

Critical Reflections on Safeguarding Culture: The Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museums Field School in Lamphun, Thailand

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Abstract

This article examines the educational approaches taken by the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museums Field School in Lamphun, Thailand, organized by the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (SAC). Since 2009, the Field School, which takes place over a period of two weeks, has brought together fifty-five heritage professionals from throughout South East Asia to learn about intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding. Through classroom lectures and discussions, participants are introduced to both the practical and theoretical aspects of sustaining intangible cultural heritage. Through in situ, community-based exercises, participants are given an opportunity to apply research tools and approaches that encourage building collaborative relationships with local communities, as well as learning about intangible cultural expressions from the perspectives of their practitioners and within their source environments. The Field School also actively promotes critical reflection on the limits and challenges of implementing the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) mandate as they emerge from the field practicum exercise. Such challenges include issues of representation, power relations, and decision-making within the community—complex issues which are left unaddressed in both the 2003 UNESCO ICH Convention and the 2012 Operational Directives.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza los enfoques educativos adoptados por el Taller sobre Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial y Museos en Lamphun, Tailandia, organizados por el Centro Antropológico de la Princesa Maha Chakri Sirindhorn (SAC, por sus siglas en inglés). A partir del año 2009, el Taller, que tiene una duración de dos semanas, ha convocado a cincuenta y cinco profesionales de todo el sureste de Asia para aprender sobre el patrimonio cultural inmaterial y su salvaguarda. A través de conferencias y coloquios, se introduce a los participantes en los aspectos tanto prácticos como teóricos de la conservación del patrimonio cultural inmaterial. La realización de ejercicios comunitarios in-situ brinda a los participantes la posibilidad de aplicar herramientas de investigación y abordajes que fomentan la construcción de relaciones de colaboración con las comunidades locales, a la vez que les permite aprender sobre las expresiones culturales inmateriales desde la perspectiva de quienes las practican y dentro de sus ambientes originarios. Al finalizar las prácticas de campo, el Taller también promueve activamente reflexiones críticas sobre los límites y desafíos que supone la implementación del mandato de la UNESCO sobre el Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial (ICH, por sus siglas en inglés). Estos desafíos incluyen asuntos de representatividad, relaciones de poder y toma de decisiones dentro de la comunidad, asuntos complejos que no son abordados ni por la Convención de ICH de la UNESCO del año 2003 ni por las Directrices Operativas del año 2012.

Résumé

Cet article examine les approches pédagogiques de la Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museums Field School de Lamphun en Thaïlande, organisées par le Princess MahaChakriSirindhorn Anthropology Centre (SAC). Depuis 2009, la Field School (école de terrain) qui se déroule sur une période de 2 semaines, a rassemblé cinquante-cinq professionnels du patrimoine culturel venant de toute l'Asie du Sud-Est pour en savoir plus sur le patrimoine culturel immatériel et les différentes façons de le préserver. A travers des cours magistraux et des discussions, on fait découvrir aux participants les aspects à la fois pratiques et théoriques de la préservation du patrimoine culturel immatériel. Par le biais d'exercices in-situ réalisés au sein de la communauté, les participants ont l'opportunité d'appliquer des techniques et approches de recherche qui encouragent la création de liens de collaboration avec les communautés locales, tout en étudiant les expressions culturelles immatérielles depuis le point de vue de leurs pratiquants et au sein même de leurs environnements d'origine. La Field School promeut également une réflexion critique sur les limites et défis inhérents à la mise en application du mandat de l'UNESCO sur le Patrimoine culturel immatériel de l'humanité tels que la mise en pratique sur le terrain les fait apparaître. Parmi ces défis on retrouve des

problèmes de représentation, de relations de pouvoir, et de prise de décisions dans la communauté; des problèmes complexes auxquels ne s'attaque ni la convention de l'UNESCO sur le patrimoine immatériel de 2003, ni les Directives opérationnelles de 2012.

KEYWORDS: Intangible Cultural Heritage, museology, ecomuseology, ethnography, participatory approaches, community museums, critical heritage studies

Introduction

The intangible cultural heritage (ICH) discourse has gained significant momentum on an international scale since the adoption of the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2003. One outcome of the 2003 Convention, and its related promotional tools, is that there has been a steady increase in the number of meetings, conferences, and training events focused on the safeguarding of ICH worldwide. Moreover, the body of scholarly literature devoted to the 'intangible cultural heritage' concept and its multitude of manifestations at the local level is also growing, particularly from anthropological, archaeological, museological, and heritage studies perspectives. Most relevant to the following discussions is the expansion of the discourse into the museum sector, where it is realized that the safeguarding of living cultural expressions should become more integrated into professional practice and, thus, awarded a higher degree of priority with respect to museum activities.

Historically, the international movement for stronger museum involvement in the safeguarding of ICH, as it is defined today, found its footing in the early 2000s, predominantly due to the efforts of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and its subsidiary committees (see Viereggs & Davis, 2000; ICOM, 2002a, b; ICME, 2003). Although there have been meetings and publications concerning the relationships between museum practice and ICH since 2000, the *Seoul Declaration of ICOM on the Intangible Heritage*, adopted in 2004, is especially noteworthy here. Considered as ICOM's official endorsement of the 2003 Convention, it serves to underscore the importance of ICH and the roles museums should be playing to safeguard it. In this light, it also recommends that 'all training programs for museum professionals stress the importance of intangible heritage and include the understanding of intangible heritage as a requirement for qualification' (ICOM, 2004). This recommendation highlights the fact that ICH is living and ever-changing and, thus, traditional methods developed for preserving tangible heritage, or material culture, may not suffice. Indeed, one concern that was expressed by participants of the ICOM General Conference in 2004, during which the *Seoul Declaration* was adopted, was that museums risk fossilizing ICH if it is to be conceptualized

and, thus, treated as tangible heritage (Kurin, 2004; Lee, 2004; Matsuzono, 2004; Yim, 2004).

Moreover, in the most recent *Operational Directives*, a set of more definitive guidelines on how States Parties are to implement the 2003 Convention, it is noted that museums, and similar institutions, should ‘play an important role in collecting, documenting, archiving and conserving data on intangible cultural heritage, as well as in providing information and raising awareness about its importance’ (UNESCO, 2012: paragraph 109). Echoing the aforementioned concerns expressed at the 2004 ICOM meeting, the *Operational Directives* also emphasize the ever-changing nature of ICH and, in turn, encourage museum and heritage professionals to develop ‘participatory approaches’ that include ‘tradition bearers’ during promotional and safeguarding processes, shifting the spotlight from the traditional focus of museums—material culture—to the actual, living cultural expressions themselves (UNESCO, 2012: paragraph 109).

Recognizing that ICH is extremely nuanced and specific to the communities, groups and individuals who embody it, as well as the places in which it is expressed, it continues to be vital for museum and heritage professionals to be trained in the necessary skills for understanding it holistically and working with its practitioners. Reflecting this commitment to in-depth field research, the following discussions focus on the educational approaches taken by the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museums Field School, a two-week workshop that is organized each year by the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (SAC) and supported through the Asian Academy for Heritage Management, the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia Pacific Region (IRCI) and UNESCO Bangkok. After an overview of the conceptual frameworks and methodologies which inform the Field School, this article turns to a detailed discussion of four in situ, community-based research and training exercises in Lamphun Province, Thailand. Through these case studies, we aim to offer some critical insights into the limits of the 2003 Convention and *Operational Directives*, such as the problematic focus on the nomination and listing of ‘elements’ of intangible heritage and the vague definition of community participation in the safeguarding process. Moving beyond the critique, we aim to draw some practical lessons from these three years of field experiences about the kinds of tools and approaches that are most effective for supporting community engagement in the identification and revitalization of intangible heritage. Herein, we hope to contribute to a nascent field of critical, academic research examining the implications and impacts of the 2003 Convention as it is implemented by States Parties.

The ICH and Museums Field School

Overseen by the Thai Ministry of Culture, SAC is a public organization that was established in 1989. Its chief mission is to ‘promote understanding among peoples through the study of human societies’ with an emphasis on ‘fostering tolerance and cross-cultural awareness through anthropological research and public

education' in the Greater Mekong Sub-region and Thailand (SAC, 2009). As such, research, documentation, and public education and outreach are the key activities of SAC. The ICH and Museums Field School grew out of one of the Centre's main research programs, the Local Museums Research and Development Project, which began in 2005 and has sought to create a digital database of the hundreds of local museums within Thailand, as well as collaborate with associated communities in capacity-building and knowledge-sharing projects (SAC, 2009).

Since 2009, the Field School, which takes place over a period of two weeks, has brought together a total of fifty-five heritage professionals from across the Asia Pacific to learn about ICH and its safeguarding. An average of eighteen participants are involved in the Field School each year. They typically work within museums, heritage organizations, site management teams, and relevant governmental agencies from Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Timor Leste and Thailand. In addition to the participants, there is also a large team of resource people from the Asian region and beyond, who lecture and guide participants in their fieldwork, as well as SAC staff members, who are responsible for the many logistical and organizational aspects of designing, planning, and running the daily programs. A typical day during the school consists of morning lectures and follow-up discussions in small group settings, afternoon fieldwork at designated sites, as examined in detail later, and a period of time spent in the evening to prepare for the following day's activities.

The main aims of the Field School are as follows:

- to provide participants with a critical understanding of the ICH concept, particularly with respect to the current international discourse and its associated transnational initiatives;
- to gain a better understanding of how and why ICH is expressed through actual engagement with community practitioners;
- to underscore the importance of community participation in possible safeguarding efforts;
- to learn the tools necessary for facilitating community-based approaches to safeguarding ICH by using anthropological research methods.

The first aim, which seeks to introduce participants and encourage them to critically engage with the current ICH discourse at the international level, is reflected in the thematic structure of the school program. Specifically, daily lectures, discussion groups, and fieldwork are linked to each other through the nine 'measures' that are articulated as being integral to safeguarding ICH in the 2003 Convention: identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, and revitalization of ICH (UNESCO, 2003: Article 2). For instance, morning lectures and group discussions that are dedicated to exploring the ways in which ICH can be identified, as well as why identification is important, are connected to the afternoon fieldwork session by guiding participants to identify intangible cultural expressions at their designated field sites. Here, it is evident that

one of the key strengths of the Field School is its application of theory through practice in the field.

It is important to note that while the Field School aims to provide participants with a practical understanding of the 2003 Convention and hands-on methods for safeguarding ICH, critical perspectives of this international instrument are emphasized throughout the training and discussed in relation to each of the measures. For instance, in the lecture and discussions on identification, resource persons highlight the numerous critiques of the inventorying and listing process that have been put forward by academics, such as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004), Nas (2002), Brown (2003), and Hafstein (2009), who argue that the process of listing is one which creates a hierarchy of value, validating certain forms of heritage, while excluding and marginalizing others. Similarly, the inventorying process, which is the only required step toward safeguarding ICH that States Parties are required to undertake, risks itemizing living cultural expressions and, thereby, may promote limited understandings of ICH that neglect its embeddedness within larger social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental contexts.

Moreover, in the lecture sessions on research and documentation of ICH, the resource persons emphasize not only practical tools for data gathering but also the ethical aspects of research, including issues of informed consent and the use of collaborative, inclusive research methodologies. These sessions also unpack the concept of ‘community,’ pointing out that the goal of research should be to reveal the complexity of social meanings inscribed in cultural practices, rather than represent communities and their heritage in monolithic terms. It is through actual engagement with particular communities that participants gain more fluid understandings of the nature of ICH, how and why it is expressed and transmitted, as well as ways in which it can be effectively safeguarded through community-based management schemes.

Learning through fieldwork

In order to maximize learning at each of the field sites, the eighteen participants are split into four groups, each corresponding to a particular site. Before fieldwork begins, they are also introduced to the key tenets of anthropology and its core research methods, such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, the making of socio-cultural calendars and cultural maps, as discussed in detail later. As noted in the fourth aim, linking anthropological theory to practice is considered essential to learning *from* cultural practitioners about their living traditions and the reasons why they are significant. Additionally, understanding how best to identify, document, promote, and transmit ICH—in its multitude of distinct forms—should be based on research that is conducted out in the places where it is expressed and practiced by those who embody and transform it. Therefore, it is believed that the effectiveness of training programs for museum and heritage professionals can be heightened through the use of basic anthropological tools.

The four field sites examined here—Luk Village, Camadevi Monastery, Pratupa Monastery and Ton Kaew Monastery—are all located in Lamphun Province in Northern Thailand. While only Camadevi Monastery and Ton Kaew Monastery have museum structures on their premises, all four of the sites are actively engaged in the revitalization of local history and cultural heritage. It should also be noted that a team from SAC undertook research and organized consultations with the participating communities during the months prior to the Field School, in order to obtain consent, foster rapport, and plan for insitu Field School activities. Rather than attempting to describe all aspects of the Field School practicum at each of the four sites in their entirety, the discussion that follows focuses on a particular aspect of the fieldwork experience, highlighting one of the aforementioned ICH safeguarding measures and certain issues that have arisen in relation to the UNESCO-ICH framework, as structured by the 2003 Convention.

Identifying ICH at Luk village

Located on the outskirts of Lamphun's town center, Luk village is a rural community with approximately 1200 residents. The village was established in the early 1800s by ethnic Yong migrants¹ from present-day Myanmar. After settling in Lamphun, the founders adopted the name 'Luk' (water wheel) village to remind them of their homeland. Historically, Luk villagers were paddy rice farmers who also raised livestock, but with the introduction of the longan fruit as a lucrative cash crop in Lamphun starting in the 1950s, farmers began converting their rice fields to longan orchards. While longan production for export is still the primary source of income for most families, younger generations of Luk residents increasingly find employment outside the village, in the government sector and in Lamphun's industrial processing zone (*nikhom udsahakam*).

During the Field School, participants worked closely with the Luk Village Senior Association to learn more about the community's history and cultural heritage. Established in 2009 with funding from the local government, the Senior Association now has over sixty members who meet on a daily basis. The Luk Senior Association differs from other senior associations in that their activities also focus on safeguarding local ICH, including traditional handicrafts and ritual knowledge. As explained by its President, Mr. Thongned Kansit, the association had two primary aims in reviving these practices: the first was to generate supplementary income for seniors; and the second was to maintain and transmit these traditional skills and ritual knowledge to younger generations. Toward this end, the association set up an informal, extracurricular program entitled, *Uy Sorn Laan*, or Grandparents Teaching Grandkids, to teach handicrafts to elementary-level students in Luk village on the weekends.

Over the past few years, the association has become well-known in Lamphun for its skilled craftsmanship and ritual expertise, and the Luk Village seniors are frequently invited to demonstrate traditional handicrafts at schools, provincial cultural

events and festivals. It is also regularly commissioned by private individuals and neighboring communities to prepare ritual paraphernalia for traditional ceremonies, including life-lengthening ceremonies, funerals and other Buddhist merit-making rites.

In keeping with the 2003 Convention's promotion of inventories as a tool for identifying ICH, one of the first tasks for the Field School participants was to undertake a survey of ICH in the Luk community. For this task, the participants relied primarily on two research tools: the socio-cultural calendar and community mapping. For the socio-cultural calendar, the participants sat down with a group of seven seniors and sketched a simple, annual calendar in table format on a large piece of paper. On one side of the calendar, the participants listed important periods in the longan agricultural production cycle, as well as other economic activities. In the adjacent section of the calendar, participants listed the key cultural events and rituals, most of which are related to the Buddhist calendar, as well as the associated performances and handicrafts. From this process, participants got a preliminary introduction to the rich corpus of intangible practices and traditional expressions in Luk village, including Buddhist ordination (*Poy Luang*) rituals, life-lengthening rituals, and Lent (*Kathin*) ceremonies, as well as northern folk dances and textile weaving traditions.

In order to get a better picture of how these living practices were embedded in the local landscape, the participants also undertook a participatory cultural mapping exercise together with several of the association members. As argued by heritage experts (e.g., Clark et al., 1995; Poole, 2003; La Frenierre, 2008), cultural mapping is a valuable tool for safeguarding the cultural resources of a community, inasmuch as it is a process which fosters dialog about the value and meaning of heritage, and why and how it should be documented and transmitted. Cultural mapping is also a more holistic method than the listing of intangible heritage in that it links cultural practices, traditional knowledge, memories, and oral narratives to individual culture bearers as well as significant sites in the landscape, thereby reflecting the inextricable interrelationship between the tangible and intangible.

In the case of Luk village, this exercise entailed walking through the village to identify the sites for ritual practices and ceremonies (i.e., a Buddhist monastery, the village pillar and ancestral spirit shrines), as well as the homes of the custodians of traditional knowledge (e.g., a traditional herbal doctor). The mapping exercise shed light on a number of important dimensions of ICH in the village that did not emerge from the socio-cultural calendar. First, it revealed that there were many sites (e.g., trees, spirit houses) throughout the village associated with ancestral spirits (*phi puuyaa*), which periodically had to be placated or propitiated with mediumship rites and offerings (*liang phi*). Secondly, it uncovered oral narratives associated with historical structures, such as an abandoned Buddhist assembly hall (*ubosot*). In general, the process gave participants a better understanding of the fact that even though intangible cultural 'elements' can be identified, listed, and classified into 'domains' (UNESCO, 2003), in the end, ICH cannot be atomized

and separated from the local particularities of cultural landscape and historical context. Considering the diversity of intangible heritage that was uncovered through the cultural mapping exercise, Field School participants were faced with the inevitable question—what ‘element’ should be safeguarded, and who in the community is authorized to make such a decision? This process brought participants face-to-face with two of the inherent problems of the 2003 Convention, namely, the elusive definition of community and ambiguity about the role of communities in selecting intangible heritage for nomination and safeguarding.

For the purpose of the Field School exercise, the ‘community’ recognized as having the authority to make these decisions was limited to the Senior Association, inasmuch as the local residents regarded them as the primary custodians of traditional culture. After a review of the many forms of ICH in Luk village, seniors chose to focus on the life-lengthening ceremony (*Seup Chata*)² for the Field School project. The *Seup Chata* ceremony is an elaborate Buddhist ritual that is practiced on numerous occasions throughout the year. At the community level, the ritual is held once a year in April to re-affirm community identity and unity (*khwam samakhi*). On this occasion, all the households of the community are linked by a sacred thread which is tied to the central pillar of the village, the *jai baan*, while Buddhist monks chant a prayer. The *Seup Chata* is also performed for individuals, such as in the case of illness or house-raising ceremonies, as it is believed that the rite can bring good luck and foster well-being³. Villagers selected this rite for safeguarding because they regarded it as an embodiment of Yong identity and village unity, and they were concerned that knowledge and skills associated with the ritual were not being transmitted to the younger generations.

Identifying ICH at Camadevi Monastery

In 2010 and 2011, Field School participants working at the Camadevi Monastery were also involved with an interesting process of identifying ICH.⁴ The Camadevi community, situated on the northern outskirts of the urban center of Lamphun, was established in the 1930s and has a population of around 2,000 households, who are mostly engaged either in farming or commerce. The cultural hub of the community is the Camadevi Monastery, named after the legendary Queen Camadevi, a powerful 7th century ruler who founded the kingdom of Hariphunchai, its capital being the original site of the city of Lamphun. The monastery is notable for its principal stupa, known in Northern Thai as *Ku Kut*, which, according to legend, was built by one of Queen Camadevi’s sons. Her ashes and belongings, including the bones of her beloved elephant, are reputedly buried beneath the stupa, making the site of great importance in northern Thailand. Despite its antiquity and significance, by the early 20th century the monastery had largely fallen into disrepair, the ancient stupas were in ruins, the monastery lying deserted amongst paddy fields. Khruba Srivichai (1878–1931), a revered monk, arrived at the monastery in 1936, and led a group of devotees to rebuild the monastery. It

was this monastic site, and its surrounding area, that became the focus for a small group of participants attending the Field School, with the principal aim of identifying which features of ICH were most valued by local people.

During the Field School, participants worked closely with three main informants: the monastery's abbot, Mrs. Silai, a retired local schoolteacher, and Mr. Naren Panyaphu, a local historian and anthropologist. All three knew the monastery and surroundings well and were able to provide introductions to local residents, schoolteachers, and children, as well as lending their own opinions about ICH and its significance to the local community. Through interviews with these key individuals, the group learned about the historical origins and development of the monastery and began to compile an inventory of ICH and develop a socio-cultural calendar for the local community.

In order to gain a better understanding of the relationships between the Camadevi community and their intangible cultural expressions, participants then undertook a cultural mapping exercise within the grounds of the monastery and the surrounding area, learning that several sites were places associated with the memory of Queen Camadevi and Khruba Srivichai. These included well-known features such as the stupas, the buildings erected by Khruba, his cremation ground and a well that provided water during the restoration period. Exploration of the grounds also revealed a newly-built structure, a museum dedicated to interpreting the history and significance of the monastery, but with an emphasis on the life and work of Khruba Srivichai. Interviews with two elderly members of the community, Noi Wirorot and Kham-ai Chaiyasit, who were in their teens when Khruba arrived at the Camadevi monastery, further highlighted the significance of the monk. It emerged that the local school featured the story of Khruba in its curriculum, and that schoolchildren actively participated in many events and ceremonies commemorating Queen Camadevi and Khruba. Participants extended their cultural mapping beyond the Camadevi area by visiting other monasteries in the region to assess the impact of Khruba Srivichai's building program.

Through their face-to-face interviews with local residents and participant observation, the participants gained a good understanding of how intangible cultural expressions can be identified. Very early in the fieldwork, participants recognized the importance of local beliefs in and veneration of Queen Camadevi and Khruba Srivichai. It appeared that these beliefs, and the annual rituals and ceremonies associated with them, were arguably the most important forms of ICH within the Camadevi community. The monastery's abbot, who had himself documented ceremonies and recorded local stories about Khruba Srivichai using video, made a strong case that this should be the Field School participants' focus.

Many other forms of ICH were identified in the local landscape by walking through the streets, talking to individuals, and observing local street scenes. These included children's games, local craft and culinary skills, farming techniques, beliefs in ancestral spirits, and the longan harvest. However, the key informants guided the participants very strongly towards the veneration of Khruba Srivichai

as a living tradition; they were urged to consider how he is remembered by community members and his significance as a symbol of local identity.

The experience at Wat Camadevi offers yet another illustration of the challenges associated with the Convention's ambiguous definition of 'community,' inasmuch as most decisions about the ICH identification and safeguarding process were made by a small group of local cultural brokers, who were strongly influenced by the abbot of the Camadevi monastery. Is it necessary to facilitate more democratic and participatory decision-making processes for identifying and safeguarding ICH, or can community leaders speak for the community? While such deference may often be contextually appropriate (as in the case of Camadevi), there are attendant potential risks of deferring such decisions to local authority figures, including the neglect of women's viewpoints and other locally marginalized groups, such as migrants or ethnic minorities.

ICH documentation at Pratupa Monastery

Pratupa Monastery was built in 1758 by ethnic Yong from present-day Burma, who were forcibly resettled in Lamphun to repopulate the region after centuries of warfare between the Thai and Burmese kingdoms. One group of Yong settled with a highly respected monk, Kruba Lek, who became the first abbot of Pratupa Monastery. Settlers planted mango seeds from their former village and named the new village *Pratupa-muang* or Mango Forest.⁵ Pratupa Monastery became well-known to ethnic Yong peoples in Thailand and abroad through its popular website, (<http://watpratupa.blogspot.com>), which was created by Assistant Abbot Phra Patiphan Puriphanyo to document and circulate the distinctive culture and practices of the temple community. In addition to this blog, the Assistant Abbot maintains a Facebook page featuring documentation of local history and cultural events.⁶ The shifting terrain of local ICH documentation practices has made Pratupa Monastery a rich and complex site for students to engage with the challenges of documenting ICH in the digital age.

Between 2009 and 2011, Field School participants used digital photography, video and audio recordings, and field notes to document a range of intangible cultural practices and to critically evaluate documentation methodologies and techniques for ICH. During the first Field School, participants documented community-wide preparation for the Salak Yom festival, in which bundles of offerings and tree-like structures as tall as 17 meters are constructed and lavishly decorated with handicrafts, money, and food, and offered to the monks in the form of a lottery. The Salak Yom ritual is a significant Buddhist merit-making activity for the families and communities who work together to prepare the offerings and to improve their karma. Participants learned that in the past, the Salak Yom offerings were donated to the temple by young, unmarried women, to make merit for their families and announce their marriageability. The Salak trees took many years to prepare, and represented not only the skills and wealth of the female donor but

also her family, friends, visitors from other villages, as well as potential suitors, who would contribute money, goods, and labor. During the 1960s, it became prohibitively expensive for young women and their families to donate the Salak Yom trees, and the tradition began to fade. Fearing its demise, community leaders in Lamphun, including the abbot of Pratupa Monastery, collaborated to revive the Salak Yom tradition in the early 2000s. Rather than asking young women and their families to donate the trees, however, the local monasteries, together with the Lamphun Provincial Administration, offered support to communities to create the offerings. They also arranged to host the festival at a different monastery each year, and organized competitions for the best Salak trees. In 2009, participants documented older members of the Pratupa community, gathered under the supervision of the abbot and assistant abbot of Pratupa Monastery, as they created the elaborate handicrafts used to decorate the towering Salak Yom. The culminating Salak festival was held at Wat Phra That Hariphunchai, where participants and the public alike watched as the offerings were won by monks from the region and claimed from the community members who had created them. The festival was documented locally and featured prominently (<http://watpratupa.blogspot.com>).

Participants continued to learn about local digital media strategies in the second Field School in 2010, working with the assistant abbot and the Pratupa community to explore issues related to the safeguarding of one element of the Salak Yom, the Kap Kalong. This poetic narrative retells the history of the ethnic Yong migration from Burma, and details the contributions of individuals and families to the construction of the Salak offering. The Kap Kalong was composed by an individual of great lyrical talent and fluency in the Lanna language, and transcribed by the composer in Lanna script. It would be performed by members of the contributing family or community at the Salak Yom before presenting the Salak to the monk who had won it in the festival lottery. It was learned, however, that a rapid language shift from Lanna literacy and fluency to the Central Thai dialect, which stems from the Bangkok area, was undermining the continuity of the Kap Kalong and ethnic Yong identity. Participants saw that documentation of the Kap Kalong script and recordings of contemporary performance were being circulated (<http://watpratupa.blogspot.com>), raising awareness of the challenge of maintaining Yong traditions in the face of language shifts and diminishment.

After the assistant abbot, local elders, and youth identified Lanna language literacy as a safeguarding priority, the 2011 Field School group collaborated with the assistant abbot and members of the Pratupa community to produce a six-minute documentary video entitled *Because We Are Yong*, which could be used to promote awareness of the need to revitalize the Yong language. This video was also quickly made available on the community's Facebook page.

In the process of producing this film, Field School participants working at Pratupa Monastery had the opportunity to learn not only about the potential of audio-visual documentation for safeguarding, but also about its many problems and limitations. In the *Operational Directives*, the use of digital technologies and new media in

documenting and promoting ICH is recognized as being a highly effective means for raising awareness of its importance (UNESCO, 2012: paragraphs 110–112). Moreover, it is noted that such technologies can help to foster a sharing of information about particular ICH expressions within cultural communities (UNESCO, 2012: paragraph 114). While the Field School participants were inspired by the assistant abbot's innovative approach to documentation and community mobilization, the experience of producing the film made them acutely aware of the fact that documentation is a process that is heavily dependent on the selection of audio and/or visual representations of a community's living heritage, as well as the subsequent interpretation that is needed to create a 'final product,' whether it is a documentary film or archive. Here, again, the issue of cultural representation arose: who was most involved in the decision-making and selection process, and how could the widest possible participation of community members be facilitated?

Another important lesson from the audio-visual documentation exercise was the imposing task of cataloging and archiving their abundant digital documentation, as well as anticipating how the ICH documentation might be mobilized for transmission in the future. These experiences of the potential excesses of audio-visual documentation drew attention to the challenges of managing audio-visual resources effectively, both at the institutional and community level. Finally, participants also encountered the issue of the digital divide, as it was found that a large number of elder community members lacked access to the internet and would only be able to access the documentary film by visiting the temple and watching it on the abbot's DVD player. As such, participants questioned the value of high-tech documentation formats if they could not be used by older generations of culture bearers.

Promoting and transmitting ICH at Ton Kaew Monastery

Wat Ton Kaew is a monastery complex in Wieng Yong Village, a vibrant Yong community near the center of Lamphun. Like the ethnic Yong of Pratupa and Luk Village, the Yong of Ton Kaew migrated to Lamphun from present-day Myanmar during the reign of King Kawila in the early 19th century, bringing with them distinctive cultural traditions, beliefs and ways of life. However, unlike Pratupa and Luk Village, which are further from the city center, Ton Kaew Monastery is located near the heart of the city, and thus has been more directly affected by socio-economic development and cultural change. As was explained by senior residents, over the last few decades, the number of young people leaving Wieng Yong Village in pursuit of better employment opportunities in Chiang Mai and Bangkok has increased significantly. This has contributed to the concern that distinct Yong ways of life, including language, traditions and other cultural expressions are significantly endangered.

Responding to this sense of cultural loss, the Ton Kaew Monastery has played an important role in revitalizing Yong culture and identity. A leading figure in this local effort to maintain Yong culture is the abbot of Ton Kaew Monastery, Phra Khru Paisan Thirakun. Since becoming abbot in 1987, Phra Khru Paisan Thirakun has

fostered his commitment to serving as a religious and cultural center of Lamphun and the Wieng Yong community. One significant ICH expression that the abbot sought to safeguard was the living tradition of Yong weaving. As the abbot explained, ethnic Yong women brought weaving skills and patterns with them from their homeland in Burma. Upon settling in Lamphun, they acquired new skills and textile design motifs from the northern Lanna court, with its capital city in Chiang Mai. Later, in the 1950s and 1960s, several textile workshops were established in Lamphun, employing weavers of the Wieng Yong community. Senior women who had worked in these textile workshops told Field School participants about their fond memories from this period, which included not only work, but also the organization of beauty competitions. These small-scale textile workshops were gradually replaced by larger textile factories in Lamphun, and the weavers of Wieng Yong returned to their households.

With the aim of preserving the skills of this group of senior Yong weavers and providing them with a modest income, in 1998, the abbot established the Wat Ton Kaew Weaving Association. In 2008, the abbot used temple donation funds to construct a textile museum on the grounds of the monastery. Built in the architectural style of a traditional Yong house, the museum features the Weaving Association's looms on the first floor and a collection of traditional textiles on the second floor. It is the abbot's hope that the textile museum will serve as a space for the promotion and transmission of this living tradition to younger generations.

Since 2009, Field School participants have worked with the Ton Kaew Monastery to identify and develop safeguarding plans that include methods of promoting and transmitting local ICH. The dynamic presence of the Weaving Association and its members, and the community's commitment to the safeguarding of Yong weaving, underscore its local significance. After several consultations, mapping and participatory inventory activities, each Field School group sought to understand how to effectively promote and support the transmission of this living tradition to younger generations.

Accordingly, a series of planning meetings with the Wieng Yong community were held. The main concern of the abbot, weavers, and other community members was that young people were not interested in weaving, as it was primarily sustained by elder women of the community. It was also felt that a career in weaving was not as lucrative as other professions. Moreover, the introduction of mass-produced clothing over the past decades threatened the vitality of Yong weaving, contributing to a diminishing demand for traditional Yong textiles. Whereas Yong textiles were once worn on a daily basis, today, the handmade textiles created by the Weaving Association are tailored into skirts that are worn only on special occasions.

From the very beginning, Field School participants discussed the importance of building links between the weavers and younger members of the community. Mapping activities highlighted the proximity of Ton Kaew monastery to the local primary school. Participants identified the partnership between the monastery and the school as a first step to how weaving could be promoted and transmitted to

the next generation. In their recommendations to the abbot and community leaders, it was suggested that Yong weaving be included in the local school curriculum, which could include the organization of weaving classes. This proposal was accepted, and since 2010, there have been regular weaving classes taking place each week at Ton Kaew monastery. Pupils visit the weaving workshop and develop hands-on skills in using the looms and learning about various patterns.

At Wat Ton Kaew, community members and participants both agreed that the first step in the transmission of the weaving tradition was for it to be taken up by younger, local residents. The introduction of weaving into the school curriculum and the development of closer bonds between the monastery and the pupils appeared to have the strong potential to contribute to the continuity of the weaving tradition. This promising outcome, which will hopefully continue, provided a unique learning opportunity for Field School participants as it constituted a successful—albeit possibly short-term—example of safeguarding ICH. It has shed light on what is, arguably, the most important aspect of keeping ICH alive: the active passage of its nuanced knowledge, skills, meanings, and significance to the next generation. Participants witnessed firsthand the enthusiasm of the pupils in learning these skills and the meanings behind them. These experiences have underscored the need for not only community participation in *effective* safeguarding initiatives, but the involvement of younger members. At the same time, by proposing local pupil involvement, participants were involved with longer-term thinking—that is, the development of long-lasting transmission and safeguarding schemes. Nonetheless, as discussed in the following section, the need for community participation—as well as long-term planning—in safeguarding approaches should be more strongly emphasized within the 2003 Convention and its Operational Directives.

Lessons learned

After three Field School cycles, there are a variety of conclusions that can be drawn. While supporting and strengthening the living heritage of the four Lamphun communities was at the heart of the Field School project, it was also a training program for utilizing the 2003 Convention and its accompanying Operational Directives as guidelines for safeguarding efforts, particularly at the local level and in close collaboration with ICH practitioners. As the description of the case studies above have shown, however, the authors maintain that hands-on practical training on safeguarding cultural heritage need not—and indeed, must not—be divorced from critical and reflexive engagement with how heritage operates as a discourse, transforming cultural practices through processes of selection and representation. Throughout the Field School, participants were encouraged to consider how identification and classification as ICH impacts communities' understandings of their own living traditions, and to recognize that even when ICH safeguarding is genuinely participatory, it is still a selective process of 'metacultural production'

(Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004), which generates new meanings and audiences for cultural practices.

Indeed, this points to another significant lesson from the Field School, having to do with the translation of international heritage concepts. The newness of the ICH discourse presented a challenge to participants and communities, as there is yet no stable term in Thai which reflects the meanings and processes that are associated with the English phrase.⁷ As such, the Thai-speaking resource persons and participants had to approximate and draw on a range of Thai terms—both formal and informal—to describe both the content and safeguarding process to communities. Indeed, in this process of seeking the appropriate local terms to describe ‘safeguarding ICH,’ Field School participants discovered that there was an already existing, albeit fluid local vocabulary about cultural heritage and the articulation of concern about its transmission in the context of rapid socio-cultural and environmental change.

Nevertheless, it is also worth questioning the level of influence the ICH concept may have during identification efforts, especially on behalf of a group of international museum and heritage professionals. More specifically, were participants imposing the UNESCO conceptualization of ICH, or was community input more or less achieved? Was it an imposition to define each of the identified elements as forms of ICH since this is not a concept that holds much currency at the local level in Lamphun? What sorts of living traditions, practices, and expressions may have been identified if the ICH concept, and its associated categories, were not used as reference points?

Turning now to more specific lessons from the sites, with respect to the task of identifying ICH, which was examined in this paper at the Luk village and Camadevi Monastery fieldwork sites, one main lesson concerns the difficulty in identifying and, thereby, delineating particular ICH expressions or ‘elements’ (UNESCO, 2003) from their broader social and environmental milieu. Indeed, the fieldwork process underscored that one of the dangers of the classificatory approach to identifying ICH by ‘domains’ is that it encourages a selection and description of it according to the prescribed categories.⁸ However, in reality, as UNESCO (2009) has also acknowledged, most forms of ICH encompass more than one domain. In the case of the Seup Chata ritual of Luk village, for instance, four out of five domains are represented: oral traditions (Buddhist chanting) and language (Yong), knowledge of the universe (spirit beliefs and cosmological principles), and traditional craftsmanship (see UNESCO, 2003). Moreover, the identification exercise highlighted the impossibility of separating the intangible from the tangible. As the community mapping revealed at both Luk village and Camadevi Monastery, ICH is expressed in specific places and made tangible through material objects and structures. As such, efforts to identify, and ultimately safeguard intangible cultural practices and expressions, must overcome this false divide. Taken together, these case studies have served to demonstrate the need for a more holistic understanding of ICH during all steps of a safeguarding initiative, as well as for stressing, within

the UNESCO-ICH discourse, that ICH, as stated by Kurin (2007:12), is not ‘something that can easily be isolated from a larger constellation of lifestyles, nor de-articulated from a broader world of ecological, economic, political and geographic interactions’.

Another valuable lesson that emerged relates to the potential to overlook certain ICH expressions during the identification process. Although the Field School emphasized that participation and guidance by the community is highly important, key or dominant informants may take a very influential role and lead participants to a particular conclusion about which element of ICH is most significant to the community. This was certainly the case at Camadevi Monastery, where ‘the community’ was self-defined and limited by association with the monastery. As a result, many other forms of ICH that exist locally may have been neglected or given too little emphasis.

Participants faced similar challenges in negotiating community consensus with respect to documenting ICH at Wat Pratupa, particularly in terms of what to document and how it should be made accessible. While some participants and community members questioned how websites and digital archives could contribute to the transmission of local practices, others, such as the assistant abbot of Pratupa Monastery, emphasized the importance of this technology for promoting the recognition of local culture by wider audiences. He stated:

A sense of ownership keeps growing, which may lead to two different strategies: increased security measures, or increased studies and revitalization. The decision depends on the conservators and the community. Just keep this fact in mind, ‘If you swallow, it disappears; if you spit it out, it remains.’ Let the knowledge spread within the community⁹

Here, an overarching lesson of the Field School is highlighted: recognizing the different perspectives of those who embody, practice, and change ICH, and facilitating open dialogue and debate about the most appropriate safeguarding measures among culture bearers can only help to mitigate possible problems and enhance the effectiveness of safeguarding efforts down the line.

This particular lesson serves to underscore the weak treatment that ‘community participation’ is given in the 2003 Convention, as mentioned earlier (see also Blake, 2006). In the most recent Operational Directives, States Parties remain only ‘encouraged’ to foster the community participation within a list of suggested promotional and safeguarding activities (UNESCO, 2012: paragraphs 79 & 80). This wording is weak considering that decision-making power with respect to ensuring ‘the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals’ in safeguarding schemes rests at the national level, as opposed to the local level, where ICH lives (see Blake, 2006; Ruggles & Silverman, 2009 for a discussion on the power awarded to States Parties within the UNESCO-ICH framework).

Furthermore, the fieldwork exercises that focused on promoting and transmitting ICH also brought forward important lessons concerning the nature of collaboration between the museum and heritage sector (in this case, represented by the participants) and local communities. Using the Ton Kaew Monastery example, if the tradition of Yong weaving is no longer as central to community life as it used to be, what role is the heritage sector playing in bringing the tradition to new levels of visibility? Looking forward, can ICH training programs, such as the one examined here, set aside the time and create the space for meta-discussions among participants and local communities about how heritage discourses transform the meaning and value of living cultural practices? These lessons and questions comprise a broader set of issues that often emerge through local-level, community-based heritage work. Issues such as cultural authenticity, ownership and representation surface—even over the course of two weeks—when closely collaborating with communities, groups, and individuals in the places and spaces they know best. Most significantly, this sort of critical thinking and experiential learning ought to be encouraged, especially with regard to training programs that focus on safeguarding ICH. The approach of the SAC Field School is one where participants develop the skills to engage with people through respectful and culturally sensitive ways. As Kurin (2004: 8) notes: ‘Clearly, the skills needed by museum professionals to work with people and communities in this type of engagement are much more akin to community development than they are to materials conservation.’ In essence, if museum and heritage professionals are to become more involved with identifying, documenting, promoting and transmitting ICH, then they will have to learn to *learn* from those who own it and breathe life into it, while steering clear of monolithic representations of ‘community.’

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Notes

- 1 The ethnic Yong of Lamphun Province were formerly the inhabitants of Muang Yong, in the Shan State of Myanmar. During the early 19th century, around 10,000 Yong were forcibly resettled to Lamphun Province to repopulate Northern Thailand after a period of warfare between Burmese and Thai kingdoms. Today, many Yong continue to express a strong sense of their ethnic identity, which is maintained through the transmission of their language and distinctive cultural practices. The Yong dialect is part of the Tai-Kadai language family, and it is closely related to the Tai-Lue language.
- 2 Seup Chata is found elsewhere in Thailand, and there are many regional variations in terms of how the rite is performed, and the required material elements.
- 3 Examples include the ICOM Cross Cultural Task Force concurrent session on Museums and Intangible Heritage at the ICOM General Conference, Vienna, Austria, 2007; Intangible Heritage Embodied, a conference organized by the Collaborative for Cultural Heritage and Museum Practices (CHAMP) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA, 2007; Exploring Intangible Heritage, a postgraduate conference at the University of Ulster, Londonderry, Northern Ireland, 2008; Between Objects and Ideas: Re-thinking the Role of Intangible Heritage, the 4th Annual International Colloquium of the Ename Centre for Public Archaeology and Heritage Presentation, Ghent, Belgium, 2008; Sharing Cultures 2009: the 1st International Conference on Intangible Heritage, Azores, Portugal, 2009; and Sharing Cultures 2011: the 2nd International Conference on Intangible Heritage, Tomar, Portugal, 2011, among many others.
- 4 It is important to note that fieldwork conducted at Wat Camadevi began in the 2nd Field School, in

2010. Prior to this, in 2009, Field School participants worked at the Urban Lamphun Community Museum, which has since undergone administration changes.
- 5 Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, 2010, Field School Course Materials, p. 13.
 - 6 The Assistant Abbot's Facebook page is <http://www.facebook.com/patiphanphangwana>.
 - 7 There is ongoing debate in the state heritage sector about the most appropriate translation of this term into Thai. At present, there are two preferred translations, *moradok thi cap tong mai dai*, which is a more literal translation, and *moradok phumpanya thang watthanatham*, which utilizes a more familiar, state recognized category of heritage which translates roughly as 'local cultural wisdom.'
 - 8 The five domains are as follows: oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship.
 - 9 Interview with Phra Patiphan Puriphanyo, conducted by Kate Hennessy. August 18th, 2011, Lamphun, Thailand. Translation by Linina Phuttitarn.