting and sculpture and publish those works to provide Zat and Anyeint performances, marionette shows, dance, music and songs at state functions and receptions, to give public performances, to implement cultural exchange programmes and to establish fine arts schools. The objective is to bring to light, preserve and propagate the Myanmar traditional painting, sculpture, dance, marionette and classical Zat performance to new generation artistes. Department of Fine Arts under the Ministry of Culture has laid down the following

worked programmes.

- to study, expose and preserve Myanmar traditional performing arts, drama, plays, anyeint, classical dramas and national races, traditional dance and music
- to expose and preserve ten kinds of Myanmar traditional arts and crafts
- to carry out cultural exchange programmes with foreign countries
- to scrutinize and make efforts for issuing correct traditional Myanmar calendar
- to scrutinize Myanmar fine arts if it is harmony with norms and customs
- to nurture and bring out new generation persons of advanced fine arts through basic painting, sculpture, and theatrical training schools and Universities of Culture

7. Cultural Centres for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage

To carry out its aims and objectives, fostering the human resources for the cultural development and dissemination is one of the vital roles of the Ministry of Culture. Since its establishment the Ministry took responsibilities for opening Cultural Centres for preservation and safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The State School of Music and Drama

(Yangon and Mandalay)

The state school of Music and Drama (Yangon) was first opened in 1952 at Jubilee Hall on the site of Defense Services Museum and later moved to No 131, Kaba-aye Pagoda Road, Bahan Township. The State School of Music and Drama (Mandalay) was first opened in 1952 located at Ashe Pyin quarter, Mandalay. The objectives of the two schools are:

- to maintain, to preserve, to promote Myanmar Traditional Dances, Cultural Dances, Court Dances, Drama, Music and Dances of National Races
- to make research for Myanmar forms of Performing Arts
- to handover the true type of Myanmar Dances, Classical Songs and Music to next becoming generations as National Cultural Heritage

The State School of Fine Arts

(Yangon and Mandalay)

The State School of Fine Arts (Yangon) was opened in 1952 at Jubilee Hall and Shwedagon Pagoda Road Yangon and moved to No. 8, Ko Min Ko Chin Road, Bahan Township, Yangon. The State School of Fine Arts (Mandalay) was opened in 1952 at Ashe Pyin quarter, Mandalay. The objectives of the two schools are:

- to maintain, to preserve, to promote Myanmar Traditional Art and Handicraft
- to handover the Myanmar Fine Arts and visual arts and to turn out good artistes and artists

University of Culture

(Yangon and Mandalay)

University of Culture (Yangon) was established in 1993 and located at Aung Zeya Road, No.26 Quarter, South Dagon Myothit Township, Yangon and University of Culture (Mandalay) was established in 2001, at Shwe Sar Yan Pagoda Road, Ohn Chaw Village, Pathaein-gyi Township, Mandalay.

The Aims and Objectives of the two Universities are:

Aims:

- keeping dynamic patriotism
- strengthening of national unity
- preservation of national culture

Objectives

- to Preserve, promote and disseminate Myanmar Cultural Heritage
- to conduct research and training with the aim of bringing about the progress of Myanmar fine arts and visual arts turning out outstanding artistes and artists
- to contribute to the teaching of traditional cultures and customs of indigenous national races at the universities, institutes, colleges and schools
- to strengthen the spirit of nationalism and patriotism
- to turn out good artistes and artists with high morality and integrity

Degree

B.A (Music / Dramatic Arts / Painting / Sculpture)

B.A (Hons.) (Music/ Dramatic Arts/ Painting/ Sculpture)

Diploma

- Post Graduate Diploma in Museology (P.G.D.M)
- Post Graduate Diploma in Applied Archaeology (P.G.D.A.A)
- Post Graduate Diploma in Music
- Post Graduate Diploma in Dramatic Arts
- Post Graduate Diploma in Painting
- Post Graduate Diploma in Sculpture
- Diploma in Computer Arts (Dip. CA)

Post Graduate Diploma in Museology (P.G.D.M)

The Yangon University of Culture also confers a Post Graduate Diploma in Museology (P.G.D.M) since 2002-2003 Academic Year. The duration of study is one year course. Any University Graduates, interested in Museology can apply for admission.

The main components of the curriculum are-Museum Administration and Management, Collection, Registration and Storing Exhibits Technology, Museum Works of Research, Museum Exhibition Technology, Museum Conservation Technology, Museum Publication and Education.

Post Graduate Diplomas in Music / Dramatic Arts / Painting / Sculpture

The Yangon University of Culture confers a Post Graduate Diploma in Music / Dramatic Arts / Painting and Sculpture. The duration of the course is one year. Any graduates, interested and talented in specialised field can apply for admission.

Field School of Archaeology

Date of Establishment - 2005

Address - Pyay Township, Bago Division, Myanmar

Post Graduate Diploma in Applied Archaeology (P.G.D.A.A)

One year Post Graduate Diploma in Applied Archaeology at the Yangon University of Culture, affiliated with Field School of Archeology. The two basic principles of the curriculum of the Field School are - to reinforce all teaching by infield practice which is an integral part of the Field School's on-going research strategy - to introduce the modern scientific technique as a complement to reinforcing traditional practice and local knowledge. The main components of the curriculum and complementary research strategy are the following:

- Photo interpretation based on satellite imaging and multi-temporal aerial photographs
- Archaeological and topographical reconnaissance of the area.
- Archaeological sciences
- Geo sciences, Field Archaeology and Surveying
- Archaeological Excavation
- Ancient Art and Architecture
- Ancient Art and Iconography
- Museology
- Epigraphy and Numismatology
- Geographic Information System (GIS data base system)
- Preservation of Monuments, Chemical Conservation
- Pre-historic, Proto-historic and Historic Archaeology
- Protection of National Cultural Properties
- Field Training
- Vocational training courses for current and potential staff

Department of Cultural Institute runs museums and libraries through out the country and sub-departments for the preservation and study of the culture of national races. More than 300 libraries are kept at the district and township offices of the Information and Public Relation Department. Moreover mobile library projects for rural people have been implemented. Mobile Libraries have visited more than 500 villages. Myanmar Radio and Television informs and educates and entertain the public. The MRTV is informing and imparting knowledge on activities of safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage of various department enterprises and organisations which are carrying out respective task, under the government.

8. Activities carried out for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage Art Exhibitions and Performing Arts Presentation

With a view to preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage at national level, the Government has been holding annually Myanmar's Traditional Cultural Performing Arts competitions since 1993. The 13th Myanmar Traditional Cultural Performing Arts Competitions will be held according to seven objectives mentioned as before.

The Myanmar Traditional Cultural Performing Arts Competitions are so effective in helping to raise the dignity of the nationalities and cement the united strength of the Union of Myanmar. Hence, all the people should take part in their respective sectors of successful Myanmar Traditional Cultural Performing Arts Competitions which is on a grand scale according to the lofty objectives.

At the Myanmar Traditional Cultural Performing Arts Competitions, students from the University of Culture have taken part and won 374 prizes and 44 students from Music and Drama were awarded prizes.

The Myanmar Traditional Cultural Regatta Festival, The Myanmar Rural Folk Arts Exhibitions, Ten Myanmar Traditional Arts and Crafts Exhibitions and Myawady Anyeint Competitions are organised by the Department of Fine Arts under the guidance of Ministry of Culture.

9. Research Activities

The Department of Fine Arts, University of Culture (Yangon and Mandalay), Department of Anthropology, Department of Archaeology, Department of Geography and Department of History at the Yangon University conduct research on Intangible Cultural Heritage.

10. Publications

Recent Publications of the Ministry of Culture

Recent Publications of the Department of Archeology

- Bagan Inventory (Volume 1) (In Myanmar)
- Bagan Inventory (Volume 1) (In English)
- Ancient Myanmar Cities From Aerial-Photo Interpretation (In Myanmar)
- Art and Architecture of Bagan Stupas and Pagodas (In Myanmar)
- Hagiography of Maha Thera Shin Arahana and an Account of the reconstruction of Shin Arahana's Brick Monastery (In Myanmar)
- Hagiography of Maha Thera Shin Arahana and an Account of the reconstruction of Shin Arahana's Brick Monastery (In English)
- Ancient Myanmar Inscription (Epigraphy) (In Myanmar) (Volume 4)
- Ancient Myanmar Inscription (Epigraphy) (In Myanmar) (Volume 5)
- Records on Restoration of Bagan Monuments (In Myanmar) (Volume 1)
- Records on Restoration of Bagan Monuments (In Myanmar) (Volume 2)
- Records on Restoration of Bagan Monuments (In Myanmar) (Volume 3)
- Records on Restoration of Bagan Monuments (In Myanmar) (Volume 4)
- Records on Restoration of Bagan Ancient Sites and Mounds (In Myanmar)

(Volume 1)

- Inventory of Mandalay and its Environs (In Myanmar)

Recent Publications of Department of Fine Arts

- Mahar Gita (Classical Songs) (in Myanmar)
- Kabyarlut Grade (1) (Myanmar Traditional Basic Dance)(In Myanmar)
- Kabyarlut Grade (2) (Myanmar Traditional Basic Dance)(In Myanmar)
- Myanmar Traditional Musical Instruments (In Myanmar)
- Myanmar Traditional Musical Instruments (In English)
- Shwe Mann Tin Maung Sarsu (1) (In Myanmar)
- Shwe Mann Tin Maung Sarsu (2) (In Myanmar)
- Summary on Conservation of Myanmar Traditional and Culture. (In Myanmar)
- Summary on Conservation of Myanmar Traditional and Culture. (In English)
- Pyathike Pyinnyar (Museology) (In Myanmar)
- Dictionary of Plastic Arts

Recent Publications of Department of Fine Arts

- That-ba-gi-takkama kyan (Myanmar Classical Music) (In Myanmar)
- Law-ka-byu-har Kyan (Customs of Royal Ceremonies) (In Myanmar)
- Brief of the Department of Cultural Institute (In Myanmar)
- Department of Cultural Institute and Cultural Museums of Nationalities in Myanmar (In English)
- The Myanmar Royal Regalia and Household Articles Displayed ((In Myanmar and English)

11. Conclusion

The intangible cultural Heritage expresses part of spiritual and social life of people. It is the source of identities, diversity and creativity. The preservation of Cultural valued systems, the guidance of teaching of Buddha, the ways of living prescribed by Thirty-Right Blessing are the major concern of safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage. The State Peace and Development Council have been laid down the 12 objectives on political economic and social sectors. The council also enacted the "The Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage Region Law" on 10th September 1998. Holding the national level competitions, exhibitions, conducting research activities, establishing cultural centres and publications of books are some of the government mechanisms of safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage. Since there are rapid changes of recent society because of globalization, the safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage is the duty of the whole nation. Overwhelmed by the teaching of Lord Buddha for politeness in word, deed, thought and the way of life guided by the Thirty-eight Blessing of the Mingala Sutta, Myanmar People always avoid every misdeed and embrace deeds of merit.