

The Pearl of Tuva: Authenticity and Tuvan Khorekter (Throat Singing)

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Abstract: The Russian Republic of Tuva is home to the solo multiphonic singing styles encompassed under the umbrella terms *khorekter* and *khomei*. This paper explores the conceptual complexities of authenticity pertaining to Tuvan throat singing. The author reveals ethnicity and race as primary authenticity markers as expressed by indigenous performers of Tuvan music. This paper also examines the events surrounding the 2002 *Dembildei* International Throat Singing Competition held in Tuva's capital city Kyzyl. Concerns of authenticity as expressed by the panel of judges for *Dembildei 2002* are presented alongside some other political, social, and economic forces that resonate around this event.

I recall an advertising campaign initiated by the popular clothing and accessory giant, GAP in 1994. *Rolling Stone* was one of many magazines to feature a full-page spread of a contemplative Miles Davis seated somewhat awkwardly in a metal studio chair and dressed in khaki trousers. The photograph was taken nearly forty years before the GAP's advertising crusade for the revival of plain khaki pants. A series of memorable GAP television advertisements that hit the airwaves in 1999 always concluded with the perfunctory catch phrase "This is original." One of the more short-lived commercials featured trumpeter and co-composer of *The Little Spanish Flea*, Herb Alpert. Alpert wandered the stark white backdrop of the ad while playing his trumpet. The borders of the room were amorphous, intersections where ground meets wall and wall meets ceiling were eerily blurred. Alpert concluded his playful romp with the token statement of GAP's claim to authenticity: "This is original." The system of signs accounting for the American trumpet player's aura of authenticity is worthy of analysis on its own and it is unlikely that the selection of these two separate advertising icons was arbitrary. Regardless of the symbolic qualities intended by the designers of the advertisements, the most obvious strategy stands out: The inculcation of image, product and verbal affirmation as a unified symbolic entity serves to construct or reinforce a sense of authenticity for the consumer.

While viewing the television commercial one senses that its foundations of authenticity are weak at best, and this gives rise to suspicions of its function. I also find it ironically fitting that the signifiers of "original" are grounded against no ground at all. The washed-out white room of indecipherable borders delivers an illusion of a constantly shifting ground with no apparent fixity. Why does the image of Herb Alpert and his trumpet against a negative white space convey *any* authenticity? The answer is easy, particularly in the context of the advertising industry: The viewer is told, "Tis is original."

I had the occasion in 2002 to conduct research in the Russian Republic of Tuva on the subject of *khomei* or "throat singing." The term *khomei* has come to signify all types of Tuvan solo double-voice singing, but *khomei* also refers to a specific style alongside at least four other principal styles. The all-encompassing term *khorekter* is used in the regional scholarly discourse to denote all styles of Tuvan double-voice singing. So, too, it was my great honour to serve on the panel of adjudicators for the 2002 *Dembildei* Throat Singing Competition commencing on June 28th in the capital city Kyzyl. Being a novice singer of *khorekter* and player of the *igil*, a two-stringed spike fiddle, I frequently encountered the term "authentic"—expressed in both the Russian and Tuvan language—and the complex notions that follow the word. In her extensive study of *Mongolian Music, Dance and Oral Narrative*, Carole Pegg

(2001:245) states that protests are arising from both Mongolians and Tuvans asserting claim to their cultural property, namely, throat singing, to which outsiders are not welcome. Unlike Pegg, I found no evidence of outward Tuvan resistance to those outsiders, myself included, who were compelled to learn more about *khorekteer*. However, events surrounding and including the 2002 *Dembildei* competition revealed surreptitious resistance that served to protect Tuvan throat singing from non-Tuvans.¹ It should not be assumed that *khorekteer* is only protected from the grasps of Westerners. Cultural artefacts are also zealously guarded from other indigenous people of nearby proximity.

The system of authenticity that surrounds and protects Tuvan throat singing is perhaps of irreducible complexity. Attempting to fully stabilize these concepts in place within the Tuvan Republic will only lead through distracting philosophical mazes. This paper principally explores ethnicity as the primary marker in the Tuvan matrix of authenticity. Ethnic or cultural authenticity is a stable pillar of insurance against potential plunderers of the Tuvan singing tradition.² Although in my interpretation, ethnicity and race remain the vital layer in the armour, other authenticity markers exist within the structure that encompass both external/international and internal/regional protective strategies. I present some of the circumstances that are applicable to the matter of authenticity as a fixed cultural concept in Tuva. I also refer to the embedded economic concerns, which are strategic ulterior motives within the system of authenticity. The topic outlined here was derived from data collected through interviews with Tuvan performers, researchers, folklorists, educators, elders, and fans, all to whom I am indebted and grateful. Recorded data and academic sources on the subject of throat singing are scarce, and most existing sources were created by non-Tuvans. I conducted and recorded 42 interviews for this study. I realize that the material I have examined is representative of only a small portion of the Tuvan population. However, the fraction of subjects I interviewed contains many dominant figures with positions of power and influence. This, I feel, is representative of some significance and worthy of attention.

The first professional recording and release of Tuvan solo double-voice singing on gramophone disks took place in 1934 under the supervision of E.V. Gippius. The recording featured such eminent throat singers as Kyrgys Soruktu, Sat Manchakai, Sanchy Kyzyl-ool and M. Kambu. Since then, ethnomusicological recordings as well as studio recordings featuring ensembles or individual performers have swelled in number and availability worldwide. Although a recording of Tuvan singing can be found in most major North American record stores—and with even greater ease in some parts of Europe—recordings of Tuvan throat singing are nearly absent from local stores and markets in Kyzyl. The sale of cassettes and compact discs in Tuva is limited to Russian-style disco, or popular techno beats with Russian lyrics.

It is useful to illuminate some of the shaded misunderstanding pertaining to the political state of indigenous music during the Soviet Era. Contrary to assumption, Tuvan *khoomei* was neither forbidden nor elevated to the status of National music; yet Mongolian throat singing was bolstered as the national music of Mongolia under Soviet rule. Unlike forbidden activities such as ritual and concomitant spiritual belief systems and freedom of speech, Tuvan folklore

¹ The term *dembildei* is a phonetic vocal sound comparable to jazz scatting. It is also the title of festival organizer Kongar-ool Ondar's most popular medley of throat singing styles.

² Michelle Bigenho (2002: 10) has referred to three types of authenticity in her adapted dissertation, one of which she has called Cultural/Historical Authenticity and has some parallels to the terms employed here.

remained acceptable. Furthermore, *khoomei* and other folkloric artefacts were promoted as amateur art with the frequent organization of small-scale festivals and contests. Many Tuvan performers reasoned that the comparative unpopularity of *khoomei* and its relegation to the status of amateur art could be attributed to the ubiquitous propaganda of the Soviet era. Most Tuvan people I surveyed over the age of twenty-five could recall and recite the everyday slogan found on television, in books and newspapers, on the radio and in posters and banners: “The Soviet Union opened a new era for ordinary Tuvans and liberated them from the dark, feudal and capitalist past.” There was no shortage of Soviet propaganda in the depths of southern Siberia and the ubiquity of that media led to the mindset that *khoomei* or any other element of folklore was an embarrassing relic of the past, just like “living in a yurt was considered a product of the old peasant life.”³ Currently, massive billboards can be found on streets and on the side of buildings, this time encouraging a new national unity with the phrase “Russia and Tuva together in the future.”

The formation of the Tuvan quartet ensemble featuring plucked and bowed strings, vocals and percussion was a recent development in the last twenty years. The performing quartet Huun Huur Tu has experienced immense worldwide success.⁴ Its members are Kaigalool Khovalyg, Anatoly Kuular, Sayan Bapa, and Alexei Saryglar, of whom Khovalyg and Bapa served on the jury for the 2002 competition. Huun Huur Tu makes annual worldwide tours, easily selling out concerts across North America, Europe and Asia while moving substantial quantities of their recordings at performance venues. No calculation is required to estimate the relative wealth these musicians and their Russian manager, Alexander Cheparukhin, share.

Zoya Kyrgyz and musicologist/folklorist Valentina Suzukei have observed that the formation of the idea of the performing quartet, epitomized by the Huun Huur Tu ensemble, can be attributed in part and indirectly to the influence of Soviet performance aesthetics and the Soviet promotion of amateur art. Mariatta Sundui (2003) has observed that as of 2002 there were thirty-six *khoomei* ensembles in Tuva. According to Sundui, less than twenty years ago there were none. The financial rewards and worldwide recognition of the Huun Huur Tu ensemble have led to the imitation of the performing quartet’s instrumentation, repertoire, and performing gestures. But the cultural imperialism of the Soviet regime encouraged the competition and performance of Tuvan music on stage indoors with amplification. This conflicts with the notion that *khorekteer* has a special relationship with the myriad components of nature, a notion expressed on the recently constructed website for the Khoomei Centre. Regarding the preparation for performance of *khoomei*, the site reads, “Khorekteer is an instrumental musicianship based on the sounds in the surrounding natural world.” (www.khoomei.ru 24 August 2003) With these concepts in mind, the performance of *khorekteer* in an auditorium establishes a set of principles that conflict with a tangent of the authenticity paradigm. The Huun Huur Tu performance format is characteristically suited to indoor performance. Thus, existing concepts of fixed authenticity are open to new challenges. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the possibilities for international success became very real, and with that success

³ These are the words of Anna Dharma, an elderly woman who currently charges four rubles to use her bathroom scale in the local outdoor market. Anna has lived through an independent Tuva and the Soviet Occupation. Her husband was a former KGB officer who passed away in 1987. To say the least, her recollection and observation of Tuvan history and current affairs is fascinating.

⁴ Huun Huur Tu literally means “sun propeller.” Specifically, it refers to the vertical separation of light rays that often occurs just after sunrise or just before sunset. For the members of Huun-Huur-Tu, the refraction of light that produces these rays seems analogous to the refraction of sound that produces articulated harmonics in Tuvan throat singing.

came a new concern for the financial vitality of an art form once deemed as amateur by the Soviets. I suggest that the concerns of authenticity interwoven with economics were amplified by the collapse and reformation of political forces. The average income of the Tuvan citizen is about \$100 U.S. a month. With this in mind, there is significant potential for generating wealth on the international world music scene: the stakes are suddenly much higher in the game of authenticity.

Tuvan musicologist Zoya Kyrgyz is the founder and director of the International Scientific Center for Khoomei situated within Kyzyl. Kyrgyz and her assistant/translator Konstantin Khlynov work in tandem to fulfill the goals of the Khoomei Centre mission statement: preserve and develop the traditional culture of Tuvan throat singing, *khorekteer*, organize scientific research for revealing and studying the throat singing of people in the surrounding region and in other parts of the world; create archives of *khorekteer* recordings and analyses of those materials; train and validate young performers including foreign performers; participate in international music contests and organize international symposia, seminars, conferences and festivals of Tuvan singing; promote scientific and practical international contacts; and ensure the social protection of performers. The hallway walls in the Khoomei Centre are decorated with photographs and a hand-painted banner that reads, in English, "Khoomei: The Pearl of Tuva." Beneath the caption the five primary styles of throat singing are listed and briefly defined, although some *Khoomeichis* (master throat singers) insist that there are up to twenty-six styles. There are two main instructors for hire at the centre, Fedor Tau and Sergei Ondar. Tau is an older master in his seventies and Ondar is a younger, middle-aged performer and instructor who has toured internationally and recorded on several occasions. Observation of instruction between Sergei Ondar, Fedor Tau and the non-Tuvan students who had travelled from abroad, as well as my own participation in practical learning, provided some evidence of existing notions of ethnic authenticity. Following a lesson, Ondar exclaimed to an English-speaking student:

You manipulate your oral cavity very well. But the sound is not authentic. It is very difficult because you must be born here in Tuva to sing properly. You must be born a Tuvan baby. (Interview with the author: 13 June 2002)

I asked Sergei Ondar if he could decipher a Tuvan singer from a non-Tuvan singer of *khoomei* based solely on sound, language excluded. He replied:

One can always tell foreign singers because of the vowel sounds. As a baby you learn the Tuvan language and know the sounds deeply. This is not the only way, living here in nature gives a singer his sound. (Interview with the author: 13 June 2002)

Sergei Ondar's statement is just one of many similar statements—uncovered through interviews and found in the written discourse—made by Tuvan singers that suggest a set of ethnic and regional precursors to the propriety of performance. It is clear from the words above and from subsequent conversations that sound is an authenticity marker of ethnicity and, so, too, the reverse is true: ethnicity is an authenticity marker of sound.

There are many Tuvan people who do not speak Tuvan, and there are many Russian citizens who speak the Tuvan language.⁵ I posed the hypothetical question: between a non-

⁵ There are approximately 200,000 Tuvans and 100,000 Russians in the Republic of Tuva. Tension between the two races is not immediately apparent. A lesser-known event of recent history is

Tuvan-speaking student of Tuvan descent and a Tuvan-speaking student of Russian descent, who would be most likely to produce an authentic sound? Ondar was quick to respond, “Not the Russian.”

The structure of authenticity is often constructed with commercial discourse at its concealed foundation. Tuvan *khorekteer* has not always been a marketable musical form, or, in other words, the “Pearl of Tuva” was once treated like a grain of sand. When did *khomei* become a precious gem in the commercial or economic sense?

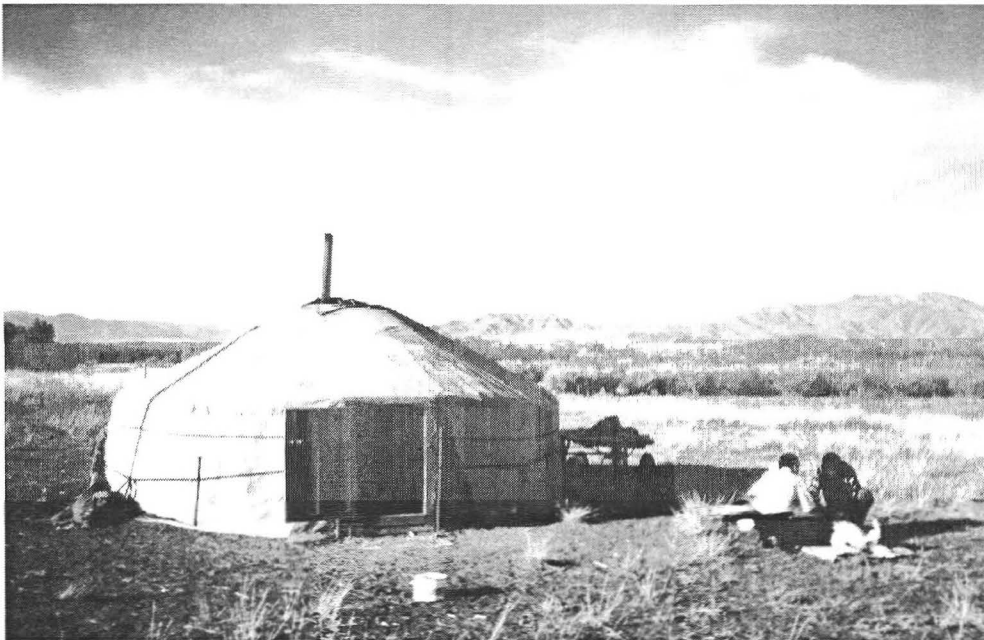
The performance, recording, distribution, and paid instruction of Tuvan music have only peaked in the last three years. The commercial ascent of *khomei* began following the collapse of the Soviet Union, of which the formerly independent land of Tannu-Tuva (1929-1944) was a part. Michelle Bigenho, in her recent monograph *Sounding Indigenous: Authenticity In Bolivian Music Performance*, states that claims to indigenosity acquire a new value and currency when they become “things that have an exchange value outside of their use value within lived experience” (Bigenho 2002:5). It was the financial success of various performance media (compact discs, concerts, films, workshops, instructional videos, television appearances) abroad that ignited the recognition of Tuvan music as a commodity of considerable “exchange value.” The hourly fee of \$30 U.S. at the Khoomei Center and the sale of concert tickets and recordings in Europe, Japan and America generate hefty sums of money in the local Tuvan economy.

Claims to ethnic authenticity are entangled with notions of locality and exposure to a pastoral, natural environment that is paramount for the development of a good singer. The great majority of Tuva’s celebrity-status performers hold firm to the belief that *khomei*, by nature, is an endogenous phenomenon: it is a unique expression emanating from distinct and fixed borders. Kyrgyz, director of the Khoomei Centre, commented on the necessity for regional exposure in order to throat-sing: “One should listen to sound in the surrounding steppes and mountains or by rivers and streams and then *khomei* will start to speak the same language” (Interview with the author: 15 June 2003). The Tuvan concept of environmental inspiration as a prerequisite for sonic authenticity shares some parallels with nineteenth-century Romantic assumptions about imagination, genius and inspiration of the autonomous composer. I have come to refer to this variety of authentic inspiration from transpersonal sources as Divine or Transcendental Authenticity, for lack of a better term. The Western composer’s authentic access to divinity has been examined in some detail: Nicholas Davey (Kemal and Gaskell 1999:66) examined the question of authenticity and its links with both aesthetic and religious experience. Davey approaches the topic through the philosophical outpouring of Gadamer and Heidegger, among others. In the field of ethnomusicology, the topic is seldom explored for obvious reasons of essentialist leanings. Peter Kivy (1995:108) makes a ground for philosophical exploration of the topic where he refers to all metaphysical types as the “other authenticity.” Kivy’s term also connotes the quasi-moral brand of authenticity based on genuineness and integrity.

Tuvan music has an aesthetic and pragmatic relationship with surrounding natural ecology. Theodore Levin (1999) described Tuva as “a living record of a protomusical world, where natural and human made sounds blend.” Tuvan music is entwined with the tradition of animism, the belief system that natural objects and phenomena have souls and are inhabited by spirits. Levin explores throat singing as one means for the pastoral hunter-herders of Tuva to interact with the acoustic entities of the elements and phenomena of nature. Levin appropriately

the race riot that took place in 1993 when nearly 80 residents of Kyzyl were killed.

refers to this relationship as *sound mimesis*. Among the throat singers surveyed, there are but few pastoral extremists, meaning those who reserve the performance and instruction of *khoomei* exclusively for the natural environment. One such radical traditionalist is Aldyn-ool Sevek, who, after touring with the Tuvan punk band *Yat-kha* under the leadership of Albert Kuvezin, retreated to the untouched Mongun-Taiga region of Tuva. Apparently, students seek out the elusive *khoomeichi* as he agrees to teach the various styles of throat singing only in nature or in a yurt (a dome-shaped, fully portable nomadic dwelling).



The yurt of Aldyn-ool Sevek. Sevek, who had no interest in posing for the photograph, is slaughtering a sheep for our dinner.

Setting aside the few pastoralists, the remaining singers take part in amplified performance within modern spaces at home in Tuva and abroad. I will adumbrate the ideas of these performers who walk the line between pastoral settings for *khoomei* and contemporary performance contexts. A singer must have extended exposure to nature; specifically, the Tuvan landscape.

Performance indoors is acceptable but not preferred, and the sound of *khoomei* should represent the natural Tuvan landscape in contemporary performance contexts. Many singers claim that the rendering of *khorekteer* in modern spaces serves as a kind of vehicle for experiential transport. A lesser-known Tuvan singer, Chodoora Tumat, exclaimed somewhat poetically:

When I sing *khoomei* my heart must be in a state of joy. No matter where I am I see the beautiful rivers and mountains of this land when I sing. A good singer can make others see and feel the same. (Interview with the author: 22 June 2002)

In performance contexts, there is awareness and acceptance of the difference between the performances as witnessed on stage and the original performance that is being represented. In the case of *khoomei*, this “metaperformance” is situated relationally to the real, to the natural

landscape of Tuva (Bigheno 2002:62). The recreation of natural soundscapes in performance by Tuvan ensembles is to be expected at most concerts.⁶

Metaperformance is situated in relation to the real at a distance, but the distance is variable and one can deviate too far from the real. Several ensembles and individual artists in Tuva have been locally rejected for their avant-garde status. For example, those ensembles that do not employ traditional instruments for performance are not permitted to enter the throat-singing competition. Groups such as *Gen' Dos* employ hybrid forms blending electronics and rock elements with traditional throat singing.⁷ Female performer Sainkho Nahchylak has broken nearly every boundary in the pop, free jazz, and sound poetry genres. It was rumoured that she was stoned (in the biblical sense) in the streets of Kyzyl for her deviation from an idealized and imagined boundary of authenticity.

There are complex standards of authenticity in place; but the Tuvan model can be described as what Connell and Gibson (2003:43) would call the “first model of spatial authenticity.” The authors observe a problematic paradox that is, in all likelihood, the source of some confusion in the general matter of authenticity. When fixity is claimed in spatial or regional terms, it is assumed that movement away from this fixed point is a movement away from authenticity. The founding paradox remains that in this model, authenticity is defined both relationally *and* as a fixed point. Authenticity is often assumed to be intrinsic and essential; yet it is always expressed in relational terms, via the negation of the inauthentic. The pastoral origin remains the “fixed point,” while indoor amplified performance represents one point of relational deviation. Although many performers play in modern structures and spaces, pastoral exposure and pastoral suggestion are necessary anchor points of fixity for authentic performance according to the local discourse.

As an inside participant observer at the *Dembildei 2002* competition, I was able to witness the authoritative authentication of throat singers of both Tuvan and non-Tuvan descent. The panel of judges was comprised of eight performers and/or researchers, seven of which were Tuvan; I was the only international member—from “the Republic of Canada,” as I was introduced to the audience. Other members included the aforementioned Zoya Kyrgyz, Valentina Suzukei, Sayan Bapa and Kaigal-ool Khovalyg. There were thirteen awards available to the competitors: One prize for an “innovative and talented newcomer”; one prize for the “hope of the festival”, usually reserved for young performers; one “audience favourite award,” determined by the judges; one award for each of the five recognized styles including *khoomei*, *kargyraa*, *sygyt*, *borbannadyr*, and *ezengileer*; three prizes for Laureates, those performers who execute all styles; one “grand prix” for the star solo performer; and one prize for the best ensemble performance. Funding from sources such as the Tuvan Ministry of Culture was substantial: as the grand prizewinner, Igor Koshkendei, received a new Russian-made automobile, an item of great expense in the Post-Soviet era.

⁶ I recall one performance by Huun Huur Tu in Ann Arbor, Michigan, August 2000 when a group of enthusiastic listeners closed their eyes, sat cross-legged and extended their arms to hear the “healing sounds” of the landscape. They did the same for a traditional Tuvan song that compared the quality of a horse to a far away girlfriend. I did not wish to disturb their deeply profound spiritual trance to inform them of the amorous meaning of the song.

⁷ Gen' Dos refers to the ensemble and the lead performer who is a self-proclaimed shaman. His first name is Gennadi and DOS, of course, refers to the extinct pre-Windows computer language.

My time serving as an adjudicator was sufficient to reveal the pre-emptive strategies involved in the evaluation process and the inherent presumptions of authenticity, or lack thereof, based on ethnicity and regional origin. In the company of the other judges, I asked out loud, "Will the foreign participants be evaluated by the same criteria with which resident performers are evaluated?" Even more succinctly I questioned, "Can someone who is not Tuvan receive the grand prize?" Kyrgyz responded, "Tuvan khoomei is for everyone, for the whole world. But foreigners receive special prizes." Following her statement, I recalled Paul Pena's performance and the award ceremony that followed in the film *Genghis Blues* (1999). In the film, Pena is said to have won first prize in the *kargyraa* division, while Kyrgyz, a juror at the time, refutes his victory in the *kargyraa* category. She claims that Pena only received the award for "audience affection," which is commonly given to foreign participants. Foreign participants are defined as performers of non-Tuvan descent, including local indigenous persons from the South-Siberian region. Performers from parts of Northern Europe were disqualified, receiving scores of zero within the first few seconds of their time on stage. The judges were quick to assume from their inauthentic homemade garb that their singing was inauthentic. Tallying the scores following the competition, I noticed that the names of foreign performers were not mentioned; moreover, I was not asked for the scores I had recorded for those performers—albeit they were low. An indigenous throat singer of Sayano-Altai descent performed some sub-tone singing that was similar to Tuvan *kargyraa*. Two of the judges were so displeased that they switched off their desk lamps in protest. Kyrgyz turned to me and said, "You see, this is their music."



The 2002 *Dembildei* panel of judges congregating in a yurt following the competition. From left to right: Valentina Suzukei, Sundukai Mongush, Andrei Mongush, Kaigal-ool Khovalyg, Zoya Kyrgyz, and the author. Absent are Sayan Bapa and Mariatta Sundui.

In addition, some controversy erupted in the form of argument between Kyrgyz and Sayan Bapa in the judges' chambers following the competition. The dispute centred on the dramatic stage performance of the ensemble *Alash*. The young members of *Alash* performed a soundscape that was largely accompanied by the sounds of relaxed domestic labour tools. Butter was churned as the rhythmic pounding of a mortar and pestle accompanied the singing of *khoomai*, birdcalls and lyrical song. The performance climaxed with the sudden disrobing of two boys who were wearing the sparse Khoresh wrestling attire beneath their clothing. They staged

a mock wrestling match and resumed their positions as musicians for the conclusion of the piece. The performance was well received by the audience. But Bapa felt that the ensemble should have been disqualified for the excessive use of stage props and dramatic gesture. Kyrgyz argued that the tools and actions were legitimately musical because they originated from the pastoral scene represented by the performance. Although the competition judges are instructed to consider costume as a valid component for evaluation, there remains some uncertainty surrounding an excess of the visual component. Peter Kivy (1995:80) explored concepts of authenticity as practice whereby the practice is not a means to an authentic sound but rather, an end in itself that appeals to sense modalities other than those of the ear. The conflict went unresolved, and *Alash* received no award for their performance. One judge felt that this performance was inauthentic as it moved so far from its point of fixity that it was nearly back again: in other words, the performance was too real for the stage.

The day of the competition ended with an open stage jam session for all of the competitors. Foreign participants eliminated at the onset of the competition sang alongside some of Tuva's finest singers and musicians. Some foreigners experienced intense joy at this event that in all likelihood felt very real to them. Bigenho (2002:4) refers to those in positions of relative power who critique the performance of others as "authenticity police." Although the perpetrators in this case seemed to be having an experience of "feelingfulness" that was quite real, in some other way, to them, Experiential authenticity (Bigenho 2002:9) seemed to be secondary or of much lesser value than cultural/historical authenticity in the context of official competitions or folklore festivals.

To the surprise of many festival participants and observers at the *Dembildei* competition, there was not a single representative of neighbouring Mongolia. It did not take long to observe that Mongolia serves as an isolated pernicious other in the mindset of the Tuvan discourse; "they" are less authentic than "us." Mongolians and Tuvans are rivals on cultural and ethnic grounds, preferring not to be compared. Negation of the other is often the primary edifice in the formation of the authentic. The denigration of Mongolian throat singing occurs frequently in the scholarly discourse and everyday conversation of the Tuvan people. Tuvan performers and scholars are quick to sternly assert that Tuvan *khoomei* is the superior form, boasting a greater number of styles, a higher required quality of musicianship, and melodic strains of greater complexity in the harmonics. Although I could gather no evidence for this claim, Tuvan performers stated that the Mongolian argument for their superior form is the same as the Tuvan argument; but according to the Tuvan performers, the Mongolians were the "copycats." During a brief appearance on a local television show in Kyzy, the host Kendenchik Kuular, a former singer himself, pressured me to express my preference for Tuvan singing over Mongolian singing. I expressed my opinion that I enjoyed both styles and could find no basis for the formation of a hierarchy. Kuular warned me to be careful and that some may say I wrestle like a Mongolian. Although I had never wrestled, nor had I expressed a wish to do so, the phrase "wrestle like a Mongolian" is a common impudent insult expressed, usually, on a foundation of friendship.

The rivalry between Tuvan performers and their threatening counterparts, the Mongolians, can also be deciphered in the local institutionalized scholarship. I refer to such groups as the Mongolians, Altaians, Bashkirs and Khakassians as potential adversaries, as they pose one to the other both an economic threat and a social threat concerning notions of identity. The competitive tension between the indigenous people within the region is evident from reinforced notions of aesthetic autarchy and the refuted possibility of syncretism found in regional scholarship.

Boris Tartarintsev's monograph *Problems In The Origin of Tuvan Throat Singing*, published in Kyzyl 1998, is now locally a frequently referenced landmark text. Tartarintsev investigates the origin of *khoomai* through the complex network and linguistic data emerging from the regional Turkic languages. The linguistic roots of the terminology encompassing Tuvan throat singing are traced into the murky regions of antiquity, where there is a great scarcity of resources and little reliable information. It is obvious from the jumbled and vague parallels that the answer to the question of absolute origin is not easily found; yet based on the grey linguistic evidence, Tartarintsev (1998:78) states a conclusion: "The appearance of throat singing as an art among neighbouring peoples was borrowed [by neighbouring cultures] quite late from Tuva." Based on inconclusive evidence, the author denies the possibility of some protoform that existed between the indigenous tribes, suggesting that Tuvan *khoomai* pre-dates other forms. Attempts to determine the source of the art form are attempts to secure ownership of a commodity and a token of identity. Tartarintsev's attempt to determine the source is an attempt to secure ownership of throat singing.

The 1995 publication *Xoomai* was released to commemorate the third international throat singing symposium in Kyzyl. The introductory article was composed by the Chairman of the Supreme Khural of the Republic of Tuva and candidate of philological sciences, K. Bicheldei. The article is titled "Khoomey—A Tuvan Soul" and begins: "Khoomey is the original throat singing, which has been brought to the highest levels of art and mastery during the centuries by the Tuvan people" (Bicheldei 1995:7).⁸ The publication was of great significance, as it was the first publication on the subject of throat singing translated into multiple languages. Knowing its weight on the discourse of Tuvan music, I am curious about the consequences resulting from the following published excerpts: "In the modern conditions of development and spreading cosmic consciousness as a system of integral searching of the human civilization, I start thinking of throat singing as a possible deep and straight link of homo sapiens with Space..." Regarding the outdoor performance of the subtone *kargyraa* style, Bicheldei (1995:5) goes on to say that singing "...is able to take away from a person's soul all of its artificial civilized cover and elevate it above the world, tear it away not only from the vanity of being, but from the sinful Earth as well, and precipitate it into the Great Infinite." These passages could very well be excerpts from some of the bizarre philosophies of twentieth-century German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, whose concern for "cosmic consciousness" was evident in his compositions and performances from the 1970s onward. Bicheldei's words not only assume that Tuvan *khorekteer* is a pure artefact of Tuvan origin but also invite waves of New Agers to gather the artefacts of Tuvan culture for surface level engagements and reckless appropriation. An exploration of the Western New Age fascination with Tuvan singing and shamanism is a study I cannot conduct in full here; but the number of those travellers in search of alternatives to their own cultures has exploded in the last three years.⁹

Zoya Kyrgyz recently published an extensive book outlining the history, physics and social significance of Tuvan throat singing.¹⁰ She based some of her conclusions on a 1995

⁸ The transliteration of the Tuvan word for throat, *khoomai*, assumes variable spellings. The same is true with the other styles of throat singing.

⁹ David Hykes made the journey to Mongolia in the mid-1980s to learn to sing overtone. Hykes has developed a unique style of harmonic singing that differs noticeably from *khoomai*. Books such as Jonathan Goldman's *Healing Sounds: The Power of Harmonics* and Rolin Rachele's *Overtone Singing Study Guide* are evidence of the New Age appropriation of harmonic singing.

study in the United States, which involved physiological examination of vocal cords, respiratory peculiarities, and the system of vocal mechanism's resonators. Without physiological comparative analysis of other throat singing forms, Kyrgyz and the other project participants concluded, "Tuvan khorekteer is so specific that it does not allow us to make anywhere near correct correlation with any other known forms of solo double-voice singing" (Kyrgyz 2002: 25). In this case, the argument for the authentic Tuvan origin of khorekteer is founded on the grounds of unique physiological characteristics of Tuvan singers, but without an examination of similar detail aimed at other non-Tuvan forms of throat singing.

The following described events occurred on the evening of the first day of *Dembildei* and illustrates another amusing protective strategy of authentic cultural property in Tuva. The Republic of Tuva had adopted Buddhism as the national religion in 1992, but shamanism in the region remains intact and functional. The local registry of shamans known as *Tostaar* consists of a small log home and two yurts nestled on the bank of the Yenisei River less than fifty paces from the monument representing the geographical centre of Asia. The symposium attracts many international tourists interested in all facets of Tuvan culture, from wrestling to horse racing. At dusk, just prior to the evening ritual, a group of filmmakers from Italy approached *Tostaar* while struggling with their cumbersome equipment cases. A rule posted in both Russian and English states that taking photographs is forbidden and requests those who are desirous of photographic documentation to inquire within.



The local shamanic registry known as *Tostaar*. Although pictures were forbidden, the shamans kindly allowed me to take this photograph so long as I would sing a "love song" from Canada.

With the aid of their translator, the Italian film crew requested permission to film the evening ritual. Although the ritual at dusk is sacrosanct, the shamans were quick to accept a substantial number of rubles to allow the filmic documentation. As the ritual began, the filmmakers assumed stealthy positions of the utmost filmic pomp to capture this event. But I soon noticed that this

¹⁰ Zoya's book *Tuvan Throat Singing* (2002) was only published in Russian and with limited availability. Currently we are working together to create a translation and release in North America.

particular evening ritual was distinctly different from the usual execution of the actions. The ceremony concluded, and the filmmakers packed their equipment to depart for their next expedition. I approached the shaman's young apprentice and asked why the ritual was different. She said, "This was not for them. We just made a new one for them." The performing shamans had spontaneously improvised a different bogus ritual for the filmmakers. Another matter of some significance was the inclusion of throat singing in this ad lib performance for the camera. Typically, any vocal sounds resembling *khoomei* and the sub-styles are not utilized for the evening ceremony. Pegg (2001:246) has declared that she could hear nothing in Mongolia that would support a link between harmonic singing and shamanism. In Tuva the structural parameters of *khorekter* are tightly connected with lyric songs and instrumental music, while shamanic *kamlanie* is sung by a shaman who acts as the intermediary for the voice between those who seek the help of spirits and the spirits themselves. It is possible that the shamans included *khoomei* in this case to satisfy the common outsider's assumption that throat singing and *khoomei* are linked. In this case, the shamans effectively preserved their real ceremony while providing the filmmakers with the product they sought, turning a tidy profit for the shamanic registry. This is one example of transnational relating in which the source culture successfully reserves the authentic artefact and still maintains an advantageous position for economic benefit. I believe that in many cases such as this one, the protective strategies generated by the systems and structures of authenticity mark an ulterior motive that is primarily economic.

Statistically, Tuvan *khorekter* receives greater recognition than Mongolian singing in the world market, as revealed by the Tuvan predominance of international record sales, live performances and workshops. The sales and profits are miniscule compared to the figures reflecting popular music sales; but the profits are substantial to the small indigenous population responsible for the production of the marketable artefacts. I attribute a portion of Tuvan throat singing's heightened global awareness to the establishment of friendly relations between Tuvans and Americans. Ralph Leighton¹¹ has been responsible for the release of several compact discs including *Deep In The Heart Of Tuva: Cowboy Music from the Wild East* and Kongar-ool Ondar's successful techno-inspired compact disc featuring Willie Nelson titled *Back Tuva Future*. In addition, he was the producer of the film *Genghis Blues*. He has also coordinated several concert tours of Tuvan performers and most importantly, established *Friends of Tuva*, a website (www.fotuva.org) and organization dedicated to the promotion and sale of all things Tuvan, from shaman's drums to coffee mugs decorated with the Tuvan flag.¹² While he has been successful promoting the Tuvan people in North America, Tuvans frequently express some bitterness about the success of Kongar-ool Ondar and Kaigal-ool Khovalyg. Zoya Kyrgyz complains: "Why do Kongar-ool Ondar and Khovalyg get to perform and record? Because they have American friends who help them." Others specialists, such as Suzukei and Sundui, have feared that merely average singers will misrepresent Tuvan singing. The connoisseurs of *khoomei* hold the belief that the "real" throat singers live in the country and have yet to receive deserved recognition.

¹¹ American physicist Richard Feynman and his friend Ralph Leighton recalled the triangular-shaped postage stamps from Tuva that were a collectible item following their release in the 1930s. Feynman and Leighton's recollection of the forgotten land inspired them to locate the formerly independent nation. Richard Feynman passed away before he could visit Tuva, but Leighton made the journey in Feynman's memory in 1991.

¹² Technically, *Friends of Tuva* serves to promote knowledge of Tuvan culture while the linked website to *The Tuva Trader* (www.tuvatradet.com) manages the sales and marketing of merchandise.

There is no shortage of interconnection between cultural identity, economics and authenticity. Another component in the matrix of internal and external protective strategies is the internal protective strategies between Tuvans. At this time, the traditional/modern or authentic/commercial dichotomy as it applies to the subject is difficult to observe, since in Tuva many people lead dual lives as both nomads and city dwellers. A clearer example of the dichotomy to which I refer is expounded in Joli Jensen's *The Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialisation and Country Music*. Jensen explains the concepts of authenticity and commercialisation in country music as dialectic interplay between the artificial and the natural. *The Country and the City* by Raymond Williams selects an appropriate metaphor for the idyllic past—the country, and a distressing modern present—the city. Jensen establishes the signifiers or authenticity markers depicting some of the country genres. Jensen (1998:175) makes two theoretical claims: first, that we criticize commercialisation, one of the facets of modern life, and instead use cultural forms to construct identity and connection; and secondly, that concerns about authenticity and commercialization are often symptoms of nostalgia. As stated previously, some authentic poles have been established for traditional Tuvan singing and its modern hybrid forms; yet a nostalgic longing for an Edenic past is not obvious in Tuvan culture. Even though the capital city possesses most conveniences, the remainder of the republic ranges from quaint Russian-style one-story homes and cabins to yurts indicative of the nomadic lifestyle. Since the majority of the country is still struggling to attain the benefits of modernity, the country/city dialectic is also not yet applicable. Many Tuvans lead dual lives nomadically in yurts during the summer months, and in heated flats in the city during the harsh winter. There is, however, an unfortunate reality of class and status in place that is observable in the city/country dichotomy. In the town of Khandagaity, about an eight-hour drive southwest of Kyzyl on the border to Mongolia, I was treated to the hospitality of Khöomeichi German Kuular, his family, and the family of the legendary performer Gennadi Turnat who died suddenly in 1996 at the age of 32. At German Kuular's birthday, several attendees suggested that the best throat singers live outside of the capital city. This may or may not be the case; regardless, several fine semi-nomadic singers wished to take a place in the competition for a chance at a prize and the recognition that would follow a victory. Since the cost of a bus trip to Kyzyl was about \$15 U.S. and the entry fee only slightly less, most performers outside Kyzyl could not have afforded it, and so were excluded from the competition and the potential for wide recognition.

I have yet to mention any of the gendered norms and hegemony of male primacy that is, in all likelihood, a component of the Tuvan authenticity model. Such an examination is much needed. Female performers of *khorekter* are only now emerging in performance spheres. The delayed appearance of women performers can be partly attributed to the long-held belief that throat singing could cause infertility or even miscarriage. Of course, this is not true; women are physically capable of executing all throat-singing styles. But the women's ensemble *Tyva Kyzyl* is finally receiving some local and global recognition. It remains to be seen if female soloists and performing ensembles will find a niche alongside the many recognized male performers: One hopes it will soon be so.

After reflecting on these events and reviewing the existing discourse pertaining to the subject of authenticity, I have come to a common realization: this paper is subject to the same criticism I have applied to the subject itself—my reinvented wheels are easily deflated. Try as one may to avoid the pull toward philosophy when discussing this topic, the tug of subjectivity seems inevitable. I ask the question, "Is this theory?" But one must ponder whether theory is little more than well-structured and published philosophy. Philosophical distraction arising from a discussion of authenticity is unavoidable, since there is no system of absolute measurement, and objective scientific criteria is lacking. My impression of the prevalent biases and ulterior

motivations in the Tuvan music scene are primarily derived from oral sources. The limited availability of printed resources necessitated this method.

To summarize, I observed what authors Connell and Gibson (2003: 153) observed: ethnicity and fixed locality become the “cradle of authenticity,” regardless of the blurred lucidity between culture and place. Steven Feld has mentioned the “heightened symbolicism of race and/or ethnicity” burgeoning on the polemic “sites of struggle”: authenticity and appropriation (Keil and Feld 1994:268 & 270). Regardless of authenticity discourse as philosophy or theory, the evidence suggests that notions of authenticity and credibility are serious concerns. It was my wish to present some examples of strategic authenticity expressed and/or demonstrated by indigenous Tuvans. Actually, it seems redundant to qualify authenticity as strategic for, at its core, authenticity is fundamentally strategic.

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