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The Kyrgyz Republic: Concept, Strategies, and Practices for the Preservation of the National Cultural Heritage

This study deals with the concept of “cultural heritage” in the Kyrgyz Republic, including both material culture and traditional ideology. We describe their codification, and strategies for their preservation and popularization. We draw on a large database, which includes findings of original fieldwork. We outline the elaboration of the concept of cultural heritage and its content, presenting a systematic description of institutional aspect and meaning, and we analyze the practices of its implementation. The historical and cultural heritage is viewed as a multifactorial space. The realities of modern Kyrgyzstan suggest that the nation implements integration strategies in foreign policy. While using the notions of cultural heritage and traditional values, the republic strengthens its ties with other members of the CIS, raising the level of its integration into the Central Asian community and maintaining its status as part of the world civilization. Cultural heritage is a key resource of social change and the economic stabilization of local communities. Its preservation at the level of everyday culture, academic, and educational practices, museums, festivals, etc. is a condition of national consolidation.

Keywords: Kyrgyzstan, historical-cultural space, intangible cultural heritage, folk art crafts, epic tradition, national identity.

Introduction

One of the key issues of the humanitarian discourse of the modern world is the assessment and preservation of cultural heritage. It is marked on the Eurasian scale at the global and national levels. It is significant that

according to the decision of Council of Heads of State of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) 2022 was declared as the Year of Folk Art and Cultural Heritage. On December 30, 2021, the President of the Russian Federation signed the Decree “On Observing the Year of Cultural Heritage of the Peoples of Russia in the Russian

Federation”. In this context, the study of the experience of the Commonwealth countries in the implementation of national and international integration projects has acquired particular importance.

When evaluating the phenomenon of cultural heritage, it is important to take into account that its development goes back to the European humanitarian tradition of the Modern Age. Initially, it was about objects that represented the past and civilizational differences. Understanding their connection with contemporary culture determined the emergence of the category of “cultural values” in the Contemporary Period. The concept of “cultural heritage” was actively being formulated in the 20th century; in that period, its legal and organizational aspects were being developed at the international and national levels simultaneously. Academic science was addressing the phenomenon of cultural heritage in the context of global and national history, through the prism of studying collective social memory and ethnic traditions. On the scale of national discourses, the assessment of cultural heritage was projected onto the spheres of economics, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, information theory, etc. (Nora, 1997; Smith, 2004; Chepaitene, 2010; Pomian, 2010; and others).

In Kyrgyzstan, as in many other countries, the concept of “cultural heritage” in the legal, public, and academic spheres began to be developed in the 1990s. This was preceded by a long study of the history and traditional culture of the Kyrgyz. Back in the first half of the 20th century, there appeared studies by S.M. Dudin (1925), M.S. Andreev (1928), V. Chepelev (1939), and M.V. Ryndin (1948). The results of the Kyrgyz archaeological and ethnographic expedition of 1953–1955 was a breakthrough in the field. Also, there were the outstanding works by A.N. Bernshtam (1952), K.I. Antipina (1962), D.T. Umetalieva (1966), S.M. Abramzon (1990), and others.

In 1943, the Institute of Language, Literature, and History was established, whose main focus was the study of cultural heritage. Owing to its work, the study of the artifacts and objects of historical and cultural heritage achieved a new level. While Kyrgyzstan’s independence was being secured, this humanitarian center was transformed into the Institute of History and Cultural Heritage of Kyrgyzstan of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS); then, in 2018, into the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnology of the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic. In 2016, together with the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, it produced a generalized publication “Kyrgyz” (Kirgizy, 2016). In recent decades, the authorial and collective projects in Kyrgyzstan in the field of cultural heritage have been carried out taking into account the analysis

of the realities of the past, ethnic traditions, and the characteristics of the socio-cultural modernization of the country. Some topics dedicated to the study of traditional culture, historical and architectural records, with a focus on conservation, informational support, and the teaching of historical and cultural heritage were highlighted in the works of Z.K. Urmanbetova and S.M. Abdrasulov (2009), E.S. Luzanova (2010), A.I. Toktosunova (2009), R.S. Zainulina (2009a, b; 2010), A.Y. Malchik (2010), A.K. Bektanova (2016), N.A. Prokhorova (2020), and others. However, no attempts have been made to systematically describe the cultural heritage of Kyrgyzstan as a whole in its conceptual, institutional, and content aspects.

The purpose of this study is, while tracing the development of the “cultural heritage” concept, to assess the practices of preserving and promoting the tangible and intangible historical and cultural heritage of the Kyrgyz Republic. This involves studying the history and content of state and public initiatives, legislative developments, as well as academic and sociocultural projects.

The study is based on field materials—the results of work at museums and festival sites, in craft workshops and tourist centers of the country in 2018–2021. Normative documents, publications in periodical, specialized and popular Internet resources from Kyrgyzstan were used in this study, reflecting the processes of the codification and updating of the country’s historical and cultural heritage.

The theoretical and methodological basis of this research is a modern interpretation of culture, which is considered to be a form of existence of the human community—a way of storing, transmitting, and updating social experience. Cultural heritage (integrated through its material and non-material aspects) is the embodiment of historical continuity. In the current state, it is a palimpsest, which arises as a result of the imposition of non-contemporaneous cultural layers.

Modern science interprets cultural heritage as a set of values inherited by society from the past; these are used in the system of synchronous cultural ties, acting as relatively stable forms that create a cultural tradition. Based on the assessment of the huge potential of the multidimensional cultural heritage, strategies are being developed for its conservation and use as one of the most important resources for development. The loss of cultural values is assessed as irreparable and irretrievable; it inevitably affects all areas of life of present and future generations; it leads to gaps in historical memory and spiritual gaps in ethnic and national communities. Successive cultural ties ensure the integrity and stability of these associations (Baller, 1987; Chepaitene, 2010; Toktosunova, 2009; Luzanova, 2010; Alymkulova, 2013; and others).

The Kyrgyzstan state policy for the protection and promotion of historical and cultural heritage

In Kyrgyzstan, the concept of “historical and cultural heritage” was intensively developed in the final decades of the 20th century at the administrative, legislative, academic, and educational levels. Although, the foundations for strategies for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage sites were laid much earlier, at the beginning of this century. The Soviet Union, which united the vast expanses of Eurasia in 1922, systematically supported the socio-cultural projects of the republics that were part of it. The Turkestan Committee for Museums and Protection of Antiquities, Art, and Nature has played an important role in preserving the cultural heritage of Central Asia.

In the course of the national-territorial demarcation of Central Asia, with the support of the state and regional authorities, an academic and administrative infrastructure was formed in the macroregion, focused on the study, systematization, and protection of historical and cultural monuments, and later of cultural values, cultural heritage sites.

In 1924, the Kara-Kirghiz Autonomous Oblast was formed (as part of the RSFSR), which in 1926 was transformed into the Kirghiz ASSR, and in 1936 into the Kirghiz SSR. An important event in the life of the republic was the organization in 1966 of the Kirghiz Republican Voluntary Society for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments.

In 1976, the Law of the USSR “On the Protection and Use of Historical and Cultural Monuments” was adopted. In the Kirghiz SSR, a similar law appeared in 1977. It outlined the attitude towards historical and cultural monuments, with respect to civic awareness. By 1991, the Kirghiz Republican Society registered 2659 objects (mainly archaeological and historical); 22 monuments of federal importance and 452 monuments of republican importance were registered as protected (Moskalev, 2011).

From the end of the 20th century, the process of developing the concept and strategies for the protection and promotion of the historical and cultural heritage of already sovereign Kyrgyzstan, in accordance with world trends, developed on the basis of a broad interethnic dialogue. In 1992, the Republic of Kyrgyzstan became a member of the UN. In the same year, the UNESCO World Heritage Center was established. In 1994, a UNESCO Office for Central Asia was opened in Almaty, Kazakhstan, with the participation of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In 1999, on the basis of the Yeltsin Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University, the UNESCO Chair for the Study of World Culture

and Religions was organized. Since 2017, Kyrgyzstan has been a member of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. In 2021, the republic was admitted to the Evaluation Body of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The implementation of UNESCO programs and projects has become one of the factors for Kyrgyzstan’s entry into the world cultural space. This activity was based on cooperation with a number of organizations. Among them is the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), founded in 1965. Today it brings together 110 countries and evaluates sites proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List.

One of the partners of UNESCO in Kyrgyzstan is the Central Asian Crafts Support Association (CACSA). It was created in the early 2000s. D.I. Chochunbaeva—an actress and artist, now an honored worker of culture of the Kyrgyz Republic—became the president of the association. She began her social activities in the late 1980s; in 1996, she founded the Center for the Development of Traditional and Modern Culture “Kyrgyz Style”. With the active participation of Dinara Chochunbaeva in 2000, 17 organizations of the nation united to develop traditional crafts. Emerging as a public project, CACSA was quickly gaining authority: by 2006, it included more than 60 craft groups, and several thousand Central Asian artisans were in the sphere of influence. This organization has implemented several dozen projects on traditional handicraft technologies and folk art. In 2009, on its basis, the CACSARC-kg (Resource Center in Kyrgyzstan) was established and registered as an independent public foundation (Obshchestvenny fond..., (s.a.); Ala-Toodogu..., 2016).

The effectiveness of CACSA activities in the field of cultural heritage preservation can be judged by partner projects. In 2003, the organization became a member of the World Crafts Council for the Asia-Pacific Region (WCC-APR) and a partner of UNESCO in the implementation of the UNESCO Award of Excellence for Handicrafts and the UNESCO Seal of Excellence projects in Central Asia. The UNESCO Seal of Excellence program was initiated by the UNESCO Bangkok office in 2001; in 2004, it was extended to Central Asia. In 2005, the “Asahi” handicraft group from Kyrgyzstan, which took part in the Central Asian Cultures Festival in Paris, received the UNESCO prize for traditional embroidery.

One of the partnership projects of CACSA/CACSARC-kg, with the participation of Kyrgyzstan and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, was the regional forum of cultural and art workers: “Cultural Space of Central Asia: Unity in Diversity”,

held in 2009 in the capital of Tajikistan, Dushanbe. In recent years, CACSARC-kg has been actively cooperating with the Central Asian Culture and Arts Network platform, an information network created with the participation of the Goethe Institute and UNESCO in Uzbekistan to develop a dialogue in the field of cultural heritage of Central Asia.

An important condition for the development of programs for the preservation of cultural heritage in Kyrgyzstan is the strengthening of cooperation with the CIS countries (Oktyabrskaya, 2013a; Martynenko, 2017). The beginning of integration in this area was laid down with the adoption in 1993 of the Charter of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The strategic partnership was consolidated by the Agreement on the Return of Cultural and Historical Property to the States of Their Origin and the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Culture of 1992, as well as the Regulations on the Procedure for the Return of Illegally Exported and Imported Cultural Property of 1997. These documents outlined the conditions for the preservation of the cultural values of the Commonwealth member states on the basis of recognition of their sovereignty, originality, and equal cooperation.

In the CIS, international conferences have become a permanent platform for dialogue. Their organizer was the Likhachev Russian Research Institute of Cultural and Natural Heritage. It was created in 1992 to implement the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. In May 2014, the institute received the status of the Commonwealth's main organization for the scientific support of a coherent cultural policy and programs for the preservation and use of the national cultural heritage. The discussions held with its support were focused on the prospects for integration of the CIS member states (Analiticheskiy material..., (s.a.)).

With the adoption by UNESCO of the Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003, the cooperation strategy of member countries of the CIS began to be determined by the recognition of their traditions and historical and cultural heritage as a whole as the basis for national consolidation and development potential. For coordination in this area, in 2006, the Council for Humanitarian Cooperation was established, as well as the Working Group for the Study and Comparative Analysis of Legislation in the Sphere of Culture and the Working Group for Cultural Tourism of the Commonwealth countries.

The nature of the interaction of the CIS countries in the development of the concept and strategies for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage was determined by the principles of unity and diversity, integration of world and national values as a condition

for self-preservation and progressive development based on intercultural dialogue.

In accordance with an agreement signed in May 2006 at a meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of Government (Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan), the Interstate Fund for Humanitarian Cooperation (IFHC) was established. It has become a permanent platform for dialogue between the Commonwealth countries, in particular, in the field of the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage.

In 2010, it was decided to declare the year 2011 as the Year of Historical and Cultural Heritage of the CIS countries. In accordance with its results, the "Cultural Capitals of the Commonwealth" interstate program was initiated. In May 2011, the Concept of Cooperation between the CIS member states in the field of culture was signed. In 2012, a new edition of the Model Law on Cultural Heritage Objects was approved; in 2013, the Model Law on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The program "Main Measures of Cooperation Between the CIS Member States in the Field of Culture for 2016–2020" began to operate in 2015, and the Model Code on Culture of the CIS started in 2018.

In 2000–2020, hundreds of projects were being implemented across the CIS, aimed at preserving and popularizing cultural heritage. In 2018, the International Forum "Volunteering in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage in the CIS" was held by the IFHC. Kyrgyzstan took the most active part in it. Over the past 15 years, it supported more than 350 IFHC events (including 60 on a permanent basis). Among them are international competitions in national sports, the International Festival of Epics of the Peoples of the World, etc. (Mezhgosudarstvennyy fond..., (s.a.)).

Taking into account the large contribution of Kyrgyzstan to the implementation of international projects, the CIS Council of Heads of Government decided to declare Karakol, one of the tourist and museum centers of the country, as the cultural capital of the Commonwealth for 2022.

In the last decade, integration processes have become one of the trends in the formation of the cultural policy of Kyrgyzstan. The republic has developed close relations with the countries of Central Asia, with international structures representing the Turkic world, in particular, with the Turkic Council, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture, etc.

The International Organization of Turkic Culture holds an important place in the space of intercultural dialogue in Kyrgyzstan. The idea of its creation arose in 1992 in Istanbul during a meeting of the ministers of culture of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan,

Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkey. In 1993, in the capital of Kazakhstan, Almaty, a document was signed that consolidated the formation of a structure that united the Turkic-speaking countries in order to preserve and develop common historical and cultural values. Its general directorate is located in Ankara, the governing body is the Permanent Council of Ministers of Culture of the member states.

Since 1996, the International Organization of Turkic Culture has been officially cooperating with UNESCO. In 2009, it received its modern name Türk Kültür ve Sanatları Ortak Yönetimi (Tur.) – TÜRKSOY / TURKSOY, and in the same year it became a member of the Turkic Council founded in 2009. Currently, six states are members of this organization, including Kyrgyzstan. The activities of TURKSOY are focused on the implementation of educational and scientific projects to preserve and popularize the cultural heritage of the Turkic-speaking countries. The TURKSOY leadership emphasizes that the organization does not pursue political goals. However, since the 1990s, at its behest, the prospects of Islamization and geopolitical models of Turkic unity are being actively discussed in Eurasia (TÜRKSOY..., (s.a.)).

For 30 years, Kyrgyzstan has been participating in the implementation of TURKSOY programs. In 2018, the journal of the organization published materials dedicated to the Year of the Great Kyrgyz Writer Chinghiz Aitmatov, announced in honor of the 90th anniversary of his birth. In 2019, Osh in Kyrgyzstan was named the cultural capital of the Turkic world. In the spring of 2021, the Minister of Culture of the Kyrgyz Republic visited the headquarters of the organization and took part in the opening of the exhibition in honor of the 30th anniversary of the State independence. During the meeting, it was noted that cooperation between TURKSOY and Kyrgyzstan continues to develop (Ibid.).

Of great importance for the implementation of cultural heritage programs in Kyrgyzstan are the projects of the Eurasia Foundation, which operates with the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development. The foundation with offices in Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek, Osh), Kazakhstan (Almaty), and Tajikistan (Dushanbe) was founded in 2005. It supports initiatives to develop local communities, social entrepreneurship, educational systems, etc. For example, a grant allocated by the foundation for the creation of the CACSARC-kg Resource Center made it possible to increase the efficiency of work to preserve the cultural traditions of Kyrgyzstan.

The activities of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) are aimed at the integration and preservation of the cultural heritage of Central Asia. It is designed to help the rural communities

of Central Asia, in particular, to support traditional crafts. The prospect of their development is set by the FAO framework program for 2022–2031. Today, according to the experts of the organization, the problems of the macro-region are poverty and forced migration. However, under these conditions, it is ethno-local crafts (as the FAO studies of their socio-economic potential have shown) that can be an effective stabilization factor (FAO, (s.a.)).

At present, an important condition for the repeatability of traditional crafts and the preservation of cultural heritage of Kyrgyzstan is the support of a number of international organizations and foundations. These are, for example, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Japan International Cooperation Agency, etc. European funds also work in Kyrgyzstan. The multi-vector nature of the country's external affairs is determined by the formation and development of its cultural policy, which includes the preservation and promotion of the national heritage. The Republic attaches great importance to the preservation of traditions. Cultural heritage is considered the most important factor in the formation of national unity. The state plays a decisive role in its codification, study, and popularization.

The concept of “historical and cultural heritage” of the Kyrgyz Republic

At present, the formation of the concept of the historical and cultural heritage of Kyrgyzstan is based on the experience of its study and preservation, on a widespread global dialogue and the achievements of international scholarship.

The basis of reflection on the topic of “cultural heritage” became the interpretation that is traditional for the language and culture of the Kyrgyz. According to K.K. Yudakhin, the author-compiler of the fundamental “Kyrgyz-Russian Dictionary”, the word *muras* (Arabic) denoted a stable circle of concepts: ‘property’, ‘inheritance’, ‘legacy (of ancestors)’, ‘reliance (on relatives)’ (Kirgizsko-russkiy slovar, 1985: 92). Throughout the 20th century, in the course of comprehension of the theme of heritage, there was a gradual expansion of its semantic field from a collection of memorials to a system of values, which was formed on the basis of continuity in global and local development. Cultural values served as a presentation of the achievements of the past. The totality of these meanings determined the content of the word *muras* (Oktyabrskaya, 2013a: 21–22). The transition to the understanding of their inalienability from the current

culture predetermined the emergence of the concept of “cultural heritage”. Its foundation was the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted in 1972. To ensure its implementation, in 1976, the Committee and the World Heritage Fund were established. According to the convention, “cultural heritage” includes: monuments—architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; groups of buildings—groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; sites: works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view (Konventsiya..., 1972).

The Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage came into force in 1975. In the USSR, it was signed in 1988. After the declaration of independence, Kyrgyzstan, like other countries in the post-Soviet sphere, began to form national legislation in the field of culture. The Law “On Culture” in the Kyrgyz Republic was adopted in 1992. It was drawn up taking into account international normative practices and cultural dialogue with the CIS countries (Oktyabrskaya, 2013a, b).

In 1995, Kyrgyzstan ratified the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, having approved the concept of *muras* (‘heritage’) as a key category of state policy in the field of preserving cultural traditions and values. In 1999, the Law “On the Protection and Use of Historical and Cultural Heritage” was adopted in Kyrgyzstan. Like the Law “On Culture” of 1992, it was edited during the 2000–2010s. Being coordinated with national and international acts, this document outlined the principles for compiling a national register of historical and cultural monuments, including the recognition of the diversity of cultural heritage in unison with the natural environment, and the understanding that its actualization is inseparable from the respect for human and people’s rights and from the protection of comfortable living environment.

The first to be included in the Representative World Heritage List from Kyrgyzstan in 2001 were the medieval historical and architectural complex Shah-Fazil; the territory of the city of Uzgen, which arose in the 2nd–1st centuries BC on the way from the Ferghana Valley to Kashgar; the archaeological and architectural complex

“Burana Tower”, the main structure of which was a minaret, presumably built in the 10th–11th centuries; cultural and natural landscape of the lake Issyk-Kul. Later, these properties were removed from the Representative List. At present, the List contains: the Sulaiman-Too Sacred Mountain (since 2009), the network of routes of the Chang’an-Tian Shan Corridor of the Great Silk Road (since 2014, together with China and Kazakhstan), Sary-Chelek, Besh-Aral, Padysha-Ata nature reserves of the Western Tian Shan (since 2016).

At the end of the 20th century, the topic of intangible cultural heritage has become one of the most discussed in the world community. Its discussion was connected with the development of anthropology, folkloristic studies, with overcoming the “Eurocentrism” of cultural policy, and the growing interest in the traditions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Recognition of the “intangible heritage” (manifested not in objects, but in traditional skills, knowledge, ideas) of a wide range of peoples emphasized their significance and originality. In 1998, UNESCO developed a program for the proclamation of masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage (Galkova, 2010).

In 2003, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted, which included oral traditions and their expressions, customs, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices associated with traditional crafts, as well as tools, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces. It was recognized that the intangible cultural heritage remained relevant to the community for many generations, and determined its sustainability. It was recreated in interaction with nature, forming a sense of continuity and originality, respect for cultural diversity and creativity (Konventsiya..., 2003).

In 2006, Kyrgyzstan ratified the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. In 2012, the Law “On the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Kyrgyz Republic” was adopted, which made it possible to integrate traditional culture into the national and global cultural space at the regulatory level (Kyrgyz Respublikasynyn tarykhyi-madaniy..., (s.a.)).

In 2012, under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, the “*Muras*” (“Heritage”) Fund for the Historical and Cultural Heritage of the People of Kyrgyzstan was established. With its support, in the 1990–2000s, objects of archaeology, history, and traditional culture, names of outstanding craftsmen, storytellers, and heroes of the past, etc. were introduced into the sphere of cultural heritage of Kyrgyzstan. In cities, villages, and natural areas of the country, monuments were erected to the heads of tribal associations and volost governors of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A set of sacred and memorable places was compiled. The task of preserving the unique historical and cultural

heritage in the republic was outlined in the Law “On Museums and the Museum Fund” of 2015.

Museum, festival, and commemorative practices have become a form of actualization of the historical and cultural heritage, which has acquired a multi-level character, combining tribal, ethno-local, ethno-cultural, ethno-political, and civilizational components. The ideas about the phenomenon of Eurasian nomadism and Turkic unity became definitive. Images and motifs of the ethnic history of the Middle Ages and Modern times, objects and monuments from the times of the Russian Empire and the Soviet past expanded the space of the historical and cultural heritage of Kyrgyzstan at the beginning of the 21st century.

In 2015, the Concept for the Protection and Use of the Historical and Cultural Heritage of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2015–2020 was approved. At present, there are approximately two thousand outstanding monuments of history, archaeology, urban planning, and monumental art, and more than one thousand monuments of local significance, of which 583 objects (including 66 historical monuments, 335 archaeological monuments, 122 architectural monuments, 53 art monuments) are included in State List of Historical and Cultural Monuments of the Kyrgyz Republic (Kyrgyz Respublikasynyn tarykhyi-madaniy..., (s.a.)). To effectively use this potential in shaping the national development model of Kyrgyzstan, 2016 was declared as the Year of History and Culture.

The development of a conceptual framework for the cultural policy of Kyrgyzstan continued on the basis of international integration. The national legislation of the republic was harmonized with the 2013 CIS Model Law on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the 2018 CIS Model Code of Culture, and the 2000 CIS Model Law on Items of Cultural Heritage.

In the state regulations of Kyrgyzstan, intangible cultural heritage was defined as a set of spiritual, intellectual, and moral values inherent in a community (national, ethnic, confessional, etc.), which are a reflection of its identity.

In the official interpretation, the intangible cultural heritage of the Kyrgyz Republic is ideas, knowledge, and customs concerning nature and the universe; customs, rituals, and festive events; folklore, storytelling, and other performing arts (including the art of storytellers-manaschi); traditional crafts and skills, as well as tools, objects, and cultural spaces; traditional games and sports (Zakon..., 2012). Overall, this is Kyrgyzstan’s traditional ethnocultural array. From 2012 to 2021, ten objects were included in the World List from Kyrgyzstan (including at the level of collective applications). National legislation and programs for the preservation of historical and cultural heritage have approved their value as an integral

part of the world cultural heritage. The main indication of the significance of the historical and cultural (and intangible) heritage of Kyrgyzstan at the level of political and broad public and journalistic discourse was recognized to be the cultural sovereignty of its people as the basis of state sovereignty (Kovshova, 2012).

Practices of the actualization of intangible cultural heritage of Kyrgyzstan in the past and present

The synthesis of ideas about historical and intangible cultural values that are significant for national identity and ethnocultural distinctness determined the concept of historical and cultural heritage, which was embodied in the system of normative acts of Kyrgyzstan in the 1990–2020s. It dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, when the living practices of crafts (later, intangible cultural heritage) became the object of interest of the society and the state.

In the 1920s, within the boundaries of modern Kyrgyzstan, several carpet, jewelry, and similar guilds (*artels*) and training workshops were created. In the 1930–1940s, in the city of Tokmak, there was an educational and production art center that united the best artisans of the republic. In 1937, the largest workshop of its time, “Kyzyl Kilemchi” (“Red Carpet Weaver”), began work in Osh. During the Great Patriotic War, they were redesigned.

The adoption by the Council of Ministers of the USSR of the Decree “On Measures for Further Development of Folk Art Crafts” in 1968 became an impetus for the revival of such organizations. Following the Federal Decree, the Decree of the Council of Ministers of the Kirghiz SSR “On the Results of Implementation of the Plan for the Development of the National Economy of the Kirghiz SSR for 9 Months of 1968” was issued, within the framework of which the “Kyyal” (“Dream”) association was formed in 1969. Its head office was located in the capital, and branches WERE established in a number of cities and villages of the republic. Each of them specialized in one type of craft. For example, in the village of Komsomol (now, the village of Bulan-Sogottu), T. Amantaev was working, a famous woodcarver, whose heir continues today the work of his father. The Osh branch of “Kyyal” specialized in the production of traditional clothing. In Uzgen, the production of pile carpets and majolica tableware was launched, etc.

In 1973, under the Ministry of Local Industry, the Central Artistic Experimental Laboratory was created, whose employees, during expeditions around the republic, assembled a collection of 200 samples that were the

products of 50 best folk craftsmen. This collection served as the basis for applied and methodological developments in the field of preserving the folk crafts and applied art of the Kyrgyz SSR, and then independent Kyrgyzstan (Malchik, 2010: 67–75).

In the 1970–1980s, at the “Kyyl” Association of Folk Art Crafts, there was a school, the teachers and students of which created reference samples of products, adapting them to the present. The merit of the “Kyyl” association is the popularization of the *ak-kalpak* traditional male headgear. In the 1970s, six types of this item were produced. *Ak-kalpak* became the brand of “Kyyl”: in 1977, it was awarded the silver medal of VDNKh (Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy) of the USSR; in the 2000s, it was qualified as one of the symbols of the Kyrgyz Republic.

In the USSR, “Kyyl” was one of the leading folk craft centers focused on export. Having survived the difficult 1990s, the association continued its work. In 1993, it acquired national status, which is retained at the present time. In the late 2010s, more than 120 thousand artisans working throughout the republic were registered with the association. The “Kyyl” association was given the task of developing the national art crafts of sovereign Kyrgyzstan (Ibid.; Ozerov, 2017).

In addition to the “Kyyl” association, there are other similar centers, for example, the “Muras” (“Heritage”) workshops in Osh, the “Ademi”, “Zhez oimok” (“Bronze thimble”), “Tulpar”, “Zerger” (“Handyman”) enterprises in Bishkek, and many others. The ethnic jewelry industry is rapidly developing. Currently, the “Keldike” and “Ethno” brands are recognizable both in country and abroad.

In modern Kyrgyzstan, craftsmen have a very high status. Since 2006, on the second Sunday of October, the country has been celebrating Artisan’s Day. Recognition of the great role of traditional technologies preserved in Kyrgyzstan served as the basis for including this “living heritage” in the world cultural arsenal.

After the ratification in 2006 of the Convention for the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the adoption in 2012 of the relevant law in Kyrgyzstan, the title of “Master-Bearer of the Material and Spiritual Traditions of Folk Culture” was approved; the work began on compiling registers of intangible cultural heritage (Zainulin, 2009a).

In 2012, traditional felt carpets *shyrdak* and *ala-kiiz* were included in the World List of Intangible Cultural Heritage from Kyrgyzstan; likewise, in 2013, the epic trilogy “Manas-Semetey-Seitek” and the culture of its performance. In 2014, felt yurt (from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) was recognized as belonging to all mankind. In 2015, the list of world masterpieces was supplemented by the art of musical and poetic improvisation *aitysh*

(from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan), and in 2016 by the Nowruz / Nauryz holiday (from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, India, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Turkey) and the traditions of cooking and serving *kalam* wheat cakes among the Kyrgyz (from Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Turkey). The equestrian game *kook-boru* was included in the UNESCO list. Then, in 2019, the tradition of making and wearing a men’s headgear from felt *ak-kalpak* was included, the day of which has been celebrated in Kyrgyzstan since 2011. In 2020, the traditional game of *toguz korgool*, a variant of chess, was added to the World List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. In 2021, the World Nomad Games, which were first held in Cholpon-Ata (Issyk-Kul Region) in 2014, were also included in the UNESCO list (O gosudarstvennoy politike..., (s.a.)).

The codification of the intangible cultural heritage in Kyrgyzstan was accompanied by the restoration of many elements of traditional culture. Much attention was paid to national sports. In 1995, large-scale competitions were held in the republic on the occasion of the 1000th anniversary of the “Manas” epic. In 2003, the Law “On National Sports” was adopted, embodying the values of the Kyrgyz people. The following competitions were classified as national: *kok-boru*, *oodarysh*, *kyz kuumai*, *kuresh*, *ordo*, *toguz korgool*, etc.; these were included in the Unified Sports Classification of the Kyrgyz Republic. Federations of *kuresh*, *toguz korgool*, *kok-boru* were founded; honorary titles were approved for several types of national sports. The state concept for the development of physical culture and sports in the republic approved the priority development of traditional sport games. The result of many years of efforts was the organization of the World Nomad Games with the support of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and the World Ethnogames Confederation. For the first time, they were held in 10 types of ethnospport, with 37 types by 2018 (O vsemirnykh igrakh..., 2018; Sporttun uluttuk..., (s.a.)).

One of the most significant elements of the intangible cultural heritage of Kyrgyzstan is the epic tradition. In 2003, at the request of China’s Kyrgyz community, the “Manas” epic was recognized as a model of creativity of world significance. In 2006, the subject “Manas studies” was introduced into the curriculum of higher education in Kyrgyzstan; and in 2011, the Law “On the Manas Epic” was adopted. In 2013, Kyrgyzstan applied for inclusion of the “Manas-Semetey-Seitek” cycle (trilogy) and the art of *manaschi* into the UNESCO Representative List (Bakchiev, 2018).

In 2014, the work on the academy publication of the epic was completed. In 2015, by a decree of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, Manas Day was

established as a public holiday, which is celebrated annually on December 4. Over the past decade, more and more new studio schools have been opened in the country, festivals and competitions in storytelling skills have been held, and museums have been created. Many monuments to Manas adorn the cities of Kyrgyzstan. In 2019, the “Manas” National Academy, named after Chinghiz Aitmatov, was created in the country; in 2021, the “Manas” Theater was opened.

The epic tradition and its keepers (the *manaschi*) enjoy great prestige in modern Kyrgyzstan. The “Manas-Semetey-Seitek” trilogy is valued at the state and public level as an encyclopedia of folk culture and the embodiment of the national idea. In public and journalistic discourse, the “Seven Commandments of Manas” (reconstructed on the basis of a modern reading of the epic) are widely discussed: strengthening and protecting of the state; the unity and cohesion of the nation; national honor; inter-ethnic harmony and cooperation; work and knowledge as the basis of prosperity; generosity and tolerance; and healthy life in harmony with nature. These are considered the moral code of the Kyrgyz nation. At the level of public awareness, the appeal to the epic tradition is seen as a way of the renewal and unity of Kyrgyzstan and of the entire Turkic world (Ibid.; Manas, (s.a.)). The expression of this trend is the Festival of Epics of the Peoples of the World; in 2021, it was held for the sixth time at the most prestigious venues in Kyrgyzstan.

The preservation of the epic, and also the entire cultural heritage, implies the training of specialists. With the support of national and international funds, numerous courses operate in the country, as well as workshops and training courses are held. For example, in 2018, the training of rural residents of Kyrgyzstan was carried out by the Association of Hungarian Folk Artists. After the completion of the project, several artisans of the republic were invited to participate in the annual Festival of Folk Arts in Budapest.

Back in the 1990s in Kyrgyzstan, efforts were made for involving the population in socio-cultural activities. Traditional crafts began to be seen as an important resource for development. The villages of Kyzyl-Tuu (Tonsky District, Issyk-Kul Region) and Kochkor/Kochkorka (Kochkorsky District, Naryn Region) became well-known centers of national crafts in the republic. In Kochkor, there are several women’s cooperatives engaged in the production of patterned felts. Kyzyl-Tuu is called a manufactory village, where yurts are made, and each yard specializes in a certain operation. In other locations of the country, for example, in Karakol, there are family workshops for the production of yurts. Today, as before, these portable dwellings are used in the republic in everyday and ritual life. They are prestigious

symbols of family and state holidays, the embodiment of national treasure.

Patterned felts are the most recognizable brand of the republic. The task of their popularization is solved by the international festival “Oimo” (“Pattern”). It was first held in 2006, with the support of CACSA, within the framework of the republican program “One Hundred Cultural Projects”. Originally, the festival had a regional/local character. Today, dozens of artisans from Kyrgyzstan and other countries of Central Asia take part in it.

Numerous handicraft groups engaged in the manufacture of felt have been created in the villages and cities of the republic. One of the most well-known is the “Altyn oymok” workshop-gallery, uniting craftswomen in Bokonbaevo village (Tonsky District, Issyk-Kul Region). They have been certified by UNESCO. In total, 20 artisans have UNESCO certificates in the republic. The workshop produces ca 60 patterned felts *shyrdak* and *ala-kiiz*, most of which are exported.

In modern Kyrgyzstan, artisans (keepers of traditions) are considered to be a creative stratum. In the village of Barskoon/Barskaun (Jeti-Oguzsky District, Issyk-Kul Region), traditional textiles are produced by the “Topchu” handicraft group. It was created in 2017, with the participation of FAO, within the Mountain Partnership Products (MPP) Project, which brings together producers of eco-products living in the mountains of the world. MPP branded labels provide information about the history of products and their significance to the local culture. This marking makes it possible not only to advertise the product, but also to recount the unique traditions of Kyrgyzstan. Inspired by the needlework of “Topchu” craftswomen, designer S. Zhan developed a collection of clothes with traditional Kyrgyz embroidery and felt appliqués, which was presented at Milan Fashion Week in March 2021 (Gorny voilok..., (s.a.)).

The Mountain Partnership program is effectively developing in the republic. At the initiative of Kyrgyzstan, the UN declared the year 2022 as the International Year of Sustainable Mountain Development. Of great importance for modern Kyrgyzstan is the project “One Village – One Product”, initiated in 2011 by the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Initially, it covered 20 villages and about 30 local communities that formed the Issyk-Kul Region Development Association for the purpose of the production of food, clothing, and patterned felts from local raw materials, based on traditional technologies. Within this project, workshops for the production of felt products were created in the villages of Kara-Shaar (Tonsky District, Issyk-Kul Region), Kara-Oi (Issyk-Kulsky District, Issyk-Kul Region), and others. Their products represent the “Issyk-Kul Brand”. The association provides villages with jobs (Kiizbaev, 2019).

In 2018, the “One Village – One Product” project brought together more than 2000 artisans, who produced (among other goods) more than 25,000 felt products for export. In 2019, the Issyk-Kul model spread to other regions of the country; approximately 300 craft groups were created, engaged in the manufacture of food additives, preserves, dried fruits, etc. Over the past decade, culinary traditions and folk recipes have become one of the national brands of Kyrgyzstan (Ibid.).

The “One Village – One Product” project is also focused on the development of tourism and hotel business using authentic practices of hospitality. International organizations, in particular, UNDP, USAID and others, which have their offices in the country, played an important role in the creation of the leisure infrastructure in Kyrgyzstan. The development of tourism business has maintained the values and objects of cultural heritage. In 2018, the slogan “Yurts, koumiss, and artisans” has once again represented the republic at one of the largest tourism exhibitions in Berlin. Historical and cultural heritage has become an effective tool for integrating Kyrgyzstan into the global cultural space.

Conclusions

Global changes in Central Asia that are rapidly gaining momentum have given the issues of cultural heritage a new dimension in the last decade of the 20th to early 21st century. The total globalization of economic processes, as well as ongoing westernization, has exacerbated the problem of preserving traditional cultures. Strategies for the modernization of the countries of the macroregion, including Kyrgyzstan, “put antiquity at the service of modernity”. Theorists and practitioners of nation building began to consider historical and cultural heritage as the active factors in socio-cultural transformations. Their preservation contributed to the consolidation of national communities, for the harmonious development of the country for the benefit of future generations.

In modern times, the historical and cultural heritage in Kyrgyzstan is valued as a multidimensional space, and the interconnection of ethnic and universal values is affirmed. Cultural heritage is in the focus of political activity and public attention. The popularization of cultural values is primarily directed towards the youth. The traditional culture occupies an important place in primary, secondary, and university education. The embodiments of the cultural and political potential of the country are the heroes and rulers of the past, as well as the heads of the Kyrgyz clans. The epic tradition (the spirit of Manas) is recognized as an expression of national self-consciousness and patriotism. An appeal to

cultural heritage serves as a tool for building a system of interethnic, international relationships. By appealing to traditional values, the country forms a positive image, strengthens ties in the Turkic world, integrates into the Central Asian community, and confirms its place in the global cultural space. The republic is building effective ties with the CIS countries, by adhering to common strategies for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. Historical and cultural heritage, shaping the mentality and way of life of the national community of modern Kyrgyzstan, is a factor in its consolidation and ensuring social stability.

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