

Mongolia's Efforts Taken in the Safeguarding of the Common Intangible Cultural Heritage In Euro-Asian Region

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1. Introduction

Mongolia is the foremost country that has been protecting and preserving the cultural traditions of the Central Asian nomads, in addition to its contribution for its development with inputs from the modern and sedentary civilization. Since its transition into the democratic society and market economy in 1990, Mongolia has made preservation of its culture a state mission and incorporated it into its formal documents. The Constitution of Mongolia at its preamble states that

We the people of Mongolia:

- strengthening the independence and sovereignty of the nation,
- cherishing human rights and freedoms, justice, and national unity,
- inheriting the traditions of national statehood, history, and culture,
- respecting the accomplishments of human civilization, and
- aspiring toward the supreme objective of building a humane, civil and democratic society in the country

Hereby proclaim the Constitution of Mongolia.

Mongolia also cooperated with world countries and commonwealth organizations for cultural preservation. The ratification into the UNESCO "2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible

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Cultural Heritage” and the “2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions” has given new platforms to Mongols to develop and protect the traditional culture in accordance with the achievements of humanity and promote it worldwide.¹

The legal environment of culture and art is being enhanced in Mongolia with the laws newly adopted by the Government of Mongolia, such as the “Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage,” the “Mongolian Language Law” and “Mongolian Law of Library” and these laws are being implemented along with the UNESCO conventions.

The registration and information database of intangible cultural heritage was established in *soum* (district), province, city, and state level and there is a continuous collection of data on intangible cultural heritage elements and its practitioners into this database according to the bottom-up system.

As of 2019, a total of 14 intangible cultural heritage elements of Mongolia has been inscribed on the UNESCO’s two lists: Seven of the intangible cultural heritage elements were registered on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, and seven of them were registered on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The Government of Mongolia is pursuing a policy that supports intangible cultural heritage (ICH) practitioners and non-governmental organizations aiming to protect and safeguard the intangible cultural heritage. For instance, the government organizations are closely cooperating with NGOs and associations of particular intangible cultural heritage elements, such as the Association for Mongolian Folk Long Song, the Association for Morin Khuur, the Association for Mongol Khoomei, the Association for Folk Dance Bii Biyelgee, the Association for Mongol Tsur and the Association for Mongol Tuuli (Epic). Since 2018, the most experienced and talented practitioners of the intangible cultural heritage who have made a great effort to transmit their own

¹ Ts. Samdan and U. Sainbayar, “Basic documents for Implementation of UNESCO 2003 Convention for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage”, Mongolian National Commission for UNESCO, UB, 2011.

knowledge and practice to youth are being examined, evaluated and selected as "intangible cultural heritage practitioner of the year" and given a prize equal to \$12,000.

Throughout their long and rich history, the Mongols have built up their distinctive cultural heritage and cultural significance in connection with the nomadic way of life, and have preserved and transferred it from generation to generation. In conjunction with the specificity of the nomadic life style, Eurasian countries have similar intangible cultural heritage elements such as "Falconry," "Epic," "Airag or Kumis" and some handcrafting techniques. This paper documents the Mongolian efforts and initiatives in safeguarding and promoting the common intangible cultural heritage in Euroasia, particularly in Mongolia, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan and parts of Russian Federation.

2. Mongolia's Initiatives for Safeguarding of Common Intangible Cultural Heritage in Euro-Asian Region

Initially a technique for acquiring food, falconry has increasingly been connected with nature preservation, cultural heritage and social relations inside and among communities. "Falconry, a living human heritage"² is the largest multi-national nomination on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The nomination is made by Germany, Saudi Arabia, Austria, Belgium, United Arab Emirates, Spain, France, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Mongolia, Pakistan, Portugal, Qatar, Syrian Arab Republic, Republic of Korea and Czechia and falconry is inscribed in the list in 2016. Mongolia was one of the eleven countries which were elaborating and developing this multi-national nomination file for the first time in 2009 and had received the inscription certificate of the "Falconry, a living human heritage" in 2010 from UNESCO.

The tradition of the eagle hunting, one of the main hunting techniques of Falconry is still being practiced in the communities of Kazakh ethnic group in Mongolia and being transmitted from one generation to another preserving its original style. Aiming to protect, safeguard, and develop this tradition and culture, the "Eagle

² "Falconry, a living human heritage", Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO, 2016, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/falconry-a-living-human-heritage-01209>.

Hunter's Association" was founded in Bayan-Olgii province of Mongolia in 2000. Currently, the association has over 400 members and organizes the "Festival of Eagle Hunters" every year on the first weekend of October. Indeed, this festival is playing a significant role in the dissemination and transmission of the tradition and history of Kazakh people and their traditional customs associated with the eagle hunting to the young generations. Mongolia has inscribed the intangible cultural heritage element "Falconry, a living human heritage", produced and disseminated two series of documentary films as "Fest of Eagle" and "Hunting with Eagle" to the general public through national broadcasting.

A result of the analysis of the registration and inventory data of the eagle hunters in Mongolia shows that eagle hunters have been bearing and practicing the tradition of hunting with eagle for two to six generations. Another result of this analysis is that the tradition of hunting with the eagle is being constantly transmitted from generation to generation and the tradition's viability is quite stabilized.³

Many of the world countries have domesticized the falcon, eagle, and hawk, and developed the tradition of hunting with these birds since ancient times. Mongols also have the tradition of hunting with falcon. Moreover, Mongolian ancestors were using the depiction of the white falcon on the emblem and flag. In 2012, the bird falcon was named "National Bird of Mongolia" for representing the sovereignty, freedom, and unity of Mongols. Mongolia became a member of the "International Association for Falconry" in 2006 and since 2013, Mongols have started celebrating the International Day for Falconry on November 16th. Since then, Mongolians also organized several events and activities associated with falconry: for instance, there has been a "Falconry painting contest" and an exhibition titled "King Falcon." Furthermore, through training courses and workshops, the culture of Mongolian falconry is being transmitted to younger generations.

Not only the national festivals and events but also the international festivals and initiatives are very important to the safeguarding and dissemination of the ICH elements. Aiming to strengthen

³ "Annual Reports of National Center for Cultural Heritage", *The State Database of Registration and Information*, 2013 and 2018.

the cooperation on the safeguarding of similar intangible cultural heritage in the Euro-Asian region, and bring the possibility to exchange the knowledge and experience associated to falconry and to promote the specificity of Mongolian falconry to the other counties and the world, the "International Festival for Falconry" and a research conference on falconry was organized in Mongolia in 2015. Over 30 delegates and representatives from the "International Association for Falconry" and Falconry Associations in the People's Republic of China, in Pakistan, in Kazakhstan, in Uzbekistan, in Kyrgyzstan, and Qatar have attended the festival and the conference.⁴ Another of these international festivals, the "World nomad game" was initiated and organized by Kyrgyzstan between 3rd and 9th of September 2016 on the bank of Issyk Kul Lake. Over 2000 participants from 40 countries have attended the festival, which incorporated 25 different competitions. Representatives of the Mongolian Association for Falconry have also attended this festival and showed the performance of hunting with eagles.

Mongolia has also inscribed the "Traditional craftsmanship of the Mongol Ger and its associated customs"⁵ on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013. The *ger* is a round structure of dividers, shafts and a peaked rooftop covered with canvas and felt, and fixed with ropes. It is the perfect dwelling for nomads to move from one pastoral land to another because it is light enough for nomads to carry, flexible enough to fold and pack, and sturdy enough to be dismantled and reassembled. Mongolian *ger* is also an eco-friendly dwelling, since it has a wooden frame painted and decorated with traditional ornamentation, covers made of white felt and canvas, ropes of animal hair, flooring and carpets of hand-sewn felt, and furniture. As a traditional dwelling, the Mongol *ger* plays an important social and cultural role for nomadic families and its makers are highly respected.⁶ The *ger* is used commonly across the country and those traditions and customs associated with the *ger* are still being

⁴ Galbadrakh Enkhbat, "Grand Festival of Intangible Cultural Heritage – 2018", UB.7, 2018.

⁵ "Traditional craftsmanship of the Mongol Ger and its associated customs", Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO, 2013, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-craftsmanship-of-the-mongol-ger-and-its-associated-customs-00872>.

⁶ Urtnasan Norov, *Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Mongols*. (Ulaanbaatar: The Foundation for the Protection of Natural and Cultural Heritage, 2010), 216-222.

practiced. Besides Mongolia, the craftsmanship of Ger exists with its own distinct features in the neighboring regions of Central and Inner Asia, namely, the Mongols of Inner Mongolia, Qinghai in China, Buryatia and Kalmykia in Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan.

Another case of safeguarding on a similar intangible cultural element is the Epic. The Mongol Tuuli⁷ (Mongol Epic) has been inscribed on the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2009. Aiming to study and promote the unique expression of the Mongol Epic, researchers of the Republic of Kalmykia in the Russian Federation, People's Republic of China, and Mongolia have jointly implemented the project "Through the trace of Jangar 2017" and traveled over 20,000 kilometers, spanning through four countries - Republic of Bashkortostan, Republic of Altai, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan for 40 days and collected data of different epic variations.. The heroic epic Jangar was created in the 15th century among the Oirad people and disseminated to all Mongols. The Epic Jangar depicts the traditional living style of nomadic Mongols, their religion, and history.⁸ Today the epic Jangar is being practiced at the Republic of Kalmykia and the Republic of Buryatia in the Russian Federation, Mongolia, and China. Along with Epic Geser and Secret History of Mongols, the Epic Jangar is considered as one of the three pillars of the Mongol's ancient literature.

Mongolia also shares a common intangible heritage on camel culture with Euro-Asian and Middle-Eastern countries. Accordingly, camel culture can also be identified as another intangible cultural heritage element and nominated for inscription. As an initiative intended for the protection and safeguarding of camel related culture and cultural heritage, delegate of Mongolia has attended the first assembly of International Camel Organization, organized at Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, between 19 and 23 of March 2019 and selected as vice-president of the International Camel Organization's branch in Northeast Asia.

⁷ "Mongol Tuuli, Mongolian epic", Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO, 2009, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/mongol-tuuli-mongolian-epic-00310>.

⁸ Ts. Jargalsaikhan, "Reference Book of Culture", UB, 2015.

3. Conclusion

Throughout their long and rich history, Mongols have created their unique cultural heritage and cultural value in association with the nomadic way of living and protected and transmitted it from generation to generation within the different stages and cycles of life. Euro-Asian countries, such as Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia have similar Intangible Cultural Heritage elements such as "Falconry", "Epic", "Airag or Kumis" and some handcrafting techniques in association to the specificity of the nomadic way of living. This paper documents the Mongolian efforts in the safeguarding of common intangible heritage elements in the Euro-Asia region.

In the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, especially the similar heritage in Euro-Asia and Middle-East, the joint initiative and cooperation can play a significant role and make changes in the research and safeguarding of the heritage beyond imagination. National Center for Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, and Sports of Mongolia is pursuing cooperation opportunities with ECO Member Countries and other Eurasian communities on the safeguarding of common intangible cultural heritage. Such cooperation can be developed further by planning, organizing and conducting joint research projects on common intangible cultural heritage elements, by organizing workshops and meetings to exchange experience on the safeguarding of common intangible cultural heritage elements, by organizing annual or biennial research conferences and symposiums, as well as folk performing art festivals and competitions.

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