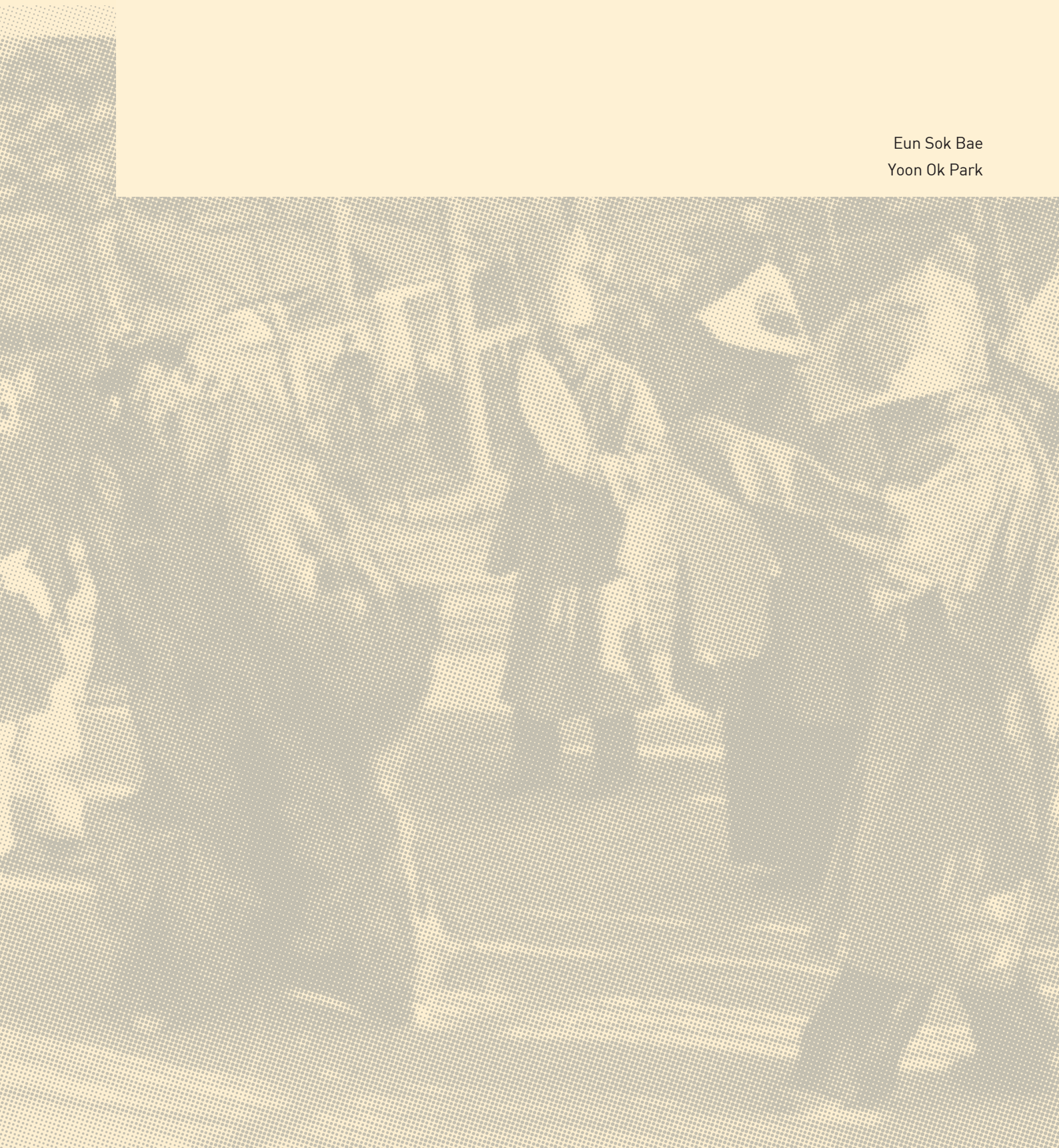


# Sokcho *Saja Noreum*: Transition and Transmission of a North Korean Community's Intangible Cultural Heritage

Eun Sok Bae  
Yoon Ok Park





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● **Eun Sok Bae**

Ph.D, Lecturer in Cultural Contents, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies

● **Yoon Ok Park**

Ph.D, Lecturer in Korea National University of Cultural Heritage

## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore how the transmission of intangible cultural heritage contributes to the identity of a community through *Saja Noreum*, a folk play which has been re-created at Abai Village, Cheongho-dong, Sokcho. The play embraces the memories of the villagers' hometown, Bukcheong, in North Korea, the Korean War, the national division and the loss of their home. People of the diaspora identify themselves as the 'Sokcho people from Bukcheong'. This is also manifested in their changing the name of the play from *Sokcho Bukcheong Saja Noreum* to *Sokcho Saja Noreum*. This transition is analysed in terms of some of the main factors of intangible cultural heritage: self-identification, constant re-creation as a response to the historical and social evolution of the community and groups concerned, the connection of heritage to the identity of its creators and bearers, the authenticity of the heritage, and the interrelationship between intangible cultural heritage and human rights. *Saja Noreum* is a living expression and an important link between South and North Korea.

## Keywords

cultural archetype, diaspora, *Saja Noreum*, identity, Bukcheong, Sokcho, Abai Village, lion dance, collective memories, living human treasures, human rights, North Korea, South Korea, Korean war

## 1. Introduction: discussions about intangible cultural heritage

The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between intangible heritage and cultural identity, investigating aspects of the archetype, conservation and transmission of *Saja Noreum* as intangible cultural heritage. *Saja Noreum* is a folk play or dance drama

with participants wearing lion masks, and has been kept alive by a community of displaced people in Sokcho who have experienced the distress of war and national division. We will first examine the historical context of *Saja Noreum* which developed in the Bukcheong area

in South Hamgyeong Province (now in North Korea) through research into the extensive literature about it. Then, taking a practical, realistic approach, this paper focuses on observing how intangible cultural heritage has been transmitted through community activities, including festivals, and studying how the people of Abai Village in Sokcho remember *Saja Noreum*. Their collective memories and sense of community have been collected and analysed through personal interviews and contacts.

Intangible culture heritage has been relatively neglected in comparison with tangible cultural heritage. Even when UNESCO announced the 1972 *World Heritage Convention*, it was a measure mainly focused on the tangible cultural heritages of architecture and historic sites, such as the Pyramids in Egypt, the Acropolis in Greece, and Machu Picchu in Peru.

Thirty-one years later, the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* was at last adopted. According to this *Convention*, intangible cultural heritage means *the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage* (Article 2.1).<sup>1</sup> Thus, intangible cultural heritage tends to be practised and transmitted orally in daily life. That is why it is sometimes called a living cultural heritage, manifested in a) oral traditions and expressions, b) performing arts, c) social practices, rituals and festive events, d) knowledge and practices, e) traditional craftsmanship (Article 2.2). That is, it encompasses stories, family occasions, speeches and songs, food, anniversaries and folk medicines. These everyday practices can form a very important cultural heritage for the groups and communities concerned, which ultimately becomes a strong base from which to construct a sense of identity. Intangible cultural heritage works as a driving force of cultural diversity, while cultural globalisation spreads at a rapid pace throughout the world and the sense of community is declining due to urbanisation. Nonetheless, intangible cultural heritage can actually be vulnerable to 'safeguarding' where emphasis is laid on the preservation of its archetypes rather than on the revitalisation of its practice. Therefore, it is no wonder that countries of the African, South American and Asian regions, which have been threatened by industrialisation, westernisation and wars, give full support to the *Convention*.

In this circumstance, the most crucial point is the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. It can be achieved *particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalisation of the various aspects of such heritage* (Article 2.3). It is therefore vital to practise intangible cultural heritage in everyday life as it was in the past. This is the way to keep it alive. The focus of intangible cultural heritage moves from documentation, evaluation and listing to measures for the transmission and safeguarding of on-going knowledge (Boylan: 2012). In this regard, the role of the communities and groups concerned comes to the fore, emphasising the process and circumstances rather than the heritage itself. The safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage is not supposed to fix or freeze it as a pure form or archetype, but to practise and perform it in people's everyday lives.<sup>2</sup>

Korea is one of the few countries in the world with a long history of institutions for safeguarding intangible heritage. It has implemented systems and policies for the active protection and conservation of intangible cultural heritage. A representative example is the system of so-called 'Living Human Treasures'<sup>3</sup> as 'Important Intangible Cultural Properties' from the early 1960s. This period witnessed people's traditional way of life rapidly undergo changes under the influence of modernisation, industrialisation, urbanisation and westernisation, and thereby intangible cultural heritage, such as living expressions of traditional arts, rituals and customs based on traditions, were at risk of rapid disappearance. The introduction of this 'Intangible Cultural Properties' system aimed to preserve, cultivate and transmit those aspects of Korean cultural heritage deemed worthy of protection through designation, for fear that traditional culture would be swept away by modernity. Designation of 'Intangible Cultural Properties' in Korea has been implemented through the enactment of the *Cultural Heritage Protection Act* of 1962. In general, its designations are mainly based on noteworthy historical, artistic or academic value among domains of the intangible cultural expressions and practices, such as music, drama, dance, folk games, rites, martial arts, handicrafts and cuisine. A person or an organisation which can conserve and reproduce skills or artistic abilities of the relevant important intangible cultural properties by mastering them in their original state, is designated as a holder, or a holding organisation, of skills and artistic abilities in 'Important Intangible Cultural Properties'. Once designated as a 'Living National Treasure', the relevant person or organisation is entitled to

receive government support. In return, they have the duty to present performances and events to the public, and to transmit the designated properties to the next generation by teaching students.<sup>4</sup>

Intangible culture such as songs, music, dance, drama, cooking, crafts and festivals take forms that can be recorded, but cannot be touched or stored in physical form, so that it can be experienced only through human beings. They are the carriers, transmitters and agents of such elements of culture in the heritage industry. Therefore, performers are bearers and holders of traditions, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett says (2004, p.58). They are, as UNESCO stated, 'Living Human Treasures'.<sup>5</sup> People come and go with the generations, but culture continues to exist. However, the relationship between culture and humans changes because of pressures like globalisation and migration: those pressures change people's ways of understanding their cultures and themselves, and the basic conditions of cultural production and reproduction. *Change is intrinsic to culture and measures intended to preserve, conserve, safeguard, and sustain particular cultural practices are caught between freezing the practices and addressing the inherently processual nature of culture* (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: 2004, pp.58-9).

Fragile, intangible cultural heritage, recreated endlessly in response to changes in social and cultural environments, plays an essential role in helping to enrich cultural diversity. In the case of immigrants or displaced people, for example, an expression of intangible cultural heritage can be reproduced and transmitted to several communities or groups as their own heritage, regardless of geography. They recreate it with the knowledge and forms connected to a place, a memory and an identity. As a form of intangible cultural heritage often begins in a relatively small village, the name of the village is often used for the title of the heritage like *Haman Hwacheon Nongak*,<sup>6</sup> *Gangneung Danoje Festival*,<sup>7</sup> and *Culture of Jeju Haenyeo*.<sup>8</sup> As stated in the *UNESCO Convention* (Article 2.1), intangible cultural heritage is characterised by constant re-creation, and a sense of identity and continuity through communities and groups in the transitional process of transmission, their environment, their interaction with nature and their history.

Until recently, organisations and scholars concerned with heritage, including museums, were accustomed to the conservation policy for tangible cultural heritage.

The general conference of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) held in Seoul in 2004 on the subject of *Museums and Intangible Heritage* has become a touchstone for museum professionals in a variety of fields to begin to seriously pursue cultural relativism in their practices (Yim: 2004). As work on intangible cultural heritage increases with the interest shown by UNESCO and ICOM, research has mostly been carried out from a museological perspective. It is relatively easy to apply the approaches and practices established and developed in museums for the utilisation and preservation of heritage. As observed before, however, it is necessary to realise that measures for the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage have to be different from those for tangible cultural heritage. Now we will explore an element of intangible cultural heritage, *Saja Noreum*, in depth to see how it has survived in the midst of constant social changes.

## 2. 'Abai Village' - a diasporic community in Cheongho-dong, Sokcho and the identity of its people

The term, 'diaspora', originated from the ancient Greek, meaning a scattered population, or the migration of a people away from an ancestral homeland, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Today, the use of this term has expanded to refer *...essentially to any and every nameable population category that is to some extent dispersed in space* (Brubaker: 2005, p.3). One of the distinct characteristics of diaspora is that the group maintains a 'myth' or collective memory of their homeland; they regard their ancestral homeland as their true home, to which they will eventually return, they are committed to the restoration or maintenance of that homeland and they relate *personally or vicariously* to the homeland to a point where it shapes their identity (Safran: 1991, pp.83-4). In Korea, there was a massive increase in the number of displaced people during the Japanese occupation (1910-45), followed by the Korean War (1950-3). With the division between north and south, the war caused great tragedies - casualties, destruction, separated family members, and displacement from home towns. About sixty years have passed since the war and a great number of people still suffer from the pain of separation.

The northernmost city of South Korea, Sokcho, is situated on the coast of the East Sea and has a population of 80,000. Displaced people who defected to South Korea

during the Korean War account for 70% of this town. The original home of most people from this diaspora is Hamgyeong Province. Abai Village in Cheongho-dong is the community of the first generation of refugees. They intended to stay for a short time, but had to settle there as the period of division was prolonged. They thought of the place as a foothold from which to return home after the end of war, and did not put down roots. They stayed, thinking they could go home in one or two, or at most, three months.<sup>9</sup> Although many people came down from the north to the south overland, most of the people who settled down in Cheongho-dong fled there in boats. They expected to be able to sail home again after the war, so somewhere where they could anchor their boats was considered a good place to take up temporary residence. Moreover, people managed to settle in the area with relatively little conflict compared to other places, since the dunes of Lake Chongchoho formed an empty sandy beach. Those who had lived in the same region in North Korea gathered together, giving the community the name 'Abai Village' in Cheongho-dong.

It is not very clear when the term 'Abai Village' started to be used. In dialect, the dictionary definition of *abai* is 'father' or 'grandfather'. This name is used in North Gyeongsang Province, Pyeongan Province and South Hamgyeong Province with a slightly different nuance for each region. In the past, it was mostly people from Bukcheong-gun, South Hamgyeong Province, who used the term *abai*, but now it is what most men call males who are older than themselves. In the memory of displaced people, Hamgyeong Province is remembered as a region with a very unique culture: the regional people are characterised by toughness, meanness and a high regard for education. Before the division of Korea, the North Koreans used to call people from Hamgyeong Province *Hamgyeong-do abai* which referred to those characteristics.<sup>10</sup> The second and third generations of displaced people in Cheongho-dong still have a strong sense of belonging. In general, the sense of belonging to the village comes from regional kinship. In the case of Cheongho-dong, however, it is based on internalised experience and seems to have been learnt from the village community (National Folk Museum: 2014).

For diasporas, memory as intangible heritage, and cultural reproduction seem to be more important than tangible heritage to nourish their sense of identity. That memory tends to be revived in the form of food and

amusements enjoyed before they lost their homes. The displaced people of Sokcho have struggled to survive in a foreign place by cooking favourite foods and recreating the amusements they enjoyed in their hometowns. This helped to heal their pain from living in exile, and would have strengthened a sense of community and belonging. Foods and amusements must have been the driving forces of their lives. This paper focuses on *Saja Noreum*, a lion play which has been inherited and preserved by the diaspora in Sokcho.

### 3. Bukcheong *Saja Noreum*, the intangible cultural heritage of South Hamgyeong Province

Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* is a typical *Saja Noreum* of the east coastal area of the Korean peninsula based in Bukcheong, South Hamgyeong Province. It is one of the traditional seasonal customs performed by farmers at each village in Bukcheong-gun composed of eleven *myeons* (as a subdivision of a *gun*) and three *eups* (towns). It is a masked play, performed at night on the day of the first full moon of the lunar year ('Great Full Moon Festival').

The play is about warding off wicked spirits to ensure a trouble-free year. It begins with *Gilnori* (a kind of exorcism performed on the street) which prays for the peace of the community, and is performed by the troupe going around every corner of the village. When the *tungso* (a six-holed bamboo flute) sounds, all the villagers gather around the players for the ceremony to begin in earnest. They enjoy the lion dance, while relishing food and drink around a bonfire. *Saja Noreum* was performed at dozens of villages in Bukcheong on the same day. This indicates that it was not originally performed by professionals or one troupe of players – but that almost all the village people must have acted as merry-makers.

*Saja Noreum* was commonly performed throughout the whole region of Hamgyeong Province, including Bukcheong, Jeongpyeong, Youngheung, Heungwon in South Hamgyeong Province, and Gyeongseong, Myeongcheong, Musan, Jongseon, and Gyeongwon in North Hamgyeong Province. Of these, the play in Bukcheong was the most famous. Even in the Bukcheong region, *Sajagye*<sup>11</sup> in Bukcheong-eup, *Hakgye* in Gahi-myeon, and *Yeongnakgye* in Yangcheong-myeon were outstanding in the play, and the *Jukpyeong-ri* lion was the most well-known in Bukcheong-eup. In *Jukpyeong-ri*, every small village



**Plate 1**

The lion and all the players.

Source: Seok-ha Song, National Folk Museum of Korea, 1936.

made their own lion for the play, like the Ichon Lion, the Jungchon Lion, the Neomungae Lion, the Dongmunbak Lion, the Hupyeong Lion, the Bungni Lion, and the Dangpo Lion. A contest was held among the lions who flocked into the town from every village. From around 1930, *Saja Noreum* was about serious competition with one another, and a winning team was selected. As the play of Toseong-ri, Cheonghae-myeon won the contest, that team had the most power.<sup>12</sup>

Seok-ha Song (1904-1948) took photographs on 7, February 1936, when he carried out his on-site research at Toseong-ri, Cheonghae-myeon, Bucheong-gun, South Hamgyeong Province (Plate 1).<sup>13</sup> After the performance of *Saja Noreum*, he took a picture to commemorate it with the lion and all the team members in their masks and dance costumes. Seok-ha Song was a scholar who made a decisive contribution to making folklore an independent discipline in Korea. According to the lunar calendar, 7, February 1936, when this picture was taken, actually fell on 15 January. This proves that *Saja Noreum* was performed as an old custom during the Great Full Moon Festival for the well-being of the community.

The performance of Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* needs two people who play the role of a lion wearing a lion costume, and musicians who play various instruments, including a *tungso*, a *jangu* (double-headed drum), a drum and a gong (*jing*). In addition, *yangban* (a nobleman)

and his servant lead the play and narrate the story. It is unusual in that the performance concentrates mainly on the lion dance, rather than on subtleties or satires in the dialogue.

As dozens of villages in Bukcheong made their own lions, the appearance of the lion masks were very different from each other depending upon their origin. Il-chul Kim, who implemented on-site surveys in Bukcheong three times from 1955 to the summer of 1956, classified the types of lion mask into a tiger or cat-shaped lion, a lion with a devil's face, and lion painted with dragon scales.<sup>14</sup> At present, there remain two lion masks in the National Folk Museum of Korea,<sup>15</sup> which were presumably produced in the 1940s. Plates 2 and 3 show their difference in appearance and shape.

The lion mask shown in Plate 2 is 20cms high, 57cms long and 51cms wide. Its face and chin were made of wood and paper separately, and then connected by a joint made of wooden sticks and wire. Upon the centre of the wooden stick, a red-paper tongue is hung through a connecting wire. It is painted red overall, and the eyes, eyebrows, beards and teeth were drawn with different colours. This is thought to be one of the cat or tiger-like masks described in Il-chul Kim's report. Plate 3 is a lion mask 50.2cms in length and 62.5cms in width. Three wavy lines are drawn as wrinkles with ink, three and four gold foils are attached to the red forehead vertically and horizontally, and teeth



**Plate 2**  
A tiger or cat shaped lion mask.  
Source: National Folk Museum of Korea, 1940.



**Plate 3**  
A devil-faced lion mask.  
Source: National Folk Museum of Korea, 1940.

are drawn evenly beneath the straight-lined mouth. This appears to be one of the devil-faced lion masks. Considering that these two lion masks are very different in appearance and shape, it may be surmised that each village used a quite unique lion mask.

Going through the Korean War and its subsequent division between North and South, Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* suffered a crisis in its transmission. It has been passed down very differently in two regions. First, the play in North Korea is used as a tool to promote aspects of the political system. The current play has been restored after being suspended in the late 1950s, and it is conducted as a form of a competition between the performers of each village from the day after Lunar New Year's Day until the first full moon day. The play is acknowledged as national cultural heritage, but is highly ideological. It is much valued there because it has a strong plot, with the story disclosing and mocking corruption, incompetence and the exploitation of feudal overlords. Its dynamic story acidly exposes the avarice and immorality of the ruling class of *yangban* by means of a mask dance and derisory jokes. It is also thought that the people's great desire for a bumper year is included in Bukcheong *Saja Noreum*. However, it can be argued that it is only the plot that has been passed down by word of mouth; its original text has not been transmitted, and its story reflects a sense of hierarchy and expresses a struggle for consciousness.<sup>16</sup> As the Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* in North Korea has degenerated into a vehicle of political propaganda, it has lost not only its original form but also its pure purpose as one of the traditional seasonal customs that prays for the

well-being of a community and solid friendships among the members.

In South Korea, meanwhile, the 'Buckcheong *Saja Noreum* Preservation Society' was launched in August 1960, led by displaced people from Buckcheong who had defected from North Korea. The performances were mainly initiated by Yeong-chun Yoon, Hu-seop Ma, Hee-su Ma, Su-seok Kim, Dong-sul Oh, Tae-seon Dong, In-seop Lee, Keunhwaseon Lee, Jung-sik Jeon and Seong-yeong Dong. They have participated in the National Folk Arts Contest every year since 1965. Eventually, Bukcheong *Saja Noreum*, a traditional seasonal custom which comforted displaced people from Buckcheong and eased their homesickness, was designated 'Important Intangible Cultural Property No. 15' in 1967.<sup>17</sup> Subsequently, the people who could perform the play were also designated as its official transmitters. At present, as the Society is based in the capital city in South Korea, their activities focus on the stage show of the play without much involvement of the communities and groups concerned, thereby decreasing any real sense of community.

#### 4. From Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* to Sokcho Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* and then Sokcho *Saja Noreum*

##### 1) *Intangible cultural heritage of Sokcho Bukcheong Saja Noreum embodying the identity and continuity of the first generation of displaced people*



**Plate 4**  
Scene of Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* performed at Sokcho in 1957.  
Source: Sokcho Cultural Center.

Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* in Sokcho was started by the war refugees from South Hamgyeong Province after the Korean War. It was performed at Sokcho on the first full moon day by the lunar calendar in 1957 (Plate 4). At that time, under the leadership of Su-seok Kim and a *tungso* master, Ha-ryun Kim, it was for all members of the diaspora living at Cheongho-dong who had ever watched the play or actually performed in it while living in South Hamgyeong Province. The 1957 performers included Su-seok Kim as the lion (front), Dong-sul Oh (rear), Dong-wook Lee as the *yangban*, Gye-keon Yang as the servant, Ms Park as a dancer who performed a *Sadang* dance,<sup>18</sup> Nam-woo Jang as a doctor, Bong-su Kim as a dancer who performed a Buddhist dance, Won-sa Kim as a bachelor, Yu-deuk Ma as a hunchback, Hyo-hwan Kim as a goblin, and Jong-ho Lee as a Chinaman. In addition, there were musicians like Mu-seong Byeon (*tungso*), Jin-hwan Park (*tungso*), Jae-seop Lee (*tungso*), Ha-ryun Kim (*tungso*), Bang-seop Ma (drum), Jong-jun Lee (gong) and Gyeom Shin (*janggu*).

During the war, it is said that half of the Bukcheong residents (140,000 out of 280,000) defected to South Korea, and of these, 300-400 households from Bukcheong settled in Sokcho. There, thirty-six persons from Bukcheong founded the Bukcheong Provincial Office and organised the Bukcheong Fellow Provincials Friendship Gye (society) on May 2, 1959. The Gye was formed for the purpose of friendship, good will and co-operation among the members. It was led mostly by the members who performed Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* at that time. The Gye leader was Su-seok Kim who played a central role in their

activities as the oldest member among the performers. With departments for entertainment, funerals and ritual, the Gye held a monthly meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> of every month, and performed the play and funeral ceremonies. They devoted their efforts to restoring the archetype of Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* while socialising with other displaced people in Seoul and Sokcho. Su-seok Kim was designated 'Holder of Craft and Performance Traditions No. 84' in 1970 as the front of the lion. Even afterwards, when he lived in Sokcho, Su-seok Kim continued to promote *Saja Noreum*. Since the 1970s, however, *Saja Noreum* in Sokcho has shown signs of a gradual decline, though Su-seok Kim taught the students of the Dong-U Technical College in Sokcho *Saja Noreum* to put on a performance at a festival in 1982. The activities for its transmission eventually ceased in September 1982, with a final performance in the Grand Saemaeul Art Festival for Welcoming Autumn.

After a while, on the first full moon day in 1988, about 10 people from Bukcheong attempted to restore Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* in Sokcho, but it was far from a fully-fledged restoration. Nevertheless, they expressed a will for its transmission, performing it by playing *tungso* on the day before the first full moon day.<sup>19</sup> Then, the Sokcho Cultural Center started a full-scale survey on *Saja Noreum* conducted at Sokcho since 1991. As a substantial survey through in-depth interviews, this allowed researchers to find the rules and the list of the Bukcheong Fellow Provincials Friendship Gye members. It confirmed that the members were practical transmitters of Bukcheong *Saja Noreum*. During the survey, there was an opportunity to discover the first Bukcheong *Sajatal* (lion mask) manufactured immediately after they defected to South Korea, and to take its photograph at the house of old Mr Ha-ryun Kim.<sup>20</sup>

What then does Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* mean to the displaced people of Sokcho who are eager to restore and transmit it to the next generation? A poem titled 'Sokcho' written by a poet, Jae-soon Che, part of the first-generation diaspora, might answer the question. The following is part of her poem:

*We are still refugees.*

*Earnestly wishing that we could imposingly walk up  
there by removing barbed wire,  
and that the day will come soon, Bukcheong Saja(s)*



*which hardly ever fall asleep as they live longer,  
are waiting for the winter of the loss of hometown.*<sup>21</sup>

As expressed in the poem, Bukcheong *Saja* is not only an emotional comfort for the displaced, but also a symbol of their identity. In other words, they believe that they 'become themselves' through the transmission of the intangible cultural heritage of Bukcheong *Saja Noreum*, and revive their sense of community. What about the second generation of displaced people? This will be discussed in the next section.

## **2) Sokcho *Saja Noreum*, an intangible cultural heritage which embodies the identity of the second-generation of displaced people**

The current *Saja Noreum* of Sokcho forms a community culture with the elderly and professional artists teaching it to the local young people. They endeavour to reproduce the tradition of *Saja Noreum* performed at Sokcho since the 1957 premiere, through collecting memories and old pictures from displaced people. 2005 marked the initiation of the restoration work on *Saja Noreum* with the Sokcho Cultural Center. They set about archiving materials on the play as an intangible cultural property, collecting memories mainly from the performers who enacted the premiere at Sokcho. In addition, a local museum joined in the task of transmitting the diasporic culture with exhibits and an educational programme. Opened in 2005 along with the Displaced Civilians' Folk Village, the Sokcho Museum presents the diasporic culture represented by 'Abai Village' as well as the indigenous local culture associated with mountains and fishing. In particular, masks of the lion and human characters appearing in Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* are also exhibited. The museum couples an opportunity to

enjoy the performance of Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* with educational programmes which teach how to perform the play and to make lion masks, so as to experience the diaspora's folk art. Furthermore, the museum helps preserve the nearly-extinct folklore of North Korea and hand it down to future generations through a programme of visiting the diaspora community and experiencing their way of life.

Since 2005, local artists and residents have gathered to experience Sokcho Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* led by the South Hamgyeong Province Youth Group made up of members of the second-generation of displaced people in Sokcho. They have come to the fore in the village community while learning how to perform the play and practising it. They have acted as guides in all sorts of local festivals, performing the play as a representative local traditional performance.<sup>22</sup> In the end, they created 'The Sokcho *Saja Noreum* Preservation Society' in 2013 for the purpose of the collection, discovery, preservation, transmission, exchange and creative development of the intangible cultural heritage of their ancestors. This strengthens the solidarity of the society devoted to revitalising their heritage. They provide educational programmes with classes in *tungso*, making feasts and the lion dance. They target not only all the students of the Cheongho Elementary School but also the general public. Seong-ha Kim, who has been in charge as the president of the Society since its foundation, is a second-generation member of the diaspora who grew up at 'Abai Village' in Cheongho-dong. He said that he valued the development of Sokcho's own lion play while discovering, preserving and succeeding to the archetype of Bukcheong *Saja Noreum*.<sup>23</sup> The society takes a leading role in praying for



**Plate 5**  
Visiting houses on the first full moon day in 2016.  
Source: In-seop Kim.



**Plate 6**  
*Saja Noreum* at the 2017 Sokcho Diasporic Cultural Festival.  
 Source: Eun Sok Bae.

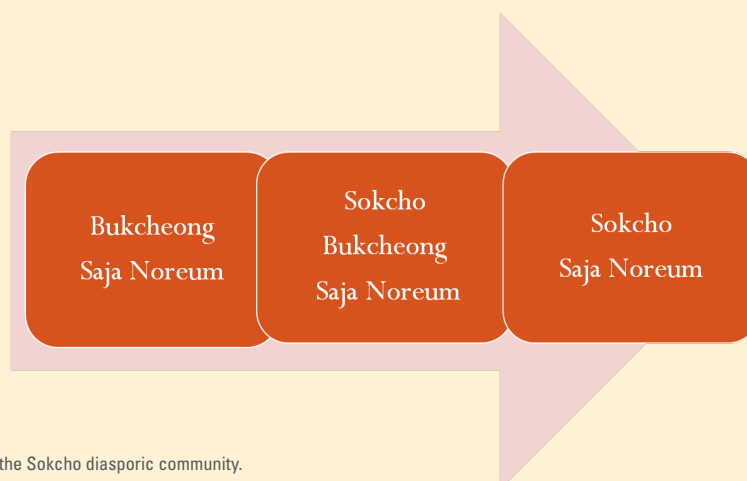
peace, visiting houses in Cheongho-dong and traditional markets on the first full moon day every year (Plate 5).

Indeed, it was invited to the 'Cultural Festival for Diasporas' held in June 2017 to perform the version of Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* rooted in Sokcho, namely, Sokcho *Saja Noreum*, while interacting with audiences (Plate 6).

The interesting thing is that the Sokcho *Saja Noreum* Preservation Society formed by members of the second-generation diaspora wants it to be 'Sokcho' *Saja Noreum* rather than 'Bukcheong' *Saja Noreum*. All this while, the Society was managed under the leadership of a member of the first-generation diaspora in the name of 'Sokcho

Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* Preservation Society'. Now, the second-generation in charge of the Society does not want it to be called by that name anymore. They want to be called 'Sokcho *Saja Noreum* Preservation Society', removing 'Bukcheong' from the title. According to Seong-ha Kim, the president of the Society, this Society is referred to by two different titles. He says, *The elderly* (the first generation of the displaced) *do not want to omit 'Bukcheong' from Bukcheong Saja Noreum. So we call the lion dance Sokcho Bukcheong Saja Noreum in front of them. However, we* (the second generation) *have named it as Sokcho Saja Noreum as our group is called the Sokcho Saja Noreum Preservation Society. We are now going to apply for the designation of Gangwon Province intangible cultural property under the title of Sokcho Saja Noreum.*<sup>24</sup> This is linked with the issue of identity: the first-generation perceive themselves as Bukcheong people with a hometown in Bukcheong, by defining themselves as Bukcheong *Saja*, whereas their children see themselves as Sokcho people. (Figure 1)

Initially, when they had the premiere of the play longing for their hometown of Bukcheong, people called it 'Bukcheong *Saja Noreum*'. While they settled in Sokcho, as years went by it was called 'Sokcho Bukcheong *Saja Noreum*'. The second generation obstinately names it 'Sokcho *Saja Noreum*' even though they acknowledge Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* as the archetype of *Saja Noreum*, which shows them that Sokcho *Saja Noreum* is an inheritance from Bukcheong. They maintain its archetype in their play, although at the same time adding some new content which reflects the social conditions of the times.



**Figure 1**  
 Name changes of *Saja Noreum* in the Sokcho diasporic community.

This aspect could be seen as re-creation manifested in the process of transmitting intangible cultural heritage to the next generations.

At present, the Sokcho *Saja Noreum* Preservation Society and the Sokcho Cultural Center are trying to get Sokcho *Saja Noreum* listed as a 'Gangwon-do Intangible Cultural Property'.<sup>25</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

As examined above, intangible cultural heritage involves on-going living expressions. As such, it is not ideal to standardise it in a fixed form. The institutionalisation of intangible cultural heritage brings a high risk of its fossilisation, just like a showcase for tangible cultural heritage. In particular, the 'Living Human Treasure' system in Korea sustained by the holders, apprentices and scholarship students is limited to practising it through teaching/learning between generations in a community. On the premise that intangible cultural heritage may be practised in daily life, it is a 'living' cultural heritage performed and enjoyed by the members of the community. As a public event, however, a stage performance in front of an audience is not necessarily the way to preserve intangible cultural heritage, as it is isolated from the community concerned.

Nevertheless, intangible cultural heritage will have been protected and conserved thanks to the system to some degree. It is timely to discuss how to find common ground about the preservation of archetypes in the sense that heritage means 'inherited'. The main factors of intangible cultural heritage are expressed by a) 'self-identification', an essential element in the cultural identity of creators and bearers of cultural heritage, b) constant re-creation as a response to the historical and social evolution of the communities and groups concerned, c) the connection of the heritage with the identity of its creators and bearers, d) the authenticity of the heritage, and e) the interrelationship between intangible cultural heritage and human rights (Lenzerini: 2011). Applying this logic to Sokcho *Saja Noreum*, the relationship between intangible heritage and a sense of identity in the community concerned will be explored, coupled with aspects of its archetype, preservation and transmission.

Firstly, seen from the perspective of self-identification, the community as creators and bearers of their cultural

heritage keeps *Saja Noreum* alive by discovering, preserving and succeeding to the archetype of Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* restored by the first generation of members of the diaspora, although the name of 'Bukcheong' is not used any more. They go around Cheongho-dong village wishing for blessings for every family and the region, following the tradition on the first full moon day of the year. They maintain the living heritage in people's lives by re-creating the archetype of *Saja Noreum* to fulfil its original purpose. Their dancing signifies that they identify themselves as the descendants of the Bukcheong people. In addition, it shows that they, as offspring of displaced people, are re-establishing their identity with Sokcho which at present is their hometown.

Secondly, in terms of the constant recreation of the historical, social evolution of the communities and groups concerned, we see that *Saja Noreum* was created and re-created as several village communities held contests, and it evolved in response to historical and social environments. Individual communities made and named their own lions. Practising the *Saja Noreum* and participating in the play for themselves helps the participants establish and affirm their own identities, keeping a sense of continuity by passing the tradition down to the younger generation. Based on such a tradition, the second generation settled in Sokcho calls Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* 'Sokcho *Saja Noreum*'. They re-create richer stories than the earlier generations as they are invited to give performances in various festivals and events in the Sokcho area.


Thirdly, in connection with identity, Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* was performed by refugees from Bukcheong soon after the Korean War. They began this play without any expectation that the then situation of national division would continue until today. Through this play, they perhaps intended to alleviate the hardships they were suffering, living away from home in a tragic situation. Dealing with their homesickness together, they shared the pain of the loss of their hometown and re-established their identity in an unfamiliar land. This is important, proving that the intangible cultural heritage of *Saja Noreum* embodies the cultural identity of the community. Today, the Sokcho *Saja Noreum* Preservation Society manifests a sense of community.

Fourthly, in order to examine the authenticity of heritage, it is necessary to examine the external element of the Korean War and national division again.



*Saja Noreum* reveals a huge difference between North and South. In North Korea, the cultural archetype has degenerated. The play tells the story of a worker who criticises the *yangban* (upper) class, which reflects the political system in the North. On the contrary, the people of the diaspora have managed to incorporate Bukcheong *Saja Noreum* into their own culture on their own volition in terms of human rights, i.e. their cultural rights in South Korea. In particular, Sokcho *Saja Noreum* illuminates the aspect of a living expression practised in the community, directly associated with a sense of place. In this respect, it could be considered an authentic expression of intangible cultural heritage.

The last point is to reflect on the interrelationship between intangible cultural heritage and human rights. The sustainability of intangible cultural heritage might be attributed to people's desire for survival in harsh circumstances. Unlike tangible cultural heritage of beautiful and outstanding products usually enjoyed by the upper class, intangible cultural heritage as 'living expressions' has been carried on in the life of ordinary people who were hardly ever recorded in history. They pass down and transmit their inheritance, freely practising it in their daily lives. This is probably the most important aspect of intangible cultural heritage. From the viewpoint of human rights, it is evident that the descendants of the diaspora in Sokcho exercise not only the right to receive quality education and training which respects their own cultural identity, but also the right to develop their unique cultural practices, while expressing themselves and participating in the cultural life of their own choice.

As examined through Sokcho *Saja Noreum*, constant change is intrinsic to intangible cultural heritage. It is crucial to apply a more evolved approach to conserving and safeguarding such intangible cultural heritage. Special attention should be paid to how the heritage as living expression can be made to permeate the life of the communities and groups concerned. For this, co-operative efforts are required among the public, the government and academics. In the case of Sokcho *Saja Noreum*, the Sokcho Cultural Center, the Sokcho Museum, and above all, the concern and participation of the community and groups directly related to the culture, are urgently needed. A cultural expression is a living organism. It will only survive by adapting to constant change. To today's Koreans, living in the period of national division, the significance of Sokcho *Saja Noreum* lies in the connection of ancestors with descendants, as well as in an important link between the South and the North in Korea. 

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, 2003. [http://heritage.unesco.or.kr/ich/ich\\_intro/ich\\_convention/](http://heritage.unesco.or.kr/ich/ich_intro/ich_convention/) [accessed: 22 Nov. 2017]
- 2 UNESCO, *Identifying and inventorying Intangible Cultural Heritage*, <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/01856-EN.pdf>
- 3 A 'Living National Treasure' (Living Human Treasure) is an informal term for those individuals certified as holders of Important Intangible Cultural Properties designated as national treasures. They have the ability to make or perform one of 108 aspects of Korean traditional culture officially designated Important Intangible Cultural Properties. [Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, [http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Index?contents\\_id=E0072620](http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Index?contents_id=E0072620) [accessed: 29 October 2017]]
- 4 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mofa.go.kr/webmodule/htsboard/template/read/engreadboard.jsp?typeID=12&boardid=313&seqno=305621> [accessed: 29 October 2017]
- 5 UNESCO, *Guidelines for the Establishment of National "Living Human Treasures" Systems*. <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/00031-EN.pdf>
- 6 *Haman Hwacheon Nongak* is farm music with *Jisinbapgi* (a collective event to bring new things to the community and an event to pray for personal desires and for the prosperity of farming) which is transmitted mainly in Hwacheon-ri, Chilbuk-myeon, Haman-gun, South Gyeongsang Province. It was designated 'Intangible Cultural Property of South Gyeongsang Province No. 13' in 1991.
- 7 Gangneung *Danoje* Festival is a local ceremony in Gangneung, Gangwon Province, held on the fifth day of the fifth month of the year of the lunar calendar. It was designated a 'Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity' by UNESCO in 2005.
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- 17 Kyung Wook Jeon, 1996. *Bukcheong Saja Noreum Transmission Text*. Seoul: Taehak-sa: p.129.
- 18 A dance in which a dancer sings while dancing.
- 19 Interview with In-seop Kim, executive secretary of the Sokcho Cultural Center (6 April 2017).
- 20 Jung Young Jang, op cit., pp. 48-9
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