

Xoan singing to become intangible cultural heritage of humanity

english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/art-entertainment/159628/xoan-singing-to-become-intangible-cultural-heritage-of-humanity.html

“Hat Xoan” (Xoan singing), a celebrated art form in Vietnam’s northern province of Phu Tho, which was recognised by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage in need of urgent safeguarding, is expected to be recognised as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity by 2017.



A Xoan singing performance in Phu Tho province.

According to Director of the provincial Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism Nguyen Ngoc An, Vietnam’s proposal to ask for the new status was approved at the 10 th meeting of UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Namibia in late last year.

A dossier on Xoan Singing was submitted to the Committee for considering and recognising the art genre as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity, An said.

Vietnam has asked UNESCO to remove Xoan singing from the list of cultural heritage in urgent need of protection . Most country members of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003 agreed to support Vietnam in her bid to recognise the folk singing as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

UNESCO listed xoan singing as part of the world’s intangible cultural heritage in need of urgent protection in 2011. After four years of being listed as in urgent need of protection, Vietnam last year submitted a report to UNESCO stating that xoan singing has seen a revival thanks to the great efforts made by Phu Tho province.

However, Vietnam is still awaiting guidance from UNESCO as to how to reclassify Xoan singing as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

Vice Chairman of the Phu Tho province People's Committee Ha Ke San highlighted efforts made by the local authorities to preserve the art form, saying that Xoan singing meets UNESCO's standards related to value and community.

Xoan singing is practised in front of communal halls at spring festivals. It is said to have appeared about 4,000 years ago, during the time of the legendary Hung Kings.

There are three kinds of Xoan singing: songs of worship for Hung Kings and village guardian spirits; ritual songs for abundant crops, health and good luck; and festival songs, with villagers alternating male and female verses in a form of courtship. The singing is accompanied by dancing and musical instruments like clappers and drums.

After being listed as a world's intangible cultural heritage in need of urgent protection, Phu Tho made great efforts to preserve and revive the old genre of singing.

In 2010, there were 13 Xoan singing clubs with nearly 300 members in Phu Tho. After a concerted effort, by the 2015 there were as many as 30 clubs across the province with over 1,000 regular members, and hundreds of others interested in joining. The number of artisans that can teach old Xoan singing tunes has increased to 62 from only 7.

Over the past years, Phu Tho province has taken measures to preserve Xoan singing, including restoring 19 relic sites involved in Xoan singing, putting forward policies to honour Xoan artisans, and consulting the State on designing and enforcing preservation projects to remove Xoan singing from the list of intangible heritage in need of urgent protection soon.

A number of promotional activities were carried out by elder Xoan singers aimed at popularising Xoan songs to the younger generations. As many as 71 individuals have been honoured as Distinguished Xoan Artists so far.

The provincial People's Committee has prepared a 165 billion VND (7.85 million USD) project, entitled: "Maintaining and Developing Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity - Xoan Singing in Phu Tho in 2013-2020," funded by the Government.

VNA