

International Partnership Programme for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage  
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## COUNTRY REPORT: MONGOLIA

### Safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritages of Mongolia

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As the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO takes multilateral measures to provide cultural freedom for humanity, to safeguard and protect cultural diversity, native languages, tangible and intangible cultural heritages, and to make them a creative factor for human development.

As part of the action to protect the intangible heritage of the culture, in 2001 UNESCO adopted the “**UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity**” at the 31<sup>st</sup> session of the General Assembly, in 2003 adopted **the International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**, and in 2005 adopted the **Convention for Promoting Diversity of Cultural Expression**, and has started their implementation.

Since 2001, UNESCO has been announcing worldwide the masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity. During the Third Proclamation in 2005, 80 items of intangible heritage were announced as masterpieces of humanity. In 2003, the traditional **art of morin khuur music**, and in 2005, the **Mongolian traditional long song**, both created by the Mongolian nation, were declared as **Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**.

These documents and activities of UNESCO refute the idea that the 21st century would become a century of globalisation, experiencing conflict and contradiction between cultures and civilisations. Moreover, these documents are important for giving confidence to nations and people of the world that the safeguarding and protect on of the native languages, the cultures, and their diversity and mutual understanding among the cultures, will become a guarantee to establish a peaceful, better, more sustainable and reasonable world.

In the line of UNESCO policy and principles, we aim to discuss the safeguarding, protecting, revolutionising, and emerging issues of the intangible cultural heritage of Mongolia.

The UNESCO Convention, which was adopted in 2003 and clarifies the main categories and techniques to identify the intangible culture, is highly important. Examples are as follows:

1. **Oral traditions and expressions including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage (saga, ode, eulogy, comparison words, poems of ethnology, ritual sprinkling, etc.);**

- 2. Traditional performing arts and expressions (traditional long and short songs of Mongolia, throat singing, whistling, Morin khuur, reed pipe, harmonica songs, traditional musical arts, traditional dance /bielgee/, tsam and other dances);**
- 3. Social practices, rituals and festive events;**
- 4. Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;**
- 5. Traditional craftsmanship. It was noted that the list is open for continuation;**

We assume it is correct to include in the list the methodologies and technologies of traditional arts, as well. For instance, traditional diversity of knowledge, methodologies and technologies such as making felt, dressing leather and sheepskin, fermenting milk, drying meat, etc. are demonstrations and proofs of the incredible traditional Mongolian intangible heritage.

Nature requires the safeguarding many types of biological species in order to sustain itself. In the same way, humanity needs to safeguard many types of cultural heritage in order to be sustainable and requires unlimited possibility to develop them. For this reason, the intangible cultural heritage of any nation, ethnic group or group of people is a business card to represent their idiosyncrasy and image as well as the cultural compositions of humanity. Today, there are more than 5000 ethnic groups in 220 countries of the world, so that the life and civilisation of our world are becoming more and more multilateral, rich and interesting.

The oral and intangible cultural heritage of the nations and ethnic groups spring from the location and atmosphere where they exist, the types of work of the people, their art of living, languages, and historical situations of the civilisation.

The Mongolians are one of them, and our oral and intangible cultural heritage's idiosyncrasy is as follows. Since ancient times, Mongolian nomads have been migrating across the wide steppes of Central Asia and have created a civilisation called worldwide the "Nomadic civilisation". This particular method describes the intellectual imagination and basic idiosyncrasy of the oral and intangible heritages.

1. Mongolian intangible heritage is expressed by its possessors, in Mongolian language. There are more than 4 million people who speak Mongolian around the world, and this language carries a marvellous culture of intangible heritage.
2. Compared to sedentary citizens, the nomadic Mongolians interact on a daily basis and more closely with nature, and their life relies more on nature. That is why they respect and are fully acclimatised to it. The folk-arts of Mongolia, its customs, traditions, and feasts are tightly connected to nature and the world, expressing its thousands of occurrences through rhythm. When listening to the traditional Long songs and Morin khuur music, we think of the wide steppes and grassland of Mongolia, but if you listen to the reed pipes and hoomi (throat singing), it feels like you are among huge waterfalls, running down the valley. Mongolians praise the "Blue sky as father" and "Golden land as mother" in the sagas, odes and blessings, having a complex system of customs, traditions and feasts to protect the Motherland and native country.

3. One other peculiarity of the intangible cultural heritage of Mongolia is five major kinds of livestock called “Five precious”. Mongolians value their five kinds of livestock and treat them as human beings.
4. The Intangible traditional cultural heritage of Mongolia is also idiosyncratic for its close connection with shamanism, through thousands of generations, and was later nourished by Buddhism and enriched with traditions, rituals and feasts of ideology “doing good, tolerating wrong habits”, respecting and loving the nature, environment and animals.

Today around 94 percent of the population of Mongolia are Mongolian nationals generating from one ethnic group, and 5 percent are Kazakh nationals. Mongolians speak Mongolian language and Kazakh nationals speak their very own Kazakh language. Buriad, Durvud, Bayad, Uriankhai (Altai uriankhai, Tuva uriankhai, Arig uriankhai, Tsaatan uriankhai), Zakhchin, Torguud, Uuld, Myangad, Darkhad, Barga, Uzemchin, Khamnigan and Chantuu ethnic comprise 17-18 percent of Mongolians. These ethnic groups speak Mongolian language with their own dialects. In addition, they have different cultures from Khalkh people, who comprise 82 percent of the nationals. The State implements a favorable policy to support the human rights, cultural rights and freedom of all ethnicities, without any objection and limitation to their rights in safeguarding, protecting and promoting the cultural diversities. The Kazakh nationals living in Bayan Ulgii province are the national minority. In Bayan Ulgii province, 82,000 people speak in Kazakh language. The national religion is Islam. The Kazakh nationals have their very own traditions and rituals of feasts with rich art, culture, songs and music. The Mongolian and Kazakh nationals have lived side by side in a wide land with a peaceful and friendly tradition of solving the disagreements that arise between them.

However, nowadays, globalisation, centralisation and Western civilisation are influencing to Mongolia, significant changes are happening in our language, in particular the creative environment of intangible heritage of ethnic minorities being replaced by contemporary culture. We are at the risk of losing our intangible cultural heritage, folk art, customs, rituals and traditions.

UNESCO has proclaimed the priceless creations of nomadic Mongolians - the traditional art of Morin khuur music and Long song - as Masterpieces, as the appreciation of the cultural contribution of Mongolians to the heritage fund of humanity.

1. Morin khuur music is a unique traditional art created by Mongolians in their native land. Looking back at history, Morin khuur music was created a long time ago in Mongolia. The Tang chronicles first recorded that in the 3rd century before our era the neighbouring Khunnu nomads, and in the 1st century of our era their descendants the Dunkhuus played a strange musical instrument called “Human Khuur”. According to history, Morin khuur music was created even earlier than in the 3rd century before our era. More important documentation from the 18th century has been found on Morin khuur music of Mongolia, their customs, feasts, traditions, about the fact that the Morin khuur has inseparable connections with long songs, its diversities such as the ladle khuur, khuurs with human, dragon and lion heads and ikhel khuur of western Mongolians. The Morin khuur with its horse head and 2 strings is a unique and exceptional instrument which cannot be found among any other nations of the world, and it differs by its structure and shape as well as its methodology and techniques of playing, sounds and expressions from all other musical instruments with strings.

2. The traditional art and skill of playing the Morin khuur also has exceptional features, which constantly developed over time and have reached high level, becoming a contribution to the intangible cultural heritage fund. According to the research of experts, the fingers positions during the playing of the instrument are different from those of other instruments with strings, many dissimilar methods and positions such as loose strum, single strum, double strum, linked strum, split and pull, slide strum, and *tatlaga* or other variations. As a result, the Morin khuur plays any musical composition perfectly.
3. In addition, Morin khuur music is inseparably related to the worship, pride and symbolism of the spirit, the horse. The head of the Morin khuur is shaped like a horse, its strings and **bow** are made of horsetail hair, and during all occasions such as holding a foal, branding the steeds, horse racing, and other events related to horses, the Mongolians celebrate by playing the Morin khuur.
4. Morin khuur music expresses the musical emotion of nations and ethnicities who speak Mongolian, moreover, it plays an important role along with Long song in reciting of sagas, eulogies, singing of long and short songs, and in ordinary and state customs, rituals and feasts. Therefore, Morin khuur music's traditional art has widely spread not just in Mongolia, but in Inner Mongolia, Buriad, Khalimag, i.e. countries where Mongolian is spoken, as well. Concluding from this, **the Mongolian language, Morin khuur music and Mongolian traditional Long songs are the three foundations of the intellectual aesthetics, mentality and intangible cultural heritages of Mongolia.**
5. Like other intangible cultural heritage, Morin khuur music has become more and more sophisticated throughout history, becoming a living tradition and culture for contemporary Mongolians and other ethnic groups, and has become an inseparable part of their life.

The Morin khuur musical art is an exceptional intangible cultural masterpiece, which has been created and developed by nomadic Mongolians. For this particular reason, it was proclaimed as a unique masterpiece of the oral and intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

We deeply respect our ancestors, who have created, developed, safeguarded and handed down this marvelous masterpiece for us.

The modification, development, safeguarding and protection of Morin khuur music was not an easy task. After the end of the Great Mongol Empire, the Mongolians experienced collapses, wars, and conflicts from time to time, and it is understandable that during the 200 years of Manchu-Chinese colonisation it was not easy to safeguard or form a favorable atmosphere to develop all that what we now call the intellectual and ethical intangible heritage.

Furthermore, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mongolia was dragged into the world's communist system, which in order to spread "the new proletarian culture", denied what was called "the ancient, old fashioned, religious, superstitious (shamanism)" culture, traditions, customs and rituals, and announced a crusade against the "national concepts", and it is shameful that the system created a public philosophy to neglect, prohibit and even eliminate everything that was national, such as oral, intangible heritage, folk arts, traditional rituals, customs, knowledge, and technologies. During that

particular time, traditional Morin khuur music and Long songs were removed from the stage of households and feasts, and almost forgotten as being part of Mongolian customs.

After the “great victimisation” the event that we call “globalisation” has followed and the contemporary public art movement has monopolised the promotion of the Morin khuur and Long songs to the professional stage. From one side, this change has helped to restore, improve the methodology and techniques of almost forgotten Morin khuur music and Long song; however, from the other side, it inhibits the possibility of making Morin khuur and Long songs a live element of the rituals, customs and feasts, putting the idiosyncrasies of the regions, methods, variety and rhythms of playing the Morin khuur and singing long songs in danger of becoming history.

Thus, the tradition of Morin khuur music has survived difficulties of revolution and development; however, it has kept its basic characteristics and value, and is still deeply absorbed into the intangible cultural heritage, tradition, ritual and feasts. I would like to stress here the merits of our early and contemporary Morin khuur players of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as Tudev, Tuvden, Jamiyan and Buyan, the prominent khuur players such as Darigangin Saaral and Khovdin Dovchin; the Bayad ethnic ikhel players Idesh and Khoton Nyamaa; the Bayad ethnic khuur player, Khumbaa; and composer and musicologist J. Badraa for safeguarding, protecting and developing the traditional heritage of Morin khuur; and many other scientists, researchers, the national talents of Morin khuur, professional khuur players, long song singers and cultural devotees such as the Honorary Actress Norovbanzad, Jantsannorov and Batchuluun for their persistent endeavour for the development of traditional heritage, advertising it worldwide and for making it well known.

Since 1990, Mongolia has become accessible to the world and has followed new road to development by creating favourable conditions to restore and safeguard traditional pride and heritage. The Government of Mongolia has started to pay more attention to the issue. Many measures have been implemented to safeguard and develop the intangible cultural heritage, in particular Morin khuur music, since when civilians have shown the will and intention to develop the national culture.

**First of all the Parliament of Mongolia adopted a “Law on Protection of the Cultural Heritage”. The President of Mongolia issued a Proclamation on Honouring and Propagating the Culture of the Morin Khuur, and the Government adopted and implemented the “National Programme on Propagating the Traditional Culture and Folklore” There are the major achievements.**

**In 1997, an opportunity was opened for us to collaborate with UNESCO and, Mongolian experts started to work actively in the UNESCO programmes and activities for safeguarding intangible heritage. Consequently, the “Saga of Central Asia”, the international symposium was organized in Mongolia in 1998. During this time, our honorary artists founded the National Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage with the technical support from the Japanese Fund Trust. Furthermore, through this organisation and under the auspices of UNESCO a virtuous deed of the registration of Morin khuur players, Long song and saga singers, and throat singer and video and audio documentation was initiated.** In addition, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture provides significant support by the timely organising and examining of the Festivals of Traditional Culture and Folklore, **Competitions of Young Morin Khuur Players** and Competitions of Morin Khuur Craftsmen, supporting and strengthening the National Conference on Morin Khuur and conducting the Morin khuur lessons in all provinces and cities.

Moreover, a public movement to learn, craft and propagate Morin khuur music has taken place, and **founded many professional and civil associations, unions, ensembles, groups, schools, training courses, factories, firms and companies.** Their benefit is invaluable and I am happy to see some of them here in this hall.

During the past years, the Ensemble of National Song and Dance Skills together with the Morin Khuur Ensemble propagated Morin khuur music in every corner of the world involving the attention of thousands of foreigners. Now this marvellous heritage is acknowledged and admired worldwide.

In 2005, the Morin Khuur Ensemble of Mongolia played at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France, and received cordial appreciation from all.

The Mongolian National Commission for UNESCO initiated work to include the traditional heritage of Morin khuur music in the list of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and to get an approval of proclamation as a Masterpiece with the assistance of the National Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage and Mongolian National Committee of World Heritage. In 2003, their work succeeded, proclaiming Morin khuur music as a Masterpiece.

Following that, in 2005, they registered the Mongolian traditional Long song in the list of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritages of Humanity and achieved the result of proclamation. We, Mongolians honour this achievement and it is indeed the happiest event for Morin khuur players and Long song singers.

Even though Morin khuur music has become a Masterpiece of Humanity, the Mongolian National Commission for UNESCO has proposed a project for organisations of UNESCO to safeguard and propagate this heritage, which is at high risk of disappearance. **UNESCO has received the proposal and with the assistance of Japanese Fund in Trust, a financial possibility to implement the “Safeguarding of the Traditional Music of the Morin Khuur of Mongolia” project has opened for us. Under the auspices of UNESCO and Japanese Fund in Trust, the project is being implemented by the Representative Office of UNESCO in Beijing, the Mongolian National Commission for UNESCO and the National Center for Cultural Heritage.** Within the framework of this project, the research was conducted involving all areas in Mongolia. Today we are here at this consultative meeting to discuss and determine the future objectives to safeguard and develop the traditional heritage of Morin khuur music.

Now we would like to propose a few ideas on what needs to be done to safeguard and protect the traditional heritage of the Morin khuur.

As a result of the previous research, some courses of action have been determined:

1. Due to the above-mentioned historical and other causes, it is evident that the tradition of Morin khuur heritage is at high risk of fading away in East and Central rural areas of Mongolia among herders. In these regions, there are many soums and baghs, which are hard to find. Hence, it is time to take urgent action such as teaching the benefit and value of Morin khuur music in these regions and preparing teachers and trainers to carry out training. However, in the Gobi regions including Dundgobi, Dornogobi and Umnugobi and in western regions of Mongolia, the situation is a bit different. The tradition of Morin khuur music is

maintained in the gobi regions and ikhel music in western regions among fewer people. It is appropriate to take active measures to strengthen and develop these people.

2. There was a time when Morin khuur music was a significant part of people's life and rituals; however, this has declined and even been forgotten in some areas. According to this fact, it is required to restore and propagate the previous rituals in a real means along with work to restore the traditional heritage of Morin khuur music. The research, dictionaries of the rituals, handbooks and educational materials are highly important at this time as well as teaching methodologies of the music.
3. The idiosyncratic traditions and methodologies of the regions have become rare. Instead, public courses and professional training of Morin khuur music exist in many areas. This is of course important to safeguard and promote the art of Morin khuur music; nonetheless, we face the needs to open some other doors. Although it is natural that during the globalisation period the traditional art of Morin khuur music has been modified, life has shown that there is a requirement to perfectly match the tradition with developments which occur in playing methodologies, repertoire, regimes and training, related rituals, craftsmanship and shape of the khuur. Thus, it is important to conduct the Morin khuur public training at schools and cultural organisations, by restoring, using the disciple training methods from talented national long song singers and morin khuur players, and to develop, and distribute the training materials and handbooks.
4. **The number of national talented Morin khuur players and Long song singers has decreased in the past 50 years. More than 60 percent of the people who were involved in the research are over 60 years old. In the past 10 years many talented khuur players such as J. Saaral from Eastern Mongolia, Zakhchin ethnic T. Banzai, Bayad ethnic D. Badam, Uriankhai ethnic Sh. Baasanjav, and Kh. Dugarjav from Dariganga have passed away. That is another reason to prepare their future generations as soon as possible.** Despite the number of appeals from the President of Mongolia to respect and honour the national talents, the Government has not still taken any specific actions to raise their honour, appraise their endeavour and effort for carrying this precious heritage. Why cannot we provide a substantial money award for those who have successfully participated in the international festivals and passed down their knowledge to the future generation? Or, isn't it possible to encourage them by appraising their effort of teaching that heritage? By naming here the Morin khuur players, we are also talking about Long song and ode singers, throat singers, and traditional bielgee dancers. We would like to do many more things in the future. UNESCO has started the implementation of the "Human precious" project to promote the talented people who possess valuable cultural heritage, and in the line of the programme "Safeguarding for the Traditional Heritage of the Morin Khuur" we are seeking the possibility to implement it in Mongolia. It is understandable that the interest, policy and decisions of the member country are highly crucial.
5. The results of the research have indicated that people's will, initiative and interest to safeguard, protect, learn and honour the traditional heritage of the Morin khuur and heritage of Long songs have increased compared to previous years. It is important to support the active movements of the public, increase the participation for the propagating of the heritage

of the Morin khuur and long songs, support the creating of Morin khuur, and form a social environment and atmosphere.

These are the main reasons for the need to propagate and honour Morin khuur music, tradition and rituals, expand related research, registration and information, take talented khuur players under the state auspices, support and look after them, pass on their talent to young people, conduct formal and non-formal trainings, advertise, teach, restore the household and communal traditional rituals in order to widely use the Morin khuur, encourage, propagate and support the craft of the Morin khuurs, broadly organise Morin khuur and Long song Naadams, competitions, contests and meetings, conduct other activities from the State and government organisations, involving the local civil organisations, citizens and youngsters of every corner of the country.