

**Sub-Regional Experts Meeting in Asia on Intangible Cultural Heritage:
Safeguarding and Inventory-Making Methodologies**
(Bangkok, Thailand, 13-16 December 2005)

**Preservation and Protection of Intangible Cultural Properties: Institutional
and Policy Measures in Korea**

Mr. Kyunghwan Kang
Director
International Affairs Division
Cultural Heritage Administration
Republic of Korea

1. Introduction

Intangible Cultural Heritage Division, Cultural Heritage Administration

Preservation and protection of Korea's intangible cultural properties at institutional and policy levels were first initiated following the enactment of the Cultural Properties Protection Act in 1962. With the designation in 1964 of Jongmyo Jeryeak, the royal ancestral ritual music from the Joseon Dynasty, as Important Intangible Cultural Property No. 1, conservation efforts began to take concrete shape.

After several decades that saw numerous big and small changes and improvements brought to the initial institutional environment for protecting intangible cultural properties, in May 2001, Korea finally reaped the fruit of its efforts, as UNESCO included Jongmyo Jerye and Jongmyo Jeryeak - Important Intangible Cultural Properties No. 56 and No. 1 - among the "Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity." The subsequent inclusion in November 2003 of Pansori Epic Chant (Important Intangible Cultural Property No. 5) among the Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage, marked a veritable turning point for Korea's intangible cultural properties, at present objects of worldwide recognition.

As of November 2005, Korea counts, 3 intangible heritages, including the Gangneung Danoje Festival that was designated as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, 7 world heritages and 4 documentary heritages, while there are currently 8 world heritages and 4 intangible heritages on tentative lists.

2. Institutional and Policy Measures for Preservation and Protection of Intangible Cultural Properties

Institutional and policy measures for preserving and promoting intangible cultural properties in Korea have the Cultural Properties Protection Act as their legal grounding.

The Cultural Properties Protection Act defines intangible cultural property as cultural manifestations of intangible nature with high historical and artistic significance, such as theatrical and musical performing arts, and crafts and skills. The act, furthermore, distinguishes intangible cultural properties into two different types: important intangible cultural properties designated by the state and municipal or provincial intangible cultural properties designated by local governments.

As for important intangible cultural properties, its categories, numbering 31 in 1964, rose to 110 by 2005, tripling the initial number.

Institutional and policy measures for preserving and protecting intangible cultural properties implemented in accordance with the Cultural Properties Protection Act fall into five large categories: protection by designation, support toward transmission of traditions and practices, assistance toward performance and exhibition hosting, support for creating spaces devoted to educational activities for transmission of heritages, and documentation preservation.

A. Protection by Designation

The overriding principle, for all activities involved in protecting and managing cultural properties and reviving them as living culture, is preserving these heritages in their original forms.

However, in the case of intangible cultural properties, due to their very nature, existing and transmitted in oral forms, they are especially vulnerable and endangered in today's fast-evolving, industrialized and urbanized society. Ensuring their continuity through time is accordingly more particularly challenging and requires active interventions.

Therefore, the state and local governments select and designate categories of intangible cultural properties comparatively more severely threatened than others by changing social environments, and provide support for transmission activities by holders and transmitters of skills and arts to guarantee the continuity of traditions and the cultural identity of the nation.

The following are the summary statistics on important intangible cultural properties protected by the state as of end of September 2005:

<Holders and Transmitters of Skills, Techniques and Arts>

		Art and Artistry			Skills and Craftsmanship (Individuals)	Total
		Individuals	Groups	Subtotal		
Designated Categories		16	47 (56 Groups)	63	47	110
Transmitters/ Trainees	Intangible cultural property holders (1)	33	101	134	63	197
	Instruction assistants(2)	56	192	248	58	306
	Trainees(3)	967	1,454	2,421	316	2,737
	Training fellows on scholarship(4)	22	-	22	80	102
Total (1+2+3+4)		1,072	1,794	2,866	484	3,350

<Holders and Transmitters by Category>

	Art and Artistry					Skills and Craftsmanship		Total
	Music	Dance	Theater	Festive Events and Rites	Martial Arts	Crafts	Food	
Designated Categories	17	7	14	24	1	45	2	110
Holder Organization	13	4	13	26	-	-	-	56
Holders	45	12	35	41	1	61	2	197
Instruction Assistants(2)	92	20	71	64	1	54	4	306
Transmitters/ Trainees	1,146	453	367	431	24	299	17	2,737
Training fellows on scholarship (4)	16	-	4	2	-	80	-	102
Total (1+2+3+4)	1,299	485	477	538	26	494	23	3,342

B. Support toward Transmission Activities

Currently, the government provides a monthly subsidy intended as a means to promote and facilitate transmission activities of intangible cultural properties, to individuals and entities that are holders and transmitters of cultural properties, and to instruction assistants in the amount of 1 million won (US \$ 851) and 400,000 won (US \$ 340), respectively.

In addition to this intangible cultural properties transmission subsidy, the state also grants an additional monthly stipend amounting to 2 million won (US \$ 1,720) to holders in especially endangered categories, and purchases their works, when the category is craftsmanship, to ensure the survival of tradition. Also, stipends in amounts of 3 to 5 million won (US \$ 2,553 – 2,816) are issued to property holders under livelihood-threatening economic hardship.

Meanwhile, the government has implemented various other support systems, designed to ensure economic stability among property transmitters, and raise their morale and instill pride in them as well. Property holders, who find themselves ill and need hospitalization, receive a special cash contribution from the government as a token of support. Property holders and their families are provided with free medical insurance. The state also contributes toward funeral costs upon the death of intangible cultural property holders.

C. Performance and Exhibition Support

To give public exposure to the skills and arts of intangible cultural property holders and holding organizations, and to showcase Korea's traditional culture to worldwide audience, the government offers support for hosting public events and overseas performances and exhibitions. The government also makes cash contributions toward event expenses for tradition-holding individuals or organizations, participating in international events held in Korea or regional festivals organized by local governments.

In the meantime, 'Intangible Cultural Property Performances On-Call,' a program in which tradition holders visit and perform in remote islands or out-of-the-way mountainous regions,

orphanages, nursing homes or other culturally-deprived regions and milieus due to regional conditions or economic uncertainty, is eliciting highly enthusiastic responses.

Other programs implemented to promote transmission of intangible heritage include 'Important Cultural Property Holder Exhibition,' hosted by the government (Cultural Heritage Administration) to awaken public interest and affection in traditional crafts and to create sales opportunities for craftsmen, and 'Traditional Craft Contest,' open to general craft artists, sponsored by the government.

D. Support for Creation of Educational Facilities for Transmission Activities

Ensuring the survival of intangible cultural properties through time requires more than simple inclusion of a skill, practice or art among protected categories, or protective measures for tradition holders and transmitters. Providing a space for their activities to thrive is vital to guarantee effective transfer of these traditions to future generations.

Accordingly, since 1974 the government has been offering support toward the construction of training facilities to give a setting to transmission activities, in collaboration with local governments.

These facilities not only serve as an educational space to train future holders of intangible cultural properties, but also as a public cultural and arts space where performances and previews are staged for area residents, who, through this means, can initiate themselves to these traditional art forms.

The national government and local self-governments have jointly sponsored the construction of 84 total such facilities by 2004, investing 77 billion won.

E. Preservation of Intangible Cultural Properties Documentation

The continuity of intangible cultural properties is endangered upon the demise of their holders, whether due to advanced age or illness. Therefore, the government documents the traditions held by these individuals by recording their performances in video or audio formats or in book form during their most productive periods to preserve them as permanent archives.

The results of documenting activities started in 1965 have been compiled and published, as of end of 2004, into 70 videos, 37 audio records and 70 publications. Production of documentary materials on a continual basis, tackling newly-designated categories, completing documentation on categories yet to be finished and duplicating or re-mastering archives in deteriorated condition are currently under way.

3. Conclusion

The four decade-long history of institutional and policy-level protection of intangible cultural properties in Korea has been fraught with numerous challenges. In spite of numerous adversities, both of political and economic natures, since its official debut in 1962, successive changes and improvements have finally brought about a new, more hopeful era in the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage.

However, our work is far from done. There are still areas of improvement to be urgently addressed. Among the critical pending issues are dealing with the financial burden weighing on the government; need for a more rational classification system and likewise rational support and management methods; finding ways to effectively manage categories requiring special interventions to stimulate transmission activities; and beefing up activities in preservation and transmission and strengthening post-intervention evaluation system.

Protective measures for intangible cultural properties are principally geared toward cultural forms that are unable to sustain an autonomous growth, as do popular music or mainstream theatrical arts. Their preservation therefore heavily relies on governmental financial support. Financial burdens from cultural properties protection needs grow only weightier when quality of life improves, as this entails a larger demand for cultural enjoyment. Accordingly, in order to effectively carry out preservation activities with a limited budget, a greater degree of efficiency must be introduced to support and management operations. This may be achieved by overhauling or reshuffling the cultural properties classification system with the long-term consequences in mind. Furthermore, true to the principal purpose consisting in protecting traditional culture forms, unable to provide for their continued existence, levels of support and management toward popular art categories that are capable of sustaining autonomous growth may be reduced in favor of those in more adverse situations.

Meanwhile, to guarantee the continued transmission process of traditional culture forms, transmission status of designated cultural property categories must be monitored on a regular basis. Transmissions must be faithful to original forms, and any deviation or alteration should be corrected so as to restore the intangible cultural properties to their authentic aspects.

Finally, this commitment by the government to improving institutional and policy measures must be also accompanied by an autonomous will, on behalf of holders and transmitters of intangible cultural properties, to make the most of the government's financial assistance by developing new cultural products and seeking new creativity so as to ensure the survival of the traditions entrusted in them.