

Jeju Haenyeo's Diving as the Intangible Cultural Heritage:

Sustainable Development and Ecofemism

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This paper

- examines whether Jeju haenyeo's knowledge, skills, and practices are eligible to be the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) defined in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted by UNESCO in 2003.
- elucidates the reason why the intangible cultural heritage of Jeju haenyeo is to be safeguarded by the Convention.
- suggests what haenyeo, scholars, and communities do to safeguard haenyeo's culture.

The definition of the ICH by the Convention

- The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith -
- that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.
- Traditional and living: Living heritage
(cf. authenticity; museum; tangible cultural heritage; World Heritage)

The domains of the ICH by the Convention

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage
- Performing arts (such as traditional music, dance and theatre)
- Social practices, rituals and festive events
- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- Traditional craftsmanship

The ICH to be safeguarded by the Convention

- is transmitted from generation to generation;
- is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their

- environment, their interaction with nature, and their history;
- provides communities and groups with a sense of identity and continuity;
- promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity;
- is compatible with international human rights instruments;
- complies with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, and of sustainable development.

Haenyeo's work

- In Jeju Island live women divers called haenyeo, who are known for their astounding capacity to hold their breath while underwater.
- Jeju haenyeo dive as deep as 40 feet without the aid of an air tank to catch shellfish and seaweed underwater in one-minute dives for three to eight hours at a stretch.
- In the 1960s, it was natural for girls in a coastal village to begin diving in shallow water at the age of 11 or 12 and to think of diving as a lifelong profession.
- The fact that diving is a lifelong profession is unique to Jeju haenyeo.

Haenyeo's work

- Most haenyeo don't peak in their diving skills until their 40s or 50s, because they require a long experience and extensive knowledge of the reef.
- One young Jeju haenyeo says, "We learn diving through experience. It requires both intelligence and a desire to win. A desire to get the biggest catch implies not only competition against others, but also competition against oneself."
- Even though diving is very hard, the haenyeo continue to dive because of higher income.

Haenyeo's knowledge, skills, and practices

- The haenyeo must be self-reliant. Underwater, her surroundings are in ceaseless motion. She must continuously adjust her movements to irregular waves, surges, and changes in buoyancy and visibility.
- She must draw on her knowledge of reef topography and her experience at estimating where the shellfish may be resting today.
- She must gauge her distance from the surface of the water against the relentless decline of oxygen in her lungs.
- Like an athlete, a haenyeo is a specialist in the live-ware of the human body.

Haenyeo's knowledge, skills, and practices

- fit the definition and the domains of the intangible cultural heritage in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the

Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted by UNESCO in 2003.

- must be safeguarded because new haenyeo are not being recruited and their practices without the aid of an air tank comply with the requirements of sustainable development.

Decrease in the number of Jeju haenyeo

- In 1965, when their numbers were at the peak, there were over 23,000, roughly 21 percent of the total population of women over age 15, and 79 percent of all people engaged in fishery.
- The number of Jeju haenyeo had declined sharply from 1965 to 1975: The number in 1975 was a third of that in 1965.
- In 2000, there were 5,789 women divers on Jeju Island and about 78% of them were over 50 years old.

The number of Jeju haenyeo by year

The number of Jeju haenyeo by age

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- In the 1970s, foam-rubber wet suits replaced crude, cold cotton bathing suits. The patterns of diving work changed most sharply with the change of swimsuits.
- In 1968, when the haenyeo wore cotton bathing suits, they worked an average of one hour a day during winter and for 3 hours a day during summer.
- In 1992, they worked for 3 hours a day in winter and for 8 hours a day in summer without a break.

Jeju haenyeo in the 1960s

Jeju haenyeo in the 1990s

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- Long hours without food and rest often resulted in a chronic illness that women divers became prone to – the jamsu-byeong, which may consist of stomach disease, joint pains, or headaches.
- The introduction of modern technology to dive fishery could endanger the haenyeo's health, as well as affect yields. This happens when technology does not serve the micro-ecology of the local sea territory and fails to control human greed.
- Sometimes the best technology is a human body well fitted to its surroundings.

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- The haenyeo's work is a good example for education for sustainable development.

- At the individual level, human greed for a big catch is counterbalanced by the haenyeo's ability to remain underwater without the aid of equipment.
- At the community level, the local fishery cooperative controls diving and non-diving days, regulates working hours and the size of catch, and outlaws technologies other than wetsuits, flippers, glass face masks, and weights.

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- The haenyeo must cut weeds and put small rocks underwater. The rocks are a good niche for abalone and top shells, while the cut of weeds allows the seaweeds to grow better.
- The haenyeo till their sea territory the way they till their upland farms for crops and vegetables. This is why they call the sea their underwater-upland.

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- In these times of post-industrial societies and high technology, free divers in dive fishery try to survive. They are like food gatherers during the hunting-gathering period of human society.
- Obviously, they serve to preserve underwater surroundings, conserve resources, and promote sustainability.
- However, with their numbers declining, the haenyeo face challenges. The work of 20 women divers can now be done by one diver with scuba equipment in a single day.

Safeguarding by the Convention

- means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage,
- including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage.
- Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity will have a major role in ensuring better visibility of the intangible cultural heritage, in increasing awareness of its significance and also in encouraging dialogue that respects cultural diversity.

The identification and definition of the ICH should be established by

- requiring proper identification of communities/ groups and their representatives,
- ensuring that only ICH that is recognized by communities and groups is inventoried, or proposed for listing,

- ensuring that the permission of communities and groups is obtained for inventorying,
- ensuring the free, prior and informed consent of communities and groups for nominating their ICH for the lists of the Convention, e.g. in a "Memorandum of Understanding".

The process for inscription on the Representative List

- is to be linked to the elaboration of safeguarding plans, based on best practices, and elaborated with strong participation by the tradition bearers.
- Since practitioners best understand the transmission processes of their ICH, the community should be provided with the means to elaborate safeguarding measures aiming at maintaining or improving their capacity of transmitting their ICH, rather than having plans elaborated by external experts in the first place.

Suggestions

- Scholars seem to regard Jeju haenyeo as the symbol of Jeju culture and identify their diving as the cultural heritage, rather than as an economic activity.
- We must know whether Jeju haenyeo recognize their diving as part of their cultural heritage or simply as hard labor;
- whether Jeju haenyeo want their diving work to be transmitted to next generation;
- whether new generation is willing to dive if haenyeo's diving is recognized as the cultural heritage, rather than as hard labor or a mean job.