Introduction

The Morin Khuur is a Mongolian bowed stringed instrument. It produces a sound which is poetically described as expansive and unrestrained, like a wild horse neighing, or like a breeze in the grasslands. It is the most important musical instrument of the Mongolian people, and is considered a symbol of the Mongolian nation. The instrument consists of a trapezoid wooden-framed sound box to which two strings are attached. The strings are made from hairs from horses' tails, strung parallel, and run over a wooden bridge on the body up a long neck to the two tuning pegs in the scroll, which is always carved into the form of a horse's head. The bow is loosely strung with horse hair coated with larch or cedar-wood resin, and is held from underneath with the right hand. The underhand grip enables the hand to tighten the loose hair of the bow, allowing very fine control of the instrument's timbre. Traditionally, the frame is covered with camel, goat, or sheep skin, in which case a small opening would be left in back.

One legend about the origin of the Morin Khuur is that a shepherd named Kuku Namjil received the gift of a magical winged horse; he would mount it at night and fly to meet his beloved. A jealous woman had the horse’s wings cut off, so that the horse fell from the air and died. The grieving shepherd made a horse head fiddle from the now-wingless horse's bones, and used it to play poignant songs about his horse.

Objectives of the Project

In 2003, UNESCO proclaimed the Mongolian traditional Morin Khuur music as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. By proclaiming the Morin Khuur as a UNESCO Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, Mongolians take a big responsibility before humanity and history to safeguard and propagate its legacy and transfer it to future generations.

Project Structure and Methods of Project Implementation

Within the framework of the project the following activities were conducted:

- Field research in four administrative regions in Mongolia and the extension and update of existing database/archive/inventory
- Consultative meeting of Master Morin Khuur musicians and experts
- Preparation and development of training materials and curriculum design
- Regional Training for trainers of Morin Khuur
- Morin Khuur trainings in local provinces
- Organisation of a Morin Khuur Festival
- AV Production of Trainings and Festival
- Publication
The project team have discussed preparation, implementation and results of the Morin Khuur trainings a number of times, planned, and decided further action. The evaluation, assessment, recommendations and methodologies of Ms. Kaldun, the Programme Specialist of the UNESCO Office Beijing, and Mr. Akira Kamimura, the expert-advisor to the project, have played an important role in the successful implementation of the project.

Based on these conclusions the following requirements were determined:

- An obligation to pass on the traditional collections and methods of playing the khuurs and ikels of different provinces to future generations,
- An obligation to safeguard and propagate the forgotten and neglected Morin Khuur traditions through the training objectives.
- A proper balance is required in correlating the tradition and revival of Morin Khuur culture.

The field study was conducted with the assistance of the National Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage, Institute of Language and Literature, some researchers and professionals of the National University of Mongolia, and a report and assessment of the research was published. During the research, methodology, techniques and collections of 56 hours’ audio and 70 hours’ video documentations of 128 khuur players from 16 provinces were documented in a database, compiling a list and catalogue of all Morin Khuur players.

According to this research, the following conclusions were made on the current situation of the Morin Khuur

1. A specific professional inclination has dominated in the past 60 years in Morin Khuur culture. The traditional trend of the culture was almost neglected; thus, methods of playing Morin Khuurs of each province, training and rules, diversity of tunes, adjusting of tunes, traditional repertory, traditional khuur crafting, Morin-Khuur related other cultures, and a wide range of customs have become endangered or entirely lost.

2. It is concluded that khuurs and ikels are vitally connected to many other types of traditional art and culture such as long songs, folk dance, fairy tales, saga, eulogy, blessing, etc. and being by it’s an inseparable element, it is necessary to pay more attention to the future existence of the khuur and ikel traditional playing methods and repertory which will directly affect the destiny of other long-established cultural entities.

National Consultative Meeting

A national consultative meeting under the topic “Safeguarding and developing of traditional heritage of Morin Khuur” was organised in March 2006 with the assistance of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

The safeguarding and transmission issues of the traditional heritage of the Morin Khuur were discussed. The project staff, central and local khuur players, khuur artisans, khuur trainers, researchers and scientists, management bodies, representatives of honorary artists participated and made decisions as follows:

- It is required to select pilot sites and teaching methods and decide how to organise local trainings productively,
- It is required to set selection criteria for Morin Khuur training teachers and regional training organizers, and define their roles and involvement.
- We must approve content and methodology of the formal and one-on-one trainings’ handbooks
• We must define the best possible ways to solve the problem of raw materials for trainings and khuur crafting

As the outcome of the consultative meeting, the pilot sites were selected for the best possible options to organise the Morin Khuur trainings. The peculiar characteristics and heritage of each place were defined as well as ways to safeguard and propagate the traditional Morin Khuur heritage. A set of recommendations defined the protection and development of Morin Khuur’s traditional heritage for all, including government organizations and public, as well as children and youth.

**Outcomes and Results of the Project**

1. Certain progress has been made in restoring the traditional art of the Morin Khuur, ikel and their playing method and passing them on to the future generation. A total of 402 people from 36 soums of 14 aimags have been involved in the non-formal Morin Khuur training that is organised within the framework of the project.

2. This has provided sufficient influence to create a favorable environment for restoring and developing other types of traditional arts such as long song, folk dance, pharynx (throat singing) and blessing that are closely linked to khuur and ikel.

3. Significant progress has been made in restoring the traditional art of the playing Morin khuur which was in danger of disappearing.

4. Social status of the khuur players who play in the traditional way has increased substantially. Central and local areas have been taking various measures such as promoting their art pool, rewarding them with certain titles and organising competitions on their behalf. In the future, there is a need to implement the Living Human Treasure programme step by step in line with the financial capability of the country.

5. There have been public and community initiatives and movements aimed at respecting and promoting the Morin Khuur, and the public became more active in this regard. In the last years, households and organisations have been trying to purchase the Morin Khuur more than before. Following this, Morin Khuur related traditions and customs have been restored.

6. Each aimag (province) has developed and provided implementation of the “Morin Khuur and long song” sub programme and are implementing various measures such as providing each families with the khuurs, organising Morin Khuur training, identifying khuur players and crafters and providing relevant support for them. State, administrative and cultural organisations of aimags such as Dundgobi, Hovd, Hubsgul, Zavhan, Darhan-Uul and Gobi-Sumber that have been mentioned in the report were very productive in the protection of the traditional art of Morin Khuur. One example is that objective and content of our project is now able to be continued further through the initiative and participation of the local areas themselves, and we consider that we further need to support non-formal education by any means. We believe that all these activities that have been initiated under our project can now be continued in many other aimags and it has had a significant impact in passing on the traditional art of the Morin Khuur to the future young generation.
Study and promotion of the Morin Khuur have been expanded. The number of Morin Khuur related newspaper articles, TV and radio programmes has been increased, research papers, books and reports have been produced and many DVD and VCDs have been produced using the traditional melody of the Morin Khuur.

7. Inventory database of intangible cultural heritage, in particular the traditional art of Morin Khuur was enriched by 56 hours’ audio and 70 hours’ video documentations of 128 khuur players and an integrated list of khuur players was produced. Audio and video documentations of the intangible cultural heritages have been transferred to the digital system and provision of technical supplies for the inventory, study and research work has been upgraded.

8. Many people who were covered under this project that is being implemented under UNESCO funding in order to protect traditional art heritage of different Mongolian ethnic groups, participated in its activities and benefit from it. Now they are all very much aware of UNESCO itself.

9. Lessons, experience and methodology of this project that received and was implemented upon UNESCO’s advice and recommendations will not be restricted to the Morin Khuur. It also has significant importance as a model for protecting other types of oral and written masterpieces and passing them on to the future generation.

This project is valuable because through it, UNESCO was able to declare that the best cultural masterpieces of humanity have been preserved and also that it has provided realistic financial, methodological and organisational help to protect those masterpieces, and became a model project for UNESCO on the Convention initiative to protect the “Intangible cultural masterpieces”.

Conclusion
Approved by the parliament in 1996, the national programme called “Cultural policy of the Mongolian state” has a provision to “Keep composers, crafters and bearers of precious cultural heritages under the state care and attention”; however, due to the lack of central and local budget financing, this provision has not been implemented in reality so far. Therefore, implementation of the UNESCO-recommended Living Human Treasure concept, used in neighbouring countries successfully, has been an important for Mongolia. It has helped to meet the objectives facing the country on how to protect our cultural heritage. With respect to the introduction of the system, it is important for the government and state to make a decision over the legal framework and financing sources and regulate the matter.

First of all, it is required to prevent the risk of eliminating local khuur playing methodology, techniques, traditional culture and unique masterpieces together with their owners and bearers. It can also take elder khuur players who represent the various ethnic groups of Mongolia, and place them under state care and provide special attention within the framework of the Living Human Treasure national programme.

It is important to keep the local talented people who inherited the oral and intangible cultural heritages through their high professional skill, under state protection, preserve their knowledge
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for future generations, allocate certain resources from the central and local budgets for the investigation and dissemination of their work, and to collaborate with foreign and domestic donors in this regard.