

V. Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

1. Item: The Art of Akyns, Kyrgyz epic tellers, was proclaimed by UNESCO a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003 and in 2008 incorporated in the RL.

Introduction

The art of akyns, Kyrgyz epic tellers, was proclaimed by UNESCO a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003; in 2008 incorporated in the RL. Manas is one of the world's longest epic poems (some versions have about a million poetic lines) and is of immense importance to Kyrgyz cultural heritage and identity. Even though its textualization started in late 19th century, its continuity as living oral heritage has so far been uninterrupted. Manas is still performed in public (even though less and less frequently) and there are still some young people who (often after having had a visionary dream) wish to learn the complex and beautiful art of Manas-telling and become an akyn.

Traditionally, the three main types of oral poetry performed by Kyrgyz akyns are:

- the epic trilogy: “Manas”, “Semetey”, “Seitek” (the performers are called manaschy or semeteichy);
- shorter epic poems called “dastans” (such as Kojash, Er Toshtuk, Kurmanbek, Sarinji-Bokoi, Er Tabyldy, Janysh-Bayish and many others; the performers are called dastanchy);
- oral folk songs.

The Kyrgyz epics are intrinsically linked with the art of akyns: each epic poem is associated with a certain akyn and his/her particular manner of performance, and vice versa, each akyn is associated with a specific repertoire. Akyns are both the bearers and the creators of the Kyrgyz oral poetry. Indeed, the best akyn-manaschies are the ones who improvise at each performance while keeping to the same plotline. Of special interest is *aitysh* – a traditional competition of two akyns-improvisers. Aitysh usually takes place before a big audience and is a good school for developing and perfecting the art of akyns.

Being highly endangered due to, among other reasons, loss of interest on the part of young people and lack of funding, the Kyrgyz National Commission for UNESCO and the experts from WPE (“World’s Peoples’ Eposes” NGO) developed a national Action Plan to safeguard this ancient tradition in the framework of the project on “Safeguarding the art of akyns, Kyrgyz epic tellers” supported by the Kyrgyz Government/UNESCO/JFIT.

Its main objective, and hence the core activity, is the fostering of the process of transmission of the art of akyns from the older generation to the young one. For this purpose, a network of youth study centers (henceforth referred to as “Studios”) established in various regions of Kyrgyzstan, providing an appropriate framework for the traditional “master-apprentice” way of transmission. The other activities of the project (training, akyn contests, publications, etc.) contribute to the transmission process through improved archiving, recording and promotion of the Kyrgyz oral traditions, and in particular, the *Manas* epic.

It is expected that, as a result of this project, a renewed interest will arise in *Manas* and in epic-telling among Kyrgyz public. This will eventually lead to a country-wide revival of the akyn tradition, implying also greater prestige and better prospects for those who choose epic-telling as their life’s vocation.

Objectives of the safeguarding project

The long-term objective of this project is the safeguarding of the art of Kyrgyz akyns. The mid-term objectives of the project are:

- To increase the awareness and knowledge by the general public of the content of the *Manas* epic, which is a crucial to the revival of interest in the art of akyns;
- To encourage the “horizontal” (from smaller to larger audiences) transmission of knowledge and interest in the art of akyns, through publications, contests and other promotional activities;
- To support the “vertical” (inter-generational) transmission of the knowledge, experience, skills and technique of the Kyrgyz akyns through 8 Studios to be opened in various regions of Kyrgyz Republic;
- To build local and national capacities for the safeguarding and transmission of the art of akyns, through organization of relevant training workshops and scholarly conferences.

Methods of project implementation

Traditionally, each Kyrgyz akyn was a tutor/teacher for his students and followers, and his followers in their turn became teachers of next generations of students. Thus, the art of akyns was transmitted orally and perfected through the “mechanism” of akyns’ tutorship. This mechanism being crucial to the safeguarding and transmission of the art of akyns, the main activity of this project is the opening and running of youth study centres (Studios), where transmission of the oral tradition will take place from the older to young akyns.

In 2006, 8 Studios was opened in different regions of Kyrgyz Republic, in coordination with the Ministry of Culture, local authorities and NGOs. Special agreements had been negotiated with the municipalities of the regions concerned to use the premises of local Cultural Centers free of charge. Recognized akyns living in the area were selected by the Steering Committee to become tutors for young akyns (one tutor per Studio). According to the plan of action of the project was established the Steering Committee, which include performers (recognized akyns), scholars and government representatives. The role of the Steering Committee is to monitor project implementation and provision of assistance to school-studios in their work.

In the framework of the project were organized the training course on “Textualization, digitization and archiving of epic heritage”, the International conference on “Epic Poetry and its Safeguarding”. Concert tours in different regions of Kyrgyz Republic were organized to popularize the Manas epic and akyns tradition. In addition, in all school studios competition among students was organized. These contests serve to identify talented young akyns and to provide them with an opportunity to get accustomed to performing in public. The contests also help revitalize the tradition of akyn competitions. Throughout this activity, audio-visual recordings were made.

Conclusion

As a result of this project, a renewed interest has arisen in “Manas” and in epic-telling among Kyrgyz public. This eventually leads to a country-wide revival of the akyn tradition, implying also better prospects for those who choose epic-telling as their life’s vocation. Activities implemented during the project helped to increase the awareness and knowledge by the general public of the content of the “Manas” epic, which is a crucial to the revival of interest in the art of akyns. Promotional activities encouraged the “horizontal” (from smaller to larger audiences) transmission of knowledge and interest in the art of akyns. They support the “vertical” (inter-generational) transmission of the knowledge, experience, skills and technique of the Kyrgyz akyns through school-studios in various regions of Kyrgyz Republic. Local and national capacities for the safeguarding and transmission of the art of akyns have developed, through organization of trainings and scholarly conference during implementation of the project.

Case study report by Soltongeldieva Sabira National Project on Safeguarding of the Art of Akyns, Kyrgyz Epic Tellers, Kyrgyz Republic

1. Introduction

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and identity. Even though its textualization started in late 19th century, its continuity as living oral heritage has so far been uninterrupted. *Manas* is still performed in public (even though less and less frequently) and there are still some young people who (often after having had a visionary dream) wish to learn the complex and beautiful art of *Manas*-telling and become an akyn.

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It is expected that, as a result of this project, a renewed interest will arise in *Manas* and in epic-telling among Kyrgyz public. This will eventually lead to a country-wide revival of the akyn tradition, implying also greater prestige and better prospects for those who choose epic-telling as their life’s vocation.

2. Objectives of the project:

The long-term objective of this project is the safeguarding of the art of Kyrgyz akyns. The project also lay the basis for the development of a national policy and such programmes as the “*Living Human Treasures*”, the national inventory of the intangible cultural heritage of Kyrgyzstan.

The mid-term objectives of the project are:

- To increase the awareness and knowledge by the general public of the content of the *Manas* epic, which is a crucial to the revival of interest in the art of akyns;

2. Items: Nooruz, New Year celebration / Multinational nomination

Introduction:

Novruz/ Nowrouz/ Nooruz/Navruz/ Nauroz/ Nevruz is celebrated on 21st of March, which is considered as New Year holiday and the beginning of Spring. There are various ceremonies, rituals, and cultural events held within every family and community. It enjoys traditional games, special cuisines, respect for nature, performances in music and dances, oral expressions and literature, handicrafts and painting masterpieces (in particular miniature arts). Values of

peace and solidarity, reconciliation and neighborhood, cultural diversity and tolerance, healthy life-style and renewal of living environment are promoted and transmitted from generation to generation during this cultural event. Women play a major role in the cultural event, by managing the ceremonies and disseminating the traditional knowledge to the youth.

During the Nooruz Celebration in Kyrgyz Republic, people are inviting each other. Doors are open for everyone. There is an understanding among people that how many houses you visited so you will gain that much prosperity, success, and richness. This day used to be very special day. If enemies could not decide their problems in between, they had to come to one agreement and consensus. Overall, if this holiday is a reason of living together in one harmony, this holiday would give peace in each house, in each soul of people. Therefore, the measurement of fumigation with juniper (Archa) saying words "Alas, alas, coming new year, new day, may new life, new success will come with it". Ceremony "Alas, Alas" is held by only old woman. Older men have to gather kids and tell some stories, legends, and interesting fragments from the Kyrgyz history. Youth are playing different types of games such as jumping over the fire, swinging, and so on.

Safeguarding activities:

The main commitment of the Kyrgyz Republic to safeguard the element is reflected in the Law of the KR on "Establishing Nooruz as a national celebration day" signed by the President of the KR on February 5, 1991, #380-XXI. Within the framework of this law, governmental structures in the sphere of culture prepare and conduct activities related Nooruz celebration in order to safeguard and transmit the element. Communities in regions of KR take the active part in safeguarding and development of components of Nooruz since they are bearers of cultural practices related to Nooruz celebration and its components.

The following are a list of Kyrgyz Republic's laws, decrees and other activities:

- Law on "Establishing Nooruz as a national celebration day" signed by the President of the KR on February 5, 1991, #380-XXI;
- Annual governmental decrees "On preparation and conduction of activities devoted to the celebration of Nooruz" (i.e. Governmental Decree of March 18, 2008, #98-P);
- Annual orders of local administrators "On celebration of Nooruz", (i.e. Order of Bishkek Mayor's Office of March 19, 2007, #140-P);
- Inclusion of Nooruz celebration onto National List of the ICH;
- Organization of seminars, conferences, concerts, theatrical performances devoted to Nooruz and its history (i.e. Seminar "Nooruz celebration-Heritage of Ancestors", Kyrgyz National University, March 18, 2008; Kyrgyz Drama Theatre, "Nooruz" play performed on Nooruz celebration day, etc.);

- Introduction of the history of Nooruz celebration in textbooks of universities teaching history of Kyrgyzstan, (Institute of Eastern Languages and Cultures, O. Karataev, 1997);
- Preparation and TV and radio broadcasting of programs related to Nooruz celebration (i.e. TV program “Babalardyn murasy” (Heritage of ancestors), National TV and Radio Broadcasting Corporation);
- Creation of documentaries on Nooruz and its history (i.e. “Nooruz”, Kyrgyztefilm, director B. Karagulov).