

The Preservation of Cultural Heritage: Continuity and Memory

Andrey R. Khazbulatov, Moldir Nurpeiis

Abstract—Contemporary science and technologies largely widen the gap between the spiritual and rational of the society. Industrial and technological breakthroughs might radically affect most processes in the society, thus losing the cultural heritage. The thinkers recognized the dangers of the decadence in the first place. In the present article the ways of preserving cultural heritage have been investigated. Memory has always been a necessary condition for self-identification, - continuity is based on this. The authors have supported the hypothesis that continuity and ethnic memory are the very mechanisms that preserve cultural heritage. Such problem-formulating will facilitate another, new look at the material, spiritual and arts spheres of the cultural heritage of numerous ethnic groups. The fundamental works by major European and Kazakh scientists have been taken as a basis for the research done.

Keywords—Continuity, cultural heritage, ethnic memory

I. INTRODUCTION

THE degree of a nation's interest in its roots increases in direct proportion to its rate of technological progress. Unfortunately, the rapid improvement of living conditions intensifies the spiritual impoverishment of modern society.

This alarms the intellectual elite around the world, and as a result, its members increasingly unite for the salvation of their spiritual identities, formed over thousands of years, but very vulnerable today. This process has particularly intensified since the beginning of the 20th century. With a more rapid advancement of science and technology, the gap between society's spirituality and its rationalism grew wider. As a way to protect spiritual values, creative minds look to preserve and transmit these values to their descendants in the form of cultural heritage. The authors believe that one of the ways to preserve cultural heritage is through continuity and memory. In the first part of the article, the authors consider cultural heritage as memory, by way of examples and comparisons. In the second part, the authors suggest that continuity, the main functional component of culture and the phenomenon responsible for its preservation, is at the heart of the knowledge transfer process. In conclusion, findings are presented.

II. CULTURAL HERITAGE AS "MEMORY"

Cultural heritage is formed slowly: bit by bit, it absorbs the best that the human spirit, powered by the spark of creativity, can provide. Culture and art are quite special phenomena; there are no bans or restrictions. In fact, history shows that the stronger the pressure and the more fierce the taboo, the louder they assert themselves. "History shows that cultural self-evolution begins with evolution of its material parts. That is what defines culture's self-propulsion as a unity of material, spiritual and artistic realms," says G. Shalabaeva [1, p. 4].

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In the 20th century, the world's cultural and anthropological schools have devoted all their efforts to study mythologies and cultures of different peoples, not only for the sake of learning about them, but also to find something common, original, real. As A. Nasanbaev notes, "there's a direct relationship between cultural heritage and national identity" [2, p. 423].

Folklore, which has mythology as its dominant component, now has the status of an "immaterial heritage". It brings together mainly temporary art forms that have no material basis. It is the most vulnerable part of the cultural heritage and "special attention is paid to its preservation due to the looming threat of extinction, provoked by the process of globalization" [3, p. 131].

Despite the abundance of definitions of "culture" and "cultural heritage", characterizing them as spiritual, sociological, and philosophical concepts, ultimately, it boils down to this: "cultural heritage is memory" [4, p. 332].

In cultural studies there is a clear guideline, which can be summed up by one word: "continuity". Perhaps this is what makes culture an integral part of a harmonious life. Cultural development occurs in direct proportion to changes in society, i.e. being. Any social transformation inevitably leads to a change in culture. However, the principle of continuity in culture does not function incessantly. From the philosophy of culture standpoint, we understand that this way, the theory of continuity maintains its vitality, avoiding degeneration into a regular algorithm, which sooner or later leads to extinction due to a fading of its internal logic. "Continuity, a necessary condition for development, is contradictory" [5, p. 41], and it is these contradictions, born as a result of a global dialectic, that are so resilient and eternal.

Modern society is characterized by many challenges. In order to classify these challenges in order of importance, undoubtedly, the primary goal would be the processing of this huge flow of information coming from all sides. However, this would not be enough. A further question arises: how does one protect it? Format, methods and mechanisms of preservation are some of the most pressing issues in many spheres of public life far removed from art, for example in computer technology.

Since 2010, Google, one of the largest internet companies, joined efforts with Harvard University to enter the field of digitization and online distribution of books. The selection of books has been deliberate, shaping the initial stage of the world's cultural heritage.

This gave rise to a new branch of science - cultural science. It is based on vast digital data compiled by Google in the 14 years of its existence. As of today, Google has "digitized approximately 15 million books, representing 12% of all released volumes. It contains 500 billion words, more than what a person can read in his entire life" [6].

The memory remains a necessary condition of self-identity. This forms the basis for continuity, since the responsibility for the past and future elevates the human being, making him part of the overall context.

Conscious memory is the main measure of harmony in life. "A perfect memory, then, is superior to the ability to recollect," - writes M. Eliade [7, p. 122].

He also offers his concept of two kinds of "restoring the past." First, an instant or "direct reproduction of the original situation." This can be accomplished only by a society that really knows how to do it.

In mythology, due to their importance and particular proximity to reality, special place is given to myths about heroes. They tell of events of local, not planetary, scale, and provide a basis for people to reconstruct the whole story and understand its meaning. Besides, the story focuses on national history.

Thus, myths and mythological consciousness are a kind of mortar that binds different worldviews, and a means to preserve and transmit information to descendants, which is of vital importance to individual cultural traditions and the world at large.

III. CONTINUITY IN THE FORMATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Unfortunately, almost always, the restrictions caused by a given vector of artistic vision, "for the most part are little understood, and are not subject to investigation in a timely manner. Only a new age, having developed a more comprehensive artistic vision, begins to notice the "glasses" nearly invisible to the preceding period, through which the art was perceiving the world" [8, p. 77]. That is why the idea of continuity becomes even more important.

The inner dialectic of social and cultural continuity, in spite of the general philosophical principle of negation, is based on a deep sense of respect and responsibility that makes up the foundation of culture as such. We cannot have a discussion at the level of the state, if the concept does not envisage the free will of each individual.

New trends to revive the family tree are based on a deep, archetypal disposition to preserve family history.

Awareness of one's ancestors requires knowledge and awareness of one's self, and of one's own roots. The cult of the ancestors still plays a dominant role in any Eastern culture.

Continuity, as a major functional component of culture, and the phenomenon responsible for its preservation, is the basis for the transfer of knowledge and coded information among the initiated. This way, continuity "links yesterday with today by giving form and presence to influential experiences and memories, incorporating images and tales from another time into the background of the onward-moving present, and bringing with it hope and continuity," says Jan Assmann [9, p. 15].

In the East, true skill was linked to direct inheritance, where the master chose his apprentice, passing to the latter all the knowledge and secrets of the craft. Members of the same clan were connected not only by blood, but more importantly, by a responsibility to their ancestors and descendants.

Applying their efforts and creativity in a common direction, the people would form a national idea, which became the trunk of the ethnic tree. "The formation of the national idea is possible only on the basis of a new interpretation of our own history," [10, p. 238] said Nursultan Nazarbayev.

It is obvious these days that the ideological characteristics of society have changed under the influence of irreversible global change. They affect all areas of life. In an attempt to highlight common features, we observe two indicators: inclusiveness and interdependence at the global level. The increasing pace of life is directly proportional to cultural change. Today, one generation of people has to face social, political, psychological and environmental changes that not so long ago would fall on several different generations.

"Art is the first indicator of maturity of the society, the exponent of its social virtues and ethical life" - wrote John Ruskin in the XIX century, in his "Lectures on Art" [11, p. 12]. Ruskin was a Briton, a representative of a country that sooner than others industrialized its production, leading to strong cultural transformations. An eyewitness to the invasion of new economic relations, he realized that the main damage would be incurred by the culture. John Ruskin, without exaggeration, can be considered the founder of the Western tradition of conservation, the first champion of safeguarding the environment. In the last one hundred years, nothing has changed in this respect.

IV. CONCLUSION

A large number of countries have been in search of common ground. Society is actively looking for what we share, not how different we are. Artistic culture is probably the only philosophical parameter that has accumulated great potential and positive experience in understanding values, tolerance and freedom of spirit. As mentioned above, art (culture) in all its diversity is a "child" of memory, and its logical extension, a guarantee of immortality. It is the source that feeds the ethnos with its energy, giving the latter an opportunity to live in harmony in this world. "Through cultural memory, human life gains a second dimension or a second time, and the possibility of living in two times is one of the universal functions of cultural memory or, to be more precise, of culture as memory," [9, p. 90] says Jan Assmann.

People are constantly in search of their identity. They take on the burden of responsibility before history and continue to strengthen cultural memory through art. Modern art in Kazakhstan aspires to become a part of world art, and is constantly in search of its style.

Joint study, cultural exchange, and acquaintance with new cultural layers of different peoples are the features of the new world order. Efforts by the government, and the consciousness and involvement of its citizens not only protect acquired wealth, but also open up new sources of life-giving strength that we can share with each other, since the "cultural renaissance of a nation, an assurance of a revival of the ethnos and super-ethnos and of a stronger state, is only possible in the context of global cultural processes, but not in defiance of them" [12, p. 57].

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