

# Report and Case-Study on the Course

*The Conservation of Collections  
and Intangible Heritage  
Brunei March 13 - 27, 2011*

Kyaw Myo Ko (Myanmar)

## **Introduction and Context**

A two week international training course for the 'Conservation of Collections and Intangible Heritage' was organized by the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SEAMEO-SPAFA), and the Brunei Museum Department (Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Brunei) as well as the Getty Foundation from March 13-27, 2011 in the National Archives building of Brunei Darussalam.

## **Course Description**

During the opening ceremony, the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports Pehin Orang Kaya Pekerma Laila Diraja Dato Paduka Hj Hazair Hj Abdullah highlighted the importance of culture in unifying and creating understanding among people, which can also strengthen the regional and international cooperation by creating mutual respect and tolerance. He said "However the challenges faced in preserving cultural heritage, which is the soul of the nation, among others, originate from the lack of appreciation of local culture, which compounds our own efforts to enhance cross-cultural understanding among nations."

He also mentioned the collective responsibility for the preservation, protection and promotion of cultural activities falls to the youth and educational institutions, which disseminate local cultural values.

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The purpose of this course is to establish mechanisms for sharing knowledge, methods and approaches for the management of heritage collections and intangible heritage among the aforementioned professionals in Southeast Asia. With that aim 27 participants took part in the programme including those from the host country Brunei along with those from Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Additionally, the course addressed and focused on exploring sustainable practices for strengthening the role of tangible and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as a resource for social cohesion, inter-cultural dialogue and sustainable cultural tourism programmes.

The course enhanced the capacity of the participants to establish inter-cultural collaborative activities between institutions in their respective countries to bring about effective strategies for the integrated conservation of tangible and the safeguarding of intangible heritage.

Mr. Masanori Nagaoka as one of facilitators of the training and Head of UNESCO's Culture Unit in Jakarta, introduced the participants to the 2003 ICH Convention and its Operational Directives over the first two days. Mr Nagaoka particularly focused on clarifying the nature of the Convention, the reason why it should be ratified, guidance in solving problems in implementing the Convention, sharing past and on-going experiences of safeguarding of intangible culture heritage, collective reflection on experiences and challenges in safeguarding ICH, details of the essential features of inventorying under the Convention, community-based inventorying, clarification on how inventorying contributes to safeguarding, and practical technical skills in inventory-making.

During the course, he encouraged the participants to promote the implementation of the 2003 Convention with a view towards strengthening the safeguarding measures of ICH in the Asia-pacific region, through international cooperation between States within the context of the 2003 Convention.

### **Course Summary**

This superb 14 day course provide the participants an in-depth training and multifaceted experience in all aspects of intangible culture heritage preservation. There was enlightening presentations by representatives of UNESCO, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation Regional Center for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SEAMEO-SPAFA), and International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property ICCROM. Additionally, the participants personally learned the necessary skills related to intangible culture heritage preservation through a variety of workshops, field trips, and group activities. A detailed description of the numerous course activities follows the References in the Appendix.

Representatives from the Brunei Museum Department, SPAFA, ICCROM, COLLASIA 2010, 2003 Intangible Culture Heritage Convention of UNESCO provided the introduction to the course and commenced a "pair introduction" activity for participants to become acquainted.

### Presentations

- Leadership in Conservation Education, Object significance, Documentation, Preserving Traditional Knowledge for the Future (Documenting and managing ICH) by Dr. Ana Labrador, Associate Researcher (National Museum of The Philippines)
- UNESCO and Safeguarding Intangible Heritage by Masanori Nagaoka (UNESCO representative)
- National Museum of Philippine and ICH by Jeremy Barns, Director
- UNESCO's World Memory Programme by Dr. M.R. Rujaya Abhakorn, Director of SEAMEO-SPAFA
- World values Ingle hart Values Map, Program Cycle Lecture by Kevin Kettle, Project Development Officer of Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation Regional Center for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SEAMEO-SPAFA)
- Climate Change and Intangible Culture Heritage, Cultural mapping: The Case of Thailand, Working with Communities in Heritage Management in Phrae, Thailand by Dr Patcharawee Tunprawwat (Jay), (SEAMEO-SPAFA)



Figure 1. Documentation Activity above and a Performance below



- Objects handling, Course Planning by Katriina Simila, Project Manager for the International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM)

### Workshops

- Leadership in Conservation Education “How do we learn?”; Activities during site visits, Modes of Learning; Task Analysis; How to store and retrieve items (digital and analog recording); Documenting and collecting; Presentation on the making of a course outline (divided into as courses for tourism and researchers/curators) by Katriina Simila, Project Manager of ICCROM
- Challenges and Expectations; Review of the ICH definition; Perceptions and Assumptions about others; SWOTARA; Personal weaknesses; Do you think that the values you have today as the same as your grandparents? by Kevin Kettle, Project Development Officer of SEAMEO-SPAFA

### Museum and Site Visits

Brunei Museum, Malay Technology Museum, Tasek Merimbun Heritage Park, Brunei Royal Regalia Museum, Boat ride to “Kampung Ayer” - a traditional water village, the old English house of Brunei, and a house of traditional textile handicrafts



Figure 2. Ethnic Dress of Borneo left and Crafting Demonstration

### A Balance of Theory and Practice

The performance of the course’s teams met the participant’s expectations by providing the participants with tools for assessing the material characteristic of the collections in their care, as well as for tracking the ways in which the material heritage is linked with the essence and identity of the manifestations of intangible heritage. Pg Anak Hj Aminuddin Halim Shah Pg Anak Al-Haj, one of the participants from Brunei and a culture officer at its Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport said, “We realized what changes in the environment that have a strong impact on our community and our collections.” We now easily see how sacred and ritual objects are viewed as being connected to intangible cultural heritage along with traditional crafts and technologies and the knowledge and skills they require. At the venue of the Brunei National Archives, Director General of the Brunei Museum, Bantong Antaran presented a certificate of completion to all the participants.

### Critical Evaluation Beyond the Course

Katriina Simila the Project Manager at ICCROM, remarked that different institutions such as local museums, central museums and other kinds of specialized institutions should work together to build linkages among different

culture and art stakeholders. She also said “the communities doesn’t come to the collection, they don’t know the specialists who work with the dance master, the craft masters and don’t have any link to museums people. And the museum people don’t have links with the craft specialists.”

The workshop also questioned and touched on some intangible heritage which is disadvantaged or not practical anymore due to hygiene reasons or other social issues in some communities where it continues.

In the case of traditional craftsmanship the focus should not be on just the craft products themselves and their community, but on the skills and knowledge that are crucial for their ongoing production.

Yet finding strategies to identify and safeguarding the intangibles like memories, relationships, social practices, ideas, skills, knowledge, and shared histories is challenging.

But for me, a cultural worker from Mandalay, this city culture center of Myanmar and cultural continuity is the context in which we ask these questions and consider these issues. For example, to be effective, we in the private sector can initiate a similar culture heritage related course/seminar within the local community first, then to expand and exchange with others at the regional and international levels.

### Conclusion

I now realized how to nominate items to be inscribed on the Intangible Masterpieces list and understand its benefits. But in Myanmar this list is not yet extensive. And what about all the historic and even archaeological materials in Myanmar? To what extent can we hope to recover intangible data in Myanmar, and what are the best approaches for this goal from the private sector?

Methodologies from the course ‘Conservation of Collections and Intangible Heritage’ were wide ranging – from the anthropological (such as participant observation, interviews, and documentation by film, photography, and field notes); to the sociological (analyzing how individuals and groups develop and participate in social and cultural relationships, and mapping relationships that occur simultaneously between people, things, technologies, and ideas), from historic preservation (such as measured drawings and architectural design analysis), to community development work (such as traditional artists community and ethnic groups), and even to performances such as Myanmar traditional puppetry, Myanmar Traditional Orchestra and others.

In my last group we defined “Intangible Culture Heritage” as follows:

“INTANGIBLE CULTURE HERITAGE IS THE EVER-MOVING CONSTANTLY RECREATED TRADITION AND LIVES AND LIVING EXPRESSION OF A COMMUNITY”

## References

Power Point of UNESCO and Safeguarding Intangible Heritage by Mr. Masanori Nagaoka (UNESCO representative).

Brunei Can Lead Heritage-saving Efforts by Sally Piri (THE BRUNEI TIMES PRESS, Saturday, March 26, 2011).

“International Course on Conserving Collections concludes” by Achong Tanjong.

Lecture Notes for ‘Conservation of Collections and Intangible Heritage’ by Kyaw Myo Ko.

## Appendix - A Detailed List of Group Discussions and Activities

- Definitions and discussion by groups about the terms: culture, conservation, and intangible cultural heritage
- Culture mapping of Brunei’s heritage: ethnic groups, performing arts, craftsmanship, beliefs, and food.
- Documentation activity - For all during their visits to the handicraft and traditional textile center
- Brunei’s traditional board game by Suriyani Binti, Brunei Museum
- Perceptions and Assumptions About Others - An exercise of “how people see you”, a “no talk” exercise-lining up participants according to age, and judgments of people with an awareness of the same as we judge objects
- Group illustration activity - “everyday mindscapes”
- Discussion group on traditional cultural practices which are no longer observed
- Individual activity concerning three personal weaknesses
- Group activity on object significance: Participants divided into groups for the role of supporting different institutions (King Leo Museum, The British Museum, a university, a national museum, and national archives) During site visits participants would go around the museum, discuss the intangible aspects of the objects and select one exhibit or object and list as many intangible aspects as possible. Take some pictures to record the object for sharing your ideas during the group discussion session.
- Discussion on defining “stakeholder” with individual translation for each country
- Activity on “Stakeholder Analysis” by placing the key primary and secondary levels of influence and importance
- Activity concerning the “Program Cycle” and the order of the processes
- Discussions for “SWOTARA” (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats, Action, Risk, and assumptions)
- Group activity on “Task Analysis” - How to cook rice? How to wash the brush?
- Documentation activity - illustration of the object for every individual i.e. from every point of view
- Discussion on the visit to the Royal Regalia Museum of Brunei and its exhibition of inherited traditions from many generations and the intangible culture heritage aspects of each object as selected by each group

- Discussion on the visit to the Tasek Merimbun Heritage Park Complex regarding its community-based intangible culture heritage by interviewing local experts i.e. musicians, performers and craft persons
- Presentation and analysis of the Tasek Merimbun's documentation: The interviews, photos, video, audio, observation, participation, drawing, writing, sound recording, buying products, musical annotation
- Documentation and presentation on the groups visit to the traditional textile handicraft house
- Story telling and performing by the groups (These stories themselves are an intangible culture heritage)
- Discussion and presentation on “course planning” as curators, as researchers, and the tourism industry
- Discussion on the issues of climate change from the perspective of ones respective country
- Re-defining the definition of intangible culture heritage as a summary activity of the course by groups
- Final discussion and sharing of the reports from the group activities
- Ideas for the future and the next step – (5 small ideas to be implemented now, 3 medium ideas for within a year, and one big idea for the COLLASIA)

**Films** (with discussion: The importance of film & documentation, film as a reference, and film clubs)

- Kampung Ayer - A traditional water village in Brunei
- Simon Warrack's documentary on the conservation of Ta Reach in Angkor Cambodia