

# THE VALUE OF ORAL AND TRADITIONAL HERITAGE OF KAZAKHSTAN AND THE GREAT SILK ROAD

BAZARALY MUPTKEYEV

Kazakh National University of Arts

ALIYA SABYROVA

Kazakh National Conservatory

The Kazakh oral tradition is closely associated with the culture and lifestyle of nomadic civilisation. One of the main branches of the Great Silk Road is known to have led across Central Asia and Kazakhstan. The instrumental and oral traditions of numerous nomadic and settled nations were developing along the Great Silk Road in close interethnic contacts. In particular, many scientists and researchers note that different cultures and ethnic groups have common variations of tamboura-like instruments with silk strings and dulcimer-like instruments and traditional guttural singing.

The latest research into the genesis and regional peculiarities of the Kazakh instrumental music carried out by G. Omarova reveal two major spheres in the musical space: the Eastern sphere, including Mongolia, the eastern, northern, central and southeastern regions of Kazakhstan, China, Korea, Russia's southern Siberia, Kyrgyzstan, the northwestern regions of Uzbekistan (Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya Provinces), and the Western sphere, including Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran,

Karakalpakstan (Uzbekistan) and the western and southwestern parts of Kazakhstan (the Syrdarya area, Mangistau, Aktobe, Atyrau, Oral).

These musical spheres can be identified through the bourdon-overtone scale, the specific structure of the stringed musical instruments played by plucking (in particular, the rectangular or oval-shaped and arched bodies) and their tonal and compositional structure formed through its frets.

Nowadays only few branches of the Kazakh oral performing art are identifiable.

### **The singing tradition**

The large sphere of the folk song genre in the Kazakh music can be divided into two big groups:

I - ritual genres: 1) the songs (*oleng*) of the life cycle rituals (birth, marriage, funerals); 2) ritual, mystic and shamanistic songs (*arbau*, *badik*, *kulapsan* and *baksysaryny*); 3) calendar songs (Islamic rituals - *jarapazan*, *sahar*; the rituals of the oriental New Year (*Nauryz*) - *nauryzoleng*)

II - common genres: 1) children's folklore (children's songs and songs for children - *otirikoleng*, *sanamak*, *oiynoleng*, *jumbakoleng*); 2) youth folklore (youth songs and games); 3) *karaoleng* (traditional song lyrics); 4) the instructive and didactic genres of the epic and *akyn* (singing) traditions - professional traditional singing - *anshulik*, *terme*, *tolgau*, *nasihat*, *minajat*, *amanat*, *hatoleng*, *osiet*, *nakyloz*, *shygarmaoleng*, *Qissa-dastan*, *jyr*, *bastau* and traditional instrumental legends (*kyi*).

### **The instrumental performing tradition**

*Dombra*, *sybyzgy*, *kobyz* and folk instruments (*jetigen*, *shankobyz*, *sazsyrnai*, *dabyl*, *asataiak* and so on). The analysis of the material collected in the course of the field trips aimed at systematisation and identification

of ICH showed that the elements of the abovementioned oral performing traditions had changed, which was associated with the latest urbanisation tendencies and changes in the socio-economic conditions. Earlier the elements of the steppe civilisation determined the image of the culture, while nowadays the culture of big cities has a great impact on the existence of traditional music space. Nevertheless, new layers of traditional music folklore continue to emerge, and the latest ICH field trip in Kazakhstan showed that there were a number of unexplored and unresearched branches of traditional culture left, such as *ahunjirau* - performance of literary poetry, the modern type of Goliard poetry known among people as *salserilik*, the storytelling *jyrau*, *Shezhireshi* - the keepers of the steppe historiography, *kozha* - the bearers of ICH in the contemporary social stratum, *tore* - the descendents of Genghis Khan, *biy* - judges, *aksakal* - tribal elders, *asaba (tamada)* - entertainers and so on.

The function of *toybastar* (a special ritual and gifts presented at the end of a wedding party), *aitys* and various traditional games have changed by now. In the 1950s - 1980s *toybastar* was performed at the end of a wedding party and had the form of a poetic contest (*aitys*) between two families of the newlyweds (a woman from the bride's side and a man from the bridegroom's side). The *aitys* competition heated up the atmosphere, since each side supported the participants with exclamations and monetary gifts. In the modern practice *toy* (wedding party) ends with short blessings from relatives and gifts.

Many ICH elements have disappeared in contemporary practice, particularly those connected with traditional rituals. In the last few years, *oralmans* (representatives of Kazakh diasporas who returned to their historic homeland from abroad) have brought and disseminated the ancient types of *synsu* (the weeping of a bride), *korisu* (a funeral ritual song), different forms

of applied arts (*keste* - traditional embroidering, *zergerlik* - jeweller's art, *teri ondeu* - leather processing, *agashsheberi* - a master in woodcutting, *usta* - a blacksmith and so on). Unfortunately, even these forms of traditional business are not in demand in towns and cities and, therefore, are left behind with the lack of succession and passing. The traditional story-telling school - *jirshilik* - and the art of *kuyshi* - performers on folk instruments - do not have followers and students nowadays.

Therefore, the contemporary keepers and bearers of different traditional ICH elements (folklore, singing, musical and instrumental arts, traditional crafts and so on) come up with the following proposals: to support ideologically and financially ICH activities in governmental bodies, educational institutions, non-governmental organisations and regional and municipal centres - wherever it is possible to establish various educational workshops, studios, schools, hobby groups and so on with the purpose of teaching children the traditional art; to provide ICH bearers and practitioners with a socially and publicly recognised status to support them financially and morally; to create an electronic database for the identification and systematisation of ICH; to make the electronic database available for the general public on the Internet; to establish a department at the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan that would deal with the revival of ICH; to launch special TV and radio programmes to propagandise ICH in the mass media; to organise centres for systematisation and cataloguing of ICH at universities and Houses for Traditional Arts in administrative centres; to create a new specialisation, an 'ICH expert,' at institutions of higher education.

### **Formation of ICH at the present stage**

In the period of globalization, it is the ICH that forms the core of

traditional art, which has been safeguarded by our ancestors. Nowadays, a number of political, socio-cultural, historic, ethnic, aesthetic, urbanistic and other factors influence the formation and development of ICH.

By their dependence on urbanisation ICH performers can be divided into steppe performers and urban performers. As many rural people have migrated to urban areas, the Kazakh performing art has also moved to big cities.

The imperial policy of the Soviet state resulted in a loss of 70% of the authentic performing tradition, the rest having adapted to the urban life. In the urban environment (a town or the centre of a district or province) the performing tradition (*anshilik* - the singing tradition, and *shilik* - the instrumental tradition) mainly popularises the art of the European type or that of a mixed type through public organisations (primarily entertaining centres, concert halls and the mass media).

In towns the development of ICH elements is levelled and standardised, and they lose their authentic valuable qualities. Music schools copy European systems in teaching traditional musicians separate specialities, such as *dombyrashi*, *kobyzshi*, *sybyzgyshi*. The European performing styles usually eliminate some of the communicative elements of ICH (for instance, telling *kuy* legends).

Traditionally, outstanding *kuyshi* could play several instruments at a very high level, aside from being good in singing and storytelling. Thus, the Kyrgyz traditional art to this day demonstrates the original high quality. On the contrary, the Kazakh government gives no support to the authentic art of ICH.

Today in Kazakhstan there are several regional schools of traditional performance: the western part of the country - Mangystau, Atyrau, Oral, Aktobe, Kyzylorda and Aral, as well as among the Kazakh people in the

Karakalpak Republic of Uzbekistan and in Turkmenistan is dominated by the instrumental tradition called *tokpe*, its song, epic and akyn versions being the most common for the regions. There is also the shertpe instrumental tradition, which is known as arka in the central part of Kazakhstan, karatau in the south and *jetisu* in the south-east and east, which include Altay Tarbagatay, Bayan Olgi region of Mongolia, and the Xijiang-Uyghur and Ile-Kazakh regions of China.

Every style has its own performing manner, principles of compositional structure, specific scales (*pernelikzhuye*) and other typical features. Only the traditional ICH bearers from the steppes know all the details of each style.

As the entire music education system in Kazakhstan is built on the European notation system, the contemporary musical culture of Kazakhstan is characterised by both the *traditional type of kuy performance* and the *orchestral type of kuy performance*. Therefore, recently two systems of music education have been used in the educational institutions: the universal system (offering general courses on different regional performance techniques and preparing folk musicians for traditional ensembles and orchestras) and the traditional learning system aimed at in-depth learning of the musical semantics of one particular regional school, without using the notation system and following the master-student principle.

Unfortunately, the number of the bearers of the authentic steppe forms of ICH is decreasing year after year. The situation about the bearers of regional performing traditions is particularly poor. According to a survey, most of these people are quite aged and have no target audience and no successors. In the course of the ICH field trips, the respondents asked for the following measures to be taken to safeguard the ICH they practiced

(their requests were audio and video recorded): to open the schools of Talasbek Asemkulov and Dauletbek Saduakassov representing the shertpe style traditions; to open the traditional *tokpe* school represented by masters Shamil Abiltayev, Edil Basygharayev, Zhumabek Kadyrkulov, Azirbay Oskebayev (the traditional art of Atyrau, Mangystau and Aktobe); to open a museum and a workshop managed by Darkembay Shokparuly in the village of Akshi, Almaty Province with a possibility of further development of traditional jewellery, a blacksmith's art and other forms of applied arts with Daulet Darkembayuly (son of Darkembay Shokparuly) as a master; to render financial support to the 'Center of Traditional Singing' located in Semey, East Kazakhstan region.

All these proposals want to be immediately included in the list of urgent things to be done to safeguard the ICH.

The audio and video records and the use of information technologies (digital systems) have been and still are the main format of safeguarding the heritage.

Up to this day 70% of ICH materials is stored in state and private funds. Among them are the 'Golden fund' of the Kazakh Radio, the State Photo-Phono Archive, the audio recording fund of the Auezov Institute of Literature and Arts under the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the laboratory of folklore at the Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conervatoire. The private collections of Almat Mergaliev and Uali Bekenov should also be mentioned. The foreign funds include the Tashkent records factory *Melodiya*, which recorded the most valuable heritage of the traditional Kazakh culture.

Since 2012 the Korkyt Ata Scientific Research Institute under the scientific research laboratory at the Kazakh National University of Arts has carried out several music and ethnographic expeditions to different regions of the country. The researchers of the laboratory have made up a list of ICH and

its bearers in Kazakhstan, along with questionnaires. And the National ICH register with the detailed information on bearers and practitioners of ICH of Kazakhstan. Besides, for three years now the researchers have been implementing a scientific project named *The Kazakh National Art: the Continuity of Traditions* (collection, studying and systematisation' aimed at systematisation and identification of different ICH elements of Kazakhstan. The first stage of the project was supported by a number of international organisations, including UNESCO, the organiser of the forum. We would like to study your experience in safeguarding and development of ICH and are in need of your further support in the following fields of the art of our country: *anshilikoner* (the traditional art of singing), *kyishilikoner* (the traditional instrumental music), *koloner* (the applied art), *sal-serilik* (the inventive actors), and *salt-dastyr rasimder inoryndau* (the performance of traditional ceremonies).



## Reference

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