

Inscription of Intangible Cultural Heritage under UNESCO's Convention of 2003: Application in Vietnam and Expectations of Community

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Received on 4 August 2020.

Revised on 11 August 2020.

Accepted on 16 August 2020.

Abstract: The process of inscribing intangible cultural heritage (ICH) under the 2003 Convention of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) can be considered heritagisation with the participation of stakeholders from international organisations and state agencies to experts and individuals. The multidimensional heritage inscription process has raised much scholarly debate and discourse in the mass media. The inscription recognises the values and functions of the heritage to the community and thus raises awareness about the significance of safeguarding the heritage, increasing interventions to safeguard it, and addressing stakeholder concerns of the heritage. Analysing the inscription of ICH in accordance with the 2003 Convention is of great importance for the same process in Vietnam.

Keywords: UNESCO, 2003 Convention, inscription of intangible cultural heritage.

Subject classification: Cultural studies

1. Introduction

Nation states have taken measures to safeguard cultural heritage for centuries, long before the implementation of related national laws, international conventions and instruments. The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted in 2003 and took legal effect in 2006. By the end of 2019 the Convention had been ratified by 178 State Parties.

ICH can be understood as the “intangible” cultural manifestation (i.e. ICH is invisible and only felt in terms of socio-cultural meanings and functions, intellect, knowledge, relations, or the reflection of polysemantic nuances of the social, cultural and spiritual life of the community). The 2003 Convention established four lists: the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (also known as the Representative List), the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding (in short the

Urgent List), Register of Good Safeguarding Practices, and international financial assistance requests of over USD 100,000.

The requirements of a nomination which meets the criteria for inscription and the procedures for appraising inscription nominations are all strictly regulated under the Convention and through related documents, such as the operational guidelines to implement the Convention, and in decisions reached at meetings of the Intergovernmental Committee [28].

The inscription review and approval started in 2008 after the Intergovernmental Committee included 90 Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity on the Representative List. In fact, the first heritage elements to be inscribed were decided by the Committee in 2009. By 2019, 549 elements relating to 129 State Parties had been added to the lists by UNESCO, 47 of which belonged to the Urgent List, 365 on the Representative List, 17 assigned to the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices in line with the goals of the 2003 Convention, while there were 73 requests for international financial assistance.

The inscription plays a crucial role in the implementation of the 2003 Convention with positive impacts, such as enhancing the visibility of ICH in general, raising the awareness of all stakeholders, and strengthening the cooperation among State Parties to improve the safeguarding of intangible heritage elements. With all aspects, the inscription triggers academic debates on the politicalness of heritage, heritagisation, and the heritage created by external stakeholders. The UNESCO inscription also leads to developments in policies and laws of countries. For instance, in Vietnam, the

Law on Cultural Heritage was issued in June 2001 (Law No.28/2001/QH10). The country increased its knowledge and understanding of some of the Convention's provisions with regard to the definition, recognition and safeguarding of ICH when the law was amended and supplements added in 2009. The 2003 Convention is an international legal instrument which creates favourable conditions for State Parties and the community to safeguard ICH. This paper² analyses the inscription of ICH in line with the 2003 Convention, the application of the Convention to inscribe ICH in Vietnam and expectations of the community³.

2. The UNESCO's inscription of ICH: Objectives and some theoretical viewpoints

2.1. Objectives of the ICH inscription of the 2003 Convention

The 2003 Convention delineates the objectives of, and criteria for, inscribing elements on the lists in specific articles. Article 16 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity states: "In order to ensure better visibility of the intangible cultural heritage and awareness of its significance, and to encourage dialogue which respects cultural diversity...". Article 17 on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding emphasises the need for "taking appropriate safeguarding measures" that ensure the viability of the element. In Form ICH-01 of the nomination for a heritage element to be put onto the Urgent List, State Parties need to demonstrate that "the element is in urgent need of safeguarding because its viability is at risk

despite efforts of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals and State(s) Party(ies) concerned”. Criterion U.3, in both the Representative List and Urgent List, requires states to demonstrate that “safeguarding measures are elaborated to enable the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned to continue the practice and transmission of the element”. In addition, regarding this criterion, the Urgent List requires nominations to include concrete programmes of safeguarding related to addressing the risk of heritage falling into oblivion, an estimated budget, and the timeframe for implementing such safeguarding programmes. For both lists, criterion U.4 relates to “the active involvement of the community in the development of a nomination”, while criterion U.5 refers to the presence of the proposed element in the inventory of the country submitting the nomination⁴.

The primary objectives for inscribing ICH on the Representative List are to raise awareness of the safeguarding of the heritage in general, ensure the vitality of the ICH, facilitate dialogue, and respect the cultural diversity of individuals, groups and communities. To be inscribed on the Urgent List, States Parties and the community must prove that they are trying to safeguard the vitality of the heritage and provide measures of safeguarding to ensure its continuing practice and transmission. These inscription objectives have been understood and interpreted in different ways by States Parties in general and in Vietnam in particular.

According to Frank Proschan, anthropologist and folklorist, who assisted with the 2003 Convention, Vietnam misunderstood the terms of the Convention, as well as the

objectives of the UNESCO inscription. In accordance with the 2003 Convention, an element is “inscribed”, not “recognised” or honoured. Lists in the 2003 Convention are categorised as Representative and Urgent rather than lists of “world heritage or heritage of humanity”. According to the Convention, the ICH of humanity literally means human heritage, not “at the level of humanity” or “of the world level” [18]. This objective of the 2003 Convention on ICH is different from that of tangible cultural heritage, and fundamentally different from the 1972 Convention on the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Under the latter, the basic criterion for inscription as world heritage requires the element to have outstanding universal values. According to the 2003 Convention, on the other hand, ICH is still a heritage element of the community, created and practised by the community for generations, regardless of whether or not it is inscribed by UNESCO.

2.2. Some theoretical points of view on the intangible heritage inscription of UNESCO

Today, cultural heritage in general and ICH in particular is an area that attracts the attention of the public, political systems, state management agencies, and academia. ICH has changed, partly because elements are now regarded, assessed and guided through an administrative lens, while cultural and political management is influenced by the UNESCO inscription process and procedures [23, pp.413-431], [10, pp.40-61], [17, pp.1-32]. Moreover, the participation of diplomats, managers, experts, scientists, and other external stakeholders of State Parties in

UNESCO's inscription process has many consequences [19, pp.158-180]. The expectations of the custodian community and the state in relation to activities carried out by external stakeholders on an inscribed heritage element sometimes surpass the objectives of the 2003 Convention. Basically, communities want their heritage to gain more recognition and be honoured at an international level. They wish for it to be recognised as world heritage, eventually attracting financial investment for infrastructure development, to become well known throughout the world and a popular tourist attraction. According to the 2003 Convention, the objectives of inscription are: to contribute to raising awareness of ICH safeguarding in general, enhance interpersonal and community dialogue on the issue, respect cultural diversity, and at the same time ensure that the element is safeguarded and transmitted.

Some researchers believe that the inscription of elements on the UNESCO lists increasingly leads to exclusion and is likened to a process of "heritagisation" [14, p.104]. Certain scholars criticise the inscription. For example, L. Smith (Professor and Director of the Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies, at the Australian National University, Canberra), contends that what matters is the core essence of heritage in the view of the custodian community. During the process of inscription, some other cultural and social meanings of human beings are attached to an element by external stakeholders, thereby changing its core nature with the disappearance of the so-called heritage (of the community) [22, p.11]. In recognition of this, R. Harrison, a professor of heritage studies, asks whether heritage

inscription is a process involving the community, locality, state, and international organisations. In addition, is this a good thing or just aimed mainly at achieving political objectives rather than its true meaning [16]? According to him, there seems to be a general perception that once cultural objects, places and practices are inscribed, they will be transformed into a kind of "privilege" which we call "heritage" [15, p.4].

For some scholars, the process through which a heritage element is inscribed is a "selective" one [19], [20]. The selection has, by chance, created the hierarchy of heritage in the thinking and understanding of the community, managers, media, and the public at large. The hierarchy of the ICH inscribed by UNESCO, in comparison with the uninscribed heritage, is contrary to the objectives of the 2003 Convention [18]. The current discourse is to have a "world heritage" ranking (incorporating elements inscribed by UNESCO), "national heritage" (inscribed by the state), and heritage at the provincial level. These inscribed elements are privileged in the way that they are provided with "favours" over other elements. This may be through concentrated investment in the development of those which are subject to safeguarding programmes. For example, hundreds of billions of Vietnamese dong have been spent on the restoration and building of venues (space for performance) for certain elements, as well as transmitting their knowledge from generation to generation, such as *Xoan* singing of Phu Tho Province [12]. One could say that inscription is almost like turning a particular heritage into "a brand name" (lit. a trademark). It becomes more of a cultural expression or

practice compared to what had previously existed in the community for hundreds of years. It can be exploited as a tourist attraction, used to promote the locality's profile, and for community and personal gains. To a certain extent, the intervention of UNESCO, the state and the team of experts involved in the inscription, has resulted in the element being "appropriated" [19] for the political agenda and that of travel companies - i.e. external stakeholders, governments, and national and international organisations.

3. The inscription of ICH in Vietnam

At the national level, the procedures for inscribing ICH are clearly stipulated in law. In Vietnam, related agencies such as the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MoCST); the National Council of Cultural Heritage, and some appointed experts, had oriented the inscription of heritage, as well as selected heritage, proposed for the final list of elements approved by the Prime Minister in 2002 and 2012. The People's Committees of provinces and centrally-run cities, where the custodian communities reside, are agencies presiding over the development of nominations and finalisation of necessary documents for submission to the MoCST to seek permission for developing nominations. In Vietnam, since 2002 up until now, the development of ICH nominations for submission to UNESCO have been based mainly on official dispatch No. 39171/VHTT-BTBT dated 4 September 2002 regarding collating comments and feedback on the list of ICH over the preceding ten years, including: (1) the Space of Gong

culture in the Central Highlands; (2) *Ca trù* singing of Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta; (3) Epics of Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam (epics refer to sung or recited poems about life); (4) *Quan họ* Bac Ninh folk songs; and (5) Water puppetry of the Red River Delta, northern Vietnam. This list was drawn up according to the proposals of a number of related divisions under the MoCST, Vietnam Association of Folklorists, and the Institute of Folklore (now the Institute of Cultural Studies). Up until now, three of the above five elements have been inscribed by UNESCO, while the Epics of Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam, and Water puppetry in the Northern Delta have not yet been nominated by the relevant localities or the MoCST (at the time this paper was published).

According to official dispatch No.8868/VPCP-KGVX dated 5 November 2012, the list of ICH submitted to UNESCO for the period 2012-2016 included ten elements. This list was proposed by the National Council of Cultural Heritage and the Vietnam National Commission for UNESCO. To date, only four elements (actual element names have been changed in comparison to those listed on the official dispatch) have been inscribed by UNESCO, namely: *Ví* and *Giặm* folk songs, Practices related to the Viet Belief in the Mother Goddesses of Three Realms, Art of *Bài chòi* in Central Vietnam, and *Practices of Then* by Tay, Nung and Thai ethnic groups. Three additional nominations, namely: the art of *Xòe* dance of the Thai ethnic people, the art of pottery-making of the Cham people, and the Craft of Dong Ho woodblock printing, have also been submitted to UNESCO for inscription consideration during the next

cycle. The remaining three elements, which include: the Knowledge and techniques of planting crops in the stone niches of ethnic minorities of the Ha Giang stone plateau, the initiation ritual of the Dao people, and the art of *Dù kê* musical theatre of the Khmer people in southern Vietnam, have not yet been nominated (at the time this paper was published).

Criteria and procedures for a heritage element to be submitted to UNESCO are regulated by Article 6 of Decree No. 98/2010/ND-CP detailing a number of articles of the Law on Cultural Heritage and the Law Amending and Supplementing a Number of Articles of the Law on Cultural Heritage. The following text is taken verbatim from Article 6:

Article 6. Selection criteria and order and procedures for proposing the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to include typical intangible cultural heritage in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding:

- Typical intangible cultural heritage shall be selected in accordance with the following criteria:

- a) It is intangible cultural heritage on the list of national intangible cultural heritage;
- b) It has special historical, cultural or scientific values;
- c) It represents the original identity of traditional culture and provides bases for the creation of new cultural values;
- d) It has historical, cultural or scientific impacts at the national and international levels;

e) It satisfies the selection criteria of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

- Order and procedures for making a nomination of typical intangible cultural heritage:

a) Based on the list of national intangible cultural heritage and the criteria defined in Clause 1 of this Article, the chairperson of the people's committee of a province or centrally-run city (hereinafter referred to as the chairperson of a provincial-level people's committee) which possesses intangible cultural heritage shall submit a written request to the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism, proposing him or her to consider and propose the Prime Minister to permit the compilation of nominations of typical intangible cultural heritage to be submitted to UNESCO.

In case the intangible cultural heritage is found ineligible for submission to UNESCO, the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism shall issue a written reply within 30 days after receiving the request;

b) After getting the permission from the Prime Minister, the chairperson of a provincial people's committee shall develop a nomination of typical intangible cultural heritage and submit it to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism;

c) The Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism shall coordinate with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and relevant ministries and sectors in appraising the nomination and requesting the National Council of Cultural Heritage to provide comments and feedback on the nomination. The National Council of Cultural Heritage shall appraise

the nomination and make written comments and feedback within 30 days since the date of receiving the nomination;

d) The Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism shall submit the nomination to the Prime Minister for consideration and decision.

After getting the permission from the Prime Minister, the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism shall coordinate with the Minister of Foreign Affairs in finalising formalities to submit the nomination to UNESCO in compliance with regulations.

- A nomination of typical intangible cultural heritage to be submitted to the Prime Minister comprises:

a) A written request of the community or individual holding the intangible cultural heritage and a written request of the chairperson of the provincial people's committee;

b) Nomination of typical intangible cultural heritage is made under the regulations of UNESCO;

c) A written appraisal of the National Council of Cultural Heritage;

d) A written request of the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism to be submitted to the Prime Minister.

- The Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Minister of Foreign Affairs shall report to the Prime Minister and notify the chairperson of the provincial people's committee and the community or individual holding the intangible cultural heritage of the UNESCO's decision on such intangible cultural heritage.

The National Council of Cultural Heritage is the agency taking responsibility for the quality of nominations through the evaluation on, amendment to and approval of the

nominations. Finally, the MoCST will be the presiding agency, as well as the final approval point, before submitting documents to the Prime Minister for him to authorise the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism to sign the nominations, and the Vietnam National Commission for UNESCO to issue the diplomatic notes allowing the submissions to UNESCO. From the perspective of state management, Vietnam has a system of cultural heritage management from central to local levels (from the MoCST to provinces, districts, communes and villages). The inscription of a heritage element is a procedure of centralising power in the hands of managers in charge of cultural affairs rather than the proactiveness of the community. This can be specified as the relevant institutions, policies, agencies, branches, councils and organisations in combination with leaders, managerial officials and members of the council for approving heritage elements. In short, the influence of the state and management agencies, together with administrative procedures from the grassroots' to central levels (from provinces to the Mo-CST), have developed hundreds of years of community practices into heritage elements inscribed at national and international levels. Other countries follow a similar process. The state decides what heritage elements to nominate for inscription through a body of councils made up of leaders, managers and experts. They are entitled to propose which heritage elements, in their opinion, should be included onto the list and approved. This, according to D. Byrne, a professor of heritage studies, is the effect of the hegemony in the inscription as well as safeguarding and promoting heritage. This moves towards legalising the State's

rights and showing how the heritage is inclusive for the people, both locals and expatriates, of that country [11, pp.147-149].

In connection to the changes in the policies and procedures for nomination development in some countries sharing a similar culture with Vietnam, such as Japan, China and the Republic of Korea, it can be concluded that Vietnam needs to adjust certain legal documents in line with the 2003 Convention. Such countries have recently witnessed the gradual trend in decentralisation within the management and inscription, creating many favourable conditions for the community to actively engage in the inscription and safeguarding of heritage elements [24], [13].

Outsider intervention will gradually take ICH away from the community as well as change its inherent nature and functions. To tackle such intrusion, China and the Republic of Korea recently promulgated some laws on ICH stressing the active and proactive role the community plays as well as the support it receives with resources needed for the application and empowerment of the heritage [2]. However, in Vietnam, the Law on Cultural Heritage of 2001 (amended and supplemented in 2009), as well as legal normative documents, hardly touch on the community's role. In the process of inscription, the official role is still played by state management agencies, and the procedures to propose for inscription are made by state agencies. In some cases, the community takes part in the development of nominations and in drafting written commitments indicating their consent for the inscription.

4. Expectations of the community on the inscription of intangible cultural heritage

The majority of communities expect their heritage to be included onto UNESCO lists. However, it has also been observed that community members also have concerns, particularly in relation to how inscription could impact on them. A common question raised is "Does the inscription come with material benefits and honour?". When it is explained that the inscription is to ensure better safeguarding of the cultural heritage, recognise its contribution to socio-cultural development, enhance dialogue, and respect the cultural diversity, etc., judging by reactions of the local people, such objectives do not completely meet their expectations. "So, what is the inscription for?", some ask. "We have still safeguarded the heritage that our ancestors have passed down for a thousand years"⁵. The objectives of inscription under the law and the UNESCO Convention are not to provide material benefits, but to safeguard the vitality and viability of the heritage in general. Obviously, inscription is not a financial or material "gift" in the literal sense. It is not about great investment projects for infrastructure improvement, promoting the heritage for tourism development, or making use of it for other purposes. The significance of inscription is to safeguard the heritage and raise the community and public awareness of the cultural heritage transmitted by previous generations. What the community benefits from is their invaluable "assets" that cannot be measured or seen. ICH elements, on the other hand, are cultural expressions reflecting the cultural identity of the community, their worldview, human knowledge, and other

cultural and social values of tradition, history, art, and education, etc. If intangible heritage is lost, it is difficult to be regained because all the values are invisible treasures that would vanish forever with the disappearance of the heritage.

In fact, inscription is the desire of the majority of the community because, besides “pride”, it also brings about practical benefits in promoting the profile of the locality, and taking advantage of tourism investment and development. Activities that are proposed and implemented which benefit the community, without deteriorating the vitality or endangering the heritage, will be supported according to the 12 ethical principles established by UNESCO [25]. Moreover, some of the main practitioners of elements have used their heritage as a tool in their own “everyday politics”, such as to fight for the legal right to practice. For instance, relying on the inscription of the Practices related to the Viet beliefs in the Mother Goddesses of Three Realms, the adherents spoke out to the venerable and some Buddhists at Ba Vang temple in Quang Ninh Province, who understood incorrectly the history and practice of the popular belief. The singers of *Quan họ*, *Đờn ca tài tử*, and *Ví* and *Giặm* folk songs similarly used their heritage’s inscription to ask the government for recognition as “emeritus and people’s practitioners”.

Currently, in Vietnam, the inscription is sometimes just a phenomenon of jumping on the bandwagon when localities all want their heritage elements to be inscribed. Spiritually, inscription is not only the pride of the community, people and practitioners, but also an accomplishment that descendants can proudly report back to their ancestors

and village tutelary deities. Politically, this activity can be considered an “achievement” of the leadership in the reports on socio-economic affairs. Economically, the inscription acts as a catalyst for tourism promotion and economic development in localities. However, misunderstandings about the inscription of heritage still exist, as analysed below.

4.1. Misunderstanding of the inscription

The core of the issue with inscription is that it was misunderstood from the outset, as the overall objectives of the 2003 Convention in adding an elements to a list were not correctly understood, as a result of an incorrect interpretation from English or French into Vietnamese. The inscription is not a ranking or honour title, but aims to achieve other noble objectives that will ensure the visibility and vitality of the elements on the Representative List, and that those on the Urgent List continue to be practised and safeguarded.

4.2. Misunderstanding the responsibility of safeguarding the heritage

The discourse at local level is that heritage is inscribed at the state and world [UNESCO] levels, and therefore, both UNESCO and the state are primarily responsible for investing in infrastructure development, widening the heritage space, and building tourist facilities, etc. The expectation is that impressive infrastructure and modern facilities would make the heritage something “of the world class”. According to a member of the Management Board of the traditional Giong festival of

Phu Dong, Hanoi, the “leaders [must] pay more attention to and develop a master plan for the historical complex, to make the Giong festival better and better.”⁶ Some people believe that if the heritage is inscribed, the state should be responsible for management and infrastructure construction⁷.

The UNESCO inscription also creates the belief among community members that, to some extent, the element belongs to the state and the world. In nominating an ICH element to a 2003 Convention list, State Parties commit to implementing measures to safeguard it as the third criterion (out of the five inscription criteria)⁸ on the safeguarding of the element, which must be taken with state support and community participation to ensure the visibility and vitality of the heritage. This has created a belief in the community that the element was “no longer theirs”, or that the state must be responsible for the heritage. In fact, the safeguarding of heritage is a collaboration between the state, community and stakeholders, in which the community plays an active role in the practice and safeguarding of the heritage left by their ancestors. This is clearly stated in the Operational Directives of the 2003 Convention. That is to say, at the local level, inscription has been misunderstood and misinterpreted, including heritage management, organisation and safeguarding.

4.3. Misunderstanding about the use of the heritage element

Once the heritage element is inscribed, apart from relying on external resources, there is a trend of using the listed element to

generate business, provide services, develop tourism, and so forth. Inscribed heritage becomes a venue for pilgrims and tourists to experience the elements, such as *Xoan* singing, for which a number of projects have been approved to build venues to hold performances for tourists. For other elements, however, their inscription has become a tool exploited by certain individuals, groups of people, communities, or organisations for various purposes, such as advertising, branding, logo design, tourism development, and so on. Such heritage elements include the folk songs of: *Quan họ*, *Đờn ca tài tử*, *Ví* and *Giặm* and *Bài chòi*. In addition, numerous practitioners have used the heritage to ask for recognition through honouring designations, such as being made a people’s or emeritus practitioner by the state. Senior practitioners now perform their heritage for tourists in homestays and communities, such as the Gong performance in the Central Highlands township of Lac Duong, Lam Dong Province, and in Ban Don Village, Dak Lak Province.

Performance held at the heritage to raise money from tourism is a way to take the heritage away from the community. The new performance context creates opportunities for practitioners economic values for the custodian community. This is in accordance with UNESCO’s 12 ethical principles. However, UNESCO also recommends the community and management agencies take measures to support activities that safeguard the heritage, and stop it from losing its inherent value to the community. Excessive exploitation of the heritage to serve tourism, make money and generate illicit profits can be classified as commercialism, profiteering from and decontextualising the community,

all of which go far beyond the objectives of the 2003 Convention.

5. Conclusion

The 2003 Convention has specific criteria and objectives for inscribing ICH elements on its lists that are clearly stated in the provisions, as well as other UNESCO documents. UNESCO inscribes ICH elements with the aim of raising awareness about the importance of safeguarding the heritage in general, encouraging dialogue, promoting respect for the cultural diversity of individuals and communities, and ensuring that it is continued to be practised and transmitted to future generations. Today, however, inscription is fundamentally misunderstood as a ranking of elements at “international” and “world heritage” levels which are exploited for the specific purposes of communities, agencies and State Parties. The inscription is misinterpreted, which results in many countries targeting their efforts to have more and more elements inscribed, thereby overlooking many other important issues. The objective of inscription is to support local communities in safe-guarding their heritage, and promote the function of the heritage to the community.

In fact, the outcomes of inscription differ from heritage to heritage. The inscribed heritage becomes an object and a tool for individuals, groups of people or communities to use for other purposes other than the original objectives which have been developed and practised up until now. The heritage is ascribed with many new meanings, equipped with different properties

or exploited for tourism and sustainable local economic development.

The inscription is a component in the heritagisation, with the participation of international and national organisations, a cultural management system from the central to local levels, as well as a contingent of experts, researchers and cultural managers. With the participation of multiple stakeholders, the heritage naturally becomes transformed with new cultural nuances and meanings. The complexity of the nomination process, as well as ICH management once it is inscribed, increasingly creates a forum for management, as well as scholarship. At the same time, the community sees the inscription of their heritage as an honour that gives them pride, and which becomes the catalyst for creating new impetus for the element’s safeguarding, transmission and practice. The journey of developing a nomination and achieving ICH inscription is a really exciting one because of the different social and political motivations, and the needs and goals of related individuals, groups of people, and communities. The inscription is sometimes interpreted as a title, and always accompanied by fame and agents, which overall brings more benefits than inadequacies. This also provides impetus to better understand the importance of ICH, and contribute to the safeguarding of its vitality in Vietnam, as well as by other State Parties to the 2003 Convention.

Notes

¹ This paper was published in Vietnamese in: *Tap chí Khoa học xã hội Việt Nam*, số 8, 2020, then developed

into this English version. Translator: Vu Xuan Nuoc. Language editor: Stella Ciorra.

² This research is a part of the research project entitled “Heritagisation and Making Heritage in Vietnam” funded by the Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) under grant No.699.01-2017.01.

³ Information and data in the paper are based on observations and experiences of the author as a participant in meetings of the Intergovernmental Committee of the UNESCO 2003 Convention and one among 12 members of the UNESCO Nomination Appraisal Council during the 2017-2020 term. The author has also conducted research in rural and remote areas as well as being directly involved in the development of nominations of Vietnam’s ICH for submission to UNESCO for inscription.

⁴ The heritage inscribed in the lists of the 2003 Convention on safeguarding ICH in accordance with nomination forms ICH-01 and ICH-02 [26].

⁵ Interview with a local villager on the UNESCO’s inscription of Giong festival of Phu Dong and Soc temples (Phu Dong Village, Phu Dong Commune, Gia Lam District, Hanoi), October 2015.

⁶ Interview with a local villager of Phu Dong Commune, September 2015.

⁷ Nguyen Thi Thanh, Phu Dong Commune, September 2015.

⁸ The five criteria for inscription: (1) the heritage is recognised as intangible cultural heritage, (2) the inscription can contribute to the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage in general (for the Representative List) and ensure the heritage is practised and transmitted (for the Urgent List), (3) safeguarding measures are proposed with the clarification on the role of the state, community and stakeholders in safeguarding the heritage; (4) the community participates in, and agrees on, the development of heritage nomination in a voluntary

and well-informed manner, (5) the nominated heritage is listed in the country’s inventory.

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