

CONTINUITY AND INNOVATION IN AZERBAIJANI CULTURE

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Continuity is an immanent sign of cultural development, the indicator that the new is not only formed on the basis of the past, but also retains a number of its essential features. Due to continuity, well-known, previously justified ideas, plots, and principles are transferred from already established areas of culture to newly emerging ones, and their use while implementing new goals. In fact, this is manifestation of the dialectical unity of tradition and innovation. Tradition gives culture fundamental, heuristic force, linking modernity and history, spiritual ups of past eras.

Herewith, continuity is a multifaceted and ambiguous phenomenon indicating that archetypal attitudes interact with varying intensity with modern trends, new scientific and artistic discoveries. Moreover, all this may be associated with socio-psychological and often political factors.

The continuity problem does not accidentally draw the attention of historians, culturologists, and science experts. Considering continuity in various fields of culture, it is possible to show evolution of cultural needs and recreate the history of society as a whole. This is in line with the approach of the French historical school of the Annals, according to which universal history is generated primarily on the basis of identifying past socio-cultural ties, studying the genesis of people's lifestyle and way of life.

Historically, various forms of human activity, political arrangement, and beliefs have arisen, which have been replaced by others over time. If we agree with Academician Vyacheslav Stepin's opinion that, forming matrices of permissible and unacceptable, culture performs a certain programming

function in people's lives, then the historical process really appears as co-evolution of culture and social forms.

In each field of culture, continuity is expressed in its own way, the relationship between the past and the present, the new and the old can be both explicit and implicit. In such a fundamental field of culture as science, at the beginning of the 20th century, when the problem of cognition of the microcosm and the mega-world arose, the phenomenon of continuity became the subject of special methodological research.

In this case, continuity was revealed through the so-called principle of conformity. This principle makes it possible to identify deep relationships between qualitatively different theories describing processes of the microcosm and the mega-world, and theories of classical physics reflecting phenomena at the macrocosm level.

Continuity is particularly significant in literature, music, and painting. Here it manifests itself in the context of a certain tradition, in the relevant space-time continuum. Without considering the cultural heritage, twists and turns of its development, it is difficult to understand modern cultural processes. This is essential for defining the comprehensive cultural policy that promotes harmonization of social processes and proper orientation of social development.

Peculiarities of Azerbaijani culture and its diversity are determined by the multinational and multi-confessional composition of the country's population. Besides its ethnocultural, axiological significance, preservation of national cultures is unambiguously associated with issues of respect for human rights. For national culture, as Professor Vadim Mezhev justifiably believed, is primarily realization of rights of a person for his/her own world [5]. Provisions of the national policy fixed in the Constitution of Azerbaijan ensure equality of all citizens, regardless of their ethnicity and race. This creates in the Republic prerequisites for transition from syncretic culture to integrative one.

If syncretism is a combination of cultural elements of different origins, which are often combined conditionally, then integrativity proceeds from the deep foundation ensuring integrity of the culture.

The Azerbaijani people's historical memory that preserves in their minds stages of passing through three religions – Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam – is an essential factor for understanding the meaning and significance of transcultural communications, the synthesis of cultural values of peoples who have lived in the territory of Azerbaijan for centuries. People unite on the basis of common historical, political, and religious components of culture. In this case, culture creates more favorable conditions for people to communicate, consolidate social groups, and spiritually unite representatives of various ethnic groups, which ultimately leads to formation of the stable structure of society.

In general, it can be noted that in Azerbaijan, culture ensures realization of the goals and ideals of various ethnic groups, and simultaneously contributes to growth and development of common national interests. It should be emphasized that this is happening in unison with implementation of the national-political concept of Azerbaijanism to be formed in the country at the end of the 19th century, and received the new justification by the country's national leader Heydar Aliyev.

It is quite obvious that in conditions of Azerbaijan, issues of interaction, mutual enrichment of the traditions of the peoples of Azerbaijan, as well as cultural factors, such as religion, moral values, aesthetic attitudes, etc., are of particular importance.

As a historical phenomenon, tradition plays in culture the role of universal mediator, connects its various fields, and contributes to the culture integrity. It links the past, the present and the future. Famous American anthropologist and culturologist Edward Sapir believed that tradition, or “the past, is of interest to culture only when it is still the present and can still become the future” [6].

It should be noted that historically Azerbaijan has been an arena of unprecedented cultural interaction. Relatively recently, the country covered territories far exceeding the borders of the modern Republic of Azerbaijan. And until the 19th century, cultural development of Azerbaijan took place in close relation with culture of the countries of the Near and Middle East, in the context of Arab-Muslim culture.

When turning to the history of Azerbaijan, we can see the change of several cultural waves in this small territory. In the 4th – 3rd centuries BC, Caucasian Albania appeared in the north of Azerbaijan [4]. The advantageous geographical location with access to the sea, at the crossroads of trade routes, contributed to intensive cultural contacts of Caucasian Albania with Greece, Egypt, and Persia.

Starting from the 1st – 2nd centuries AD, Christian ideas gradually infiltrate the country, and in the 4th century Christianity was declared in Caucasian Albania the state religion.

In the seventh century, as a result of the Arab conquests, there happened the religious turn to Islam. Azerbaijan has become part of the Muslim world. Accordingly, Azerbaijani culture began developing in the context of Arab-Muslim culture, which absorbed the ancient heritage, having modified them in accordance with the values of Islam.

Arab-Muslim philosophy had a significant impact on formation of humanistic values of the Renaissance. Azerbaijan played an important role in this cultural dialogue. It is enough to mention such poets-thinkers of Azerbaijan as Nizami Ganjavi (1141–1209), Imadeddin Nasimi (1369–1417), Shah Ismail Khatai (1487–1524), Muhammad Fuzuli (1494–1556); philosophers Bahmanyar al Azerbaijani (1001–1065), Nasereddin Tusi (1201–1274), whose names are well known to the philosophical and scientific community of Europe [3].

Since about the 11th century, a special layer of Turanism emerged and started increasing in the culture of Azerbaijan. Here it is justified to talk not so much about influence as about something that came from outside, but about the very essence of Azerbaijani culture, since Turanism changed the original fabric of culture – its language. After all, it is language that determines the essence of culture, the psychological mindedness of the people, its mentality.

Essential features of the modern Azerbaijani culture are associated with Turanism. It is important to note that Turanism defines the deep foundations of interaction of Azerbaijani culture with the culture of Slavic peoples, which also has a Turanian element. Actually, it was this cultural relationship between the Turks and the Slavs that eventually gave rise to the Eurasian type of culture. The famous linguist, philosopher Nikolai Trubetskoy, who studied ethnopsychology of the Turanian peoples, believed that “the Turanian psyche imparts to the nation cultural stability and strength, strengthens cultural and historical continuity, and creates conditions for saving national forces, which is favorable to any construction” [7].

The history of cultural exchange with the Slavic world has been going on for about two centuries, which resulted in the modern Azerbaijani culture to have been formed, with its organically incorporating components of European and Eastern cultures.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Azerbaijan was divided between Iran and tsarist Russia. After that, Azerbaijani culture begins interacting directly with Russian and Western European cultures. This was clearly reflected in new traditions to be formed in literature, fine arts, music, and architecture. However, new trends did not eliminate manifestations of Islamism and Turkism in Azerbaijani culture. Together, these diverse traditions, which have been formed over many centuries, determine the qualitative originality of Azerbaijani culture, the grounds of its multicultural nature even in our time.

The political events that took place in the early 20th century in the Russian Empire, which led to the fall of the tsarist monarchy in February 1917, then to the October Revolution, created the conditions for declaration of the independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic on May 28, 1918. However, its existence was interrupted on April 28, 1920, by the 11th Red Army and establishment of the Soviet power. The Soviet period in the history of Azerbaijan lasted until the collapse of the USSR. On October 18, 1991, the state independence of Azerbaijan was restored.

The positive factor of the Soviet period was the struggle for general literacy, for availability of culture and arts to all segments of the population. The slogan “art to the masses” was a guide to action. During the Soviet period, composers *Uzeyir Hajibeyov, Gara Garayev, Fikret Amirov, singer Bulbul, who mastered the art of “Bel Canto” in Italy and created a new professional vocal singing school based on the synthesis of European, Russian and Azerbaijani vocal schools, poet Samad Vurgun, scientists Heydar Huseynov and Yusif Mamedaliyev, sculptor Fuad Abdurakhmanov, as well as worldwide recognized artists Tahir Salakhov and Sattar Bahlulzade, created and made significant contribution to the world culture.*

After June 15, 1993, when Heydar Aliyev came to power at the people’s insistence, the new stage in development of Azerbaijan began. Cultural policy has got a different attitude. Along with education in terms of achievements of the world culture, it continued strengthening values and traditions of its national culture. Herewith, the past achievements of the Soviet period of cultural development were not devalued, but were considered as a particularly important stage in the history of Azerbaijani culture. It is hard to question that, despite ideological limitations, Azerbaijani literature, poetry, music, and fine arts flourished in the 20th century, based on deep national values. In framework of my report, I will focus only on some illustrations.

Continuity in Azerbaijani literature. Historically, Azerbaijani literature is divided into two traditions, which began to unite since the 19th century. One of them is folk tradition, another – written tradition. The folk tradition was oral and almost unaffected by Persian and Arabic literature. The bearers of this tradition were Ashugi, i.e. folk singers, and the most common of all the poetic forms of Azerbaijani folklore were the lyrical quatrains “Bayati”. One of the brightest representatives of the Ashug school was the poet Mehseti Khanom (12th century). Folk poetry of Azerbaijan was always associated with folk music and most of this poetry could be sung.

Since the beginning of the 12th century, the foundations of the Azerbaijani literary school have been formed in the environment of Arab-Muslim culture. Nizami Ganjavi (12th century), Nasimi (14th century), Fuzuli (16th century) laid the groundwork for this school.

Like in Western European and Russian literature, the main factor that determined the grounds of realism in Azerbaijani literature since the beginning of the 19th century was the Enlightenment philosophy. During this period, under the influence of Russian and Western European culture, Mirza Fatali Akhundov and Abdurrahim-bek Akhverdiyev founded Azerbaijani drama.

However, in drama and literature in general, deep traditions had an impact even in the 20th century. So, at various times, a number of outstanding poets of Azerbaijan invariably turned to the heroic-romantic love story. The sublime, romantic description of love in the conditions of the triumph of rigid socialist realism seems to remain in history. But in 1941, one of the brightest Azerbaijani poets of the Soviet period, Samad Vurgun, who considered his main “creative task to reveal the poetry of modernity”, presented his drama “Farhad and Shirin” written in verse form. The play is created in the 12th century, after Nizami Ganjavi’s poem “Khosrow and Shirin”. It’s hard to believe now, but the play was staged in difficult wartime and was awarded the Stalin Prize.

Considering the issues of continuity in literature, one involuntarily recalls the female images created in the 20–30 years of the 20th century by the talented Azerbaijani playwright Jafar Jabbarly, especially his play “Sevil”, in which a woman of the East fighting for her liberation from darkness was shown for the first time. This tradition was continued by Ilyas Afandiyev in the 70s and 80s: he managed to show in his plays what life of “Sevils” in Azerbaijan had become, just a few decades after Jabbarly. In Afandiyev’s works the woman’s emancipation is no longer understood only as liberation from the chador and the husband’s dictate, but as her right to remain free in her beliefs, actions, and lifestyle choices.

Continuity is clearly manifested in Azerbaijani music, due to which genres, performance forms and manners are transferred from generation to generation. Poetry and music are the most common types of art in Azerbaijan, they are in demand by various segments of the population. Azerbaijan would probably agree with the writer Kurt Vonnegut, who believed that “music is a necessary and sufficient proof of God’s existence”.

Music often evokes in a persona a favorable emotional response. Lovers of high music can confirm that harmonious rhythms seem to cleanse a person from worries and everyday fuss. I agree with the writer Viktor Astafyev that “music may be the most wonderful creation of man, his eternal mystery... it returns to man all the best in him, and will remain on earth” [2].

However, music does not live outside of a person, outside of time, it carries not only the individual’s spiritual world, but also the world of the epoch, features of its spiritual atmosphere. As Mark Aranovsky noted, musical creativity allows finding “the new in the old or the new through the old” [1]. Many Azerbaijani composers turn to folk music, modify its sound, make its new arrangement, and quote certain phrases. In this regard, the work of the founder of Azerbaijani classical music Uzeyir Hajibeyov can be considered as a model. At the beginning of the 20th century, he created the opera “Leyli and

Majnun”, based on mugham, a medieval oriental genre of music. Following the traditions, already in Soviet times, Fikret Amirov showed that mugham monody is possible to be developed with European principles of end-to-end composition and timbre variation, creating a new genre “Symphonic mughams”, or the Azerbaijani jazz pianist Vagif Mustafa-zadeh, who used mugham in his improvisations, thereby creating a new type of jazz music – the style of “jazz-mugham”. And now, in the modern musical works of Azerbaijani composers, the use of folk melodies and rhythms, the principles of mugham, improvisation are organically combined with variational and polyphonic development.

Continuity in fine arts. Fine arts of the 20th century were largely related to previous traditions. It is known that at all times, artists turned to the art of their predecessors. So, in the Renaissance and in the Middle Ages, they turned to ancient masters’ works. Turning to the origins is also typical for creativity of outstanding Azerbaijani painters – Sattar Bahlulzade, Tahir Salakhov and Togrul Narimanbekov.

Bahlulzade is a “storyteller artist” who created in his landscapes the amazing world of diverse nature of Azerbaijan. His work embodies philosophical lyricism, optimism of the Azerbaijani miniature, refinement of the national carpet ornaments...

Tahir Salakhov is the major artist of the 20th century, one of the creators of such a trend in Soviet art as the “harsh style”, his works are displayed at the best galleries over the world. In his works, Salakhov, however, not only turned to the daily life and ordinary people’s concerns, but also transferred his artistic ideas to the medieval language of the carpet, thereby emphasizing his involvement in folk art.

Togrul Narimanbekov’s works definitely present one of leading lines of modern national art development. The plots of almost all of the artist’s famous

paintings are associated with Azerbaijani everyday life and culture, but the technique of their execution, the form of presentation tend to impressionism.

Summing up, we can note that the Azerbaijani people's commitment to principles of humanism, tolerance, and mutual understanding is deeply rooted in the history of Azerbaijani culture. The centuries-old history of Azerbaijan is an important source for revealing the twists and turns of the spiritual life of not only the Azerbaijani people, but also the neighboring peoples of the Near and Middle East.

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