

Folk arts to be celebrated

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Mongolian folk art is unarguably unique and rich; and has a long history dating back for thousands of years. It's difficult to define when it was formed, but probably then when the nation and tribes found their ethnicity and developed their own distinctive culture, tradition and special way of livelihood.

We say that it's vital to preserve our folklore and give lots of efforts, but how much do we know about our folk arts, about music, song and dance?

Mongolian folk art is amazingly rich and diverse as its great variety has been enriched by clans and tribes; and herited by generations. Historical recordings say that our ancestors had developed even a music and dance ensemble at their palace to enjoy performances each with special music, choreography, repertoire and technique. They used to have festival during big



ceremonies after their victory in a war or collaborative work, which was a good chance for musicians, singers and dancers to gather together. Coming from different areas, most often representing different tribes, people had the opportunity to perform, to learn from others and to take home a new melody or song. In this way, the ancient patterns of various corners of Mongolia have been preserved by local masters for the whole nation.

Central Mongolia is a home to the famous long song, which was stimulated from the vast wide space and praises the beauty of the native land and daily life. Their dancing style is an ode to the beautiful land, horse or great heroes. North Mongolian songs are rhythmic, spirited and up-and-down toned as they live in the mountains and forests. Eastern Mongolian, especially Buryatian dance *Yokhor* is more active and energetic with fast movements of head and feet and their song more interactive like dialogue. Kazakh dance is more rhythmic with quick changes of one to another movement. Western Mongolian dancing style *bijelgee*, meaning to dance with whole body, is performed in a crowd or in a ger, moving mostly with their head and chest and expresses acts of labor. As Western Mongolia is a home to a dozen Mongol tribes, it's a great treasure of folklore. The legendary epics and tales, a combination of poetry, songs, music and a library of folk wisdom and nomadic philosophy were originated in this area. Also the famous *khoomei* singing which is considered to be a musical art using one's throat as an instrument was born from the area too.

These examples can be a long list if continue, but the point is how to transmit, preserve and revive this multiplicity of folklore to younger generations in this high tech area

of globalization. For over a decade, we try to fill the gap of 70 years, which broke the chain of heritage, nomadic culture and tradition between generations. During the socialist regime, the folk arts have been kept by artists and public have followed modern way of life. The elder generations are going away one by one without having chance to pass their knowledge from ancestors to us. Nowadays, it's difficult to find a child who wants to learn thousands of quatrains of oral epic; play on *tovshuur* or talk in ancient Mongolian sayings. It's rare to find a girl who can dance *bijelgee*. How to preserve our precious folk arts in the future? How to attract and call youth into the treasure of our ancestors?

In October, 2005 the Folk Arts Festival was organized in Khovd province, where over 60 semi-finalists participated in the contests including epics, odes and khoomei; folk and dialogue song; oral tales and *bijelgee* dance. It was a great success to initiate "My culture" heritage education project of ACM, which is an after school music course for children in Khovd province. As 2006 is a year of the 800th anniversary of Great Mongol Empire, the Organizing Committee is organizing another regional folk art festival in Western Mongolia in March, 2006. On March 25th, there will be Bijelgee dance festival in Uvs and on 27th, a Khoomei festivity in Khovd province, each involving over 70-80 professional and amateur artists. There are several other nationwide events to celebrate traditional arts during this year, but will it cease next year? We should find new, interesting and innovative ways to transmit the heritage to young Mongolians. Not only festivals, but also interactive events to involve youth, after school trainings for secondary schoolchildren or wider scope media promotions to raise their interest in folk arts. Mongolians say if the language, culture and borders are safe, the nation exists secure. Mongolians should struggle for that and there are many things to do in the future.