URTIIIN DUU:
PERFORMING MUSICAL LANDSCAPES AND THE MONGOLIAN NATION

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Urtiin duu, or Mongolian long song, is a vocal genre prevalent throughout Mongolia and especially common among mobile pastoralists of the central Gobi steppe. Based on fieldwork conducted in 2001, 2004, and 2006 in Dundgovi province and Ulaanbaatar, this thesis focuses on urtiin duu as a marker of regional and national identity. Urtiin duu signify various levels of meaning for performers and listeners alike. Through the mimesis of landscape topography in melodic contour, these songs have become powerful emblems of clan identity important to Chinggis Khan’s legacy. Their melodic contours allude to landscape deities, or ezen, associated with particular geographical formations and regional topographies, and their texts often praise important Tibetan Buddhist deities or monks. A musical tool utilized in efforts to calm and soothe livestock, these songs also form an important component of various mobile pastoral herding practices. During Mongolia’s socialist era (1921–1990), however, urtiin duu were invariably implicated in processes of cultural modernization and reform, during which time the genre’s performance context and associated meanings were largely transformed. Although these songs continued to be performed in the domestic sphere, they were also increasingly performed at large, staged gatherings in support of the Mongolia People’s Republic and Communist Party. Additionally, melodies were standardized according to Western tunings, and differing regional dialects were consolidated into that of Tov Khalkha, which became known as the “national” Mongolian urtiin duu style. Over the course of decades, these reforms came to change the meanings associated with urtiin duu. Once a rural genre prevalent predominantly in the domestic sphere, it ultimately became a key component in the construction of Mongolian national identity writ large. This work focuses on the various meanings of urtiin duu implied in domestic, spiritual, political and social realms, and the processes that led to the genre’s valorization as an emblem of the Mongolian nation.
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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

It’s a long ride from Ulaanbaatar to Deren Soum, the small town in the center of the Gobi near where my mentor Dad’suren lives. The roads are unpaved, full of rocks, and though the Russian vans available for rent are as tough as their iron-clad exteriors, the ride is still, inevitably... bumpy. At times my neck muscles cannot support the springing of my head back and forth and I’m pretty sure the momentum of the car is giving me minor whiplash. I look around the Russian van and can see that the other passengers aren’t enjoying the voyage any more than I am. We still have five hours to drive, and the journey only gets worse as we head further south.

I’ve hired a driver to get me from Ulaanbaatar to Deren Soum, and we’ve given a ride to three of my teacher’s ten children. Dad’suren’s three sons are in my van, along with the wife of one of the sons and their newborn child. Along the way we stop at a roadside store to pick up some airag (fermented horse milk). Since it’s August, the airag season is in full swing, and we purchase a couple of liters to make our ride a little more enjoyable. I have some gulps as we pass the bottles around; it has a strange, biting taste but it gives an ever-so-slight alcoholic buzz that lightens the mood (and diminishes the effects of the whiplash) as we continue along the bumpy road.

In the distance, the landscape is dotted with remote yurts, herds of sheep, and many mountain peaks, valleys, and hills expanding across the vivid green horizon. This area is known as Dundgovi province. It is located in the center of the Gobi desert and is generally described in geographical terms as the “low steppe.” In
the summer, grass covers the mostly-treeless mountains in a fairly uniform way, creating unique shades of green where the large rounded summits fold into one another. In the winter, the grass turns a glistening shade of gold and covers the mountains in the same thorough manner. The golden hues infusing the landscape with color in winter are as remarkable as the greens that appear in summer, though vastly different in character and appearance. Only telephone poles string across the landscape: besides these, the immeasurable view is completely unmarred by roads, cultivated fields, or homes sectioning off pieces of land.

As we continue to traverse the rocky terrain, it occurs to me that Dad’suren would have made this voyage on horseback. Although he is over sixty years in age, he rarely rides in a motor-operated vehicle.¹ Dad’suren’s children live in the capital city and are clearly more comfortable in a van, but Dad’suren himself travels predominantly by horse and occasionally by camel. He is an adept rider, and has made the voyage from Ulaanbaatar south to Deren Soum many times.

At one point during the ride, I ask my fellow passengers if they want to sing some popular Mongolian songs. Artiin duu oo? My driver asks us, “folk songs?” He is referring to electro-acoustic popular songs that are widespread throughout Mongolia. Someone suggests orosnii duu (Russian techno-pop), but we all shoot that idea down quickly. We might have considered singing urtiin duu (long song), but no

¹ Older nomads in this desert still use their horses for mobility. I use the word “still” because international opinion is that current technologies, such as cars and other motor vehicles, are gradually replacing horseback riding and camel riding as the common means for mobility among Mongolia’s nomadic population. According to Nambaryn Enkhbayar, former prime minister of Mongolia, trends of modernism will cause nomadism in Mongolia to disappear completely by the year 2018. Whether or not this prophecy will come true has yet to be determined, though current population censuses do indicate that increasing numbers of nomads are moving to the capital city due to harsh conditions in the Gobi.
one in the car really knows how. None of Dad’suren’s children have acquired his interest in singing. *Artiin duu* (short songs), on the other hand, are known by all. With their short recognizable melodies with studio-recorded Western backgrounds, *artiin duu* are easy for almost anyone to follow. Everyone enthusiastically agrees to hear *artiin duu*, and our driver inserts a tape in the cassette deck before we continue on our way. We all begin to sing along as *Eeji Min* (an *artiin duu* called “My Mother”) begins to play over the car stereo.

Late in the evening, we finally arrive at Deren Soum, and everyone laughs as I attempt to find Dad’suren’s summer camp (which I had been to more than three times, at that point). In my defense, this task is not as easy as it sounds, for it entails recognizing the correct mountains and land formations and turning before or after them appropriately (and in the right direction). Without roads to follow, the vast landscape is intimidating to navigate. Nevertheless, it is an easy task for Dad’suren’s children, who spent almost every summer of their childhood within this same general location, and grew up reading and navigating the geographical forms of this particular landscape.

In this area, nomadic migration patterns tend to be seasonal, with nomads returning to specific locations—within about a fifteen to twenty kilometer radius—every season. Most of the families in the area know the nomadic patterns of other families, particularly the location of families to whom they are related. This results in a network of shared knowledge regarding people’s whereabouts as they relate to different geographical formations. Needless to say, I don’t share in this knowledge,
and it takes me much longer to find seasonal camps and different families’ locations (a point of humor for many Mongolians with whom I have traveled).

When I finally do find the summer camp, everyone jokingly cheers. We get out of the vehicle in good spirits, grateful to stretch our legs. The families’ dogs surround us, barking. We have finally arrived, full of airag but knowing that more awaits us inside Dad’suren’s yurt. When Dad’suren greets me, he holds out his palms in his customary way, touching them to mine, and smells my forehead (in Mongolia, a sniff such as this is equivalent to our version of a kiss). “You couldn’t find the summer camp?” he asks me, incredulous, as he chuckles and opens the door to his yurt. These doors are always small, about three feet in height. I duck down, careful not to bang my head, and turn left immediately. There is a taboo against women visitors being on the right side of the yurt; in addition, guests customarily enter a home towards the left. When Dad’suren enters, he heads immediately right, where the host’s family typically sits.

Inside, everyone is seated on the floor, huddling around the warmth of the center stove. Here fresh milk tea is boiling for the new arrivals. Food has also been prepared in anticipation of our visit, and Dad’suren’s wife promptly hands me a bowl of goriltai shuul, a typical Mongolian soup containing noodles and boiled mutton, as I take a seat. I quickly devour my soup, eating as many of the large pieces of mutton fat as I can tolerate, as I know these were given to me as a demonstration of hospitality.

That night, Dad’suren and I continue my lessons learning urtiin duu. We sit toward the north side of the yurt, and periodically take breaks to drink airag or
salted milk tea. It is hard work. Usually, he will repeatedly sing sections of the song to me, and I will play them back to him on my flute until I get them right. *Urtiin duu* phrases are long, and after a while I grow dizzy from holding my breath for such lengthy spans of time. Our practice will usually continue until I am able to play an entire verse of a song from memory. That night, I complete my learning of the song *Kherliingin Bariya* before we blow out the candle and the group of us drift off to sleep. As it gets cold in the desert at night, the family is wrapped in wool and sheep blankets, and I am in my gortex sleeping bag with a few extra blankets Dad’suren’s wife has piled on top of me for warmth. My eyelids are heavy and I drift away, singing *Kherliingin Bariya* in my head so I don’t play it incorrectly during my lesson tomorrow.

* * *

Using the musical practice of *urtiin duu* as a lens through which to view Mongolian cosmology, music and practice, this thesis builds on the burgeoning literature associated with twentieth-century and contemporary Mongolia. As a key component in the construction of the Mongolian nation, *urtiin duu* was subject to the drastic cultural reforms of the country’s socialist and post-socialist eras. Yet its origins lie in rural Mongolia, where it has long been sung for entertainment, in ceremonies, as a form of worship, an aid in mobile pastoral herding practices, a marker of regional identity, and a sonic illustration of landscape. This thesis explores the mimetic connection between melodic contour and landscape topography in *urtiin duu* practice, and the various levels of socio-spiritual, political and cultural meanings implicated therein.
Among other things, the opening anecdote illustrates the extent to which natural land formations—including hills, ravines, and rivers—are necessary for navigating the great rural expanse that comprises the majority of the Mongolian steppe. As a performance practice that originated in these rural areas among mobile pastoral communities, *urtiin duu* have extensive ties to these topographies—and many of the melodic contours of these songs emulate the landscape contours of certain geographical locations (Pegg 2001e: 44-49, 106). As certain Mongolian clans tend to reside in particular locations, the genre has a historical importance as a marker of regional and clan identity.

Most Mongolian musical practices are categorized according to whether or not they are from Eastern or Western Mongolia; the East encompasses the geographic areas of the lower steppelands, Buriyatia and present-day Inner Mongolia, while the West spans the mountainous regions of Xinjiang, Tuva, the Altai, and parts of present-day Russia. Historically, Eastern and Western Mongolia have periodically fought against one another since the thirteenth century. In the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries (1630-1750s), Eastern Mongolia developed into an independent state, known as Jungar. Separated by geographical as well as cultural and clan boundaries, the musical practices of each confederation are unequivocally unique, though they nonetheless exhibit strong similarities in sonic quality, form, purpose, and associated cosmology. Many Mongolian musical practices are vocal traditions, and almost all involve cosmological beliefs associated with nature spirits, including mimetic sonic emulations of natural phenomena sung

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2 Note that the phrase ‘*urtiin duu*’ is both singular and plural (Pegg 2001e).
out of reverence for the environment, and as offerings of prayer to landscape deities (Levin 2006; Pegg 2001e).

Vocal music of both East and West Mongolia includes a large variety of genres, including heroic epics, musical poetry, legend songs, incantations, praise songs, dialogue songs, and short, satirical songs (Pegg 2001f). When accompanied, they are most often performed with a plucked or bowed stringed fiddle (the topshuur or ikil in the West, or the morin khuur in the East). In the East, vocal traditions such as urtiin duu were once widespread, as well as musical narratives known as holboo and an elegant dance called biy (which is now predominantly practiced among Inner Mongolians). In the West, khoomii (throat-singing) is prevalent, as well as other polyphonic musical practices that involve the interplay between drone tones and overtones, including the end-blown pipe known as the tsuur. Before the turn of the twentieth century, epic singers who sang days-long musical narratives (tuul) were common in Western Mongolia.

Urtiin duu finds its place among the wide variety of Mongolian musical practices, and it is one of the only genres that is found in both Eastern and Western Mongolia (although it is more commonly sung among Eastern clans). As a performance practice, it has the capacity to enliven the surrounding environment through its emulative capabilities, like the vast majority of Mongolian vocal music. More commonly accompanied by the morin khuur (the two-stringed, horse-headed fiddle), or the ikil as it is known in the West, urtiin duu can also be accompanied by the Mongolian flute, or limbe, found predominantly among Eastern clans, as well as other voices sounded in “heterophonic layers of sound” (Pegg 2001f: 1005).
Learning to Perform Melodic Landscapes

I first heard *urtiin duu* in a very different setting than the one described above. In March of 2002, I attended a performance of what was advertised as “classical Mongolian folk music” in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia’s capital city. The concert, held in the elegant “State and Dance Opera Building,” was largely attended by Westerners in fancy attire. Once we were seated, a beautiful Mongolian woman dressed in an exquisite *del* (nomadic cloak) made of silk thread and intricate embroidery stepped on stage. On her head was a large headdress with two incredibly large, wild goat horns protruding from its sides, giving her a regal, if not ostentatious, appearance. The performer stood two-and-a-half to three feet away from the microphone; I later understood that this was done in order to avoid the distortion that would ensue if her powerful voice overwhelmed the device in front of her. She opened her mouth and, beginning in a very high vocal register, began to sing. The melody sounded powerful and reverberant; it became immediately clear why this genre would aptly be described as “long song.” Her melody was expansive and overarching, and initially quite hard to follow as there was little motivic repetition. The performance lasted around ten minutes, and the melodic contour easily traversed more than two octaves. She made frequent use of glottal stops to accentuate long notes, slurring between pitches which nonetheless clearly fell into the Western tuning system, and there was no noticeable rhythmic meter to her vocalization. Notes were sustained as long as she had the breath to do so, and they lasted long enough to elicit raised eyebrows and gasps of pleased astonishment from audience members.
Captivated by the performance, I hung around afterward to speak with the singer. Her name was Chuluuntsetseg and she was a professional urtiin duu singer who had studied the genre at a conservatory in Ulaanbaatar. She told me that urtiin duu originated in the Mongolian countryside centuries ago, and developed in conjunction with the nomadic lifestyle, as a kind of herding tool used to communicate with animals through song. Her advice was to travel to the mid-central Gobi, to a province known as “Dundgovi” and nicknamed “the singing province.” She assured me that the remaining rural urtiin duu herders in existence would be there.

Upon completing my four-month study abroad program in May of 2002, I was afforded the opportunity to extend my stay in Mongolia. Having just finished a series of intensive language seminars in colloquial Mongolian, I had attained strong proficiency in the language, enabling me to travel and work independently. As a flautist and avid aficionado of urtiin duu, I was drawn towards learning the art of accompanying the genre. During my stay, I had been lucky enough to receive instruction in Mongolian flute, or limbe, from a professional flautist named Tsendpuro, based in Mandalgovi. Following Chuluuntsetseg’s advice, I travelled to Dundgovi province to seek out urtiin duu singers and found a handful who were kind enough to instruct me in the art of accompaniment. It was in Dundgovi province, among Dad’suren and his family, as well as with various other rural urtiin duu singers, that I accomplished my fieldwork for this project, on four different visits to the area between May 2002 and August 2006.
During this time, I became very close to one particular mentor, the elderly Dad’suren. When I initially approached him, Dad’suren was wary of my motives, having been warned by local authorities to be suspicious of Westerners hoping to make a quick profit by recording his urtiin duu and selling them in the international market. I had heard of Dad’suren’s singing prowess from various other urtiin duu singers, but when I first stepped into his yurt and asked him to teach me the art of long song accompaniment, he kindly but sternly refused, explaining that though I seemed perfectly nice, he could not know what my true motives were for approaching him. Without arguing, I brought out my limbe and began to perform all of the short Mongolian songs (bogin duu) I knew, all of which had been taught to me aurally by my aforementioned limbe teacher, Tsendpuro. I played about three songs, and when I finished, Dad’suren looked satisfied. “I can see you are here to learn,” he told me. “I’ll teach you.”

Thus began our lessons, which would last a few hours each day, interrupted only when Dad’suren was required to go herd his sheep to distant pastures, or to round up some of his camels for the evening. Our lessons would always proceed the same way: Dad’suren would teach me a song by singing me the first few seconds. Then, he would wait until I repeated the pitches correctly; nodding in approval when I was accurate, and promptly correcting me through his singing when I had rendered something incorrectly, by emphasizing any pitches, slides or ornaments.

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3 In later years, Dad’suren informed me that his hesitancy upon first meeting me was largely fueled by his fear of retribution from local authorities, who had warned him against working with foreigners. In the socialist era, such defiance was potentially met with violent punishment; in this case, such fear is the psychological legacy of the more violent aspects of socialist Mongolia.
that I might have missed. Once I had mastered a phrase, he would sing the next phrase, and the process would then repeat, ad infinitum.

Initially, I began learning to accompany *urtiin duu* on the *limbe*. Over time, Dad’suren asked me to switch to another flute that I also carried with me throughout my travels; this instrument, a B-foot, open-holed silver Yamaha, fascinated him. He adored the “precise” equal-tempered pitches and various different keys within which *urtiin duu* could be performed, and explained how the precision of the instrument was useful for accompanying the precision of *Borjigin urtiin duu*, the songs of his particular clan. Dad’suren helped me develop a technique of gradually sliding my fingertips over the open holes of my Western flute to conjoin pitches in a manner reminiscent of the vocal elisions found throughout his *urtiin duu* melodies. Once I completed learning a song, Dad’suren would then practice performing the song with me, and I would accompany him in the appropriate style: pre-empting his entry with the first few notes of the melody, and then holding back to shadow his vocal line, creating the appropriate, delayed heterophonic texture of traditional *urtiin duu*. According to the performance practice, the accompanist is secondary to the voice in melodic importance, and should be sensitive to the stylistic nuances of the vocal line being rendered. Eventually, Dad’suren and I began performing together at local *nair* festivals (including weddings and celebrations throughout Dundgovi province). I took great pride in reaching a state where I was able to publicly perform as an accompanist for Dad’suren, and I could sense his approval in the way he nodded with satisfaction when we performed together successfully.
Mongolian Mobile Pastoralism and the Navigation of Landscape

Like Dad’suren, the majority of individuals with whom I studied were elderly and predominantly resided in rural settings. They had all grown up in the Mongolian countryside and had spent most of their lives living as mobile pastoralists. I found that, as opposed to the kind of urtiin duu performances found in concert halls throughout Ulaanbaatar, urtiin duu is a very different performance practice in these remote environments and herding contexts. Though many singers, including Dad’suren, are equally adept at performing in both herding contexts as well as large-scale concert settings, they acknowledge that the purpose behind the performances varies greatly. While herding animals, urtiin duu are often sung in an informal manner, often to coax the animal or entertain the singer. The dynamics are much softer than those of concert performances and rigid rules involving melodic recitation and specific breathing techniques are not necessarily present. In these informal settings, singers often improvise melodies and sounds in relation to those that they perceive from their surrounding environments, often creating a mimetic exchange.

Other Mongolian song types, including khoumii (throat singing), are said to emulate sounds found in the outdoor world when practiced informally by herding musicians. These musical sounds imitate various environmental phenomena, including the whistling of the wind or the rushing of water (Levin 2006; Pegg 2001e). In the case of urtiin duu, the songs often portray particular landscapes through the representation of topography in melodic contour, to the extent that both singers and listeners alike are able to distinguish landscapes depicted by the
rising and falling of pitch as the melodies are sung. These performed landscapes, described and emulated in song, have a basis in practices associated with the worship of spirit-entities known as ezen, who are thought to reside in particularly holy landscapes. Just as Chinggis Khan worshipped holy geographical locations, such as the mountain Burkhan Khaldun, nomads of this area worship the various land formations that surround them and the ezen who reside within them (Weatherford 2004). Dad’suren, for example, worships a particularly tall mountain near his home. He prays to the oboo (ritual cairn) and sings urtiin duu on the mountaintop when he is in need of spiritual protection and guidance. This is all part of the act of reciprocity: as a mimetic exchange with the environment, Dad’suren gives back to the earth in song what he and his herds have taken in sustenance.

During my time among singers in Dundgovi province, I found ezen worship to be an extremely important and valued daily activity, and these spirit-entities were often praised through song. Indeed, singing urtiin duu was an important aspect of human-ezen interaction, where individuals utilized mimesis to sonically interact with the spirits that reside in particular landscapes. In the case of urtiin duu, the melodic contours of songs are mimetic of environmental sounds and topographies unique to the landscapes of the ezen particular to a specific nutag, or geographical location. A singer’s nutag is not only one’s personal homeland, but also the home of one’s ancestors and ezen; thus the landscapes signified by urtiin duu melodies are deeply important to the people who live there.
Literature Review

Various ethnomusicologists have demonstrated the extent to which mimesis plays a role in Mongolian musical practices writ large. This thesis builds on this scholarship by examining a particular kind of sonic mimesis that occurs in *urtiin duu*—the emulation of landscape topography. Through an application of semiotic theory, this work adds an analytical perspective to the examination of mimesis in Mongolian performative practices. By creating a graphic notation for the songs and outlining both the spiritual and political meanings associated with them, I explore the relationship of these songs to both Mongolian landscapes and the Mongolian nation. Additionally, I examine the career and musicianship of Dad’suren, whose life intersected with the large-scale political changes and tumultuous cultural reforms of twentieth-century Mongolia. In doing so, I hope to illustrate an individual’s perspective on the negotiation of meaning involved in *urtiin duu* performance as it transformed over time.

My work has been greatly influenced by the work of Theodore Levin (1996, 2006) and Carole Pegg (2001e, 2001f), both of whom have spent extensive time researching the reciprocal, mimetic qualities of Central Asian musical forms and the importance of *nutag* to mobile pastoralists of this area. I have also been informed by Caroline Humphrey’s writings on *ezen* worship (1992, 1995, 1996a, 1996b), and the importance of reciprocal giving among mobile pastoralists in Mongolia—through prayer, song, and material goods—to spiritual beings in order to promote successful animal husbandry and spiritual wellbeing. Like Humphrey (1995, 1996a, 1996b) and Atwood (1996), I view the mix of Buddhist and animistic spirituality prevalent
throughout the communities I encountered as cooperative, mutually reinforcing sides of apotropaic spirituality, where individuals regularly pray to both ezen and protective Buddhist deities for the wellbeing of themselves, their families, and their herds.

Additionally, Turino’s work on Peircian semiotics (1999, 2000, 2008) has proven extremely valuable for explaining the details of signification in urtiin duu performance, as well as the impact of Soviet cultural reforms on this genre. Also influenced by Peter Marsh (2002, 2009) and Tom Ginsburg (1999), I have attempted to show how cosmopolitan values were adopted and internalized by many during the socialist era, influencing how urtiin duu is currently conceived, valued, and commodified within a tourist economy.

Nonetheless, I also recognize that some scholars disagree on how to regard the drastic cultural and musical reforms of the twentieth century. Carole Pegg (2001e), for example, views the Soviet presence in Mongolia as a largely monolithic, imposing force. She has argued that, in the face of complete dominance, Mongolians maintained their own form of resistance through the secret underground performance of outlawed musical forms, which vibrantly reemerged once communism was overthrown in the 1990s. Peter Marsh (2002, 2009), however, has recognized the important, complicit, and often decisive role many Mongolians played in the adoption of communist ideology over the course of Mongolia’s socialist era. As a result, Marsh argues that Mongolians’ readoption of indigenous musical forms in the early 1990s is not quite a refloourishing of pre-socialist musical performance, but a re-negotiation and re-adoption of indigenous musical forms in
line with the dominant and pervasive remnant of the socialist era—an underlying discourse of modernism.

Like Marsh, I recognize the impact of modernist reforms and cosmopolitan values on musical practices, and argue that the current situation is a complex amalgam comprised of internalized discourses and indigenous values. My scholarship is largely inspired by Levin’s work in Central Asia (1996) as well as Buchanan’s research in Bulgaria (1995, 2006)—which is focused on the ways that Soviet-style socialism was both resisted and internalized by Bulgarian musicians. In Bulgaria, for example, folk orchestras composed of “traditional Bulgarian instruments modeled on the Western classical philharmonic,” were created to aid in the construction of a distinct Bulgarian national identity (Buchanan 1995: 382). As in Bulgaria, Mongolian officials also implemented such cultural reforms, largely inspired by the Soviet model. Realized through both violence and excessive persecution, these reforms that helped reframe indigenous musical practices according to nationalist sentiment and Communist Party loyalty. During this time, individuals had to negotiate their acceptance and resistance of these reforms in complex ways.

Throughout the twentieth century, the socialist government’s implementation of modernist reforms existed in a dialectical relationship with previous, indigenous values held among the population. Urtiin duu, now an index of the Mongolian nation, once helped aspects of the socialist-sponsored reality appear natural, as “the truth of common sense” (Buchanan 1995: 384). Though communist dogma was initially actively resisted, parts of its hegemony were accepted as
legitimate, particularly its dissemination of the ideals of nationalism. The unsuccessful Mongolian nationalist rebellion of the 1960s, for example, was the ideological product of a combination of domination and resistance: informed by indigenous ideas of spirituality associated with Mongolian clan identity and Chinggis Khan, but fundamentally guided by a discourse of nationalism (Boldbaatar 1999). In the realm of urtiin duu practice, a similar process occurred: cultural reforms valorizing urtiin duu as an icon of the Mongolian nation were adopted but simultaneously co-opted as emblems of performative resistance.

All of these levels of meaning derive from the connection between urtiin duu melody and landscape topography. Various Mongolian clans rely on the melodies of urtiin duu to proclaim their own personal relationships with specific geographical areas and the ezen found therein. In chapter two, I will illustrate urtiin duu's involvement in complex issues of clan identity associated with both real and imagined homelands. In chapter three, we will see how these relationships became further complicated when Soviet cultural reforms helped reframe the melodic landscapes and nutag according to nationalist sentiments associated with Soviet loyalty and the Mongolian motherland (eh oron). These reforms markedly changed the way urtiin duu was and is practiced and received. By the time Mongolia became a parliamentary democracy in the early 1990s, urtiin duu had become a key emblem in the construction of Mongolian national pride.
CHAPTER TWO:
PERFORMING MUSICAL LANDSCAPES

I was born in a herding family,
Saturated with thick cattle-dung smoke,
I regard as my cradle
The grassland, my homeland (*nutag*).

I love like my own body
The homeland (*nutag*) upon which I dropped.
I regard as my mother's milk
The crystal clear river.

This is a Mongol.
A person who loves the motherland (*eh oron*).

- *Bi Mongol Hun* ('I am a Mongol')
  by R. Chimed

(translation by Uradyn Bulag, Bulag 1998: 174-75)

In the above song, R. Chimed describes how his livelihood is contingent on
the sustenance provided by his homeland, or *nutag*. He considers his *nutag* his
provider and mother, the one who cradles him in the folds of her terrain and
nourishes him with her rivers of milk. His deep emotional attachment to her is laden
with feelings of gratitude, and he responds to her needs as she responds to his. He is
careful to maintain this reciprocal balance with her, because it is upon her that his
survival depends.

Chimed's perspective is influenced by his lifelong practice of mobile
pastoralism, a way of life loosely defined as a kind of specialized, itinerant form of
animal husbandry focused on raising, herding, and breeding domesticated livestock.
Mobile pastoral practices have largely developed in response to the inhospitable,
arid climate of Central Asia. Indeed, the geographical terrain and the land-use strategies employed by pastoralists in this area have mutually impacted and influenced one another to a great extent over the course of the last millennia.

Contrary to romanticized notions of the Mongolian steppe as “pristine nature,” the grasslands are actually a unique bio-environment that has developed in conjunction with the millennia-long presence of seasonal mobile pastoralists and their domesticated herds (Humphrey and Sneath 1996b: 9). The seasonal migration of nomads, as well as the grazing habits of their particular herds—specifically horses, cows, yaks, camels, sheep and goat—have all contributed to the development of the seemingly endless green pastures that spread for thousands of miles across the Central Asian steppe. This relatively “undamaged” environment (in a non-polluted sense) is largely the result of pastoral practices that conserve the environment’s natural resources, including using dried dung rather than wood for domestic fuel, and breeding livestock that can survive on natural pasture throughout the year (Ibid.: 12).

As anthropologist Uradyn Bulag describes, the concept of nutag, or homeland, is extremely important among Central Asian mobile pastoralists and inextricably tied to ezen worship:

When someone moves away from his native land, he should take stones from the homeland, and add them to the new oboo honouring local deities… one should be buried in one’s natal land or homeland (torson nutag). Upon one’s return home, the first thing one should do is drink the water (ugaasan us)… The Buryat Mongols usually bury the placenta under the yurt, a sacred spot to which men would travel miles to pay homage. The homeland is thus said to be connected to one’s umbilical cord (hüisen holbootai). An emotional metaphor for land is törsön nutag ugaasan us (the land that gave me birth, and the water that baptized me).

(Bulag 1998: 175)
Among the mobile pastoralists with whom I resided, I found a great tendency for herders to work in cooperation with their *nutaq*. Indeed, the extensive literature on Central Asian nomads describes how they often defer judgment on where to allow their animals to graze based on signals from the environment and the spirit-masters, or *ezen*, who reside there. Certain clues can help determine where animals should be herded, including considerations like how much precipitation has fallen in a certain area, or whether or not a pasture has been repeatedly grazed over many seasons and needs to rest. As a means of respect, these individuals also praise the landscapes upon whose bounty they sustain their herds, and every day they make offerings to the ancestral spirits and *ezen* that reside in the land formations surrounding their yurts (Bulag 1998: 175).

In addition to *ezen* worship, other religious and spiritual beliefs have certainly left their mark on *urtiin duu* practice. Many of the themes described in *urtiin duu* lyrics reflect the mixture of spiritual and religious beliefs present in Mongolia since about Chinggis Khan’s time. According to the *Secret History of the Mongols*, written in the thirteenth century, the Mongolians of Chinggis’ time worshipped “eternal, mighty heaven” (Hessig 1980:47-49). Tengriism, a belief system that consider the sky (*tenger*) the supreme deity, includes elements of ancestor worship and animism. Also incorporating elements of land worship, these beliefs are tied to the practice of consulting shamans as mediators between the spirit world of ancestors (who usually reside in particularly holy mountains or rivers) and people of the earthly realm. Additionally, starting in the sixteenth century, Tibetan Buddhism was gradually introduced when Altan Khan, ruler of the
Mongol tribes and descendent of Chinggis Khan, recognized Soyom Gyatso of Tibet as the Dalai Lama. By the eighteenth century, the religion was firmly entrenched among the population by the ruling Manchu Qing dynasty, and a delicate balance had formed between the various beliefs associated with Tengriism and those introduced by Buddhist monks, temples, and practices established across the steppe.

Various scholars have described the mix of animism, shamanism, and Tibetan Buddhism in rural Mongolian communities, with animism and Buddhism predominating in the central steppe grasslands and shamanism (virtually absent in the central steppelands of Mongolia) prevalent in the wooded forests towards the margins of the nation’s borders (Humphrey 1995: 159). Though earlier religious scholars tended to focus on the “contamination” of the Buddhist literary tradition with the superstitious beliefs associated with shamanism and animism, referring to the brand of Buddhism in Mongolia as a kind of watered-down “Lamaism,” recent scholars (with Christopher Atwood at the forefront) have criticized such false dichotomies, explaining that both Buddhist and animistic beliefs have apotropaic qualities, allowing the two belief systems to intermingle in daily practice (Atwood 1996). Thus certain animistic rituals, like the worship of mountaintop cairns, or oboo, devoted to particular ezen, are actually presided over by Buddhist lamas (Humphrey 1995: 122).

The practice of worshipping ezen was supported by both Buddhist clergy as well as ruling aristocrats, in order to maintain credibility among mobile pastoral communities. During Manchu Qing rule, for example, local Manchu landlords
ceremonially presented themselves to *ezen* as a means of ensuring their authority among Mongolian nomads (Humphrey 1995: 146). Despite facing extensive persecution during the socialist era, animistic and Buddhist beliefs have led a somewhat vigorous underground existence in the central Gobi desert, where *urtiin duu* is predominantly found. This is, in part, due to the ease of practicing certain animistic forms of land worship covertly, as well as the fact that beliefs associated with animist themes could thrive under the blanket of nationalistic praise towards the homeland and thus escape attention from ruling authorities.

The apotropaic practices associated with the worship of both *ezen* and Buddhist deities concern the importance of appeasing these spiritual beings, who hold the power to provide “generalized well-being, good weather, and fertility, or, if ‘angered,’ drought and pestilence” (Humphrey 1995: 145). *Ezen*, in particular, can be pleased through both material and musical offerings sung in their image. Simultaneously, they can dictate where and when nomads will move their herds based on the cues they manifest in the environment. Inherent to this animist philosophy is a fundamental respect for and consideration of every entity in the environment, where “animals, mountains, trees, grass, weather and so forth function as active subjects which have their own ways of being that affect human beings” (Humphrey and Sneath 1996b: 3). Thus, it is necessary for individuals of these communities to consider the well-being of their surrounding environments if one wants his or her own well-being to be considered in turn. Certain taboos, known as *yos*, are practiced in this area, and rest on the premise that humans should avoid any unnecessary disturbance of *ezen* or the environment. For example, one should not
scuff marks or footprints on the earth, nor hunt young or pregnant animals, nor rip out grass by the roots. Additionally, it is prohibited to urinate or wash oneself in a river, or to urinate or defecate in the burrows or living area of any animal (Humphrey 1995: 141). The Mongolian word for nature, *baigal*, comes from the verb *baix* (to be), which literally translates as “what is,” and includes both human beings and the environment under its purview. As Humphrey describes:

> It is not in contemplation of the land (*gazar*) that is important but interaction with it. . . . [Mongolian nomads] do not take over terrain. . . . and transform it into something that is their own. Instead, they move within a space and environment where some kind of nomadic life is possible. . . . That is to say, they let it [their environment] pervade them and their herds, influencing where they settle, when they move, and what kinds of animals they keep.

(Humphrey 1995: 135, my emphasis)

Central Asian mobile pastoralists interact extensively within their environments, not just physically, but through sonic means as well. This premise is echoed in the work of ethnomusicologist Carole Pegg (2001e) and Theodore Levin (2006). Levin asserts that such musical practices animate sonic resonances of the environment by using mimetic faculties to interact with the natural reverberations produced by geographical formations. These include sounds such as the trickling of water, the booming echo in a cave, or the vibration of sound as it courses across an open plain. *Urtiiin duu*, which, according to Levin, constitute “one of the most dramatic examples of resonant reverberation,” are songs that mimetically emulate the environment, producing sounds that are not merely a product of human effort, but rather a result of the interaction between human and environmental sound (Levin 2006: 37).
Utilizing mimetic faculty in performance affords urtiin duu singers the ability to produce human sounds iconic of the sounds produced by certain geographies; in so doing, practitioners enter into a kind of communication with the resident ezen emulated in song. Urtsin duu are sung as a kind of offering to ezen, either in melodic emulation of the worshipped entity or through a poetic description of it:

Contemporary folk-religious practices are dialogic and mutually influencing reciprocal exchanges between human beings, nature-spirits, and gods of the universe, achieved by mimesis in performance. . . . Topographical images are mapped in contours of melodies and dances; the body used to produce sounds and shapes in imitation of the environment. Such mimesis is an integral aspect of a sociospiritual process of exchange. Reciprocity is necessary, for, whether it is vocal reproduction of sounds heard in nature or using materials from nature in order to produce those sounds, something has been given that must be returned. Having returned the gift in performance, there is an expectation that the relationship of exchange will continue: the forces of nature will grant the favors asked of them.

(Pegg 2001: 97)

Through mimesis of landscape topographies, the environment, and animal sounds, urtiin duu performances involve the sonic emulation of entities in the outdoor world. In the case of landscape and environment, melodic contours are iconic of different geographic topographies and environmental phenomena—such as the rising and setting of the sun. In the case of animals, the words of urtiin duu operate through onomatopoeia: by mimicking animal sounds in song, singers are able to communicate with their herds. As “imagistic sketches of nature,” urtiin duu practice can be a mimetic expression of gratitude and an appeal for protection from ezen that reside in particularly holy land formations and rivers (Levin 2006: 91). The ezen, pleased by the musical offerings iconic of their landscapes, provide protection and answer prayers of nomads.
Mimesis and Semiotic Theory

Peircean semiotics is useful for describing the kinds of mimetic faculty found in urtiin duu practice, as well as the multilayered meanings inspired by the production and reception of these songs. According to Peirce, human beings develop their senses of their world and themselves through the mediation of sign-object relations. In order for a sign to effectively signify some kind of meaning—be it an idea, an emotional feeling, or a remembrance of a past experience—the sign must be something (a sign vehicle), which signifies something (an object) for somebody, creating an effect, or interpretant (Peirce 1995: 99). Sign-object relationships can be iconic, as is often the case when human beings employ mimetic faculties in artistic and musical performances, but icons are only one of three types of sign-object relations. The others are indices, based on co–occurrence in real-life situations, and symbols, based on linguistic definition and agreement. In any social situation there is always an overlap between the iconic, indexical, and symbolic realms, as processes of creating and interpreting meaning necessarily involve chains of signs—where the interpretant of the first sign can become a new sign vehicle, standing for a new object, creating a new interpretant, and so on, ad infinitum (Peirce 1955: 169).

When urtiin duu singers emulate particular landscapes through melodic contour, part of the process involves the production of musical signs iconic of landscape topographies, environmental phenomena, or animals (Nakagawa 1980, Pegg 2001e, Levin 2006). Since these processes imply “a transfer of properties of space and place to sonic parameters such as pitch, timbre, rhythm and dynamics” (Levin 2006: 91), they can be considered diagrammatic icons, involving “analogous
relations of the parts between sign and object as the basis of similarity between
them” (Turino 1999: 227). The initially iconic sign-object relationships, then, further
create powerful responses in individuals familiar, and often deeply emotionally
attached, to these objects. These effects, or sign-object-interpretant relationships,
can be described as one of three types: rhematic (where the sign is interpreted as
one of possibility), dicent (where the sign is interpreted causally and can be
confirmed or denied through fact or experience), or argument (where the sign is
interpreted as a symbolic proposition or idea).

Signs produced and received in musical performances are often interpreted
as dicent indices, in that they are perceived as being actually affected by their
objects. Dicent-indices can be particularly powerful signs in that they come to stand
for their objects in seemingly natural, innate ways. Among Mongolian nomadic
pastoralists, urtiin duu are often produced and received as dicent-indices, especially
when sung during daily life activities, such as while herding animals. ‘Tugemel’ urtiin
duu (a more abbreviated version of urtiin duu), for example, are often sung playfully
on the steppe by herders in emulation of surrounding landscapes. Described as a
form of “ludic mimesis” by Levin, these sonic emulations are performed in an
unofficial manner, usually when herders entertain themselves during long hours
spent horseback riding and herding animals from one pasture to the next (Levin
2006: 82-88).¹ The melodic contours are iconic of particular landscapes personally
favored by the herder, and they index emotional feelings of attachment involved

¹ On long herding journeys, nomads sometimes ride for over ten hours straight, and are able to eat
and sleep on horseback. They often sing to entertain themselves on these long, solitary rides.
therein: “Long-songs are the fetish of connoisseurs of landscape acoustics: they elicit the distinctive sonic qualities of a favorite outdoor place, and long-song singers savor and recall these” (Ibid.: 37).

Mimesis and Urtiin duu

Several different sociocultural groups across Mongolia have their own unique urtiin duu style, including the Oirat and Uriangkhai groups of northwest Mongolia, the Darkhat and Buryat groups of north Mongolia, the Tov Khalkha (central Khalkha) and Borjigin of the central-southern Gobi, and various other peoples across Inner Mongolia. Despite the wide geographical range in which urtiin duu are practiced, as well as the disparate settings in which they are currently found—including rural nomadic encampments as well as large-scale tourist productions—all urtiin duu exhibit certain similar characteristics. Most are sung in powerful, declamatory voices that can easily echo across vast steppeland, fill a yurt with deeply resonant vocalizations, or carry across a concert hall. The melodic contours of most urtiin duu traverse a range of at least two octaves, contain few words, and are performed without fixed meter. Since these songs incorporate very few words over the course of long melodic verses that sometimes last over five minutes in duration before being repeated, many syllables are sung as non-lexical vocables (sounds without distinct symbolic meaning), such as hai, eh, ooh, or ah. For example, only eight words are sung over the course of the of the Tov Khalkha version of Kherlen giin bariya, though as many as thirty non-lexical vocables can be
counted. Similarly, the Borjigin version of this same song, with the same lyrics, also contains over thirty non-lexical vocables.

The song lyrics that typically carry referential meaning are often those referring to particularly holy landscapes. These lyrics can be understood as they mark the beginning of musical phrases and are emphasized through loud dynamics and carefully placed vibrato and glottal stops. Two urtiin duu in Appendix A serve to illustrate this point. In the two aforementioned versions of the song Kherlengiin bariya, both the words Kherlengiin (phrase one), and bariya (phrase two) can be understood as they begin each important phrase (Appendix A: A.3, A.4). These words directly refer to specific geographical locations and phenomena, particular those associated with Chinggis Khan and particular Mongolian clan identities, such as the legendary river Kherlen that runs through what is thought to be Chinggis Khan’s birthplace.

Many of the words used in urtiin duu are pronounced according to Old Mongolian script, the vertical script prevalent in this area before 1921, rendering their lexical meaning difficult to understand for the average Mongolian. Syllables are “interpolated to preserve the melodic line of the text,” and the lyrical line “is often truncated, so that metrical elements of the written text are not preserved in song,” further obscuring the meaning of the words and indicating that song lyrics are operating primarily as iconic and indexical signs for most Mongolians (Pegg 2001e: 45). Many rural Mongolians confirmed this point, explaining that urtiin duu lyrics are “difficult to understand,” “in old script pronunciation,” and as Dad’suren
explained, they would have to be studied by “scholars” in order to fully capture their literal meaning.

Signs created by urtiin duu performance, then, primarily operate as iconic and indexical relations, a semiotic feature common to many musical practices. According to Turino, “iconic and indexical signs typically operate together in expressive cultural practices, and indices have their own special potentials for producing emotional response and social identification” (Turino 1999: 234-35). In urtiin duu, iconic emulation and indexical signification are often communicated through iteration of these melodic contours representative of certain landscapes. These musical landscapes, in turn, can evoke powerful feelings associated with ancestral and ezen spirits, as well as different sociocultural identities for performers and listeners alike.

**Graphing Melodic Contours**

In urtiin duu, melodic contour is an overwhelmingly significant and salient feature of a song; it is what renders a song recognizable from one singer to the next. For this reason, I have created a graphic representation of urtiin duu that essentially “maps out” melodic contour as it is expressed over time in order to emphasize these contours. It is my hope that this form of notation, as a kind of visual representation of melodic contour, will help depict the way urtiin duu melodies can operate as diagrammatic icons of certain landscape topographies. This notation is also helpful for illustrating how the overall melodic contour of an urtiin duu remains steady, varying according to the personal style of the singer.
Certain melodic gestures, for example, are an integral part of the melodic contour of specific urtiin duu (Nakagawa 1980: 153). In the following example, the main motifs of the song Giingoo are confirmed by graphic notation of two different performances of the song (Appendix A: A.1, A.2). The specific rhythms and ornamentation within such contours can change depending on the individual performer, as does the starting pitch of the song. In these two examples, each performer, Dunjima and Dad’suren, employs different internal rhythms while performing Giingoo. However, the melodic contour of these songs remains relatively stable, despite variances in ornamentation, use of vocables, and rhythm. To illustrate this point, I have labeled the shared melodic motifs in the graphs of each singer’s version.

Urtiin duu are powerful, in part, because of their ability to signify different kinds of nutag, ranging from vast geographical landscapes and homelands (including entire mountain chains) to specific geographies (such as nearby hills and valleys important to the individuals who live near them). On one occasion, I happened to come across an example of the latter kind of signification. In May 2002 I met two different singers, Jantsan and Dolamsuren, who each sang their own versions of an urtiin duu known as Bogdin ondor (Holy tall mountain). They sang the same song, with the same lyrics, and the same general overall melodic contour. Nonetheless, their versions differed in unique and important ways: Dolamsuren’s melodic contour was calmer, without as many unanticipated leaps and falls as Jantsan’s version. Jantsan’s contour, on the other hand, incorporated much more drastic pitch variation and less of the overall smooth quality conveyed by
Dolamsuren. When I asked both the singers and family members the reasons for their different styles, the responses centered on the differences in landscape between the geographical areas surrounding each singer’s home. Dolamsuren’s rendition of Bogdin ondur is influenced by her own indexical experiences of the landscape topographies she is surrounded by and which she reveres. These happen to be flatter than the mountains near Jantsan’s home, who resides in an area around thirty kilometers away from Dolamsuren known as Bagagazriin chuluu (small, rocky hills), a place noted for its rocky contours:

**Figure 2.1**

![Image](https://www.flickr.com/Baga Gazriin Chuluu, Dundgovi province)

The particular landscape that surrounds Jantsan’s home influences the more drastic hill-like rises and falls in pitch of his personal urtiin duu style. Graphs A.5 and A.6 in Appendix A demonstrate the different contours of Jantsan’s and Dolamsuren’s versions of the song, respectively. Though these melodies are iconic of the different
landscapes surrounding Dolamsuren’s and Jantsan’s yurts, they also index each singer’s personal relationship with the particular landscapes in which they reside. This type of indexical signification operates in powerful ways and can implicate multiple layers of meaning for any individual singer, accompanist, or listener. Jantsan, for example, was moved to tears when singing Bogdin ondor for me, particularly because his son had just passed away. In the moment he sang to me, his melody became a sonic catalyst for eliciting strong feelings of grief. Jantsan later explained that the song had reminded him of his home, evoking emotional recollections associated with his family and his deceased son. This experience illustrates that urtiin duu has the potential to be a powerful form of experiential signification for many individuals at any given moment.

Though the melodic contours of urtiin duu can signify particular surrounding landscapes where nomads currently live, they can also represent larger geographical areas, even those where singers do not live or that they have never personally seen. Mongols who self-identify as Tov Khalkha, for example, currently reside in the central Southern Gobi desert, an area they have occupied for centuries. The landscape features characteristic of this area are not unlike those of the southwestern United States, including mesas and plateaus, as well as low valleys and flatlands. Their urtiin duu style, described as aizam, or “extended” urtiin duu, is said to be a reflection of the vast, low steppe of the Gobi: “Mongols use terms such as ‘spacious,’ ‘wide,’ ‘long-lasting,’ ‘big,’ ‘free’ and ‘of great size’ for this style” (Pegg 2001e: 45).
The two versions of *Bogdin ondor* depicted in Appendix A are good examples of *aizam urtiin duu* (graphs A.5 and A.6). The graphs of these two songs include brackets at the bottom marked with asterisks (*), indicating sudden leaps in register and the frequency with which these occur. The following picture demonstrates the plateau-like formations characteristic of the central Gobi.

**Figure 2.2**

Reprinted from [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com), Stefan Heusch: Bayanzag, central Gobi

The melodic contours of *aizam urtiin duu* are typically longer and more extended than those of *urtiin duu* that represent other landscapes. For example, the *urtiin duu* known as *Uyakhan zambuvutiviin nar* has a melodic contour that lasts well over three minutes. Additionally, *aizam urtiin duu* incorporate elongated phrases that can traverse as many as three octaves, as well as melodic leaps and falls encompassing fourths and fifths, all of which suggest different landscape elevations in their melodic iteration. They often demand that singers sing in both chest and falsetto vocal ranges. Another unique characteristic of these *urtiin duu* is the use of a deeply resonant voice during particularly low sections of the songs, a representation of the echo-like resonance that voices carry in the low valleys of the central Gobi.
desert. In fact, several of the urtiin duu singers I encountered used the word tsuurai, or echo, in relation to urtiin duu practice, in particular when describing Tov Khalkha urtiin duu. I suspect that the word tsuurai is linked to the word tsuur, the name of an end-blown flute performed by Western Mongolians in conjunction with khoumii. The term tsuurai is also translated in conjunction with the words duurix, meaning “to imitate,” and dabtax, meaning “reiterate,” both of which are used extensively by singers to describe the mimetic qualities of urtiin duu. In the following picture, the vastness of the Gobi desert is depicted, a topography that influences the “extended” quality of urtiin duu:

Figure 2.3

The quality of low resonance is evident in the Tov Khalkha songs, Kherlengiin bariya and Uyakhan zambuutiviin nar. As Uyakhan zambuutiviin nar demonstrates, these songs often demand that phrases be prolonged as long as a singer can hold his or
her breath. Dad’suren often taught me to end my accompaniment by extending the
last note as long as possible in an elongated way, to emphasize this characteristic of
the landscape.

The urtiin duu of the Borjigin clan provides another example of the capacity for urtiin duu contours to signify large geographical areas. Nomads of the Borjigin clan occasionally identify their urtiin duu as aizam, though this term is not as prevalent, and their songs are more often described as general or abbreviated (besreg). These songs are not nearly as extended as Tov Khalkha aizam long songs, and tend to incorporate more intricate decoration (chimeglel) of the melodic line (Pegg 2001e: 47). The Borjigin people assert that their clan originated in a very different landscape from the one in which they currently live, and it is this landscape that is reflected in their urtiin duu stylings.

The melodic contours of Borjigin songs reflect how singers imagine their original homeland in the Khentii mountains. The smaller intervals emulate rocky mountains with step-like ascents and descents, instead of the more plateau-like formations of Tov Khalkha long songs (Ibid.). Unlike Tov Khalkha songs, Borjigin songs do not suddenly switch to the highest vocal register, but rather work up to these points in a more gradual manner. The Borjigin singers Dad’suren and Ulziibot both indicated that this melodic style is representative of the mountainous slopes where these melodies are said to have originated. The following picture, taken by photographer Don Croner, depicts the landscape topography of the Khentii mountains, which bears a clear iconic resemblance to the step-like contour of Borjigin urtiin duu.
Just as in the *Tov Khalkha* version, the *Borjigin* version of Kherlengiin bariya begins an ascent to a very high vocal range with the iteration of the word *bariya* in the second phrase. Unlike the *Tov Khalkha* version, however, the melodic contour of the *Borjigin* version does not incorporate as many sudden leaps but rather rises in smaller pitch intervals (Appendix A: A.4).

In yet another example of the step-like ascents and descents in pitch found in *Borjigin urtiin duu*, the song *Jaakhan sharga* (Young bay horse), sung by the *Borjigin* singer Ulziibot, employs a similar kind of melodic contour (Appendix A: A.7). The *Borjigin* style of vibrato, which oscillates between intervals as wide as a second (unlike *Tov Khalkha* stylings, which usually include more glottal stops), is also iconic of a step-like topography. Unlike the low-voice resonance typical of the *Tov Khalkha* style, *Borjigin* singers primarily emphasize high melodic peaks accompanied by powerfully resonant singing, indicative of the type of resonance one would encounter singing on mountaintops in such regions. Characteristically, *Borjigin* songs do not incorporate the low-ranged resonance nor declamatory voice typical of the *Tov Khalkha* songs.
Borjigin people are invested in separating their personal identities from Tov Khalkha, in part because this identity proclaims them to be direct descendents of Chinggis Khan and his courtly performers, who were also from this same area of Khentii: "Borjigin have a very clear mental image of the boundaries of their territory despite repeated changes in name and administrative divisions since the seventeenth century. It is, they say, the ‘shape of a sheep’s stomach, fastened at the top by Mount Bayan Ulaan in Delger sum of Khentii aimag’" (Pegg 2001e: 17).

Historically, the Borjigin were considered an elite clan and predominantly ruled over the Khalkha during the Manchu Qing era before the 1921 Communist Revolution (Humphrey and Sneath 1996b: 27). During the socialist era, proclamation of Borjigin identity was outlawed due to its feudal basis and elite lineage claims. In Soviet censuses conducted in 1918, 1963, 1969, 1979, and 1989, the Borjigin clan is neither mentioned as a tribe nor as an ethnic group, but completely excluded from description (Bulag 1998: 30, 66-69). The idea of a separate Borjigin identity is still part of an ongoing, contentious debate, with most Khalkha arguing that all Borjigin are Khalkha or vice versa, and most Borjigin arguing that they are distinct from Khalkha. As Pegg explains,

Chinggis Khan is the seed from which Khalkha Mongols, the imperial Borjigin clan, and those concerned about the unity of the Mongols are cultivating their current identities. References to Chinggis Khan in songs and melodies were just beginning to be acceptable in 1989 and the label “Borjigin” used as a measure of cultural supremacy. The Borjigin long-song style was said to be the best, since Borjigin musicians and singers performed in Chinggis’ court. Chinggis Khan’s father, Yesühei Baatar, was from the Borjigin clan, and his descendants consider themselves to be the nucleus of Mongol identity. … By 1993, there was some confusion as different Mongol groups used the symbol of Chinggis Khan to reinvent themselves. There was even confusion between Khalkha and Borjigin. I was told by a Khalkha friend “all Mongols are Khalkha” and by a non-Borjigin Khalkha “all Khalkhas are Borjigin.”
Despite the contentiousness of the supposed separate identities of the Khalkha and Borjigin, there is no question that their urtiin duu differ from one another stylistically. This difference became increasingly more pronounced during the twentieth century due to the varying contexts in which the songs were performed. As Tov Khalkha songs were promoted to the level of “national urtiin duu style” during the socialist era, their dissemination was extensive and younger Mongolians have learned them from the radio as well as in staged musical gatherings. Borjigin urtiin duu, however, were primarily outlawed during this time, and were thus typically passed from one generation to the next in private during domestic celebrations known as nair. No longer subject to prohibition and censorship, these nair are now openly practiced by Borjigin families.

**The Nair Festival**

I was lucky enough to attend several of these celebrations, which are held to mark important occasions such as weddings and births. Though almost all Mongolian nomadic groups hold their own versions of nair, the Borjigin nair is unique in its extensive incorporation of urtiin duu into the celebration, sung according to specific rules designated by the Nairiin Darga, the Director of the Feast. This position is usually designated according to age, occupied by the eldest male present. The festival always begins by singing Tumen Ekh (The first of ten thousand), an urtiin duu commemorating Chinggis Khan’s greatness. The party then continues with the ceremonial and generous handing out of airag.
Every person attending the ceremony is required to sing an *urtiin duu* while holding a bowl of *airag* in front of them. Throughout the course of the ceremony, each person will typically be asked to sing three times. The *Nairiin Darga* judges the singers based on the accuracy and precision of their rendition. If he or she is found to have sung improperly—or somehow to have broken a rule such as talking while another person is singing—the person is then “punished” and required to imbibe thirteen liters of *airag* from a large bowl centered in the middle of the yurt. Several people will undoubtedly be “punished” over the course of the evening, and a humorous situation usually ensues, with the person attempting to drink as much *airag* as possible, usually getting quite drunk, and eventually vomiting.\(^2\) *Nair* celebrations can last into the night or all night, and on some occasions several days, as long as there is *airag* available.

These *nair* have maintained a similar structure and set of rules over the course of the twentieth century. Pegg describes an interview with an elderly *Borjigin* nomad, whose description of *Borjigin nair* in “Old” Mongolia (pre-Revolutionary Mongolia, or pre-1921), is extremely reminiscent of the various *nair* I attended in 2002, 2004, and 2006:

> The seventy-six-year-old *Borjigin* Gelegsamdan, who remembered *nairs* from his childhood, explained that participants had to be smartly dressed, with the gown (*deel*), buttoned up, collars neatly touching, and hats on straight. The correct posture had to be adopted. Smoking and talking was not allowed during performances and anyone wishing to go to the toilet had to ask for permission from the Director of the Feast. . . . Penalties were given to ensure order. Anyone who broke a rule had to consume three large bowls of *airag* . . . . All were expected to perform long-songs, and those who could not . . .

\(^2\) With luck, the person will vomit outside, but on one occasion I witnessed one of Dad’suren’s sons who, unable to control himself, vomited in the crowded yurt, resulting in a chain of vomits from various disgusted members sitting nearby. The outrageous night is still remembered fondly by both Dad’suren and I whenever I visit.
were made by elders to drink airag until they vomited, thereby ensuring the songs would be learned by the next time.

(Pegg 2001e: 42)

In order to ensure proper learning of Borjgin urtiin duu, the gathered community will join in singing every other verse of the urtiin duu, reinforcing the correct delivery of the song. I theorize that the importance placed on precise renditions of urtiin duu in Borjgin nair celebrations, as well as the strict and formal rules maintained by both the Nairiin Darga as well as ceremonial participants, has aided in the maintenance of both a separate Borjgin urtiin duu style as well as a separate Borjgin identity. Borjgin urtiin duu occur in contexts asserting the importance of the clan’s distinctiveness. The Borjgin people are said to be the direct descendents of Chinggis Khan. Having come to the central Gobi many generations back, most have never directly seen the Khentii mountains. This fact brings into the question the validity of Borjgin claims that their urtiin duu specifically represent the Khentii mountain landscape. Though it is possible their urtiin duu style was once influenced by the step-like contour of the Khentii mountains, these songs are no longer directly iconic of this landscape. They are, rather, iconic of people’s imagined ideas of what this landscape actually looks like. Thus, the melodic contours of Borjgin urtiin duu and their perceived connection to the Khentii landscape have come to index the idea of the Borjgin identity itself. This point is strengthened by the fact that most Borjgin consider their urtiin duu to be “‘detailed,’ ‘accurate,’ ‘precise’ and ‘refined,’” descriptions that allude to their elite status as Chinggis Khan’s imperial descendents and the power their particular clan possessed in pre-1921 feudal Mongolia (Pegg 2001e: 47).
Other Forms of Mimesis

Regardless of clan association, various similarities exist among both Tov Khalkha and Borjigin singers in this area regarding urtiin duu practice, especially when it is utilized as a kind of herding technique. Not all urtiin duu are iconic of landscape topography. Some urtiin duu are iconic of other environmental phenomena. Through utilizing different kinds of mimesis, singers engage animals and other environmental entities through song. Dad’suren explains how, in Oyakhan zambuutiviin nar (The sun shines around the earth), the melodic contour is reminiscent of “the rising and setting of the sun.” Turning to graph A.8 in Appendix A, one can detect the overall rise and fall of the melodic contour, which unfolds over three minutes. The overall arch-like rise and fall of the melody is especially noteworthy towards the second half of the song. Notably, the song emphasizes the word nar (sun) at the beginning of the verse, followed by an elongated, ascending musical phrase iconic of a sunrise (Appendix A: A.8).

Uurtiin duu are also mimetic of the powerful, reverberant echoes that can resound across the open steppe when, for example, wind gusts across the landscape, or a human being sings, or an animal releases a loud sound. This kind of mimesis occurs when urtiin duu vocalists are accompanied by instrumentalists or other singers. During these performances, the resonance of the melody echoes between the musicians, creating a powerful kind of reverberation. Uurtiin duu can be accompanied by the horse-head fiddle (morin khuur) or the flute (limbe). While performing with a singer, an accompanist will anticipate the singer’s entrance at the
beginning of verse. Once the singer begins the melody, the instrumentalist will then shadows the singer’s melodic contour in a kind of delayed heterophonic style. The result is an echo-like, sonically resonant melody. As mentioned above, the word tsuurai, or echo, is used in relation to urtiin duu practice and accompaniment, as are the words duurix (to imitate) and dabtax (to reiterate).

The same effect occurs when two or more urtiin duu singers join one another in song. Since the songs are not performed in any kind of fixed rhythm, two or more singers never sing in perfect unison, and a similarly delayed, heterophonic melodic effect is created. This kind of resonance is a mimetic emulation of the kind of echo-like reverberance found in certain landscapes, particularly across the open steppe, or in a cave.

In addition to being iconic of landscape and other environmental phenomena, certain urtiin duu are also iconic of animal sounds and are sung during a particular situation that confronts herders during the birthing season: specifically, when a mother animal does not accept her calf after giving birth to it, and will not allow her child to suckle from her (Batzengel 1980a: 51). Such situations are urgent in that the calf’s survival depends on receiving milk from its mother. Since nomads raise all their own food, every animal is a potential provider of sustenance and every calf’s life is important for the family as a whole. During these critical situations, urtiin duu are sung to mother animals in order to calm them and allow their young to suckle from them. In particularly difficult situations, such as in the case of a stubborn mother camel, an instrumentalist is required to accompany a singer (in
this case, typically a morin khuur player) in order to render the melody more effective.

There are five urtiin duu mimetic of animals, one song for each of the five domesticated animals found in nomadic herds. Each respective song uses words iconic of the particular sounds each different kind of animal makes. Levin describes a similar phenomenon among Tuvan herders, who

... imitate animal sounds exclusively through iconic mimesis of the sounds themselves... the ability to imitate animal sounds with a high degree of verisimilitude is singled out for special praise. The [Mongolian] term for such imitations, ang-meng mal-magan öttüneri, “imitation of wild and domestic animals,” is widely used by herders.

(Levin 2006: 85)

In Mongolia, herders similarly employ the ang-meng mal-magan öttüneri techniques to mimic animal sounds through onomatopoeia. For example, in the case of tsoigo (sung to sheep) the word tsoigo is sung in a rapid manner, creating a vibrating effect reminiscent of the animal’s vibrating grunts. Dad’suren explains that khoos, sung to camels, is also performed in a way reminiscent of a camel’s low moans, similar to the word oov, used to call camels and yaks.

The following table shows the name of each song and the corresponding animal to whom the song is sung. With the exception of Giingoo, sung to horses prior to racing, every song listed below is composed entirely of the repetition of the word as it is sung to different contours. Dad’suren describes how these songs actually communicate with animals, as in the case of the mother camel, who cries upon being moved by the melody and words of khoos and reunites with her calf: “When someone sings khoos, khoos in the melody of the long song, the camel mother is coaxed into nursing her baby and weeps. It means that the camel mother is touched
by the melody and words of the song. The animal is moved.” I have found that these melodies are more variable from singer to singer than other, long-established urtiin duu such as Kherlengiin bariya or Oyakhan zambuutiviin nar, discussed earlier.

Table 2.1: Urtiin duu words sung to different animals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Song name/lyric</th>
<th>Giingoo</th>
<th>Khoos</th>
<th>Tsoigo</th>
<th>Toigo</th>
<th>Ooh, oh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>Гийнгоо</td>
<td>Giingoo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camel</td>
<td>Хоос</td>
<td>Khoos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goats</td>
<td>Цойго</td>
<td>Tsoigo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>Тойго</td>
<td>Toigo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cow</td>
<td>Ооб, ов</td>
<td>Ooh, oh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a mother horse always accepts her calves, horses are sung urtiin duu for different purposes, particularly to calm a racing horse before an event and synchronize the mentality of the singer (who is always the racer) with that of the horse. Before almost all horse races, both urban and rural Mongolians perform Giingoo, sometimes accompanied by the morin khuur. Unlike the other songs listed in the above table, there are no words onomatopoeic of horse sounds in Giingoo, though the morin khuur accompaniment can incorporate neighing sounds reminiscent of the horse. Additionally, Dad’suren performs a song called Mornii yavdal (gait of the horse) on the morin khuur, where the rhythm of the fiddle-playing intentionally evokes the galloping rhythm of a horse’s hoof beats.

Conclusions
*Urtiin duu* thus holds the capacity to index particular landscapes and entities in the environment, as well as the experiences and feelings they inspire, often producing powerful emotional responses in those individuals who have intimate knowledge of them. As ethnomusicologist Tony Perman describes, “Emotions are particularly powerful when the signs that instigate them are indexical dicents” (Perman 2008:278). The signs produced by singing *urtiin duu* often operate as indexically dicent to the experience of mobile pastoralists when they interact with their *nutag* and, moved by its beauty or even a sense of gratefulness for the sustenance it provides, become inspired to produce musical landscapes in its image. This explains why, during the socialist era, so many viewed the removal of *urtiin duu* from outdoor contexts and into concert halls as a particularly egregious affront. During this time, performance contexts were re-framed according to a new political authority in ways that conflicted with nomads’ personal associations of *urtiin duu*. Tsendpuro, a music teacher in the capital city of Dundgovi province, recalls that “the communists destroyed long song, because they moved them from the steppe to the concert hall.”

However, as we shall see in the next chapter, the changes imposed during the socialist era on *urtiin duu* and other musical practices were not wholeheartedly dismissed by Mongolians. The modernist-socialist-cosmopolitan ideologies introduced in the 1920s ultimately came to be internalized by the 1960s, especially values associated with modernity. As we have seen, the sounds of certain *urtiin duu*, as sign-vehicles, can iconically signify particular homelands and landscapes. These associations have lingered as new, multilayered, and complex meanings were
formed over the course of the twentieth century. My intention in describing the mimetic significations of *urtii duu* in this chapter is to illustrate what is essentially an earlier layer of meaning in what was to become the multilayered indices associated with *urtii duu*. As its performance context, style, and reception changed during the twentieth century, *urtii duu* was ultimately transformed into an emotion-laden index of the Mongolian nation.
CHAPTER THREE: PERFORMING THE MOTHERLAND

_Urtiin duu_ has a long and complicated history in Mongolia, having undergone profound stylistic and contextual changes over the twentieth century. Over time, the term _urtiin duu_ has come to describe a multitude of genres and song variants. As a performance practice, its history has paralleled the drastic transformations in government, social ideologies, economic reforms, and urbanization that transformed Mongolia into a communist state. Now proclaimed to be “Mongolia’s national song,” _urtiin duu_ is indelibly associated with both the decades-long resistance against communist rule, as well as the acceptance and internalization of certain socialist-cosmopolitan attitudes valuing ideas associated with progress and modernization. In order to understand the complex relationship of _urtiin duu_ to these ideologies, a brief history of twentieth-century Mongolia will be recounted here, with a focus on cultural reforms, the birth of Mongolian separatist nationalism, and the impact of these on musical practices.

**Historical Overview**

Scholars typically organize twentieth-century Mongolian history into five general time periods: the pre-revolutionary era, lasting until 1921; the revolutionary era, a period marked by bloodshed and upheaval, lasting from 1921-1939; the Second People’s Republic, so called because it marked the second drafting of Mongolia’s constitution, lasting from 1940-1961; the Third People’s Republic, marked by Mongolia’s official induction as a socialist state, lasting from 1960-1990;
and the post-socialist era, lasting from 1990 till the present day. These eras are useful, not only because they signal distinctive moments in Mongolia’s history as a sovereign power, but also because each corresponds with an increasing internalization of modernist-cosmopolitan values among the population. Throughout the communist period, Mongolia was ideologically, economically, and politically allied with the Soviet Union, in part to counteract the threat of Chinese occupation. During this time, a kind of cosmopolitan ideology gained hold that presented the Mongolians as connected with a larger international socialist community, one with its center of power in Moscow: “When we speak about Mongolian cosmopolitanism of the communist period, we are speaking about . . . Mongolians’ openness to a distinctly Soviet form of internationalism” (Marsh 2002: 10). Of note, this particular brand of cosmopolitanism was accompanied by a kind of isolationism, whereby international engagement and exchange predominantly occurred with the Soviet Union and other communist nations under the Soviet sphere of influence.

Developing the theses of scholars Peter Marsh and Tom Ginsburg, I will argue that the cosmopolitan ideals and modernist reforms introduced in the revolutionary era, and expanded upon during the Second People’s Republic, became the basis for reframing urtiin duu practice according to nationalist sentiments. It also became the basis of the subversive Mongolian nationalist movement that developed during the Third People’s Republic—a movement that depended on a specific kind of Soviet-inspired cosmopolitanism for its nationalist basis but simultaneously defied continued alliance and subservience to the Soviet Union. Both the modernist-
socialist cosmopolitanism adopted from the Soviet ideology and the emergent separatist nationalism depended on reframed indigenous musical practices and instruments—including urtiin duu—as evidence of Mongolia’s distinctiveness.

As we have seen, in the pre-revolutionary era urtiin duu signified particular homelands and landscapes through mimetic processes. During the revolutionary era, however, the Communist Party began making a concerted effort to create a new, national music culture (Marsh 2005). During this time, urtiin duu came to be performed in new settings framed as nationalist gatherings; thus, their associations co-occurred with new objects in changing situations. This kind of phenomenon is usefully described as “semantic snowballing,” where a particular sign vehicle—including a song or musical style such as urtiin duu—co-occurs with different objects in various contexts over time, thereby indexing new meanings while still retaining elements of past associations (Turino 2008: 9). In urtiin duu practice, previous emotional associations of urtiin duu melodies with certain landscapes lingered as new, nationalist meanings were introduced during the revolutionary era. By the Third People’s Republic, urtiin duu were further recontextualized as a professional practice associated with newly-established “national orchestras” comprised of groups of indigenous instruments arranged into ensembles inspired by the Western classical idiom (Marsh 2002: 79).

Such large-scale musical changes were common, not just in Mongolia but across Central Asia. In Uzbekistan, for example,

[T]he Shash maqâm comprised an important cultural property that provided evidence of an Uzbek literary and musical great tradition. Soviet cultural politics had fostered the creation of such great traditions for each official Soviet nationality, often aided by a reimagination of cultural history
that produced notable distortions in the way that both cultural boundaries and cultural commonalities were perceived and reified.  

(Levin 1996: 46)

Like the *Shash maqâm* in Uzbekistan, *urtiin duu* became an important kind of Mongolian cultural property, exalted as an emblem of Mongolian identity, but simultaneously standardized, institutionalized, and performed almost exclusively in patriotic contexts—all in an effort to consolidate a national consciousness.

However, the ideologies associated with these reforms were adopted in complex and often contradictory ways, demonstrating the fluid and dynamic relationship between the official version of reality that communist authorities tried to promote, and the way individuals internalized and creatively reinterpreted the dominating discourse. Though authorities often promoted the idea of Mongolia as a loyal Soviet ally and ethnically homogenous state, the subversive practices maintained by many Mongolians throughout this period—in spite of the known and feared consequences of continuing such practices—demonstrates the extent to which the official version of Mongolian cultural identity was contested during these decades.

Nonetheless, state-sponsored versions of Mongolian history and identity were not wholeheartedly rejected; indeed, the resistance movement of the 1960s was fundamentally based on the nationalist ideals promoted by the very regime these individuals were trying to resist. During this time, indigenous ideas of tribal identity and loyalty towards Chinggis Khan were justified and propagated in nationalist terms. Thus, to some extent, Mongolians of the resistance movement came to internalize the discourse substantiated by the dominant social order, and
their rebellion—based on the idea of a wholly independent Mongolian nation capable of resisting Soviet influence and the communist regime—was modeled accordingly.

As a communist state, Mongolia was modeled after the Soviet system, including the establishment of a single-party governmental structure headed by the Communist Party, a socialist economic system, and the enforcement of communist ideology through extensive tactics of cultural reform. Often trained in Russia and closely allied with Soviet officials, Mongolians appointed as communist authorities embarked on a campaign to reframe and promote certain aspects of urtiin duu performance while banning other aspects of the performance practice deemed potentially subversive to the communist agenda (Marsh 2002: 122-24).

Urtiin duu became subject to various constraints in order to conform to the ideals of the new music culture sponsored by the state. Aware of the potential for subversive expression in musical practices, authorities continually suppressed urtiin duu performance through extensive prohibitions. Only those urtiin duu deemed “not dangerous to sing” could be played on the radio (Pegg 2001e: 259), and all performances of urtiin duu were to be held in concert halls and staged, patriotic competitions.

Yet throughout Mongolia’s communist era, urtiin duu practice continued in the domestic sphere, including the performance of prohibited melodies and lyrics. The melodic contours of urtiin duu allowed performers to secretly allude to homelands that fell outside of the official borders of the newly-created Mongolian state. Thus, urtiin duu became a powerful form of resistance during this time, as its
signification of particular landscapes could elude authorities not familiar with these contours. I theorize that the subversive performances of *urtiin duu* gathered new nationalist meanings associated with Mongolian nationalism during the 1960s, not only because they had already been reframed and essentialized as indices of Mongolia’s unique national character (which undoubtedly contributed to this process), but also because of their ability to covertly signify objects key to the formation of a pan-Mongolian national identity—one that could potentially resist Soviet influence and unify Mongolians across China and Russia. I further theorize that singers’ narrations of myths associated with *urtiin duu* practice began to highlight the capacity of melodies to communicate secret messages, as it had become important for Mongolians to elude authorities and secretly maintain identities that conflicted with the official version of reality sponsored by the Communist Party.

**Pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary Eras**

The collapse of the Manchu Qing dynasty in 1911 signaled a period of upheaval among the Mongolian people, who scrambled to maintain their recently found independence as a theocratic state. Recognizing the threat China posed, they eventually sought refuge under the Soviet umbrella and sacrificed a relative amount of sovereignty for what they assumed to be a basic level of independence. A long-standing, historical fear of Chinese colonization fed the eagerness with which Mongolians sought to align themselves with the Russians:

The most pressing danger was not the “colonial” control of their country by a few foreigners representing a foreign government but actual colonizing of the best part of their land by Chinese settlers; not subjection, but
displacement, not the fate of India, but the fate of the American Indian.  

(Lattimore 1955: 39)

The Russians, meanwhile, focused on Mongolia’s utility as a buffer region against China, and happily accepted an alliance: “Like other small states at the periphery of large empires, Mongolia’s survival has depended on giving large powers a stake in its continuing independence. In this regard, Mongolia was fortunate in that its own nationalist ambitions after 1921 overlapped with the imperial interests of the USSR” (Ginsburg 1999: 248).

By 1924, Mongolia was proclaimed as the “Mongolian People’s Republic” (MPR), an independent communist state allied with, and heavily dependent on, Soviet military assistance and influence. Though the relationship between the two was depicted as “fraternal”—with the USSR described as an ‘elder’ brother—Mongolia was “clearly a junior partner at best” (Boikova 1999: 107). The USSR helped draft Mongolia’s first constitution, recognizing the MPR as the only legitimate government of Outer Mongolia, and by 1929 they had established an isolated economic trade alliance with Mongolia and themselves. At that time, Mongolian authorities of the communist regime began an aggressive campaign of indoctrination in Mongolia that included extensive violence, persecuting those individuals who posed any kind of political threat, and promoting those individuals who were loyal to the communist agenda to positions of significant power within the country’s sole ruling party, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (MPRP). With increasing urbanization, the creation of an industrial work force, and the institution of “merit-based performance criteria,” individuals were rapidly
integrated into the new regime and quickly rose to positions of power (Ginsburg 1999: 258).

In order to extend the ideological influence of the Communist Party during the early years of the revolutionary era, these Mongolian authorities established “enlightenment gers” (gegeerliin ger), also known as “red gers” (ulaan ger), throughout urban and rural areas. Their purpose was to spread communist propaganda among the population and remove all feudal and religious influences from any kind of creative or performative endeavor. Embarking upon a “radical bowdlerization program to assimilate and refashion the existing culture,” Soviet authorities explicitly targeted musical practices (Pegg 2001e: 253). The pre-revolutionary themes of urtiin duu and other musical practices—including all associations with animism, Buddhism, and Chinggis Khan—were expressly forbidden. Instead, new songs with patriotic themes were composed and disseminated among the population. Soldiers were trained in military contexts on specific instruments and learned nationalistic songs such as “The Mongolian People’s Republic” and “Lenin Loves Children.” Certain new musical practices, including military-style marches that incorporated the use of trumpets and drums, were introduced to the public and in schools, while other indigenous instruments were destroyed. Those that survived were standardized and reoriented according to the European tuning system.

Over the course of the 1920s, the communist regime greatly expanded its authority over Mongolian social policy, including the development of over sixteen ulaan ger by 1929, as well as successfully establishing a non-capitalist economy in
the country. Nonetheless, the MPRP still found their power over the rural population unsteady at best. The feudal aristocracy and Buddhist church still maintained significant ideological control, as they had for almost three centuries during the Manchu Qing era. In order to effectively force people to comply with the regulations of the new communist government, the MPRP and its head, Marshall Choibalsang, instigated violent purges throughout rural areas. During this time, anyone or anything that posed a threat to the new authority was massacred or destroyed:

The Mongolian and Soviet secret police (NKVD) troops went among the herders, entering their homes and arresting those they believed to be associated with the former aristocrats or Buddhist leadership and destroying Buddhist and other spiritual paraphernalia. One musician from Arkhangai says that old herders told him that fiddles were also destroyed, saying, “the soldiers seized their fiddles, took them outside of the ger and burned them along with the Buddhist scriptures.”

(Marsh 2002: 62)

Musicians and musical practices underwent forceful persecution during this time. “Performance practices were eliminated or forcibly changed,” and performers “were reduced to living in holes in the ground and begging” (Pegg 1995: 77-78). It is estimated that over one hundred thousand people—including musicians, Buddhist lamas, shamans, and anyone assumed to be anti-communist—perished in the purges (Sandag and Kendall 2000). As Dad’suren explained to me, “religion was considered to be a drug in the communist period and Marx said so. Marx’s book said so. We were taught that religion was empty and false, there was neither Buddha nor devil, and there were no ghosts.”
The aggressive campaign eventually came to a close in the late 1940s, leaving behind a trail of blood and terror that discouraged any person from defying the new government. A palpable sense of fear was still present among older nomads when I traveled among the Mongolian countryside some eighty years after the purges had come to pass, with some musicians recalling these events and refusing to share their songs for fear of retribution from local authorities. Haslund-Christensen, a folklorist who visited Mongolia in the 1930s and 1940s, paints a vivid picture of the situation facing both Outer and Inner Mongolian musicians during this time:

[W]ith some few exceptions the singers and musicians of the old era had long since fled to remote valleys . . . . Upon my asking where these exceptions might be found, who had not fled to remote places of hiding, I finally received the melancholy reply that they were incarcerated in the prison of the town for having been too deeply rooted in the past to be able to understand the message of the new era.

(Haslund-Christensen 1943: 28)

Thus, authorities essentially wiped out older musicians and practices, and were in a position to promote songs that explicitly supported the Party. The “Song of Future Leninists,” for example, begins as follows: “With the melody of the trumpet and the drum, with the echo of calls and slogans, with the wings of red kerchiefs, our march progresses. We are today’s pioneers, we are future Leninists, we will learn all good things from Lenin, we will build a bright future with Lenin” (Pegg 2001e: 278). During this time, musicians who refused to promote the communist agenda were imprisoned, but those musicians who sang ideologically inspired songs were heavily rewarded. In one example, a musician known as Luwsan khuurch (Luwsan the fiddler) composed songs in praise of the Party and spread them among the
population, and was consequently rewarded by being appointed director of the first music and drama theater established in Mongolia in 1922 (Marsh 2002: 65).

Mongolian authorities were clearly inspired by ideologies associated with modernist reforms. Based on evolutionist ideas that societies progress from primitive to sophisticated (read: superior) as they “civilize,” this ideology promoted the idea that development and modernization were equivalent to social advancement. According to these principles, societal changes “would occur in one direction, from the primitive to the advanced, towards a utopian goal . . . [such that] economic and cultural development in a less-developed nation would naturally lead its people to assimilate the more progressive traits and lifestyles of the more developed and advanced nation with which it has contact” (Marsh 2002: 118). In Mongolia, Soviet models were imposed on creative practices under the guise of necessary cultural reforms important to the cultivation and advancement of Mongolian society.

By the 1930s, Choibalsang, a close ally of Stalin, dictated that Mongolian teachers be sent to the Soviet Union for Russian language training. Additionally, the Russians began sending educational materials to Mongolia, indoctrinating young children with Marxist-Leninist theories (Boikova 1999: 115). By 1940, with the purges still occurring, the Second People’s Republic was established and Mongolia’s second constitution drafted. During this time, a new group of Mongolians came into power, largely because the older leaders had perished in Choibalsang’s violent campaign. These individuals were typically urban intellectuals who had been professionally trained in the Soviet Union and espoused communist values. They
had spent so much time training in Russia that they easily “integrated into Russian patterns of life . . . [they] ate Russian food, spoke Russian, and sometimes lived with Russians” (Ginsburg 1999: 260). Peter Marsh argues that these urban intellectuals were early cosmopolitans who helped introduce and establish modernist-socialist-cosmopolitan values throughout Mongolia:

[M]any of the early Mongolian cosmopolitans . . . viewed Mongolian cultural development as having been long hindered by unprogressive traditions and a self-serving aristocracy. As they rose to positions of power within the party and government, they saw themselves less as protectors of the ancient cultural heritage than as agents of cultural modernization and change . . . [M]any of these cosmopolitans placed emphasis on the development of “new culture” (shine soyol), including the arts . . . that would be brought about through both ‘reviving’ the essential Mongolian traditions lost as a result of centuries of feudalism and aristocracy, and then “developing” them in accordance with the contemporary examples of Soviet and socialist . . . nations. This is the process by which these Mongolians constructed a distinctly cosmopolitan national culture.

(Marsh 2002: 12)

This new class of cosmopolitans utilized strategies of modernist reformism to reframe indigenous creative practices as part of an emerging Mongolian national identity, while simultaneously modifying them according to cosmopolitan values.

In Mongolia, such cultural reforms had to strike a careful ideological balance between the influence of Soviet power with the notion of Mongolian national independence. In order to avoid threatening Soviet imperialism, the emergent Mongolian nationalism had to frame Mongolia as a distinctive nation that was nonetheless economically and ideologically reliant on the Soviet Union. Cosmopolitan values based on evolutionist theories helped frame this ideology, for it depicted the unique but backwards Mongolians as a potential equal partner with the Soviets, if only they relied on Soviet domination to help them modernize and progress. The unavoidable tension inherent in “Mongolia the nation” as the
dependent younger brother to the Soviets, versus “Mongolia the nation” as a wholly independent sovereign power, would play out in the 1960s. In the meantime, authorities could moderate the necessary praise of Mongolian distinctiveness by emphasizing the need to “develop” their indigenous practices according to an ideology that prized complexity and sophistication and conveniently positioned Mongolia as entirely reliant on its more-civilized, “elder” Soviet sibling.

In Mongolia’s Second People’s Republic, these reforms led to the establishment of the rhetorical constructions “modern” (orchim üyein) and “traditional” (ulaamjilal or ugsaatny) in relation to musical performance, identifying certain indigenous musical practices, songs and instruments, as objects “separate from everyday life,” and “needing to be ‘developed’” (Marsh 2002: 14, 147-8). For example, the Mongolian Academy of Sciences sponsored expeditions to rural areas to conduct folkloric collection of songs and the term ardiin (folk) was adapted to describe musical practices in pre-revolutionary Mongolia. At the same time, the Party organized small, semi-professional orchestras comprised of indigenous instruments that began performing modern (orchim üyein) European classical works. In 1941, the State Music and Drama Theater was founded in the capital city and a committee “specifically set out the theater’s ideological tasks, bringing it in line with the socialist programs of the state” (Pegg 2001e: 254). These included reforms that emphasized classical music-making on European instruments. Throughout the twentieth century, such drastic music reforms were common across the Soviet sphere of influence:

Soviet culture policy with respect to traditional music was identical for all the Central Asian republics. The main problem in culture policy was the
relation of traditional music and the music of contemporary European-style composers. The State cultural leadership announced that the principal priority in the development of musical culture was to be the assimilation of so-called European professional music. In general, this priority was preserved right down to the beginning of the 1990s, when the Soviet Union collapsed. Only after this cleansing could traditional music be published in collections of musical folklore and performed in public concerts, on the radio, and so on. And traditional music was performed not only in ordinary concerts, but also at special ideological meetings and Party-sponsored concerts.

(Djumaev 1993: 43, 45)

Nationalist sentiments were simultaneously encouraged and developed through the efforts of composers such as L. Mördorj, who set revolutionary poetry to musical accompaniment and repeatedly referred to particularly beloved landscapes in conjunction with the idea of the Mongolian nation (Marsh 2002: 84). These songs were performed at staged competitions framed as patriotic gatherings in support of the Party, where trophies were awarded to the best singers according to values determined by the communist authorities and academics in positions of power. New song texts helped transform previous emotional associations of nutag (homeland) into a kind of landscape-based national unity. For example, a song known as Shivee Hiagt (Fortress Kyahta) was composed for performance at musical rallies. Deemed "the first song of the modern generation," the lyrics clearly point to famous landmarks throughout Mongolia with ideas of the Party and the unity of the Mongolian people: “Between the Altai and Hyangan, throughout the homeland, in the valleys of the sacred Kerulen and golden Selenge rivers, beloved songs about our renowned Party, are being created freely by our people with one accord” (Ibid.: 279-80). As described in chapter one, the idea of nutag has an important place among mobile pastoral communities. Seen as the homeland that provides nourishment for
the kind of subsistence-based living of mobile pastoralists, the concept is also tied to nostalgic feelings associated with favorite landscapes, where a person’s ancestral spirits and ezen reside. These new musical gatherings removed urtiin duu from outdoor contexts, but still allowed people to retain their strong emotional ties to particular landscapes through song, reframing them in new settings according to nationalist sentiments.

Not only were songs reframed this way, but the imagery and myths associated with them were re-imagined in new song contexts at political rallies. The well-known tale of Kookhoo Namjil, for example, recounts a legendary flying horse whose hairs were used to string the original morin khuur. In the following song example, the image of the mythical flying horse is reinterpreted as “flying toward Communism”: “We, who all became owners in such a fine homeland, developed our motherland and are all living a rich life. We horse-riding people, holding lasso-poles, made clear on the emblem of our state. Let’s leap with our winged mounts toward the bright sun of communism” (Pegg 2001e: 260). Notice that images of certain herding activities essential to the pastoral lifestyle of rural Mongolians, including horseback riding and lasso-swinging, were also creatively reinterpreted in the above song as emblems of the state.

During the Second People’s Republic, Party-sponsored musical gatherings also began to promote particular indigenous musical instruments and styles as national, while banning alternative performance styles, in conjunction with state efforts to consolidate a singular Mongolian national identity as Tov Khalkha. During this time, the Tov Khalkha style of urtiin duu was chosen and promoted as the
appropriate Mongolian “national style.” *Urtiiin duu* sung almost exclusively in this clan’s musical dialect were also performed to melodies that had been re-tuned according to the European classical system. All of these efforts were central to the Party’s creation of an ethnically homogenous Mongolian state predominantly identified as *Khalkha*. Other styles of *urtiiin duu*, including the *Dorbet*, *Dariganga*, and *Borjigin* styles, were prohibited. Additionally, the *morin khuur* was promoted to the level of “national instrument” and was standardized through the addition of *f*-holes in imitation of the Western violin (Marsh 2002: 91-92). At patriotic rallies, singers of various clans were forced to sing in the *Tov Khalkha urtiin duu* style. Furthermore, their songs had to stick to patriotic themes and all spiritual associations and lyrics were removed from performance. As long as they followed these rules, they were amply awarded with prized titles such as “Labor Hero” and “Century’s Long Song Singer.” These efforts resulted in a fundamental transformation of meanings associated with *urtiiin duu*. While the melodies still retained their previous meaningful associations with particular landscapes, they came to further signify Party loyalty and values associated with modernist reforms.

**The Third People’s Republic**

In the 1960s, the growing nationalist sentiment associated with *urtiiin duu* was carefully monitored by the government’s cultural administration, who had to ensure that Mongolians did not assert their autonomy to the point that they would resist Soviet influence. The Mongolian-Soviet tension had formed a rather delicate balance over the course of the socialist era, and as Sino-Soviet relations soured with
the advent of the cold war, the Soviet Union had a vested interest in keeping
Mongolia her staunch ally (Boldbaatar 1999: 244).

In 1960, Mongolian authorities began a massive cultural campaign known as the “Cultural Leap Forward” program, coinciding with Mongolia’s attainment of “the historic state of socialism,” forty years after the People’s Revoution, “when private ownership of capital . . . was eliminated in favor of either state or collective ownership” (Marsh 2009: 73). Inspired by the Cultural Revolution of the People’s Republic of China to the south, Mongolian authorities “took the message of the new China to the whole country [Mongolia] and local musicians were incorporated into a state union structure” (Pegg 2001: 1006). At this time, all herds, livestock, and private property were collectivized and most nomads were placed in collective farms (negdel). As Dad’suren described to me of this time,

I had only seventy-five heads of livestock then. A household was allowed to have up to seventy-five heads of livestock and fifteen heads of livestock per family member under the laws. I had ten children, so my family had twelve members. I lived in the Soum Center then. Livestock exceeding the limit of fifteen heads of livestock per family member was confiscated and given to the cooperative. A rural herder’s family was not allowed to have more than seventy-five animals. Those few livestock animals had to provide the livelihood of herders and their families.

In order to gain popular approval for this national collectivization effort, communist authorities instigated massive cultural reforms throughout urban and rural Mongolia. This included an extensive escalation in professional musical practices. During this time, the number of rural cultural centers, music buildings, schools, and concert halls where Party rallies were held increased dramatically, and the terms “professional” (mergejliin) or “amateur” (sain duryn) came into increasing use to describe musicians and musical practices. Newly established conservatories
based in Ulaanbaatar and modeled after Russian and European counterparts began disseminating musical reforms among the population. Aspiring musicians trained at such institutions would often receive positions of pay in rural cultural centers, thereby influencing amateur practices in nomadic communities and continuing the spread of Europeanized instruments and playing techniques (Marsh 2002: 76-77). Other Mongolian musicians who had trained in Russia began forming ensembles comprised of Western European instruments. Between 1963 and 1969, various works by Tchaikovsky, Dargomizhsky, Puccini, and Rachmaninov, among others, were routinely performed by Mongolians at the State Dance and Opera Theater in Ulaanbaatar (Ibid.: 79-80).

During this time, national and classical ensembles were separated from one another, though cultural administrators placed more attention and value on European-style classical performances. National ensembles, such as the Folksong and Dance Ensemble described above, were considered professional folk ensembles. Though not considered as important as European ensembles, they were still clearly established according to European principles. For example, string quartets were established, whose instrumentation comprised morin khuurs as well as the new ikh khuur (or “large” fiddle), created in the image of the contrabass violin. Other smaller ensembles were also modeled after the classical European chamber ensemble, but incorporated standardized indigenous Mongolian instruments including the shanz, khuuchir, morin khuur, limbe, yoochin, contrabass, drum and accordion. Notably, the inclusion of Western instruments, such as the trumpet or clarinet, was thought to
“further enrich and strengthen the sound of the orchestra” (Ibid.: 102). According to Peter Marsh,

[T]he character of the new national music culture of Mongolia had achieved a fundamental break with the pre-Revolutionary musical world. The emphasis of the new musical culture focused upon professionalism, centralization, and standardization within the framework of the European classical musical ideas and aesthetics. The look and sound of a typical concert of national “folk” music in the mid-1970s, for example, probably bore a greater resemblance to a typical performance of a contemporary European-styled symphony orchestra than to a typical traditional performance of a Mongolian herder, sitting in his ger in the countryside. These changes reflected the broader cultural transformation that was occurring within Mongolian society of the Third People's Republic. The professional arts of this period bore little resemblance to the traditional arts of the pre-Revolutionary era. But neither were they merely “Soviet,” implying that they were imposed on the Mongolians. Instead, they represented a new cosmopolitan influence.

(Marsh 2002: 111)

Indeed, by the middle of the Third People’s Republic, few traces of pre-Revolutionary musical activities in Mongolia had survived the sweeping reforms.

Norovbanzad and the Increasing Professionalization of Urtiin Duu

Namjilyyn Norovbanzad, Mongolia’s most famous urtiin duu concert singer of the twentieth century, became a national hero and icon in her own right during Mongolia’s communist era, as her singing career paralleled the professionalization and standardization of musical practices during this time. By the time she was a young woman, Norovbanzad’s musical talents were recognized by authorities, and she was increasingly promoted and paid for the concerts she gave, eventually becoming a professional urtiin duu singer, as she describes:

In 1948 I began to perform at concerts and act at the Cultural Palace in Mandalgobi city . . . . As a result I became a professional artist. In 1957 . . . I was asked to join a Mongolian group of actors and participate in a Youth Festival to be held in France. When I returned home, I was told that I had
I have been chosen as a member of the National Central Theater’s troupe to be sent to China . . . . I performed as a soloist with the [State Folk and Dance] Ensemble from the fall of 1957 to 1988. During those years I went on tour to . . . most of the former Soviet Union countries, including Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Latvia and Central Asia, as well as Denmark, France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Germany, Bulgaria, Rumania, Poland, Hungary, Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh, and China. I have also given seven performances in Japan . . . . In order to pass down Urtyn duu to younger generations, I have organized competitions, set up curriculums and training schools and taught Urtyn duu at the Department of Singing in the National Arts University for over ten years.¹

(Norovbanzad 1993)

Not only did Norovbanzad's career correspond with the increasing professionalization of indigenous Mongolian musical practices, she was also afforded ample international exposure due to her various performances abroad. By 1957, she was being paid for her performances as an urtiin duu singer. It was not long before she was hired to perform urtiin duu in many nations across the world, helping her develop an international awareness and cosmopolitan inclination. After establishing herself, she was eventually hired as a professor of urtiin duu at the National Arts University, and was the first to hold this post. She was amply rewarded for her musical loyalty to the Party, not only monetarily, but through her appointment as a congresswoman from 1961-1965 (Norovbanzad 1993).

Dad’suren and Norovbanzad provide an interesting point of comparison, because their different singing styles are an example of the kind of musical changes urtiin duu underwent as it became professionalized during the Third People’s Republic. Norovbanzad was trained by Dad’suren, an amateur, rural musician. She probably would never have gotten her start nor become Mongolia’s first professional urtiin duu singer had this amateur not imparted to her his extensive

¹ Note that this translation uses an alternate form of spelling for urtiin duu—Urtyn Duu.
knowledge of songs and singing technique. Nonetheless, certain aspects of her singing style and presentation would differ dramatically from Dad’suren’s, especially towards the end of Norovbanzad’s career, when she had come to adopt the cultural reforms imposed on urtiin duu performance over the course of the communist era.

Both Norovbandad and Dad’suren were both from Deren Soum, in Dunggovi province, and Norovbanzad was trained by Dad’suren in the 1940s and 1950s, just as musical practices were professionalized according to socialist cultural policies. Not only did venue and context differ between the two performers—with Norovbanzad performing primarily in concert halls and international music festivals, and Dad’suren performing in herding contexts and in domestic nair festivals—but the style of presentation varied as well. Norovbanzad was presented in an extremely stylized manner, wearing elaborate costumes associated with twelfth- and thirteenth-century Mongolia, during the height of the state’s imperial power. Dad’suren, on the other hand, performed in pastoral contexts and was never much rewarded, but neither was he subject to such stylized performances or overt censorship. He continued to sing at home, during the breeding season for the benefit of his animals, as well as for his own personal enjoyment while herding or in domestic nair festivals.

Unlike the informal del, or traditional robe, worn by Dad’suren during impromptu urtiin duu performances in rural settings, Norovbanzad began wearing stylized costumes at almost every national event and concert setting in which she performed. These costumes are still worn in elaborate, showy settings, particularly
when urtiin duu is performed at the yearly induction ceremony marking the country’s national Naadam competition:

The performance of the fiddle and long song are usually overshadowed by or subsumed into the [imperial] imagery that accompanies the Naadam ceremonies . . . . There were always men dressed in 13th century army regalia . . . . Sometimes there was even a person dressed like Chinggis Khan . . . [while] the long song singers typically wear stylized army uniforms or costumes.

(Marsh 2002: 215-216)

Norovbanzad's performances were framed according to nationalist sentiments, just as they continually are in present-day, nationalistic performances. These costumes are iconic of an ancient nomadic past and are meant to be dramatically evocative. Typically, they appear as an older form of the nomadic del, complete with an elaborate, antiquated headdress (worn by Mongolian princesses almost a millennium ago) made from the long, arched horns of the wild Altai goat, as depicted below:

Figure 3.1

Reprinted from:
http://www.mongoliatourism.gov.mn/about-mongolia/
It is noteworthy that the above picture of Norovbanzad is now the icon portraying Mongolia’s “Culture” section in the Official Tourism Website of Mongolia, and one must click on this picture to access the official, government-sponsored interpretation of the definition of “Mongolian culture.”

In their different contexts, the musical performances of both Norovbanzad and Dad’suren vary in subtle ways. Upon comparison, the respective melodic contours of their songs remain relatively static, though their singing techniques differ. Although Norovbanzad uses the vocal yodeling (shurankhai) common to most urtiin duu singers, she also incorporates the kind of vibrato found in Western operatic and Broadway contexts. This type of vibrato is noticeably absent from Dad’suren’s singing. Additionally, having been required to perform exclusively in the Tov Khalkha style, Norovbanzad’s Borjigin urtiin duu began to exhibit Tov Khalkha qualities, including loud dynamics with little variation, as well as a prolonged form of delivery characteristic of stage performances. This could also have been a result, in part, of the constant vocal projection required of her in large concert halls, or the single dynamic level afforded her in microphone amplification, which may have caused her to downplay dynamic nuances in delivery. However, these variations were largely due to Norovbanzad’s adoption of the Tov Khalkha singing style, which (as described in chapter one) emphasizes loud dynamics and incorporates the use of a declamatory vocal delivery.

A good comparison between Dad’suren’s and Norovbanzad’s singing styles can be heard through examining their versions of the urtiin duu, Uyakhan Zambuutiviin Nar (The sun shines around the earth). Dad'suren's performance has
much more intricacy in his melodic contour, as well as more dynamic control.

Furthermore, Norovbanzad’s ascents are not nearly as step-wise as Dad’suren’s, probably the result of her having been influenced by the plateau-like rises of the Tov Khalkha urtiin duu she was required to perform for decades.

In the following speech, Norovbanzad eloquently depicts ideologies associated with modernist reforms that she had clearly internalized over the course of her performance career, proclaiming the genre’s supposed primordial origin as well as its complexity as a justification of its musical value:

Mongolian folk music . . . dates back to ancient times. Historical documents indicate that the form of Mongolian folk music was fixed during the Hun era, around 100 B.C. . . . Scholars are divided on the origin of the word Urtyn duu, which translates from Mongolian as “long song.” Some believe that the name Urtyn duu refers to the fact that the songs had been sung for many centuries without changing their style, rhythms, or tunes . . . . Urtyn duu forms a unique part of the world’s musical culture . . . [It] describes the beautiful countryside of the motherland, Mongolia . . . . Solemn [aizam] Urtyn duu is the perfect example of the artistic excellence of Urtyn duu in general . . . the beautifully intricate lyrics contain many syllables and are artistically composed . . . . Customarily, solemn Urtyn duu is performed before Naadam, the national sports festival . . . . Urtyn duu, and particularly solemn Urtyn duu, require a powerful voice and technical skill. Classical Mongolian folk music has come to the attention of the world at large and is regarded as one of the world’s greatest art forms.

(Norovbanzad 1993)

In the above speech, given while receiving the “Fukouka Asian Culture Prize Award” in Japan in 1993, a couple of years after Mongolia’s transition away from communism and to a parliamentary democracy, Norovbanzad demonstrates the way modernist-cosmopolitan values had permeated her thinking by essentializing the origin of urtiin duu as ancient and unchanging while still arguing the genre’s progressiveness in terms of the complexity of the songs. Her use of the phrase “artistic excellence,” especially while arguing the technicality, intricacy, and skill
involved in performing the songs, reveals the way she equates complexity with value and the level to which she had internalized urtiin duu performance as an art object, separate from everyday life. This correlates to the new contexts in which she performed, which were no longer nomadic yurts but large, staged gatherings. Furthermore, her depiction of urtiin duu as a description of the "motherland," a patriotic term introduced during the period of cultural reform, indicates that she had come to indexically associate urtiin duu performances with ideas of Mongolian nationalism (Bulag 1998: 175). This is not only true for Norovbanzad but took place across Mongolian society, through the repeated performance of urtiin duu at nationalist gatherings and sporting competitions such as Naadam, which she also describes. Her adoption of the term "classical folk music" to describe urtiin duu is most telling, demonstrating the degree to which European classical values had come to inform her thinking, to the point that the term "classical" is used as the ultimate justification of musical value. The classical Mongolian composer N. Jantsannorov made a similar point in an interview I conducted with him in 2002, describing urtiin duu as "classical music" and justifying his use of the term by detailing the complexity of the genre.

The myth of urtiin duu's ancient origin represented in Norovbanzad's words has become a widely promulgated nationalist discourse throughout Mongolia. The creation of such a discourse is not unique to Mongolia, but a general phenomenon witnessed in many socialist states of the twentieth century, where authorities attempted to construct and impose a kind of national consciousness (Buchanan 2006; Djumaev 1993; Levin 1996). In Mongolia's case, urtiin duu was reframed as an
exceptional “folk art” unique to the Mongolian people, and had thus become an
index of the Mongolian nation itself. Other international cosmopolitan institutions
played a role in the dissemination of this kind of nationalist discourse. For example,
UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) declared
urtiiin duu to be one of the world’s “intangible human cultural treasures” in 2005,
simultaneously asserting that urtiin duu “is widely believed to have originated 2000
years ago” (UNESCO 2005).

Yet the claim of urtiin duu’s “ancientness” is largely a nationalist construction
and has never been substantiated by concrete evidence. For example, though
Norovbanzad argues urtiin duu originated in 100 B.C., it was only in the 1960s that
the genre now known as urtiin duu was given the name “urtiiin” (or “long”) for
classification purposes, so as to differentiate it from bogin duu, or short songs (Pegg 2001e: 259). Writing in the 1930s, for example, Ernst Emsheimer (having been
informed by Haslund-Christiansen’s fieldwork) refers to what must have been urtiin
duu by the term aizam, the same term used for the extended urtiin duu typical of
Khalkha singers. Notably, he does not refer to the songs as “urtiiin,” since this term
was not yet in use: “[a]s H. Haslund-Christensen was informed by a Khalkha Mongol
… aizam duun … [are] songs that according to Mongolian tradition date back to
the time of Chinggis Khan, and that for the most part have historical import, as for
example tales of notable heroic deeds, or praises of olden times” (Emsheimer 1943: 72). Though he still refers to the myth of urtiin duu’s (or as he writes, aizam duun’s)
origin in Chinggis’ time, it is difficult to find other evidence of this claim.
Norovbanzad also points to the use of music during Chinggis Khan’s court to prove the “ancient” roots of urtiin duu, as does UNESCO: “urtiin duu has been recorded in literary works since the 13th century” (UNESCO 2005). Yet documentation of the music made in noble Mongolian courts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, found in the writings of Marco Polo when he visited Kublai Khan’s court, do not show explicit evidence of urtiin duu practice (Harris 2008). Only wartime music is described, and nothing resembling urtiin duu is ever mentioned. One urtiin duu, known as Ertnii Saikhan, continues to be sung in the present day and is widely proclaimed among Mongolian musicians as having originated in Chinggis Khan’s court, but there is no explicit evidence to substantiate the idea that these songs were sung in the style of urtiin duu eight hundred years ago. Though Norovbanzad argues that “The classical language is used in Urtyn duu . . . Thus, Urtyn duu was in existence when both orthodox and colloquial Mongolian were combined” (Norovbanzad 1993), scholars can only assert that urtiin duu were sung during the pre-revolutionary era, before Mongolians adopted Cyrillic script in the 1940s and changed the pronunciation of colloquial words accordingly. Urtiin duu have certainly existed in this area for quite some time; one urtiin duu known as Ovgon Shuvuu was documented by a Russian writer, Robinsky, in 1870 (Ibid.). Yet there is scant evidence of any kind of urtiin duu performance prior to this date.²

Nonetheless, the myth of urtiin duu's ancient origin has contributed to the adoption of the performance practice as a mark of national distinction. One

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² One counter-claim to this argument can be found in the widespread distribution of music genres similar to urtiin duu, indicating that the genre (or something like it) could have spread across central Asia and eastern Europe around the time of Chinggis Khan’s empire, in the thirteenth century.
professional *urtiin duu* singer explained that he performs internationally because he “want[s] to introduce our traditional culture to the world,” describing how “every country has its own specialty, like Italy has its classical art, France has its choir, Japan has samurai dance and China has the music ensemble and flute,” and Mongolia has *urtiin duu* (Lkhagvasuren 2008). Walking on the street in Mandalgovi in Dundgovi province in 2006, I asked one Mongolian I met whether or not he knew any *urtiin duu*. His reply was, “of course I know them! They’re our nation’s song.” When I asked him to sing one, he said, “well I know them, but I don’t know how to sing them.” Dad’suren, a self-described nationalist, has mentioned his hopes that *urtiin duu*, a “wonderful national art,” will “one day conquer the world” and prove Mongolia’s worth as a unique nation on a global scale.

**A Rising Mongolian Nationalism**

Not everyone was pleased with the reforms characterizing indigenous musical practices during the Third People’s Republic. Badraa, a Mongolian scholar trained in Russia, published several papers from 1966-68 in which he lamented the loss of certain pre-revolutionary musical abilities, including the improvisational skills performers possessed before the introduction of written musical notation (Badraa 1998). In one article, entitled “The Mongolian Folk Long Song,” Badraa criticized the Party for not paying enough attention to pre-revolutionary *urtiin duu* styles. He also criticized staged performances as “music with little feeling,” precisely because the artists were being compensated, monetarily, for musical endeavors that had so recently been performed and received as inherent to mobile pastoral life. As
a direct result of these writings, Badraa was accused of “non-Marxist minded activities” and dismissed from his job (Marsh 2002: 155-56).

Supporters of a more indigenous and less Soviet-influenced musical style, such as Badraa, were condemned for supporting a subversive kind of nationalism that defended Mongolian independence against Soviet influence and threatened communist control. It was during this time that the delicate balance between an independent versus dependent Mongolian nationalism was disrupted, and Mongolian intellectuals began to speak out against the Soviet sphere of influence.

Signs of rebellion began to spring up all over Mongolia. Perhaps most notable was the Chinggis Khan memorial incident of 1962, fueled by a strong sense of independence and national consciousness emerging among intellectuals in the population (Boldbaatar 1999). When the question arose regarding how to celebrate Chinggis Khan’s eight-hundreth anniversary in the early 1960s, several leaders embarked upon a project to erect a monument to Chinggis Khan in his supposed birthplace in Dadal Soum, northern Mongolia. Though several arguments had been waged among authorities in the political community over whether to valorize Chinggis’s conquests or deplore his barbarism, a subversive group of intellectuals decided to proclaim Chinggis’ valor in an effort to instigate a national movement that supported a kind of Mongolian independence separate from Soviet influence. These intellectuals succeeded in erecting a statue of Chinggis Khan in June 1962; during the opening ceremony, they openly criticized communist scholars for their negative treatment of Chinggis, and praised their lost hero as the creator of the first Mongolian nation:
The Chinggis monument was the first public acknowledgement of the role Chinggis had played in creating the Mongol state. Not only did it express the Mongols’ pride in their long history of nationhood and national independence, but it quickly became a symbol of the revival of Mongolian national consciousness.

(Boldbaatar 1999: 243)

The individuals involved in the uprising were dealt with harshly. Authorities demanded that the organizers of Chinggis’ anniversary issue statements condemning their own actions. Though authorities left the monument intact, several supporters of the movement were brought into custody for questioning and eventually fired from their positions within the Party. Government officials were concerned that the growing Mongolian nationalism was fundamentally incompatible with Soviet internationalism and the MPRP’s political monopoly and they embarked upon an aggressive campaign to destroy the movement. Although the nationalist movement was effectively demolished after the construction of the Chinggis Khan statue, it nonetheless “continued to be a factor of Mongolian life,” and the Chinggis Khan monument incident “undoubtedly played a crucial role in keeping Mongolian nationalism alive, so that it could express itself yet again in the tumultuous events surrounding the Mongolian nationalist revival some thirty years later ” (Boldbaatar 1999: 245).

_Urtiin Duu as Performative Resistance_

During the 1960s, _urtiin duu_ gathered new nationalist meanings associated with Mongolian independence. Though many aspects of _urtiin duu_ practice had been banned by authorities since the First People’s Republic, certain songs and melodies continued to be practiced covertly in the domestic sphere, particularly during _nair_
celebrations, such as those described in chapter one. Aspects of the urtiin duu that could escape detection, including the melodic signification of landscapes that fell outside political boundaries, continued to be performed without authorities noticing that any kind of subversive activity was occurring. Though the melodic signification of landscape in urtiin duu practice had helped promote nationalist ideologies valorizing Mongolia as the national motherland, it was also a valuable tool for concealing subversive identities at odds with those sanctioned by the government.

During this time, Borjigin urtiin duu were prohibited but covertly maintained in domestic nair festivals. According to Dad’suren, these festivals were arranged in secret among close family members. The urtiin duu melodies performed were of the Borjigin musical dialect. Their contours referenced homelands in the Khentii region associated with Chinggis Khan, covertly signifying the river found in Chinggis Khan’s homeland without overtly referring to him.

Other sociocultural groups, including the Bait Mongols, also resisted the communist regime through the performance of urtiin duu that referred to their homeland in the Altai mountains (Pegg 2001e: 16). The Torgut Mongols secretly performed an urtiin duu signifying their original homeland in Hovog Sair, and their biy dances used movements that mimeterically evoked the topography of mountains in Xinjiang (Ibid.: 20). Other forms of performative resistance were also practiced during this time. Urtiin duu lyrics valorizing Chinggis Khan could be changed to escape detection. Tumen Ekh (The First of Ten Thousan) could be performed by eliminating Chinggis’ name and explaining that the song was about a very fast horse (Ibid.: 23). Additionally, as a Tibetan Buddhist Mongolian monk by
the name of Batpuro informed me in 2002, the song Gingoo continued to be performed during training for horse races, though the words of the song are in Sanskrit and praise Tibetan Buddhist deities.

According to Dad’suren, that urtiin duu melodies have always had the ability to convey secret meanings has long been attributed to the performance practice. Myths surrounding these songs reveal that their melodic contours can convey secret messages. Though these myths suggest that urtiin duu have always had this role, I theorize that such myths became more prevalent during the socialist era, when covert signification became essential to the resistance effort. One such myth, described to me by Tsendpuro, my flute teacher from Mandalgoi, Dundgovi aimag, describes how urtiin duu were used during Chinggis Khan’s time. Tsendpuro related that there once lived an honorable man who had been unjustly imprisoned by another tribe. His devoted wife discovered the location of his imprisonment and traveled there on horseback, hoping to meet with her husband. When she reached the camp, she convinced the jail guards to let her see him. In her cloak, she brought her husband a piece of cheese, explaining to the guards that she was worried her husband was hungry. The guards allowed the wife to give her husband the cheese. Once her husband had received her package, the wife sang an urtiin duu to him that conveyed a secret message: inside the cheese she had hidden arrows. Her husband heard the urtiin duu and, upon understanding her message, found the arrows buried in the cheese and was able to escape.

Another myth, described by Dad’suren, explains the secret messages communicated in the urtiin duu, Hartsag. Hartsag, Dad’suren explains, was a young
man who had fallen in love with a poor but beautiful girl named Sarangoo. Although Sarangoo was secretly in love with Harstag, she was betrothed to a local prince, who hated Harstag for his strength. On the night of the nair to celebrate Sarangoo’s union with the prince, Harstag showed up and improvised an urtiin duu for Sarangoo, depicting his love for her. The prince, not being versed in urtiin duu, could not understand the message. Sarangoo, however, had understood, and she sang an urtiin duu back to him that communicated her love for him. Through song, the two communicated the details of how and when they would escape together. The story ends sadly, for Sarangoo did not survive the escape—the harsh weather proved too difficult for her body to withstand and she perished. According to Dad’suren, this myth was considered acceptable by authorities because it depicted princely authority (associated with the old feudal system) as negative. However, the myth also contained another message, one emphasizing the ability of urtiin duu melodies to elude authorities. This point was very important to the nationalist movement of the 1960s.

Though authorities succeeded in crushing the burgeoning Mongolian nationalism by the mid-1960s, nationalist sentiments continued to thrive underground. This explains why those urtiin duu that referred to Chinggis Khan were so easily remembered and re-adopted in an overt manner once prohibitions were lifted in 1990. However, in other respects, these songs had been fundamentally transformed during the seven decades of communist rule. No longer overtly associated with the MPRP, they were nonetheless inextricably linked to the cosmopolitan values and nationalist sentiments that had long since framed them.
during the twentieth century, and were thus easily adopted as an emblem of
Mongolian national identity when the country transitioned from a communist state
to a parliamentary democracy in 1990.
CHAPTER FOUR:  
CONCLUSION: THE COMMODIFICATION OF URTIIN DUU

When the Soviet Union began to collapse in the late 1980s, many Mongolians seized upon this as a chance to create a democratic state. Inspired by the revolutions in Eastern Europe, protests erupted in 1990 in front of the Parliament Building in Sükhbaatar square, Ulaanbaatar. The MPRP was immediately faced with two choices regarding the conflict: aggressively suppress the protest (which at the time was peaceful) or commence governmental reforms. The MPRP, wishing to maintain its political monopoly over the nation, decided to respond favorably to the protests and immediately called for multi-party elections. As a result of their political support for the revolution, the Party was viewed as a force for liberalization. Accordingly, the MPRP and its associated political leaders triumphed as the dominant winners of the first multi-party election held in 1990. The new government swiftly established a new *Baga Khural* (standing legislature) and had drafted a new constitution by 1992, effectively and quickly converting Mongolia into an official democratic state. The international community was shocked by the ease of the transition, which went “smoothly compared with other post-communist countries. This was despite the fact that the economic shock caused by the Soviet pullout was among the most severe ever recorded” (Ginsburg 1999: 247).

The ease of Mongolia’s transformation to a democracy has been attributed largely to internal factors. The Mongolian independence movement of the 1960s still resonated among most of the populace for the three decades following its public dissolution. Elements of the resistance movement practiced covertly in *urtiin duu*
performances helped maintain these sentiments. Thus in the 1990s, Mongolians embraced their chance for political change, even if it meant facing difficult economic turmoil. These changes corresponded with the full readoption of banned performance practices, including urtiin duu themes pointing to distant homelands, and Tibetan Buddhist beliefs and practices.

Nationalist sentiments surged and Mongolians fully reclaimed the glory of their lost hero, Chinggis Khan. His image, as well as his nationalist associations as the original founder of the Mongol state, now have another level of resonance for the newly independent Mongolian nation. Chinggis Khan has become a nationalist icon signifying the unity and single origin of the Mongolian people. It is not uncommon for younger Mongols to refer to Mongolia as “Chinggis Khan’s Mongolia,” or Mongols, in general, to refer to themselves as “Chinggis Khan’s children.” Some Mongols describe a great sense of sorrow over having essentially ignored their spiritual leader during the country’s term as a Soviet satellite. According to a song written by the heavy-medal band Honh,

Great Khan, Lord Chinggis, oh, my ancestor!
Though there are many hundreds of monuments,
There are none for you, our ancestor,
Though we had respectful thoughts,
Nobody uttered them.
Forgive us, poor things,
Descendants of dear Mongolia,
Forgive us, forgive us, forgive us.

(Pegg 2001e: 24)

As we saw in the last chapter, many of the urtiin duu were covertly maintained over the twentieth century. Currently, they are openly practiced and proclaimed, especially those associated with Chinggis Khan. Thus, Tümen Ekh (First
of Ten Thousand), the song whose narrative of a very fast horse actually signified Chinggis Khan, now openly reveres Chinggis as a deity. Pegg observes that “Chinggis Khan . . . became part of some Mongols’ performative resistance to communist attempts to mold their identities . . . In the song . . . Tümen Ekh, it is now openly acknowledged that the ‘Ezen deed bogd’ (Lord Supreme Holy One) of the first verse is a reference to Chinggis Khan” (Ibid.: 22). Having readopted the worship of Chinggis Khan as kind of national Mongolian ancestor, Tümen Ekh is now performed at the opening of every national Naadam ceremony. References to Mongolia as a nation are inherent in its lyrics, such as “May this be a fine state, the first of ten thousand” (Ibid.). Songs like Tümen Ekh are indelibly associated with Mongolian nationalism, not only because they were framed as an index of the Mongolian nation over the course of the twentieth century, but also because of their association with the secret defiance of communist control. Now lyrics and themes once previously censured are proclaimed and even emphasized in performance.

The Growth of Tourism and an Internationally-Oriented Market Economy

The immediate withdrawal of Soviet economic support created a severe depression in Mongolia in 1990 and beyond, but this was somewhat mitigated by the assistance of Western powers. The Mongolians, who continued to fear Chinese colonization and Soviet dominance, eagerly turned to their Western allies for ideological and economic support, including backing for cosmopolitan goals aimed at the continued modernization of the nation:

... the late 1980s witnessed a weakening of Soviet-imposed constraints on Mongolia’s choices . . . . Russian weakness and preoccupation with domestic
reform mean that Mongolia’s leaders now have some room to maneuver internationally and domestically. Their aggressive courting of Europe, the United States, and Asia reflects the search for a "third force" to guarantee national security and support modernization. Cosmopolitanism continues to be the instrument of national survival in the modern Mongol worldview.

(Ginsburg 1999: 250)

The support of Western powers has come, in large part, through the development of a substantial tourism industry geared towards Western travelers. With the establishment of a National Tourism Board in 1995, an unprecedented number of European, Asian, and American tourists have begun to visit the country. The industry now garners over 180 million dollars in annual revenue, comprising more than ten percent of Mongolia’s gross domestic product. Focused on commodifying tourists’ nostalgic perceptions of nomadic life, tourist companies often promote ideas of Mongolia as a primitive, ancient land where civilization and time are transcended: “The Mongolian steppes and their nomads, horses, herds and gers form a cultural landscape which is the region’s iconic attraction, the central image in Mongolian marketing, the key feature of its flagship tourism products, and the most heavily commoditized component of its industry” (Buckley, Ollenburg & Zhong 2008). The idealizations are disclosed in many locales promoting tourism:

Endless steppes, untouched nature, magical light. A sky close enough to touch. Become one with the lifestyle of the nomads. Discover a land of unbelievable beauty, and the lifestyle of the Mongolian herdsmen which has hardly changed for centuries. This country, which these resilient people on their hardy little horses once made into the largest empire ever to exist worldwide, will fascinate you. Experience unending space, unfettered freedom, and a fascinating culture.

(Ibid., translated from www.deepmongolia.com)

Chinggis Khan’s legacy has also taken on commercial meanings. Walking around Mongolia’s capital city, Ulaanbaatar, in the present day, one is immediately
inundated with images of Chinggis Khan on billboards, signs, and in commercials. His name is used by Mongolian vodka and beer companies, heavy metal bands, and restaurants. In the following advertisement for Chinggis Khan vodka (Fig 4.1), Chinggis’ image and life dates hover over images of beautiful, scantily-clad Mongolian models drinking vodka out of elegant shot glasses reminiscent of champagne flutes. Mongolia’s international airport is called “Chinggis Khan International Airport,” and his face appears on the 500, 1000, 5000, and 10,000 tugrik currency bills. Furthermore, his legacy is marketed to tourists. In 2006, a huge Naadam was held for the benefit of Western travelers, marketing Chinggis Khan’s 800th anniversary with huge celebrations and sporting competitions. The event brought so many tourists to Mongolia that concerns rose over the nation’s ability to accommodate such a large influx of people (Buckley, Ollenburg & Zhong 2008).

The tourist industry has also had a profound impact on professional musicians, who have turned almost exclusively to tourist venues for employment. Peter Marsh is quoted at length, below, for his eloquent description of the way urtiin duu performances are now marketed to Western audiences. Notice that the ensemble he describes has also consciously adopted the name Tümen Ekh. His description is similar to the one I gave in the introduction to this thesis, detailing my first encounter with urtiin duu performance.
Figure 4.1: Advertisement for Chinggis Khaan Vodka from Mongolica magazine, 2006

Mongolica 6(2): 70, Summer 2006.
In late 1999 (near the end of the tourist season) I and my colleague attended a concert program by the ensemble Tümen Ekh . . . . [W]e were among an audience of about 25 people . . . . All in the audience were non-Mongolians, including people from Germany, France, England and a couple from Japan, among other places. Only a few pieces were of the so-called classical folk music, that is, traditional songs, instrumental pieces or dances that were performed in more pre-modern ways . . . . Perhaps the most interesting piece in the program for me was the ensemble’s arrangement of a long song. The song began traditionally enough, performed by a not unusual combination of two singers, backed by two horse-head fiddle players, but soon the rest of the ensemble—yatga, shanz, yoochin, ikh khuur, and even snare drum—joined in. It is traditional for other voices to join in and sing in unison (though not necessarily with the same melodic interpretations) with the singer who began the song [sic]. But it is not traditional to accompany a long song with an entire ensemble of instruments. Nor is it traditional to accompany a long song with harmonic progressions—as the ikh khuur was doing, and as the plucked instruments were creating through their noodling. Nor is it traditional to interpret a steady rhythm in a long song—as the snare drum was doing . . . . At the end of the entire program, . . . . I noticed that the large double doors in which we entered the hall were closed and blocked. But another set of double doors were opened on the other side of the hall that led directly to an adjacent gift shop.

(Marsh 2002: 234-36)

Not only were all audience members tourists, but they were led into a gift shop after the performance where various dolls, crafts, and other souveniers of a kind of essentialized, consciously marketed Mongolian identity, including images, paintings, and dolls of Chinggis Khan, key chains with gers on them, and miniature morin khuur. Clearly, the above performance demonstrates urtiin duu’s transformation into a lucrative product, almost as if it were one of these souvenirs; it has been commodified as a cultural item for sale in a growing market economy dominated by foreign tourists.

Such commodification is but an extension of the cosmopolitan values fueling the separation of urtiin duu and other indigenous musical practices from daily life, a separation that was increasingly institutionalized over the course of socialist rule. In the above example, the ensemble’s director and arranger, Ts. Pürewkhüü, was
clearly influenced by modernist-cosmopolitan values in his musical performance. When describing his arrangement, his words demonstrate the extent to which he equates the creation of a Western, classical-style musical arrangement of an indigenous song with improvement:

“There can be no improvement without a base, without tradition. We must improve the national traditions because it is art. It wouldn't be interesting without improvements! Take for example the long song we played tonight . . . the classical form of performing the long song, as you know, is with just one singer and one fiddle player. We didn't change the song or melody in any way, we just added an arranged accompaniment. We think it makes it sound better, and also more interesting for our audiences.”

(quoted in Ibid.: 237)

The boundaries of what a musician considers an appropriate stylistic performance of *urtiin duu* has come to be quite flexible, as the above example demonstrates. Pürewkhüü is not the only person to have created new, supposedly improved arrangements of *urtiin duu* that stretch the boundaries of the genre. A 1996 recording of Norovbanzad demonstrates the kind of “improvements” she made on the *urtiin duu Uyakhan zambuutiviin naran*, marketing the new recording to a world beat audience. The studio-made track betrays a strong Western influence, utilizing an extensive, synthesized electronic background in the vein of New Age music to create the perception of a meditational kind of calm and tranquility. Additionally, a harmonic, chordal background composed of synthesized tonic and dominant chords has been added to the song, to enhance its appeal to Western audiences familiar with such harmonies. The CD is sold in the larger tourist stores of Ulaanbaatar. In the recording, Norovbanzad uses synthesized chords and technological simulations of wind and other “natural” environmental sounds, iconic
of nomadic Mongolian life, to “improve” her *urtiin duu*—or rather, market them to foreign tourists.

In another example, the world-beat music project known as “Enigma” sampled part of the *urtiin duu* “Alsyn Gazryn Zereglee.” This song was sung by a professional *urtiin duu* singer named Adilbish Nergui, who trained with Norovbanzad and regularly performs with the ensemble *Tümen Ekh*. Enigma’s version is called “Age of Loneliness” and is recorded on their 1994 CD *Cross of Changes*. It samples the *urtiin duu* in segments, accompanied by a synthesized background and drum beat, and features an instrumental solo meant to sound like a wooden flute. A whispering voice admonishes the listener, “life is crazy, life is mad. Don’t be afraid . . . that’s your destiny, the only chance. Take it, take it in your hands.”

Other indigenous Mongolian musical practices have been subjected to different forms of development. As one blogger who self-identifies as Mongolian writes,

> When visiting UB, the Mongolian National Song and Dance Academic Ensemble’s show is a must see. It offers a great overview of the Mongolian songs and dances. I remember seeing their show a couple of years ago, the khoomii singer was throat singing *O Sole mio*. I guess, foreign tourists find it quite entertaining, since it’s a very well-known song. But, why *O Sole mio*? It seems like most of the khoomii singers sing this song at one point of their careers.


Additionally, classical Mongolian musicians are continually and consciously attempting to create a national Mongolian sound, and N. Jantsannorov is at the forefront of these reforms. For example, Batchuluun, the founder of the State Morin
Khuur ensemble and a People’s Artist of Mongolia, describes Jantsannorov’s uniquely Mongolian classical musical compositions as having the same particular “smell” as do the Mongolian people. “When I listen to Jantsannorov’s music,” he says, “I smell Mongolia from the 13th century to the present. It’s like when a foreigner meets a Mongolian person and can smell the scent of meat and milk. In this case, the scent is the melody. Jantsannorov knows our traditions and he’s really proud of our cultural heritage. This pride comes out in his music. That’s why people love his work” (Sumiyabazar 2006).

The free hand with which musical arrangers and producers are increasingly marketing urtiin duu to Western audiences is but an extension of the modernist reforms and cosmopolitan values they have come to associate with the genre, particularly as an emblem of Mongolia’s national distinctiveness. Nonetheless, these various reforms bring into question what urtiin duu really is and whether or not it is apt to use this single term for describing pre-revolutionary, revolutionary, and now democratic-era long song singing styles and contexts. The various performance contexts, styles, and meanings associated with the genre are multifold. It is proclaimed to be Mongolia’s “national song,” iconic of the Mongolian nation and performed in antiquated, ceremonial garb (reminiscent of the clothes worn in Chinggis Khan’s court) before every naadam sporting competition in honor of Chinggis Khan and the original Mongolian nation. It is also a nomadic herding tool, used to calm animals and help baby calves suckle from their mothers. It is proclaimed as an ancient art form that dates back over two thousand years, as UNESCO claims, a tendency towards constructing revisionist histories of urtiin duu,
all of which, as we have seen, have a questionable basis in fact. It is also proclaimed as an almost-extinct and endangered type of song now performed for tourists in showy costumes. Yet all of these developments follow a distinct course, paralleling Mongolia’s history in the twentieth century as a socialist state influenced by Soviet cosmoropolitanism, including an ideology valuing European-influenced aesthetic tastes, which have been internalized by the populace over the course of decades. Nowhere are these developments more apparent than in the genre of urtiin duu. While urtiin duu is still practiced in the countryside in a similar manner to how it existed in the pre-revolutionary era, it has undeniably been modified in form and practice. Subject to modernist reforms, it is now proclaimed a classical folk art, an emblem of the perceived national essence of the Mongolian people that is simultaneously unique and modern, with a primordial Mongolian essence passed down from the warriors of Chinggis Khan and his court. This image has become an important source of economic and political capital, and it is consciously maintained and exported to an international audience in a way that helps promote Mongolia’s tourist industry and further its essentialized image as the land of Chinggis’ ancestors.

Nonetheless, this commodification comes at a price, for while urban urtiin duu artists are supported if they adapt the aesthetics of a “world beat” audience, rural urtiin duu practice is becoming increasingly scarce. And as urtiin duu is exported and promoted with synthesized backgrounds and New Age beats, its uniqueness becomes increasingly questionable, much like during the course of the
twentieth century, when modernist reforms enclosed the genre in a discourse that only allowed its success and longevity to be judged in terms of Western aesthetics.

The current blossoming of indigenous musical practices and religious beliefs is not a wholesale return to the Mongolia of pre-revolutionary times. Many aspects of Mongolian cultural identity are now promoted in a nationalistic light and consciously marketed as such to tourists, including romanticized notions of nomadic life, icons associated with Chinggis Khan and his warriors, and musical performances modeled after European ensembles that purport to have a uniquely Mongolian flair simply because they incorporate indigenous instruments or songs. The current situation has resulted from various factors. At once the product of internalized modernist reforms, it is also due to the continual promotion of a certain image of Mongolian culture, and thus the Mongolian nation, which is an important form of economic and political capital for a burgeoning state hoping to carve its place among others in the global order.
REFERENCES


GRAPH A.1.

Graph A.1: Gingoo, Dad'suren

LEGEND

(n) = Breath
(v) = Vowel
(L) = Large Melodic Leaps
Graph A.2: Gingoo, Dunjima
Graph A.3: Kherleqiin Bariya, Tov Khalkha version, Dad'suren
Graph A.5: Bogd Onдор, Dolamsuren
Graph A.7: Jaakhan sharg3, Ulziibot