Oral Tradition of The Asia-Pacific Communities
As we enter into December, we are preparing to bring this year to a close. Among the many events that marked this year, the COVID-19 pandemic was undoubtedly the most unforgettable feature of 2020. The mature sense of civil awareness shown through efforts such as quarantine and social distancing, as well as preventive measures such as wearing masks, will be long remembered as a united endeavor that brought together entire populations to overcome this global crisis.

The theme of ICH Courier Volume 45 is “Oral Tradition of Asia-Pacific Communities.” Oral folktales consist of diverse narratives ranging from the life story of heroes from national founding myths to everyday wisdoms passed down to successive generations from mothers and teachers. These stories are passed on by word of mouth as everyday wisdom transmitted through the generations and become infused in a nation’s history, philosophy and way of life, thus forming the very foundation for the knowledge systems of a community. In the past, when the illiteracy rate was high, and even in some regions today, the knowledge and wisdom that are transmitted orally continue to play an important role in daily life.

However, the accelerating pace of globalization and urbanization today have brought these oral traditions to the brink of extinction. Furthermore, the extinction of minority languages has had a significant impact on the conservation of collective memory that embodies the oral traditions and everyday wisdom of minority communities, which has also hindered the safeguarding of cultural diversity.

In this volume’s “Windows to ICH” section, we showcase the traditional folktale genre “Amal Bisso” of Sri Lanka, “Ollachitnger” of Palau, the narrative heritage of Kyrgyzstan, and the story of the saint Thánh Gióng of Vietnam. In addition, the “Expert Remarks” section describes the current state and outlook of oral transmission in the digital platform era, while the “Field Report” section introduces cases of continued oral transmission in communities using novel communication methods in the age of the “new normal.”

ICH Courier, published by ICHCAP, endeavors to introduce the traditional folktales of various countries in the Asia-Pacific and to raise the profile and enhance the value of oral traditions as a form of intangible heritage. Through this volume, we hope to share various stories from across the Asia-Pacific region as well as the intangible values that are instilled in these stories.

We wish you good health and happiness for 2021.
Oral Tradition
Its Status and Prospects in the Digital Platform Era

Kim Heon-seon
Professor, Department of Korean Language and Literature at Kyonggi University

The upheaval and extinction faced by traditional culture is a core issue in today’s world. It has brought us to the realization that we are living in an important transition period where the future of humanity will be determined. In particular, the advent of digital platforms has provided a communication channel to link people together; the importance of these platforms seems poised to become much greater. In this era, in which means of communication are facing remarkable qualitative changes, oral tradition is under considerable threat.

In past eras where humankind created languages and memories to resolve all kinds of issues and share information, speech was a way to achieve totality. Through speech, people delivered their thoughts and opinions, created new things, and embraced differences to become one. As such, spoken language became an absolute means and solution to maximize the immense capacity of humankind. People discovered interests and meanings through conversations, they combined work and enjoyment by singing, they wore masks and gave movement-based performances accompanied by amusing anecdotes. By reciting and dedicating bonpuri, a ritual song to pray to deities and receive oracles, their creations became content passed down through oral culture.

In such times, the creator and audience in oral culture stood in close proximity to the extent that they shared a strong emotional sense of unity and belonging. In the era of oral culture, people existed chiefly within their own community (a clan or tribe); this gave them a small frame of history that was limited to oral culture. In primitive or ancient times, societies were formed in small areas and territories. In such societies, specific figures were revered through the totality of oral culture, and their own distinctive cultures developed with a worldview centering around the community leaders.

Following oral culture, text introduced yet another dimension. Text had originally been a complement to memory, but as it became an established part of ancient civilizations, written characters came to function as a subject that effectively controlled society and monopolized information, thereby adding further complexity to society. As written characters became used as an instrument to allow humans to control and coerce other humans, certain power groups exclusively dominated their usage, which resulted in the creation of written culture separate from oral culture. In this regard, oral culture and written culture interacted with each other and functioned as a mechanism of unifying the culture of humanity.

Written culture constituted a standard of civilization. Civilizations were founded upon universal or common written languages and tended to take on characteristics of the sacred texts of universal religions in the medieval era. The most universal written languages include Latin, Classical Arabic, Sanskrit, Chinese characters, ancient Greek, and Pali, which represented religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Hinayana Buddhism, thereby contributing to the establishment of the six great civilizations of the Middle Ages.

Of course, there had been cases in which written characters were created and established in ancient civilizations before the emergence of the medieval universal religions, but most failed to be handed down through successive generations and eventually sunk into extinction. In this regard, medieval civilizations clearly were the first civilized empires based on written culture, in which overarching universality was a core aspect. There are three key elements of universality to consider here: linguistic universality, religious universality, and medieval imperial universality of the given civilization. In this context, it is without doubt that the influence of medieval civilizations was immense at one time.
The rise and fall of medieval imperial civilizations led to the creation of nation-states, resulting in the emergence of ethnic languages and the convergence of oral and written languages. Oral culture survived and continued its original role, but it was forced to continuously compete with written culture.

Amid such developments, a new era arrived and caused enduring debates on the terminology necessary to characterize this era, which is strongly associated with the advent of specific cultural mediators through various terms such as culture of dissemination, electronic culture, cyberculture, or digital culture, and it has resulted in an unusual phenomenon of convergence into “digital platforms.” These platforms are also described using myriad other expressions, including such neologisms as “online platforms” or “cyber platforms.”

This paper defines this period as “the digital platform era” and analyzes its cultural characteristics. The emergence of this culture has had an enormous impact on society, which can be characterized by first-hand information sharing and cultural communication.

In particular, the annihilation of totality is another remarkable aspect, and the acceleration of universal access to information is an undeniable trend. These characteristics share similarities with the current universal development of the attitudes of Internet users exercise significant influence, there are notably no main agents or power elites in this domain. In the same vein, the digital platform era is accelerating the disappearance of intellectuals. Neither emperors of civilized countries nor presidents of modern nations can proclaim the cultural totality of the era as they used to in the past.

In this age of rapid proliferation, anybody is able to upload to digital platforms their own written text and the results of other creative activities. To create and upload one’s own content is a remarkable aspect of contemporary cyberculture. A case in point is YouTube, a platform for sharing creative content.

Users are both author and audience, and this phenomenon of dynamic creation is continuing to accelerate. Meanwhile, the enjoyment of universal culture in the absence of totality sometimes generates clear and defined meanings. The result is an epochal creation.

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The Healing Power of Peganum harmala

Nilufar Z. Mamadalieva
Institute of the Chemistry of Plant Substances, Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan. 2011 UNESCO-L’ORÉAL Fellow

Peganum harmala L. belongs to the plant family Zygophyllaceae and appears spontaneously in the wide arid and semiarid areas between Western China and the Middle East/North Africa region. It is also distributed in Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Caucasus. *P. harmala* is a perennial glabrous herb that reaches thirty to one hundred centimeters in height with a short creeping rooting system, white flowers, and three-chamber capsule-type fruits that can contain about fifty black seeds. The roots can reach a depth of five or six meters to adapt to drying soils. The plant tends not to suffer from grazing due to its bitter taste (alkaloid content).

*P. harmala* is a rich source of alkaloids, polyphenols, flavonoids, tannins, saponins, essential oils, fatty acids, and anthraquinones. When the seeds are extracted with alcohol, a red dye is obtained; this dye is commonly called “Turkey Red” and is used to dye carpets and wool. *P. harmala* seeds have also been used to produce an invisible ink, the process for which involved pounding the seeds before soaking them in water for two days. The liquid obtained thereafter functioned as an oral solution and externally as ointments and poultices as a treatment for joint pain, inflammation of the sciatic nerve, and urinary retention, menstruation, and colitis.

In Central Asia, the seeds, bark, and root of the plant have been widely used for the treatment of lumbago, bronchoconstriction, intestinal spasms, and as a stimulant for the immune system. However, the fruits are effective as an analgesic and antiseptic while the seeds were used as an antipyretic agent.

In Afghanistan, *P. harmala* seeds have been used for the treatment of central nervous system disorders and tumors, while decoctions of the seeds have been used for treating asthma and rheumatism, and with chili pepper for the treatment of syphilis.

In Ukraine, the roots have been used for treatment of rheumatism, itching, and pediatric fits. In the Caucasus, juice from fresh herbs have been used for treatment of cataract and the seeds used as a sleep aid. Kazakhs and Uzbeks drink a decoction and extract of *P. harmala* herb for the treatment of neurotic fits and malaria. However, the Kyrgyz people also drink a decoction of the herb for the treatment of gastrointestinal diseases and dyspepsia. *P. harmala* leaves have been used in Azerbaijan as a wound-healing aid and for the treatment of abscess.

In traditional Chinese medicine, the seeds have been widely used to treat cancer, asthma, jaundice, and lumbago. Seeds in the form of a powder are given as an anthelmintic against tapeworms. In general, the seeds are widely utilized in Turkey, Iran, and the region from Central Asia to China to treat coughs, rheumatic inflammation, elevated blood pressure, diabetes, and asthma.

The oil obtained from the seed is said by some to be an aphrodisiac. Smoke from burning pods with seeds is a traditional intoxicant, relaxant, and sexual stimulant in the countries of Central Asia. People use the plant in the form of smoke by burning the aerial parts to purify the air and kill airborne pathogens, but also to expel ghosts and spirits, especially after childbirth and during marriage ceremonies. The smoke from burning seed pods is believed to have antiseptic properties.

The antimicrobial potential of this medicinal plant has also been reported. Components of *P. harmala* showed promising antibacterial potency against both gram-positive and gram-negative microbes such as *S. aureus*, *P. aeruginosa*, *Brucella melitensis*, *Salmonella*, *E. coli*, *Klebsiella*, *P. vulgaris*, and others. The extract has also demonstrated good antifungal effect against different *Candida* and *Aspergillus* species. The antiviral effect was noticed on Herpes simplex virus 1 (HSV-1) and Coxackie B3 (CoxB3) viruses.

*P. harmala* represents one of the most economically and medicinally important plants that has been extensively used in traditional medicine for management of various ailments. Chemical profiling of the plant revealed the presence of a wide array of secondary metabolites that have been isolated from different plant organs. Biological survey illustrated the wide range of pharmacological and biological activities exhibited by the plant or its isolated compounds. However, the presence of many toxic symptoms associated with its use might limit its wider application in treatments. Therefore, more in-depth clinical studies are still required to establish a good lead compound for treatment of many ailments.
Oral Tradition of The Asia-Pacific Communities

Oral tradition consists of diverse narratives. It is passed on by word of mouth as everyday wisdom and transmitted through the generations. After that, it becomes infused in a region’s history, philosophy, and way of life, thus forming the foundation for a community’s knowledge systems. This volume introduces traditional tales in Sri Lanka, Palau, Kyrgyzstan, and Vietnam.
once upon a time, a beautiful young woman wandered into a jungle carrying her little baby girl in search of food. She was very tired, so she made a soft bed from the petals of flowers and laid the baby on it. Then she left to search for fruits to satisfy her immense hunger. Two great birds who had no babies of their own found the little human baby in its nest of flowers and carried it away on their backs to their own nest. Their nest was very large; many strange birds lived together there in harmony. There was a parrot, a myna, a hen, a stork, a kingfisher, and a tailorbird in their nest. As the little girl grew big, she helped the great birds to build a house with doors and windows. Everybody in the land of birds heard of “the house of many birds” and the kind little girl who had helped to build it. The birds called their little adopted daughter Amal Biso, and all loved her very much.

One day Amal Biso’s foster parents lit a fire on the hearth in the house and asked her to look after it. She was to be sure not to let it go out before their return as they were going on a long journey to get bangles and ornaments for little Amal Biso. But there will be ashes along the path on which she went. Go, look and follow the ash path."

Amal Biso (Bird Girl)
A Folktale from North Western Province, Sri Lanka

The Rakshaya then tried to catch Amal Biso several times, but always failed. The Rakshaya, approaching the house, called out, “Here are golden bracelets, O elder sister. Here are golden anklets, O elder sister. Don’t open the door, wise elder sister.”

Then the Parrot said, “No golden bracelets, O elder sister. No golden anklets, O elder sister. Don’t open the door, wise elder sister.”

The Rakshaya ran to catch the parrot, but was unable to. The parrot fled into the jungle and stayed there. Afterwards, the Rakshaya, having come back to the house, said, “Here are golden bracelets, O daughter. Here are golden anklets, O daughter. Open the door, my daughter.” Then the stork, said, “No golden bracelets, O elder sister. No golden anklets, O elder sister. Don’t open the door, wise elder sister.”

The Rakshaya chased down the stork and killed him. The Rakshaya then tried to catch Amal Biso several times, but each time birds appeared and protected the poor girl.

The Rakshaya went to an old witch who lived in a cave nearby and begged her assistance to catch Amal Biso. The old witch gave him a charmed nail, which she told him to place upon the door of the house.

In the evening, the great birds returned home and their little human daughter went to open the door to greet them. But when Amal Biso opened the door, the charmed nail pierced her head. She fell down and died. The poor parent birds put Amal Biso in a decorated boat with her dear friend the parrot and sent the boat down the river. It sailed a very long way.

The following morning a lady from another village went down to the river, and noticed a strange boat coming toward her. She swam out to meet it and brought it ashore. The lady took Amal Biso out of the boat and dressed her in soft, white silk and combed her long, black hair. She found the nail had fallen in the hair and she removed it. With the nail removed, the little girl came back to life.

The lady loved Amal Biso so much she thought they must have been mother and daughter. Then all her sorrows vanished when she found a mark in the shape of a tiny red star on the palm of Amal Biso’s left hand—this confirmed that this was indeed her own lost child.

While Amal Biso loved being with her mother, she never forgot her kind bird parents. They discovered she was alive and well, and often visited her, bringing her news of the rest of her friends in the house of many birds.

The story of Amal Biso is a great example of a regional folktale. The culture of Sri Lanka mixes the ancient with modern cultural elements and is known for its regional diversity. Sri Lankan culture has long been influenced by the heritage of Theravada Buddhism, which was introduced from India in the third century BCE. The religion’s legacy has also influenced the oral tradition in Sri Lanka and the wider South Asian region too. Oral tradition can be classified under folklore. It should also be noted that the transference of oral tradition to writing and printed form does not destroy its validity as folklore. Indeed, freezing or fixing its format helps to keep it alive and to disseminate it among those to whom it is not native.
In Palau, important lessons about life and how to conduct oneself may be captured in a particular oral tradition. Stories are told a retold from generation to generation to impart significant principles and values about being Palauan. There are stories explaining the origins of life on Palau, settlement patterns, and migration between places. These oral traditions may be transmitted through stories, chants, performances, and architecture. Significant cultural sites are also a medium of conveying important oral histories of migrations and events that supports close lineage among families and villages. Other oral stories show the importance of certain plant and animal species in Palauan culture.

The following are two stories that illustrate important lessons about respect, friendship, and how to live in harmony with nature.

**Story 1: Ngchui—Kereomel and Melbaob**
A long, long time ago before mankind in the village of Ngchui, there were two friends, Kereomel and Melbaob. They were birds who fed on fish.

One early morning, Kereomel walked to the mangrove dock of Ngchui to check the tide and found Melbaob sitting there.

Melbaob looked up and saw his friend, and asked him, “What brings you to the dock this early?”

Kereomel replied, “Oh, I came to see the tide because I am thinking about going fishing.”

“Then the tide is right to go fishing, could I go with you?” Melbaob asked his friend.

“Sure, if you want to,” Kereomel answered. Kereomel went home and waited for the tide to recede. Once the tide started to go down, he went and called his friend.

“Where will we go to fish?” asked Melbaob.

Kereomel replied, “We’re going to a place called Tnger.”

When the two friends got to Tnger, the west end of the reef near the village of Ngchui, the tide was still high so they sat on the reef picking fish.

And so they sat waiting for the tide, and still Melbaob could not control himself because of the sight of the fish. Finally, he could wait no longer and went down to fish. His friend Kereomel warned him, “Fish, but do not overdo it, for our village is far and we do not wish to have any problems.”

When the tide was low, Kereomel too began to fish. When he thought he had enough, he said to Melbaob, “It is time to go home.” Melbaob agreed.

Kereomel turned to his friend to see that Melbaob’s neck could not bend because he had eaten more than he could swallow; sticking out from his mouth was a fish’s tail. Kereomel thought, “Now we have a problem.”

On their way back to Ngchui, Melbaob fell into the sea between Tnger and Ochimer. Kereomel went to him and said, “I warned you to be careful about how much you took but you never listen, so now you have brought ollachitnger [a lesson learned] upon yourself. And now that you have vomited everything in your stomach here, this place will be called Tmecherur.”

So, the sea between Tnger and Ochimer was called Tmecherur. “When they finally got home, Melbaob was hungry because he had vomited everything he ate, due to the fact that he did not listen to his friend’s advice. The lesson learned from this story is to listen to and heed advice. Do not wait until something goes wrong and then say, “Oh, I should have listened to the advice after all.”

**Story 2: A Moral Lesson from Ongael of Ngerchemel**
This is the story of an ongael (Phaleria nitida or Kanib) plant in Ngerchemel, a village in Airai. This particular ongael plant bore so much fruit that each branch nearly broke from the weight. All kinds of fruit-eating birds visited this plant regularly and waited patiently for its fruit to ripen. While waiting they held a meeting and decided to divide the branches equally, meaning all birds should receive an equal share of its fruit. The uppermost branch of the tree was designated to the lab (Nicobar pigeon).

During the harvest season, all of its fruits ripened except the top part that belonged to lab. All the other birds nourished themselves while the lab starved, waiting for its portion to ripen. The lab’s portion did not mature until the harvest season ended, when it fell to the ground.

This went on for the next four harvest seasons, leaving no ripe fruits for the lab. The other birds began to notice the lab sulking on the ground, so they called another meeting. They asked the lab “Ngerang a chised me ke metitingot er behul a chuten?” (“Why are you wandering and hopping back and forth on the ground?”)

The lab replied, Sechelei, ng mocha re ngii a ewang el mo bedul a eim el sim el diak bo el mark a bingelek el chutetel a ongael. (“Friends, about four to five harvest seasons have passed but my portion has not ripened.”)

The other birds responded Chlechung el mei el sim, ea loekum ng diak bo le mark sei el blengelem, e ke mei me ke melai a ulas e ra wemargang ra delongelam. (“If your portion does not mature this coming harvest season, you will eat from our portions.”)

There is a moral lesson to be taken from this short story. It is about love and compassion toward those who are in need. The lab’s attitude of waiting for the harvest season became a Palauan idiom referring to a person who waits patiently for an unmarked time that might never arrive. The idiom is: EERV, ngerang a ke mengil el ngii, ke mengil ra rekel ongael? (“Hey, what are you waiting for, the ongael to ripen?”) (Palau Society of Historians 1996:61.)

**NOTE**
1. Ongael is also known as Delal a Kar (Mother of Medicine), and is a significant medicinal plant in Palau.
The oral tradition of the Kyrgyz people is based on a unique intangible cultural heritage that reflects Kyrgyz cultural identity. Oral heritage, developed over centuries, depicts the history and culture of the Kyrgyz people. Their creativity has been proven to survive exclusively in an oral form for many generations. This oral tradition represents a unique layer of traditional knowledge, making it a valuable source of cultural and traditional values and evidence of the development of the sociopolitical history of the Kyrgyz people. Kyrgyz oral heritage takes a wide variety of forms, including songs, fairy tales, proverbs, and riddles. These can all be different in terms of content and structure. Depending on the genre, oral tradition can reflect history, legends, fairy tales, or lore, which can be important in educating younger generations about the value of peace, attitudes toward nature and people, and love for the motherland. Many traditional oral works portray the main characters as defenders of their native land, arousing a sense of pride, and also depict the rich nature of the Kyrgyz land, nourishing love for their home. Some elements of oral tradition such as songs and folktales tell the stories or the specificities and peculiarities of the everyday life of Kyrgyz people. Folktales also reflect the ethereal views of the Kyrgyz people and teach us to recognize beauty, rhythm, and skilfull use of language.

Epic heritage is the most treasured and unique oral expression of the intangible cultural heritage of the Kyrgyz people. The epics have been transmitted entirely in oral form since the early ages and is still practiced today by Manaschy and Dastanchy, the bearers of the element who recite these epics. Some Kyrgyz epic heritage pieces are famously large—the “Epic of Manas” trilogy is one of the greatest examples of epic poetry and one of the longest epics in the world. A special place in the treasury of the intangible cultural heritage is, however, occupied by smaller epics, differing in themes, genres, plots, and music.

The “Epic of Manas” describes the feats of the legendary eponymous hero who fights many enemies and reunites has scattered people. The second and third books, respectively, are dedicated to Manas’s son Semetei and Seitek, Manas’s grandson. This epic trilogy is composed of folktales, legends, and myths that widely depict the history of the Kyrgyz people and all aspects of their life such as traditions, customs, rituals, morals, their relationship with nature, religion, and worldview. Manas affirms Kyrgyz people’s cultural and ethnic identity, and is widely visible in modern Kyrgyzstan—the flag of the Kyrgyz Republic features forty rays of sun, representing the forty tribes that Manas united to form the Kyrgyz nation, and there are many other statues and landmarks across Kyrgyzstan dedicated to the legendary figure.

Small epics have become a repository of traditional knowledge, and as such are one of the key elements in heritage preservation since they contain a huge quantity of the national memory of the Kyrgyz people. Small epics differ by genre, and stylistic and poetic techniques. They are recited in a special way by “akyn” storytellers, who accompany their recitations with musical instruments. “Art of Akyns, Kyrgyz epic tellers” was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008 as a predominant cultural expression that combines singing, improvisation, and musical composition. Depending on the genre, akyns can recite small epics verbally using theatrical methods including gestures and body language, singing the entire epic or performing some parts using traditional Kyrgyz musical instruments, or most popularly using mixed methods and techniques of verbal and musical recitation.

Kyrgyz small epics are characterized by a variety of plots, representing heroic, mythological, social, and lyrical genres. Heroic epics describe a hero’s fight against invaders and the protection of the Kyrgyz nation. One of the most famous is Kurmanek, a hero who fights a rival tribe of Kalmyks. Janyl-Myrza is another well-known heroic epic, and is perhaps the most unique because Janyl-Myrza is a female hero who protects her people from rival tribes. The epic depicts her as brave and displaying strong leadership qualities.

Mythological epics contain elements of the mythological beliefs of ancient Kyrgyz. These epics depict the struggle between humans and nature as well as containing evidence of worldview such as totemism and animism. The story of “Kojojash” is one example that describes the harmonious coexistence of humans with nature and the idea of sustainable use of natural resources. The plot of the epic “Kojojash” is based on deep folk wisdom. Meanwhile, the epic “Er Toshstruk” is a classic example of the early tribal system with descriptions of the mythological perception of the ancient Kyrgyz people.

Social epics reflect the everyday life of Kyrgyz people as well as describing social utopias. The epics “Kedeikan” and “Mendirman,” for example, describe the social views and struggles of Kyrgyz people of their time, class differences between rich and poor, conflicts between commoners and the ruling elites, and ordinary people’s struggle for justice and wellbeing.

Lastly, lyrical and romantic epics such as “Ak Moor,” “Sarindji-Byokei,” and “Kishimzhan” reflect social and domestic problems. These epics revolve around tragic love due to social inequalities and norms, or reflect the social problems across different stages of the history of the Kyrgyz people.

Thus, small epics are significant historical and cultural phenomena that have been safeguarded and transmitted over many generations. Small epics cover different cultural and social aspects of the Kyrgyz people and remain one of the best examples of their cultural identity.

A young Manaschy recites the “Epic of Manas,” an incredibly long poem that has been transmitted orally for generations. © National Commission of the Kyrgyz Republic for UNESCO

“Janyl-Myrza” is the hero of a small epic, a brave woman who devoted her life to protecting her native land. The epic demonstrates the special place of women in Kyrgyz culture © National Commission of the Kyrgyz Republic for UNESCO

Kyrgyz epics are rich in lyrical horizons, reflecting different aspects of oral life © National Commission of the Kyrgyz Republic for UNESCO

*Janyl-Myrza* is the hero of a small epic, a brave woman who devoted her life to protecting her native land. The epic demonstrates the special place of women in Kyrgyz culture © National Commission of the Kyrgyz Republic for UNESCO
The Legend-Based Practice of Vietnamese Culture

Vietnamese Culture

Thu Cu C Tran

Saint Giong (Thánh Gióng), one of the Four Immortals (alongside Tan Viên, Chu Dong Tu, and Lê Lợi) worshipped by the Vietnamese people, is a historical hero dating back to the early time of the Viet nation. The story of Saint Gióng has been transmitted through many generations as a legend that invokes the bravery and community solidarity of the Vietnamese people in fighting against foreign invaders. Today, the tremendous legacy of Saint Gióng is manifest in the spiritual belief, the annual ceremony, and the temple where past and present collide.

From the Past…

According to legend, Saint Gióng was born in Phu Dong Village. His mother had fallen pregnant after stepping on a giant footprint. At the age of three, Gióng could neither talk nor move as a normal child would. One day, King Hung (Hùng Vương) the Sixth’s emissary went in search of a leader who could salvage the country that was in chaos because of the An invasion. As the emissary approached Phu Dong village, Gióng was still lying in his family home. All of a sudden, he spoke his very first words to his mother, asking her to deliver a message to the emissary that he needed an iron horse, iron armor, and an iron sword in order that he could lead the troops to fight back against the invading forces. Although shocked, his mother talked to the emissary as the boy asked. From that moment, the boy could move his body and ask for food. The neighbors contributed food as there was not enough available for him.

Soon, he grew up to become a strong man. Equipped with the armor and the horse that the King provided, he traveled to the front and joined the war. He fought bravely against the might of the enemy army, but his iron sword broke due to the sheer number of invaders he had to battle. Thinking quickly, he picked up bamboo sticks to use as weapons. The enemy soldiers were afraid of his bravery and prowess. They were also burned by the horse, which had the ability to breathe fire. The battle turned in favor of the Viet side and, finally, the enemy forces were swept away from the territory of Viet Nam. After victory was secured, Gióng knelt on the land of Soc Son Mountain to show his appreciation to his mother and the neighbors who helped him through their donations of food to become strong enough to defeat the invaders and restore peace in the country. He then flew on his horse into the sky, and this was the last anyone saw of Gióng. Since then, Gióng acquired the name Phu Dong Thiên Vương (Heavenly King of Phu Dong). A temple was constructed at the place from where he departed for future generations to pay worship to him. It is believed Saint Gióng was sent by God to help the Vietnamese people defend their land from foreign enemies.

The story of the saint features a symbolic expression of desire for national independence and community solidarity for the collective good, as evidenced in the part where Gióng’s neighbors joined together to contribute food for the boy. Also, the horse and bamboo that feature in the legend are traditional elements that indicate the spirit of strength and persistence in Vietnamese culture.

...To the Present

Today, Vietnamese people honor Saint Gióng’s patriotism and contribution in several places. Among the celebrations, the Gióng Festival, celebrated annually from the sixth to the ninth day of the fourth month of the lunar calendar at the Phu Dong temple, is the most popular. Located in Phu Dong, the village in the Gia Lam district on the outskirts of Hanoi where Saint Gióng was born, the temple was rebuilt in the eleventh century during the dynasty of King Lý Thái Tông. The temple features a traditional Vietnamese architectural structure composed of chambers, yards, gates, ponds, and sculptures. The temple, which is listed as a Special National Relic, houses a statue of Saint Gióng in the chamber, with a statue of his legendary horse outside.

In the Gióng Festival, people participate in a performance demonstrating the battle as described in the legend of Saint Gióng. The Gióng Festival was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010 for its part in conserving historical value. Meanwhile, at Soc Temple, where Saint Gióng ascended to heaven, there is a celebration held during the first lunar month, which takes the form of a ritual ceremony to deliver offerings to the saint.

Being honored as a symbol of Vietnamese patriotism, the legend of Saint Gióng has been passed down from the elder generations to teach their younger counterparts lessons in morality and make them aware of their cultural roots.

Together with the legend, the Gióng Festival and the temples dedicated to Saint Gióng demonstrate the culture and belief system in which worshippers Saint Gióng is the way the Vietnamese people conserve the national spirit and wish for peace and prosperity.

NOTE
1. Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư (A Historical Encyclopedia about Vietnam), edited and revised by Ngô Si Lien et al., translated by Mac Bao Thân, Tân Việt, 1945.
New Communications, New Communities: Unfailing Oral Heritage

Dr. Erfrat B. Imambek, Socioanthropologist, Asst. Prof. of the Kazakh National Academy of Arts

When it comes to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), threats that lead to the loss of the viability of one or another element of ICH are latently implied. From a social anthropological point of view, this is a question of the interaction between tradition and innovation: do new technologies always negatively affect traditional art? How does modern everyday life affect the sustainability of a traditional view of the world that underlies the identity of each element of ICH?

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a formidable challenge to humankind as a whole, but it has also provided crucial experience, and accelerated many processes in the culture of a particular society that have been quietly brewing in recent decades. As an example, we consider here the experience of Kazakhstan in the first half of 2020, living under strict quarantine conditions, and look to comprehend the impact of the latest information technologies on the safeguarding of oral heritage.

There is a contradiction between the need to popularize a folk song, which necessitates new arrangements with contemporary styles, and the need to preserve its original spirit, which is lost due to the processes of commercialization and massification. Traditional songs in Dimash Qudaibergen’s magnificent performance, for example, are taken out of the context of their traditional existence to fit modern standards, changing the presentation and sound of the composition and the songs themselves. Meanwhile, a world-renowned band, Ulytau, which has been produced by Alan Parsons and Kadyrali Bolmanov, performs traditional Kazakh music in a rock/meta adaptation. The question of whether traditional art should become part of show business remains open. “The songs remain the same”—is it really so?

This contradiction is facilitated by three factors:

• Technology provides unprecedented breadth of access to cultural heritage.
• Carriers of the elements easily mastered the practice of recording their performances and presenting them on social networks, giving them the opportunity to freely create.
• In difficult conditions of general self-isolation, people need emotional and psychological compensation, and many find that in traditional culture.

New ways of communication change the familiar understanding of the term “community of intangible heritage.” Communities now preserve and discuss elements of oral
Kazakh kuy is undoubtably part of the spiritual heritage of nomadic culture, a particle of a living organism of traditional culture. Kuy is an instrumental piece of music, short in duration, but very deep in content and refined in form, with a complex rhythm and developed melody. The kuy reflects the duration, but very deep in content and refined in form, with a certain nature, but they do not serve the function of presenting a story. The connection of dombra practice with oral poetry gave rise to a peculiar form of music-making—a musical composition accompanied by the kuy's story. The links between legend and music are diverse, in some cases the music reflects the character's actions in the composer's narrative, as, for example, in the legend of the kuy "Aqsaq qulan" ("Limping Wild Horse"), in which the music itself informs the king about the death of his son. In other instances, music illustrates particular episodes of the story. However, the narrative accompanying the kuy is more often not directly related to the content of the music; rather, the kuy will describe when, where, from whom, or under what circumstances he composed it. Such descriptions can anticipate music of a certain nature, but they do not serve the function of presenting a story. In the framework of the nationwide action "Biz birgemiz" ("We are together"), many well-known performers of this genre as well as very young dombra players recorded performances at home and posted them on social networks such as Facebook and Instagram. Online concerts, both solo and ensemble, have become a new form that has gained popularity during the pandemic.
Understanding Mata ni Pachhedi Paintings from the Chitara Community

Jyoti Shukla
Manager, Centre for Heritage Management

With a history of exclusion and caste-based discrimination, the Devipujaks (worshippers of the Mother Goddess) have come a long way and carved out an identity of their own through the creation of the Kalamkari (hand-painted) tradition called Mata ni Pachhedi. A community of painters, hand printers, and dyers, settled in a small urban slum in Vaana, Ahmedabad, are struggling to sustain themselves by keeping alive this age-old art. This article attempts to capture the artform Mata ni Pachhedi and how the community is working on sustaining the textile tradition despite facing numerous challenges.

Mata ni Pachhedi was started by the Chitara, part of the Devipujak community of Gujarat. They were a nomadic tribe that traveled from place to place along the Sabarmati river. The idea of the paintings originated at a time when temples or idols were being destroyed during invasions. As a result, the community painted the Mother Goddess on pieces of cloth and started traveling with the textile wherever they moved. The cloth, considered sacred, was kept in an earthen pot or copper vessel during journeys; when the people reached a camping ground, multiple painted cloths were taken out to construct tents. This sacred fabric came to be known as Mata ni Pachhedi, which translates as “Behind the Mother Goddess.”

This tradition has evolved over time and has incorporated many changes. During the nine-day Navratri festival celebrated widely in Gujarat, the Chitara worship the traditional cloth with numerous other communities. The cloth is worshipped and celebrated with folk songs and rituals practiced by communities that apart from Chitara (makers of the cloth), also include Bhuvva (priests who perform the rituals) and Jagariya (who interpret the Pachhedi and sing songs).

Based in Ahmedabad, the textile city of India, the Chitara community is the only one practicing this centuries-old craft that is disappearing from the public knowledge. The word “Chitara” refers to a chitrakar, or a painter. Hence, the community that produced the handmade paintings began to be called Chitara. They are part of a seven-century-old textile art tradition and have continued to pump life into this dying craft: Some prominent artisans from the Chitara community include Bhulabhai Chitara, the first artisan to have won a national award for the craft and to make a name for the textile art. Chandrakant Chitara, the master artisan who has received global acknowledgment for his work, and Kiran Chitara have both received the national award for their craftsmanship as well. The younger artisans in the community include Kirit Chitara, who has created his own identity for new innovation in the craft, and the first woman artisan, Niral Chitara, who is learning from her family and carving out her own name, which should encourage more women artisans to enter what is traditionally a male-dominated space. All of them have shared their knowledge of this incredibly rich cultural heritage and numerous stories relating to it.

The paintings are a true representation of craftsmanship and cultural creativity. However, with the declining number of artisans, the identity of the community is under serious threat as a result, screen-printed cloths have entered the market, making art is fading away with the demand for cheap paintings; as a result, screen-printed cloths have entered the market, creating difficulties for the traditional practitioners of this craft. With more awareness about cultural heritage, one can only hope that such rich crafts not only continue to exist but also to inspire the next generations by telling them stories of ancient times.

Making a Mata ni Pachhedi painting involves the following process:

1. The cotton fabric is soaked in water for twenty-four hours as otherwise it is unsuitable for printing or dying due to the accumulation of starch in the cloth.
2. It is then soaked in Harda (Myrobalan) solution for fifteen minutes and dried completely in sunlight.
3. The outline of the Mother Goddess on her vehicle is drawn in the center along with numerous other characters with the help of a bamboo stick and black dye. (The black dye is prepared using scrap iron, jaggery, and water, and is fermented for two to three weeks. Tamarind seed powder is then added and the mixture is boiled until it achieves a thick consistency.)
4. After the outline illustration dries, the painting is filled with red color that is made of alum and tamarind seed powder. The remaining white area is left blank, and wooden blocks are used for the borders. The cloth is thereafter dried in sunlight.
5. After the application of the two traditional colors (red and black), the artisan takes the cloth to the river for washing. This process requires running water as it helps to remove excess color and does not leave a stain on the cloth. The black and red colors were used traditionally in the paintings to ward off evil powers as well as to signify auspicious festivities. Many more colors have since been incorporated in the art, including blue, yellow, and green, using traditional methods of extracting colors from natural materials.
6. Once the cloth is completely washed, it is then boiled in water on a high temperature with the mixture of dhavdi (fire flame bush) flowers and alizarin. This helps to fix the color on the cloth. Afterwards, it is washed in plain water again.

The paintings are an essential requirement of this craft. With such decreasing opportunities, the Chitara hope to present their stories by adopting more innovative ideas, unfortunately so far without much support.

The Mata ni Pachhedi craft boasts a distinct identity and has a rich cultural value not only for the Devipujaks but also for craft consumers. Sadly, this natural and completely hand-made art is fading away with the demand for cheap paintings; as a result, screen-printed cloths have entered the market, creating difficulties for the traditional practitioners of this craft. With more awareness about cultural heritage, one can only hope that such rich crafts not only continue to exist but also to inspire the next generations by telling them stories of ancient times.
Avicenna Public Foundation

Preservation and Promotion of the Traditional Knowledge of Abu Ali Ibn Sina

N. F. Mahmudov,
Chairman of the Board of Avicenna Public Foundation

Prof. Sh. Ya. Zakirkhodjaev,
Head of the Department of Internal Diseases of Tashkent Medical Academy

The period of cultural awakening in Central Asia, which began in the Middle Ages six hundred years before the European countries, facilitated the development of a large group of genius scientists whose names were written in gilded letters in the annals of world history. One such genius is Abu Ali Ibn Sina, who blessed creativity on almost all fields of science and raised medicine to great heights.

During the time of Abu Ali Ibn Sina (known in Europe as Avicenna), medicine in the Central Asia region reached perfection in all respects. It was strongly influenced by Greek, Roman, Jewish, Syrian, Arabic, Persian, Chinese, and Indian medicine, among which the ancient scientific and practical manual Ayvot was the main point in this maturation process.

It is not only Ibn Sina’s knowledge of science that is unique; he also perfectly mastered such subjects as medicine, philosophy, logic, morality, natural science, astronomy, chemistry, poetry, linguistics, and musicology, and he wrote notable works in these areas.

The writings of Ibn Sina show awareness of the works of such scholars as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Ptolemy, Pythagoras and Iamblichus. Ibn Sina completed major works such as Kitab al-Shifa’ (“The Book of Healing”), Al Komun fit-Tibb (“Canon of Medicine”), Kitab al-Najat (“The Book of Salvation”), and Donishmandnoma (“The Book of Knowledge”), dedicated to his philosophy, medicine, and medical sciences.

Within the works of Ibn Sina dedicated to medical issues, his “Canon of Medicine” is the great masterpiece. “Canon of Medicine” was republished in Latin twenty times, and thirty-six times in total, by the sixteenth century. In this regard it can be compared only to the Bible. Until the middle of the seventeenth century, Ibn Sina’s masterpiece was the main teaching manual in the field of medicine in the prestigious universities of Europe.

The highest merit of the “Canon of Medicine” is that Ibn Sina introduced advanced ideas of Western, Eastern, Chinese, and Indian medicine, which were up to the task, and enriched them with the results of scientific observations and experiences, both personal and those of contemporaries. Thanks to this, “Canon of Medicine” is an encyclopedic medical resource recognized around the world.

Among the works of Abu Ali Ibn Sina on medicine, Kitab al-Shifa’ consists of twenty-two books, of which eight are related to medicine and Al-Urjuza fit-Tibb (“Medical Poem”) occupies a special place. This work is the largest epic poem attributed to the pen of the scientist. The book is an encyclopedic work that covers all knowledge of the time when Ibn Sina lived—that is, in the Muslim East.

It should be noted that in Kitab al-Shifa’ Ibn Sina made conclusions on works created by previous scholars in these scientific fields, and sometimes included their own attachments to them. For example, according to Juzjaniy, in the mathematics sections of Kitab al-Shifa Abu Ali Ibn Sina added ten theorems to Euclid’s geometry and developed theories about parallax (a technique for measuring cosmic distance). In the section on astronomy, Ptolemy’s notable work in the field was completely included in the “Almajity” new thoughts.

In Ibn Sina dedicated a large amount of his work Donishmandnoma to astronomy, describing the movement of the main celestial bodies, the movement of the Sun and Moon, a comparison of the size of the Earth, Moon, and Sun, the movement of the planets, and so on. Ibn Sina also fed the construction of an observatory in the city of Isfahan between 1024 and 1032, where he conducted systematic astronomical observations. Ibn Sina even made an astronomical instrument for the observatory that boasted a measurement accuracy significantly superior to other instruments of its kind at the time. This tool was used in observatories for several centuries.

The last part of the mathematics section of the Donishmandnoma refers to the theory of music, and consists of nine chapters. Ibn Sina describes innovative ideas about the ratio of sounds, rhythms, melodies, and musical instruments. Ibn Sina paid great attention to musical education in human life and for the first time created a scientific basis for understanding the effects of music on a single whole organism.

If the rhythm of the music heard is equal to or greater than an average of seventy-five beats per minute, the heart rate of a person who was previously calm will equalize accordingly, and they will begin to show physical activity. On the other hand, when the rhythm of the music is lower than seventy beats per minute, the heartbeat also decreases and the person begins to calm down. Playing music can
thus provoke a living organism into different conditions with its timbre, its highs and lows. With the rational use of such properties of music, Ibn Sina cured his own nervous condition. In addition to treating such mental health issues, music was also appropriate to raise the mood of otherwise healthy people and direct them to engage in various activities.

Ibn Sina noted that it is important to balance the resonance between the heartbeat, breathing impulses, and the sound heard when music affects a person. The understanding of music is determined by the nature of the “resonance,” which is said to make a person happy when they experience it, provoking improved mood, an increase in working capacity, calming of the nerves, and the impact on sleep, instability, and so on.

Studying the musical heritage of Ibn Sina in a broad sense plays an important role in the education of young people, the promotion of health, and the treatment of illnesses.

Currently, Avicenna Public Foundation studies and promotes the heritage of Abu Ali Ibn Sina, with a particular focus on healthy lifestyle among the population, which is a great medical and social problem. Avicenna Public Foundation is a non-governmental, non-commercial organization that was founded on 6 January 1999. Its mission is to study and manage and encourage research efforts in the study of the scientific heritage of Ibn Sina in the Republic of Uzbekistan and abroad, and to promote healthy lifestyles on the basis of the work of the great scientist and modern medicine. The foundation publishes books, magazines, and brochures, and produces regular TV and radio programs, develops traditional medicine, and aims to establish and develop close cooperation with UNESCO.

The foundation also regularly holds national and international seminars, conferences, and roundtable discussions on health issues, and offers its consideration and promotion of a number of draft laws in this area. It also aims to organize work in the direction of the promotion and popularization of healthy lifestyle among the population and the intensification of civil society activity in this direction.

Over the past six years, as well as the national and international seminars, conferences, and forums on healthy lifestyle, the foundation has collected scientific theses and articles, along with reports directly addressing healthy lifestyle and the dangers of smoking, e-cigarettes, nasvay (a type of smokeless tobacco for oral use), and hookah.

The foundation regularly participates in parliamentary hearings on health issues, and offers its consideration and promotion of a number of draft laws in this area.
ICHCAP has published *Traditional Martial Arts*, the fourth book in the Living Heritage Series, in collaboration with the International Centre of Martial Arts for Youth Development and Engagement under the auspices of UNESCO (hereinafter “ICHCAP”).

The Living Heritage Series is a series of books on the transmission and safeguarding status of each region and to visually promote its value. ICHCAP previously published three books in the Living Heritage Series: *Traditional Medicine in Asia-Pacific Region*, *Traditional Martial Arts for Youth Development* and a total of nineteen manuscripts were collected and published in the books.

This book presents creative and historical traditional martial arts from around the world, such as Taekwondo in Korea, Kaapirapat in India, Taing in Myanmar, Xilam in Mexico, and traditional wrestling in Central Asia from the perspective of intangible heritage. As an ICH, traditional martial arts are closely related to the environment, history, and identity of the community, passed down through generations, and are immersed in the life of the community through change and recreation. The transmission of traditional martial arts effectively contributes to the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals.

In particular, chapters on influx of judo and kendo that started with the Japanese migration to Brazil, the development of judo through the establishment of the judo and kendo alliance, and the African art of capoeira being introduced to Brazil during the Portuguese colonial era and developing into Capeoira rodas are eye-catching because it includes case studies on movement and development of martial arts as an intangible heritage.

Through this book, the center shares a range of information with readers, such as the historical background of traditional martial arts, and spreads the value of ICH inherent in martial arts. This publication will be globally distributed to organizations related to intangible heritage and can be downloaded for free from the center’s website.

The 2020 Governing Board Meeting of ICHCAP took place 20 November 2020 at the Daejeon Convention Center, Republic of Korea, under quarantine control. The meeting was attended by eight Governing Board members, and Category 2 Centers from China and Japan also attended to discuss the ICHCAP’s 2021 projects. This year, due to COVID-19, some participants, including Board Members outside of Korea, participated online.

The Secretariat reported on the current status of the 2020 programs and major pending issues, and examination and approval of the agenda including appointment of new board members and next year’s project plan. The board members commented that ICHCAP’s 2020 activities, regardless of the COVID-19 situation, have been successfully implemented by actively using the online platform, while at the same time, collaboration with the Chinese and Japanese centers and UNESCO field offices stands out.

ICHCAP’s 2021 projects, established based on UNESCO’s strategies (thirty-seven C/4 and forty C/5) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, were confirmed. The 2021 projects will be carried out under sixteen programs in the framework of five strategic tasks: 1) Establishing and Activating ICH Information-Sharing Mechanisms; 2) Diversifying and Strengthening ICH Networks; 3) Raising Visibility and Awareness of ICH; 4) Building an ICH Information-Sharing Platform; and 5) Increasing Efficiency in Planning and Management. In particular, next year, ICHCAP will develop and operate a platform called ichLinks under the value of “Openness, sharing and decentralization” to implement a voluntary information sharing system that focuses on member states participation and joint use of contents.

In addition, Ms. Chang Hwee Nee, chairman of Singapore’s National Heritage Committee, who was recommended as a candidate by the ICHCAP’s Executive Committee, will be appointed as a new board member and serve a role as a representative of member states in the region for two years from next year.

The 2020 ICH NGO Conference through the sessions, there was a wide range of presentations: Holding online festivals and practicing events, increasing accessibility to ICH information through online recording, maintaining transmission of traditional knowledge, and method of practices by adapting in the present, innovative art and cultural education through the Google Culture and Art Project, and untangling corporate engagement considering influence, etc. In particular, the two-day event ended by noting that all participants focused on the NGO itself, emphasizing the role of a “bridge” between governments and communities and recalling that to overcome the crisis through “solidarity” and “integration” is the biggest task we currently face.

As the conference was held online this year, all video materials can be replayed on ICHCAP’s website (https://www.unesco-ichcap.org/2020ichngo-conference/), and the proceedings will be posted at a later date and distributed to related agencies.
ICH Courier Online is coming back with a new look in January 2021.

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