

The Integration of Tradition and Modernity: The Status of the Epic of Manas in Contemporary Chinese Culture

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Abstract: In modern society, “Manas” holds a significant role as the brilliant gem of Chinese culture. Through distinctive plots and themes, this epic demonstrates the distinct artistic attractiveness of the Kirghiz people while including their rich historical and cultural significance. Multimedia and digital technologies have made it possible for people in modern society to more effectively disseminate this epic and increase the number of people who are aware of and drawn to the allure of traditional Chinese culture. In addition to being a cultural gem, the epic poem “Manas” also represents people’s spiritual prosperity, which is crucial to the moral and cultural development of modern civilization. A thorough analysis of this epic can uncover its underlying significance and encourage Chinese culture’s innovation and legacy.

Keywords: Manas Epic, Chinese Cultural Status, Tradition and Modernity, Inheritance Method, Performer of Manas

1. INTRODUCTION

As an oral literary gem that has been preserved over time, the Kirghiz epic poem “Manas” contains not only a wealth of national history and culture, but also a significant portion of Chinese civilization. Modern culture and traditional culture are entwined in the setting of science and technology’s rapid advancement and worldwide integration. However, the creative development of traditional culture is also stimulated by the incorporation of multiculturalism. The epic poem “Manas” responds positively to the context of this time by attempting to represent modernism and creative inheritance. Studying the positioning of the epic of Manas in contemporary Chinese culture is not only an in-depth exploration and inheritance of traditional culture, but also a beneficial exploration of the integration of modern culture and tradition.

By analyzing the status of Manas in contemporary culture and its connection with traditional culture, this article explores its contemporary value, and explores how to combine the essence of the epic with modern culture to contribute to the promotion of Chinese culture. As one of the longest epic poems in the world, “Manas” carries the profound history and culture of the Kyrgyz people, telling the magnificent story of the hero Manas defending freedom, justice, and home, and has irreplaceable

cultural significance. It is not only a literary work, but also an important carrier for recording and preserving national history and national spirit. The performance of the epic poem “Manas” is considered an aesthetic act, and the on-site narration of the epic poem “Manas” is a sensitive channel that affects the audience, and the basic factor that affects the audience’s awareness of the on-site epic narrative is the narrator’s rhythm (Bakchiev, 2021). In the dissemination process of Chinese national epic, most of it is mediated by Chinese and then translated into other languages, thus attracting people’s attention to its translation. Therefore, it takes “Manas”, one of the three epic poems in China, as the research object to explore how Chinese translation makes a simple epic text (Ma, 2022).

The study focuses on “Manas”, one of the three great heroic epics of China, which showcases the protection of intangible cultural heritage of ethnic minorities through excavation, organization, research and publication (Aili & Wufu, 2022). “Manas” is listed as one of the three great heroic epics of China. Over the past century, numerous experts and scholars have conducted in-depth research and exploration on “Manas”, with fruitful results (Wang, 2010). Since the 19th century, the multidisciplinary value of the epic “Manas” has been fully recognized by scholars around the world and deeply explored (Adili, 2011). The epic “Manas” is a great epic created by the Kyrgyz people from the 10th to the 16th century and is still widely spread among the Kyrgyz people. This is mainly due to the needs of the Kyrgyz people, which enables the oral transmission of the epic poem “Manas” today (Li, 2013). These scholars’ research on the epic of Manas can provide certain theoretical support for this study.

Due to the lack of in-depth explanation of the status of the epic of Manas in contemporary Chinese culture, the research results still have some limitations, which is not conducive to people’s in-depth understanding of the epic of Manas. The study of the positioning of the epic poem “Manas” in contemporary Chinese culture is an important measure to deeply explore and inherit traditional culture, and also a beneficial attempt to promote the integration of modern culture and tradition. The main focus of this article is to comprehensively analyze the status of “Manas” in contemporary Chinese culture and its close connection with traditional culture, and to deeply explore and demonstrate its unique contemporary cultural value. This epic not only has extremely high literary value, but also is a brilliant gem in the treasure trove of Chinese culture, worthy of in-depth research and inheritance.

2. THE TRADITIONAL VALUE AND MODERN INTERPRETATION OF THE EPIC OF MANAS

“Manas” is an oral epic with a long history, and its traditional value is undeniable (Jacquesson, 2020). It records the history, culture, beliefs, and heroic deeds of the Kyrgyz people, and is an important component of their national spiritual life. In contemporary times, people have conducted extensive research on Manas. They not only discovered the traditional wisdom and values contained within it, but also attempted to provide new interpretations with modern perspectives and methods, giving it a new era connotation. Manas is known as the "Pearl of Chinese Folk Art" and is renowned in the world. As a large-scale epic that integrates various aspects of the Kyrgyz people, Manas is the most brilliant epic in the history of the Kyrgyz people. “Manas” praises the heroic deeds of the Kyrgyz hero Manas, who has defended their homeland and pursued a better life for generations. It truly reflects the production, life, and social customs of the local people, forming the oldest and most vivid “historical scroll” of Kyrgyz. The Kyrgyz people have unconsciously integrated many issues such as “people to people,” “people to society,” and “people to the world” into their thousands of years of singing, becoming an encyclopedia for people to understand the Kyrgyz people.

2.1 Modern Interpretation of the Epic of Manas

The epic poem “Manas” of the Kyrgyz people is a heroic epic that has been passed down to this day. It tells the heroic story of Manas and his descendants who led the Kyrgyz people to fight for their freedom and happiness under the exploitation and enslavement of outsiders (Koldoshev, 2022). In contemporary society, people can interpret the epic of Manas from multiple dimensions. From a literary perspective, “Manas” is undoubtedly a magnificent literary masterpiece, vividly depicting the heroic legend of the Manas family and profoundly showcasing the spiritual core and cultural heritage of the Kyrgyz people. By delving deeper into this epic, one can glimpse the challenges and struggles that this nation has experienced throughout its long history. In contemporary times, the courage, wisdom, and resilience in the epic of Manas still hold profound enlightenment for modern people. These excellent traditions not only belong to the Kyrgyz people, but are also precious spiritual treasures for all humanity. Inheriting and carrying forward this epic is of great significance for the inheritance and development of Kyrgyz culture. By using modern methods to sort out and

inherit it, people can better understand the history and culture of the Kyrgyz people, enhance the cohesion between different ethnic groups, and promote cultural exchange between them. Overall, by interpreting the epic of Manas from multiple dimensions, it can be found that it is not only a literary work with profound people-oriented and ideological significance, but also an important carrier for the study of the history and culture of the Kyrgyz ethnic group.

2.1.1 Literary Research on the Epic of Manas

Epic is a literary form, and its most prominent feature is still its literary nature (ZHOU, 2023). The study of Manas has long focused on the in-depth interpretation of epic texts, gradually forming a unique perspective on the epic of Manas through the exploration of several issues in epic literature. With the continuous advancement of the organization of the epic text of Manas, people's meticulous research on the epic text has also entered a new stage. The research in this stage mainly focuses on exploring the acceptance of epics, character portrayal, and other aspects. In terms of research methods, text analysis remains the core of the study of the epic literature of Manas. Through a detailed analysis of the artistic characteristics of character portrayal and storyline in epic poetry, the overall artistic style of epic poetry can be comprehensively displayed. Early researchers paid more attention to the heroic images and storylines in the epic of Manas, mostly starting with the narrative techniques of traditional epic literature. By analyzing the personality traits and common plot developments of heroes, the unique literary and artistic charm of the epic of Manas can be revealed, and this literary and artistic work full of national characteristics can be presented to the world. Manas can be examined from the perspective of receptive aesthetics. This not only provides an excellent example of the organic integration of Western literary theory and epic research, but also serves as a witness for Chinese scholars to pay attention to the aesthetic art of living epics, leading people to pay more attention to "living epics". The image of the hero in the epic "Manas" is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: The image of the hero in the epic "Manas" is displayed

2.1.2 The Transmission Mode of “Manas” and “Manas Qi”

“Manas” is an epic about the hero Manas that has been passed down by the Kyrgyz people through a long period of production. It is mainly disseminated and passed down through oral singing, and the performers of the epic poem “Manas” are also revered as “Manas Qi” (Hu, 2015). During traditional festivals of the Kyrgyz people, “Manaschi” would hold such performances, and many Kyrgyz people would gather around the artists, listening attentively. Its dissemination is also a process of education, where the audience can gradually receive the spirit conveyed by the story while watching the performance. During the performance, there is still some interaction between the audience and the actors, which can also be seen as the creative process of “Manas”. Manas is a folk culture that has been passed down from generation to generation in this form (Abalova, 2019). When singing “Manas”, the performer expresses the changes in epic plot and the protagonist’s emotions through facial expressions, gestures, and melody in the song. The audience was mesmerized by the performance, and to thank the performers for their outstanding performances, people often gave gifts and entertained them by slaughtering sheep. The epic performance of Manaschi has become a culture. From the perspective of the inheritance relationship between Manaschi’s master and disciple, an experienced epic singer can have at least one apprentice, most of whom are descendants of themselves or their own parents. When selecting apprentices, Manaschi first needs to consider the influence of family culture. If there is an inheritor in a family, then their children can have a family atmosphere full of singing. In this environment, children grow up listening to epics and being influenced by them, so they have a greater chance of becoming the next inheritor. The second is to facilitate communication between teachers and apprentices. The inheritance of the epic of Manas can be divided into two types: “mother’s inheritance” and “father’s inheritance”. When the master sings the epic poem “Manas”, the disciple listens to it, which is the most basic teaching method and gradually cultivates the inheritors through communication between both parties. So, when selecting disciples, masters often choose the person who has the best relationship with them to become their disciple. The epic score of “Manas” sung by “Manaschi” is shown in Figure 2.

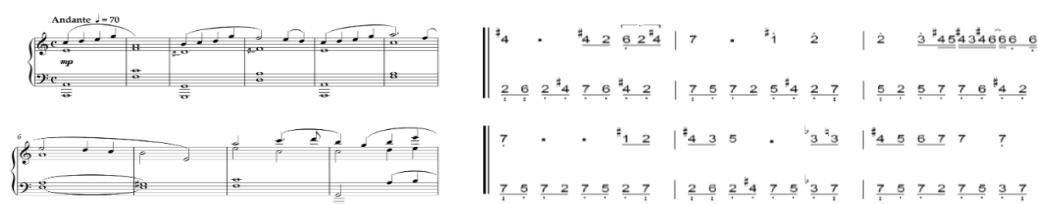


Figure 2: The epic score of "Manas"

2.2 The Traditional Value of the Epic of Manas

Wherever the Kyrgyz people are, they are accompanied by the epic of Manas. The epic poem “Manas” is widely circulated in Xinjiang, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and many other places, and is loved by the Kirghiz people (Raxmatullaev, 2022). Among all the inheritances, the best is the epic poem “Manas”. The epic poem “Manas” has been passed down from generation to generation among the Kirghiz people and is a spiritual symbol of national unity. Its social value lies in the unchanging spirit of patriotism, unity and progress. This national epic has extraordinary value in history, culture, scientific research, and other aspects, and has extremely high practical value for its research. The Kyrgyz people have a strong sense of identification with “Manas”. Once recognized, it can form strong cohesion, stimulate fighting spirit, and strive to move forward. Even in modern times, its practical value remains significant, providing spiritual support and a source of motivation for the Kyrgyz people. After the 1980s, research on the epic of Manas not only surged in China, but also internationally. By studying the epic of Manas, it can better understand the history, culture, and customs of the Kyrgyz people. The epic poem “Manas” is a very broad and highly valuable research topic, and is an outstanding representative of traditional Chinese culture. It reflects the spirit and consciousness of the nation well and has high value in witnessing the vitality of Chinese cultural traditions.

3. THE STATUS OF THE EPIC OF MANAS IN CONTEMPORARY CHINESE CULTURE

Manas is an important component of Chinese culture, and its cultural status in modern society is also very high. On the one hand, at the national level, high attention has been paid to the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, providing strong policy guarantees for the inheritance and development of the epic of Manas. On the other hand, the global popularization and promotion of Chinese culture have made the epic of Manas one of the representatives of Chinese culture, receiving attention and recognition from the world. The main academic research on the epic of Manas refers to the study of various issues related to epic poetry, as well as the expansion of related fields. The main content of this field includes the study of epic plot, structure, generation, theme, and other aspects. It involves a wide range of disciplines and is a comprehensive discipline with great extensibility in both time and space. The study of the

epic of Manas in China has shown great development space and promising prospects. Manas is a heroic epic of Kirgiz people's resistance to foreign aggression. From the opponent's point of view, the national defense war with the invading enemy is the most. But the magical heroes in the first part of the epic Manas, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: A list of magical heroes in Manas

Magic Hero	
Manas's Hero	Manas, Gamu Goeltsch, Al Manbet, Chuva Ke, Kuoshoyi, Selhak.
The Hero Of The Other Side	Kongwuerbayi, Xiaoruke, Kongtuoyi, Kaledayi of Kang 'ayi, Neskala.

Digging, refining, transforming, and enhancing the content and expression methods that have reference value in the epic of Manas, endowing it with modernity, activating and expanding its vitality, in order to meet the challenges of the times and solve practical problems. It can mainly start from the following aspects: first, it needs to "make the past serve the present", liberate the epic of "Manas" from the state of a nation's self-appreciation and self-entertainment, and combine it with the development trend of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics in the new era. Modern art forms and technological means can be used to express it, making the epic of Manas more closely related to people's lives and making it an important and precious cultural heritage in China. Secondly, in order to recognize the creative transformation of the epic of Manas, it is necessary to take theoretical innovation as the source and foundation, and then endow it with new era connotations. This can better adapt to the pace of the times, enrich, expand, and improve the original connotation of the epic of Manas, enhance its influence and appeal, and achieve innovation and improvement in the epic of Manas. The third is to provide strong guarantees for the modern inheritance of the epic of Manas, broaden the channels of dissemination, and achieve market-oriented operation. In modern life, the epic of Manas not only carries profound historical and cultural values, but also has important cultural functions and extensive dissemination influence. Through education and literary and artistic creation, it promotes excellent traditional culture, enhances national identity and unity spirit. The heroic spirit and values in epic poetry provide spiritual and moral support for people's daily lives. Since its origin, Manas has been a world-renowned classic, covering historical events closely related to the world. Throughout the entire history of the

development of the Kyrgyz people, many elements called “Manas” have emerged. Until today, the versions of “Manas” sung by these Manas Singers are no longer just the original appearance, but have begun to change and expand in scale. These changes are the result of the epic “Manas” that has gone through thousands of years of history, refined by generations of great artists. At that time, they created today’s masterpiece. Although it remains to be verified whether the core hero Manas in the epic truly exists, in any case, Manas has become a symbol of strength and courage. The worship of Manas by the Kyrgyz people has gradually elevated to a sense of national pride and responsibility. “Manas” and its oral singing generally began in the 19th century and gradually became an important part of cultural exchange between China and Central Asia. During this period, the epic inheritor, Manas Qi, played an irreplaceable role as a link. In recent years, Chinese epic singers have played an important role in the cultural exchange of Manas between China and Kyrgyzstan. Many epic singers have visited Kyrgyzstan multiple times, sparking a frenzy of learning the Chinese epic “Manas” in Kyrgyzstan, which has had a profound impact on the promotion and dissemination of the Chinese epic “Manas” in the country. This can not only increase the popularity of the epic Manas in Kyrgyzstan. It can also demonstrate China’s emphasis and protection on the epic “Manas”, which promotes the ethnic policies of the party and the state on the other hand, effectively helping to enhance the friendship between the two countries. The heroism portrayed in the epic of Manas has expanded from the literary level to the cultural level, inheriting the essence of heroic spirit and adapting to the progressive needs of the times. Heroism is deeply rooted in Chinese culture, like seeds growing in the soil. From ancient heroes to gentlemen in Confucian tradition, and then to young people and the masses in the new era of modern socialism, heroes and their spirits have gradually integrated into the cultural heritage of China, showcasing the cultural characteristics of the Chinese nation, strengthening cultural identity, and enhancing national confidence. At the same time, the heroism in the history of Manas has shaped a new image with contemporary characteristics in the evolution of history, which has been remembered by people all over the world. In today’s society and international stage, it is an important business card that showcases China’s image and national style. The heroic spirit conveyed by the Chinese stories it tells helps to closely link the fate of humanity into a community, and jointly address life challenges and crises.

4. THE INHERITANCE OF THE EPIC OF MANAS IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

4.1 Incentives and Propaganda: Rescue Protection for Inheritors

The inheritance of epics refers to the creation of epics, and the dissemination of epics refers to the inheritors of epics (Qu, 2020). Due to the behavior of epic actors and the creation and inheritance of epics in singing, the dissemination of the epic text and tradition of Manas has been promoted. The Kyrgyz language is the carrier of inheritance for the epic of Manas. However, with the popularization of Mandarin, the new generation of Kyrgyz people have experienced a decline in their mother tongue, resulting in fewer and fewer people being able to sing the epic of “Manas”. In this situation, the inheritance of the epic of “Manas” is facing huge problems. To this end, cultural organizations and workers at all levels can produce a large number of bilingual promotional materials in both Chinese and Kyrgyz, which can enhance people’s understanding of the epic culture of “Manas”, while also increasing the popularity of the performers of “Manas” epic, and better assist in the dissemination and development of “Manas”. Since 2010, many places have carried out a series of cultural heritage protection, research, and talent team building activities (Masciotta et al., 2021). The personnel composition is based on the original “Manas” collection and organization work group, which has equipped the staff with work knowledge and the ability to write and protect epics. The government should also pay attention to the recognition of the value of intangible cultural heritage, and enable cultural heritage protection centers at all levels to prepare rich and colorful cultural heritage protection activities for the public every year, showcasing the effectiveness of epic and other folk cultural protection to the Kyrgyz and Han people. At the same time, epic singers can be invited to perform in each event, which can greatly enhance the sense of honor of epic performers, thereby better helping to spread and continue the epic of Manas.

4.2 Image: Visual Presentation of Oral Performance

When people use cameras to study a certain social phenomenon, it is easy to associate it with the image ethnography in anthropological research (Yang, 2023). The image ethnography mentioned here mainly refers to the display of cultural principles through photography and film and television, to record, present, and interpret the culture of a nation, or to attempt to compare different cultures (Chen, 2019). As the "encyclopedia" of the Kyrgyz people, the epic of “Manas” must contain rich information, and

this culture can be observed and interpreted through the lens. In addition, the image can faithfully reproduce the scene at that time. This not only allows people to hear the rise and fall of the singer's voice and the tone of the voice while singing, but also allows people to see the singer's facial expressions, gestures, emotional changes, and on-site reactions. The perception of the on-site audience and the atmosphere of epic singing can help achieve a deep analysis of the epic of Manas, mainly through a combination of visual and auditory methods. For the epic "Manas", the singer is not only the key to its dissemination, but also a direct manifestation of the epic's vitality.

4.3 Digital Platforms: A New Context of Oral Performance

The "virtual reality" created by digital media provides technical support for the authenticity of epic content (Rao & Kalyani, 2022). Social media not only revolves around people, but also the environment itself (Dolan et al., 2019). The emergence of multimedia in digital media confirms this view. From various forums to various software today, from pure picture-based social methods to the present social methods of text, sound and image, digital media has integrated the media forms of the past and integrated various content (Lu et al., 2020). Taking the webcast as an example (Lu et al., 2020), it can interact face-to-face with the audience through the Internet, which is similar to the way Manaschi interacts face-to-face with the audience in a yurt. At the same time, image modeling technology can simulate and reproduce the scenes and facial expressions of Manas and the audience, providing assistance in creating the content of the epic of Manas. The development of media technology has made communication intuitive, expanded the scope of communication, and enabled the epic of Manas to flourish under modern technology, bringing opportunities for the dissemination and development of the epic of Manas.

4.4 The Morality and Mission of Manaschi in Inheriting Excellent Culture

Manaski demonstrated a profound wisdom in life by rap the epic of Manas, which is to comprehend the truth of infinity from the limits. Manaski not only focuses on the external plot of the epic, but also values the in-depth exploration of its inner spirit, grasps the essence through appearances, and traces the roots behind the story. This process requires Manaschi to have a firm heart, be brave enough to seek truth, and adhere to faith. From this, it can be seen that Manaschi is a representative of knowledge and virtue. In terms of understanding truth, they always constantly explore. It is not difficult to find that the spiritual beliefs

mentioned in the epic are vividly portrayed in their rap performances in Manaski. Manaski is widely regarded as a disseminator of the epic of Manas, and excellent Manaski has played an important role in presenting the epic of Manas.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The epic poem “Manas”, created based on the heroic epic of the Kyrgyz people, has extremely high cultural value and has been passed down through unique means of dissemination, allowing it to last for thousands of years in China. The epic poem “Manas” has a long length, detailed narration, and profound meaning, which can reflect the intelligence, courage, and unity of the Kyrgyz people. Manas is a treasure of contemporary Chinese culture and an important carrier of excellent traditional Chinese culture. It is an artistic masterpiece that combines classical and modern elements. Only through in-depth exploration and inheritance of the epic of Manas can the heroic images, legendary stories, and national spirit depicted in it be revitalized in today’s society. The development of modern science and technology has also injected new strength into the inheritance of this epic, making the content of the Manas epic more vivid, thereby expanding the scope of influence of the Manas epic. The epic of Manas has played an important role in promoting world civilization communication and maintaining social stability in modern society. The spiritual qualities of unity, bravery, and wit reflected in the epic of Manas have great reference significance for contemporary people. In summary, the epic poem “Manas” holds a pivotal position in modern Chinese civilization with its unique ethnic symbols and cultural values, highlighting the charm of the fusion of traditional and modern Chinese culture.

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