



UNESCO Chair

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University of Rome

Intangible Cultural Heritage
and Comparative Law



Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Singapore

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About Singapore

- Small and densely populated city-state with a multi-cultural society of 5.69 million.
- Main ethnic groups: Chinese, Malays, Indians; many other minorities.
- Singapore is one of the most religiously-diverse societies in the world:
 - The Inter-Religious Organization in Singapore officially recognises ten different religions that are present in the country.



Why is ICH important to Singapore



Intangible cultural heritage provides a continuous link between the past, present and future.



Encourages cultural understanding; contributes to social cohesion.

Diversity of ICH in Singapore



Lion Dance



Theemithi



Malay Weddings



Jinkli Nona Song and Branyo Dance



Peranakan Cuisine



Orchid Cultivation

About the National Heritage Board (NHB)



NHB – an agency under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth; established by an Act of Parliament.

National agency for heritage; oversees all cultural and heritage policies and matters, including preservation of monuments, safeguarding of ICH and promoting awareness of heritage in general.



National Heritage Board Act

Formed in 1993, with the establishment of the National Heritage Board Act (Chapter 196A)

“6. The functions of the Board shall be:

(a) to explore and present the **heritage and nationhood** of the people of Singapore in the context of their **ancestral cultures**, their links with **South-East Asia, Asia and the world** through the collection, preservation, interpretation and display of objects and records;

→ ***Custodian of Singapore’s Heritage***

(b) to promote **public awareness, appreciation and understanding** of the arts, culture and heritage, both by means of the Board’s collections and by such other means as it considers appropriate;

→ ***Educator: telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience, imparting the Singapore spirit***

(d) to **advise the Government** in respect of matters relating to the **national heritage of Singapore...**”

→ ***Advisor to government: policies on heritage sites, national museums, national collection***

National Heritage Board Act

Section 7 of Act: Powers of Board

(b) To collect, classify, preserve and display objects and records relevant to its functions;

(d) To undertake or sponsor research and investigation relevant to its functions;

(g) To establish liaison with other museums, universities and other institutions to secure maximum collaborations of all activities relevant to its functions;

(j) To extent grants, contributions or loans to any person or organisation connected with the national heritage of Singapore;

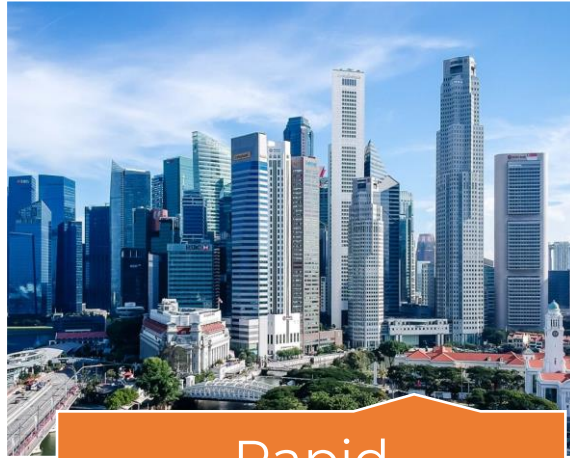
(m) to provide or undertake publicity in any form;

Etc....

National Heritage Board Act

- No explicit mention of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the Act.
 - NHB Act was passed in 1993, before the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH
- Heritage is defined or interpreted very broadly
 - Potentially includes all forms of culture and heritage, including historic buildings, archaeology, objects, and intangible cultural heritage.
- Separate “Preservation of Monuments Act”
 - Legislations concerning National Monuments, including gazette, establishing legal guidelines for works permitted at National Monuments, grants for restoration of National Monuments, etc.
 - Concerns only National Monuments; does not include Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Challenges in Safeguarding of ICH



Rapid
Urbanisation



Globalisation &
Imports



New Technology



Lifestyle changes



Aging Population



Lack of
Transmission

Rapid Urbanisation



The Marina Bay area and Central Business District, 2000 and 2015.

Source: <https://graphics.straitstimes.com/STI/STIMEDIA/Interactives/2018/08/singapore-slider-past-and-present/index.html>

Rapid Urbanisation



Rochor Canal, at the junction of Selegie, Bukit Timah and Serangoon Roads
1979 & 2015

Source: <https://graphics.straitstimes.com/STI/STIMEDIA/Interactives/2018/08/singapore-slider-past-and-present/index.html>

Lack of Transmission



Mr Jimm Wong, one of the last traditional paper lantern painter in Singapore



Mr Henry Ng, the last traditional lion head craftsman in Singapore

“New” versus “Old”



- Concerns that new citizens or migrant communities may bring their own cultures, diluting the “existing” cultures.
- Questions arise: When does a cultural practise become “localised”?
- People want to keep things “authentic”, in the same way that it is practiced today. But this is against the notion of Intangible Cultural Heritage
- Living heritage changes over time – evolution, adaptation, fusion, emergence, death & disappearance.

Singapore Heritage Plan (2018 – 2022)

- First comprehensive heritage master plan for Singapore
- Sets our broad strategies and initiatives from 2018 to 2022 and beyond, including ICH policies and initiatives
- Developed in consultation with Singaporeans



Singapore Heritage Plan (2018 – 2022)



Singapore Heritage Plan (2018 – 2022)



OUR VISION

Our rich and multicultural heritage anchors our Singaporean identity.

We aspire to create a cohesive society where we value and engage with our heritage.

This makes us proud of our nation and our connections to the world, and takes us confidently into the future.

Key words:

Multicultural; cohesive society; connections; identity.

Singapore Heritage Plan (2018 – 2022)



OUR PLACES

Our Places refer to Singapore's historic buildings, structures, sites, landscapes and precincts.



OUR CULTURES

Our Cultures cover Singapore's intangible cultural heritage, which comprises the traditions, rituals, crafts, expressions, knowledge and skills that we practise and pass on from generation to generation.



OUR TREASURES

Our Treasures refer to over 200,000 artworks and artefacts in our National Collection, and the museums and institutions which house these objects.



OUR COMMUNITIES

Our Communities encompass the groups and individuals who protect, promote and celebrate Singapore's heritage.

Singapore Heritage Plan (2018 – 2022)

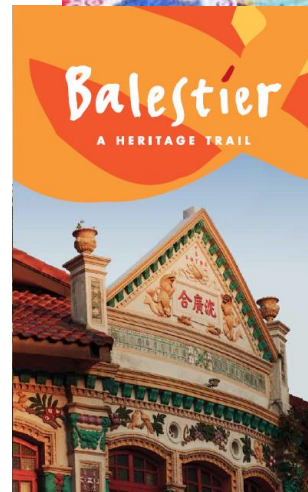
OUR CULTURES

- A** Ratify the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- B** Develop an intangible cultural heritage inventory by 2019 to create greater public awareness and understanding of our diverse intangible cultural heritage.
- C** Effect legislative changes to the NHB Act to better safeguard and promote Singapore's intangible cultural heritage.
- D** Enhance efforts to promote our intangible cultural heritage, such as by leveraging our festivals, exhibitions and programmes.
- E** Introduce a recognition scheme for practitioners of intangible cultural heritage by 2019.
- F** Strengthen research and documentation of intangible cultural heritage.
- G** Nominate a Singapore intangible cultural heritage element for UNESCO's Representative List.



Overview of Safeguarding Efforts

- ICH Inventory
- Promoting Awareness
- Supporting Practitioners & Heritage Businesses
- Partnering Communities



Inventory of ICH

<https://www.roots.gov.sg/ich-landing>

- Launched in 2018, with **101 ICH elements** currently
- Elements identified with input from the community and nationwide survey
- Updated once a year; with the community consulted on information about the ICH practices; views of communities are featured in the inventory
- Each article contains content on the history, current practices, and community involved in each ICH element – including photo and video documentation

Making of Wood-Fired Pottery

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Traditional Craftsmanship Social Practices, Rituals and Festive Events



Watch: **Dikir Barat**



Inventory of ICH

<https://www.roots.gov.sg/ich-landing>

☰ ROOTS 🔍

Intangible Cultural Heritage

The inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants. There are six Intangible Cultural Heritage categories.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE](#)



Social Practices, Rituals and Festive Events



Knowledge and Practices concerning Nature and Universe



Oral Traditions and Expressions



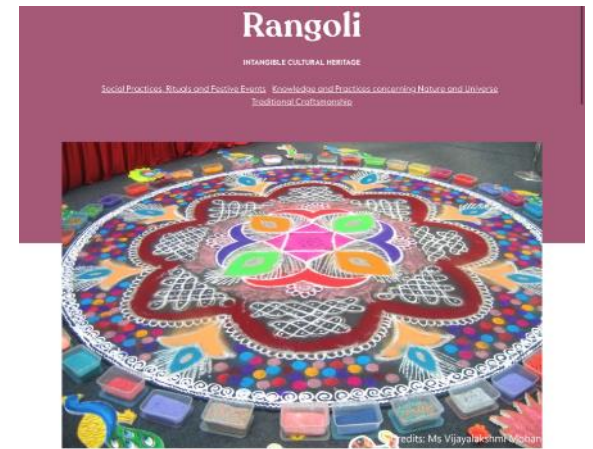
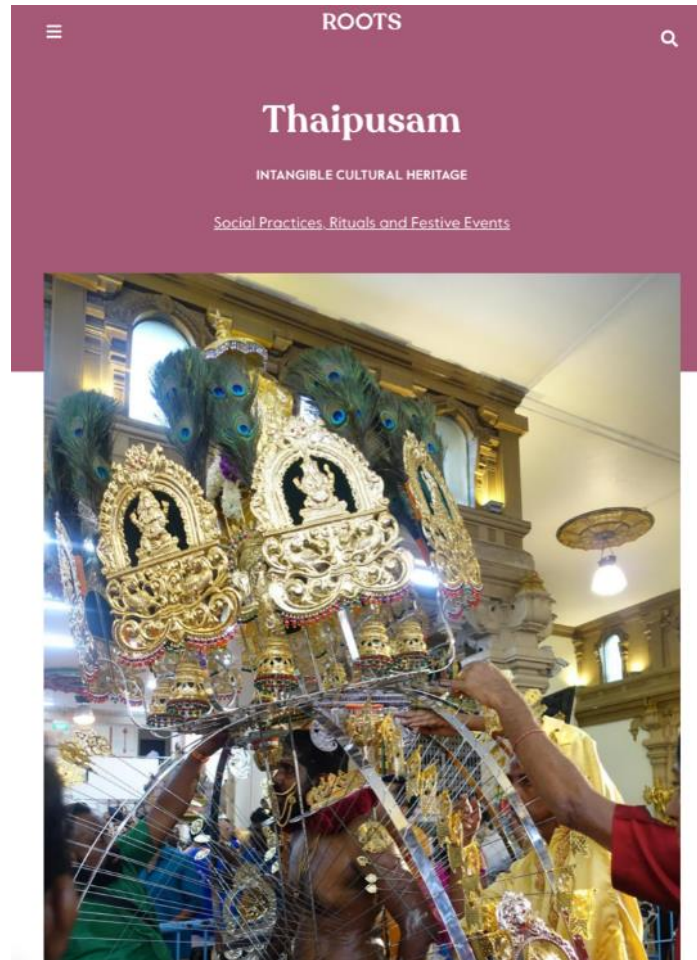
Traditional Craftsmanship



Food Heritage



Performing Arts



Introduction Rangoli

Rangoli, which means "an array of colours" in Sanskrit, is a traditional Indian art form dating back some 5,000 years to the pre-Aryan period. It is known as kolam in Tamil.

[Read more...](#)



Introduction Yusheng and Lo Hei

Lo hei 捞起 (Cantonese for "tossing up") refers to the communal tossing of yusheng 鱼生, a dish comprising fish slices, vegetables, spices and condiments. Traditionally, the practice was commonly observed on Renri 人日, the seventh day of the first lunar month. Today, people can

Inventory of ICH



Oral traditions about the origins of the island and its links to turtles



Devotees on a pilgrimage to the island

- Pilgrimage to Kusu Island, listed on inventory “Social Practices, Rituals and Festivals”
- Kusu Island is an offshore island located southwest of Singapore.
- Variations on the origins of the island. Local legends about two holy men, a Chinese and a Malay who went on pilgrimage to the island, fell ill and prayers were answered. And hence their return regularly to give thanksgiving.
- Annual pilgrimage involving worship at the island’s Chinese temple and Malay keramat; fusion of cultures.

Inventory of ICH



Typical scene at a hawker centre



A hawker preparing a dish at his stall

- Hawker Culture – an integral part of everyday life in Singapore, involving hawkers who prepare hawker food and people who dine and mingle at hawker centres.
- Hawker Centres – community dining rooms where people from diverse age groups, genders, ethnicities and religions gather and interact over food.
- Inscribed on UNESCO Representative List of ICH of Humanity in December 2020

Promoting Awareness



A Wayang Wong (traditional Javanese theatre) performance within the historical precinct of Kampong Gelam



A Malay percussion performance in Kampong Gelam

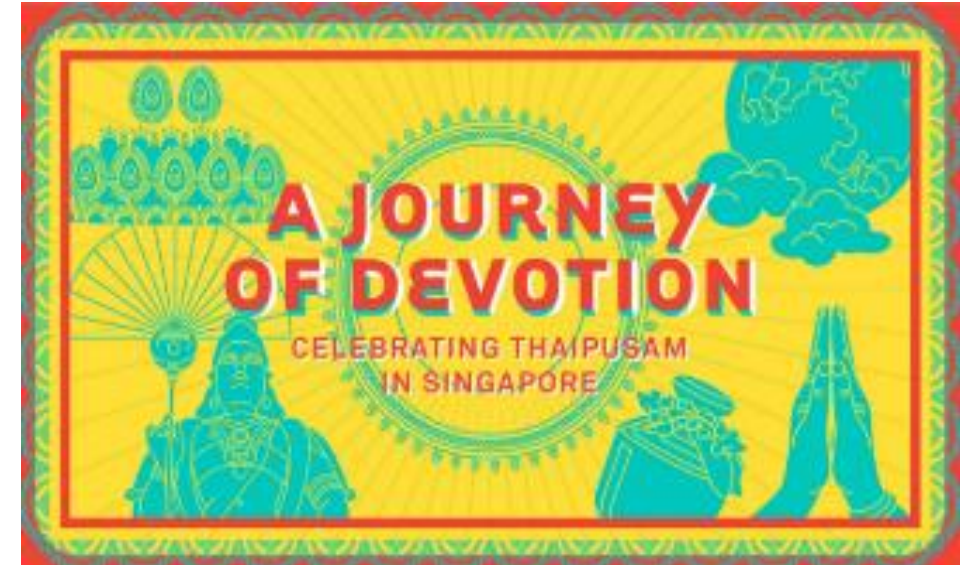
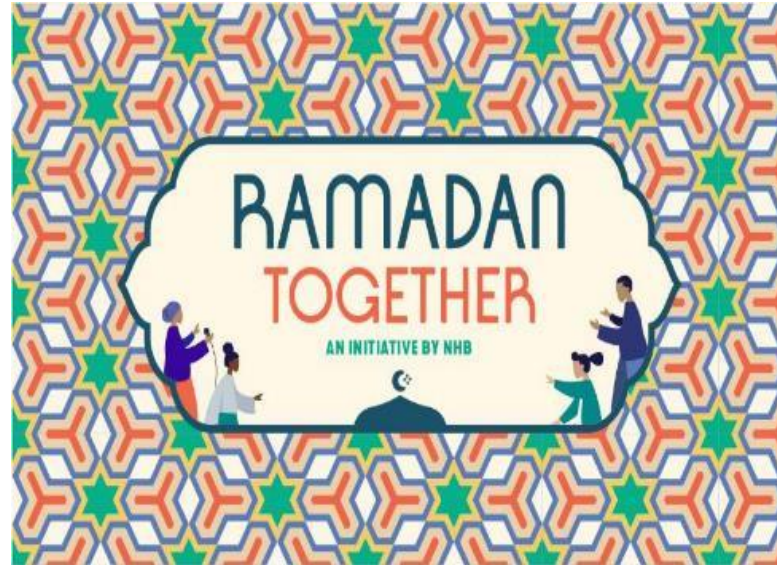
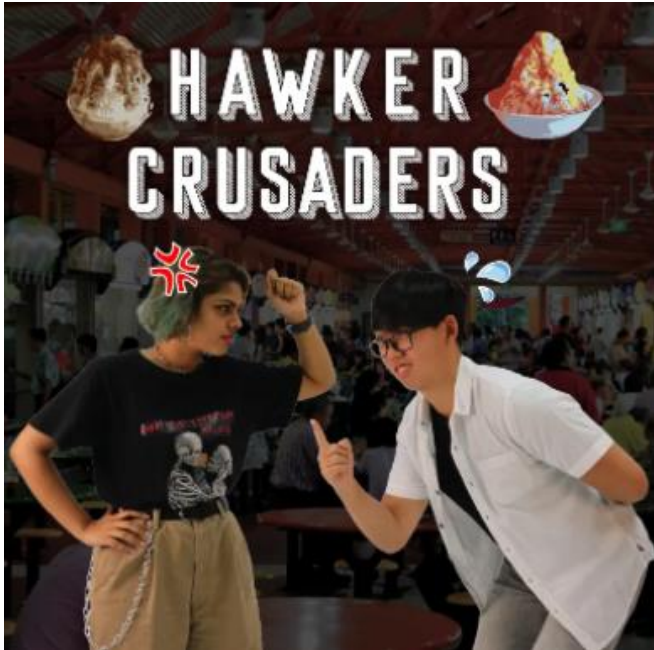
- Range of programmes including exhibitions, public programmes, education programmes, annual Singapore Heritage Festival, etc.
- Reaching out to different audiences: Students, general public, etc.
- Promotes cultural understanding and appreciation of diverse forms of ICH

Promoting Awareness



- Use of social media to promote awareness of ICH (including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc)

Promoting Awareness



Digital Campaigns

Enabling communities to connect; foster intercultural awareness and understanding; and reach out to the digitally-savvy youth communities.



Stewards of ICH Award & Grant

- Recognises practitioners and organisations dedicated to the practice and transmission of ICH to the wider community and to future generations of practitioners
- Supports ground-up initiatives by the Stewards via a project grant of up to \$20,000



Craft X Design

- Programme pairs craft practitioners with designers, to create new product inspired by traditional crafts and heritage.
- Programme aims to:
 - Raise public awareness and appreciation of local traditional crafts
 - Explore how traditional crafts can be revitalized to ensure their long-term sustainability and commercial viability



Organisation Transformation Grant (OTG)

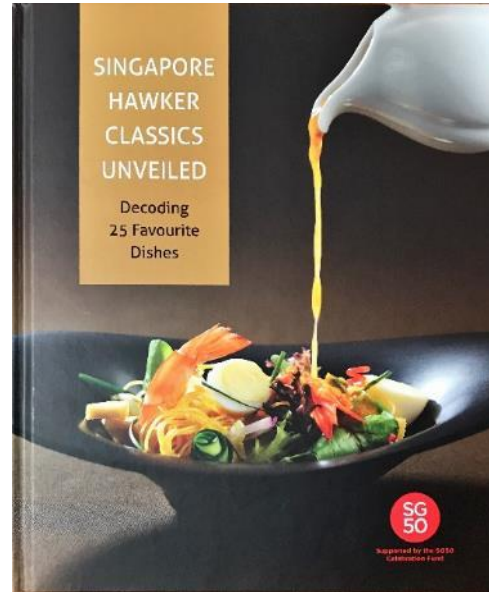
- New grant scheme introduced in 2021 during COVID-19 pandemic
- Provides up to \$40,000 to support cultural practitioners and businesses to
 - Transform and sustain their practices;
 - Evolve with changing economic conditions, consumer preferences, etc.
- Grants can be used to support documentation, promotional efforts, developing new products and designs, etc



Partnering Communities

Heritage Project Grants –

Financial support for community projects, including events, publications, exhibitions, etc



*Left: Publication on hawker culture & food heritage
Right: Event on “xinyao”, a form of oral tradition & expressions*

Heritage Research Grants

Financial support for universities & non-government organisations to conduct research projects and fieldwork



Nine Emperor Gods Festival – a research project supported by grants

Partnering Communities



Members of Chetti Melaka community



Kreta Ayer Community Gallery

- Partnering communities to co-create exhibitions and programmes
- Indian Heritage Centre Singapore – Chetti Melaka Exhibition: featured information, personal accounts and ICH-related items contributed by community members.
- Kreta Ayer Community Gallery – features communities' contributions in the exhibitions and public programmes

Singapore Heritage Plan 2.0 (2023-2027)



- Ongoing efforts to develop next version of Heritage Plan
- Involves consultation with public, stakeholders, non-government organisations
- Next 5-year masterplan to promote and safeguard heritage in Singapore, including both tangible and intangible cultural heritage

Conclusion



- Rapid urbanisation and accelerated rate of change are trends affecting many global cities, and poses challenges to the continual transmission of ICH.
- Cities encourage the exchange of commerce, trade, ideas and cultures, leading to evolution and possible fusion of cultures.
- ICH can encourage social interaction and cultural understanding in cities, where diverse communities live and work.
- Opportunities to involve communities, individuals and experts.

THANK YOU