COUNTRY REPORT: CHINA

Mechanism of Communities for Safeguarding of ICH

Li Xinfeng
Researcher
Chinese Academy of Arts

1. Governmental System of Chinese Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Role of Central Government

In order to guarantee the scientific and orderly development of Chinese safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage all over the country, special attention is given by Chinese government on the establishment of safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage leading organizations. Chinese safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage is mainly led by the government and administrated by Ministry of Culture of P.R.China.

At the start of 2003, Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Finance combined State Ethnic Affairs Commission and China Federation of Literary and Art Circles launched the China National and Folk Culture Safeguarding Project. This project plans to set up the comparatively completed safeguarding system of intangible cultural heritage from 2003 to 2020 basically, turning safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage into scientificalization, normalization and legaliztion. Currently, segmental achievements have been made by 40 national-level pilot safeguarding projects. Census work is being carried out in each area actively and steadily. The work on database construction of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding has almost been completed.

In order to further exert governmental leading role, Chinese government setups effective leading system of safeguarding in 2005, namely, Ministry Level Joint Conference System of Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. This ministry level joint conference system is led by Ministry of Culture and consists of nine ministries or commissions, such as: Ministry of Culture, National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Education, State Ethnic Affairs Commission, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Construction, China National Tourism Administration, State Administration for Religious Affairs of P.R.China and State Administration of Cultural Heritage. The aim of establishing this system is to coordinate and resolve the key problems existed in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. The main responsibilities are as follows: draft guidelines and policies of safeguarding; examine and approve the safeguarding layout of intangible cultural heritage; coordinate and resolve key affairs related with safeguarding; look through the list of Directory of National Level Intangible Cultural Heritage Masterpiece; report to the State Council for approval and issuance.

As the national level professional organization of Chinese intangible cultural heritage safeguarding, China Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Centre was founded in Chinese Academy of Arts in September 2006 after being approved by Chinese Government, which undertaking detailed works of nation-wide intangible-cultural-heritage safeguarding, implementing policy consultancy on intangible cultural heritage safeguarding; organizing nation wide census work; guiding the execution of safeguarding plan; carrying out theoretical research of intangible cultural heritage; arranging academic, exhibition and public benefits event, exchange,
recommend and promote achievements and experiences of safeguarding works; organizing and carrying out the publication of research results and personnel training.

In order to carry out safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage scientifically and efficiently, special attention is given on the building of **Directory System of Intangible Cultural Heritage Masterpiece** by Chinese government, it clearly requires to make the examining and approving standard, and set up national, provincial, municipal and town level four-level of intangible cultural heritage masterpiece directory system. Therefore, Chinese government issued the **Interim Administrative Method for Application and Assess of National Level Intangible Cultural Heritage Masterpiece** in 2005. On May 20, 2006, the State Council issued the first batch of national level intangible cultural heritage directory projects, altogether 518 items and involve with 758 application regions or units. In October of the same year, the Ministry of Culture issued the **Interim Administrative Method for the Safeguarding and Administration of National Level Intangible Cultural Heritage** in the form of minister order.

Intangible cultural heritage is a kind of live culture, in which man behaves as its carrier. Strengthening the safeguarding work on intangible cultural heritage representative transmitter is the key part in intangible cultural heritage safeguarding. Chinese government pays great attention to the establishment of transmitter safeguarding rules, Ministry of Culture drafted **Cognizance and Administration Method for Representative Transmitter of National Level Intangible Cultural Heritage Project** (draft), which regulated the cognizance standard, rights, obligations and subsidy of representative transmitter of national level directory’s project. In June 2006, Ministry of Culture issued the first batch of 226 national level intangible cultural heritage project representative transmitters, altogether five categories including folk literature, acrobatics and athletics, folk arts, traditional handcraft arts and traditional medicine. Its social effect is extensive.

In order to normalize and strengthen the administration on national intangible cultural heritage safeguarding special fund, improving the benefits of capital utilization, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Culture co-issued the **Interim Administration Method of National Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Special Fund** in 2006. In the respect of capital, the nation invested a special fund of RMB 236 million Yuan for intangible cultural heritage safeguarding from 2002 till now. Central Finance provided more than RMB 40 million Yuan from 2003 till now; Chinese Ethnic and Folk Cultural safeguarding project also got a special fund of RMB 4 million Yuan from intermediate superior organization, and this kind of support is ongoing and increasing.

In December 2005, the State Council made the decision of setting up China **“Cultural Heritage Day”** and regulated that from 2006 on, the second Saturday of June in each year is China’s **“Cultural Heritage Day”**. The setup of Cultural Heritage Day is playing an important role in improving self-awareness and passion of safeguarding cultural heritage by the whole nationality.

**The Role of Local Governments**

Chinese local authorities are playing an important role in China Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding process.

Taking the system of central government's safeguarding of intangible cultural-heritage work ministry level joint conference for example, local governments established the joint conference system of safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage work in provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities respectively.

After the nation's establishment of China Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Centre in
2006, it occurred in provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities all over China, thus the basic organization of safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage work had been preliminarily set up. And the Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Centre had become the main working agency of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding system.

For the administration of financial affairs, the governments of each province, autonomous region, municipality, and their cities (autonomous states and prefectures), districts (autonomous countries, townships and regions) allocated special funds to the local safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage work in consort with their cultural construction. Some local governments issued the provincial *Interim Administration Method for Special Funds Management of the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Some provinces even list the funds of safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage work in their annual provincial financial budget.

In order to fulfill the construction of the four-level directory system of intangible cultural heritage's masterpieces in the nation, provinces, cities and districts; after the issuance of the *Interim Administration Method for Application and Assess of National Level Intangible Cultural Heritage Masterpieces*, then, most provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities published the provincial method or implementation advice for application and assess of intangible cultural heritage masterpieces.

In the respect of the legislative construction of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding, China has studied out the draft of the Law of the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding, and it'll turn into NPC's legislative procedures. While in the local law of each province, autonomous region, and municipality; eight provinces and regions had published the relevant safeguarding ordinances. In addition, some provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities are planning and deliberating the relevant laws and regulations.

2. Regional System of China’s Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding

**Regional Role**

China’s intangible-cultural-heritage safeguarding starts from the characteristic of actual existing situation and ecologic environment of intangible cultural heritage brings the region’s active role in intangible cultural heritage safeguarding into full play. Constructing cultural ecological protection area, achieving the integral safeguarding of cultural ecology is one of the main measures on this aspect.

Cultural ecological protection area refers to a special area that tangible cultural heritage (ancient architectural structures, historical streets and towns, traditional residences and historical relics and so on) and intangible cultural heritage (verbal legend and statement, traditional performance arts, folk custom, etiquette, festival, traditional handicrafts arts) coexists, closely related with living and production, and an ecological environment that harmoniously coexists with natural environment, economic environment and social environment. In Culture Development Outline of National “the Eleventh Five-Year Project”, it put forward, during “the Eleventh Five-Year Project”, China will set up 10 national level ethnic and folk cultural ecological safeguarding areas, for areas that with rich and intensive intangible cultural heritage contents, integral safeguarding will be practiced. On June 9, 2007, Ministry of Culture ratified the establishment of Minnan Ecologic Protection Experimental Area; this is the first national-level cultural ecologic safeguarding area in China. The experimental area including three places in the south of Fujian Province - Quanzhou, Zhangzhou and Xiamen, birthplace and conservation place of Minnan culture. By the year of 2020, a comparatively completed safeguarding system of Minnan culture ecologic safeguarding
area will be primarily set up.

Currently, lots of regions are actively considering to setup cultural ecologic safeguarding area according to local nationality and geographical features. Such as Anhui province and Huangshan city, based on old-line Huizhou culture, much attention is given to the establishment of Huizhou cultural ecologic safeguarding area, and Huizhou cultural ecologic safeguarding special fund is also founded, *Outline Plan of Huizhou Cultural Ecologic Safeguarding Area* they made has passed the expert appraisal and argumentation, and is now applying the first batch of national level cultural ecologic safeguarding area for Huizhou Cultural Ecologic Safeguarding Area. Xiangxi Miao nationality and Tujia nationality autonomous state in Hunan province composed *A Report on Establishing National Level Ecologic Safeguarding Area*; Guangxi Zhuang Nationality Autonomous Region made *Outline Plan of China Red Water River Nationality Cultural Ecologic Safeguarding Area. Interim Administration Method on Naming and Administering of National Level Ecologic Protection Area* (exposure draft) has been drafted by Ministry of Culture, and has been submitted to all walks of life to discuss; it will be issued after modification and approval.

Cooperation with other organization, such as: local governments and nongovernmental organizations

Mainly led by government, the safeguarding of Chinese intangible cultural heritage achieved extensive engagement and active practice. Among which, some social groups, scientific research organizations, universities and some other nongovernmental organizations are playing an important role in intangible cultural heritage safeguarding. Chinese Academy of Arts is the highest academic organization subordinated to the Ministry of Culture; this organization plays an outstanding role in the respect of China Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding and Research. First, Second and Third batch of human verbal and intangible cultural heritage masterpiece submitted to the UNESCO by China has achieved a great success, and the work is mainly carried out by Chinese Academy of Arts. In recent years, Chinese Academy of Arts calls on one large scale international academic seminar or international academic forum titled with intangible cultural heritage safeguarding each year, the impact is extensive. Researchers of Chinese Academy of Arts actively getting themselves involved in the safeguarding and research work of intangible cultural heritage, large quantity of relevant academic research achievements has been published and released, such as *Outline Introduction to Intangible Cultural Heritage* composed by Wang Wenzhang, *Census Manual of China Intangible Cultural Heritage* composed by Chinese Academy of Arts, *China Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding* magazine (four issues have been released) mainly sponsored by Chinese Academy of Arts.

As the mass group of Chinese folk arts worker, China Folk Artists Association of China Literature and Arts League has conducted lots of beneficial work on excavation, editing, safeguarding and research on Chinese folk culture, and outstanding progress has been made. This association advocated and sponsored “Chinese Folk Cultural Heritage Salvaging Project” in 2002; active role has been played in the salvage and safeguarding of Chinese extinct folk cultural heritage. Furthermore, there are many scientific and research organizations, social groups, universities getting involved in the safeguarding and research of intangible cultural heritage in diverse forms, great progress also has been made. For example, Beijing University Sino-foreign Woman Problem Research Center was funded by American Ford Foundation, undertaking a project of “Research and Exhibition of Chinese Woman Folk Arts”, they mobilized more than a hundred university students, graduates and doctors all over the country as visitors to carry out onsite interview, recording, editing to eighty female folk artists, finally *My Folk Arts World—Eighty Women's Life Statement* was composed, the book was published by Beijing University Publishing House, the
social feedback on it is very good.

In order to improve the self-awareness and scientific features of intangible-cultural-heritage safeguarding work, Chinese government pays attention to the role exerting of experts. For instance, during the application of “Human Verbal and Intangible Cultural Heritage Masterpiece”, an expert commission on recommendation and assess of application was established. In order to improve the decision making level of governmental intangible cultural heritage safeguarding work, the Ministry of Culture approved the establishment of National Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Work Expert Commission in July 2006, which operates as the professional consultancy and brainpower organization of Chinese governmental intangible-cultural-heritage safeguarding work. The safeguarding of Chinese intangible cultural heritage also brings the social force into play; intangible cultural heritage transmitting and safeguarding activities with characteristics is arranged at the villages and towns that with rich intangible cultural heritage. 412 villages or towns all over the country have been entitled with “Hometown of Chinese Folk Arts”, “Hometown of Chinese Special Arts” since 1988, among which including Hometown of Kite, Hometown of Paper Cutting, Hometown of Yangko, Hometown of Bamboo Articles, Hometown of Waistdrum and Hometown of Puppet and so on.