

I . Background

Kazakhstan, the largest country in Central Asia (and ninth in the world list of countries according to its territory) starts its nation-state history since the 15th century. However, the people occupied its territory since ancient time. Turkic peoples lived and still live in the several regions of the country, and other various ethnic groups migrated here throughout the known history. The culture of Kazakh people arises from the deep past of Eurasia. A national creativity of nomadic tribes wandered in steppes of Kazakhstan a long time before these tribes joined in Kazakh nation. This culture was born by people and it is optimistic by its origin from a nomadic life of these tribes. It demonstrated a harmonious amalgamated model of a different cultures, languages and confessions. Nevertheless, it was not only nomads, who benefited from their ability to perceive the world, interact and share the experiences. The neighboring cultures entered into a dialogue and accumulated the best practice, and the archeologists and historians found this evidence from the South East Asia to Northern Europe.

More than two and a half thousand years ago the ancient states of Saks were located at the modern territory of Kazakhstan. These distant ancestors of Kazakhs created their unique civilization and the beautiful animal-style art. The Saks were already literate and they established the nation-state referred by historians. These tribes were engaged in crafts, agriculture, established settlements and migrated along the Great Steppe. The establishment of blacksmith' work by the Prototurkic tribes of the Altai at the beginning of I millennium BC had contributed greatly to the formation of this civilization and was recognized as a greatest event of humanity technical progress. A new dynamic force - nomadic civilization had rapidly raced towards the unknown world of great ancient civilizations of China, India, Iran, Egypt, Babylon, thereby predetermining the unseen turn in a history of Eurasian dialogue between civilizations.

This interaction of settled population and nomadic civilizations had launched the epoch of the world's religions, philosophy, and the appearance of the great prophets. The nomadic way of life is associated with the cultural peculiarity, still the nomads were open to the outside world. They were in close contact with settled population, and this cooperation enriched cultures and peoples through transfer of cultural values. One can argue that the distinctive culture of Kazakhstan could be the focal point of the cultural streams and reverse flows between Western, Central and Eastern Asia and Europe. Numerous empires like

Hun States, Turkic Khaganats and the Golden Horde had imprinted itself at the infinite spaciousness of the Great Steppe. The Turkic people had the advantage of capability to integrate and absorb innovation, and this made the Turkic empire extensive and megacontinental. These processes are described in details in the fundamental UNESCO' in-depth History of Civilizations of Central Asia.

The Great Silk Road is the famous network of numerous caravan roads, which infiltrated the most fertile and densely populated regions of Central and Western Asia. While going from West to East and back, caravans stopped to rest at suitable locations with water springs and herbage in two or three days of uninterrupted travel. The settlements and cities appeared very fast in such places. Ambassadors, academicians, travelers, dervishes, priests and poets – all moved with caravans. Therefore, recreation places and *caravan-serai* turned into a kind of facilities for a lively conversation, a briskly trade,

hearing tales, and worship. Travelers brought the samples of their original culture, and presented traditions and customs of everyday life. The centers of education were at religious spiritual centers and academies in ancient cities, but also at crafts' workshops. In families and nomadic tribes the master' secrets of craft transferred through generations from father to son, from master to journeyman. Silk Road has improved the interaction of cultures between the remote countries and East-West nations. These events continued until the XVI century, when the decline of the world's great oriental civilizations has turned Central Asia for many decades in the cultural backwater. The unique geographical location of Kazakhstan at the great crossroads of the civilizations nourished the national cultural heritage.

Kazakh people faced new challenges in the beginning of the XX century, when the radical transformation of societal life went alongside with the conversion of the nomadic life style. Political, social innovations influenced greatly on people and became the serious trial for national identity. The steppe people adopted a new culture, education and science.



Figure 2 Drawing by I.Claproth, 1816
[Source: Kazakh Folk Applied Art, 1986]

Moreover, the spiritual world of Kazakhs started perceiving of new values because of the channeling of the Kazakh culture to the European and worldwide cultural systems through Russia. The cultural consequences of the October revolution in 1917 ironically combined the vitality of the Russian Imperial traditions and the new effort to re-shape the country. During the next 70 years a new non-traditional system of ethnic relationships started to develop around the new



Figure 1 Drawing by J.Claproth, 1816
[Source: Kazakh Folk Applied Art, 1986]

government structural principles. It included search of “cohesion” of the governmental control system into the joint framework, that would include confessional, linguistic and cultural approaches (projects on creation of eastern committee of enlightenment, Turkic board, Muslim, Christian departments). Still, according to the known saying of Nursultan Nazarbayev, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “...our Kazakh people, despite all obstacles and vicissitudes of life, was able to preserve and to retain its human, frank soul, melodious, sonorous songs, beautiful customs and traditions, pure, picturesque speech”.

Despite the many attractions of modern life, the Kazakhstan people remain attached to the values and the social rules inherited from their ancestors. The impact of this heritage is in effect in several aspects of the routine life of an individual or a local community. For instance, people will refer consciously or unconsciously to the ancestors at the time of a meeting where an important decision regarding community life must be taken. It is as inviting the people, who passed away, to participate in the assembly of the living. Sometimes before the meeting, people may wish to visit one or more sacred sites related to vanished heroes and make a donation. These sacred places can be tombs, a spring, a tree or a rock. These sacred spots are known everywhere, establishing a tight network, but the significance of a particular site varies according to its origin. The people also count on a supra-natural power named *Tengri*, which would be the equivalent of the God in the Christian society.

The Kazakhstani people celebrate the key stages of their life (birth, circumcision, marriage, mourning, etc.) as well as special auspicious periods of the calendar year such as *Nauryz*. Some particular events too can be marked: *kuda tasu* (the matchmaking), *betashar* (the ritual of unveiling the bride's face to the marriage guests), *at koyu* (the solemn ceremony of giving names), *tusaukeser* (the cutting of fetters when the baby make his first steps), inauguration of a house or a tomb, set up of a commemorative stone, etc. This living culture is therefore more than a religion and surpasses all other considerations. The contribution of ancient traditions and practices left its strong imprint on the language, religious beliefs and practices, gastronomy, manners, ways of living, eating, working, building and creating. Hence, the Kazakh people have a constant need for these tangible and intangible references to feel secure inside their social and cultural surroundings. It would be a real disaster if these objects and these historic testimonies and beliefs disappeared one day. However, the authorities have disregarded these social practices for about two recent centuries.

The actual legislation, such as the Laws 'On Culture' and 'On Safeguarding the Historical and Cultural heritage', provide many ways for protecting the cultural heritage (also such as registers and inventories), and that stipulate that this responsibility should be shared between the public sector and society. This opens the way for broadening the scope of cultural heritage policies in Kazakhstan and for including other types of assets (than the “movable and immovable”) in the scope of cultural heritage policies.

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) also makes the link between the various types of heritage. This link is

referred to in the Preamble to the Convention: 'Considering the deep-seated interdependence between the intangible cultural heritage and the tangible cultural and natural heritage.' According to the definition of intangible cultural heritage in the convention the artifacts or the movable cultural heritage and the cultural space or a site are part of the intangible cultural heritage. The 1972 UNESCO Convention (on the world cultural and natural heritage) establishes this link in the operational directives when refers to 'the intangible values associated [with the World heritage]'. The link between movable, immovable and intangible cultural heritage requires a coordinated policy and aligned measures.

The main challenge is therefore to establish a legal mechanism that takes into account the dynamic and procedural nature of intangible cultural assets, and that simultaneously contributes to knowledge, evaluation and promotion of those assets for the benefit of their stakeholders and of the society in general. The role of the State in this case is less that of a supervisor, as far as implementation of the law is concerned but rather that of an important partner for supporting groups and cultural heritage communities in order to enable them to exert their right to the production and preservation of culture.

Another major issue is the relationship between culture and development. At present, it is impossible to ignore the impact of the values conveyed by the cultural industry, by tourism and by the fast pace of urbanisation that characterizes contemporary societies. In Kazakhstan the contrasts highlighted by the coexistence of tradition and modernity are especially crucial, particularly owing to transit to market economy and social inequality.

It also became clear that the preservation of intangible heritage is not an issue confined to the cultural domain. It involves such matters as environmental management, intellectual property, formal and informal education, crafts and touristic industry among many others. It is impossible to disregard them and reducing the inventory to a mere proclamation of cultural value, and the documentation to yet another archive for experts to consult. For that reason, it is essential to bear in mind the need for articulation with other public policies, and, particularly, the participation of the producers and stakeholders of intangible heritage in every stage of the preservation process.

Joining of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Convention (2003) has empowered the National Commission on launching the activities aimed to create a provisional list for intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Kazakhstan and nominate elements to UNESCO's Representative List. For this purpose in January 2012, the National Commission called upon the knowledgeable communities to submit the ICH elements and guided the Technical Experts' Committee work on evaluation of the proposed. This work resulted in creation of the Provisional List of the ICH elements and establishment of the ICH National Committee in May 2012.