

ART, WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA: GEOGRAPHY, NATURE, AND HISTORY

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The sovereign state of the Kyrgyz Republic was formed on August 31, 1991, when the parliament proclaimed Kyrgyzstan an independent, democratic state with its own constitution and an indivisible and independent territory.

Kyrgyzstan is located in the north-eastern part of Central Asia, in the heart of the Eurasian continent. Its territory of 198.5 thousand square km is equal to the combined area of Portugal, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands. It stretches 900 km from east to west, and 425 km from north to south. The northernmost part of Kyrgyzstan is on the same latitude as Rome, and the southernmost end is on a level with the island of Sicily.

The borders of the Republic generally follow natural bordered: mountain ranges and rivers. Kyrgyzstan is bordered by China, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The Kyrgyz Republic is a country remarkable for its natural beauty. Majestic mountain ranges give way to rolling syrts soaring up to 4000 m above sea level. Wide valleys and vast lake basins are framed by eternally snow-covered peaks, ridges and mountain ranges. Images of animals and people from 3-5 thousand years before our era

The territory of Kyrgyzstan, and all Central Asia for that matter, is one of the most ancient centres of human civilization. Archaeological research has shown that prehistoric man lived in the area during the Stone Age. The cliff paintings of the Saimaly-Tash, ravine are a widely known monument of antiquity. These unique paintings depict various animals, hunting scenes, religious ceremonies and aspects of farming.

Tradition and Cultural Change

Women's eyes are attentive, inquisitive, and observant; female hands are hardworking, always tirelessly carrying out some thankless, laborious job. Women's soul, which is filled with love, is hopeless, suffering from endless stresses, wars, crises and a deficiency of kindness. All this develops her sense about life, which is drawn in paints, made from strings, embroidered or sculpted from clay. Nowadays reality is hard for women-artists, it is not their time. Family, life, the education of children - this not an easy cart which is always voluntarily pulled by women. Women, more than men, aspire to overcome difficulties, especial those of them who have children and family. The transitional period of our time is reflected in fine art. Many criteria which served in the near past to mark our estimation of creative work now concede their places to other criteria. We begin to understand that the variety and evaluation of art depend on the various aesthetic tastes of the consumers. Artists are compelled to be guided by the tastes and claims of potential buyers. Commercial art develops, galleries appear: exhibitions, sales. At the same time it is becoming more difficult to arrange thematic exhibitions devoted to urgent problems, which required attention, without any help. One of the problems facing our updated society is the problem of preservation and development of the best traditions of Kyrgyz art. The women of deep antiquity are considered to be the bearers of national traditions.

The relation of traditional and modern styles is quite evident in creations of decorative - applied art. It is possible to notice two approaches in this kind of art. Some

artists aspire to follow ancient technological rules of manufacturing and decoration in their creations. Others try to apply new ways, or borrow from painting or diagrams composite courses, creating works only for exhibitions.

The yourts always seem a natural continuation of the mountains, white as the tops, like hill domes. And that's why mountain painting seems to be lacking of some crucial thing without it and yourts in an artistic exhibition are not the same, as when they are in the mountains of our native land.

An experienced master makes a yourt frame in twenty five days. But it serves for twenty five years. The longevity of this nomad dwelling can be explained by high-level constructive-architectural designs, brought to perfection in the course of many ages in the severe conditions of the highlands and a lack of roads. Pulling a yourta together begins with a door-case — bosogo. Upon it an open-worked wall, a kerege,- is stretched; it consists of separate links-kanat. Each kanat is made in a peculiar curve and joined by rawhide leather straps sticks, which when stretched form a diamond-shaped bays — kerege koz. And this is also a pattern made in a similar way as the ornament of the coloured mat which is put behind the kerege.

Upon this the dome poles are fastened and here male hands are needed to lift the yourta rim — tujunduk. Everything is merged in the bent birch rim: the dome lock, the flue, the light window, the solar sign turning to the sun, its ornamented motif. Kolomto is a fireplace under tujunduk. It is the organising and logical centre of the yourta and all of life. Djuk carpets and quilts, thick felt packages of clothes, pillows — everything that personifies the prosperity of a family is laid together on trunks and rests behind the fireplace, by the back wall just in front of the entrance. The place in front of djuk was called tor and considered to be a place of honour. It was allotted to older honorary guests. To the right of tor was the female part of the yourta — epchy djak, to the left — the male part — er djak. Harness, all things and articles, necessary for male occupations: cattle breeding, hunting, craft were hung on kerege here. In olden days the artificers in silver

In olden days the artificers in silver kumush-usta — were first honoured as people endowed with a peculiar sacred power over fire and iron and then as skilled masters of the favourite adornments Jewellery was part and parcel of the national dress of a Kyrgyz woman. Finger rings (shakek), arm bracelets (bilerik), earrings (iymek) were quite common adornments worn by women. A girl wore a narrow finger ring. A married woman wore a wide one with several thin rims. Oval, diamond-shaped, or square buckles were studded with cornelian or corals, and massive, round or flat open-work bracelets were decorated with engraving, niello. All this is clearly seen to be culturally unique, reserving the primordial purity of metal-craft intentionality. Earrings were of every

Earrings were of every description and technique, their forms and designs depending much on the functions of clothes and local traditions. Massive earrings were often attached to cloth or temple pendants, tied by laces and worn over the head. Earrings were forged and cast, filigree, open work with varied pendants. In the north of Kyrgyzia niello was quite common, in the south — studding with corals, mother-of-pearl, and also granulation and filigree. Each woman could value the work of the master, who had made her ornaments. And each ornament clearly manifested the fact, that it was made by a true Kyrgyz kumush-usta.

The Kyrgyz topchu-buttons and clasps, were part of the national costume. Topchu could be circular and convex, round and oval, they were decorated with grain — shaped

juts, granulation, applied filigree, and niello, inlay with coloured glass, cornelian and corals. Buttons were made of silver and were meant not only for buttoning, but also for decorating clothes. That's why they were set much and carefully kept. Old things could be thrown away, but not topchu.

Oral Tradition

The oldest epic of the Kyrgyz people – and among the best tradition of epic creations - is "Manas." The millennium of the "Manas" epic was held in August 1995. So, a few words on this epic; these words are devoted to the millennium of the "Manas" epic.

Manas is a great part of Kyrgyz heritage and a wonderful work, which surprised mankind by being a world-level cultural achievement. This epic is a kind of encyclopaedia of the Kyrgyz people and its ancient history. It is a unique monumental epic work of oral art, and its great variety reflects not only the history but all sides of the people's life. The epos Manas has more than 500,000 lines. It is 20 times longer than the famous Odyssey and Iliad put together. Manas is not only the historiography of the Kyrgyz, but also a work which deeply reflects the scientific views on philosophy, astronomy, history and mathematics of the Turkish people.

In the epos Manas, three generations of heroes are mentioned. The work consists of three parts: Manas, Semetei and Seitak. The epic is united by the main hero, Manas.

Manas's grandfather Karakhan was a wise, brave ruler of the Kyrgyz tribe. At that time, nobody dared to disturb the quiet and peaceful life of the Kyrgyz people. After his death came another time. Foreign aggressors began to constantly trouble them. The people suffered and humbly obeyed their tormentors, and those who tried to defend the interests of the people were severely punished.

Karakhan's children more than once tried to take vengeance on their enemies, but met with defeat. They were driven away to different places. At that time one of Karakhan's son, Jakyp, was driven with forty families to Altai.

After many years, a child appeared in Jakyp's family — Manas. When he was born, it became clear at once: there had appeared a Hercules. He was protected by the invisible spirits — black dappled leopard and grey lion. The women who delivered his mother of a child, were surprised with his force and weight. At the age of seven he was able to demonstrate his adroitness, courage and cleverness. When he was twelve, he defeated 700 invaders on his race-horse Toruchar. In that battle the well-known baatyr (hero) of the invaders, Er Kochku, lost his life.

Then Manas defended his people from a group of aggressors led by Joloi. He defeated such baatyrs as Kaman, Jorn, and Dongo, but Joloi himself ran away.

From that time the Kyrgyz became widely known. Manas became a national hero and leader and brought his people home from Altai. After returning home, he married Kanykei, the wise and beautiful daughter of Buktiar Khan. They settled in Talas. Kanykei was a very clever woman, and Manas's associate. She did her best to join the Kyrgyz.

Manas participated in many battles and fought astride his charger Akkule, defending his people from foreign invaders. Together with his forty fellow warriors including Bakai, Ajibai, Almanbet, Chubak, and Syrgak, he defeated the very cunning and artful foe Alloke. Manas also emerged victorious from battles against Tukubai, Joloi, Neskaru, Konurbai, Madykan and Malgun.

Manas fought for the freedom, independence, and unity of his people and he cared about the fate of the Kyrgyz people and their land. He was a clever, wise and just ruler of the Kyrgyz people.

Socialism

After the October Revolution, the Kyrgyz, along with all the peoples of Tsarist Russia, joined the Soviet Union and worked to build a socialist society. As Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev noted at the first Kyrgyz Universal Gathering, it is important to be objective and not portray the socialist era solely in somber colors. This is particularly true for the Kyrgyz. During the communist period, the historical lot of the Kyrgyz became indisputably better and brighter than it had been in previous times. This assertion is supported by dozens of examples. Before the October Revolution, the number of Kyrgyz was steadily declining, but during the 72 years of Soviet rule the Kyrgyz population multiplied four times. The Kyrgyz converted fully from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle, building hundreds of large towns and villages.

Thousands of Kyrgyz moved to cities, adapting to the knowledge, spiritual values and traditions of other nations. It was under socialism that the Kyrgyz language became stylistically defined in written form, becoming the most important means of communication and national expression. Changes occurred in daily conditions as well, and in public and cultural life. Soviet authority allowed the formerly dispersed Kyrgyz tribes to unite within the framework of a single state structure, and concrete steps were taken to establish the Kyrgyz as an independent nation. The totalitarian character of the Soviet state, however, excluded the possibility of an independent external or internal policy for the Republic. National independence and national sovereignty came to the Kyrgyz people only with the fall of the Soviet Union.

Today

The Forum of Women's Non-Governmental Organizations of Kyrgyzstan is one among about 40 organizations; three of these organizations are big ones: the Association for Support of Women Artists and Art Critics of Kyrgyzstan, the League of Women of the Creative Initiative and the Fund for Support of Talents. In Kyrgyzstan we have more than a hundred organizations of national craftspersons.

The mission of the Association is to revive the best traditions of national creativity and support the professionalism of women as fine artists, by providing for regular participation in exhibitions.

The League professes spiritual freedom, a creative attitude and aspiration towards perfection on the verge of two centuries and two worlds: East and West.

The basic purpose of the League is: propagating creativity of the professional artists and the original culture of Kyrgyzstan at home and abroad, acquainting our creative intelligentsia and the wider public with the advanced achievements of world culture and including Kyrgyz fine art in world art processes.

The mission of the Fund is preservation of original and centuries-old Kyrgyz traditions of artistic creativity. Alongside the preservation and development of traditional forms of national creativity, it unites national artists and cultural figures and together with the center develops and elaborates educational programs.