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SURVIVING TRADITIONS PROJECT · ISTR 2026 LISBON

Surviving Traditions: An Archaeology of the Senses

생존전통: 감각의 고고학

Embodied Memory Transmission in Jeju, Ryukyu/Okinawa, and Taiwan Indigenous Communities
A comparative study of how intangible cultural heritage communities reorganize embodied knowledge to survive

RESEARCH QUESTION

How have intangible cultural heritage communities survived — reorganizing bodily knowledge and sensory memory — through modernization, colonial rule, state institutions, heritage regimes, tourism, and generational change?

◉ RATIONALE & BACKGROUND

The concern this research began with

This research began with a prior study of the relational value of social enterprises on Jeju Island. In the process, we found that third-sector organizations and traditional arts communities are alike — maintaining autonomy within institutional environments, securing the sustainability of their communities, and trying to pass something on to the next generation. Yet the core resource that crosses generations is not theoretical knowledge but embodied knowledge and practice — and it cannot be fully captured in documents.

> *To the heritage that has survived under safeguarding policy, does "it has been preserved" sound like reassurance? In the field, we keep meeting intangible heritage kept alive on the life support of 'policy' while its activities are constrained. After inscription, we keep hearing that some sense within the community is quietly disappearing.*

What "Surviving Traditions" means

Surviving Traditions is **a question.**

- What do traditions preserve in order to survive?
- What do traditions change in order to survive?
- Who carries a tradition's survival — in which bodies, in which relationships?

Drawing on Norberg-Hodge's **"ancient futures"** (1991) — a future not yet arrived — this research approaches tradition not as a preserved past but as a practice of surviving.

The logic of case selection

The three regions are not treated as homogeneous comparative cases. Communities that sustained their traditions **differently** after similar historical pressures — colonization, annexation, state violence — were selected through theoretical sampling. The aim is to derive the working mechanisms and concept of surviving traditions by comparing the differences. ↓ The three regions are compared in the 'Comparative Analysis' table below.

> *This research does not reject safeguarding policy. Surviving Traditions is not the opposite of preservation. We do not blame choices made in order to survive — nor were those choices always whole. The stance of this research is to observe fiercely and coolly, with curiosity and affection.*

PRESERVATION	⇄	SURVIVAL
Records · designation · restoration · inscription · education — the legal regime and system of heritage inscription		Transformation, choice, generational change, the redistribution of the senses after legalization and systems — where this research looks

Framework — Three Disconnections

This research draws on the 'extinction of experience' (Pyle 1993; Soga & Gaston 2016; Rosen 2024) to organize the rupture of intangible heritage transmission in three dimensions.

1. **Sensory disconnection**
   Embodied skills and practical sense no longer pass from body to body — Bourdieu's habitus
2. **Environmental disconnection**
   The village-ritual grounds of Jeju, the court stage that vanished with the fall of the Ryukyu Kingdom, the village ritual grounds of Taiwan's indigenous communities scattered by forced relocation — the loss of the environments where transmission lived
3. **Institutional disconnection**
   Institutions meant to safeguard turn living practice into fixed objects of preservation — Smith's 'Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD)'

The three reinforce one another in a loop. The duality of institutions as cure and cause at once — and the alternatives each community has built to overcome it — this is the third dimension this research adds.

◎ AIMS & OBJECTIVES · THIRD SECTOR

This research conceptualizes intangible cultural heritage communities as **community-based organizations**. The third sector as ISTR defines it encompasses not only formal nonprofits but community organizations and mutual-aid, self-help associations — and intangible cultural heritage communities can be understood within this category.

Where existing research has explained organizational sustainability through financial structures and governance systems, this research analyzes the mechanisms by which embodied practices and informal networks — apprenticeship, ritual participation structures, intergenerational trust, and the search for new alternatives — form and maintain organizational resilience.

> *How do 'sustainability' mechanisms that official recognition and support cannot explain actually work? And what happens when they reach their limits?*

- How does the state designate intangible heritage — and what does it do afterward?
- What do communities keep performing, inside and outside institutions?
- Can bodily knowledge be understood as organizational knowledge?

⊕ METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork: Jeju (Mar 31–Apr 2, 2026) · Taiwan (Apr 2026, completed) · Ryukyu/Okinawa (May 29–Jun 2, 2026)

Key interviews: Head of the Chilmeoridang Yeongdeunggut Preservation Society (Jeju; simbang shaman of 30 years) · Shinji Kinjo, Artistic Director, National Theatre Okinawa (国立劇場おきなわ) · Hisashi Shimoyama (theatre practitioner) · Wang Ting-Wei 王廷瑋 (Bunun artist & dramaturg)

Lens	Norberg-Hodge (1991): *Ancient Futures* — tradition as a future not yet arrived / Rosen (2024): the extinction of experience
Field method	Pink (2009): sensory ethnography — body, sound, movement, place, ritual
Analytic concept	Bourdieu (1977): habitus — practical sense inscribed in the body
Source method	Vansina (1985): oral tradition — scholarly validity of non-written sources
Analysis	Charmaz (2014): constructivist grounded theory — concept generation, not generalization

◷ VERIFIED TIMELINE

1683	Taiwan — Qing China annexes Taiwan — the beginning of Chinese rule
1879	Ryukyu — the Ryukyu Disposition: the kingdom abolished, forcibly incorporated as Japan's Okinawa Prefecture
1895–1945	Taiwan — Japanese colonial rule — forced settlement and assimilation of indigenous peoples
1945	Ryukyu — Battle of Okinawa, followed by 27 years of U.S. military rule
1947–1954	Jeju, Korea — Jeju 4·3
1949	Taiwan — after the Chinese Civil War, the ROC government relocates to Taiwan — division from mainland China
1972	Ryukyu — Kumiodori designated an Important Intangible Cultural Property of Japan — on the very day (May 15) Okinawa reverted to Japan, Ryukyuan art entered the Japanese heritage system
1980	Jeju, Korea — Chilmeoridang Yeongdeunggut designated National Intangible Heritage of Korea (then Important Intangible Cultural Property No. 71)
2009	Jeju, Korea — Chilmeoridang Yeongdeunggut inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of ICH
2010	Ryukyu — Kumiodori inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of ICH
2026	4COP — fieldwork in all three regions (Jeju Mar–Apr · Taiwan Apr · Okinawa May–Jun)

FIELD MATERIALS

5 in-depth interviews · 14 field videos · 20 field photos · 1 written Q&A

2 performances attended (Yeongdeung farewell rite · Ryukyu arts)

◈ FINDINGS · TENTATIVE OBSERVATIONS

* Field analysis in progress — quotations (translated from Korean/Japanese) will be finalized against interview transcripts.

01 Institutions were a condition of survival — but what determined survival was how each community responded. Jeju's Chilmeoridang Yeongdeunggut received national designation in 1980, and status and constraint arrived together; Okinawa's Kumiodori was designated in 1972, and interviewees described the support that followed as limited — private lineages kept the stage alive; the Bunun community examined in this study — although government support (the Council of Indigenous Peoples) exists — declined it to keep its autonomy and chose independent operation through church funding.

> *"Once it was designated (as National Intangible Heritage), there was no choice but for everything to revolve around that alone."*
> — Head of the Chilmeoridang Yeongdeunggut Preservation Society

02 Transmission was reproduced not by individual holders but through the participation of the community. Audiences, patrons, and community members were active agents who kept traditions alive, not passive beneficiaries.

> *"In the immediate aftermath of the war, it was the audience who protected the tradition."*
> — Artistic Director, National Theatre Okinawa

> *"Yeongdeunggut shines only when there are plenty of ordinary household rituals — because the people who practice shamanic ritual must survive."*
> — Head of the Preservation Society

03 Embodied knowledge was transmitted not through documents but through shared practice and sensory experience. Jeju simbang learn by walking, listening, and sleeping alongside their teachers; the Hunter School (獵人學校) of Taiwan's indigenous communities teaches how to feel the wind with the body.

> *"Words alone have their limits. You must actually do it and show it — teach with the body."*
> — Director of the National Theatre Okinawa

04 Across the three cases examined, private participation emerged as a key foundation of survival — but by itself it did not guarantee sustainability. What sustainability mechanisms do communities organized around embodied practice need? This is the question this research poses to Third Sector theory.

> *"This is the strength of individuals, of the private sphere — but it is not infinite, so in time it may disappear."*
> — Hisashi Shimoyama (theatre practitioner, ACO Okinawa)

> *"It isn't sustained out of abundance — we find ways because we are trying to sustain it."*
> — Head of the Preservation Society

05 (Hypothesis) Institutions and communities play complementary roles rather than opposed ones. If keeping a tradition's form is the domain of institutions and systems, keeping its meaning alive is the domain of the private sphere — the third sector. In Jeju, the danggol community of believers creates the demand for ritual; in Ryukyu, the daily life of shops and schools holds the senses; in Taiwan, church and village communities guard autonomy. When this division of roles works together, a tradition survives keeping both its form and its meaning.

> *"Even where the form was lost, the meaning stayed alive."*
> — 4COP field debriefing

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Based on short-term fieldwork · some interviews mediated by interpreters · member checking of interview transcripts in progress · the aim is concept generation grounded in constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz), not generalization

WHAT'S NEXT

Complete member checking of transcripts · an online joint seminar connecting participants across the three sites (Aug 2026) · a multilingual web archive of photos, video, and transcripts · comparative extension to regions with kindred histories (Australia, the U.S., and beyond) to examine the applicability of the 'Surviving Traditions' concept

≡ COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Axis	Jeju, Korea	Ryukyu (Okinawa), Japan	Taiwan Indigenous
Key tradition	Chilmeoridang Yeongdeunggut (UNESCO ICH 2009)	Kumiodori 組踊 (UNESCO ICH 2010) · Ryukyuan dance	Bunun rituals and songs — incl. pasibutbut (eight-part choral prayer). Outside UNESCO; Taiwan runs its own heritage system
Historical pressure	Jeju 4·3 (1947–1954); roughly 10% of the population lost	Ryukyu Disposition & abolition of the kingdom (1879) · Battle of Okinawa (1945) · 27 years of U.S. military rule	Chinese rule after Qing annexation (1683) → Japanese colonial rule (1895–1945) → ROC relocation (1949) and division from mainland China · forced settlement and assimilation of indigenous peoples
Agents of transmission	Holder-centered · danggol — the community of believers (ship owners, fishers) who create the demand for ritual	Lineages and master–disciple ties, National Theatre Okinawa (国立劇場おきなわ) · court performers turned civilian	Elders, youth, cultural activists · the dramaturg = coordinating contemporary reinterpretation through research and consultation without harming the ethnic essence
Form of institutionalization	1980 designation as National Intangible Heritage → the standing of shamanic culture rose and the fossilization of "Yeongdeunggut-only" advanced together	1972 designation as an Important Intangible Cultural Property → support described by interviewees as limited; interviewees reported a substantial decline in Ryukyuan dance schools	Government support exists (Council of Indigenous Peoples and others) → the Bunun community in this case declined it — "if you accept the support, you must listen to the government" — and chose independent operation through church funding
Mode of survival	Self-sustaining through transmission subsidies + saved earnings from its own activities	Private hands passed instruments and songs on orally, into everyday life — into the shops and the schools	Life = work = art = education integrated within the village, run self-sufficiently · the norms of tradition are set not by law but by the community's own moral and ethical code
Core question	Cultural policy vs. private effort — how do the two act differently on transmission and the senses?	Tourism and everyday experience — what does a tradition restored without memory transmit?	"Tradition is the relationship between land and people." (Wang Ting-Wei) An unlisted tradition is not a weak tradition

The differences among the three regions emerge not from the kinds of traditions, but from how agents of transmission relate to institutions and the private sphere — Jeju within the overlap of the holder system and everyday life, Okinawa (Ryukyuan culture) in the post-designation support void and private lineages, Taiwan in negotiating autonomy outside the list. Each shows a different form of survival.

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