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DIFFERENCES BETWEEN QIZIQCHILIK (TRADITIONAL UZBEK COMIC PERFORMANCE) AND THE UZBEK NATIONAL ART OF ASKIYA

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Abstract: This article explores the nuanced distinctions between 'qiziqchilik' and 'milliy askiya' within Uzbek cultural discourse. While 'qiziqchilik' encompasses broader forms of humor, comedy, and jester-like performances, 'milliy askiya' represents a unique, traditional Uzbek verbal art form characterized by competitive wit, rhyming, and spontaneous repartee. The study delves into their historical development, performance contexts, and socio-cultural functions, highlighting how 'askiya' is deeply embedded in national identity and oral tradition. Understanding these differences is crucial for a comprehensive appreciation of Uzbek comedic heritage and its diverse manifestations.

Keywords: Uzbek Humor, Askiya, Qiziqchilik, Verbal Art, Cultural Heritage, Performance Studies, National Identity, Wit

Introduction

Uzbekistan, a nation at the historical crossroads of Central Asia, boasts a profound and multifaceted cultural heritage, deeply intertwined with its legacy as a hub for Silk Road trade and Islamic intellectual flourishing [3]. Within this rich tapestry, verbal arts, particularly those imbued with humor, have played an indispensable role in shaping national identity and facilitating social discourse among the Uzbek people, the largest Turkic group in the region [2]. Among these traditions, two distinct yet often conflated forms stand out: Qiziqchilik and Askiya. While both are integral to the comedic landscape, their specific characteristics, historical trajectories, and societal functions warrant a rigorous comparative analysis to fully appreciate their unique contributions.

Askiya, a celebrated genre of Uzbek verbal folk art, holds significant cultural weight, recognized by UNESCO as intangible heritage [1]. This sophisticated form typically involves a dialogue between multiple participants who engage in witty exchanges on a chosen theme, demanding exceptional linguistic mastery, improvisational skill, and quick reasoning from its predominantly male practitioners [1]. Beyond mere entertainment, Askiya serves a critical societal function, employing acute observation and humor to raise awareness about social tendencies and important issues, thereby transcending simple amusement to become a profound cultural tradition [1].

In contrast, Qiziqchilik represents another vital facet of Uzbek comedic expression, often encompassing broader forms of performance and storytelling. The very existence of institutions like the Republican Center of Askiya and Comedy Art named after Yusufjon Qiziq Shakarjonov, dedicated to fostering both "askiya and comedy art," underscores the presence of distinct, albeit sometimes overlapping, artistic domains [4]. This article posits that despite superficial similarities in their humorous intent, Qiziqchilik and Askiya possess fundamental differences in their structural forms, performative functions, and intellectual depths. By meticulously dissecting these distinctions, this study aims to provide a critical synthesis that clarifies their individual contributions to Uzbek culture and refines our understanding of the nation's vibrant comedic traditions.

Uzbekistan's rich cultural tapestry, shaped by its historical role as a Silk Road nexus and a center for Islamic intellectualism, has long fostered a vibrant tradition of verbal arts [3]. Scholarship on Central Asian cultural heritage highlights the significance of oral traditions, including various forms of humor, in articulating and preserving national identity among the Uzbek people, the largest Turkic group in the region [2]. These expressions are not merely entertainment but crucial conduits for social commentary, historical memory, and cultural value transmission. Recent academic discourse emphasizes how these traditions contribute to a dynamic public sphere, reflecting societal norms while simultaneously challenging them through wit and satire. Thus, studying Uzbek humor offers a unique lens to understand

social discourse and identity formation in a post-Soviet context, where traditional arts are re-evaluated for contemporary relevance.

Among these traditions, Askiya has garnered significant scholarly attention, particularly following its recognition by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage [1]. This acknowledgment has spurred renewed interest in its intricate structure and cultural significance. Analyses consistently highlight Askiya's defining characteristics: a sophisticated dialogic form involving multiple participants, demanding exceptional linguistic dexterity, improvisational prowess, and rapid intellectual engagement [1]. Practitioners, predominantly male, must master the Uzbek language, employing nuanced wordplay, metaphor, and irony in their witty exchanges [1]. Beyond performative brilliance, literature underscores Askiya's critical societal function: a powerful medium for social critique, raising awareness about contemporary issues through acute observation of daily life [1]. This capacity for incisive commentary, delivered through humor, positions Askiya as a vital mechanism for informal social regulation and public discourse, transcending entertainment to become a profound cultural tradition with pedagogical and ethical dimensions.

In contrast to the well-defined and internationally recognized structure of Askiya, scholarly engagement with Qiziqchilik often presents it as a broader, more encompassing category of Uzbek comedic expression. While specific academic studies defining Qiziqchilik are less prevalent in recent English-language scholarship compared to Askiya, its existence as a distinct, albeit sometimes overlapping, artistic domain is implicitly acknowledged. The establishment of the Republican Center of Askiya and Comedy Art named after Yusufjon Qiziq Shakarjonov, dedicated to fostering both "askiya and comedy art," provides institutional evidence of a recognized differentiation [4]. This suggests Qiziqchilik, or "comedy art," encompasses a wider array of performance styles, potentially including storytelling, character-based skits, physical comedy, and theatrical presentations that may not adhere to Askiya's strict dialogic and improvisational rules. Literature often traces such broader comedic forms to ancient folk traditions, wandering minstrels (qiziqchilar), and court jesters, indicating a long and diverse historical lineage. While Askiya thrives on verbal sparring and intellectual agility within structured dialogue, Qiziqchilik embraces a more varied repertoire, often involving narrative development, character portrayal, and a less constrained performative framework.

Despite the clear institutional recognition of "askiya and comedy art" as distinct categories [4], a comprehensive comparative analysis explicitly differentiating Qiziqchilik from Askiya remains an area requiring further scholarly exploration in recent academic discourse. While both traditions share the common goal of eliciting laughter, existing literature often discusses them either in isolation or under a general "Uzbek humor" umbrella, without a deep dive into their fundamental structural, functional, and intellectual divergences. Nuanced distinctions in their performative modes, required skills, historical trajectories, and precise roles in shaping social discourse are frequently conflated or superficially addressed. This gap in the scholarship highlights the necessity for a focused examination that moves beyond superficial similarities to uncover the underlying principles that define each form. Such an analysis would enrich our understanding of Uzbek verbal arts and contribute to broader theories of humor, performance, and cultural identity by providing a detailed case study of two distinct yet related comedic traditions.

Both Qiziqchilik and Askiya, integral components of Uzbek verbal culture, play indispensable roles in shaping national identity and facilitating social discourse, a theme explored in broader studies of Central Asian cultural heritage [2, 3]. Scholarship affirms humor, in its various manifestations, acts as a powerful tool for social cohesion, critique, and collective memory reinforcement. By providing platforms for lighthearted entertainment and profound social commentary, these traditions contribute to a resilient cultural fabric. However, a more precise understanding of how Qiziqchilik and Askiya individually contribute to these functions, given their distinct forms and depths, is crucial. This article, therefore, addresses this lacuna by offering a critical synthesis that meticulously dissects the fundamental differences between Qiziqchilik and Askiya, clarifying their unique contributions to Uzbek culture and refining our understanding of the nation's vibrant comedic traditions. This comparative approach will illuminate their individual artistic merits and distinct societal impacts, providing a clearer framework for future research into Uzbek verbal arts.

The research methodology employed in this study is fundamentally qualitative, comparative, and analytical, specifically designed to systematically dissect the nuanced distinctions between Qiziqchilik and Askiya within the broader landscape of Uzbek verbal arts. This approach directly addresses the identified lacuna in existing scholarship, which often conflates these two distinct comedic traditions or examines them in isolation, thereby obscuring their unique structural, functional, and intellectual contributions. By adopting a rigorous comparative framework, this study aims to provide a critical synthesis that clarifies their individual artistic merits and distinct societal impacts, thereby refining our understanding of Uzbekistan's vibrant comedic heritage.

The theoretical framework underpinning this investigation draws primarily from three interconnected domains: humor theory, performance studies, and cultural heritage studies. Humor theory will guide the exploration of how each form employs linguistic dexterity, irony, satire, and narrative structures to elicit laughter and convey meaning, analyzing their social and cultural mechanisms. Performance studies analyze performative dimensions, considering audience interaction, improvisation, character portrayal, and contextual delivery, contrasting Askiya's dialogic nature and reliance on quick reasoning [1] with Qiziqchilik's broader repertoire. Cultural heritage studies frame these verbal arts as integral to Uzbek national identity and social discourse, especially given Askiya's UNESCO recognition [1]. This perspective explores their role in transmitting cultural values, preserving historical memory, and contributing to a dynamic public sphere [2, 3].

The data analysis strategy will involve a multi-layered approach, commencing with a comparative thematic analysis. This will systematically identify and categorize the defining characteristics of Qiziqchilik and Askiya across various dimensions. For Askiya, this includes its strict dialogic structure, the requirement for exceptional linguistic mastery and improvisational skill among its predominantly male practitioners, and its function as a medium for social critique [1]. For Qiziqchilik, the analysis will focus on identifying its broader performative styles, narrative elements, and less constrained structural frameworks, as suggested by its institutional pairing with "comedy art" [4]. Subsequently, a discourse analysis will examine the specific linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed within each tradition, scrutinizing wordplay, metaphor, irony, and narrative techniques to understand how humor is constructed and social commentary embedded. Both forms will be contextualized within their historical and socio-cultural milieus, drawing upon scholarship highlighting Uzbekistan's cultural tapestry and its role in shaping national identity and social discourse [2, 3]. Finally, a critical synthesis will integrate these findings to construct a nuanced understanding of the fundamental differences, illuminating their distinct artistic merits, intellectual depths, and precise roles in Uzbek culture.

Conclusion

This study has meticulously dissected the fundamental distinctions between Qiziqchilik and Askiya, two cornerstones of Uzbek verbal arts. While both traditions are indispensable for shaping national identity and facilitating social discourse, their forms, functions, and intellectual depths diverge significantly. Askiya stands as a highly structured, dialogic, and improvisational art demanding exceptional linguistic mastery and serving as a profound vehicle for social critique. In contrast, Qiziqchilik encompasses a broader, more varied spectrum of comedic performance, often involving narrative and character portrayal with less rigid structural constraints. This comparative analysis clarifies their unique contributions, enriching our understanding of Uzbekistan's vibrant comedic heritage and its enduring value.

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