

# Case Studies on Intangible Cultural Heritage amid the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Asia-Pacific Region

Report of the Research on ICH  
Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic Project

International Research Centre for  
Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI)



Centre  
Under the auspices  
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Report of the Research on ICH Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic Project

Edited by  
Daisuke Machida, Yoko Nojima and Hitomi Yamamoto

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2 cho, Mozusekiun-cho, Sakai-ku, Sakai City, Osaka 590-0802, Japan

Tel: +81-72-275-8050 Fax: +81-72-275-8151

E-mail: [irci@nich.go.jp](mailto:irci@nich.go.jp)

Website: <https://www.irci.jp>

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## P R E F A C E

The International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI), an institution of the National Institutes for Cultural Heritage (NICH), was established in 2011 in Sakai City, Osaka, Japan, as a Category 2 Centre under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

With our mission to promote the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (the 2003 Convention) through implementing research, we are conducting various projects, among which is the 'Research on ICH Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic'. This project started with a preliminary study in FY 2021 in cooperation with researchers and institutions in nine countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Following that year, it was developed into full-scale research in FY 2022 to further investigate through case studies the situation of the practice, transmission, and safeguarding of ICH amid the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the gradual recovery process and revival of ICH. Focusing on the changes that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, the case studies have revealed the flexibility and adaptability of ICH and its related communities. To conclude the project, IRCI held a regional conference in Osaka in July 2023 to share the results of the case studies with all collaborating researchers and discuss ways to safeguard ICH in the context of pandemics and epidemics that could occur again in the future.

This book presents the results of the case studies conducted in FY 2022 in Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, and the Republic of Korea. I hope it will contribute to promoting a better understanding of ICH among its stakeholders, especially the local communities and practitioners.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to the members of the local ICH communities for sharing their personal experiences and to the specialists for providing guidance throughout the research. My special thanks go to the cooperating partner institutions and their teams who actively conducted research in their respective countries.

It is my sincere hope that this book will reach everyone involved in ICH as a researcher, practitioner, or local administrator.

Daisuke MACHIDA  
Director-General  
International Research Centre for  
Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI)





## CONTENTS

PREFACE	
Daisuke Machida .....	i
CONTENTS .....	iii
INTRODUCTION: IRCI'S PROJECT 'RESEARCH ON ICH AFFECTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC'	
Hitomi Yamamoto .....	1
TRANSFORMATION OF THE ICH IN BANGLADESH IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19	
Saymon Zakaria .....	9
IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN FIJI 2022–2023	
Elizabeth Edwards .....	23
BUILDING FUTURES: LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE CASE STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TRADITIONAL CRAFTMANSHIP IN KUTCH, INDIA	
Ritu Sethi .....	47
<i>NITIK BATIK</i> PRODUCTION AND MARKETING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC	
Mahirta, Niken Wirasanti, Fayeza Shasliz Arumdhati, Faiza Maula Syahra and Syehkhan Dartiko Aji .....	67
HANDICRAFT WORKSHOPS AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN IRAN: THE INTERNET, THE ROLE OF WOMAN AND THE RE-EMERGENCE OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTMANSHIP IN HOUSEHOLDS	
Janet Blake and Yodollah Parmoun .....	83
COVID-19 AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE: CASE STUDIES IN KYRGYZSTAN	
Achilova Altynai and Akmatova Kuluipa .....	95
THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ICH IN MONGOLIA: A CASE STUDY IN ULAANBAATAR CAPITAL CITY	
Enkhbat Galbadrakh and Saruul Arslan .....	103
THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 UPON ICH PRACTICED BY THE TOLAI PEOPLE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA: THE CASE OF <i>KUTU-TABU</i> AND <i>MALAGENE</i>	
Naomi Faik-Simet .....	115
THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TWO INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE ELEMENTS IN KOREA	
Hanhee Hahm and Semina Oh .....	131



# INTRODUCTION: IRCI'S PROJECT 'RESEARCH ON ICH AFFECTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC'

Hitomi Yamamoto<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

From the first detection of COVID-19 in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019, the spread of the disease quickly became a global menace, affecting people's livelihoods. As a protocol to prevent this highly infectious disease, measures such as border closures, staying at home, social distancing, and wearing masks were taken at local and national levels. These atypical lifestyles, which were mandatory in most areas, limited interactions among people and opportunities to socialize. These regulations, severely affected intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in a myriad of ways, as people play an integral role in ensuring the viability of ICH. The press reported the cancellation of annual festivals, closure of theatres, and suspension of performances, raising concerns about the risk to the continued practice and transmission of ICH.

In such circumstances, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) created an online platform<sup>2</sup> to call for testimonies from ICH stakeholders about their experiences amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and undertook global initiatives to learn, exchange information, and inspire communities. More than 200 reports from over 70 countries were uploaded to the platform, attracting worldwide attention. The survey results were analysed and compiled into reports (UNESCO, 2020, 2021). They included cases of tragedies and difficulties faced by the ICH stakeholders during the pandemic, as well as new and alternative ways of ICH practice and transmission to continue their ICH (UNESCO, 2020, 2021). Recognizing the urgent situation of ICH, which was facing difficulties in continuing its practice and/or transmission, the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI) implemented a project titled 'Research on ICH Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic' to closely document and study how various ICH and the related communities in the Asia-Pacific region were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Fellow, International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI).

<sup>2</sup> Platform on living heritage experiences and the COVID-19 pandemic. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/platform-on-living-heritage-experiences-and-covid-19-01123>



The project activities started with a questionnaire survey as part of the Research on ICH Safeguarding and Disaster Risk Management project in FY 2021 and was later developed as a stand-alone project to conduct further case studies in FY 2022–2023.

Case studies were conducted in the countries of: Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, the Republic of Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, and Papua New Guinea, and provided a detailed report of the findings in each country and vital documentation of ICH during the COVID-19 pandemic. This volume compiles the results of these case studies from nine Asia-Pacific countries. This chapter serves as an introduction and a brief guide to the following chapters by presenting the objectives and outline of the project, the overall activities, and its outcomes.

## **OBJECTIVES AND OUTLINE OF THE PROJECT**

The project aimed to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on the practice, transmission, and safeguarding of ICH and to document the ever-changing situation of ICH in the course of the pandemic. Attention was particularly paid to changes and alterations in ICH practices brought about by COVID-19, which could be negative and/or positive and demonstrate the flexibility and adaptability of ICH and related stakeholders. The ultimate goal was to accumulate information and build knowledge on ICH in relation to the pandemic in general, enabling us to respond to future pandemics.

All research activities were conducted in the above-mentioned nine countries in cooperation with researchers and institutions in the respective countries, namely, Kuluipa Akmatova, Saruul Arslan, Janet Blake, Elizabeth Edwards, Hanhee Hahm, Mahirta, Ritu Sethi, Naomi Fail-Simet, and Saymon Zakaria, who have sincerely devoted themselves (with their team) to this project.

FY 2021 was dedicated to designing and conducting a questionnaire survey. In consultation with the cooperating researchers, a questionnaire was developed by IRCI in August 2021 and shared with researchers in the Asia-Pacific region to seek their cooperation in conducting the project. Nine researchers and their teams kindly agreed to participate, and the questionnaire was sent out in September 2021 and returned to IRCI by February 2022. The results of the questionnaire-based survey have been published as a preliminary report (IRCI, 2022) and a booklet (IRCI, 2023).

Subsequently, field research was conducted based on the results of the questionnaire survey. The guidelines developed by IRCI were distributed to the same cooperating researchers for further work. They developed a case study design for their respective countries, and field research was initiated in August 2022. Despite the difficult conditions imposed by the pandemic and unexpected severe

weather conditions in some areas that affected the research process, the researchers submitted reports compiling the findings of field research to IRCI by March 2023. IRCI had the opportunity to participate in field research conducted in Bangladesh and Indonesia. As one of the earliest field activities since the onset of the pandemic, IRCI staff members, together with local researchers, visited the site to observe the interviews and monitor the progress of the field research.

A regional conference was held in Osaka, Japan, in July 2023 to conclude the research activities conducted during FY 2021 and FY 2022. All cooperating researchers shared the results of the case studies and discussed the overall findings and lessons learned during the pandemic.

## **QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY**

In the initial research stage, the project focused on gathering a wide range of information on ICH in the Asia-Pacific region during the COVID-19 pandemic. With reference to the UNESCO survey,<sup>3</sup> IRCI designed and conducted a questionnaire-based survey as a preliminary study in FY 2021. Two types of questionnaires were developed by IRCI. Questionnaire A was intended for researchers and institutions to fill in the overall situation of ICH at the national and regional levels, whereas Questionnaire B was intended for ICH-related individuals or stakeholders such as communities, local people, and ICH practitioners to report their experiences and thoughts regarding ICH during the pandemic. Both questionnaires included questions about the situation of ICH during the pandemic, covering topics on the practice and transmission of ICH, particularly how and in what ways it differed from the pre-COVID era. Questionnaires also asked stakeholders how they reacted to ICH during the pandemic. IRCI carefully developed a questionnaire to provide neutral questions to elicit not only the negative effects but also the positive aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic on ICH.

Questionnaire A was completed by the collaborators from the nine countries, who also translated, distributed, and collected Questionnaire B. In addition, IRCI used an online questionnaire platform to distribute Questionnaire B to individual ICH stakeholders, which added responses from Cambodia, Japan, Myanmar, New Zealand, Palau, and Singapore. As a result, 55 responses were obtained for Questionnaire A and 145 valid responses were obtained for Questionnaire B, of which 18 responses were submitted through an online questionnaire.

The questionnaires revealed the difficulties and challenges faced by practitioners and locals in continuing ICH in the same manner as in the pre-COVID era. The

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<sup>3</sup> UNESCO's online survey. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/news/living-heritage-experiences-in-the-context-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-13261>

production of local handicrafts and goods that targeted tourists, as well as performances that could not be provided online, were at risk. Notably, the use of both full and supplemental online and digital technologies has expanded dramatically since the beginning of the pandemic. This helped local ICH practitioners broaden the connections between their communities and marketing spaces to sell products to a broader range of customers. However, in some cases, exposure of ICH products online to the public can pose a threat of plagiarism, copying, and counterfeiting.

In contrast, new attempts, reformations, and revivals of ICH elements were observed. Traditional knowledge related to healthcare and disease prevention has received great attention for building stronger immune systems and fighting diseases. Others reported that the time spent during the lockdown period was used to explore new designs for crafts, new lyrics for poems, and improved performance skills. Traditional foodways also became a trend when restaurants closed, and people were preparing their own food at home. Within family units, cooking traditional foods and transmitting recipes from older to younger generations were recorded. These practices among small groups of people or limited members enhanced the practice of ICH during the pandemic. Another tendency observed was the movement and reaction of the younger generation to their local ICH. Before the pandemic, younger people were enthusiastic about moving to urban areas for job opportunities. However, the pandemic prompted them to stay in their hometowns and engage in local crafts. In other areas, lockdowns and the closure of schools encouraged young people to become involved and practice their traditional ICH as family businesses.

Despite the severity of the pandemic on a global scale, the information collected through the questionnaire provided insights into understanding new aspects of ICH. The minor and major changes that occurred in the practice and transmission of ICH during the pandemic illustrate the nature of ICH; that is, ICH is practised by the people and can change over time. The strong force of the pandemic, especially in its early stages, has challenged us to understand and accept the ever-changing situation and to be creative in safeguarding ICH. These findings on ICH and its practitioners adapting to a new situation and the cases of ICH revived during the pandemic will, therefore, be valuable resources for similar scenarios in the future.

## **FIELD RESEARCH AND ITS FINDINGS**

Based on the findings of the questionnaire survey, IRCI conducted case studies with collaborators from the same nine countries. The overall purpose of the case studies was to conduct field research on the selected ICH elements identified in the questionnaire and document in detail how they were being practised, trans-

mitted, and safeguarded. In parallel, the research also aimed to identify the additional impacts that ICH and related communities have experienced during the pandemic and in some areas in the post-pandemic situation, as compared to the results of the questionnaire survey conducted one year before. In line with this objective, the researchers individually designed their case studies based on their local situation by selecting ICH elements and considering specific themes, issues, and phenomena related to ICH during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Field research was conducted in situations where, on a global scale, social restrictions were beginning to be lifted, and the movement of people was gradually returning, although the severity of the spreading disease varied drastically from country to country or region to region, depending on local vaccine supplies and other preventive measures. Thus, the research documented the resumption of ICH practices that could not be carried out during the pandemic, especially rituals and performances that attracted large numbers of people, as well as practices that depended on tourism. It also discovered further progress in ICH practices that were initiated or enhanced during the pandemic, such as the online marketing of products, development of new designs and motifs for handicrafts, composition of new songs, and revival of traditional knowledge useful in combating viruses.

These findings showed the gradual return of ICH practices and the strong spirit of related community members, which exemplified resilience. Moreover, the re-emergence of ICH with additional changes and further efforts of related stakeholders compared to the pre-COVID era demonstrated the recovery of ICH, which resembles the quality of 'building back better' (UN, 2015).

## **REGIONAL CONFERENCE**

As the final stage of the project, IRCI organized a regional conference, 'ICH Resilience and the COVID-19 Pandemic', in Osaka, Japan, from 27 to 29 July 2023, to wrap up the activities. The main objective of the conference was to share the results of the case studies conducted in each country among all nine researchers to grasp the overall findings of the field research and develop a general understanding of how ICH in the Asia-Pacific region was affected by COVID-19. It was also intended to initiate discussions on issues and themes that emerged from the overall conclusion to build a better understanding of the relationship between ICH and COVID-19 or epidemics in general. Research collaborators from nine countries and Japanese experts were invited to participate in the conference.

The discussion revolved around the following points: 1) the overall impact of COVID-19 on ICH elements in the Asia-Pacific region, especially the positive and



negative aspects; 2) the resilience of ICH, as demonstrated in the field research; 3) the role of community members and practitioners of ICH, local and national governments, and international organizations in the field of ICH and epidemics in general; and 4) ways to share research results and bring them back to the communities involved in ICH. In the course of the discussion, the following issues were brought to the attention of the researchers, among other issues that need to be considered independent of the COVID-19 pandemic.

First, digital technologies were highlighted as key resources to be considered and taken care of cautiously because of their multidimensional characteristics. On the bright side, practitioners themselves set up their own businesses or online shops and, in some cases, started marketing products through private enterprises with the support of government organizations. Online platforms such as Zoom, which became popular during the pandemic, have become useful tools for holding classes on ICH elements. These new practices have created a huge chance for ICH transmission, especially to the younger generation, who are mostly digitally literate.

However, the limitations of online technologies and digital platforms were also considered. A good digital environment and infrastructure, such as a stable internet connection and access to certain websites and applications for individuals, are not guaranteed in all regions, especially in rural areas. The online selling of products can also expose authentic designs and original goods to the public, which can lead to copying and counterfeiting, as mentioned earlier. One participant mentioned language barriers to the use of online tools and programmes, saying that available language variations were limited and suggested providing materials in the local dialects of the practitioners. Recognizing the benefits and local needs, further consideration and caution are needed when applying digital technologies in the context of ICH.

Discussions also focused on the resilience of ICH and its future sustainability in relation to the Convention, which defines ‘safeguarding’ as ‘measures aimed at ensuring the viability of ICH’.<sup>4</sup> To safeguard and build the resilience of ICH in the face of pandemics and epidemics in general, preventive measures such as 1) understanding the role of each stakeholder, 2) documentation and capacity building to preserve knowledge, and 3) collaboration and networking among stakeholders were proposed, emphasising the importance of ensuring practitioners’ preparedness.

Referring to previous projects conducted in local areas in Asia and the Pacific, the

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<sup>4</sup> Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003 Convention). <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>

researchers emphasised the importance of involving multiple sectors in programmes, as each has its own unique role to play; for instance, the private sector for funding as well as children to bring fresh, interesting ideas. The roles of researchers in the field of ICH were reaffirmed, such as: 1) recording and documenting information to be passed on to the next generation, 2) providing data to influence government agencies concerned with supporting ICH and the community, and 3) acting as key personnel and facilitators linking stakeholders at different levels.

Other general challenges and issues for safeguarding ICH that have been acknowledged through the experience of the pandemic were also discussed. The urgent need to document ICH practitioners, for instance, using a system such as Living Human Treasures, was expressed as they were mostly older adults. Difficulties related to the digitalization and publicization of materials on ICH and the protection of original products and goods were highlighted, particularly ways to protect local practitioners' artistic skills and knowledge through legislation and government policies from being plagiarized. Increasing the understanding of ICH in society, especially among practitioners, is crucial.

The overall discussion addressed the vulnerability and evolving nature of ICH and simultaneously provided us with insights into the most recent situations of ICH at the local level. Reflecting on these subjects, the methods and responsibilities of stakeholders to continue safeguarding ICH despite the difficulties caused by the pandemic were considered.

## **PANEL EXHIBITION**

In addition to publishing the preliminary report and booklet, IRCI organized a panel exhibition<sup>5</sup> in cooperation with the Sakai City Government to disseminate the research results to the public. The Sakai City Museum, where IRCI is located, offered a space for panels to be displayed. With IRCI's analysis and summary of the project, photos and short video clips of ICH elements captured during field research by our cooperating researchers are displayed with Japanese captions. This exhibition, in cooperation with the Sakai City, has provided an opportunity for IRCI to widely publicize its research results, as well as for citizens to learn more about ICH.

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<sup>5</sup> A Panel Exhibition 'ICH Resilience amid COVID-19 Pandemic' was held at the Sakai City Museum from 7 November 2023 to 31 March 2024.

## CONCLUSION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, merely continuing our daily lives posed a significant challenge for all of us. ICH, which involves interactions between individuals, was particularly difficult. IRCI's project on ICH and the COVID-19 pandemic investigated the status of selected ICH elements during the pandemic in the Asia-Pacific region and has revealed various aspects of ICH that were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, both negatively and positively. Over the course of the project, while the pandemic was constantly changing, unstable, and harsh in most areas, difficulties in continuing ICH practices were highlighted. Nevertheless, new attempts to improve the practice and transmission of ICH have attracted our attention.

What makes a pandemic different from other disasters is that it suffocates the entire world, not just specific areas. People have become desperate to meet their own needs and found it challenging to help others. In these situations, ICH and related communities are critical in finding ways to continue its practice and transmission. The results of these case studies, presented in the following chapters, illustrate the vitality and resilience of ICH and its stakeholders, even in challenging situations. These reports on ICH elements amid COVID-19 bring insight into the powerful spirit shown by ICH and its related community members, which will become a vital resource for understanding past events as well as addressing further improvements that all stakeholders could discuss to continue the safeguarding of ICH.

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# TRANSFORMATION OF THE ICH IN BANGLADESH IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

Saymon Zakaria<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The people of Bangladesh are melomaniac. From time immemorial, they have practiced music despite of varied challenges of natural disasters, economic crises, political impediments, and others. The history is ingrained from the ancient time of *Charyapada* to the modern era of musical texts. In the recent COVID-19 pandemic, we found a new stamina among the traditional music practitioners to continue the culture of music.

Despite facing restrictions and social distance during the Pandemic time, the music practitioners continued their practices staying inside their homes. The disciples also accompanied the master artists by getting together at the guru's home. They also opted to utilize the new digital platform of social media like Facebook and YouTube. Many of them, using their mobile phone, broadcast their performances live or by uploading recorded performances. Besides, such a digital vibe broadened their opportunity to communicate with their fans living in distant locations in the country and abroad. So, it opened a new door to transmit music style, philosophic ideas and theories, and discussions over video conferences. Both the elderly gurus and young practitioners participated in utilizing digital technology for practicing, celebrating, and transmitting music traditions.

Our field research reveals that the people who were even reluctant to be engaged in traditional music practices became interested and involved in the folk culture of music. The folk music practitioners composed new songs on COVID-19, which created greater awareness of health behavior to prevent the pandemic. This trend helped the greater community to newly realize the importance of traditional music culture due to their power to relate to the contemporary challenges of daily life.

During the pandemic time, there was a new rise in the historical revival of the ancient *Charyapada*. Several centers for the revival of *Charyapada* have been

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<sup>1</sup> Deputy Director, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh.



established in different parts of Bangladesh. Even, there are some instances of conducting training on *Charyapada* singing via online media.

## FIELD RESEARCH

In search of situations of the traditional musical culture of Bangladesh in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-pandemic period, we conducted research in seven locations across Bangladesh. The geographic areas were selected considering the intensive practice of the specific musical tradition in the respective area. The oral statements and comments of the musical community we encountered were recorded. This article has been developed based on the transcript of the audio-visual records of the field research. The field research continued from August 2022 to January 2023. The research detected the changes in lives of the traditional music practitioners that happened during and after COVID-19. The research was limited to investigating three elements of ICH: the revival of the *Charya* Song, the *Baul* Song, and the *Sufi* Song.

## THE REVIVAL OF CHARYAPADA

Generally, *Charyapada* was performed prominently by Buddhist priests and the traditional body-centric saints in the ancient Bengal through singing, dancing, and acting from 650 AD to 1100 AD. In 1200 AD, this tradition disappeared encountering the Muslim invasion. However, the manuscripts of this literature were somehow preserved in the Royal Library of Nepal. Haraprasad Shastri, a Bengali scholar, discovered the manuscripts in 1907; and Bangia Sahittya Parishad of Kolkata published the manuscript in 1916.



**Figure 1.** During COVID-19 Pandemic, Bhabanagara Sadhusanga continued songs of *Charyapada* Revival Activities in limited manner at Suhrawardi Udyan in Dhaka. (Photo: S. Zakaria)



**Figure 2.** *Charyapada* performers at the Paharhpur Buddhist archeological site. (Photo: S. Zakaria)



**Figure 3.** Discussion with the artists of Paharhpur Bouddhabihara Charya Practice Center. (Photo: S. S. Tania)

A foundation named Bhābanagara Foundation incepted Bhābanagara Sadhusanga in 2014, a program to revive the ancient *Charya* songs. In the course of around one decade, almost one thousand *sadhaka* singers all over Bangladesh have been practicing the ceaseless initiative to revive *Charya* Songs. Every Wednesday, the traditional singers from different corners of the country get together at the Suhrawardy Udyan and practice *Charya* Songs.

In course of time, renowned scholars and researchers from home and abroad have experienced this Wednesday event. Being impressed, Bangla Academy, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, National Museum, University of Dhaka, Kazi Nazrul Islam University, and Bangladesh Television (BTV) have organized several events of *Charya* Song Performance. Gradually the effort of reviving the *Charyapada* extended across a number of districts of Bangladesh.

Our field works concentrated on *Bhabanagara Sadhusanga* (Figure 1) in Dhaka, the Charya Practice Center of *Paharhpur Bouddhabihara* (Figure 2) in Naogaon, *Bangladesh Folk Culture Protection and Charya Charcha Kendra*, Jhinaidaha, and the Charya Practice Center of Pabna, Kushtia, Chuadanga, Cumilla and Kishoreganj district. We also have had interactive dialogue with the individual *Charyapada* practitioners of Manikganj district.

In the COVID-19 pandemic, the enthusiastic *Charya* practitioners continued practicing *Charya* songs at home. They also started to use digital social media (Facebook and YouTube) for networking with the interested audience. Some capable people extended their helping hands to the poor *Charya* performers. Several local young persons captured their videos to share over social media. A YouTube channel<sup>2</sup> broadcasted an elaborate feature on them. The *Charya* practitioners of *Paharhpur* (Figure 3) opined that the works of elderly performers should be preserved digitally as resources for young practitioners and researchers.

Kishoreganj district is representative zone of *Sufi* music in Bangladesh. In this district, Sufi Zakir Chisti, a follower of Sufi Muhammad Fakir (Figure 4), founded a Charya Revival Centre in his village Koshakhali in the time of COVID-19 pandemic. In the lockdown situation, the local artists, who had been living in Dhaka for their livelihood, returned to villages. *Sufi* Zakir Chisti organized a *Charya* Training Workshop and invited these artists to participate. Thus, a group of local folk performers started practicing and performing *Charya* songs regularly. *Sufi* Zakir Chisti brought this new group of *Charya* revival actors under the umbrella of Kishoreganj Shantidham Charya Practice Centre (Figure 5).

Similar initiative in the Fatehpur village of Jhineda district became successful. It is unique that a group of young Bauls who had become confined within the village established Folk Culture Protection and Charyapada Practice Center in the village. They additionally opened a YouTube channel to broadcast their activities with wider YouTube users. In the after-COVID-19 time, this group also started using Facebook to connect with digital technology users. Due to their online activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, they had become so popular that they were invited by Bangla Academy to perform in Dhaka. However, it revealed that the high internet charge and the cost of the internet-friendly mobile phone set are challenges for the poor artists to use the digital platforms.

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<sup>2</sup> Rnewsbd24. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_RNATxtynY4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_RNATxtynY4)





**Figure 4.** Interview with Mohammad Fakir at the Shantidham Bhabdarshan Charya Center, Kishoreganj. (Photo: S. S. Tania)



**Figure 5.** In the Annual Gathering of the *Sufi* devotees, they discuss the *Sufi* theories, Pray and perform *Sufi* songs, Shantidham Bhabdarshan Charya Center, Kishoreganj. (Photo: S. S. Tania and S. Zakaria)

### **BAUL SONG, BAUL SADHANA AND SADHUSANGA**

*Baul* song is an ancient tradition of Bangladeshi intangible culture. It is inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The *Baul* beliefs, lifestyle, and songs are transmitted downward generations through *guru-shishya* tradition at *Baul Ashram*. The *Baul* never discriminate from religion to religion. They feel the omnipotent power within the human body. So, they believe in the *manush guru*, a human guru in the image of God. Sharing spiritual ideas through songs and *sadhusanga*, that is, union among humans is part and parcel of the *sadhana*. To investigate the situation of the *Baul* songs in context of the COVID-19, the research team conducted fieldwork in districts of Kushtia, Chuadanga, and Jhenaidah.



In COVID-19, the *Baul* became confined within the home or *Ashram*. However, facing limited mobility and restriction on social gatherings, the traditional *Baul* also started using virtual platforms for their performances, preaching, and teaching for the first time. While investigating at the *Hem-Ashram* founded by *Baul* Guru Nahir Shah (Figure 6 and 7) in the village of Pragpur in Kushtia district, we found a positive vibe of practicing *Baul* song and *Baul* philosophy on digital platform in and after COVID-19. Guru Nahir Shah used and has been using digital media to communicate with his local and expatriate disciples. He put special emphasis on interaction with the young *Baul*. The youth social media users have shown much more interest in the deeper knowledge of the *Baul* doctrine. COVID-19 thus has pushed the unique possibility of the transmission of the *Baul* culture.

The local youth developed a trend of developing video documentaries of the *Baul* performers and their performances and sharing them over Facebook and YouTube. Nahir Shah opined that the digital platforms made the young *Baul* understand the deeper meanings of *Baul* songs. At the beginning of COVID-19, *Guru-Shishya* tradition was affected due to restrictions on physical contact. However, the opportunity of using digital technology has opened new doors for the *Baul* community to remain vibrant in their living *Baul* life. The *Baul* who are utilizing social media are receiving very positive feedback from their followers and the co-practitioners. In the pre-COVID-19 time, the *Baul* would consider social gatherings as the only method of *Baul* song practice and *sadhana*-related interaction, but the pandemic has changed their mindset. The young generation is better familiar with digital technology. They taught the senior *Baul* how to use digital media.

However, it is noteworthy that the youth are found to use unmatched modern musical instruments that divert the actual facets of the *Baul* song. The senior



**Figure 6.** Saymon Zakaria with *Baul*-Guru Fakir Nahir Shah. (Photo: S. S. Tania)



**Figure 7.** *Baul*-Guru Fakir Nahir with his followers. (Photo: Nidhi)

*Bauls* consider this trend alarming for the tradition of the unique nature of the *Baul* song and the *Baul sadhana*. On the other hand, the youth opt to use Western instruments to attract viewers of the digital social media. This scenario means that the *Baul* tradition, which connects the Guru and the disciples, got a significant transition in the situation during COVID-19. Interestingly, the common people who love *Baul* songs and love to gain *Baul* knowledge are actually much more interested in physical interactions through participating in the interactive *Baul* song performances.

It was a remarkable finding that a *Baul* Practitioner who had come from France before the COVID-19 pandemic and taken the doctrine of the *Baul* Guru Lalan Sain established her own *Ashram* in the Pragpur village of Kushtia during the Pandemic period. At her *Ashram*, she introduced a digital channel on Facebook and YouTube to share her *Baul* experiences and Yoga practices virtually.<sup>3</sup> Besides, several children have started living at her *Ashram* as her disciples to adapt *Baul* practices and learn *Baul* songs. During the times after-COVID-19 period, the *Baul* songs have been being practiced in both digital platforms and the traditional interactive social gathering.

## THE TRADITIONAL SUFI SONGS

There are several schools of *Sufi* songs in Bangladesh. This element represents the diversity of *Baul-Fakir* songs in Bangladesh. The Bangla *Sufi* songs adapted a lot of features of *Baul* songs and thus created a different school of *Baul-Fakir* songs that are very popular among both rural and urban communities. This school follows Islamic ideas in *Sufi* manner. In the background of COVID-19 pandemic, we selected our field at Hasli village of Manikganj district to understand the *Sufi* song practices in and after the COVID-19 time.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mm15Bhc7HBI>, <https://www.youtube.com/@DeboYoga>

*Sufi* songs are practiced almost everywhere in Bangladesh. We had very close observation of the team of the famous *Sufi* Saidur Rahman Boyati. We visited Saidur's home considering their ages-old family tradition of these school of *Sufi* songs. After being introduced to Saidur Rahman Boyati and his group members, we observed their daily lives and activities and had elaborate discussions with his group members.

The COVID-19 pandemic encountered the humanity of the world, scaring and killing the mass with no resistance. Bangladesh too has lost countless lives. The government alerted the people to maintain social distance, even to remain afar during prayer in congregation. People did not dare to shake hands. Everybody started washing hands from time to time. All restrained themselves from physical contact and used facial masks in public places. The *Sufi* song artists took a spontaneous initiative of raising social awareness to follow the government's instructions. They interpreted the use of masks in a creative manner. They started to announce that wearing a mask means keeping breath and speech controlled which is alike religious rules. They also explained that Bengali people were used to masking their cattle to restrain them from harming the growing crops. This means that people must remain careful and controlled so that no other persons get hurt by anybody's words as well as communicable diseases. In their new songs, they narrated the mask as a symbol of protecting others from the harm of communicable diseases.

The *Sufi Boyatis* live basically on singing. In the lockdown situation, they became quite helpless. For restrictions on social gathering and music events, their earning stopped. They did not have minimum savings for survival in off time. The *Sufi* performers were in a puzzling situation about how to manage daily life. In such hard time, the traditional *Sufi* song practitioners composed new songs reflecting the serious features of the pandemic and the required safeguarding of lives. They voluntarily performed those songs roaming around the villages keeping social distance. Their purpose was to make people feel that by maintaining COVID-19 protective behavior, people may secure *Allah's* bliss to exist safely in the pandemic. The *Sufi* artists have preserved their new songs in the written form.

However, after COVID-19, the revitalization of the performance-based *Sufi* song has come across social challenges in the changed context. The society seemed to be reluctant to support their long-practiced traditional culture. Patronization to organize *Sufi* song performances drastically became discouraging. In this situation, the *Sufi* artists have had a feeling of despair. The *Sufi* believes, 'if you want to outdo a nation, hit the culture of that nation'. They think that the nation is turning into a mechanical institute detached from their cultural roots – the varied elements of their intangible cultural heritage. COVID-19 has made every person much more self-centered, which is not matched with the traditional culture of

Bangladesh. The after-COVID-19 trend of musical performances is leading Bangladesh society backward, neglecting the traditions. The contemporary lyrics of different songs have become vulgar, the instruments are not the local ones, and the musical behaviors of the young singers are not linked with the traditional mode. It is not only COVID-19 but also the impact of social media that misguides the young generation to be derailed from traditional culture and behavior.

This is why it has been possible for the *Sufi* singers of Manikganj (Figure 8) to guide people in their protection from coronavirus. Through their performances, they delivered the key messages on Dos and Don'ts to prevent Corona. Thus, some people, who never liked *Sufi* songs, became interested in this form of performance. The common villagers became convinced to admit that songs are knowledge. Songs have the power to direct the path of overcoming the pandemic. People understood that if we followed the health rules, they could be safe in the pandemic situation. They feel that if they become impure, unclean, dirty, and without protective measures, they may be affected. The villagers came to their understanding that the songs have a deep connection with practical life.

However, the *Sufi* song practitioners encountered extreme want in the pandemic period. There was no external financial or food assistance for them except a little incentive from Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

In terms of using mobile phone technology, the *Sufi* performers of Manikganj district are adaptive enough. However, they do not think that digital platforms can be an alternative the direct interactive performances. Mentioning the young generation's trend of passing a long time with social media, Saidur Rahman Boyati opined that this new digital culture is taking the new generation away from the traditional culture. They have become so addicted to mobile phone-



**Figure 8.** Informal session of the *Sufi* song by Abul Basar Abbasi at Manikganj. (Photo: S. Zakaria)



based social media that they often get involved in anti-social acts. They are coming across many different digital elements that are considered vulgar in our culture. The new generation is listening to different languages, rhythms, and tones, all of which are unmatched by the traditional features of Bangladesh. The young singers do not like the local musical instruments like *dhol*, *ektara*, flute, *totara*, or *sarinda*, etc, they opt for western instruments. The local musical instruments are under the threat of extinction.

The *Sufi* singers think that the school curriculum should include lessons on the proper manner of using digital media and awareness of internet security. The mainstream media – Television channels and newspapers – also should come forward to spread common awareness of the good uses of social media.

During the Corona pandemic, the *Sufi* Song Group members– harmonium master, *dhuli* (*dhol* player), flute artist, *dotara* player, violin artist, etc. went scattered. When they were not together, the performance became impossible. To secure daily expenses, many of them became engaged in different non-music activities for survival. Even after COVID-19, it seemed difficult for them to get back to musical performance. In the after-COVID-19 context, they started demanding more and more money for performance. But the situation was the opposite before COVID-19. They had been coming spontaneously without being concerned about how much they would receive. It means Corona pandemic caused a lot of harm to *Sufi* song practices. The patrons and event organizers have also become reluctant to spend money on organizing *Sufi* performances. Only one or two old patrons continued supporting, though on a small scale.

## **OBSERVATION OF THE ICH IN BANGLADESH**

The research team worked on the ICH of Bangladesh from November 2022 to January 2023, which mainly observed the diverse musical elements of the ICH of Bangladesh. The team stayed with the traditional music community and learned their reality in and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides the above-mentioned fieldwork, the research team also joined a *Baul Sadhusanga* at *Khoda Boks Sain Sangeet Niketan* in Jahanpur Village of Chuadanga district on the 15th and 16th of January 2023. This post-COVID-19 *Baul* Gathering was lively with the enthusiastic participation of both elderly *gurus* and young disciples as well as several observers. The same new enthusiasm was marked in the performance of *Padmar Nachon* (The Dance of the goddess Padma) at the District Literary Fest in Kushtia, jointly organized by Bangla Academy and the District Admin of Kushtia. The participation of the new generation performers in *Padmar Nachon* was remarkable. From 28th to 31st December 2022, we observed the traditional musical performance of the indigenous groups in Khagrachhari Hill Tract District. We also observed the *Buddhist Pindadaan* (offering funeral foods to the deceased ances-

tors) fest, a ritual-based festival in which more than a thousand *Buddha Bhanteys* participated. There we participated in the performance of *Buddhist Kirtana*, a performance of religious music of the Buddhist community. The performers informed us that the frequency of performing *Buddhist Kirtana* increased in different *Buddhist* dwelling zones of Bangladesh.

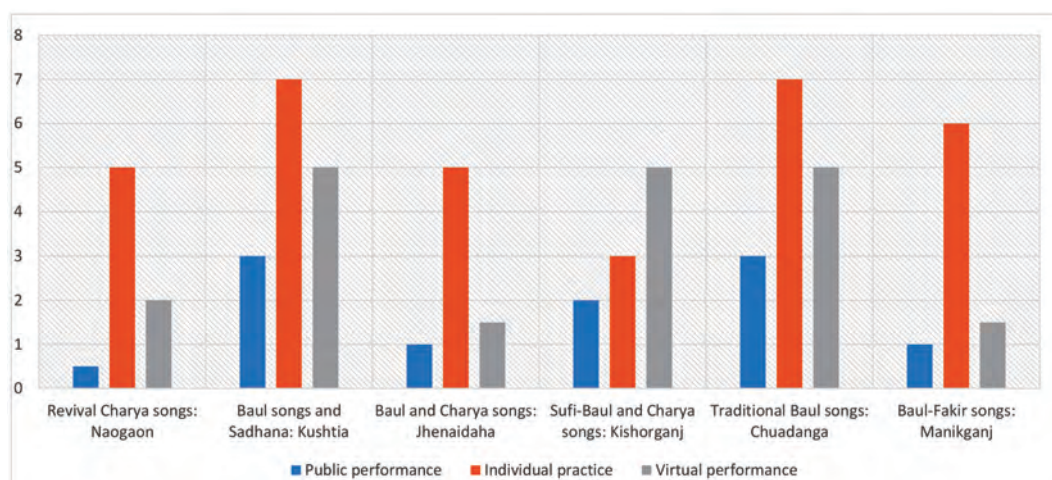
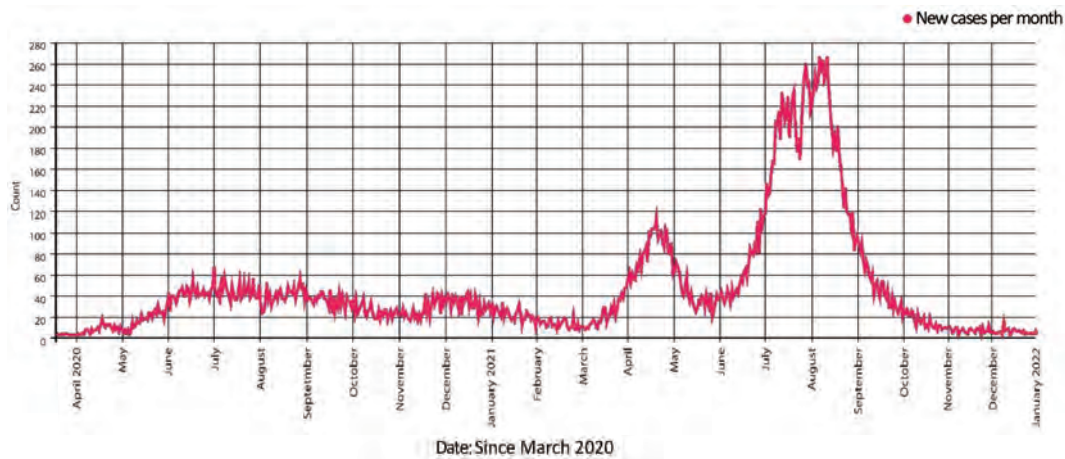
## CONCLUSION

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in Bangladesh. The folk artists of Bangladesh, *Baul* and *Sufi* performers, started composing and performing songs for people's awareness to prevent the pandemic. At the same time, they took the initiative to spread their initiatives over social media. Thus, two positive aspects of the music culture of Bangladesh appeared. One, new types of music during the pandemic appeared; Two, folk artists began to experience technology. The golden era of virtual performance of *Baul* song and the *Baul* discussion started. Many of them started Facebook and YouTube Live. The participation of the youth and children as well as women in practicing ICH increased because of the digital platforms. Apart from Facebook and YouTube Live, video conferences using Messenger, WhatsApp, IMO, etc. became very popular among Bangladeshi ICH practitioners.

The impact of COVID-19 on the ICH of Bangladesh exposes the following trends: i. The performers of the folk music groups have become scattered due to restrictions on social gatherings; ii. The traditional music performers continued their practices during their stay-home time within the family atmosphere; iii. Many artists, especially the youth, started using mobile phone-based social media; iv. The traditional performers have massively entered the digital platform for their performance as well as interaction with the followers and the common audience; v. Due to the social media activities, many younger *Baul* got engaged in ICH; vi. The enthusiastic youth group's established new organizations for their ICH practices and transmission; vii. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the ICH of Bangladesh got a new shape by adapting specifically the digital media. However, the extremely poor ICH practitioners remain out of technology-based opportunities. The government support did not reach the majority of the poor folk artists and performers, basically because of the lack of a complete ICH Inventory. Considering the need, the Bhābanagara Foundation developed a living list of folk singers and musicians. Including their address, ICH element, and mobile phone number, from all of the districts of Bangladesh and published *Bangladesher Lokoshilpi Talika* (Folk Artists of Bangladesh: an encyclopedic Dictionary) The List has been helpful for many small patronizers to support the poor artists.

The elements of ICH in Bangladesh have overcome different adverse contexts in the course of history. They faced challenges of natural disasters and other





**Figure 9.** The transition of COVID-19 pandemic situation. (Source: Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research, Bangladesh)

climatic hazards as well as socio-political hindrances, conflicts, and war and made their headway through necessary transformation. A few of the extinct traditional cultural elements, such as *Charyapada*, are reviving with new facets.

COVID-19 hit Bangladesh in March 2020 (Figure 9). From April 2020 to April 2021, the rate of COVID-19 cases and deaths remained almost stable. But from May to September 2021, the rate increased drastically. However, from October 2021, the rate of COVID-19 cases and deaths started to decrease. In this situation, the government imposed various restrictions on the movement of people and banned all kinds of mass gatherings. As a result, the tradition of public performance stopped though a few ritual-oriented public performances took place in a limited manner. On the other hand, the practice of individualistic music culture on digital platforms increased significantly.

Before COVID-19, there were few opportunities for individual artists. During COVID-19, the artists found new opportunities to improve their skills in digital

media. Confident, folk artists have gained fame at the national and international level due to technological support. Now it is possible to find the songs of almost every artist of Bangladesh in one way or another on various digital platforms including Facebook and YouTube.

[Translated by Nurunnabi Shanto]



# IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN FIJI 2022–2023

Elizabeth Edwards<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in cooperation with the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI), research has been conducted amongst our Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) custodians and practitioners here in Fiji. COVID-19 impacted the whole world in many areas, devastating nations, governments, business houses/individuals and communities throughout the world and this research is focused on Fiji's intangible cultural heritage that was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022-2023. Through the research we were able to capture information from thirteen active practitioners in: Nadroga Navosa Sigatoka, Rewa, Vanua Levu, Suva and Tailevu. They were potters – 'tuli tuli', weavers of fans, baskets, mats, purses, masi makers/designers and salt makers – 'mahima'. Each practitioner had their own unique experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, experiencing both good and bad, during and after the pandemic. Many were adjusting and adapting to their current circumstances.

## RESEARCH

A total of thirteen individuals and their communities have been researched and the interviews were conducted with:

- Ms Asena Dawai (potter) of Lawai village, Nadroga.
- Mr Sainivalati Nawawabalavu (potter) of Nakabuta Village, Nadroga.
- Ms Diana (salt maker) of Lomawai village, Nadroga.
- Ms Akesa Kunabuli (potter) of Nayawa Village, Nadroga.
- Ms Mareta Burese (voivoi weaver) of Nukubalvu village, Savusavu.
- Ms Mereilisoni (coconut leaves weaver) of Dreketi village, Savusavu.
- Ms Sanita Vu (masi maker & weaver) of Uduya village, Kabara, Lau.
- Ms Leba Duri (weaver – baskets, purses, salusalu) of Naikomo village, Kabara, Lau.

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary General, Blue Shield Pasifika

- Ms Anaseini Latu (weaver – baskets, mats, purses) of the province of Ra, vasu Fulaga, Lau.
- Ms Rigieta Nuku (weaver – mats, wedding attire) of Tuvu village, Totoya, Lau.
- Ms Sereana Nagatalevu (weaver – mats, baskets, trays) of Naceva village, Beqa.
- Ms Solinavanua Raivotu (weaver – ‘*iri ni daku*’ traditional fan) of Daku village, Tailevu.
- Ms Veniana Maraia Paulina (Saqamoli traditional potter) of Naselai village, Nuku, Tailevu.

Information obtained during the interviews were not mainly based around their main ICH practices, also a source of their living, and questions were also focused and based on their communities, surroundings, nature, traditional practices, and expressions that they were accustomed to; which included performing their traditional *mekes*, dances, rituals, funeral rites, celebrations, social gatherings and their traditional practices – known to them as their ‘norm’. Adjusting to the ‘new norm’ – before, during and after the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, is something each of the thirteen individuals and their communities, expressed during this research.

## **SITUATION OF COVID-19 IN FIJI**

The pandemic hit Fiji in an unexpected way, and no one was prepared or even knew what to expect. Medical authorities placed restrictions on movements and it was claimed that our first COVID-19 case was a flight attendant. Upon his return from the United States of America, this made everyone that arrived on international flights and through the seas a ‘high risk’ to those that were in the country. Quarantines, lockdowns, and the issuing of wearing a face mask, social distancing, constant hand sanitizing and being in your ‘bubble’ (nuclear or extended family) was a top priority when the pandemic first broke out.

The western division had many Fijians losing their full-time employments, they were mainly focused around the tourism sector, and this also stopped the flow of tourism into Fiji. Hundreds and thousands of flight attendants, pilots, hotel workers, shop attendants, business houses, governments officers lost their jobs, or worked on reduced hours, and many employees lost their homes, flats and this impacted their families as a whole. Most Fijians returned to their villages and had to live off the land and sea to provide for their daily needs and support their families. All schools were on total lockdown. Those who already living in the villages did not really feel the brunt of the pandemic, but all ICH practitioners that were dependent on the tourism sector experienced the decline in sales, orders and made no money at all during the pandemic. The pandemic brought about FEAR and ANXIETY to most of its people. With some sort of spiritual intervention to find comfort and solace during the pandemic, families bonded and

cared more for each other than ever.

Families communicated more online, and this also saw a shift to the digital era. Fiji's school system was not prepared for a pandemic and all lessons could not be accessed online.

Families all over Fiji exchanged and bartered their food, which was mainly done at the borders of the lockdown areas. Most urban and settlement families suffered during the pandemic due to a lack of food and the basic items needed. Most of our ICH practitioners experienced hardship during the pandemic, and some faced losses in their sales, orders, and the need for raw materials to make new products, not knowing how to utilize the digital spaces and the need to meet their basic daily needs, impacting their families and themselves. Some did not see the relevance of continuing the practice with all the hardship faced, but others saw their practice as an avenue to be therapeutic.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Consent forms and questionnaires were prepared and presented to every informant. Their consent was important to get the proper answers needed for this research. For practitioners that were living in their rural communities, proper traditional protocols had to be observed and traditional '*sevusevu*' and presentations of *yaqona* had to be presented asking the permission to conduct interviews and what the research was all about and where this information will be stored and its purpose holistically. Informants also signed a consent form. A set of questionnaires were prepared, and each practitioner responded to it. All interviews were also digitally documented on camera and high-resolution pictures were also taken showing their ICH practice and products produced.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Ms Asena Dawai (potter) of Lawai Village, Nadroga**

Ms Dawai was interviewed at the Crow's Nest Resort in Sigatoka. She is part of her women's group of Lawai potters in Nadroga.

ICH element: knowledge of traditional pottery making, practice and skillsets and social practices.

#### ***Background and geographical information***

Lawai village, in the district of Nadroga and Navosa Province (Western), is situated in the region of Sigatoka, in the Western division, some 61 miles or (98km) West of Suva, the country's capital. Lawai village town is Sigatoka town. The Lawai village and its people are renowned for their traditional clay potters. This unique practice has been passed down from generations to generations; they are also related to the nearby potters of Nakabuta village and Nayawa village; all have their own unique pottery skillsets and techniques for their unique big pots. Their



traditional potteries has been trademarked as ‘Naboumasi Pottery’. This design was made during their project with the UNDP – Mineral Department, post COVID-19 Recovery. This decision was made by the *mataqali* (clan) themselves – both men and women. The word ‘Naboumasi Masi Pottery’ is a word known only by the Mataqali of Lawai village. The people of Lawai village are well known for only creating this type of traditional pottery. They also make contemporary potteries to market to the nearby hotels, resorts, tourists and local markets.

### ***Schedule management***

The potters and salt makers of Nadroga, Sigatoka were all scheduled to be interviewed during my visit to Nadroga, Sigatoka. Asking for permission and observing the proper protocols (presenting my *sevusevu* – *yaqona* to the headman) in place to seek the approval to conduct my research was an area, that is highly respected for the *vanua* (community/village) and the communities/people to be interviewed. Ms Asena Dawai was selected to be interviewed as she was also representing her women folks of Lawai village, potters in Nadroga. She was interviewed during September 2022 in Nadroga, Sigatoka, Fiji. Ms Asena Dawai is a mother, married to a gentleman from Lawai village, Nadroga. The women married into their clans are given the permission to learn and create their potteries. She is also the bread winner for her family and has been practicing pottery making for more than twenty years now.

As an ICH practitioner, she is also a former committee member of the Lawai’s women potters and has assisted/supported her committee, the *vanua* and *lotu* (church) in pottery making, sales and financially.

### ***Statistical information***

During the pandemic, there were no recorded cases of COVID-19 in the village. Only the policemen, health workers and soldiers were allowed to work, everyone else was on lockdown. Most, not all the hotel workers in the villages (most of them were full-time hotel workers), lost their fulltime employment and were forced to stay home, or moved from Sigatoka town or the suburb’s back to the village. The Sigatoka area are well-known for its Sand Dunes, coastal resorts, hotels and backpackers for tourists – as it is sunny and dry in the area; just like Nadi.

The whole community have never experienced such a pandemic and this brought the whole community to their knees, families spent more time at home, family time, prayer time, there was no drinking of *yaqona* (*kava*), restrictions had to be observed because the authorities – police would do their spot checks. There was no sales or visits for the potters/artisans. All families had to live off their land/farms and whatever they could manage to feed and support their families. There was only one death during the pandemic. Even the proper burial rites/rituals could not be observed properly. Immediate and extended families could not even attend the funerals and bury the dead.

### ***Target ICH was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic***

When the pandemic first struck Fiji in Nadi (closer to Sigatoka); authorities gave the warning, and restrictions were put in place: no social gatherings, wearing of masks etc. Most of the villages went about their daily tasks and chores as her family and most of the families in Lawai village ate from their land (plantations). This was not easy for all families as some were dependent on their full-time employment. The women potters would have tourists/guests visit their villages for a live demonstration, being entertained by their 'meke' (dance), and in the end purchasing or donating to their women potters, who would display and sell their potteries in their community halls. During the pandemic, the prolonged days, weeks, months and year of the lockdowns, and with all the restrictions in place most but not all the women felt discouraged and felt abandoned for not being able to sell/market their existing potteries. This caused a lot of frustration, pressure and major discouragement to most of the women potters – old, middle-aged and young, Asena and the other women, began to think if it was worthwhile to making pottery and to keep the practice alive. The basic thought and experience of not being able to make any money from their potteries just brought on more pressure and frustration.

### **Mr Sainivalati Nawawabalavu (potter) of Nakabuta Village, Nadroga**

Mr Nawawabalavu was interviewed at the Crow's Nest Resort in Sigatoka. He is part of the potter's group in Nakabuta, Nadroga.

### ***Background and geographical information***

Nakabuta village, in Nadroga and Navosa Province (Western), situated in the interior of Sigatoka town, about a 15-minute drive to reach the village, 60-minute (or 97km) west of Suva city, the country's capital. The history about the Nakabuta people is that their pottery first came from their neighboring village, Lawai village. The women folks says this is where their elders came from; pottery was actually brought by their ancestors; but folks of the village, the people are all related in some way or another. You will find their grandfathers, grandmothers, mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles and children, all related and sharing maternal or paternal links to Lawai village or vice versa to Nakabuta village in the Nadroga Navosa province. The people of Nakabuta are renowned for their traditional clay pottery, this unique practice has been passed down from generations to generations. They are also related to the nearby potters of Nayawa village, who all have their own unique pottery skillsets and techniques for their unique big pots. Their traditional potteries has been trademarked as 'Nakabuta Mosiadi' Pottery. This design was made during their project with the UNDP – Mineral Department, post COVID-19 Recovery. This decision was made by the *mataqali* themselves – both men and women. The word 'Nakabuta Mosiadi' Pottery is a word known only by the *mataqali* of Nakabuta village. The people of Nakabuta village are well known

for only creating this type of traditional pot. They also make contemporary potteries to the market nearby hotels, resorts, tourists, and local markets.

### ***Schedule management***

Mr Sanivalati was an ideal candidate to be interviewed as he was the only male potter of Nakabuta village, and had learnt his pottery skills from his mother, who had taught him from a very young age. Ever since then he has been practicing the art of pottery making and making a living for himself and his family. He was also representing the community/village of Nakabuta. He was interviewed straight after Ms Dawai. Mr Nawawabalavu now looks after his mother and does full-time pottery making as a living. He would also display and market his products at the Sigatoka Sand Dunes center. This is also a place where he would hold small pottery classes for the tourist groups that would visit. He has been practicing the art of pottery making for more than forty years now. As an ICH practitioner, he is also a former committee member of the Nakabuta community of potters. He has also assisted/supported his committee, the *vanua* (community) and *lotu* (church) in pottery making, sales and financially.

### ***Statistical information***

During the pandemic, there were no recorded cases of COVID-19 in the village. For the district of Nadroga, there are more than 60 potters, that are registered artisans of Fiji Arts Council. There are less than 100 people living in Nakabuta village, the community consists of men, women, youths and children, a tight knit community. There is no network to the internet/mobile connection. The village is situated at the bottom of a hilltop. Hence the difficulty in connecting to the internet/mobile connection. There are a few hotel workers and people who work in the nearby Sigatoka town. Most of them had lost their full-time employment during the pandemic, forcing individuals and communities to return to the village and live off the land/plantations. The whole community have never experienced a pandemic as such and this brought the whole community to their knees, families spent more time at home, family time, prayer time, that was no drinking of *yaqona* (*kava*), restrictions had to be observed, because the authorities – police would do their spot checks. There was no sales or visits for the potters/artisans.

### ***Target ICH was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic***

Pottery making for the Nakabuta villagers is the main source of income for most of the women in their community. Pottery is the major tourist attraction for Nakabuta village, but during the pandemic there were restrictions in place and no one visited Nakabuta at all. This was not normal for the Nakabuta people and being cut off from all internet connections and mobile/phone communications, they had to rely on the authorities to bring the messages of what to do and what not to do, during the pandemic. Most of the villages went about their daily tasks and chores, eating and planting their own foods, bathing in the nearby rivers and

basically living off the land. Living off the land was nothing new for the people. During the pandemic, the prolonged days, weeks, months and years of the lockdowns and with all the restrictions in place Sanivalati and of all the women felt discouraged and felt abandoned for not being able to sell/market their existing potteries. This caused a lot of frustration, pressure and major discouragement to most of the women potters – old, middle-aged and young. The basic thought and experience of not being able to make any money from their potteries just brought on more pressure and frustration. After the pandemic, he was given the opportunity with the other women potters of Lawai, Nayawa and Nakabuta to display and sell their potteries at the Sigatoka Sand Dunes.

### **Ms Diana (traditional salt maker) of Lomawai Village, Nadroga**

Ms Diana was interviewed in Lomawai village, Nadroga. She is a part of the women's group of traditional salt makers, Lomawai village.

#### ***Background and geographical information***

History says that a woman from Vusama village, also in the district of Nadroga Navosa, married a man in Lomawai village, she was a member of the *mataqali* that were custodians of the salt makers; she brought with her the knowledge and skillsets of salt making; the villagers say that their *vu* (gods) were seen to have been digging the ponds and the history of the salt makers is that the women would be dressed in their grass skirts and topless and would dance around the ponds to attract the gods to fill up the ponds with salt water. Lomawai village is located roughly halfway between Nadi town and Sigatoka town on the coastal side of the Queens highway. It is a 35-minute (30.3km) drive via off the Queens highway. Vanua Nalolo consists of 6 villages. Lomawai village is also a part of the Vanua Nalolo, situated right beside the sea bed. This is where the salt ponds are located. There is a new concrete cooking house and an open house for tourists/guests to be seated. Connecting the cooking house is a long concrete footpath – less than 100m walkway to the current pond, that has the sea salt water available. By language, social organization and culture of the Lomawai villagers belong to the Vanua Nalolo, consisting of 6 villages, all 6 villages are the custodians and shareholders to their '*qoliqoli*' (fishing ground). Salt making practice was lost over two centuries and from many generations up until 1998. The World Wild Life Fund (WWF) and Fiji Arts Council tried to revive and brought back the traditional salt making skills and practices, bringing the women and community of Lomawai. Linguistically, the community speak the local Nadroga-Navosa dialect of the iTaukei Fijian language. The village is headed by a '*turaga ni koro*' (government appointed headman), which is Christian dominated and families are mostly patriarchal in structure. Communal agriculture, fishing, shellfish collection and raising livestock are the principal subsistence activities. The people of Vanua Nalolo in Lomawai village are renowned for their traditional salt making. This unique prac-

tice has been passed down from generations to generations. Their traditional salt packaging has been trademarked as: 'NA MAHIMA' (White Gold) Ni Lomawai, Sigatoka. This design was made during their project with the UNDP – Mineral Department, post COVID-19 Recovery. This decision was made by the *mataqali* themselves – both men and women. Their salt is marketed to the Sigatoka hospital, hotels and a few private business houses and local markets.

### ***Schedule management***

Still in the district of Nadroga Navosa, Ms Diana was interviewed in her Lomawai village. She was part of her women's group that have kept and practiced the tradition of salt making with her older sister. She would share her 'firsthand' experiences of the issues the women faced before during and after salt making. The women folks of Lomawai were the active artisans in traditional methods of cooking salt. Presented the traditional '*sevusevu*' protocols of *yaqona* to the '*turaga ni koro*' (headman), seeking permission to interview her was for this project. Welcomed and acknowledged for presenting our *sevusevu*, showing a sign of respect was done when entering a village/community, and given the permission to go ahead with the interview.

### ***Statistical information***

Diana stated that no one in the village contracted the COVID-19 disease. Villages were all put on lockdown. They were only allowed to tend to their plantations for their everyday subsistence living. Those who were dependent and reliant on having full-time employment in the tourism industry lost their full-time jobs, was depressing and had a real struggle for most of the families. Forcing families to return back to the village also being glad that they lived in the village and managed to at least feed and support their families with whatever they could till from their plantations and the nearby river. Being on lockdown was frustrating and depressing too at the same time. Most families had more family time, less *yaqona* consumption, more television time and family bonds grew stronger as families would pray and ask for protection over the 'unforeseen' disease that was spreading all throughout the country. Access to electricity and updates with the news was widely available to the community, even for the internet connectivity. The police would do their spot checks. There were no visitors to the sight and no orders or sales for salt.

### ***Target ICH was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic***

The pandemic restricted the women and men folks from cooking their traditional salt due to all the restrictions in place – no gathering of people, social distancing and wearing of face masks etc. No one in the village, dared to fetch the sea water, and cook for 2-3 days. The COVID-19 pandemic experience was something new for the whole community. With the prolonged days, weeks, months and year of the lockdowns and with all the restrictions in place Diana and the women felt

greatly discouraged and felt abandoned for not being able to sell/market their existing salt. This caused a lot of frustration, pressure and major discouragement to most of the salt makers as they would all take turns in cooking salt – from each of the 6 villages/*mataqali*'s – old, middle-aged and young. The basic thought and experience of not being able to make any money from their traditional salt just brought on more pressure and frustration. After the pandemic, things gradually went back to normal.

### **Ms Akesa Kunabuli (potter) of Nayawa Village, Nadroga**

Ms Akesa Kunabuli was interviewed in Nayawa village, Nadroga. She is the Nayawa Potters leader for the women's group, Nayawa village.

#### ***Background and geographical information***

Nayawa village, in Nadroga and Navosa Province (Western), situated along the coast heading toward Sigatoka town, located about 61-minute (98 km) west of Suva, the country's capital town, about a 5-minute drive to reach Sigatoka town. The history about the Nayawa people is that their ancestors settled on their land thousands of years ago, and were renowned traditional potters as they are situated right by the sea side. And they are also along the same seaside of Fiji's Heritage Site – the 'Sigatoka Sand Dunes', where it is said to be, where the Lapita people settled, more than 25,000 years ago. For their trademark, the *mataqali* discussed the name and drawings (type of pottery) only known to be made by the people of Nayawa village, Nadroga Navosa. The word 'Madudu' is what the *mataqali* of Nayawa are known. This design was made during their project with the UNDP – Mineral Department, post COVID-19 Recovery. They also make contemporary potteries to market to the nearby hotels, resorts, tourists, and local markets. The community of Nayawa also host and showcase their village and clay potteries to the tourists.

#### ***Schedule management***

While still in the vicinity of Nadroga Navosa, it was also ideal to interview Akesa. She was the President of her women's association at the time, and was also in the process to calling for a meeting with all the women folks of Nayawa, who were potters, to set up a new committee, register their new business, open a new bank account and apply for a new tax number to operate as a professional business for the 'Madudu Potters'. Akesa has a good command of English and her understanding the questions of the research made this interview easy. Before we began with the research, a *sevusevu* was presented to their *turaga ni koro*, upon receiving us, she acknowledged our '*sevusevu*' and observing the proper protocols in place, when visiting an indigenous iTaukei village.



### ***Statistical information***

There were no recorded cases of COVID-19 disease, during the pandemic for Nayawa village; most of the villagers stayed in their own households during the devastating pandemic. Most families lived off their farms/plantations and fished for their own livelihoods. Many families were full-time employed by the tourism sector; most, not all had lost their full-time employments; forcing bread winners to come back to the village, and support their own families from whatever was yielded from their farms/plantations and fishing. The potters carried on their pottery making, some found it more therapeutic and calming during the height of the pandemic. Whereas for others just found it hopeless to continue with their pottery making. Being on lockdown was frustrating and depressing too at the same time. Most families had more family time, less *yaqona* consumption, more television time and family bonds grew stronger as families would pray and ask for protection over the 'unforeseen' disease that was spreading all throughout the country. Access to electricity and updates with the news was widely available to the community, even for the internet connectivity. The police would do their spot checks. There were no visitors to the sight and no orders or sales for pottery at all.

### ***Target ICH was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic***

Their pottery making practice was greatly impacted during the pandemic. The women would sit together in groups, source their clay from a particular place around the village. They would then mix the different types of clays together, dyeing and then kneading them into the different types of traditional and contemporary potteries. Everything was brought to a complete halt. For pottery making, sales and tourists visiting the village in groups for tours watch their displays and purchase their pottery. The COVID-19 pandemic experience was something new for the whole community. With the prolonged days, weeks, months and years of the lockdowns and with all the restrictions in place; Akesa and of the women felt greatly discouraged and felt abandoned for not being able to sell/market their existing potteries, this caused a lot of frustration, pressure and major discouragement to most of the pottery makers. After the pandemic, things gradually went back to normal.

### ***Ms Mareta Bureta (voivoi weaver) of Nukubalavu Village, Savusavu***

Ms Mareta (Figure 1) was interviewed in Yaroi village, Savusavu. She is a weaver from Nukubalavu village, Savusavu in Vanua Levu.

### ***Background and geographical information***

Nukubalavu village is located on Vanua Levu, the second largest island in Fiji. With a population of 300, the village holds the title of Tui Na Savusavu, this being the highest title in the land of Savusavu. It is about a 5 to 10-minute drive

to Savusavu town. Nukubalavu village are well known for its long stretching, white sandy beaches, attracting tourists, who are keen to visit and also take village tours. The local dialect spoken in Nukubalavu village are of the indigenous province of Cakaudrove. Most families are Christians, and most of the population are working full-time in the tourism sector. Other family members are still traditional mat, basket and contemporary weavers.

### ***Schedule management***

Mareta was the first to be interviewed in Savusavu, and she runs her small business as a full-time handicraft vendor at the Savusavu Handicraft Market in Savusavu.

I had scheduled her interview during the day, as it would be an ideal time to meet up with Mareta. I was informed of her weaving skillsets, through her niece Rosa, who had taught her weaving at an early age.

### ***Statistical information***

During the pandemic, there were no known cases reported or recorded with COVID-19. This gave the community of Nukubalavu village a sense of comfort and ease. Most families stayed within their own homes and took care of their own families, adhering to the restrictions in place. Being on lockdown was frustrating and depressing too at the same time. Most families had more family time, less *yaqona* consumption, more television time and family bonds grew stronger as families would pray and ask for protection over the 'unforeseen' disease that was spreading all throughout the country. Access to electricity and updates with the news was widely available to the community, even for the internet connectivity. The police would do their spot checks. There were no visitors to the sight and no orders or sales for pottery at all.

### ***Target ICH was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic***

Mareta kept weaving inside her own home, same as for the other women folks, the only hinderance was there were not many orders, buyers or sales during the pandemic. She could not go and market her mats at the Savusavu Handicraft due to lockdowns and the restrictions of no social gatherings at all. Despite all the restrictions, she kept weaving all throughout the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic experience was something new for the whole community. But, during the interview, I could see that being in Savusavu away from the Viti Levu (mainland), the people still went about their normal days with only a few restrictions in place – mainly in the town area.



**Figure 1.** Ms Mareta Bureta, *voivoi* weaver of Nukubalavu village, Savusavu. (Photo: E. Edwards)

### **Ms Mereilisoni (coconut leaves weaver) of Dreketi Village, Savusavu**

Ms Mereilisoni (Figure 2) was interviewed in Yaroi village, Savusavu. She is a weaver from Dreketi village, Savusavu in Vanua Levu.

#### ***Background and geographical information***

Dreketi was once an independent state in the province of Macuata, Vanua Levu, Fiji. There is more than one denomination in the tikina (district) now, the ancestors of the Dreketi tikina people practiced cannibalism widely, while the rest of Fiji had accepted Christianity and became educated in the ways of the Western world. Dreketi village is located in the province of Macuata, Vanua Levu, the second largest island in Fiji. To travel from Dreket to Savusavu town would take about 31-minute (27.3km) via the Kings Road. The local dialect spoken in Dreketi village are of the indigenous province of Macuata. Most families are Christians and most of the population are working full-time in the tourism sector. Other family members are still traditional basket, mat and basket weavers.

#### ***Schedule management***

Mereilisoni was the second lady to be interviewed in Savusavu, and she had to travel from her village (interior) to get Savusavu. She brought her own coconut leaves, to demonstrate how she weaves baskets (Nai Lalalakai). Her interview was scheduled during the day too, as it would be the best time to digitally record her demonstration.

### ***Statistical information***

During the pandemic, there were no known cases reported or recorded with COVID-19 in her village, Dreketi. This gave the community of Dreketi village a sense of comfort and ease. Most families stayed within their own homes and took care of their own families, adhering to the restrictions in place. They were reliant on their farms/plantations and the sea to source their daily meals. Individuals and families would wear their face masks when going to the plantations and out to sea. Access to electricity and updates with the news was widely available to the community, even for the internet connectivity. The police would do their spot checks.

### ***Target ICH was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic***

Mereilisoni kept weaving inside her own home as for the other women folks, the only hinderance was there were not any orders for her baskets from the nearby hotels. Despite all the restrictions, she kept weaving all throughout the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic experience was something new for the whole community. But, during the interview, I could see that being in Savusavu away from the mainland, the people still went about their normal days with only a few restrictions in place – mainly in the town area.



**Figure 2.** Ms Mereilisoni (kato drika food basket weaver), Dreketi village, Savusavu. (Photo: E. Elizabeth)

## **Ms Sanita Vu (*masi* maker & weaver) of Uduya Village, Kabara, Lau**

Ms Sanita Vu was interviewed in her handicraft stall at the Curio Handicraft Market in Suva, Fiji. She now resides in a suburb in Suva.

### ***Background and geographical information***

Kabara is a part of the Lau archipelago group, with a land area of 31 km<sup>2</sup> (12 sq mi), its population of some 700 lives in four villages. The people of Kabara, Lau are renowned for their craftmanship in the area of wood carving. The *vesi* wood (*Instia bijuga*) is a native plant of Kabara, this is the traditional material for the wood carvers and the best to be used. Due to deforestation this has stripped the island bare, leaving only 8 percent of the island covered with *vesi* trees. *Vesi* trees take up to 70-80 years to mature. *Yasi* trees (Sandalwood), now being used as an alternative. *Yasi*, takes only 30-40 years to mature.

### ***Kabara Island (Fiji)***

The women and men of Kabara, Lau are known to be distinguished weavers, *masi* makers, wood carvers, canoe builders and more. The local dialect spoken in Kabara village are of the indigenous province of Lau. Christian Missionaries, first arrived in Tobou, Lakeba, Lau, and then to all parts of the Lauan group. Most families are Christians, and some of the extended families now live in capital of Suva, Fiji, moving to the cities looking for better opportunities for themselves and their children. Just like Sanita, she is now residing in an urban suburb in Suva, and runs her business from home and at the Suva Curio Handicraft Centre.

### ***Schedule management***

Sanita was interviewed at her handicraft stall. It was an ideal location too, because she had her own space and a display of all her products in her stall. I had scheduled her interview during the day too, as it would be the best time to take high resolution pictures of her and her *masi* (mulberry cloth like material).

### ***Statistical information***

There were no recorded cases of COVID-19 in her household, but only for the greater suburbs in Suva. Statistics<sup>2</sup> shows as follows: Coronavirus cases: 68,898; Deaths: 883; Recovered: 67,006. Sanita states that during the pandemic in Suva, Fiji, things were intense for her and the family, hearing of increasing cases of COVID daily, gave her and family caution to be careful, wearing masks, hand sanitizing, social distancing and more. She was a supplier of baskets and small pieces to 'Jacks of Fiji' (retail shop) – they would drop rations and food supplies to her family, and her family would live on whatever they would manage to get from their little garden. Being on lockdown was frustrating and depressing too at the

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<sup>2</sup> Worldometers. <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/fiji/#graph-deaths-daily>



same time. This was not normal for Sanita, she was used to making orders receiving orders on a weekly, fortnightly basis. Living in an urban suburb was scarier, as the increase of COVID-19 cases; and the fear of contracting the disease was paramount for her family. They would spend more time in devotion (prayer) – seeking protection from God. Her family would only have one meal a day; so they could have enough food to sustain themselves.

### ***Target ICH was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic***

Sanita kept making her *masi*, weaving and creating all that she could during the lockdown. But once her raw materials were exhausted, she had to stop making her products, the *voivoi* (pandanus leaves) and *masi*, mainly supplied by those living on Lau Island, and those sold in the markets, but due to the pandemic; everything came to a standstill.

### **Ms Leba Duri (weaver – baskets, purses, salusalu) of Naikomo Village, Kabara, Lau**

Ms Leba Duri was interviewed in her handicraft stall at the Curio Handicraft Market in Suva, Fiji. She now resides in suburb in Suva, Fiji

### ***Background and geographical information***

Kabara is a part of the Lau archipelago group, with a land area of 31 km<sup>2</sup> (12 sq mi), its population of some 700 lives in four villages. The people of Kabara, Lau are renowned for their craftsmanship in the area of wood carving. The *vesi* wood (*Instia bijuga*) is a native plant of Kabara, this is the traditional material for the wood carvers and the best to be used. Due to deforestation this has stripped the island bare, leaving only 8 percent of the island covered with *vesi* trees. *Vesi* trees take up to 70-80 years to mature. *Yasi* trees (Sandalwood), now being used as an alternative. *Yasi*, takes only 30-40 years to mature.

### ***Schedule management***

Leba was interviewed at her handicraft stall in Suva city, she also wanted to show her display of products made from her ICH practice. Interviewing her in the morning was best, for taking high resolution pictures, especially with all her unique products on display.

### ***Statistical information***

There were no recorded cases of COVID-19 in her household; but only for the greater suburbs in Suva; Statistics<sup>3</sup> shows as follows: Coronavirus cases: 68,898; Deaths: 883; Recovered: 67,006. Leba was in Lautoka city, in the western division of Fiji, during the pandemic. She stated it was the scariest time of her life, one

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

that she never imagined.

### ***Target ICH was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic***

Leba is a traditional and contemporary weaver, inherited from her mother, grandmother and ancestors from Kabara, Lau. When the pandemic broke out in Lautoka city, she also had a handicraft store in the market, had to close her business, but continued her weaving practice at home. However, she could only go as far as whatever materials were available. There was a shortage of raw materials of – *voivoi*, *masi* and *paogo* (sago) from the outer islands, this chain of supply was cut-off altogether.

### **Ms Anaseini Latu (weaver – baskets, mats, purses) of the Province of Ra, Vasu Fulaga, Lau**

Ms Anaseini Latu was interviewed at her residence in Vatuwaqa, Suva, Fiji.

### ***Background and geographical information***

Anaseini Latu resides in Vatuwaqa (urban suburb), Suva, Fiji. Vatuwaqa to Suva city is about 4km and it takes about 10-minute by road. Vatuwaqa is also known to be an industrial area, and the area is filled with private residents and also public housing. Anaseini resides in a public housing. The suburb has more than 1,000 affordable residential homes, more than 50 housing units and 100 plus squatters in the area. Anaseini is from the province of Ra and shares maternal links to Fulaga, Lau. She is married and has no children. Residing with her is her nephew, his wife and their two small children. She has been residing in Vatuwaqa in most of her life. She is now in her 50's.

### ***Schedule management***

Anaseini was interviewed in her home as this is also where she operates her small business.

Interviewing her in the morning was best, for taking high resolution pictures, especially with all her unique products on display.

### ***Statistical information***

There were a few recorded cases of COVID-19 in her suburb and in the greater Suva area. Statistics<sup>4</sup> shows as follows: Coronavirus cases: 68,898; Deaths: 883; Recovered: 67,006. Anaseini and her extended family stayed home during the whole pandemic. She also mentioned that it was the scariest time of her life, one that she never imagined or would not want to go through again.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

### ***Target ICH was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic***

Anaseini's weaving was impacted during the pandemic. Stopping all her sales and the supply of her works to her ready-made clients, orders had to be cancelled and this caused so much delay and set-backs for her family. Living in the city and not having a big backyard plantation or garden to grow her own root crops or vegetables, brought a lot of pressure and frustration to her and the family.

Anaseini is a traditional and contemporary weaver, inherited from her maternal links - mother, grandmother and ancestors from Fulaga, Lau.

### **Ms Rigieta Nuku (weaver – mats, wedding attire) of Tuvu Village, Totoya, Lau**

Ms Rigieta Nuku was interviewed in Valelevu, Suva, Fiji.

### ***Background and geographical information***

Ms Rigieta Nuku resides in Valelevu, (urban suburb), Nasinu, Fiji. Nasinu to Suva city is about 10km and it takes about 20-minute by road. Nasinu was formally designated a 'Town', despite having a population larger than Suva city, the capital of Fiji (92,043 as the 2017 Census). It is one of Fiji's fastest-growing towns. Its land area is the largest of any municipal area in Fiji, and more than twice that of Suva. It is a major residential hub in Fiji, housing a large majority of the work force in Nasinu itself and in the Fijian capital, Suva. The Nasinu property market has experienced significant growth over the last several years, leading to substantial increases in property value.

### ***Schedule management***

Rigieta was interviewed in Nasinu, where she was had a tent setup, and was a vendor for the Nasinu Festival. She was interviewed during the day.

### ***Statistical information***

There were a few recorded cases of COVID-19 in her suburb and in the greater Suva area; Statistics<sup>5</sup> shows as follows: Coronavirus cases: 68,898; Deaths: 883; Recovered: 67,006. Rigieta and her family stayed home during the entire pandemic and managed to get through it, without so much pressure. She still cannot believe that she and her family went through a pandemic.

### ***Target ICH was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic***

Rigieta is a traditional and contemporary weaver, she had inherited her ICH practice as a weaver from her mother and grandmother. As the sole bread winner of her family and through her ICH practice, she has managed to educate her adult daughters. Her weaving was impacted through the cancellation of orders and

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

buyers not being able to reach her to purchase her mats and wedding attire – *masi* or *voivoi* designed, also hindering their livelihood and finances. But she says they managed to get by during the pandemic.

### **Ms Sereana Nagatalevu (weaver – mats, baskets, trays) of Naceva Village, Beqa Island**

Ms Sereana Nagatalevu was interviewed in Suva, Fiji.

#### ***Background and geographical information***

Ms Sereana Nagatalevu lives on the island of Naceva village, Beqa. Beqa is an island in Fiji, an outlier to the main island of Viti Levu, 10 kilometres (6.2 miles) to the south. The island has a land area of 36 square kilometres (14 square miles) and reaches a maximum elevation of 462 metres (1,516 feet). Beqa has 9 villages broken into 2 Tikinas or Districts: Sawau and Raviravi.

The villages of Dakuibeqa (the chiefly village of the Sawau people), Dakuni, Soliyaga, Naceva and Naseuseu are a part of the Tikina (District) of Sawau. The villages of Nawaisomo, Raviravi, Lalati and Rukua are a part of the Tikina (District) of Raviravi. Tradition of the 9 villages on the island, Dakuibeqa Dakuni, Soliyaga, Naceva and Rukua are noted for the tradition of firewalking. Firewalking is an ICH practiced and passed down from generations to generations, and is only practiced by these *mataqali*'s. There are over 3,000 inhabitants of the six villages, with 4 Resorts on the island, and their main source of income is tourism. Uniquely, tomatoes can be grown on the island all year round.

#### ***Schedule management***

Sereana was in Suva city, visiting her oldest daughter, who is chef, and this was an excellent time to interview her. She was interviewed in a restaurant in Suva city.

#### ***Statistical information***

Sereana is also the President for the Soqosoqo Vakamarama's group (women's group). The group consists of more than 30 women in her village. During the pandemic on Beqa Island, there were no confirmed cases of COVID-19. Statistics for the whole of Fiji<sup>6</sup> shows as follows: Coronavirus cases: 68,898; Deaths: 883; Recovered: 67,006. All families stayed in their own homes during the pandemic on the island of Beqa.

#### ***Target ICH was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic***

The women in her group are mostly made up of traditional mat weavers, they all work in groups. Each group is tasked to weave a set of mats and this is rotated all

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

throughout the year. The pandemic restricted the young women, mothers and grandmothers from gathering and weaving together in their groups. Selling these mats would also assist their families in educating their children, buying groceries from the stores, contributing to the *vanua* and the *lotu*. This was all hindered during the pandemic.

### **Ms Solinavanua Raivotu (weaver – ‘*iri ni daku*’ traditional fan) of Daku Village, Tailevu**

Ms Solinavanua Raivotu was interviewed in Daku village, Tailevu, Fiji.

#### ***Background and geographical information***

Daku Village, Tailevu, is famous for *Iri ni Daku* (woven fans). One of the unique attractions you will find in Nausori and the province of Tailevu is the *Iri (fans) ni Daku*. Daku is a village that is located about 15 minutes outside of Nausori town and the Daku village women are known for weaving these unique fans. As an age-old tradition, it is said that the skills of making a *Daku* fan is not given easily to any woman who is not from Daku Village. The fans belong to the *Vunivalu* of Bau, and in the olden days photos of the *Vunivalu*<sup>7</sup> were usually taken with him holding a fan from the village of Daku. The fan is usually what the people of Daku take with them when paying tribute to Bau. The *Vunivalu* of Bau (paramount chief) gave permission to the women to sell/market their woven fans. The only restriction was that all fans must only be woven in Daku village and not outside of the village.

#### ***Schedule management***

Ms Solinavanua was interviewed in her village in Daku. Before the interview, the traditional protocols of a *sevusevu* were observed, once this was presented to the *turaga ni koro*. Being given the permission, she was interviewed.

#### ***Statistical information***

During the pandemic there were no cases recorded in Daku village. Statistics for the whole of Fiji<sup>8</sup> shows as follows: Coronavirus cases: 68,898; Deaths: 883; Recovered: 67,006. All families stayed in their own homes during the pandemic on the island of Beqa.

#### ***Target ICH was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic***

The women kept weaving their fans and the availability of the coconut leaves is in abundance, but they could not sell/market their fans at all; this was due to the

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<sup>7</sup> Facebook page of Visit Nausori. <https://www.facebook.com/VisitNausori/photos/a.116821143362125/331736068537297/?type=3>

<sup>8</sup> Worldometers, op. cit.



restrictions in place.

### **Ms Veniana Maraia Paulina (Saqamoli traditional potter) of Naselai Village, Nuku, Tailevu**

Ms Veniana Maraia Paulina (Figure 3) was interviewed in Naselai village, Nuku, Tailevu, Fiji.

#### ***Background and geographical information***

Ms Veniana Paulina lives in Naselai village, Tailevu. The village is famous for the 'saqamoli' potters (water vessel only made for the *Roko Tui Dreket* – Rewa chief). The saqamoli is also designed on Fiji's one dollar coin. It takes about 17-minute, 10km to travel by boat to the Nasalai jetty, where you will need to ride a water taxi, then catch a car/bus to get to the nearest Nausori Town. There are less than one hundred people living in Naselai village, Tailevu, they live in their nuclear and extended families. Veniana's *mataqali* are known to be the saqamoli potters for *Roko Tui Dreketi*. The Naselai village community speak in the indigenous Fijian Bauan language. And most families are Christians.

#### ***Schedule management***

Veniana often stays home in her village, and practice pottery making daily. Traditional protocols had to be observed by presenting a 'sevusevu' before conducting the interview in Naselai village, Tailevu. She was interviewed in her home.

#### ***Statistical information***

With less than 100 people living in the village, there were no known cases of COVID-19 during the pandemic. Statistics for the whole of Fiji<sup>9</sup> shows as follows: Coronavirus cases: 68,898; Deaths: 883; Recovered: 67,006. Most families stayed in their own homes during the lockdown.

#### **Target ICH was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic**

The practice of pottery was impacted during the pandemic, Veniana had a few clays already mixed; she kept creating her potteries but could only go as far as the availability of the clay. She would have assistance from her younger nieces to source the clay from the nearby river or around the village. The sales of her pottery are the main source of her income. She lives and looks after herself.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid



**Figure 3.** Ms Veniana Paulina (Saqamoli potter) of Naselai village, Nuku, Tailevu. (Photo: E. Edwards)

## DISCUSSION

ICH practitioners should be encouraged to market their products online; we are now moving into the digital space, and this is an avenue that needs to be explored. They will be able to market their products internationally. ICH practitioners need to also be digitally documented as some are 'Living Human Treasures' (LHT) and this knowledge and practice must be passed onto the next generation of peoples. To bridge the gap between the older and younger generation – content: like videos (LHT, demonstrations), animation (cartoons, drawings) and online shopping portals need to be developed to educate, create awareness, promote, market our ICH practitioners and their products. Each indigenous, traditional custodian and practitioner have their own unique NICHE to promote, advertise and market – locally, regionally, and internationally. If they can earn a steady income all year round, this will also encourage the younger generation to take up their own ICH practice.

## CONCLUSION

From 2022 to February 2023, I have been documenting all thirteen ICH practitioners, all throughout Fiji: in Nadroga, Sigatoka; Rewa, Vanua Levu, Suva, and Tailevu. Each practitioner shared the impacts of COVID-19 on their communities, individual business and on themselves. This report covers the background, geographical information, schedule management, statistical information, and the impacts of ICH during the pandemic. The transition of change after the pandemic, the impacts of COVID-19 on the transmission of their ICH were the use of online technology, the participation of the younger and upcoming generation, the relationship regarding ICH and its stakeholders and the related policies

and support for ICH. All of these questions had to translated into the indigenous Fijian vernacular - verbally; whilst interviewing the practitioners, once they understood what the questions were, they were able to give their detailed answers and this also came with emotions and tears, in being able to articulate the situation and experiences, as it varied.

With most of thirteen practitioners there was no struggle to the loss and practice of ICH as all have been born into the heritage of a traditional salt (*mahima*) maker, '*tuli tuli*' – potter, '*iri ni daku*' – fan weaver, *masi* maker/prints, mat, basket, purse weaver etc. It is part of their everyday lifestyle and practice. Some of our practitioners are finding it a struggle to engage the younger generations into their ICH practice, with the change in time; it is evident to see that more youths and even those that are younger are into the use smart phones and online technology. An excellent way to engage our youths of today is to allow them to document their own families in the making and production of their unique ICH's and share their stories online.

With the increase in prices of the raw materials, it would be the best for all communities to start planting their own, harvest and produce their own products. Some of the communities in this research are doing well, with no lack or shortage of raw materials. The farmers and business houses here in Fiji have taken advantage of the pandemic and scaled the prices up, increasing the costs of both, *masi*, *paogo* and *voivoi* raw materials, making it difficult for partitioners to purchase and increase their production.

Practitioners, most of whom have been 'old schooled' – are not that too tech-savvy, navigating their way around a smart phone, using new apps and camera, can be of 'culture shock' to them. Most will ask for the assistance of their children, nieces, nephews and even grandchildren to take pictures of their products and have this uploaded onto the different social media platforms for their clients/customers to see, and then eventually place their orders and purchase. Whereas for some are still used to the 'old fashioned' way of doing things, maybe not so much seeing the relevance or having their products plagiarized online.

Whereas the transmission of knowledge and their practices of ICH to their families and communities is encouraging to know that all are doing their best with their communities, trying to engage their men, women, youths, and children is to participate in their ICH practices. It is promising to know that the future generations will continue their ICH practices, apart from Ms Veniana of Naselai village in Nuku, Tailevu. Her community needs to have more revitalizations and preservations for their ICH practice in '*Tuli Tuli*' – pottery making, these are the creators of the '*Saqamoli*' (water vessels).

The participation of youths and the younger generations is of vital importance – as they are the 'future' of tomorrow and they will also continue the practice passed down by our ancestors. If this is lost, then we will have a whole generation of people not knowing their ancestry links, traditional knowledge, and its practices. We need to have more of own youths and the younger generations

engaged in the making of their own ICH's and our master weavers, *masi* makers/ prints, potters and salt makers teaching and transmitting their knowledge and skillsets to the younger generations. There is even a wider gap on the transmission of knowledge on the indicators in nature before a cyclone.

Relationships with ICH stakeholders after the pandemic have strengthened and there seems to be more engagement. Through the experience from the lockdowns, people have come to value and appreciate the purpose of meeting in person and having face-face workshops, *talanoa* sessions (meetings), market days and even mini exhibitions. Stakeholders have also become aware of the need to have 'open and accessible' markets, portals online for all practitioners and their products. During the lockdowns, most people went online. This was seen to put all their products online and have an 'online shopping' store, e.g., 'Shopify' (ecommerce platform for online stores). The Fiji Arts Council is in the process of offering its traditional and contemporary custodians; the option of having their products sold via 'Shopify'. This should be up and running by the middle of this year.

Having the proper polices and legislations in place to support our ICH practitioners, for the protection of their trademarks and their business, is important. This is an area where more awareness needs to take place; there seems to be a lack of understanding from individuals and the communities on how best to have a trademark is and the benefits it will have on their products, business, communities, and future.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic was an event which was never envisioned by our ICH practitioners. This has seen the push in a new direction of using the online digital platforms/spaces, to create content on ICH and even market their products. This would be beneficial to their own safeguarding, preservation, revitalization, and marketing of their products internationally.





# **BUILDING FUTURES: LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE CASE STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP IN KUTUH, INDIA**

Ritu Sethi<sup>1</sup>

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic that spread rapidly across the globe, a tough nationwide lockdown was initiated across India on 23 March 2020.<sup>2</sup> Announced and implemented on the same day, the total shutting down of the economy allowed no time for planning. This enforced a closure of all educational institutions, trade and business and public life, along with a halt on all transport and delivery systems. With a suspension of road, air, and rail transport services, the country witnessed an exodus of millions of internal migrant workers who, having lost their jobs and incomes overnight, walked back home to their villages and hometowns. Among the many were those from the artisanal sector who lost jobs and livelihoods.<sup>3</sup>

## **BRIEF OVERVIEW OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP IN INDIA**

India's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) of traditional craftsmanship represents a huge skill base and a vast diversity of cultural and craft traditions, these traditions which are dynamic and continue to evolve symbolise the everyday lives and worldviews of communities practicing them. Many crafts in India are intrinsically linked to cultural practices such as festivals, rituals and ceremonies.

Apart from their cultural significance, the handicrafts and handlooms form a significant economic sector in India engaging an estimated range of 11 to 200 million plus artisans and allied workers. While crafts are produced for home and extended personal networks they are also based on professional relationships whereby crafts are produced for trade and for consumption by local and distant customers. With a sizeable women and rural based population, a majority of artisans belong to communities that are socio-economically disadvantaged. With about 67 percent of handloom households earning less than Rs. 5,000 (USD 60)

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<sup>1</sup> Chairperson, Craft Revival Trust.

<sup>2</sup> First identified in December 2019 in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, this highly contagious infectious disease causing severe health issues was labelled a pandemic on 11 March 2020 by the World Health Organisation (WHO). One of the measures to stem its spread that was adopted by countries across the world was in the form of lockdown.

<sup>3</sup> The lockdown in India continued till May 31, 2020.

per month.<sup>4</sup>

## TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP AND COVID-19

Artisans across different regions in India were dealt with severe challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, facing no-work situations and loss of income impacting their ability to meet their daily survival needs. For many, the precariousness of craft based practices and livelihoods increased several folds as practitioners being mostly self-employed or work on wage basis are without adequate financial or health benefit support. Their vulnerability was enhanced as receiving formal credit through banks is a huge challenge for artisans and they are often indebted to private moneylenders who charge high rates of interest. About 30 percent of artisans surveyed for COVID-19 impact reported 'approaching moneylenders for loans even at high interest rates' as a coping mechanism during COVID-19.<sup>5</sup>

## GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE OF CASE-STUDY

While anecdotal examples of distress, survival, resilience, innovation, and rejuvenation have emerged from across the domains of traditional craftsmanship, data remains limited across India. The case study to assess the impact of COVID-19 attempts to remedy this with field research concentrated on the Kutch region in Gujarat, India.

A geographically distinctive region, Kutch is located on the western tip of India, the region is bounded by the Arabian Sea on one side, the Rann of Kutch - a salt desert on the other, with vast expanses of grasslands. With its vibrant intangible cultural traditions practicing diverse cultural and craft traditions Kutch has over twenty distinctive crafts practised by specialist communities that inhabit this region. These practices include handloom cotton and wool weaving, *dhurrie*/ floor-covering weaving, block-printing, batik, *Bandhini*/tie-dye on textiles, wide varieties of embroidery, pottery, leather craft, metal bell-making, lacquer wood, wood carving and others. The craft practitioners belong to various specialised communities that inhabit this region. It is a cultural mosaic with a diverse mix of influences due to migrations from Sindh (now in Pakistan) and Rajasthan. While crafts in Kutch are an integral part of the cultural identity and social life of communities, they also contribute significantly to artisanal income generation. Kutch has also been the ground for various successful initiatives in the past such as the revival and promotion of craft-based livelihoods and tourism as part of Kutch's rebuilding efforts after the 2001 devastating earthquake in the region. The entrepreneurial and resilient spirit of Kutchi communities has also played an

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<sup>4</sup> As per the Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20 by the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India.

<sup>5</sup> As per AIACA Report.

important role in the region's recovery and resurgence after the 2001 natural disaster. Kutch is also home to pioneering initiatives such as design education for young artisans which in other parts of India is largely the monopoly of urban educated youth. Through efforts of local civil society organisations, working closely with communities, there is also a gradual revival towards use of indigenous cotton and wool raw materials that is suitable to the local ecology.

## COVID-19 DATA FOR GUJARAT AND KUTCH

As per Government of India data 12,77,615 (about 1.27 million) were the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Gujarat.<sup>6</sup> With total deaths numbered at 11,043.<sup>7</sup>

District-wise the figure for total recovered patients in Kutch stood at 20,138, and 37,87,473 for those under quarantine. The total number of deaths in Kutch district being 146 (about 1.3 percent of the state's total).<sup>8</sup>

The Gujarat government initiated various measures in March 2020 before the national lockdown to respond to the evolving COVID situation. Educational institutions, gyms, malls, national parks, etc. were shut down. COVID-19 guidelines were issued. Partial lockdown was announced in five cities including in Kutch.

With the nation-wide lockdown initiated from March 25, 2020, a state wide lockdown became operational. Various hospitals were designated as COVID treatment facilities, steps were taken for adequate staffing at hospitals, free rations were provided to the poor and daily wagers, etc. The first nation-wide lockdown which was planned until April 14 was continued till May 31, 2020. Except essential services, the lockdown suspended all activities including transport, offices, factories, educational institutions, social, cultural, religious gatherings, etc. From early June 2020, phase wise reopening was begun with the issuance of respective unlock guidelines.<sup>9</sup>

## CRAFTS FOCUS

The crafts chosen for the survey were in two broad categories: textile embellishment and weaving that constituting a large portion of the craft based livelihoods in the region.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://gujccovid19.gujarat.gov.in/\\_Data](https://gujccovid19.gujarat.gov.in/_Data) accessed: 14 January 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. The number of recovered patients (cured/discharged/migrated) for Gujarat being estimated at 12,66,555 (about 1.26 million). The total number of quarantine cases reported at 12,20,12,032 (122 million) Data accessed: 14 January 2023.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.mygov.in/corona-data/covid19-statewise-status/> The data accessed on 13 January 2023. However, there remains a gap in government statistical information on COVID-19s depth and scale.

<sup>9</sup> India began its public vaccination program on 16 January 2021.

## Textile Embellishment: Bandhani/ Tie-dye on Textiles

Bandhani (Figure 1) is the traditional craft of tie-dye whereby patterning on textiles is created by tightly tying multiple parts of the fabric with thread to resist dyes and create dot like puckered designs. The tied fabric is dyed once or multiple times depending on the colour palette. The patterns created in the resist dyed fabric are revealed as the cloth is untied. The designs created can be in the form of dots, squares, waves, or stripes. The Kutch region in Gujarat is particularly known for very fine Bandhanis that are created with higher number of minute knots.

The tying of the fabric is generally done by women. Men are usually involved in dyeing of the fabric. The use of natural dyes such as madder roots and pomegranate which was traditionally practiced has seen a revival over the years. Bandhani is practiced by the Khatri community of the Kutch region. It is estimated that about 15,000 women are involved in this craft in Kutch.<sup>10</sup>

These textiles are used as daily wear as well as for special occasions like weddings, festivals and other sacred ceremonies where intricately designed Bandhini knotted patterned textiles are used. The design innovations by tie-dye practitioners have made the craft popular among urban clientele and in export markets as well. Young artisan-designers spearheading the Bandhini work are further revitalising the craft.



**Figure 1.** Bandhini textiles, Adil Khatri's workplace, Bhuj. (Photo: Nivedita Negi)

<sup>10</sup> <https://kutchcraftcollective.com/crafts-of-kutch/soft-material-crafts/>



## Handloom Weaving

Handloom weaving is practiced by various communities in Kutch with each following their own specialization. The focus of field research was on three different communities and three different specialities.

### *Kutchi or Kachchh handloom weaving*

The Marwada or Vankar community of weavers who migrated from Rajasthan and settled in Bhujodi village in Kutch are associated with the Kutchi or Kachchh handloom weaving (Figure 2). The weaving follows an extra weft technique whereby intricate motifs are created on the fabric by inserting supplementary weft yarns. Cotton and wool yarn are used for weaving that is done on either pit loom or frame loom. Traditionally, indigenous cotton yarn known as kala cotton was sourced from the Ahir farming communities in the region. Sheep and goat wool was procured from the pastoralist herding community of Rabaris.

These communities also formed the clientele of the Vankar weaving community who wove shawls, veils, skirts and blankets for them. Over time, there was a shift to producing for markets outside the local communities. Mill made yarns began to be used and procurement was done from outside markets such as other parts of Gujarat and Punjab. Khamir, one of the key NGOs in the region, has been in the process of reviving the use of indigenous Kala cotton yarn suited to the arid conditions of the region. Traditionally men were involved in weaving while women supported in pre-weaving activities such as warp preparation for the loom. However, in present times women are also involved in weaving.



**Figure 2.** Kutchi handloom weaving, Dinesh Siju Vishram's workplace, Bhujodi. (Photo: Nivedita Negi)





**Figure 3.** Kharad floor rugs, at Tejshi Dhana's workspace, Kukma. (Photo: Nivedita Negi)

### ***Kharad Floor rug weaving***

The second textile specialisation is of Kharad floor rugs (Figure 3), woven by the Marwada community using camel and sheep wool. The community also weave Kharad cloth called *Khurjani* that is used as a throw for the back of the camel and a thick cloth called Rasa to cover grains. Traditionally local hand spun wool was used while gradually wool procurement had to be done from outside as local hand spinning declined. The demand for products which were earlier used by local communities also suffered. The craft is endangered today with only 1 or 2 families engaged in it currently.

### ***Weaving waste plastic***

The third being the upcycling of waste plastic through weaving and its further conversion into products. This new innovative craft was introduced in 2011 by Khamir, a key NGO in the region. Since 2018 it is run by a woman artisan-entrepreneur in Bhuj town. Starting with 3 women the project now supports 30-40 women.

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Overview**

Artisans across India, including in Kutch faced great challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. In its first phase of total lockdown the artisans faced loss of income and a total cessation of work. In phase-2 with the slow opening of the country and the overall economic slowdown and lack of disposable income lowered consumer spending, leaving them vulnerable with a survey of consumers reporting that 69 percent had decreased their spending on crafts after the pandemic. As per a British Council Report (Reimagining the Craft Economy Post Covid-19), The road to recovery seemed slow, evolving in new directions.

The challenges faced by the artisans and artisan-entrepreneurs surveyed in the field research related to aspects extending from loss of business and income to changing and unstable market conditions and finding ways and means to adapt. On the positive side the pandemic had been an opportunity for producers to assess business aspects such as inventory and production planning. For craft organisations and entrepreneurs, it had been a time to reflect upon their business models and adapt them to evolving scenarios.

### **Impact on Production Activities**

Unlike other cultural industries in India crafts production is primarily home-based with work and living areas often located within the same premises. The pandemic therefore did not fully halt the production activities for many artisans who continued to operate although on a much reduced scale. For artisans employed as wage earners who are dependent on master artisans or others for provision of work, the lockdown however meant complete loss of work and income during that period.

Orders from wholesale buyers and retailers including domestic and export orders are vital for craftspeople and their businesses. They are important to ensure year round production and regular income. The COVID-19 lockdown that began in March 2020 and subsequent halting of marketing opportunities led to cancellation of orders for artisans and craft enterprises. The artisan entrepreneurs we spoke to did not face the issue of large finished goods inventory. This can perhaps be due to the fact that the main exhibition season in winter months of October-February had just finished prior to the onset of the pandemic.



**Figure 4.** Indigo dyed yarn, at Dinesh Siju Vankar's family indigo dyeing unit, Bhujodi. (Photo: Nivedita Negi)

However, the availability of raw materials was a challenge for craft producers during COVID. In case of handloom weaving in Kutch, both cotton and wool are used. As cotton is procured locally from Gujarat, its procurement was not a major issue. Wool is procured from other states such as Rajasthan and Punjab. For the first few months of lockdown, the weaver entrepreneurs had stock of raw material. Once the supply of wool became limited, they were left with no work. They utilised the limited quantity to produce design intensive pieces that could potentially be sold for higher prices later. For the Kutchi weaver, Dineshbhai and his family, they were also able to utilise the available time to prepare the stock of natural dyed yarn as they have their own natural dyeing unit (Figure 4).

For Kharad weavers, raw material was not an issue as the camel and sheep wool that is used is procured locally from Maldharis pastoralists community of Kutch. The Bandhani tie-dye artisans procure fabric from outside Kutch from Surat, Jamnagar and Ahmedabad in Gujarat, Bangalore, Tamil Nadu, and other parts of India. For Adil Khatri, the artisan-entrepreneur respondent, although some of his raw material was sourced from other states, he was fortunate to have the stock of raw material as they 'plan their materials inventory in advance.' However, on a more general scale, it can be safely assumed that raw material has been a big challenge where procurement is done from different locations in the country.

### **Transformation of Practices under the Pandemic Situation**

Plain yardage production: The distinctiveness of traditional Kutchi handloom weaving is the intricate extra-weft motifs woven in cotton or wool. The product range include clothing like shawls, stoles, blankets, saris and yardage, and home-furnishing.

'As the markets have opened up there is a huge demand for yardage due to lack of production during the pandemic years. The production in Kutch handloom weaving is thus currently largely focused on producing plain yardage. This is seen as a big shift from the earlier practice of producing mainly finished textile products with traditional motifs. The current emphasis on plain yardage production with varying quality standards has implications on skill transmission as well. Many young weavers who are in the learning phase are starting production with plain yardage and have not had the opportunity to hone their skills in the traditional extra-weft weaving technique. This is perhaps a temporary phase to meet the current demand for plain fabric. The long term impact of this development can be assessed only with time' Artisan-Weaver Dinesh Vishram Siju.

In terms of innovation in craft practices, all the artisan respondents reiterated that experimentation is not a new phenomenon and that craft communities in the region have always been adapting to new aesthetics. For instance, the traditional colours in handloom weaving and even Bandhini tie-dye were restricted to black, red and yellow. Over time, a wide variety of colours were introduced to the colour palette including natural dyes. In Kharad weaving, the floor coverings and

other products were traditionally undyed and in natural wool colours (Figure 5). Natural dyes were gradually introduced. Similarly, Kharad weavers also introduced cotton yarn apart from wool to meet the market demands. Motifs were introduced while earlier designs were restricted to stripes.

### **Creative Explorations**

Craft practices in Kutch and generally across India have always adapted and evolved to the times. Also, as a community is not a homogenous entity there are individuals within the community with varying skill levels and openness to change. As raw material supply was limited and regular production for markets was not taking place, some of the artisans invested themselves in design explorations with the limited materials they had. They worked on new patterns and sampling. Such creative activities also helped to maintain mental health in times of distress and uncertainty.

Champa Kishor, one of the young women weaver respondents utilised this period to develop textile art pieces inspired mostly by the natural environment of Kutch (Figure 6). This has added a new dimension to her work. It also helped her cope with the unfortunate loss of a close family member due to COVID. She also experimented with making accessories like bags using recycled yarn. While some of her experiments did not convert into sales due to pricing issues, she feels confident to continue her explorations as a textile artist.



**Figure 5.** Kharad floor rugs in cotton with motifs, Tejshi Dhana, Kukma.  
(Photo: Nivedita Negi)





**Figure 6.** Top left: Siju Champa Kishor with her child; Top right: Bag with recycled yarn. Below: Hand woven textile art work by Champa. (Photo: Nivedita Negi)



## Women Weavers

Traditionally, weaving in Kutch is done by men while women support in ancillary activities like loom preparation, finishing, etc. However, over the years, women have also started weaving on the looms. The artisans reported that since COVID there has been a further increase in the number of women weavers. One of the reasons cited was the need to supplement the family income once the production work resumed after COVID.

They have also been part of a weaving initiative started by the NGO Khamir to upcycle plastic waste into various products. A successful woman artisan-entrepreneur like Rajiben (Figure 7) is also creating employment for women in her community. Starting out with 3 women from the family, her weaving venture with recycled plastic waste currently supports 30-40 women. She recounts her story 'My family was full time into farming. Also, women did not weave and did not even have the opportunity for education beyond a certain age. I had a strong desire to learn weaving from an early age. I too wanted to weave like others in the community. My father did not support me but with my brother's help I managed to learn weaving during my spare time. The opportunity to engage as a weaver for livelihood came when for about 3 years there were no rains and farming was severely affected in our village. With no income option left, my father gave me a go ahead. In 2011, I became associated with Khamir's plastic waste weaving project. I worked with Khamir until 2018 and had the opportunity to participate in an international exchange programme. In 2018, with Khamir's support I decided to pursue my own work as a weaver.'



**Figure 7.** Rajiben Vankar at her stall at Dastkar exhibition in Delhi. Right: Her products woven with waste plastic and fabric scraps. (Photo: R. Sethi)





**Figure 8.** Cotton and wool yarn at Khamir. (Photo: Nivedita Negi)



**Figure 9.** Dinesh Vishram hand spinning yarn while interacting with us. (Photo: Nivedita Negi)

Prior to COVID, she was marketing her products through exhibitions and visitors. She began to explore online sales during the pandemic. These were facilitated through other NGOs with whom she continues to be closely associated. Both online and exhibition sales picked up for their enterprise after COVID. Apart from marketing, she provided free of cost trainings to women in her village who were keen to take up weaving. She has also been associated as a livelihood trainer with organisations in Mumbai whereby she has trained about 350 women from tribal areas. She further adds ‘Initially my daughter wanted to become a teacher. However, she now wants to be a part of the work I am doing.’ While she had to face many challenges when she started out including disapproval from her community, her story of resilience has been inspiring many women in her community towards their own empowerment.

### **Locally Available Raw Materials**

While exploration with local raw materials such as Kala cotton and indigenous wool had been initiated by Khamir (Figure 8) over the last few years, the pandemic has further reiterated the value of building local supply chains. Dineshbhai (Figure 9) puts it aptly ‘Local procurement of all kinds of yarn may not be possible in today’s context. But experimentation is happening.’ He cites the example of his nephew who is growing indigo on his own farm. ‘We do not buy indigo from the market. We source from our farm and process it.’ They have indigo vats which are about 25 years old. Hand spinning is another activity that has shown potential for creating income opportunities for women. Currently, Khamir has about 250 women hand spinners of cotton and wool yarn. Shri Tejshi Dhana, a leading master craftsperson in Kharad weaving wonderfully states the value of local raw materials ‘There is more demand for cotton rugs and we can certainly do more of that. But we want to work more with our traditional

material which is wool so that we can keep supporting the Maldharis (pastoralists) too who supply the wool.'

### **Impact on Marketing**

Marketing and sales was completely stopped during the lockdowns. National and State level NGOs, government organisations, private entrepreneurs that provide market access to artisans through regular fairs at various cities across India had to cancel all their exhibitions during the course of the pandemic.

Even after the lockdown was lifted and markets resumed sporadically there was lack of footfalls in exhibitions and retail stores, tourism was negligible. For the respondents including individual artisans and craft organisations, exhibitions and festive events in India are important marketing and showcase opportunities and for making contacts with long-term potential new customers, wholesale buyers, boutiques and exporters. For the Kharad weavers particularly, the marketing seems to be primarily dependent on tourists and exhibitions such as the government organised exhibitions like the Surajkund Mela in Faridabad near Delhi. They do not sell in local markets in Kutch similar to other artisan respondents in Kutch. Their losses due to cancellation of exhibitions were thus a big blow to those who cater to urban domestic markets.

In Kutch, craft marketing is also linked to tourism opportunities whereby visitors travel to places such as Bhuj and Ajrakhpur in Kutch to experience the local culture and crafts and buy directly from artisans. As mentioned above, the Kharad weavers depend primarily on tourists who visit their premises to buy products and place orders. As the travel industry was severely hit it impacted the income potential for artisans through tourists and resulted in a decline in income. However, tourism is showing signs of recovery as visitors could be seen visiting the artisan premises during our field visit.

### **Order Cancellations and Post-Pandemic Changes**

The onset of pandemic also led to cancellation of orders for craft enterprises. Although artisans reported instances of few clients who provided support by paying in advance for future orders, mostly the situation was grim. This in turn led to inability to provide work to the artisans associated with them. The loss of work and income was particularly severe for artisans' dependent on job-work such as women engaged in tying the knots for Bandhani textiles.

While sales through physical channels such as exhibitions etc. were hampered, the pandemic resulted in the growth of online/digital marketing avenues. Most of the artisan-entrepreneurs respondents use online tools. However, they do not prefer selling online through e-commerce sites or their own websites. The wholesale orders to boutique stores and other clients seem to be the mainstay for these enterprises. They also emphasised that personalised marketing such as

word-of-mouth promotions and long-standing relationships with clients work better for their product range.

A post-pandemic trend that has been reported by artisan respondents is an increase in the number of middlemen and increased competitiveness in prices which has implications on product quality as well.

## **Use of Online Tools**

The pandemic led to the proliferation of use of digital tools across industries. It resulted in artisans learning and adapting to digital technologies and on-boarding on various e-commerce platforms to market their products. The organisations working with artisans also began to actively engage online to create wider awareness about the common challenges for the artisanal sector during the pandemic. It was also an opportunity for them to build their internal capacities to respond to the evolving digital scenario.

New digital marketing initiatives specifically targeting the artisanal sector were also launched that aimed at supporting artisan entrepreneurs to establish their own brands through various services including an online marketplace for their products.

While online promotion cannot be ignored in a growing digital world, the impact of online marketing to create sustained income for craft producers is still evolving. Some of the Kutch based artisans in a webinar mentioned ‘time management issues as good photo shoot, product descriptions, and logistics add to regular production work. Tonal differences in handmade products in the way the product appears online and actual product leads to returns and rejections. Price competition and too many options online for buyers is another issue.’<sup>11</sup>

Similar view was echoed by textile artisan respondents in field interactions. The artisans who cater to niche markets that value handlooms and handcrafted textiles do not prefer selling online. They however actively use online tools such as Whatsapp to build their network of wholesale buyers and direct customers. They also have active social media presence particularly on Instagram.

For artisan-entrepreneur like Champa Kishor, her marketing for textile art work is currently limited to online channels such as Instagram. She had the opportunity to be part of a capacity building course on online marketing during the pandemic. She states, ‘As a result of the training, I have now transitioned to fully managing my Instagram account where earlier it was remotely handled by a friend.’ However, she is aware that diversifying her marketing beyond online means is essential for sustaining her work.

For the NGO Khamir (Figure 10), the need to engage more actively with online technologies meant new learnings. For instance, they had to build their capacities in better product presentation and product photography. They also experi-

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<sup>11</sup> Webinar by Khamir: Conversations from Kutch – Mastering the future after COVID-19 pandemic.



**Figure 10.** Ghatit Laheru (Director, Khamir) at his office during our meeting. Right: Khamir's retail store at their premises. (Photo: Nivedita Negi)



**Figure 11.** Adil Khatri at his workspace during our meeting. Left and Right: His bandhini (tie-dye) creations. (Photo: Nivedita Negi)

mented with converting a part of their physical retail store into a photo studio. In 2020, Khamir organised an online series called 'Conversations from Kutch' that enabled dissemination of community voices as craft practitioners from Kutch participated in these conversations and shared their experiences and concerns to a wider audience. They also collaborated as partners with other platforms that were launched during COVID to support artisans to sell online by providing various kinds of support such as e-catalogues, on-boarding on e-commerce sites, pricing, etc. 'While online marketing/sales have not been great for us, we realise that digital engagement is a must. So, we will continue to actively engage and build our capacities in this aspect.' (Ghatit Laheru, Director, Khamir)



## Participation of Younger Generation in Craft Practices

Kutch has had a vibrant tradition in crafts and the efforts of various civil society organisations and initiatives have also played a critical role in the continued sustenance of the practices. This has created an enabling atmosphere where younger generation are motivated to continue engaging with their traditional community practices. The efforts of Somaiya Kala Vidya (SKV) that provides formal education in design and entrepreneurship to youth from artisan families have been significant in providing new creative approaches to younger artisan designers and entrepreneurs.

Adil Khatri (Figure 11), a young Bandhini artisan-designer who along with his wife Zakiya Khatri runs Nilak, a contemporary design company producing Kutchi tie-dye products. Both are graduates of SKV. Adil Khatri emphasises 'There is a huge difference in my work pre and post design education. The technique is traditional but designs and motifs can be completely new and contemporary. I also work with old motifs in new placements. Traditionally, red, black and yellow formed the colour palette. Today we are working with a whole range of colours including pastels, indigo, etc. Experimentation is thus constant. I work with new designs every year. About 15 new samples are created every year. Our production is smaller in quantity and more design oriented.'

He has been part of various leading national and international platforms including the International Folk Art Market in Santa Fe and was recently part of a collaborative project with Mexican artisan-designers.

In Kharad weaving too, the younger member in the family is experimenting with new products (Figure 12). The product range in Kharad primarily includes woollen floor rugs and coverings and belts for camels. The demand for these products is not very high due to climatic conditions and lifestyle changes. There is a need for product diversification which is being led by Hirabhai Tejshi, the younger member in the Kharad family who is exploring production of bags, waist belts, etc. He further informed 'I was in Delhi for 3 months as part of a project with IGNC, Ministry of Culture. I was involved in weaving demonstration and creating new samples at the upcoming crafts centre at Red Fort.'

Champa Kishor, the young woman weaver, was part of the 6-month Creative and Cultural Business Programme conducted by the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad. The course helped her to further engage with her traditional weaving practice through creative explorations. Since the pandemic, she has been in the process of developing a distinct identity for her work as a textile artist based on traditional weaving technique.

The pandemic does not seem to have negatively impacted the participation of younger generation in the craft practices. Due to availability of time, it seems that the COVID period also allowed families the opportunity to teach various nuances of the craft to younger members.

Perhaps with growing awareness about handlooms and handicrafts and influx of



**Figure 12.** Young Kharad weavers preparing the loom. (Photo: Nivedita Negi)

social media among other factors, it was reported that a greater number of weavers now take pride in wearing their own hand woven cloth. While this trend may be limited currently to a few families, with majority still wearing cheaper synthetic materials, this is indeed a very positive development. It also perhaps underlines the strong identification that the younger generation in Kutch continues to have with their traditional craft practices. Dineshbhai shared ‘For the festive occasion of Diwali my niece insisted on wearing our own hand woven fabric. The design work and stitching of the fabric was done in Jaipur.’ Rajiben shares her experience of the situation ‘Many youngsters who earlier wanted to pursue jobs feel motivated after seeing successful examples to pursue their own work in weaving. After COVID, they also feel that perhaps there is still more certainty in one’s own work than in a job.’

### **Initiatives by NGOs in the Kutch Region**

Kutch has an active network of NGOs many of whom are working to promote craft based livelihoods. They have been providing support to artisanal communities at organisational and collective level. For instance, during the pandemic Khamir provided more than 1,000 ration kits and yarn kits to communities. They also made efforts to advocate for state government support for distribution of yarn kits. Due to very little information about COVID in the villages, they engaged in raising COVID related awareness among communities in about 25 villages in the region. Khamir was also part of Kutch Karuna Abhiyan that was launched during the second COVID wave to provide various kinds of emergency relief measures to vulnerable groups including artisans in Kutch.

Instead of working in silos, the leading craft organisations of Kutch such as



Khamir, Shrujan, Qasab, Kala Raksha and Vivekananda Rural Development Institute (VRDI) collaborated under the umbrella of Kutch Crafts Collective to 'maximise impact'<sup>12</sup> and promote the distinctive identity of crafts from the region. Various crafts of Kutch are provided marketing and other support as part of the collaborative. During the pandemic the Collective had launched the COVID-19 Kaarigar Fund to support the immediate needs of the artisan communities and provide long-term support for the development of crafts in the region.

### **Government Initiatives to Support Recovery from the Pandemic**

**Vocal for local campaign:** The Government of India launched the Vocal for Local campaign in May 2020 to garner support for domestic industries including small businesses and local products. This was particularly relevant in the context of handcrafted products that are not only local but also largely sustainable with much lower environmental impact. The #Vocal4handmade online campaign that specifically focused on handlooms was launched on the 6th National Handloom Day in August 2020 by the Government to create wide public appreciation and support for handlooms.

**Marketing support:** The State Handloom Cooperatives/Marketing Agencies have been requested to buy finished goods from weavers to provide them immediate income support. The Government has made efforts to link artisans to e-commerce sites by on-boarding various cooperatives and government marketing agencies to digital marketplaces. Also, efforts were made to organise virtual marketing events. The India Textile Sourcing Fair was organised virtually in August 2020 by the Handloom Export Promotion Council (HEPC) to connect handloom producers to global markets.

**Government E-Marketplace (GeM):** Although launched in 2016, the initiative is highly relevant for current times as it aims to register 50 lakh artisans and weavers on the GeM portal so that they can sell directly to various Government departments and to encourage procurement of handmade products by Government buyers. As per a press release by the Ministry of Textiles, 8,374 artisans and 149,422 weavers have registered on the portal as of August 30, 2021.<sup>13</sup>

**Linking textiles to tourism:** As part of this long-term initiative by the Ministry of Textiles, the handloom and handicraft clusters where artisans are concentrated are being provided with various kinds of support to develop them as craft villages and link them to tourist places. 8 craft villages have been identified so far

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<sup>12</sup> <https://kutchcraftcollective.com/about-us/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1756422>

**Note:** Paper based on investigative research conducted for the project titled 'Research on ICH affected by the COVID-19 pandemic under the auspices of by International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI), Japan. The research team included the author of the paper, Snigdha Bisht, Consultant, Craft Revival Trust, with photo and video documentation by Nivedita Negi, Research Associate, Craft Revival Trust.

for support. Although there are potential challenges of over-commercialisation and craft imitations, the initiative provides an opportunity for linking intangible and tangible cultural heritage with overall local development.

### **New Initiatives/Approaches that Emerged to Support Artisans during and after COVID**

While individual artisans and crafts businesses were hit hard during the pandemic, it also led to increased solidarity within the craft sector in India to collaborate and provide urgent support to the artisan communities. Collectives. Several initiatives mobilised craft producers, marketing and design professionals, entrepreneurs and student interns to come together via digital platforms such as zoom and Whatsapp to respond collectively to the crisis. These collectives provided food rations and medical kits to artisans in distress. Various other measures were taken to provide business and capacity building support to artisans.

These organisations helped liquidate stocks through various digital platforms and exhibitions; created digital catalogues to support artisans with marketing; on-boarded artisans on digital platforms to sell their products besides distributing COVID relief kits. Additionally, trainings in product photography using mobile phones, catalogue making and digital marketing were conducted. Capacity building trainings and marketing support were also provided to empower and sustain the artisans.

### **Capacity Building and Creative Exchanges through Digital Means**

India has the advantage of rapidly growing mobile subscription and internet connectivity including in rural areas. As mentioned earlier, digital tools began to be extensively used by creative producers and professionals since the COVID period. While digital platforms as marketing avenues are evolving, the usage of online tools for creating awareness, conducting workshops, discussions and design explorations was significant and continues to remain in the post COVID period.

### **FINAL OBSERVATIONS AND WAY FORWARD**

- The need to strengthen rural livelihoods such as in the artisanal sector of traditional craftsmanship which is largely rural based in India has been further underlined during the pandemic situation. The urban craft artisans had been hit hard by the pandemic due to loss of livelihoods and other vulnerabilities. Skilled artisanal employment presents viable livelihood alternative to urban migration, contributes to local development and environmental sustainability.

- Formal school education and design and entrepreneurship education for young members of artisan communities have been highlighted by artisans themselves as vital for their individual growth and for the continuation and revitalisation of craft practices.
- Creative inspiration and innovation while retaining the core identity of the crafts is emphasised by the practitioners as a time tested strategy to safeguard craft traditions and livelihoods and bring respect and prosperity to the communities.
- Collaboration between artisan-designers and urban designers based on a spirit of reciprocity and mutual respect is seen as an important step to retain the dynamism and relevance of the practices and for the creative growth of individual practitioners.
- Regular and updated capacity building in usage of digital tools and associated skills such as product photography, product styling, digital catalogues, digital marketing, etc. is crucial for artisan entrepreneurs and NGOs working with artisans to enable them to respond to rapidly evolving digital opportunities.
- Increased opportunities for marketing and stock liquidation through exhibitions and other physical avenues cannot be emphasised enough as a continuous effort needed to help revive the craft businesses.
- Schools and colleges located in and around the handloom and handicraft clusters can be encouraged to adopt handwoven and handcrafted fabric for uniforms. This is important both to support artisanal livelihoods and to recognise and promote the distinct craft traditions of the region.
- Collaborative efforts are vital to support craft based livelihoods. Collaborations across organisations at the local level as demonstrated in Kutch are important to increase outreach and impact.
- Campaigns for wider public awareness regarding crafts and their economic, cultural and ecological values can play an educational role towards crafts appreciation and respect for practitioners among consumers.

# NITIK BATIK PRODUCTION AND MARKETING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mahirta,<sup>1</sup> Niken Wirasanti,<sup>2</sup> Fayeza Shasliz Arumdhati,<sup>3</sup>  
Faiza Maula Syahra<sup>4</sup> and Syekhhan Dartiko Aji<sup>4</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 has given a huge impact to many sectors of human life around the world, including Indonesia (Yunus et al. 2023). Financially, some sectors gained positive impacts, and some others experienced negative impacts. The healthcare production sector, for example, gained more positive impact because most people gave priority to keeping health by consuming more vitamins, food supplements and minerals (Kamarli Altun et al. 2021), this resulted in increased sales of the health products. Fashion industry sector, considered as not urgent for humans during COVID-19 pandemic, can decrease or increase their sales of products. Those which apply online marketing may increase the sales but those which apply traditional marketing ways decrease the sales (Pang et al., 2022).

*Nitik batik* production in Trimulyo Village, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta (Figure 1) is one of the fashion industries in Indonesia that was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. If we follow the classification of craft production stated by Fanoro et.al (2021), *nitik batik* production in Trimulyo Village is considered carried out in the traditional way, where no machinery equipment is used and applied labor intensive production instead. In Trimulyo Village, the management from the production to the marketing are carried out at home, or at least in one production center, which is also a house, not a factory in the village.

Changing of times is considered as a challenge for the sustainability of cultural heritage, including *nitik batik* but the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in Indonesia starting in 2020, had some potential to disturb the sustainability of its production. One of the reasons is that for some people, *nitik batik* is considered a tertiary need. During COVID-19 pandemic the priority to buy expensive cloth such

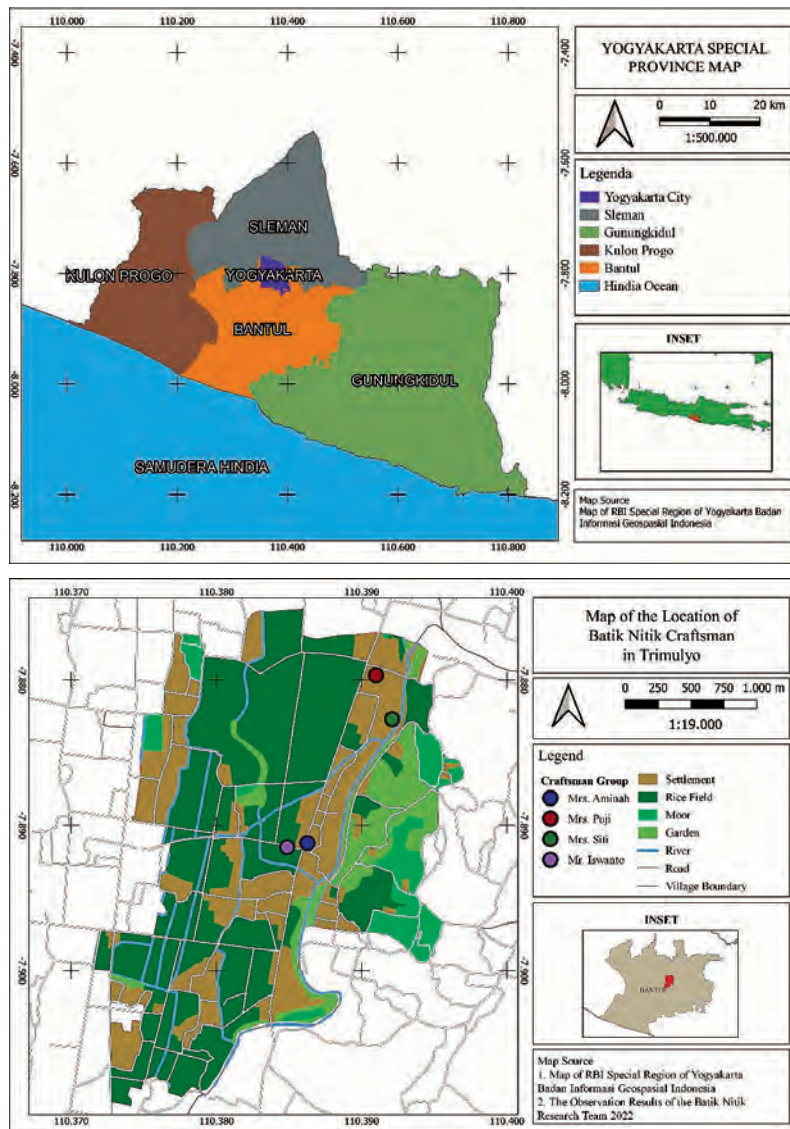
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<sup>1</sup> Correspondence author (mahirta@ugm.ac.id), Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Alumni of Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada.

<sup>4</sup> Student of Undergraduate of Archaeology Study Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada.



**Figure 1.** Top: map of Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta Province. Trimulyo Village is located in Bantul Regency. Bottom: map of the location of secretariat or center of nitik batik maker groups in Trimulyo Village, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta. (Source: Research Team, 2023)

as hand-drawn *nitik batik* has been shifted to buy clothes with reasonable price (Istiqomah et al., 2022; Surodjo, Astuty, and Lukman, 2022). Several strategies have been tried by batik makers and also government and private sectors to sustain *nitik batik* during COVID-19 pandemic.

This article describes the condition of *nitik batik* production and marketing during COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, this article focuses on some strategies to sustain *nitik batik* during COVID-19 pandemic and discusses the effectiveness.





**Figure 2.** Left: *canthing* pen with special tip, made for *nitik batik* production. Right: Copper stamp with *nitik* pattern design for stamped *nitik batik* from Afif Syakur's gallery. (Source: Research Team, 2022).

## METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data collection was conducted using the in depth interview method combined with focus group discussion and confirmation via phone calls and messages. In depth interviews were conducted in person and via phone calls for confirmation. There are four groups of batik makers in Trimulyo Village, Bantul Regency. Representatives from each group were interviewed, and once focus group discussion was managed to be carried out during the research period. Interviews were also conducted with stakeholders such as the government represented by staff from the Creative Economy Development Division of Office of Tourism Bantul Regency and Village Secretary of Office of Trimulyo Village. Non-governmental parties were represented by several members of the *Paguyuban Pecinta Batik Indonesia Sekar Jagad* (Sekar Jagad Indonesian Batik Lovers Association), batik dyer and Afif Syakur as a head of Batik Sekar Jagad association.

Analysis was carried out qualitatively by exploring, examining, describing and grouping the collected data in its natural settings by the participant's point of view and interpreting the result following Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2001).

## NITIK BATIK CHARACTERISTIC AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

According to the description in the geographical indication, the characteristic of *nitik batik* is a hand-drawn batik cloth produced with a *canthing* pen that has split ends (Figure 2). *Nitik canthing* is made by splitting the ends of the *canthing* into two perpendicularly, then the split ends are bent outwards, to create wax strokes in the form of rectangular dots (Melati et al., 2021:1). *Nitik* motifs in



Trimulyo Village are arranged by square outlines, resulting in geometric motifs (Melati et al., 2021:1–2).

Oral history suggests that *nitik batik* in Trimulyo Village developed earlier than those among noblemen in Yogyakarta Sultanate. In Trimulyo Village, *nitik batik* was initiated by Kyai Cokro Kembang, an Islamic leader living in Kembangsono, Trimulyo Village, Bantul during the 18 century. His cemetery is located in Dusun Kembangsono, Trimulyo Village (Rusli, pers communication). However, the first production of *nitik batik* in Trimulyo could be earlier, around the end of 17th century, if we interpret the first production of it as contemporary with the date of Mataram Sultanate reaction in boycotting the sales of Indian textile (Laarhoven, 2012). Among the Indian textiles monopolized by Dutch East India Company is patola, from which some scholars believe that geometric *nitik batik* arrangement motif is inspired. As a reaction, the local community then developed *nitik batik* with geometric patterns by adapting and enriching the patola motifs (Laarhoven, 2012; Melati et al., 2021: 4). Over time, *nitik batik* makers add more motifs inspired by the surrounding environment, the makers or wearers identity and some symbols. In other areas in Java, i.e. in the Pekalongan area, *nitik batik* has a popular name as *jlamprang batik* (Maziyah and Alamsyah, 2021; Melati et al., 2021), but the color of it is more vibrant. The historic connection between *nitik batik* Pekalongan (*jlamprang batik*) and in Yogyakarta has not been confirmed, probably the *Jlamprang batik* from the coastal area of Java is older as the northern coast of Java has experienced earlier contact with Indian traders and its commodities.

First indication that *nitik batik* was developed among Sultanate family is in the 19th century BRAY Brongtodiningrat, a daughter of Hamengku Buwana IV. She developed 56 *nitik batik* configurations among aristocrats in Kasultanan Yogyakarta. There is also a *nitik batik* configuration that developed among nobles in Puro Pakualaman Yogyakarta named *Wilaya Kusumajaya nitik* (Melati et al., 2021). The popularity of Yogyakarta *nitik batik* in national and international markets is increasing only in the past 16 years compared to those of other batik regional styles.

*Nitik batik* is one of Yogyakarta's cultural assets that needs to be preserved. Area of Trimulyo Village in Yogyakarta has been designated as a Geographical Indication of *Nitik Batik Tulis* as of November 2019. Granting of this status is one of the government's efforts to take responsibility for preserving *nitik batik*, with the request of the *Paguyuban Batik Nitik Yogyakarta* (Yogyakarta Nitik Batik Association) and related stakeholders.

## **PRODUCTION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

As other batik production, the batik production generally requires materials such as pencils, rulers, drawing tables, cloth, wax, *nitik canthing*, and stove. Materials such as water, large pot, stove, bucket, and dyes are required for dyeing (Figure

3). The equipment is usually prepared independently (self-subsistent) by each group, but sometimes provided by the government or the private sector especially during training activities.

Nowadays, after being introduced through training, women in the *nitik batik* groups have started to dye their batik with synthetic and natural dyes. However, dyeing is still frequently done in Giriloyo Village to maintain product quality. In addition, the whole dyeing process is too exhausting for the members who are women and dominated by older people. The choice of using synthetic or natural dyes also depends on the buyer's order, because the duration process and the material will affect the price. Most buyers still choose *nitik batik* cloth with synthetic dyes because of the cheaper price.

Several types of natural dyes that are often used and best selling in traditional markets are natural dyes derived from *jalawe* fruit peel (*Terminalia bellirica*), tingi wood (*Ceriops tagal*), and indigo leaves (*Indigofera* sp.). *Jalawe* fruit peel is used to produce a yellow dye, tingi wood produces a brown dye, and indigo produces a blue dye. Another natural dye is noni (*Morinda citrifolia*) root and mahogany fruit peels, producing a brownish red dye. But this natural color material is rarely used in Trimulyo. Fixation process will 'lock' the color and create a preferred color density. For natural dyes, *tunjung* is used to produce darker colors and chalk is used to produce fairer colors. These materials are still easy to obtain in Yogyakarta, especially in traditional markets. In the Beringharjo Market in Yogyakarta, these natural dyes are sold in the same section as spices. The batik makers in Trimulyo usually buy the coloring material from Ngasem Market and a shop in Parangtritis Street in Yogyakarta or from *koperasi* in Bantul.

During the pandemic, governments are involved in supporting traditional batik makers to keep producing *nitik batik* by giving the production materials.



**Figure 3.** Variety of plants for natural dye, left to right: Secang wood (*Biancaea sappan*, red dye), indigo (*Indigofera* sp, blue dye), and tingi wood (*Ceriops tagal*, brown dye). (Source: Bapak Widodo and Research Team, 2023)

## SUSTAINABILITY OF BATIK MAKERS

During COVID-19 pandemic 2020-2021, it is known that there are four groups of batik makers in Trimulyo. Each of these groups has one coordinator: 1) Ibu Puji (Batik Nitik Trimulyo) (Figure 4), 2) Ibu Siti (Batik Nitik Blawong), 3) Ibu Aminah (Sekar Nitik) and 4) Bapak Iswanto (Trimulyo Batik). Each group usually has around 20-35 female members. Group members are usually residents of the surrounding environment in accordance with the residency area. However, not all group members actively make batik every day. Producing batik has been the primary source of income for some members and for some other member only as a side source of income.

At the end of December 2022, a new group was created under the coordination of Bapak Iswanto. This group consists of about 20 women with a relatively younger age of under 45 years old. This group was formed to receive upcoming batik production training and as an effort to regenerate batik maker in Trimulyo, gathering members belonging to the productive age category. A younger generation of women joined the group because some of them had to quit their previous job and had nothing to do. In the same line, the government offered for all of the materials needed for making batik including the free cost training.

It is likely that the enthusiasm to join a group of batik makers during COVID-19 pandemic is influenced by the availability of government support either in materials, training or funding availability. There is funding around IDR 26,000,000.00 from *Lembaga Amal Zakat*<sup>5</sup> to develop their production. They managed to absorb the funding to create a showroom and buy tools and materials for the group. Ibu Siti mentioned that establishment of Geographical Indication helped the batik makers to be more visible to the public and gained such assistance from institutions.



**Figure 4.** Doing hand-drawing (*canthing* process) in group session at Ibu Siti's house in Dusun Blawong, Trimulyo Village. (Source: Research Team, 2023)

<sup>5</sup> Institution which collect zakat, infaq/shadaqah and other social funds (CSR) for poverty alleviation

Supporting the Geographical Indication of Trimulyo as a center for *nitik batik* in Yogyakarta, the government and private sectors often hold training for the batik makers. The office of Cooperatives and Industry of Bantul Regency has held batik dyeing training using natural dyes, while Sekar Jagad Association has held dyeing training using synthetic dyes. These training covers whole batik production process, starts from providing instructors and materials, designing motifs, applying wax, dyeing, *pelorodan*,<sup>6</sup> until the batik products are finished and ready for sale. Finished batik products belong to the batik maker for sale or for keeping. Several training sessions of processing of natural color application, fixation and the wax resist removal using cassava porridge that are safer for the environment were also held.

## THE VARIETY OF BATIK PRODUCT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Based on the existing documentation, there are 79 known motifs of *nitik batik* in Trimulyo Village (Syakur, personal comm., January 2023). According to one of the batik makers, animal body parts and various plants became the inspiration for most of these motifs. The source of inspiration is distilled and stylized, creating decorative and abstractive motifs. The *Sekar Kenthang* (potato flower) motif is known to be one of the hardest motifs to make. Batik lovers often ordered classic *nitik batik*, such as *Cakar Ayam* and *Nagasari* motifs with *sogan*<sup>7</sup> colors for occasion purposes and the aesthetically elegant impression.

Apart from producing typical classic *nitik batik* as above examples (Figure 5), during COVID-19 pandemic, batik makers also produced products that are cheaper so that more people can buy the product. One strategy to produce cheaper *nitik batik* product is to make *selendhang*. One piece of *selendhang* scarf (Figure 6) with synthetic color is sold between IDR 150,000.00 to IDR 250,000.00, and IDR 300,000.00 for the *selendhang* with natural color. The *selendhang* is cheaper than the ordinary size cloth because the size is smaller.

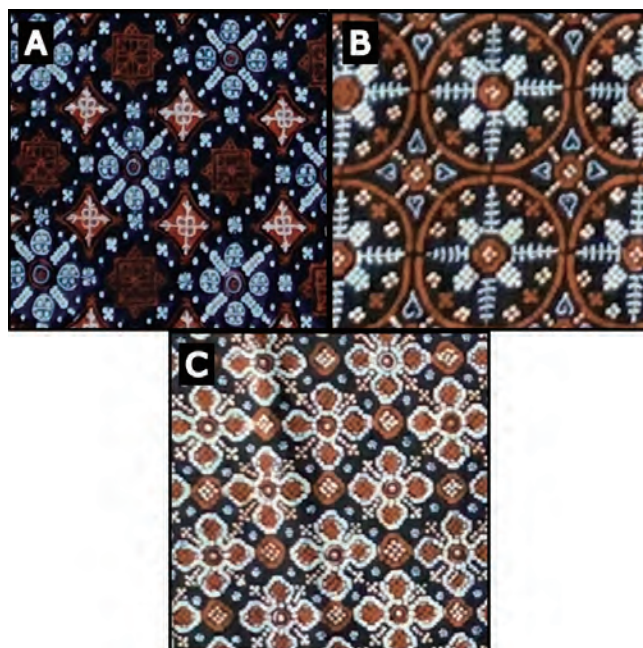
Another strategy to reduce the price is by making the motif larger. To produce larger *nitik* motif arrangements, they make the guiding square outline larger to speed up the chanting process. If the standard guiding square outline is 4x4 cm, they make it up to 6x6 cm. This can reduce the time to paint wax with a *canthing* pen, thus speed up the process to produce, and reduce the price. This type of strategy is also applied for stamped *nitik batik*. Because batik makers in Trimulyo only newly adopt stamp technique, although *nitik* stamp has been produced elsewhere, they choose to produce larger motifs to minimize block of wax accidents because the dot element is too close or too dense. This stamped *nitik batik* (Figure 7), which is quickly made, is sold cheaper. Motif variations printed on stamped *nitik batik* are not as many as hand-drawn *nitik batik*

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<sup>6</sup> Removing wax from batik cloth.

<sup>7</sup> Classic brown color in batik.



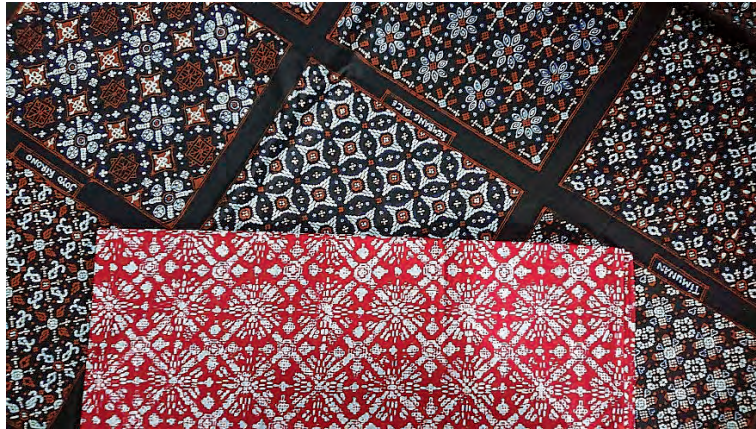


**Figure 5.** Classic nitik motifs. A: *nagasari* motif, B: *cakar ayam* motif, C: *sekar kenthang* motif. (Source: Research Team, 2022)



**Figure 6.** Long scarf (*selendhang*) sold by Ibu Aminah's group in an expo in Yogyakarta. (Source: Research Team, 2022)





**Figure 7.** Hand-drawn (background) and stamped (red cloth) *nitik batik* from Ibu Siti's group. (Source: Research Team, 2022)



**Figure 8.** *Nitik* motif in combination with line motifs made in 2021. (Source: Research Team, 2022)



**Figure 9.** Semi-finished of Afif Syakur's innovative design introduced in Trimulyo, showing combination pattern between *nitik batik* and line motifs. (Source: Research Team, 2022)

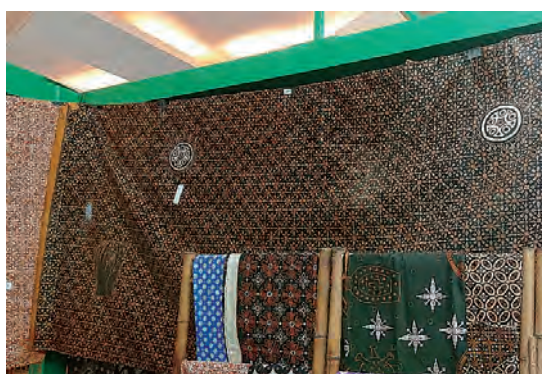


because of the limited copper stamps owned by each batik maker, caused by the expensive cost of producing copper stamps.

The third strategy to reduce price is by reducing details or reducing the density of the dots per motif and combining with line motifs to reduce the time of production. Currently, there are no standard rules on the proportion or percentage of combinations between *nitik* and non-*nitik* motifs to be considered as *nitik batik*. Batik cloth that has a combination of *nitik* motif (Figure 8 and 9) and non-*nitik* motifs will be called '*nitik batik*' and other motifs', referring to the motif's name used in the combination. The absence of definite rules creates a freedom of creativity with the batik modification they made. According to Bapak Iswanto, one of the group's coordinators, at least 30% of *nitik* motifs must be present in combination batik as a representation of *nitik* motifs in the batik cloth. While Sektiadi and Nugrahani, batik experts affiliated in Sekar Jagad Association, expressed the opinion that *nitik batik* is batik that contains only *nitik* motifs on the entire surface of the cloth, which then can be called classic *nitik batik*.



**Figure 10.** New modified *nitik* motifs, created by batik maker in Trimulyo during COVID-19 pandemic. (Source: Research Team, 2022)



**Figure 11.** Left: *Nitik batik* with *ceplok* corona motif, created by Ibu Siti's group. *Ceplok* motif means center of interest motif placed sporadically between background *nitik* motif arrangement. Right: *Nitik batik* with corona-themed motifs from Ibu Puji's group. Both created for "Membatik at Home" event during the early COVID-19 pandemic. (Source: Research Team, 2022, 2023)

The fourth strategy they applied is by making a completely new simpler motif. The motif has not been named yet, but the configuration of dots was also constructed by dot elements. Above are two examples of new motifs (Figure 10). This strategy is only applied by Ibu Siti's group members.

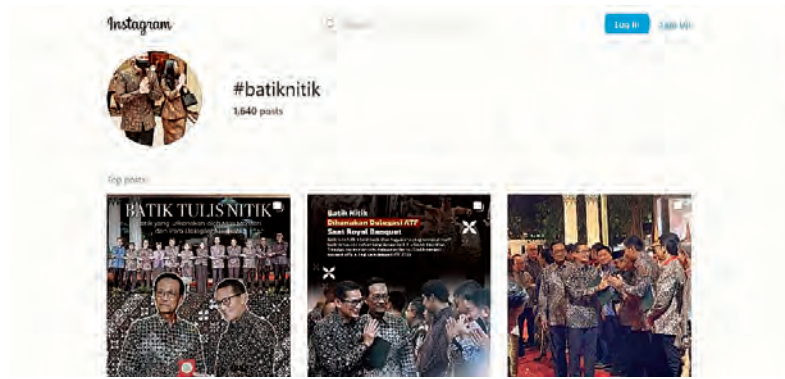
Another motif applied is the coronavirus motif (Figure 11). But this modification is initiated by the facilitator with a hope that people will attract to buy this coronavirus *nitik batik*. The facilitators introduced and encouraged batik makers to combine COVID-19 themes as an inspiration for the *nitik batik* motif. New designs were then created, with arrangements such as virus shapes, mask, and hand sanitizer bottles as center of interest among *nitik* geometrical structure motifs. They produced around 10-12 pieces of corona-themed batik, which six to eight clothes were sold via auction conducted by *Sekar Jagad*.

There are many reasons why batik makers and the instructor try some innovations. For one, to reduce the production time, resulting in cheaper selling price. For others it is to create something new, add a new design variation that is hopefully more beautiful and marketable, or just to express their crafting ability. The occurrence of new design in *nitik batik* can be triggered by customer order or training introduction. However, new modified *nitik batik* are sometimes less marketable in general, hence less produced without special order.

## MARKETING

Groups of *nitik batik* makers in Trimulyo have started exploring social media (Figure 12) to further introduce their products. Social media that have been used by the batik maker in Trimulyo are Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. Each group has an Instagram account managed by the coordinator, and most have been quite active introducing *nitik batik* products and their activity as batik makers. Some of the members also have their own individual Instagram accounts. Promotions through Instagram carried out per group have not had much of an impact. However, Instagram makes *nitik batik* known by more people. But promotion via Instagram is also important to increase brand awareness.

Online marketing is also carried out through Facebook and WhatsApp. On Facebook, batik makers individually offer batik to groups they joined on Facebook. WhatsApp is used individually by batik makers to market batik and communicate with potential buyers, especially those who are not located in the Yogyakarta area. WhatsApp features such as stories are used to share photos of the batik cloth offered, and the video call and media sharing features (photos and videos) are used by batik makers and customers to help determine the size and motif of the batik order. Transactions for customers located in Yogyakarta and its vicinity are usually made at Trimulyo, where the customer will take orders and make payments directly to the batik maker. For customers who are not located in Yogyakarta and its vicinity, transactions usually made through bank transfer and batik orders will be sent to the desired destination by post.



**Figure 12.** Photos of public participation in wearing *nitik batik*, found through hashtag #batiknitik in Instagram social media. (Source: Instagram, accessed on 13 February 2023)

During the pandemic, the batik maker relied a lot on their loyal customers and networks to continue producing *nitik batik*. An example is training assistance from Sekar Jagad Association, which is equipped with batik production ingredients and materials. Sales during the pandemic certainly decreased, but the production is still flowing, though not as busy as before the pandemic outbreak. At the start of the pandemic, there were no major changes in production. It is because batik orders that have been listed since before the pandemic occurred were still in production.

Since the establishment of *nitik batik* Geographical Indication, *batik* makers have participated in exhibitions or expos more frequently. Unfortunately, implementation of physical distancing and eventually lockdown during COVID-19 jeopardized not only the production but also events supporting the *batik* makers, leading to reduction or postponing of events (Hashim and Saruddin, 2023). As the condition of the community gets stable, more exhibitions will then be held. Participation at exhibitions usually by invitation or direct registration for each group of *batik* makers. The participation of batik maker groups in various exhibitions was also facilitated by the government at the village and district levels. Office of Trimulyo Village often provides facilities such as assistance with registration fees, meals, and accommodation for exhibitions held in Yogyakarta and its vicinity. If the Office of Trimulyo Village cannot facilitate, they will provide assistance by submitting assistance requests to the Office of Bantul Regency. This applied when representatives from Trimulyo were going to participate in the Dubai Expo 2022.

In addition to training in the production stage, online marketing training has also been held by the Small and Medium Enterprise forum in Trimulyo. As forum members, *nitik batik* makers also receive online marketing training for product advertisement. The office of Trimulyo Village is planning to facilitate and support online marketing and training in general by installing Wi-Fi at the village hall of the Trimulyo Village.



## DISCUSSION

Hand-drawn *nitik batik* is made one by one through a complex and lengthy process, combined with personal characteristics of each maker, resulting in each cloth having unique characteristics (Mahesti, Sugiarto, and Nugrahani, 2023). Considering the production time, labor work, materials, complexity of motifs, meticulous craftsmanship and cultural relevance, it is logical that hand-drawn batik are expensive (Lusianti and Rani, 2012; Mandegani et al., 2018; Sulistianingsih and Pujiono, 2018; Fontaine, 2023; Mahesti, Sugiarto, and Nugrahani, 2023). Moreover, complicated design required more eye work, thus increasing the labor price (Haron and Abd Mutalib, 2013; Hashim and Saruddin, 2023).

To sell those high quality batik products is challenging, moreover in a difficult economic condition during COVID-19 pandemic. Although some scholars argue that some creative economy sectors did not experience recession, the observation in the field found that the creative economy sector in fashion had been influenced by this pandemic. To increase *batik* sales and compete in the market, batik makers in Trimulyo mainly tried to reduce product price. It is quite difficult for them because they have to strategize to produce batik within the targeted price range by adjusting the costs of materials, production labor, and possible profits (Hansen and Mowen, 2006; Rimawati and Auliyah, 2019). Moreover, people that have known *nitik batik* before the pandemic, they already have certain quality expectations in their mind, so that the batik makers have to adjust to the standard qualification and the selling price if they would like the batik product to sell well. Research by Nurfikriyadi (2016) showed that several factors affect customer's preference in purchasing batik, and product quality (material) is considered along with price and design or pattern.

We observed that they produced small size batik cloth, innovated with stamp technique, made the motif larger, combined line and dots motif and made simple dot arrangements with the purpose to speed up the process of production and thus can reduce the price. This is carried out because during the COVID-19, purchasing high quality batik is not a priority for most people. Among the strategies, it seems that keeping the quality but reducing the sizes of the cloth is the most effective strategy to attract new customers especially for souvenir. During national and international expo in Indonesia and abroad, *selendhang* scarf is the most sell well batik. This *nitik batik* expos and fashion show which is also carried out and initiated by government and private sectors following the establishment of Geographical Indication of *nitik batik*, quite effective introducing *nitik batik* to batik lovers, although rarely the transaction took place directly during the expo. The villager said that after the expo, they came directly to the village if they are interested in purchasing batik and made some orders.

Other strategies to reduce the price such as creating simpler arrangements or configurations of dots elements seems only preferred by batik lovers. For

example, *nitik batik* motifs that have reduced details or have larger motifs. Some batik lovers still bought regular size cloth (2.25m long) of *nitik batik* with these modifications, but none of the younger generations bought regular size hand-drawn *nitik batik* during the pandemic. The young generation prefer to buy stamped *nitik batik* or if they bought the hand-drawn one, they prefer to buy *selendhang*. The price of IDR. 650,000.00 for one regular size cloth that has been the reduced price because of the COVID-19 pandemic, is still considered too expensive for young generations.

Online marketing strategy that has become one of solutions to bridge limiting physical access problems during COVID-19 pandemic also only give little impact for *nitik batik* Trimulyo Village. Governments have helped them with digital marketing training, but all of the batik's groups only use Instagram as a promotion gallery, and follow-up via WhatsApp. This type of marketing makes *nitik batik* hopefully resulting in more visible nitik batik to the public and hopefully increase hype, visits, requests, and sales.

Batik makers said that word of mouth marketing in the form of recommendations from old customers to potentially new customers felt to be more influential in increasing batik sales. For batik makers in Trimulyo, online marketing through Instagram felt to be less influential to increase buyers of nitik batik, although digital and online platforms closely become part of people's life, including shifting the purchasing patterns lately (Ithurbide and Singh, 2022; Surodjo, Astuty, and Lukman, 2022). Probably because Instagram belonged to the younger generation who favor ready to wear cloth.

We understand that *nitik batik* makers are able to produce but experienced difficulty to market their product during the COVID-19 pandemic. From this experience, we learn that to widen marketing segments, batik makers can create hand-drawn *nitik batik* that has larger motifs or make the motifs simpler to speed up the process thus reducing the price. Another strategy is by creating a combination of *nitik* and non-*nitik batik*. This can result in batik that are more beautiful but also can result in a disharmonious design. Not all batik makers in Trimulyo Village adapted to combine *nitik* and non-*nitik* motifs owing to their preference to produce a classic *nitik batik*.

## CONCLUSION

The research on *nitik batik* in Trimulyo Village in COVID-19 pandemic context has resulted in several results: Firstly, during COVID-19 pandemic batik makers in Trimulyo Village produce classic hand-drawn *nitik batik* either long sheet cloth or *selendhang* (long scarf), but most batik makers, especially the newcomers prefer to produce *selendhang*. Secondly, during the COVID-19 pandemic several facilitators and supervisors both initiated by government and private sectors had facilitated batik makers to keep producing and helped them to sell the product via auction and exhibition. This is considered as the most effective marketing tool.



Many people came to the village after they saw the exhibition, for example an exhibition in a hotel or other expo event in Yogyakarta. Thirdly, social media is also effective in introducing *nitik batik* to the public, but rather as a gallery. People do not purchase directly via online. They prefer to come directly to the village. Fourthly, during the training they introduce the corona motifs to be applied in the batik design. However, these motifs most batik lovers do not favor. These corona themes do not have symbolic meaning and look disharmonious with *nitik batik* as its background. The batik makers have not made the corona motif harmonious with a variety of *nitik* motifs. Other objects in relation with corona such as masks and bottles are considered strange for cloth. For the time being, batik makers will only produce corona batik by purchase order.

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# HANDICRAFT WORKSHOPS AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN IRAN: THE INTERNET, THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND THE RE-EMERGENCE OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP IN HOUSEHOLDS

Janet Blake<sup>1</sup> and Yadollah Parmoun<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The domain of Iranian traditional craftsmanship encompasses a wide range of elements, each of which has its own unique traditional knowledge and artistic methods. Throughout the history of generations of bearers and practitioners, such arts originated in households and were transmitted non-formally or informally to the following generations. Changes in living conditions and an increase in market demand are two factors that encouraged the transfer of these traditions from the home into workshops where specialized crafts people, who were mainly men, were engaged in producing handicraft items in larger quantities for sale on the market. Women were gradually removed from the practice, as the activities of most of them were traditionally confined to the home. Younger generations became less aware of their values and functions of handicrafts that used to be transmitted in homes and through mother-child relations. More recently, the advent of modern industrial products to rival them has had a negative effect on the popularity of these now mainly masculine handicraft industries, resulting in the loss of part of their market. As a consequence, more and more workshops gradually closed down and the practitioners became involved in other occupations (Vizārat-i Šanāyi and Malayeri, 1992; Hosseinian and Bazeghi, 2010).

One negative effect of such developments had been lack of awareness about the origins of such arts, their potential to support the family livelihoods, the hidden capacities of women and younger adults effectively to safeguard these elements and, overall, the power of Iranian households to promote diversity, inclusion, and sustainable development through the practice of their traditional arts. Iranian bearers of these handicraft traditions needed a catalyst to remind them of all these factors and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was such a trigger. In spite of all of the difficult outcomes that this disastrous period has had on all countries, economic hardships, the pandemic also encouraged families to consider the potentials of their homes and the people who lived together to help them live through these difficult conditions. One strategy available to them was

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<sup>1</sup> Director, Persian Garden Institute for Living Heritage

<sup>2</sup> Cultural Developer for Heritage, City of Ottawa, Canada

to transfer many handicrafts and traditional arts back from workshops to their homes and adjust their practice and modes of transmission to the new COVID-19 conditions.

This paper presents the findings of field research conducted on handicraft workshops related to three Iranian handicraft elements (introduced in the following section). The focus of this fieldwork was on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the practice of these handicrafts and, in particular, on the role of women in bringing some traditional crafts back into households.

### **The ICH Elements Studied**

Three handicraft elements were chosen for this field research, namely *soozandoozi* and *patehdouzi* (traditional needlework and embroidery), *givehdoozi* (traditional espadrille production) and *sofalgari* (traditional pottery). It should be noted that Iran is a country of diverse ethno-linguistic and socio-cultural conditions and each of the selected elements manifest as local varieties with their formal features, cultural meanings, and accompanied by a set of cultural norms defining them with their social functions. For each of these three elements, workshops in different regions of Iran were studied and some notable regional variations were revealed. Altogether, 15 workshops practising one of the aforementioned handicrafts were studied, distributed between rural and urban areas and covering diverse regions of the country (Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> Although it had initially been planned to include handicraft workshops in the cities of Qom and Hamedan, they were not included in the final survey due to the fact that the practices observed did not meet the criteria of a field research on traditional craftsmanship viewed as ICH. This was because the workshops in those two cities were either highly commercialized and large industries (in Hamedan), there had been an almost complete transformation of traditional methods and techniques (in both Hamedan and Qom) or there were special norms that limited access to many aspects of the element (in Qom).<sup>4</sup> The practitioners interviewed were all work-

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<sup>3</sup> The locations of the interviews for *Soozandoozi* and *Patehdouzi* were: Zahedan in Sistan and Baluchestan Province (South-east Iran); Kerman in Kerman Province (South-east Iran); and the city of Tehran (capital city) in Tehran Province (North-central Iran). The locations of the interviews for *Givehdoozi* were: Miwan village, a Kurdish community in Kermanshah Province (Western Iran); Nashlaj village in Esfahan Province (Central Iran); Senejan township in Markazi Province (North-central Iran); Abarkooh/Abarghoo in Yazd Province (Central Iran); and Qazvin in Qazvin Province (North-central Iran). The locations of the interviews for *Sofalgari* were: Garmsar in Semnan Province (North-central Iran); Kashan in Esfahan Province (Central Iran); Nazarabad in Alborz Province (North-central Iran); Rasht in Gilan Province (Northern Iran); Qazvin in Qazvin Province (North-central Iran); and Kermanin Kerman Province (South-east Iran).

<sup>4</sup> In place of these locations, the team decided to study Garmsar, Kashan, Nazarabad, and Qazvin which represented the state of the arts in a better way.





Figure 1. Map of Iran (Source: Nations Online Project)

shop owners and comprised nine women and six men.<sup>5</sup>

The specific characteristics of each handicraft element studied are as follows. Soozandoozi and patehdouzi (traditional needlework and embroidery) is one of the most diversified Iranian traditional arts that is practiced solely by women. Dating back to around 8,000 years ago, they comprise 115 different disciplines with 120 different types of sewing techniques and each locality uses colours, motifs and norms in its products in such a way that the regional and cultural features are clearly discernible. This art is widespread throughout the country, including among the ethnic arts of Balouch peoples in South-east Iran, Bakhtiyaris in West and South-west Iran and Turkmen in North-east Iran (Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang, 2021).

Giveh is a traditional espadrille that is a lasting, light traditional shoe of Iran suitable for walking long-distances, working on farms, taking cattle to the desert for grazing, and many other outdoor activities especially in rural areas. Farmers and cattle breeders need light, comfortable, strong, and inexpensive footwear to walk through highlands and rocky passages and giveh are usually the option they select. Givehdoozi is the art of producing giveh and, dating back more than

<sup>5</sup> Data-gathering was accomplished through interviews, and taking photos and videos in each location. In total, the survey covered 15 interviews, accompanied by photography and video filming. The mentioned photography and filming were conducted with regard to the resources of the field workers and wouldn't require involvement of professional photographers or film makers.



1,000 years, it is a handicraft found in almost all provinces of Iran (Nikoueia, Payvandyb and Davodi Roknabadic, 2017). *Givehdoozi* is a shared enterprise between men and women, with women usually producing the top part working with big needles, while men make the sole. The raw materials are available in the surrounding environment, the upper being made from strong threads of sheep wool and goat wool thread is used for sewing; rolled pieces of worn cloth are gathered together and connected with strong threads to make the sole; then natural gum, cow leather and sheep fat, which are abundant in the village context, are used to strengthen the whole structure and make it water proof (Anonymous, 2021).

*Sofalgari* (traditional pottery) is the art of making vessels, containers, and objects using clay. In ancient Iran, pottery has been made at home by family members for millenia. Until recently, it was thought that pottery was produced by farmers and ranchers in 8000 BC, but discoveries made in Moravia (Czechoslovakia) have changed this theory and the date of discovery of pottery is estimated to be much older than the Neolithic period (Sajjadi and Mansour, 2017, pp. 327-328; Kambakhsh Fard, 2013).

During the course of the long history of settlement in Iran, clay vessels, containers, and objects were used in households and numerous workshops were involved in the mass production of such products. A number of traditional workshops are still involved in making such containers and objects. In recent years, an emerging branch of *sofalgari* has involved talented artists, especially younger sculptors, practitioners of the fine arts and talented self-trained individuals in creating artistic or decorative clay objects (Towhidi, 2013; Rafii, 2008).<sup>6</sup> The main reasons why these three elements were selected include the following:

- They are now being practised by a considerable number of women, although *givehdoozi* and *sofalgari* are generally regarded as mainly masculine handicrafts.
- They have recently been accompanied by the emergence of good practices which satisfy the definition of ICH safeguarding in various aspects.
- They exhibit the potential to support family livelihoods in the face of the COVID-19 challenges.
- They exemplify effective employment of online platforms, appropriate involvement of women and younger adults, acceptable utilization of family resources, and solid involvement of the family to sustain the economic and psychological challenges of the difficult COVID-19 period.
- They exemplify a correct understanding of market needs by choosing industries that are less demanding with their raw materials and workshop equip-

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<sup>6</sup> Such objects include tiles, sculptures, motifs borrowed from different cultures or discovered among the details of historical buildings, historical paintings, and decorative arts on historical objects, and even motifs from Persian calligraphy, among numerous other pieces of art.

ment, on the one hand, and products that are cheaper for sale in the local, national and international markets.

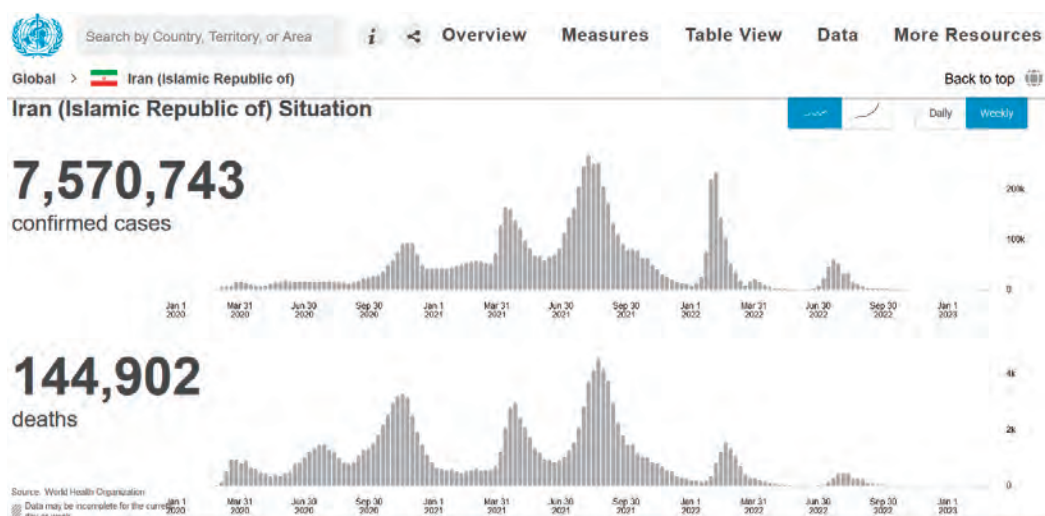
In addition, the survey of *givehdoozi* has also introduced at least one good practice, with even positive impacts in the Kurdish communities of Iran, among the country's less well-represented cultures, from international contacts. The survey of *soozandouzi* has also provided evidence of widespread involvement of vast networks of women, with a focal point located in Iran and the cooperation of the market. The survey of *sofalgari* demonstrated at least one successful creative revitalization practice accompanied by promotion and engagement.

## SEVERITY AND MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 IN IRAN

The first cases of the COVID-19 virus in Iran were identified in February 2020, and the following graphs (Figure 2) show the fluctuations in COVID-19 rates of infection and related deaths in the country between 15 February 2020 and January 2023.

The first social distancing and lockdown measures were introduced in early April 2020, following the end of the Persian New Year holiday. On 11 April many government offices re-opened, operating at a two-thirds capacity though high-risk spaces (such as cinemas, theatres and restaurants) remained closed and cultural and religious gatherings were prohibited. Schools and universities were closed from April 2020 to April 2022 and all teaching and other activities were held online.

The crafts persons and other handicraft workshop staff interviewed for this survey in Iran did not specify the periods in which they were most affected by COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, but their responses related particularly to



**Figure 2.** Number of cases and deaths in Iran from 31 March 2020 to 30 September 2022 (Source: World Health Organization)

periods in which their cities and provinces were under lockdown restrictions. The lockdown measures imposed generally involved closing governmental offices, and other offices and workplaces during more severe lockdowns, and applying a 'work-from-home' directive. In addition, cinemas, theatres, swimming pools, saunas, beauty salons, shopping centres and restaurants were also closed and even cultural and religious gatherings were prohibited. More serious lockdowns were also accompanied by a ban on movement between cities. Clearly, such restrictions had an important impact on the ability of handicraft workers to exhibit and sell their products since such spaces were closed and both domestic and international tourism<sup>7</sup> were severely restricted or prevented. The closure of schools also affected their ability to teach in-person classes in their workshops. Most handicraft workshops could continue to operate and were not affected by the 'work-from-home' directives.

In addition to all schools and universities teaching online from April 2020 to April 2022, countrywide lockdowns were imposed in April and November 2020 and April 2021; in the November 2020 lockdown, only banks, bakeries, hospitals, and grocery stores were allowed to open and travel restrictions between cities were imposed. Some areas of the country experienced additional lockdowns, such as the re-imposition of restrictions in Sistan and Baluchestan Province in May 2020, the announcement of a code 'red' with a very strict lockdown regime and travel into and out of cities in Kurdistan and Kermanshah Provinces in May-June 2020 and lockdown restrictions re-imposed in Tehran, with travel restrictions into and out of the city, in July 2020.

## **IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON IRANIAN HANDICRAFT WORKSHOPS**

In this section of the paper, we will present the main findings related to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns and other social control measures on handicraft workshops in Iran, according to the three handicraft elements studied.

Three examples of the totally female practice<sup>8</sup> of *soozandouzi* and *patehdouzi* were studied in Sistan and Baluchestan, Kerman, and Tehran (Figure 3). The workshop/institute in Sistan and Baluchestan practices traditional Baluchi needlework from Southern Iran, while the Kerman and Tehran workshops both practise *patehdoozi*, a handicraft from Kerman Province. The following findings attracted the attention of the project team as being of particular interest. The owner of the Tehran *patehdoozi* workshop has been successful in training, transmission and promotion of the element and found that the COVID-19 Pandemic presented an opportunity to explore new designs and techniques and invest more on

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<sup>7</sup> For the same period as the school and university closures, there were periods when movement between cities and internationally was heavily restricted or prohibited.

<sup>8</sup> The actual embroidery work is a practice for women. Tasks like raw material production and distribution and marketing and sales also involve men.

networking and training. As a consequence, online platforms have been extremely useful for this workshop and the pandemic period offered room for reflection and innovation both in the craft itself as well as in marketing and transmitting it. All of the workshop owners recognized that the fact that younger trainees are more comfortable working (and training) online work can be positive. However, they also noted that, ultimately, it is older women who continue practising the art since younger practitioners are too impatient to dedicate their time and effort to learning and practising the craft and their time and energy is taken up with many other preoccupations. It is interesting to note that the Sistan and Baluchistan institute<sup>9</sup> had more success in working with young people and this may be due to the fact that the younger rural women living in that area have more limited lives and opportunities. Sistan and Baluchestan is one of the most financially deprived and marginalized provinces of Iran and its female inhabitants are occupied with household tasks or helping with agricultural activities or making tools. The institute has provided them with a vital additional income source which they can pursue from their homes.



**Figure 3.** *Soozandouzi* in Tehran Province and (below) a pattern for *patehdoozi* from Tehran. (Photo: PGILH)

<sup>9</sup> The institute that works with these women has 15 female employees and outsources to 700, mostly rural, women.



Another view of the online as opposed to the 'off-line' environment was presented by the Kerman *patehdoozi* workshop. It is more inclined towards direct, 'face-to-face' marketing and the owner regards online platforms as lacking any direct quality control or understanding on the part of the buyer as to the nature of the traditional craft that goes into making the products. She saw this as potentially, leading over time to lower quality products and a loss of market opportunities and she stated a preference for the pre-COVID conditions. The differing experiences of these *soozandouzi* and *patehdouzi* workshops during COVID-19 and varied reactions of the owners illustrates well that there is some diversity in how the pandemic impacted on this handicraft.

The ways in which these women-run workshops have responded specifically to women's needs are also of interest, and there are two main messages to take away from the interviews conducted with them. Woman handicraft practitioners tend to adopt a more comprehensive outlook towards their craft and take account of aspects that are generally neglected by men. These include and investment in training and inter-generational transmission, introducing new designs and techniques and expanding their network by inviting interested older or younger women. Generally, also, they are less conservative and readier to innovate and to support transmission while male practitioners/owners were more inclined towards realizing short-term profits. Rural workshop owners are more inclined towards continuing with their traditional methods of production, partly due to less reliance on (and access to) the Internet.

*Givehdoozi* (Figure 4) and its related arts and skills requires a network of people who are involved in sourcing and preparing the raw materials, design and production and selling the *giveh* produced. As a consequence, workshops that were related to larger networks were more successful in surviving the stresses of the COVID-19 period. One of the workshops studied was in danger of disappearing, the owner being a sole practitioner who is not hopeful about the survival of the art because of the impatience and lack of interest of the younger generation.



**Figure 4.** A traditional *givehdoozi* workshop. (Photo: PGILH)





**Figure 5.** A female-owned *givehdoozi* workshop. (Photo: PGILH)

In addition, as with other handicrafts studied, the Iranian Ministry for Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism and the related governmental organizations provided no financial and promotional support to deal with COVID-19 and only gave some minor help in listing the workshops.

Two female-owned *givehdoozi* workshops (Figure 5) demonstrated a notable case in their response to COVID-19 whereby they used the additional time available to update their knowledge of the artistic and technical aspects of their work, managed to increase their networks, gave value to training women and transmission to younger people and successfully supported rural households' financial needs. These two workshops leveraged the experience of lockdown to be creative and also to build up extensive networks of practitioners, trainees and customers within Iran and overseas.

The six *Sofalgari* workshops constitute a relatively homogeneous group due to the nature of the work, their geographical locations and the equal distribution of the practice among women and men (Figures 6 and 7). The pottery items they produced were of an 'artistic' or 'decorative' nature, all of the workshops were located in larger urban areas<sup>10</sup> and three women and three men were interviewed. The *sofalgari* practitioners should be regarded as creative artists involved in re-creating pottery as an ICH element, according to contemporary demands, and see this as a form of safeguarding. Most of the general findings mentioned above also apply to *sofalgari*, but what we have learned specifically in relation to *sofalgari* include the following. First, as art works their products have a limited and specialised customer base and they needed governmental support during the pandemic to cover the costs related to shipping their (heavy) products and of potential damage during transportation. Again, they did not receive any COVID-related support.

<sup>10</sup> They are located in the cities of Garmsar, Kashan, Nazarabad, Rasht, Qazvin, and Kerman.



**Figure 6.** Some typical products of *sofalgari*. (Photo: PGILH)



**Figure 7.** A traditional *sofalgari* workshop. (Photo: PGILH)

Although the workshop owners welcomed online platforms as an effective tool for training, marketing, and online sales they generally believe that these have the negative impact since actual physical examination of the products is not possible and this had reduced their sales. They almost unanimously preferred a hybrid method of both online and in-person contact, especially as regards promotion and marketing. A further point, which exacerbated the impacts of the pandemic, was that this handicraft has a major overseas market among cultural organizations, and galleries and museums but the domestic market is not well developed; more support is required for effective awareness-raising and promotion within Iran.

The project team was especially impressed by successful practices undertaken by creative women in all three handicraft elements, who discovered opportunities under the COVID-19 pandemic conditions to continue, and even expand their practice. They successfully brought their crafts into households, utilized the capabilities provided by online platforms, engaged women and younger people in their handicraft, promoted the mental and physical health of family members through it and contributed to the financial sustainability of their families. In addition, they expanded the geographical scope of their activities to other locations within Iran and even overseas. Two of these practices, namely *givehdoozi* and *sofalgari* are traditionally regarded as masculine practices carried out in workshops located within the market place, not within houses. *Soozandoozi* was also gradually losing its household base, due to the occupation of women and younger adults with other in-home activities and amusements. Finally, all of three elements were struggling against a strong pressure from imported products of modern industrial processes, namely shoes, fabrics, and vessels made by powerful brands.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the survey conducted on *soozandoozi*, *givehdoozi*, and *sofalgari* workshops in Iran has demonstrated a some limited engagement by younger generations, the outstanding presence of large networks of women in the competitive market, the comprehensive and innovative approach of women practitioners to all aspects of safeguarding ICH, the emergence of good safeguarding practices, the potential of the handicrafts to successfully support family livelihoods and health during the pandemic, the employment of online platforms as a multidimensional tool and networking over vast geographical distances.

The above findings emphasize the need for taking more vigorous steps in Iran towards adopting and implementing a fully inclusive and respectful approach towards ICH safeguarding that includes sustainable development within its perspective. One main observation was that almost none of the surveyed workshops had received any financial support from the government during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they were left on their own to find strategies for survival. Although several workshop owners responded creatively to the pandemic stresses, it is important to adopt effective policies and allocate adequate governmental support for handicraft elements in order to support them in crises. The challenging economic conditions resulting from the pandemic, and other economic pressures from the sanctions regime on Iran, have forced some exponents of these ICH elements to turn to the luxury market. This has had the intriguing impact that some ordinary people who can no longer afford to buy these products have resorted to learning the skill in order to make these items for themselves, thus resulting in an unusual form of transmission. Although these findings presented here relate specifically to the three elements of *soozandoozi*,

*givehdoozi*, and *sofalgari*, it is more than likely that similar results would be gathered from interviewing proponents of many other ICH elements.

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# COVID-19 AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE: CASE STUDIES IN KYRGYZSTAN

Achilova Altynai<sup>1</sup> and Akmatova Kuluipa<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 in 2020 has significantly affected Kyrgyzstan. Amongst the negative impacts, a sharp decline in provision of the medical services was the most significant which was caused by the increased burden on the healthcare system when hospitals were not able to provide appropriate services to people, especially the most severe patients. The costs of the medicine were unaffordable for the majority of residents. This was one of the reasons for many people, especially in rural areas to reminisce the folk medicine which in past was based on traditional methods, skills and indigenous knowledge kept by the Kyrgyz people for many centuries. Traditional treatment using medicinal herbs has become in high demand during the pandemic period, and a large number of people assumed that medicinal herbs could relieve COVID-19 symptoms and protect them.

The current paper presents the findings of the research conducted in three regions of the Kyrgyz Republic in 2022. The study was focused on the identification and documentation of the traditional knowledge practised by local people during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods. Research also included analysis of possible changes and modifications of the traditional practices as a result of the impact of COVID-19. The approach of overall research was built on qualitative research methods. Communities for the research were selected in the districts which are characterized by rich biodiversity and good climatic conditions for the collection and cultivation of medicinal herbs. Interviews and meetings were conducted with custodians of traditional knowledge who have wide experience in folk medicine and the collection of medicinal herbs for traditional use. Custodians of Traditional Knowledge are individuals who keep, revive, and transmit traditional knowledge that they possess. They are respected in their communities and well-known for their knowledge, experience, and activities related to the treatment of different diseases. The majority of the custodians are familiar with

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<sup>1</sup> Research Consultant, Rural Development Fund.

<sup>2</sup> Director, Rural Development Fund.



different types of medicinal herbs and useful plants from childhood and have been collecting medicinal herbs for treatment for many years. It was important to involve custodians as direct practitioners in research to review the dynamic of traditions, changes and modifications in the use of traditional practices and what are the reasons for those modifications and if/how the pandemic has affected them. Research revealed that folk medicine and indigenous knowledge became used more actively in comparison to the pre-pandemic period. This is particularly true concerning not only folk medicine but also spiritual practices which have been reshaped and become more vital and relevant in the last few years.

## **IMPACTS OF COVID-19 IN KYRGYZSTAN**

The first cases of COVID-19 in the Kyrgyz Republic were detected on 18 March 2020. Starting from the end of March the entire country was placed on an emergency with the introduction of strict lockdowns in big cities and rural areas. Quarantine measures have significantly affected the country's economic stability and social situation contributing to the escalation of the crisis. The stress caused by the coronavirus pandemic has affected various aspects of people's lives – livelihoods, nutrition, education, working hours and job opportunities, however, issues related to healthcare were extremely drastic and complicated. According to official statistics,<sup>3</sup> for the period from March 2020 to February 2023 in total 206,599 cases of COVID-19 were recorded in the country and the number of deaths was equal to 2,991 people. Available statistical data<sup>4</sup> demonstrated that 62 percent of those households where at least one family member was exposed to COVID-19, faced problems related to access to medical services and obtaining necessary medicines, among which about 39 percent of people experienced difficulties accessing medical services, and 58 percent in obtaining necessary medicines. Additionally, risks related to mental health, and emotional and psychological well-being increased significantly and have become considered noteworthy. Statistical data confirms that 66 percent of interviewed households indicated that at least one member of the household experienced depression, stress, and anxiety associated with the disease and pandemic.

## **FOLK MEDICINE AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE**

In Kyrgyz culture from the older times traditional medicine, folk medicine, and traditional knowledge are attributed to the domain of the nomad lifestyle and traditional husbandry. Before and during Soviet times, women in Kyrgyz families

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<sup>3</sup> Official data is collected and provided by Coronavirus Research Center at Johns Hopkins University of Medicine. <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/kyrgyzstan>

<sup>4</sup> Research conducted by National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan 'Impact of the pandemic caused by COVID-19 on household', 2020. <http://stat.kg/ru/publications/vliyanie-pandemii-COVID-19-na-domashnie-hozyajstva/>

used to be responsible for treating children and family members using medicinal herbs. Men had expertise mainly in curing animals: sheep, cattle, etc., which was determined by the conducted activities. This determined the practical way of transmission of knowledge when skills are acquired through active involvement in productive activity. Traditional knowledge is linked to lifestyle, tools and techniques used for conducting economic activities, and spiritual practices for cultural development. Such knowledge received from ancestors is changed, supplemented, adapted, and modified in the course of the life of a single person or whole society.

The demand for medicinal herbs and folk medicine was significantly high during the dissemination of COVID-19. Custodians of indigenous knowledge confirmed that the number of people asking for traditional treatment based on folk medicine has notably increased with the start of the pandemic in 2020. Increased interest in traditional knowledge was closely associated with the emerging risks of being exposed to COVID-19 and finding other alternatives for the official medicine which became inapproachable during the pandemic. Economic issues also forced people to find other possibilities to replace expensive medicines and drugs with available resources, such as medicinal herbs and spiritual practices.

Living close to the forests or pastures gives rural people the opportunity to harvest different herbs, however, people collect very simple plants that are found even in the backyards of their houses. Wild useful and precious herbs and berries namely chamomile, wormwood, black currant, sea buckthorn berries and many others are used as tea, infusion and tinctures, while other plants like juniper are used for cleaning the air and aromatization. The use of those herbs and plants is mostly linked to the treatment of influenza and pneumonia. Barberry is known by ancestors as a plant to cure infectious diseases due to its high concentration of vitamin C. Lately traditional recipes and treatment practices have been enhanced using new ingredients like lemon and ginseng to make treatment more efficient. Such treatment was assessed by custodians as effective enough, at least in the prevention of COVID-19 and in relieving the symptoms. Custodians emphasized the importance of prevention of diseases and boosting the immune system to mitigate possible negative consequences of diseases. The application of traditional practices based on the use of medicinal herbs was mentioned by custodians as an efficient prevention measure. Some of the custodians also reported that they practice other types of traditional folk medicine, like pulse diagnosis as a traditional technique which is combined with medicinal herbs treatment.

Folk Medicine is one of the activities largely practised by Kyrgyz people from ancient times (Figure 1). It is closely linked to the abundance of medicinal herbs and useful plants widely spread on the territory of the country. There are suitable conditions for the collection and cultivation of medicinal herbs. Many types of rare and valuable medicinal plants are found in all zones and heights on the



**Figure 1.** The process of drying of the calendula. (Photo: RDF)

country's territory (Rogova and Sodobekov, 2009). The number of the higher plants is equal to 4,100 species, of which 800 species are considered to be useful plants and around 200 plant species are used in traditional medicine (Aldayarov, 2022) by healers and custodians. Kyrgyzstan during the Soviet times was one of the main suppliers of medicinal herbs in the medical industry – up to 90 percent (Altymyshev, 1976).

## **SPIRITUAL PRACTICES AS A COPING STRATEGY**

Kyrgyz people often rely on folk medicine or traditional treatment methods including non-material and religious practices. Most of those spiritual practices were lost or forgotten during the Soviet times when official medicine used to be perceived as the only way to heal diseases, and other traditional and folk methods were forbidden and were practised informally by a few healers. With the dissemination of the COVID-19 the interest in spiritual practices has become more elevated. COVID-19 has significantly impacted the mental health of people. Many people had such symptoms as anxiety, aggressiveness, and change of behaviour and attitudes, including existential crisis amid COVID-19. Performing spiritual practices and rituals has allowed to decrease the high level of anxiety and its symptoms (psychological and physical).

Rituals are based on performing some actions that are aimed at relieving symptoms, for example, relieving a headache or getting rid of styes on the eye faster. For example, the juniper is used by people for the fumigation of houses since it is believed from ancient times that archa protects from evil spirits. Custodians noted that people often have headaches when the energy in the room is changed. Juniper helps to clean the air in the room so the headache diminishes or disappears. However, the key action needed to be undertaken during the fumigation is to accompany the process with best wishes, good words and songs, otherwise, no results might be obtained. The fumigation with archa has a therapeutic effect, which is based not only on the physical impact but also on the mental relief. This is especially true taking into consideration the high level of stress and anxiety that emerged as a result of the dissemination of the coronavirus and pandemic.

Previously spiritual practices have been largely used during ceremonies, family events, and in normal life, for example, the baking of bread should be accompanied by good wishes, or the initiation of a new activity should be done after the blessings. Such practices have a therapeutic effect since it is mainly linked to self-motivation for a positive outcome. Nowadays, traditional treatment supported by spiritual rituals and rites is used widely and transformed into a new form of knowledge and effective method to heal mental problems. The impact of the pandemic is still ongoing, and every day people discover new side effects like headaches, loss of concentration, physical weakness and asthenia, social phobia and isolation. Spiritual practices along with the support of psychologies can be an effective approach to coping with such difficulties.

Another unexpected practice that was observed is related to the blessings when people mullahs and custodians of indigenous knowledge ask for good blessings directed towards the ending of the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, custodians mentioned that such spiritual practices as blessings, prayers, and benedictions have always been a fundamental part of the culture and lifestyle of Kyrgyz people, nevertheless, over the last few years, those practices have also been



transforming and receiving greater attention – the field of application of those practices has been extended: health, ceremonies, business. Custodians reported that they had been invited to many ceremonies and events to grant their blessings and benedictions for a better future, good health and improved well-being.

## **MODIFICATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE**

Dissemination of COVID-19 has increased the demand for traditional knowledge and demand on additional knowledge and education not only on folk medicine but also on other types of human activities – agriculture, housing, food systems, and nutrition. In order to apply traditional knowledge under modern circumstances (livelihoods, treatment, income generation, education of children and resilience to climate change) people and custodians adapt traditional knowledge using new technologies. Adaptation and modification of traditional knowledge lead to effective, cost-efficient, participatory, and sustainable strategies for maintaining livelihoods. The combination of traditional knowledge and new technologies has a dual purpose: for the younger generation to enhance their knowledge by making traditional knowledge revived, restored and actively practised in modern days, while for older people – custodians and local communities – to be engaged in sustainable income generation activities – the cultivation of medicinal herbs and popularization of folk medicine, indigenous practices for coping impacts of the climate change, new strategies for environmental sustainability thus contributing to the conservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage for future generations. Traditional knowledge became significant in terms of sustainable income generation. The pandemic and restrictions have introduced new ways of receiving and sending information and knowledge, including traditional knowledge and practices. Social media and digital tools made it possible to popularize indigenous knowledge through new ways of presenting the information. Not only youth can use new approaches to the presentation of data – short videos, creative advertisements and films, but also the older generation since digital tools have become accessible and understandable.

## **SUMMARY**

Traditional folk medicine is an affordable practice to treat different diseases and improve the health state since it is based on herbs and resources which are accessible and effective. This is one of the key reasons for the increase in the level of interest of people in medicinal herbs collection and cultivation during the pandemic and post-pandemic period. Research participants agreed that the dissemination of COVID-19 contributed to the strengthening of people's interest and confidence in traditional knowledge and spiritual practices. Traditional knowledge has changed – it has become more priced and valued, heard and visible.



Traditional knowledge is modified and enhanced following the real demands and available resources. The important finding presented by custodians was the statement that traditional knowledge can be powerful and may influence decision-making processes in such sectors as healthcare, agriculture, climate change resilience, sustainable environment and cost-efficient income generation activities. Traditional knowledge empowers local communities to be more active in the promotion of their wisdom and experience. New technologies are a tool for enhancing traditional knowledge and traditional practices whether it is folk medicine or spiritual practices are an approach for more sustainable and resilient development of local communities.

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# THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ICH IN MONGOLIA: A CASE STUDY IN ULAANBAATAR CAPITAL CITY

Enkhbat Galbadrakh<sup>1</sup> and Saruul Arslan<sup>2</sup>

## BACKGROUND

During 1 December 2021- 1 January 2022, we conducted a Questionnaire-Based Desk Survey on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and COVID-19 Pandemic Situation in Mongolia, regarding the new project 'Research on Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic' undertaken by International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI).

The survey was conducted at the national level to assess the status of the ICH during the COVID-19 pandemic. Questionnaire A enrolled research institutions, researchers, and other organizations in this field, and Questionnaire B enrolled the community, local people, and practitioners of intangible cultural heritage.

To ensure accessibility and participation in the survey, the questionnaires were distributed to local cultural departments, cultural centers, which are the primary focal units, of 21 aimags in 5 regions of Mongolia. In the end it covered all 5 domains of ICH, enrolled capital city and 15 aimags, 12 soums, 3 local museums, one NGO, and a total of 45 practitioners. Namely:

- Ulaanbaatar city: 8 practitioners, 1 NGO;
- Khangai region includes 16 cultural organizations, 35 practitioners /enrolled 5 aimags: Arkhangai, Bayan-Khongor, Bulgan, Khuvsgul, Uvurkhangai
- The central region includes 4 cultural organizations, 6 practitioners /enrolled 3 aimags: Govisumber, Darkhan-Uul, Dornogovi
- Western region includes 5 cultural organizations, 17 practitioners /enrolled 4 aimags: Bayan-Ulgii, Govi-Altai, Zavkhan, Uvs
- Eastern region includes 5 cultural organizations, 8 practitioners /enrolled 3 aimags: Dornod, Sukhbaatar, Khentii

According to the survey, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, negative impacts such as reduced frequency of ICH, the cessation of apprenticeship training, disrupted the inheritance system, deprived of financial resources for practi-

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<sup>1</sup> Director of National Center for Cultural Heritage, Mongolia.

<sup>2</sup> Head of Registration and Information Department, National Center for Cultural Heritage, Mongolia.

tioners, and shortage of raw materials have been observed. Despite the challenges and risks, positive changes and progress have been noted. As an example, it has been observed that there is a growing trend towards the revival of traditional culinary practices and traditional medicine. Furthermore, communities and families are engaging in traditional games to create a pleasant and effective atmosphere. Additionally, traditional dances, long songs, and other related exercises have been utilized to promote respiratory and physical activity.

To adapt to the situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of respondents noted that the intangible cultural heritage had undergone some changes in practices and transmission. It was also mentioned that these changes had both positive and negative sides (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Positive and negative aspects of the COVID-19 on ICH

Positive	Negative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Traditional technology has been revived</li> <li>- Increased ICH-based production</li> <li>- Increased ICH training and learning opportunities through online</li> <li>- Increased participation of family members, their collective attitudes, and activism</li> <li>- Inherited within the family</li> <li>- Craftsmanship developed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changes in apprenticeship training</li> <li>- Material technology changes</li> <li>- Apprenticeship training stopped</li> <li>- Lack of live communication has had a negative impact on inheritance</li> </ul>

Participants responded to the following questions: new/innovative attempts, ways, or techniques added to the practice and/or the transmission of ICH, to adapt to the current situation, and whether these have improved safeguarding of ICH (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Methods added to the practice and transmission of ICH and its effects

New/innovative attempts, ways, or techniques added to the practice and/or the transmission of ICH, to adapt to the current situation	Whether these have improved safeguarding of ICH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mutual learning in a family environment</li> <li>- Online contests</li> <li>- Online training</li> <li>- Online content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased public awareness and understanding of ICH</li> <li>- Introduced into the life and household use of ICH</li> <li>- Promoted ICH and bearers</li> </ul>

72 percent of practitioners said that the practice of inheritance had changed, while 28 percent said they had not changed. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, 29 percent have tried to continue their practices in some way, but have experienced difficulties and lack of opportunities as a result of the situation. And 20 percent have stopped because they could not continue it. To be sure, 5 percent of inheritors concluded that new opportunities have opened up. In addition, 69 percent of respondents believe that the situation during the

COVID-19 pandemic and changes related to it has negatively affected the ICH, and 58 percent believe that this change should not continue after the pandemic is gone. However, 31 percent responded that the changes of the time had opened up new opportunities and facilitated the practice of ICH, and 42 percent agreed that they could continue in this direction.

Furthermore, 33 percent of practitioners concluded that the use of the internet made it possible to learn and to continue the practice of ICH for the young generation, while 42 percent felt that the situation did not encourage people to join ICH practice.

According to the survey, 49 percent of the respondent said, that they prefer the style of practice before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey responses note that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, changes and innovations in the use of the online environment, such as the use of the Internet, were seen as more conducive to the intangible cultural heritage promotion and awareness-raising of the general public.

In some responses mentioned, there is an urgent need for support, such as capacity building and technical support. It shows that the role of information technology is important, but it also makes us aware of the importance of 'live' communication between people.

## **OVERVIEW OF ICH IN MONGOLIA**

At the present day the total of 362 ICH elements of the 23 ethnic groups in Mongolia are being registered in 7 domains of the National Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mongolia: 83 elements registered into the 'National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding', 279 elements registered into the 'National Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage', 102 bearers are registered as a masters into the 'National List of Bearers of ICH Heritage with High Level of Skill' (updated by Order A/759 of the Minister of Education, Culture, Science and Sports of Mongolia on November 29, 2019).

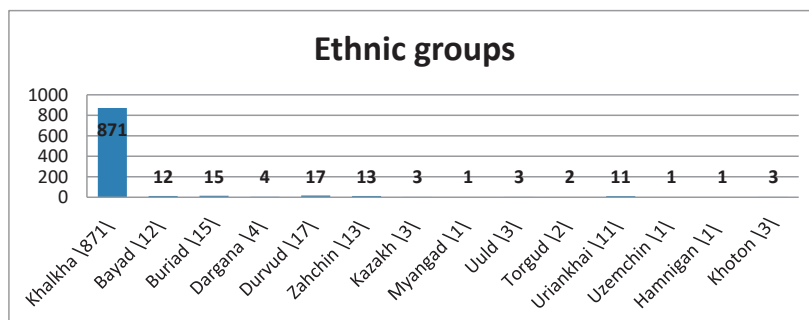
Since the year 2010, registration and information, documentation of intangible cultural heritage and its bearers have been updated annually and the state integrated registration and the information database have been made available to the public in an accountable and accessible manner.

As of the year 2023, a total of 11,189 bearers, 277 ICH elements and relevant documentation of the ICH have been accumulated in the State Integrated Registration Database of Cultural Heritage.

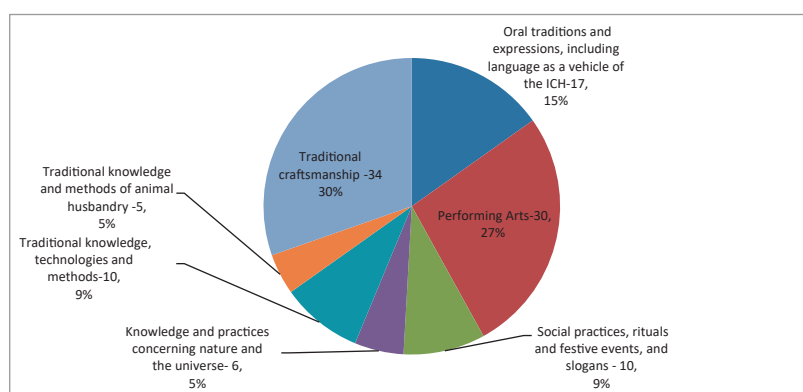
The half of the Mongolia's population lives in capital city Ulaanbaatar. In that sense, more than 30 percent of all ICH practitioners of Mongolia live in Ulaanbaatar.

In addition, during the high exposure to the pandemic COVID-19 and the restriction period has affected highly and longer the Ulaanbaatar city than in other provinces. Counting this situation, the field trip aims to focus on ICH and its

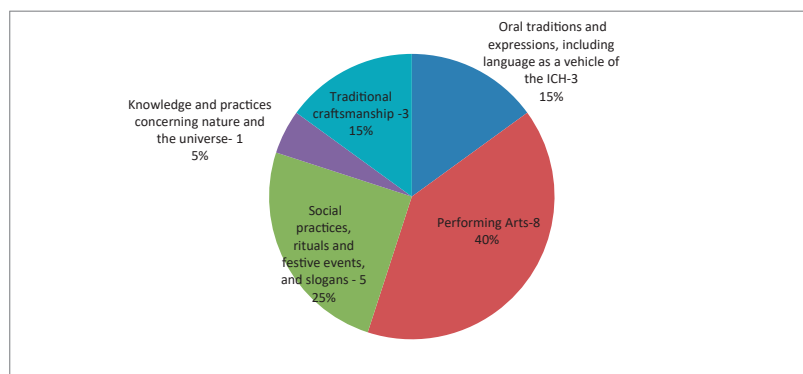




**Figure 1.** Ethnic group of ICH bearers. (Source: Database of National Center for Cultural Heritage, 2023)



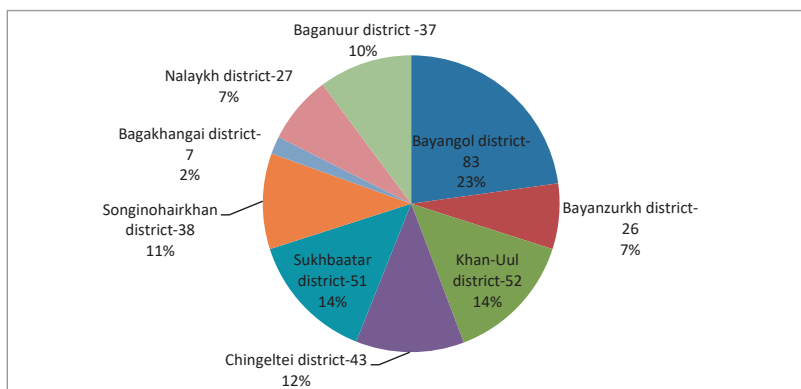
**Figure 2.** ICH elements listed into the Representative List are broken down into domains. (Source: Database of National Center for Cultural Heritage, 2023)



**Figure 3.** ICH elements listed into the List in Need of Urgent Safeguarding are broken down into domains. (Source: Database of National Center for Cultural Heritage, 2023)

practitioners in Ulaanbaatar city.

As State Database of Cultural Heritage Information and Registration (Figure 1) show a total of 957 ICH bearers are registered in Ulaanbaatar City. Out of them, there are belongs to the following ethnic groups 871 Khalkhs, Bayad 12, Buriad 15, Dargana 4, Durvud 17, Zahchin 13, Kazakh 3, Myangad 1, Uuld 3, Torgud 2,



**Figure 4.** Districts' of elderly practitioners. (Source: Database of National Center for Cultural Heritage, 2023)

Uriankhai 11, Uzemchin 1, Hamnigan 1, and Khoton 3.

There are 843 bearers on the list of the National Representative List of ICH (Figure 2), and 114 bearers on the list of ICH in Need of Urgent Safeguarding (Figure 3). A total of 364 elderly practitioners (Figure 4) were registered (above 65 years): 182 women, 182 men.

The result of the desk study shows that ICH elements within the following domains were more likely to be affected (in good or bad ways). These include:

- Performing arts
- Social practices, rituals, and festive events
- Traditional craftsmanship.

The ICH elements within the above-mentioned domains are mostly abandoned or facing the following difficulties due to COVID-19:

- Decreased frequency of inheritance
- Apprenticeship training has stopped, and the system of transmission has been lost
- Shortage of raw materials
- Loss of financial resources.

Likewise, following ICH practices were revalued as important and gained greater attention during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as:

- Traditional medicine
- Traditional Culinary culture
- Folk games.

The ICH elements which belong into the following domains are less or not affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. These domains are:

- Traditional knowledge, technologies and methods
- Traditional knowledge and methods of animal husbandry.

## **FIELD RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Initially, the field research was planned to cover two provinces from the Khangai region, such as Arkhangai and Uvurkhangai, and the Eastern region, as well as the capital city Ulaanbaatar (central 6 districts and 3 sub-districts), overall 14 field points. Nonetheless, after the discussion with IRCI and counting the situation of high exposure, and post pandemic situation the project team focused on the central districts of Ulaanbaatar City.

The field trip goal is to research the present-day's situations of ICH elements, in the frame of the selected location.

The field research will be conducted mostly using following methods:

- Observation
- Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Documentation

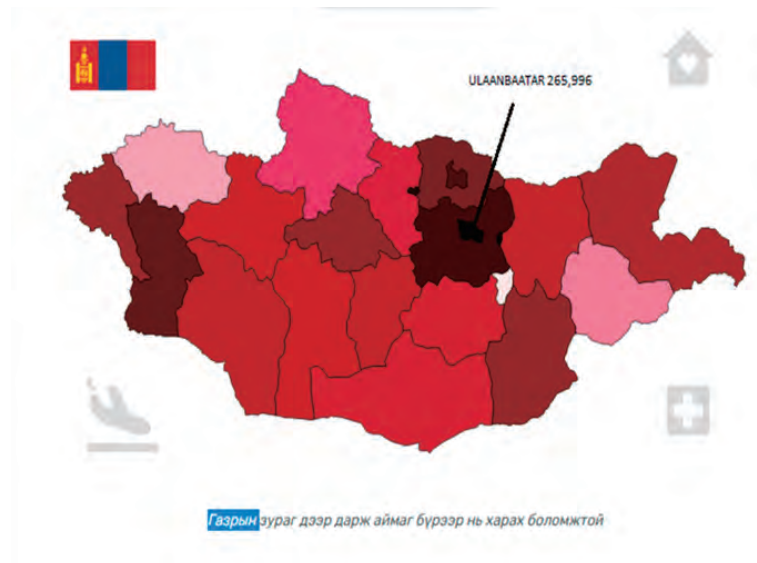
The field research concerned equal enrollments from central 9 districts of Ulaanbaatar city to cover ICH elements and practitioners from the list of the representative and in need of urgent safeguarding. In this way, it will be researched and discovered which ICH elements have stagnated during the period of COVID-19, which heritage items have developed more, and what resources and policy implementation are needed to prevent and protect intangible cultural heritage in future emergencies, and identify the post-COVID-19 situation of ICH.

The objective of the field research was to survey 15 percent of the ICH practitioners located in all six central districts of Ulaanbaatar, the capital city. We organized several consultation meetings with relevant local cultural authorities, communities, and non-governmental organizations to achieve this. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, we conducted field trips in the districts and held interviews with focus groups. The results of our field research have the potential to offer valuable insights and recommendations for all relevant stakeholders and policy-makers.

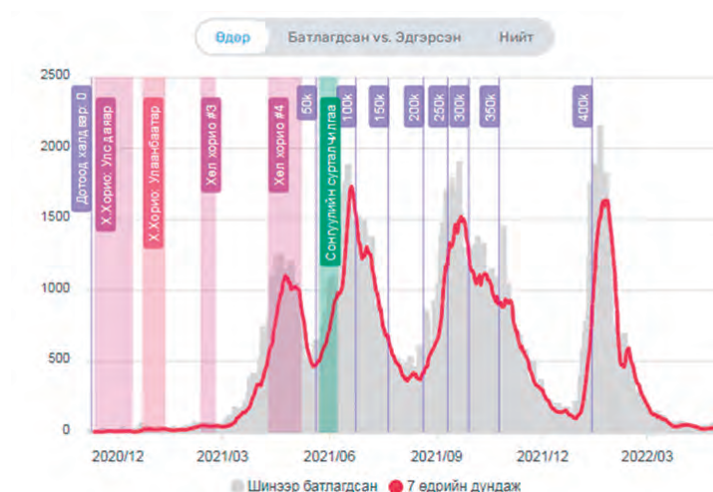
## **BRIEF INFORMATION ON COVID-19 IN MONGOLIA**

The situation of COVID-19 subsides at the end of April 2022, and the Government of Mongolia annulled the restrictions. Starting from April 29, 2022, the official website of the Ministry of Health and other media stopped to provide detailed information on the number of COVID-19 infections. (Figure 5, 6 and 7)

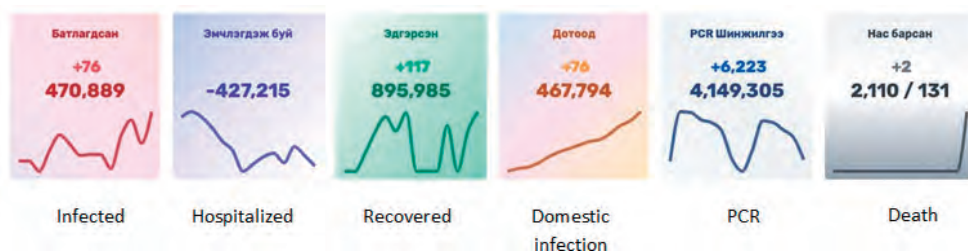
*We should note here that almost all participants of the field research were infected and some of them were infected twice.*



**Figure 5.** Map of spreading COVID-19. (Source: Ministry of Health as of 29 April 2022, <https://visual.ikon.mn/>)



**Figure 6.** Statistics of spreading COVID-19. (Source: Ministry of Health as of 29 April 2022, <https://visual.ikon.mn/>)



**Figure 7.** Statistics of spreading COVID-19. (Source: Ministry of Health as of 29 April 2022, <https://visual.ikon.mn/>)

## FIELD RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYZES

Since the field research coincided with the State inventorying of intangible cultural heritage, we had the opportunity to conduct research in 9 districts of Ulaanbaatar within the framework of the inventorying (Figure 8). Following ICH practitioners are respectively enrolled in the field research:

- Khan-Uul district- 11,
- Chingeltei district- 10,
- Bayanzurkh district- 10,
- Bayangol district- 10,
- Songinohairkhan district- 9,
- Sukhbaatar district- 7,
- Baganuur district- 9,
- Bagahangai district- 6,
- Nalaikh district- 7. (A total 79 people)

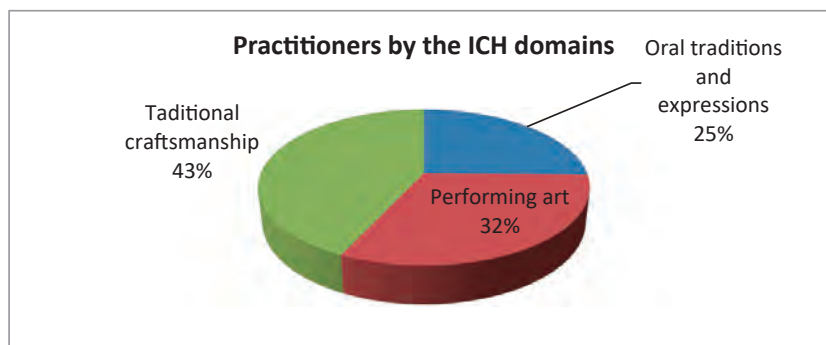
Based on the results of the previous survey and observation of the situation, in this current field study, out of the seven intangible cultural heritage domains of Mongolia, the ICH elements of three domains, which are likely to be more affected by the situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, has been covered (Figure 9). The participants in the field research are classified by the domains are following:

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the ICH 20 (major concerned ICH elements: praise, blessing, epic),
- Performing art 25 (major concerned ICH elements: horse fiddle, circular breathing of limbe flute, traditional dance of bii biyelgee, folk songs, lullaby),
- Traditional craftsmanship 34 people (major concerned ICH elements: traditional techniques of blacksmith, embroidery, wood carving, leather producing, producing of traditional musical instrument of horse fiddle, producing of traditional costumes).

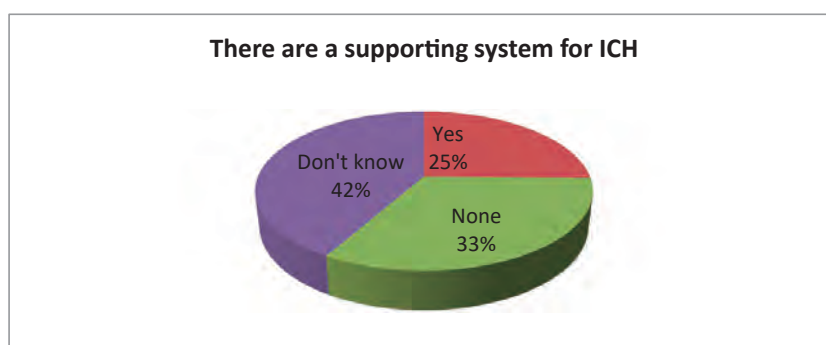


**Figure 8.** Map of Ulaanbaatar City and involved practitioners. (Source: Database of National Center for Cultural Heritage, 2023)





**Figure 9.** Practitioners involved in field survey by the ICH domains



**Figure 10.** Responses by percentage on are there any supporting system for ICH

Out of 79 people enrolled in the field research, 12 noted that they had an opportunity to learn more about ICH and increase their skills online, 30 people stated the practice has no changes, and 25 people have tried to practice continuously, still, there were fewer opportunities, 25 answered do not know.

The question that there are any supporting systems or specific means of assistance provided for the ICH communities was noted yes 20 people, none 26 people, and 33 people answered do not know (Figure 10).

The answer was that there is no state or local support for promoting, disseminating, and studying cultural heritage, and even though they request to participate in competitions, there is little encouragement and support for the ICH practitioners.

34 people who participated in the field research were the practitioners who belong to the traditional craftsmanship domain, including 29 people who sell their goods. These people have their own workshops and employ people. Individuals and small business owners who earn a living in the field of traditional crafts had to buy their products at higher prices during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they have faced the risk of reduced income, interruptions, and in some cases, work has stopped. But still, their advantage is that it is possible to sell online.

It can be seen from here that there are many people who are ICH practitioners and laborers belonging to the traditional craftsmanship domain. The fact that the

participants do not know what intangible cultural heritage is, and who are the practitioners or community of the ICH, shows that the knowledge and understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of the citizens is weak.

21 of the interviewed practitioners belong to communities, groups and associations that learn from each other. During the pandemic, these people connected with each other online, participated in trainings and activities of the association, learned, and sold their products through groups, associations, and online.

Regarding the ICH changes in ICH practices during the COVID-19 pandemic interviewed practitioners commonly noted the following positive and negative changes. Positive changes include:

- A good opportunity to create
- Increased opportunity for online sales
- A good opportunity to learn in the online environment has been created
- It is commendable that cultural services such as contests and awareness-raising content were conducted online in order to increase public awareness of the intangible cultural heritage.

However, 59 percent of the participants believed that the delivery and promotion of information about cultural heritage to the public in electronic form has a positive effect on intangible cultural heritage, while 41 percent believed that due to the lack of knowledge and information about the intangible cultural heritage, they disseminated wrong information, decontextualized the meaning of the heritage in the online environment. It has been warned that there are negative aspects such as distortion of the content. Therefore, it was believed that it is necessary to pay attention to the content of the online content of intangible cultural heritage. Negative changes are listed below:

- 21 people who were interviewed stated that they do not get profit from the ICH, while there were 6 people who passed down the blessings and praises and said that they no longer have a 'slick job' that earns and helps them for a living.
- There were no specific recommendations directed at the cultural and heritage level, common warnings were only received from the Internet.
- The small business income of inheritors, self-employed people, and other groups of people has decreased, and rent and loan payments have piled up, putting pressure on the bank.

Others have highlighted the needs of assistance. Especially for elderly inheritors through government policy and those who make small pieces of traditional crafts through financial and housing support.

In question, if there were any beneficial and helpful conditions for your ICH elements during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Most of the participants who were interviewed stated that they lost the

opportunity to earn income from their inheritance due to the lack of preliminary preparation for the pandemic rather than benefits. There is a necessity for risk management and preparedness for such kind of situation, especially for the ICH community.

- In addition to work, there were 2 people who conducted the training on ICH, and during this time they prepared teaching materials.
- 1 felt maker and 3 embroiderers answered that they taught their family members and prepared small crafting materials with help of the family members.
- Some of them received and exchanged other needed materials online.

About 20-30 percent of the interviewees expressed the desire to have their own workplace and income from their ICH elements, to be economically sustained.

Due to the pandemic lockdown, the senior inheritor has created a good opportunity to teach his family members, especially children of primary and secondary school age, to make the most of his grandfather's time. It is very appreciable that during the pandemic, 13 children of primary and secondary school age from 4 families received apprenticeship training from their fathers, mothers, grandmothers, and grandfathers. For instance, Mr. S., S., the practitioner of Nalaikh district, he showed us how he taught his grandchildren to use waste materials to make small household items.

## **CONCLUSION**

As the results of the previous survey and observation of the situation, in this current field study, out of the seven intangible cultural heritage domains of Mongolia, the ICH elements of three domains, which are likely to be more affected by the situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, are ICH elements of the following domains:

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the ICH
- Performing arts
- Traditional craftsmanship.

Concerning the 'Social practices, rituals, and festive events' domain, the domain of course affected. However, it is observed that the communities are still more or less level tried to keep or continue the rituals and practices in the family during the pandemic.

The practitioners of the 'oral tradition' and 'performing arts' are had as both desk study and field research show, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, negative impacts such as reduced frequency of ICH, the cessation of apprenticeship training, disrupted the inheritance system, deprived of financial resources for practitioners. 'Traditional craftsmanship' had a negative impact concerning the shortage or higher prices of raw materials during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they have faced the risk of reduced income, interruptions, and in some cases, work has stopped. But still, their advantage is that it is possible to sell online.

To adapt to the situation during the COVID-19 pandemic the intangible cultural heritage had undergone some changes in practices and transmission. During the lockdown, electronic advertising, training, trade, and cognitive commissions continued to be introduced, creating opportunities for public and ICH practitioners.

59 percent of the participants believed that the delivery and promotion of information about cultural heritage to the public in electronic form has a positive effect on intangible cultural heritage, while 41 percent believed that due to the lack of knowledge and information about the intangible cultural heritage, they disseminated wrong information, decontextualized the meaning of the heritage in the online environment. It has been warned that there are negative aspects such as distortion of the content.

As result of the previous desk study shows, 33 percent of practitioners concluded that the use of the internet made it possible to learn and to continue the practice of ICH for the young generation, while 42 percent felt that the situation did not encourage people to join ICH practice.

It shows that the role of information technology is important, but it also makes us aware of the importance of 'live' communication between people.

25 percent of practitioners concluded that there is a support system for ICH, 33 percent that there is none, and 42 percent that they do not know.

Consequently, there is an urgent need to raise awareness and publicize, promote the existing laws, regulations, and regulations for the protection of ICH, as well as increase the number of professional staff and capacity building. In addition, Mongolia does not have a specific policy or management for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in times of disaster or risk. Therefore, the need for innovative changes and reforms, such as the implementation of specific measures for ICH and practitioner and communities in time of any disaster or risk.

As the COVID-19 pandemic eased and quarantine subsided and transitioned to normal life were able to easily switch to old/previous conditions. We have seen that the ICH practitioners still need support from the government and the private sector.

# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 UPON ICH PRACTICED BY THE TOLAI PEOPLE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA: THE CASE OF *KUTU-TABU* AND *MALAGENE*

Naomi Faik-Simet<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Amongst many other countries, Papua New Guinea was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. It was a very difficult time as many people did not quite grasp the nature of the pandemic. Restriction on the movement of people from one location to another through lock-downs imposed by each country, resulted in escalated economic and social problems. In addition, the pandemic had a detrimental effect on the practice of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), as many of the elderly and ICH knowledge holders had died from other underlying conditions. However, in other instances, the pandemic had a positive impact on some ICH that underwent modification and adaptation to improve their practice. In this study, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon certain forms of ICH were investigated in East New Britain province from 2021–2022. Particularly, ICH practiced by the indigenous Tolai people were investigated. The research field-work was undertaken by the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI) in Japan and the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies.

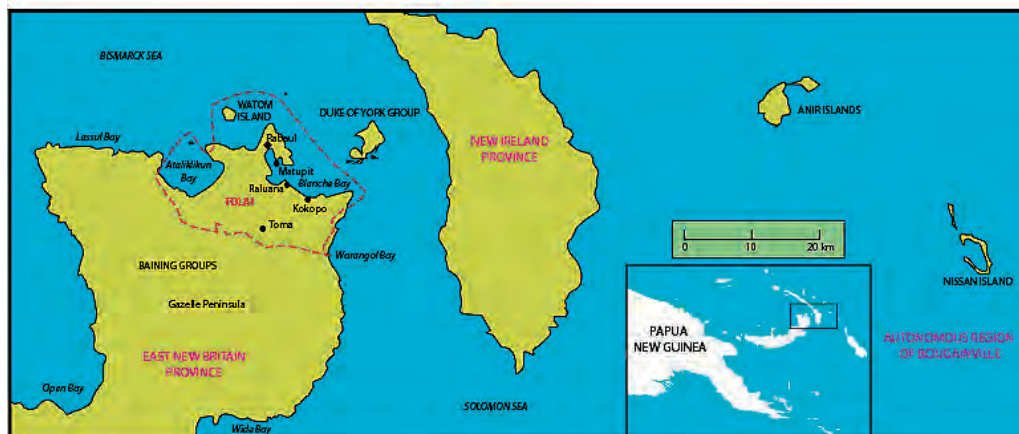
## EAST NEW BRITAIN CONTEXT

Informants for this research were the indigenous Tolai people of East New Britain who are located on the Gazelle Peninsula of the New Britain island (Figure 1). They share East New Britain with two other ethnic groups; the Baining, who are the inhabitants of the interior of New Britain, and the Pomios, who live on the southern end of the peninsula. The Tolai people are known as being culturally superior and sophisticated group of indigenous people in Papua New Guinea (Webb, 1996). Their resilience to colonialism (Blythe, 2019) and the current pressures of globalization has provided the reason for East New Britain to be selected as the context for this study.

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Director – Dance, Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies.



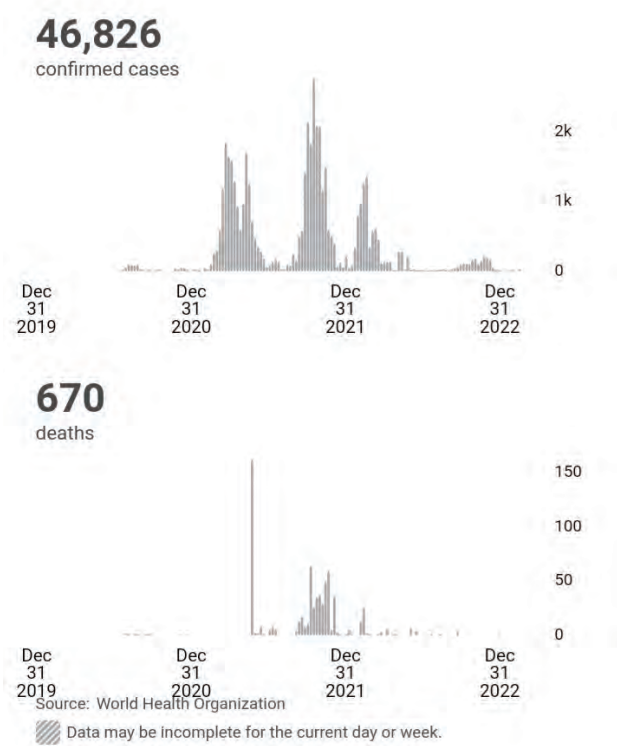


**Figure 1.** Map of East New Britain (Source: Don Niles, Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies)

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE TOLAI PEOPLE

East New Britain was the first province in Papua New Guinea to record a COVID-19 case in early 2020. The pandemic gradually reached other provinces in the country over the next two years; 2021–2022. According to statistics supplied by the World Health Organization, the number of confirmed cases for Papua New Guinea from December 2020 – December 2022 was 46,826 and the number of deaths recorded was 670 (Figure 2). Word of the pandemic reached the province of East New Britain following the revelation of the first reported case. The woman who was diagnosed with COVID-19 was from a village near the capital city of the Province, Kokopo. Following this, the fear of the pandemic was heightened even further and created stigma amongst the people. It was clear from the panic and stigma that ensued that while some awareness on the nature of the affliction had been undertaken earlier, not many people understood its nature. As to be expected in this kind of situation, people had their own ideas; much of which was based on misinformation. As a result of this misinformation, many people did not know how to respond to the ailment when it finally spread amongst the population.

In addition, a large part of the population is rural based; the people live mainly in villages. Further, the transportation amongst these rural communities was very bad. A large number of people rely on public transport to travel to town to buy their food supplies. Social distancing was a challenge as these forms of transport accommodated large numbers of people and many times were over crowded. As a result of these factors, a large number of people were infected. Many of these cases were brought into hospitals and other medical center, but at the same time a large number did not make it to hospitals or medical centers. In this scenario then, it would be difficult to establish with any certainty the exact figure of the number of deaths in the province.



**Figure 2.** COVID-19 Case and Death Statistics in Papua New Guinea 2019 – 2022 (Source: World Health Organization)

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I engaged a qualitative ethnographic research methodology for this study as the interviews with participants and observations of ceremonies were undertaken in the Tolai cultural context. Qualitative research. ‘is a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live. Its aim is to understand the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures...’ (Holloway, 1997: 2). Engaging a qualitative research methodology enabled me to undertake a social inquiry to ‘to understand and explore’ my participants’ ‘social and cultural phenomenon’ (Ohman, 2005: 274). As a social inquiry, qualitative research generates data in two ways: one is through observation of participants’ behaviour, action or performance, while the other is through face-to-face interviews with the participants as part of the research process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). These methods of inquiry assisted me in gathering my data for this study.

Being an indigenous Papua New Guinean woman scholar, I am connected to the Tolai people of Papua New Guinea by marriage. Through this connection, I had access to the participants and the information they provided. Interviews and ceremonial activities were video-recorded and documented. Still photographs of the informants and the kutu-tabu ceremony, and the cultural dance festival were



**Figure 3.** Recording a women's *malagene* at Ralaukaia, Matupit, November 2022. (Photo: N. Faik-Simet)

gathered as part of the data collection. The *kutu-tabu* mortuary ceremony was held in September and the *malagene* (Tolai cultural dance) festival took place in November 2022 respectively. As the research investigated certain intangible cultural heritage that were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to come up with unstructured questions that respected and valued my informants' views. Hence, my questions were guided within an indigenous Pacific research framework (Smith, 1997), that privileged indigenous peoples' voices, knowledge, philosophies, perceptions, interpretation and ways of knowing.

### **Duration of the Fieldwork**

Preliminary work was undertaken in August 2022, where I travelled to East New Britain province to advise the Provincial Administration of the research. As a government employee and a researcher within the Dance Studies Division at the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, it was important to follow protocol before the research was conducted. Having established this understanding at the Provincial level, it was okay for me to conduct the necessary interviews and observations in Matupit village, East New Britain province.

The research was undertaken over a three-month period; August, September and November 2022. Since I was based in Port Moresby, I had to spread the fieldwork activity over three months which required me to travel to East New Britain for the times mentioned. Since the lifting of the ban on the movement of people from one location to the other, there was an increase in the staging of cultural ceremonies as well as traditional festivals associated with tourism. These activities prompted me to attend and conduct research and recording of the *kutu-tabu*

ceremony and the *malagene* dance cultural festival, (Figure 3).

### Informants

The three main informants that participated in this study were Rebecca Darius (Figure 4), John Waninara Vuia (Figure 5), and Ligur Kulaut (Figure 6). Rebecca Darius works for the East New Britain Tourism Authority as a Culture and Tourism officer. Her views were important as she represented the East New Britain provincial government. She gave insights to the impact caused by COVID-19 to the culture and tourism industry in the province. Since the spread of the pandemic, the East New Britain provincial government banned all tourist ships entry into the province. Ms Darius expressed her thoughts in the interview, that the local people depended on tourists to supplement their daily income, and the ban did cause economic challenges since it was imposed in 2020. It was only lifted in 2022, when vaccines were introduced and the cases decreased which resulted in the re- entry of the tourists into the province.

The second interview was held with John Waninara Vuia, the Ward Member at Kikila in Matupit village. As a local level, government leader Mr Waninara Vuia shared deep concerns about the way COVID-19 affected his people. He claims that the pandemic caused social and financial stress upon the people as many of them were not familiar with the restriction on the movement of people and social distancing measures. Even the wearing of face masks were questioned as these rules were considered foreign. He had quite a difficult time during the duration of the pandemic attending to a number of deaths that occurred as a result of COVID-19. Following these deaths in the village, mortuary ceremonies such as the *kutu-tabu* could not be held as the movement of people were



**Figure 4.** Rebecca Darius, Culture & Tourism officer, East New Britain Tourism Authority. November 2022. (Photo: N. Faik-Simet)





**Figure 5.** John Waninara Vuia, Ward Member, Kikila, Matupit village. November 2022. (Photo: N. Faik-Simet)



**Figure 6.** Ligur Kulaut, Malagene (Dance) Leader, Tagitagi Male Cultural Group, Matupit village. November 2022. (Photo: N.Faik-Simet)

restricted as well as the ban on large gatherings. As a result, many people put a hold on their ceremonies and were able to stage them in 2022 when the situation improved.

Ligur Kulaut was the third informant who had a key role as the leader of *malagene*, an ICH practice explored in this study. Kulaut expressed concern about how certain *malagene* were affected during the lockdown. *Malagene* is widely performed in Matupit for certain cultural ceremonies and were shelved because of the restriction on the movement of people. This form of ICH is an important Tolai cultural expression and the practice has been maintained for many generations. In addition to ceremonies, *malagene* has also been performed for tourists as another form of generating an income. As the leader of his *Tagitagi* male



cultural group in Matupit village, his dancers have benefited from tourists and he was happy that all normal operations including the performance of *malagene* resumed in 2022.

## **SAFEGUARDING**

The Tolai of East New Britain are some of Papua New Guinea's resilient people who have safeguarded their indigenous practices against outside influence such as colonialism. By maintaining and practicing *kutu-tabu* over a number of years, they have kept this cultural ceremony alive and continue to sustain its significance, as a key part of their heritage. The safeguarding of *kutu-tabu* as a cultural practice is both a wider societal matter but also a clan matter.

For the wider society, the regular staging or performance of *kutu-tabu* ceremonies is important to its continuity. At these ceremonies, one often hears cultural leaders and custodians reminding and encouraging people to continue to perform *kutu-tabu* ceremonies otherwise it would disappear from the Tolai cultural landscape. These cultural leaders and custodians often refer to two situations in the past (Epstein 1961 & 1992), which threatened the continuity of *kutu-tabu*. The first one was the World War II, which saw the destruction of large stocks of Tolai tabu by the Japanese soldiers who had occupied East New Britain at that time. The Japanese soldiers ransacked Tolai households for tabu in order to buy their food and services during the war. As a result, by the end of the war, the Tolai had no tabu left, thus were unable to conduct any traditional cultural rituals and ceremonies, including *kutu-tabu*. It took them about thirty years to recover from this situation, before they could stage traditional cultural ceremonies again.

The second situation was the volcanic eruption in 1994, which resulted in the displacement and dislocation of many people on the Gazelle Peninsula. Large stocks of tabu were also buried in some households across the Peninsula. As a result, not many people were able to stage or perform traditional cultural ceremonies, including *kutu-tabu*.

## **IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON KUTU-TABU**

In 2020 when the first case of COVID-19 was discovered in East New Britain, the Provincial Government immediately issued advice to the public to cease all participation in public gatherings. Movement of people were restricted, which led to the cancellation of cultural ceremonies which included *kutu-tabu*. These ceremonies usually attract a large number of participation and draw crowds of people. Covid-19 posed the same challenge to the continuity of *kutu-tabu* and other traditional cultural practices of the Tolai. Many cultural activities and ceremonies, including *kutu-tabu* either, had to be cancelled or postponed for very long periods.

These cancellations had a detrimental effect on the economic situation as poverty and shortness of food escalated. According to my informants who were interviewed in this study, ceremonies such as the *kutu-tabu* provided the occasion for many villagers to share tabu and food. Many people attend *kutu-tabu* ceremonies to receive their portion of tabu and food that are being publicly shared by the deceased's clan and family. With the introduction of vaccines in 2022, the COVID-19 cases were reduced, then led to the lifting of the ban on the movement of people, eventually, saw a return in the staging of many cultural activities including *kutu-tabu*.

Research fieldwork to determine the impact of COVID-19 on certain ICH was undertaken in Matupit village. Although there are no appropriate statistics provided for the number of deaths that occurred, Dr. Jacob Simet, an elder from Matupit village revealed that in 2020 there were about 4 – 6 deaths per month and in 2021, the death figures increased to about 8 – 10 over a space of 4 – 8 weeks. The impact was quite devastating, as funeral and burials were taking place quite frequently causing financial and physical stress on individuals. The two forms of ICH; *kutu-tabu* and *malagene* were investigated in this study.

### **Kutu-tabu**

*Kutu-tabu* (breaking *tabu*) is part of the traditional religious belief system of the Tolai people of East New Britain, Papua New Guinea. *Kutu* means to cut and *tabu* refers to the Tolai indigenous currency that is still used today (Figure 7). *Tabu* has been used by the Tolai people for many generations as legal tender for the exchange of goods and services, as well as for ceremonial transactions. It is little nassa shells strung onto lengths of cane. Its value has been significant through its distribution in occasions involving mortuary, marriage and other ceremonial events. It is the only traditional currency used alongside Papua New Guinea kina and toea, and its existence is valued not only in Papua New Guinea but throughout the world.



**Figure 7.** *Tabu* shell money. (Photo: N. Faik- Simet)



**Figure 8.** The cutting and distribution of *tabu* during a *kutu-tabu* ceremony, September 2022. (Photo: N. Faik-Simet)



**Figure 9.** Crowd gathering at a *Kutu-tabu* ceremony in Matupit village, September 2022. (Photo: N. Faik-Simet)

*Kutu-tabu* is a Tolai mortuary ceremony that involves large volumes of *tabu* distribution. In this regard it is one of a number of rituals which are part of a mortuary process, which may take a few months, a few years and even a decade. I provide a brief description of the mortuary rite and where *kutu-tabu* fits in this process. The first rite in the mortuary process is of course the burial, which is done mostly in the public cemetery, although some people bury their dead in private cemeteries on their clan land. About a week after the burial, the second rite known as *kutu-palai* takes place. About six months to a year later, the *kutu-tabu* takes place. Between twelve months and two years later, the fourth rite is performed, which is known as the *paluka*. Five to ten years later the next rite known as the *balaguan* takes place. An optional final rite is the *matamatam*, but not everyone performs this. Otherwise, rites two to five are compulsory parts of the mortuary process.





**Figure 10.** The deceased coils of *tabu* displayed on a *leu*. Rapindik, Matupit island, September 2021. (Photo: N. Faik-Simet)



**Figure 11.** *Tubuan* participation at a *kutu-tabu*. Matupit village, September 2022. (Photo: N. Faik-Simet)



**Figure 12.** Cutting and distribution of the *tabu* coil. Rapindik, Matupit island, September 2021. (Photo: N. Faik-Simet)

In the Tolai traditional religious system, the spirit of the dead went to a place somewhere under the sea called laKupia, but generally known as a *gunan na tabaran* (land of the spirits). All spirits of the dead were expected to go to laKupia. The *kutu-tabu* rite was important to ensuring that the spirit of a deceased person does go to the land of the dead. If this spirit does not go to the land of the dead, it will become troublesome for the living relatives. So, it is a must for the living relatives to perform the *kutu-tabu* ceremony over their dead. As said above, about twelve months after the burial the *kutu-tabu* is performed. This is basically the breaking up of *tabu* (shell-money) by the relatives of the deceased in a number of ways, to certain categories of people but also to others who have attended the ceremony (Figure 8). On the appointed day of the ceremony, hundreds, if not thousands of people gather in a marked location for the ceremony (Figure 9).

The place is marked by a decorated bamboo structure called a *leu* that displays the *tabu* coils of the deceased (Figure 10). Very soon the crowd builds up and towards the afternoon the ceremony commences. In a moment there is a lull of silence which is followed by a screech from somewhere, and the *tubuan* (mask figure) appears (Figure 11). It is followed by a number of men or older boys carrying a number of coils of *tabu*. These coils of *tabu* are brought up into the middle of the crowd and the *tubuan* departs, having done their job of bringing the *tabu*. The coils of *tabu* are then cut up for distribution to all and sundry (Figure 12). The lead players in the distribution of *tabu* are the children of the deceased and to be made sure that everyone who has come does receive a piece of *tabu*, and they are happy with what they got. This is the measure of a successful *kutu-tabu* ceremony.

The knowledge and skill of performing a *kutu-tabu* is held by everyone. However, each clan is supposed to have certain people who are guardians of this knowledge and skill, and they pass it down to the generations within the clan. There is a man in the clan who is the main custodian of this knowledge and skill. This person then has to ensure that one or a number of young men of the clan, who are always with him to receive this knowledge and skill over time, passes it onto others who come after them. Hence, the transmission of the knowledge and skill associated with *kutu-tabu* takes place through intergenerational relationships or within clan, but mostly from the elderly to the young.

## **MALAGENE ICH PRACTICE**

*Malagene* is the indigenous Tolai term for all traditional dance. It is an important intangible cultural heritage as its performance is associated with many Tolai ceremonial activities. The Tolai have a number of *malagene* (dances) in their repertoire and which are divided between the two sexes. There are women's and there are men's dances. At the same time dance performances are segregated, meaning that man and women never perform together in the same dance. The



male dances are *libung*, *wutung*, *kulau*, *tabaran*, *alor*, *tapialai* (*tubuan* - sacred male mask dance), and the dances performed by females are *goigoi*, *patete* and *bilolo* (Figure 13). There are three dances that can be performed by both male and female; these are *parpari*, *libung* and *pinpidik*. The dances belong to the clan but families and individuals may have custody over dances for temporal periods. Like many other traditional dance forms in Papua New Guinea, the *malagene* is affected by the changing times. The biggest force is the intrusion of Western music and dance through digital platforms that are being accessed by mainly the young people through their mobile phones and decrease in the practice of *malagene*. However, this study has revealed that while these changes are there, they have to a minimum extent impacted on the *malagene*. As described above, *malagene* are skillfully crafted by each Tena *Buai* who are also referred to as *Tena Malagene* meaning master dance teachers/choreographers. These *Tena Malagene* are responsible for the transmission of the dance knowledge to the younger generation and usually appear together with their dancers during the actual performance (Figure 14 and 15).

There are certain knowledge and skill required to create, perform and own a *malagene*. Only qualified persons known locally as a *Tena Malagene* (a master teacher/custodian of Tolai dance) can manage, choreograph and teach a *malagene*. All rituals required to compose a song/music for the *malagene*, including the choreographed movements are held with the *Tena Malagene*. He/she follows a pedagogical structure within the Buai practice to engage in learning and teaching creativity which contributes to cultural continuity. By creating a new *malagene* or dance, the *Tena Malagene's* leadership skill, cultural knowledge and



**Figure 13.** Women's *patete* dance. Raulakaia, Matupi island, November 2022. (Photo: N. Faik-Simet)

creativity is valued and respected in the community. All *malagene* performed must be led by a *Tena Malagene* as these dances have multiple layers of meanings that are connected to their beliefs and ancestral practices. Aside from maintaining and preserving a past culture, the choreography and performance of a *malagene* is a result of a *Tena Malagene's* creative skill that embraces change and responds to present challenges.



**Figure 14.** A *Tena Malagene*. Raulakaia, Matupit island, November 2022. (Photo: N. Faik-Simet)



**Figure 15.** A *libung malagene* performed by young male dancers. Raulakaia, Matupit island, November 2022. (Photo: N. Faik-Simet)

*Malagene* has been an important intangible cultural heritage of the Tolai as it expresses cultural resilience, innovation, identity and the Tolai worldview. A *malagene* encapsulates the history and culture of the Tolai people, and by performing it, a people's heritage is transmitted and safeguarded across generations. Its practice was affected throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as many dancers, *Tena Buai* and *Tena Malagene* could not continue their creativity and cultural expression, and it was during this unprecedented time that they realized the importance of *malagene* in fostering cultural cohesion and continuity.

## **POSITIVE OUTCOME**

There were some notable developments during the pandemic such as an increase in new herbal knowledge needed to make local remedies to cure diseases associated with COVID-19. The use of the local lemon fruit was used widely to treat cold and flu symptoms. Other traditional herbs were used extensively to prevent or cure persons who were believed to have COVID-19. In these situations, the local peoples' resilience was seen in their efforts to fight the pandemic.

In other situations, the level of creativity increased, as new *malagene* were created. This was seen in the cultural shows staged for tourists after the lifting of the ban during the post COVID-19 period in 2022. During the lockdown and pandemic period, young people were at home with their elders and during this time, they were learning new skills and knowledge of their traditions which included *malagene*. They were able to perform *malagene* in 2022 when the number of COVID-19 cases were reduced after the roll out of the vaccination. This followed the lifting of the ban on tourists' ships which were now allowed to enter East New Britain. More *malagene* were performed to tourists as well as for their local ceremonies.

## **CONCLUSION**

I was fortunate to observe some of these *malagene* that emerged during the post – COVID period (Figure 16 and 17). Local dance groups in Matupit and other villages in the province used the opportunity to perform existing and new *malagene*. There was an increase in creativity and innovative art derived from the local peoples' indigenous knowledge. Transmission of local knowledge and ICH were evident during the pandemic, as these ICH such as *malagene* were learnt, choreographed and performed to both new and existing audience. The safeguarding, transmission and application of ICH during and after the COVID-19 era was a positive development for many communities in East New Britain and Papua New Guinea, as many people are very much connected to their culture and indigenous systems of survival.





**Figure 16.** Tagitagi Male Cultural Group performing a malagene. Ralaukaia, Matupit 2022. ©N. Faik-Simet



**Figure 17.** Dog mask malagene from Viviran village. Ralaukaia, Matupit, November 2022. ©N. Faik-Simet

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# THE IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TWO INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE ELEMENTS IN KOREA

Hahm Hanhee<sup>1</sup> and Oh Semina<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on the realm of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Drawing upon the 2021 Questionnaire Survey, we focused on two elements of ICH in Korea, namely *Namhaean Byeolsingut*, a Shaman ritual of the South Sea, and *otchil jangin*, a master of lacquer craftsmanship. The rationale for this selection lies in the dual classification by the Korean government, categorizing them as either valuable or perishable traditions within the realms of traditional performing arts and handicrafts. Since the inception of the intangible cultural heritage preservation system in 1962, ICH elements have been protected and preserved, with a focus on these two categories among the myriad of cultural traditions. The bifurcated classification system remained in force until 2015, when the newly enacted ‘Protection and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage’ law came into effect.<sup>3</sup> This legislative update resulted in the subdivision of the previous two classifications into seven distinct categories. The reclassification primarily drew inspiration from the 2003 UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage. These include traditional knowledge, oral traditions and expressions, traditional customs, social rituals, traditional festivals, traditional performance and arts, as well as traditional skills.<sup>4</sup> The subdivision aimed to provide a more nuanced and inclusive framework that aligns with the diverse nature of ICH, as outlined in the global standards set forth by UNESCO. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the majority of ICH elements continue to align predominantly with the original two categories even within the expanded framework introduced by the new law. A comparative study between these categories enables us to scrutinize the diverse effects of COVID-19 on Korean ICH.

*Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*, or the Shaman Ritual of the South Sea (referred to as gut or shaman ritual hereafter), has a longstanding tradition in the coastal areas

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<sup>1</sup> Director, Center for Intangible Culture Studies

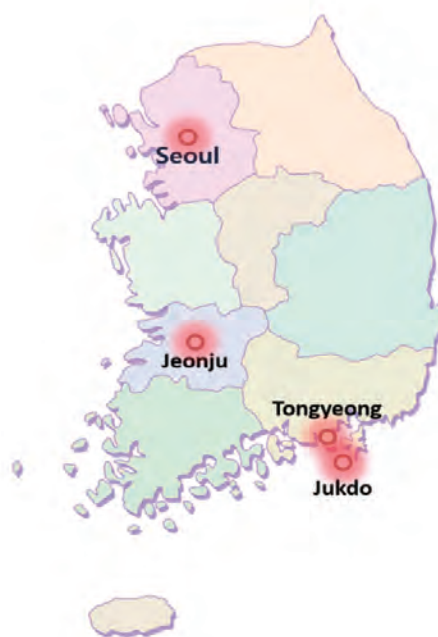
<sup>2</sup> Research Professor, Center for Intangible Culture Studies

<sup>3</sup> See the websites of Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, [www.cha.go.kr](http://www.cha.go.kr)

<sup>4</sup> See the websites of National Law Information Center, <http://www.law.go.kr>

and islands of the South Sea in Korea. Fishing villages historically conducted shaman rituals to promote the well-being of the community and foster a sense of cooperation among villagers. However, with the acceleration of the nation’s industrialization and modernization in the 1960s and 70s, the practice gradually waned in the South Sea regions. Shamanic practitioners and their adherents faced a crisis with the discontinuation of their rituals. In response, they established the Preservation Society of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut* in 1987, with its workshop situated in the city of Tongyeong, Gyeongsang Namdo. The society is led by the master shaman, Jeong Yeong Man, designated a Living Human Treasure (LHT) by the central government. Due to the efforts made by the Preservation Society, several coastal and island villages have maintained the shaman rituals. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 led to the suspension of rituals for the past three years.

The second research site focused on the lacquer workshop located in the city of Jeonju, Jeolla Bukto. Yi Eui Shik, a master lacquer craftsman, or *otchil jangjin* in Korean, is responsible for transmitting traditional skills and knowledge of *otchil*—a unique lacquering technique employing a specific plant. *Otchil*-ware is crafted by applying raw *ot*, collected from the *ot* tree or refined *ot*, onto wooden frames. Widely used as a natural paint, *otchil* renders objects waterproof, moisture-proof, and insect-proof. Designated as a bearer of *otchil* or Living Human Treasure by the provincial government of Jeolla Bukto, Yi Eui Shik’s workshop and products also fell victim to the repercussions of COVID-19. Many ICH bearers in the domain of traditional crafts faced financial hardships since the pandemic’s outbreak. The demand for lacquerware, particularly among affluent consumers, companies, or



**Figure 1.** Field Research Sites

governmental institutions seeking luxurious gifts, has sharply declined. The reduced occurrences of high-profile events and gatherings due to the pandemic further contributed to the dwindling opportunities for the purchase of such high-priced gifts.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our fieldwork concerning these two ICH elements unfolded from August 30, 2022, to January 29, 2023. The research was conducted in two distinct locales: Jeonju in Jeolla Bukto and Tongyeong in Gyeongsang Namdo, alongside the Island of Jukto in Korea (Figure 1). Despite the confirmation of COVID-19 cases in both cities and Jukto during the initial stages of 2020, the incidence was relatively low. Throughout the pandemic, these regions were meticulously regulated by the central government's preventive guidelines and mandates, compelling adherence to emergency regulations. Comprehensive insights into the COVID-19 situation and the government's responsive measures are derived from the figures (Figure 2, Tables 3 and 4), and summaries compiled from city government reports and reputable news sources. It is noteworthy that statistical data pertaining to the Island of Jukto was unavailable, leading to the exclusion of Jukto cases from this analysis.

**Table 1.** The COVID-19 situation and the government's responsive measures in Tongyeong City (Y-M-D)

2020. 02. 24	The first patient visited Tongyeong. Notice of temporary closure of public sports facilities
2020. 02. 26	On the 26th, social welfare centers, etc. are temporarily closed, and traditional markets are closed for 5 days.
2020. 02. 29	Youth After School Academy Closed
2020. 03. 03	Provision of rules for COVID 19 self-quarantine areas (2nd edition)
2020. 04. 07	Intensive social distancing extended by 2 weeks until 4.19 Patents 378 (total), 65 self-quarantine. Since then, daily corona patient statistics are provided,
2020. 04. 08	Patients 407 (total), 77 self-quarantine
2020. 04. 30	Patients 673, 51 self-quarantine
2020. 05. 30	Revision of detailed guidelines for distancing in daily life (3rd edition)
2020. 06. 10	Implementation of KI-PASS (electronic pass)
2020. 08. 23	Early closure of beach in Tongyeong
2020. 12. 01	Revision of detailed guidelines for distancing in daily life (4th edition)
2020. 12. 08	Social distancing Level 2 upgraded (until the 28th). Restaurants, cafes, and indoor sports facilities are open until 9:00 PM. Packing and delivery only.
2021. 01. 31	Announcement of social distancing administrative order extension
2021. 02. 15	Notice of social distancing Level 1.5 administrative order

2021. 04. 30	Social distancing Level 1.5, extended
2021. 06. 01	Permission to gathering up to 8 people, but in the case of immediate family gatherings, vaccinated persons are excluded from the limit of 8 people
2021. 07. 01	Social distancing reform proposal - Private gatherings of 8 or more people allowed
2021. 07. 09	Apply Level 2 social distancing due to corona spread (reinforced)
2021. 07. 17 – 28	Administrative order banning private gatherings of 5 or more people
2021. 07. 20 – 28	Administrative Order for Level 3 Social Distancing
2021. 08. 09 – 22	Announcement of special quarantine rules in Tongyeong (Suspension of incentives for those who have completed vaccination)
2021. 10. 18	Extension of the Level 3 social distancing and extension of the special quarantine rules in Tongyeong
2021. 10. 30	1st administrative order notification of social distancing following the phased daily recovery transition
2021. 12. 02	Administrative order change on quarantine rules related to eating at movie theaters and concert halls
2022. 02. 04	Corona Vaccination Information for Teenagers Going to School
2022. 12. 29	Guidance on additional vaccinations when traveling abroad
2023. 01. 19	Guidance on medical centers such as self-inpatient hospitals for COVID-19 patients in Tongyeong at home
2023. 01. 30	Mandatory indoor mask conversion to recommendation.
2023. 02. 21	60,678 (cumulative) corona patients

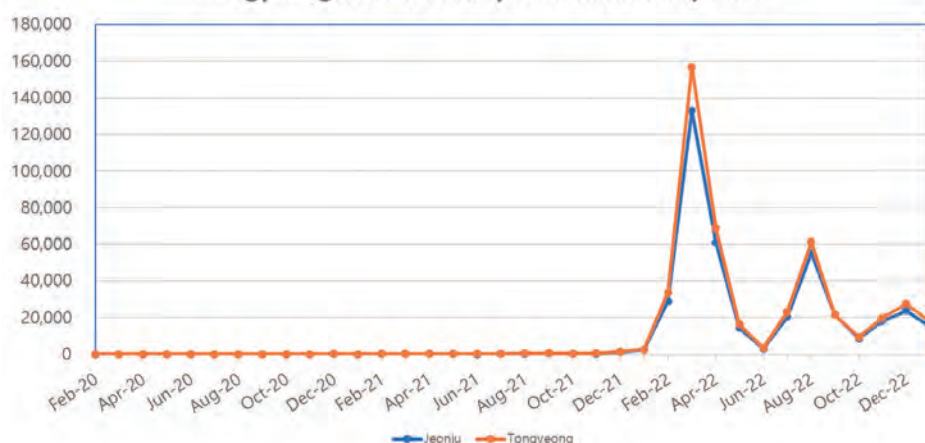
**Table 2.** The COVID-19 situation and the government’s responsive measures in Jeonju City (Y-M-D)

2020. 01. 22.	First suspected case confirmed and quarantined.
2020. 01. 28.	Jeollabuk-do raised the response level as the infectious disease crisis alert was raised from ‘caution’ to ‘warning’
2020. 01. 31.	Cancellation of large-scale events (Full-moon festival, international choir contest, etc.). Installation of heat detectors in multi-gathering places such as Jeonju Station and express/local bus terminals
2020. 02. 09.	Operation of the Regional Economic Emergency Response Team in response to the COVID-19
2020. 02. 10.	Live Coronavirus information provided (Jeonju city website & mobile app.)
2020. 02. 20.	First patient reported. Daycare centers, local children’s centers, Jeonbuk Senior Welfare Center, senior citizen centers, and healthy family support centers are closed and suspended, and swimming pools in Jeonju are suspended.
2020. 03. 03.	Provision of rules for COVID-19 self-quarantine areas (2nd edition)
2020. 04. 07.	COVID-19 Intensive social distancing extended by 2 weeks until 4.19
2020. 05. 30.	Revision of detailed guidelines for distancing in daily life (3rd edition)
2020. 06. 10.	Implementation of KI-PASS
2020. 12. 01.	Guidelines for distancing in daily life (4th edition) revised and enforced

2020. 12. 02.	Corona confirmed cases nationwide 35,163 (death 526), 94 new cases in Jeonju
2021. 01. 04.	Inspection of 162 high-risk facilities for COVID-19
2021. 01. 25.	Job opening for COVID-19 prevention
2021. 02. 26.	Public briefing on COVID-19 vaccination
2021. 04. 01.	Start of COVID-19 vaccination for seniors aged 75 and over
2021. 04. 02.	Announcement of COVID-19 social distancing level 2 upgrade (04. 02- 15.)
2021. 08. 09.	Announcement of COVID-19 social distancing level 3 upgrade (08. 09- 22.)
2021. 08. 27.	COVID-19 social distancing level 4 upgraded (08. 27.- 09. 09.)
2021. 10. 05.	Information on implementation plan for additional vaccination (booster shot) for COVID-19 vaccination
2022. 01. 17.	Measures to strengthen social distancing (until 2. 6)
2022. 01. 26.	Order to close all 470 daycare centers in the city
2022.01. 29 - 02. 22.	Enshrinement facilities closed during the Lunar New Year holidays
2022.03. 30.	1,330 Patients in the Province and 4,206 in the previous week, the highest number of patients
2022. 04. 18	Cancellation of mandatory prevention guidelines for multi-use facilities, etc. and cancellation of mandatory prevention guidelines for gatherings, meetings, and events
2022. 04. 25.	Removal of mandatory public transportation quarantine guidelines
2022. 07. 25.	Suspension of face-to-face visits to facilities vulnerable to infection such as nursing homes
2022. 09. 03.	Corona test abolished before entry regardless of vaccination
2022. 10. 04.	Lifting restrictions on visits to nursing hospitals
2023. 01. 30.	Mandatory indoor mask conversion to recommendation
2023. 02. 21.	408,772 (cumulative) corona patients



**Numbers of COVID-19 patients in the cities of Jeonju & Tongyeong from February 2020 to January 2023**



**Figure 2.** Numbers of COVID-19 patients in the cities of Jeonju & Tongyeong from February 2020 to January 2023. (Sources: Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, <https://ncv.kdca.go.kr/covdash/biz/dsbd/covDsbdOcrn.do>)

**Table 3.** COVID-19 cases in Tongyeong City & Gyeongsang Namdo (South Gyeongsang Province) from February 2020 to January 2023. (Sources: Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, <https://ncv.kdca.go.kr/covdash/biz/dsbd/covDsbdOcrn.do>)

2020		2021		2022		2023	
Month	Number of Patient	Month	Number of Patient	Month	Number of Patient	Month	Number of Patient
	Tong-yeong S. Gys Province		Tong-yeong S. Gys Province		Tong-yeong S. Gys Province		Tong-yeong S. Gys Province
Feb.	- 59	Jan.	2 686	Jan.	213 7,619	Jan.	2,832 75,003
Mar.	- 37	Feb.	4 172	Feb.	4,946 112,349		
Apr.	- 21	Mar.	18 777	Mar.	23,929 643,639		
May	- 6	Apr.	13 955	Apr.	7,795 248,149		
June	- 11	May	14 784	May	1,776 55,991		
Jul.	1 25	Jun.	6 548	Jun.	325 15,316		
Aug.	0 77	Jul.	57 1,956	Jul.	2,832 75,463		
Sep.	1 55	Aug.	74 2,777	Aug.	6,159 221,632		
Oct.	2 25	Sep.	9 1,480	Sep.	2,457 94,537		
Nov.	0 309	Oct.	17 1,548	Oct.	822 39,301		
Dec.	6 700	Nov.	70 2,007	Nov.	1,664 77,487		
		Dec.	261 5,661	Dec.	3,762 120,870		

**Table 4.** COVID-19 cases in Jeonju City and Jeolla Bukto (North Jeolla Province) from February 2020 to January 2023. (Sources: Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, <https://ncv.kdca.go.kr/covdash/biz/dsbd/covDsbdOcrn.do>)

2020			2021			2022			2023		
Month	Number of Patient		Month	Number of Patient		Month	Number of Patient		Month	Number of Patient	
	Jeonju city	N. Jeolla Province		Jeonju city	N. Jeolla Province		Jeonju city	N. Jeolla Province		Jeonju city	N. Jeolla Province
Feb.	1	4	Jan.	37	202	Jan.	2,393	5,371	Jan.	14,962	37,553
Mar.	5	8	Feb.	84	152	Feb.	28,854	61,952			
Apr.	2	5	Mar.	161	260	Mar.	132,974	317,872			
May	0	3	Apr.	151	485	Apr.	60,974	166,703			
Jun.	2	6	May	54	289	May	14,491	36,427			
Jul.	0	12	Jun.	49	139	Jun.	3,020	7,934			
Aug.	26	48	Jul.	105	403	Jul.	20,420	43,936			
Sep.	13	41	Aug.	369	821	Aug.	55,148	134,891			
Oct.	10	38	Sep.	458	927	Sep.	21,522	55,506			
Nov.	34	168	Oct.	229	672	Oct.	8,510	23,181			
Dec.	109	503	Nov.	374	1,145	Nov.	18,226	47,877			
			Dec.	1,225	3,236	Dec.	23,781	61,622			

We conducted on-site visits to the workshops of Intangible Cultural Heritage bearers, engaging in both interviews and participant observation. Our fieldwork encompassed not only interviews with the primary figures associated with the ICH but also extended to include other active participants dedicated to the safeguarding of the specific ICH under investigation.

The interviews were semi-structured, open-ended, and in-depth, involving both the ICH bearers and their associates. Their perspectives, emanating directly from their involvement in the field, were meticulously documented and transcribed in Korean. Throughout the interview sessions, the respondents exhibited a sincere demeanor, providing forthright responses to the posed inquiries, and these sessions typically extended for one to two hours. Concurrently, participant observation was undertaken during our time in the field.

Our research methodology comprises three integral components: data collection from the field, analysis of the interview materials, and a comparative study of the two ICH elements. Data collection involved compiling interview transcripts, photographs, and audio-visual recordings. When scrutinizing the interview materials, our researchers delved into discerning the distinctions and commonalities between the two ICH elements—the shaman ritual and *otchil* crafts. The field work schedules are outlined as following (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Schedule for the field work

<b>Date</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Contents</b>
2022.08.30.	<i>otchil</i> master	Introductory session
2022.09.03.	<i>otchil</i> master	General information
2022.09.05.	<i>otchil</i> master	Inquiries on COVID effects
2022.09.05.	<i>otchil</i> master	Participant observation on <i>otchil</i> practices and training session 1
2022.09.28.	Shaman & other members	Collecting General information
2022.10.07.	<i>otchil</i> master	Participant observation on <i>otchil</i> practices and training session 2
2023.01.14.-01.16.	Field trip	Visit crafts museums and galleries
2023.01.17.	<i>otchil</i> master	Photos, videos and other related materials during the period of pandemic
2023.01.26.-01.27.	shamans and musicians	Collecting general information and Inquiries on COVID effects
2023.01.28.-01.29.	field trip to the rituals	Participant observation of the ritual in the Island of Jukto

## GENERAL INFORMATION OF THE TWO ELEMENTS

### ***Namhaean Byeolsin-gut***

*Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*, the shaman ritual of the South Sea in Korea, unfolds as a village gut—an shamanic ceremony held in the islands of Hansando, Saryangdo, Jukdo, and numerous others within the South Archipelago of the Korean peninsula. The South Sea, adorned with hundreds of islands, presents a picturesque panorama, concealing behind it the harsh reality of the islanders' livelihoods, heavily reliant on fishing. In recent times, these islands have witnessed a decline in population, particularly among the younger generation aged between 20 and 40. Consequently, economic, social, and cultural challenges on the islands have intensified.

Despite the population decrease, the islanders who remain have cultivated a closely-knit community, shaped by the ecological and environmental conditions of island life. They have sustained their economic, social, and cultural fabric, placing a premium on cooperation. The village gut, once an embodiment of communal spirit, is now on the precipice of extinction, often reduced to a mere annual cultural event. The resilience of this tradition owes much to the diligent efforts of the *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut* Preservation Society.

In a bid to safeguard the endangered *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*, Jeong Yeong Man, the master shaman (Figure 5, 6 and 7), rallied practitioners to conduct the ritual outside islands where invitations had ceased. This initiative evolved into the Preservation Society of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*. Recognizing the cultural signifi-

cance, the Korean government accorded protection to the shaman ritual, designating it as a National Intangible Cultural Property in 1987. The gut practitioners were officially acknowledged as transmitters of the ritual, with Jeong Yeong Man assuming leadership of the preservation society. Comprising 30 members, including shamans, musicians, and dancers, the society is invited to village gut, where they perform rituals for and with the villagers, imbued with a spirit of reverence.

The gut serves as a community-based ceremony occurring between the first and full moon of the Lunar New Year, aimed at invoking good harvest for fishermen and the general well-being of villagers. The frequency of the gut ritual varies among villages, occurring every two or three years, with exceptions like Saryangdo Neuryang village, which conducts it once a decade. In 2020, the ten-year village ceremony took place just before the onset of COVID-19, sparing Neuryang villagers from a decade-long wait. The sporadic nature of the gut ritual in the South Sea islands is a response to the economic challenges faced by the islanders. Village heads must mobilize funds for the ceremony, with villagers contributing money, time, and labor voluntarily.

On January 28 and 29, 2023, *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut* unfolded in Jukdo village, embodying a ritual transmitted over 400 years.<sup>5</sup> As part of the village ceremony, the elderly villagers, some in their seventies and eighties, presented elaborate offerings to the Dragon God. Despite their sincere devotion and lifelong commitment to the ritual, a sense of pessimism permeated their perspectives on its future.

'I am apprehensive about the future of this ritual. Who will uphold it? There's uncertainty whether I will be here next time to prepare offerings for the sea and fish gods. No one knows.' (A senior village woman in Jukdo)

Essentially, *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut* is a ritualistic plea to the gods for a bountiful fish catch and the safety of South Sea islanders. Historically, islanders conducted *Byeolsin-gut* regularly, fostering a communal bond, expressing gratitude, mitigating risks, and serving shared objectives. In recent times, however, many islands in the South Sea have abandoned the village ritual due to factors such as the rise of Christianity, population decline, economic burdens, and labor shortages caused by aging. Consequently, the *Byeolsin-gut* Preservation Society has witnessed a diminishing role and diminished activities. In response, Jeong Yeong Man and the Preservation Society have strived to rescue the village ritual as an embodiment of communal faith, even extending its reach to urban settings as a folk art showcased at city festivals. This not only serves the city dwellers' nostalgia for a bygone culture but also broadens the societal impact of the Preservation Society. Jeong Yeongman, the *daesasani* (master shaman) and the chair of the Preservation Society, has tirelessly worked towards ensuring the sustainability of the shaman ritual.

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<sup>5</sup> In the years of 2021 and 2022 the gut was not held in the village due to COVID 19.

'I worry more than anyone else about the continuity of the gut. My family has kept the gut alive for 400 years, and otherwise, it would be extinct.' (Jeong Yeongman, shaman/chair of Namhaean Byeolsin-gut Preservation Society)

Some members of the Preservation Society have voiced their perspectives on the future trajectory of the ritual.

'I don't believe it's feasible to rescue the shaman ritual in this cultural milieu, even with government subsidies. What we truly need is a strategy to overcome the negative perception of the shaman ritual. With the advent of Westernized education, the ritual became stigmatized as an archaic cultural element, deemed negatively superstitious. I believe that actively studying how to reintegrate it and practicing it can breathe life back into the shaman ritual, without relying solely on government initiatives and preservation policies.' (Yi HW, a member of Namhaean Byeolsin-gut Preservation Society)

Despite surface appearances of Jukdo Gut surviving with care, the elderly villagers' sincere efforts to preserve the shamanic ritual, and the Preservation Society members' commitment, as pointed out by master shaman Jeong, 'We are still alive but barely holding our heads above water, working hard to avoid drowning.'



**Figure 3.** Master Shaman, Jeong Yeong Man (Photo: H. Hahm)



**Figure 4.** Jeong Yeong Man and his student shaman (Photo: H. Hahm)





**Figure 5.** Preparing gut with Jeong Yeong Man, a shaman and other members of Preservation Society (Photo: H. Hahm)

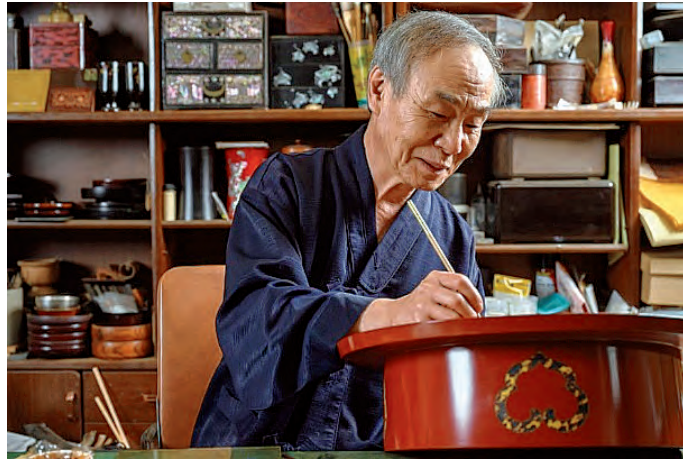
### **Traditional *Otchil* Crafts**

Korea boasts a rich lacquerware tradition spanning over 2,000 years, with state regulation of lacquerware dating back to the Unified Shilla period (the 8-9th century). The precious nature of lacquer, or *otchil*, led successive Korean dynasties, including the later Chosun dynasty, to meticulously control its production and distribution at the national level. In the late Chosun period, lacquerware gained popularity among the affluent classes, becoming sought-after household items. However, the widespread popularity of western-style furniture in the 1980s, coupled with the introduction of cashew as a more economical substitute for lacquer, resulted in a decline in demand for traditional lacquerware. Despite this, artisans like Lee Eui Shik (Figure 8) have tenaciously upheld the *otchil* tradition.

Lee Eui Shik embarked on his *otchil* journey at the age of fifteen when, as the eldest son following his father's passing, he assumed responsibility for his family's livelihood. Initially employed in a Jeonju-based lacquer workshop, he absorbed the intricacies of lacquer while diligently running errands for three to four years. His earnest commitment led him to Seoul, where he sought guidance from esteemed lacquer masters like Choi Hwan Chang, Baek Sun Won, and Hong Sun Tae.

Creating an array of works from furniture to trays, teacups, and candlesticks, Lee Eui Shik's expertise extends beyond the application of *otchil* to encompass design. Inspired by antique materials and products, he has dedicated his life to transmitting traditional lacquer techniques to the next generation, showcasing extraordinary talent in both *otchil* and design. Presently, he operates a workshop (Figure 9) producing various traditional lacquer crafts (Figure 10), including furniture, decorative houseware, and practical tableware. Furthermore, his workshop serves as a bastion for the transmission of *otchil* craftsmanship, actively engaging

in the education and training of those eager to learn *otchil*. Lee Eui Shik is involved in formal education at universities, and even during the challenging period of COVID-19, his commitment to transmitting knowledge persisted. Despite the hushed ambiance in his workshop during the pandemic, transmission training persisted with a limited number of students adhering to COVID prevention protocols. Notably, Lee Eui Shik adapted to the situation by connecting with college students through online platforms for his classes.



**Figure 6.** Lee Eui Shik, Master Lacquer Crafts (Photo: H. Hahm)



**Figure 7.** In His Workshop (Photo: H. Hahm)



**Figure 8.** Lee Eui Shik's work, *Decorative Box* (Photo: H. Hahm)

## **CHANGING ASPECTS OF THE TWO ELEMENTS UNDER THE PANDEMIC**

### ***Namhaean Byeolsin-gut***

#### ***Time for reflection***

Amid the pandemic-induced hiatus of village gut rituals and city performances, the approximately 30 members of the Namhaean Byeolsingut Preservation Association, encompassing shamans, musicians, and dancers, found themselves with an unexpected surplus of free time. Seizing this opportunity, the members voluntarily initiated a capacity-building workshop (Figure 11) facilitated by the benevolent support of Jeong Yeong-man, the master shaman and head of the Preservation Society. Leveraging online platforms, the members convened regularly to partake in a series of workshops designed to enhance their skills through introspective contemplation of their past endeavors. The schedule and focal points of these workshops are succinctly outlined below (Table 6).

Within the workshop, a distinctive lecture series spearheaded by Jeong Yeong Man, the master shaman, took center stage. He underscored the imperative need for delving into the history of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*—a facet often overlooked, particularly by younger members preoccupied with mastering music, dance, and narratives. Recognizing this gap in spiritual and historical understanding, Jeong Yeong Man seized this opportune moment to impart knowledge. The members of the Preservation Society unanimously deemed these workshops profoundly meaningful, fostering a deeper comprehension of the gut's societal and cultural functions. Consequently, they affirmed their commitment to practice and transmit the gut.

In a poignant reflection on the purpose of conducting gut rituals, Jeong Yeong Man articulated during an interview on January 26, 2023, 'The purpose of throwing gut for the deceased and for the living descendants as well. People

**Table 6.** Schedule and focal points of the workshops

Date	Topics of Workshop
2020.04.03	Discussion on the two guts: Jukto and Juklim village guts
2020.04.17	Discussion on Saryang Island's ritual
2020.10.28	Understanding of intangible cultural heritage
2020.12.23	Learning from old video records, Jansan geolri
2021.02.24	Study from basic concept of gut to in-depth study of the gut
2021.03.31	Study of the shaman guts in the village of Geoje. Visit Geoje
2021.04.24	Study on the relationship between cultural heritage and <i>Namhaean Byeolsin-gut</i>
2021.10.13	- Study on the meanings of ritual goods - Study on the differences between <i>Byeolsin-gu</i> and <i>Owisaenam-gu</i>
2021.12.22	Study on the 24 seasonal divisions to the rituals
2022.01.22	Ritual process of <i>Juklim gut</i>
2022.02.24	Colloquium of ICH
2022.06.25	Meaning and Process of <i>Seongju-gut</i>
2022.07.23	Why are shamans considered as superstitious figures?

(descendants) tell me to have the deceased go to a good place. I need to release what's stuck in their chests. Yes, the deceased must have gone to a good place because the person you (descendants) love has died. The purpose of gut is to return the living to normal while giving a vague sense of hope.' This sentiment encapsulated the essence of *Byeolsin-gut*, a tradition spanning over 400 years in the coastal villages and islands of the South Sea, gradually diminishing in recent times and exacerbated by the COVID-19 outbreaks over the past three years. Apprehensions regarding the post-pandemic future loomed large.



**Figure 9.** Online Capacity building workshop through Zoom (Photo: H. Hahm)



In response to this crisis, the Preservation Society prioritized internal education, cultivating an awareness of the vital significance of village gut. Aligning with Jeong Yeong Man's belief that crisis resolution lies in adhering to fundamentals, every member embarked on efforts to create gut rituals centered on the living, infused with the essence of the soul and heartfelt resonance rather than mere spectacle. The master shaman's teachings became integral during the pandemic, emphasizing the de-emphasis of extravagant music and dance techniques. Notably, *Sinawi* music, a crucial component of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*, was approached with a focus on natural learning over time, avoiding excessive constraints on thin music. Jeong Yeong Man encouraged the accumulation of skills and know-how through extended practice, recognizing the physical toll while emphasizing the organic acquisition of expertise.

### ***Sharing namhaean byeolsin-gut activities through social media***

The Preservation Society has recently embarked on an active utilization of Social Networking Services (SNS). Presently, the schedule of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut* activities is promptly communicated through platforms like Facebook and Instagram. This strategic shift has garnered attention not only from the local community but also from professionals, manifesting a heightened interest in the cultural richness embedded in *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut* sites. To amplify outreach, the Society shares photos and videos of the transmission activities through diverse channels such as YouTube, homepages, and additional SNS platforms. This concerted effort has enabled the establishment of connections with individuals nationwide, expanding the network beyond the pre-existing confines of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*.

Within this burgeoning network, the promotion of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut* has flourished, accompanied by an influx of supportive and encouraging messages. Preservation Society members express that these endeavors bolster their resolve to transmit this cherished tradition.

Jeong Eun Ju, a Preservation Society member, shared her experience, stating, 'I used Facebook and Instagram extensively for the promotion of *Byeolsin-gut*. It's not a natural inclination for me to engage in social media, but the circumstances left me with no choice. Now, as I primarily upload content to promote *Byeolsin-gut*, I've received numerous positive responses and friend requests from previously unknown individuals. It became apparent that many people share an interest in *Byeolsin-gut*, prompting them to seek connections. Accepting these connections has fostered engagement, with individuals leaving comments and contributing to the dialogue.' This shift to online platforms has not only facilitated promotion but has also become a conduit for fostering a broader community around *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*, reaffirming its cultural significance.



### ***Attempts to transition into a new format and achieve self-sufficiency***

Fortuitously, the Preservation Society has recently welcomed young members into its fold, embarking on a transformative journey toward self-sufficiency. This endeavor involves the creation of a children's play version aimed at educating young minds about the intricacies of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*. Furthermore, active participation in diverse events within nearby cities has been undertaken to amplify the promotion of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*. While these initiatives spark hope for the future of gut traditions, the reality is nuanced, with pervasive negative connotations surrounding gut practices. The Preservation Society, cognizant of the looming threat of gut's potential submersion into the currents of industrial-driven capitalism and urbanization in Korea, staunchly believes in its responsibility to safeguard this heritage from vanishing.

In a significant departure from tradition, *Namhae Byeolsingut* was ingeniously transformed into a puppet play format, tailored to provide a child-friendly introduction to *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*. This innovative approach debuted in 2019 and garnered immense popularity, enduring even during the pandemic era while adhering to COVID-19 prevention measures. Audiences comprised children ranging from kindergarten to elementary school students, marking a successful foray into a more accessible and engaging avenue.

Through these pioneering activities, the Preservation Society cultivated newfound confidence and devised comprehensive plans to attain self-sufficiency. Reflecting on this transformative journey, Jeong Yeong Man, the master shaman, expressed surprise and optimism, stating, 'I was very surprised. Really, I have a lot of obsessive thoughts about the *Saemaul Undong*<sup>6</sup> or some prejudice about a gut in the past. Even after developing this (children's puppet show), my worries did not stop. People would point fingers at me again because of shaman. But it turned out the complete opposite. A new world is coming so that I feel a lot of hopeful things.' This testimony underscores the profound impact of these innovative endeavors in challenging preconceptions and fostering a sense of hope for the future of *Namhaean Byeolsin-gut*.

### ***Otchil Master***

#### ***Low-cost products***

Elaborate lacquer crafts, known for their intricate detailing, were traditionally high-end items, commanding prices ranging from several millions to a million won, contingent upon the type and size of decoration. Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lee Eui Shik's workshop was frequented by patrons who purchased these exquisite lacquer crafts. These premium pieces were typically

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<sup>6</sup> Saemaul Undong, called New Village Movement, is a social reform movement initiated by the Park Chung Hee government in the 70's to eradicate poverty of Korea. There are conflicting assessment about Saemaul Undong. In this context, Jeong showed a very negative opinion about it because many folk rituals and traditional customs were banned for being superstitious.



**Figure 10.** *Otchil* spoons and chopsticks (Photo: H. Hahm)

acquired by the affluent class or individuals with specific ceremonial purposes. Notably, some Korean presidents chose these crafts as diplomatic gifts during their international tours. However, the pandemic brought a stark shift in consumer behavior, with sales of high-priced lacquer crafts dwindling amidst the economic downturn.

In response to the challenging economic landscape, Master Lee pivoted his focus to crafting practical tableware with more accessible price points. Remarkably, these lacquer tableware items gained significant popularity, especially a sought-after set of spoon and chopsticks (Figure 12). The range of tableware expanded to include utensils, cups, and plates, priced between 50,000 won to 300,000 won. Intriguingly, the surge in demand for lacquerware during the pandemic was not solely driven by affordability. Scientifically proven attributes such as the prevention of germ penetration and antibacterial properties became additional selling points. This newfound recognition positioned lacquerware as items capable of safeguarding against the Corona-19 virus, contributing to their heightened popularity during these unprecedented times.

### ***Online activities***

Amidst the disruptions caused by the pandemic, the scheduled arts and crafts exhibitions faced cancellations, presenting unforeseen challenges for Lee Eui Shik, the lacquer master. Undeterred, he dedicated several months to art creation and online training for his students while awaiting the resolution of the pandemic. Recognizing the limitations of online training, he resumed in-person sessions at the workshop once the peak of the pandemic subsided, implementing comprehensive anti-corona measures.

As the pandemic persisted, a shift towards online exhibitions emerged. Lee Eui Shik, adapting to this new landscape, decided to participate in online exhibitions, a novel experience for artisans. Together with his daughter, Seon Joo, groomed as his successor, they prepared to showcase their work at the Cheongju Craft

Biennale—an international craft exhibition covering various fields, including ceramics, wood lacquer, textiles, and metals.

Unlike traditional exhibitions, online showcases required extensive video and photo preparation. Collaborating with his technologically adept daughter, they produced an introductory film detailing the lacquer craftsman's process, from collecting raw lacquer to the final design stages. Seon Joo highlighted the advantages of online exhibitions, citing the accessibility it provided to a global audience, particularly those unable to attend international exhibitions in person. She emphasized the ease of viewing and the enhanced visibility for artists worldwide. Quoting Seon Joo in a September 5, 2022, interview, 'I think that it is not easy to go to the exhibition held abroad even in normal days. Even if it is an international exhibition that is held in Korea, it would be difficult for those who are interested in the exhibition to come to Korea to see it. However, the advantage of online is that you can easily and thoroughly view the exhibition. In addition, as artists are introduced abroad, they could have more opportunities.'

Participating in the Biennale, an international platform, garnered attention from both domestic and overseas online visitors. The video presentation, shared through platforms like the Biennale homepage and YouTube, showcased the traditional knowledge, skills, and beauty inherent in lacquer crafts. The impact of this online exhibition surpassed the reach of traditional ones, significantly elevating Lee Eui Shik's profile. Subsequently, he received an invitation to exhibit Korean lacquer crafts at the Tel Aviv Crafts and Design Biennale in 2023, extending the influence of his art to Israel.

### ***Limited time for training***

The realm of lacquer crafts demands an intricate blend of specialized knowledge and delicate manual dexterity, necessitating an extensive investment of time and effort to master the craftsmanship. The learning process extends beyond theoretical education, requiring numerous hours of practical experience. Lee Eui Shik, also involved in teaching at the University of Traditional Culture, not only imparts knowledge in his regular classes but also opens his workshop for hands-on training sessions with students.

However, the advent of the pandemic significantly impacted training practices. In 2020, as university classes transitioned to online platforms, the emphasis shifted more towards theoretical education than hands-on training. The absence of practical facilities for crafts students became a notable challenge during the pandemic. Despite these limitations, a silver lining emerged as students were still able to grasp the value of craftsmanship through theoretical studies.

Reflecting on this, Lee Eui Shik, the master of lacquer, expressed, 'Lacquer crafts require a lot of practice. However, during the pandemic, I couldn't have students take practices, so I mainly taught design and theory. How raw lacquer comes out, how to refine, etc. I also thought of the design in advance so that they could use it during practice.' Despite the constraints imposed by the pandemic, efforts were

made to ensure that the theoretical foundation and design aspects of lacquer crafts were adequately conveyed to the students, acknowledging the indispensable role of hands-on practice in the traditional learning process.

## DISCUSSIONS

The far-reaching repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic have left an indelible mark on society, particularly impacting various facets of ICH. This fieldwork report aims to meticulously document and analyze the transformative effects experienced by two distinct elements of ICH in Korea: the shaman ritual (*gut*) and lacquer craftsmanship (*otchil jangin*), offering insights into their responses to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

A noteworthy distinction between the two lies in their modes of practice—the shaman ritual being a collective endeavor and craftsmanship occurring at an individual level. The shaman ritual encountered greater difficulties in finding alternative modes of practice or transmission activities during the pandemic. As demonstrated, Lee Eui Shik could continue training students individually in his workshop, whereas the Namhaean Byeolsin-gut Preservation Society faced restrictions on group gatherings, compelling them to shift to online workshops. Additionally, village rituals were prohibited, exacerbating the threat to the transmission of *gut*.

Both elements, however, expressed satisfaction with their engagement in online activities. Despite initial unfamiliarity with new communication and presentation methods, they discovered the advantages of promoting ICH in diverse ways through online platforms. The Preservation Society, through regular online capacity building workshops, deepened members' understanding of the ritual, fostering a stronger commitment to transmission. Active use of social media platforms garnered more support, transforming fans into advocates. Similarly, lacquer master Lee and his successor achieved international recognition for lacquer crafts through online exhibitions.

The negative impact of the pandemic, marked by the suspension of primary activities like ritual performances and *otchil* practices, prompted the masters to view the crisis as an opportunity. They seized the moment to hold capacity-building workshops and diversify their production, introducing new items such as lacquer tableware and puppet shows for children. This resilience and adaptability embody the spirit of Living Human Treasures, highlighting their ability to turn challenges into opportunities for innovation and growth.

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