What's in the Song? *Urtyn duu* as Sonic "Ritual" Among Mongolian Herder-singers

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Abstract: While contemporary Mongolia experiences a rapid expansion of its global urbanized culture, its rural nomadic culture remains central to its inhabitants' traditional worldview, albeit described using nationalistic and nostalgic imagery. Drawing on the essential ideas of Naess's Deep Ecology, and looking particularly at the folksong genre of urtyn duu*, this article examines regular events in the countryside, characterized by human interaction with livestock and with the landscape, and their relevance to the performative, textual, and sonic elements of* urtyn duu*. It suggests that the act of singing among herder-singers transcends the separateness of the actors within the ecosystem, and so ritualizes the practice of* urtyn duu *as a way to balance the environment. Considering recent ecomusicological approaches, this paper seeks to understand* urtyn duu *within the ontological ecosystem through the lens of spirituality.*

Résumé : Tandis que la Mongolie contemporaine connaît une expansion rapide de sa culture urbanisée globale, sa culture rurale nomade reste au cœur de la vision du monde traditionnelle de ses habitants, bien qu'on la décrive comme utilisant une imagerie nationaliste nostalgique. À partir des idées essentielles de Naess au sujet de l'écologie profonde, et en examinant en particulier le genre des urtyn duu*, les chansons populaires, cet article examine les évènements ordinaires en milieu rural, caractérisés par les interactions humaines avec le bétail et le paysage, et leur pertinence pour les éléments performanciels, textuels et acoustiques des* urtyn duu*. Il suggère que le fait de chanter, chez les chanteurs-gardiens de troupeaux, transcende la séparation des acteurs au sein de l'écosystème et ritualise ainsi la pratique des* urtyn duu *en tant que moyen d'équilibrer l'environnement. En examinant les approches ethnomusicologiques récentes, cet article cherche à comprendre les* urtyn duu *au sein de l'écosystème ontologique à travers le prisme de la spiritualité.*

> *Mongol khün bol yeröösöö gazar delkhii baigal' gazar delkhii baigal' khün. … Mongol khünii gants gurvan khelkhee kholboo bol. …*

This article has accompanying videos on our YouTube channel. You can find them on the playlist for MUSICultures volume 45, available here: http://bit.ly/MUSICultures-45. With the ephemerality of web-based media in mind, we warn you that our online content may not always be accessible, and we apologize for any inconvenience.

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> *baigal' delkhii mal khün gurav. Baigal' deeree khün mal n' am'draad nögöö malaa khün n' mallaad tegeel l yeröösöö malyg chin' belcheerees khot ruu n' oruulakh, khotnoos n' belcheert gargakh, aa ter belcheer deerees zel ruu n' duulakh ed nar chin' dandaa duu aviagaar avdag.*
>
> Mongolians, basically they're natural, they're natural people. ... Mongolians have these three relationships. … There's the natural world, animals, and people. People and animals live in nature, people herd their animals, and so basically they take their livestock, their sheep, from the pasture to the town, and then they turn their livestock out into the pasture, so yes, they are singing from the pasture to the market, they're always singing. (Ts. Örlög, interview, June 24, 2017)

In interviews,[1] singers often pointed out to me that Mongolian herders' worldview, their way of understanding life, is to see the world as consisting of three parts: the binary of sky (*tenger*) and earth (*gazar*) as their natural environment; the animals (*am'tan*); and human beings (*khün*). They see earth and sky as their place of origin, and the natural environment as a companion of humans and non-humans. While the sky and earth are portrayed as the highest order,[2] humans are not considered superior to non-humans. Mongolian herders herd not only in order to utilize the livestock, but also to build a relationship between themselves and the animals who provide for their needs. Different from other types of nomadic pastoralists who, according to Natasha Fijn, see "the animals as property, commodities, or as metaphors for human behaviour," in Mongolia's nomadic environment, "the herd animals [are] actors in their own right" and human and non-human relations are regarded as equal; the non-human is, in fact, the focal point of Mongolian cosmology (2008: 36-41). As I travelled through the Mongolian countryside, it was common to see domesticated livestock taking a daily walk on their own, without herders, knowing exactly when and how they should come back to their homes.

Sound and songs are employed as a matter of course in these ecological communities in rural Mongolia, and the sound-makers are also predominantly herders, the people who best know their natural environment and their animals. It is in this context that the *urtyn duu* tradition has existed, both traditionally and in current practice. Urtyn duu, often translated as long-song, is a folk song genre in which vowels in the song lyrics are elongated, and often the consonants are manipulated by creating ornaments as a part of improvisatory expression.[3] This genre is still commonly practiced, even in

the lives of Mongolia's contemporary nomadic herders, despite the country's political and social development over the course of the 20th century.[4]

Through a consideration of Arne Naess's concept of "deep ecology" (1995b, 1989) in which humans, non-humans, and the natural environment exist holistically as equal actors of biodiversity in a given ecosystem, this article presents case studies in understanding how Mongolian herder-singers participate in the natural landscape through particular daily nomadic activities. These include vocalizing to animals, milking, a horse racing chant-style song called *giingoo*, and interaction with the rural landscape which all connect to the basis of vocal techniques and musical ideas used in urtyn duu. The sound/music-making of Mongolian herder-singers is, in this way, not simply an artistic and performative expression of the singers. Rather, I have found that urtyn duu singing is an act of connecting their living environment to their spiritual realm through an economic and physical participation. This article suggests, then, that urtyn duu singing becomes an emotional, spiritual, and practical interconnection with Mongolians' pastoral and environmental activities, allowing them to pursue "ecotopia"[5] (Anderson 2010).

This article specifically explores the interactions between Mongolian herder-singers, non-human livestock, and their natural surroundings to explore the meaning of urtyn duu singing. Based on ethnographic research — selected interviews with singers, long-term observation of rural landscapes, and of nomadic activities of living actors (including human and non-human) — I investigate how singing functions as a critical, sensitive, and spiritual means to create relationships that regulate environmental balance in the singers' nomadic lives. When singers are able to find the sensibility and echoes of their spirituality in their nomadic living environment, the singing of urtyn duu can be seen as a *sonically ritualized process* that makes possible what Titon calls "co-presence" (2016: 72), in which herder-singers and animals connect with each other and contribute to the vitality of Mongolia's ecosystem.

Khün: Herder-singers

While I encountered numerous professional singers[6] in Ulaanbaatar, I felt like I had never found any singers *per se* in the countryside: rather I found herders who sang. When I travel across rural Mongolia, I usually visit herders in their *ger* (a portable circular felt tent used as a nomadic dwelling), far away from the town centres. I am lucky if I find them in their encampments right away or if I can catch them on the way back from herding, rather than missing them while they are out taking their livestock to the steppe. Sometimes, I have found

them in the midst of herding, but many times I have missed them entirely as they moved with their livestock or travelled to other towns. When I stay overnight with them or stay with them for a couple of days in town, I am able to witness more closely how they interact with their livestock and their surroundings. Ranging from teenagers to elders in their seventies, the herders all understand how and when to domesticate their livestock, and how to be gentle and negotiate with them while respecting their personalities.

Herders learn how to ride horses at many different paces; from a young age, they learn horse-related terminology, and as they ride out to pasture they hear and learn the legends of their regions, local toponyms, and the paths that connect specific places. These herders see and sense what non-nomadic outsiders would not see: the landscape's subtle colours and shapes distinguishing the compass points and roads on the empty steppe. The singers I encountered in the countryside are herders who are sensitive to others, people who are aware of "the herd animals' differing levels of sensory perception and recognize that some of it is beyond the realm of humans" (Fijn 2008: 103).

Perhaps not all herders are singers, but the singers in the countryside, at least the ones I met, were mainly herder-singers. I wondered why it was that in Mongolia anybody could be a herder but only certain people could be long-song singers. Long-song singers must be herders, or at least have had experience herding in their youth. There are singers in Ulaanbaatar who have moved away from their herding lives and are now focused on the performance aspect of their careers as professional singers. However, these singers had, without exception, been herders when they were younger. One of today's best-known singers, Sh. Chimedtseyee, was a herder and has spoken about her experience in the countryside, but other younger singers nowadays have little herding experience. What little herding experience they have is gained primarily from observing or by constantly traveling back and forth to the countryside (Sh. Chimedtseyee, interview, January 25, 2010; personal communication, October 23, 2013). How then do herders become singers? Young singers in Ulaanbaatar become trained professional singers through the conservatories[7] but herder-singers become singers through everyday activities with their livestock.

Reciprocity Between Herders and Their Livestock

Learned within Mongolia's natural environment — whether open pasture, mountainous ridges, scrubland, or desert — herders' traditional knowledge is abundant. Whether it relates to their livestock or to their environment, such knowledge is an essential part of their survival; furthermore, it has become the

basis of their songs, poetry, legends, story-telling and, most of all, their sensibility toward their habitat. Mongolian herders' nomadic lives revolve around the life-cycles of their livestock. Herders take their time, deepening their sensibilities according to their interaction with their animals, and these sensibilities become indispensable to their livestock and to others.

Some livestock are born to a herder's family while others are adopted into the family when lost or abandoned by their mothers and are then domesticated. In the course of this domestication, both the herder's family and the animals go through a process of adjusting to one another. Mongolian herders have developed detailed knowledge about the constitutions of their livestock and how to deal with the process of domestication. These activities include watering the livestock, grazing, milking, breeding, castrating them, helping the newborns, slaughtering them, making by-products — dairy products and meats (including bones and organs) — and using their hides and hair to make necessary clothing, blankets, and so on.

Whether to co-exist or to affect the health of the greater ecosystem, all those processes require interaction between herders and livestock. Sometimes they communicate and forge relationships through sound, but also through touch and sight, and perhaps through odour. Herders use an animal's language to speak with it. Rémy Dor defines humanly-produced sounds designed to communicate with animals as "huchements" (qtd. in Levin 2011 [2006]: 135-136). In Dor's work, this includes "onomatopoetic words," "nonarticulated utterances," and "articulatory speech." The vocalizations that Mongolian urtyn duu singers use in communicating with their livestock are called *malyn duu* (animal vocalization/song) among singers. This vocalization functions to comfort and call the animals in a variety of herding contexts: milking, making them move, stopping or turning them, and so on. Ts. Örlög, a singer whom I met in the summer of 2017 in Baganuur, a satellite town about 130 km from Ulaanbaatar, mentioned how, when a human sings to an animal, it is not to imitate but to communicate (*khun maltai khariltsakh,* literally*: a human communicating with an animal*). She demonstrated with several huchements: "zu-zu-zu-zu" (for goats), "tushu-tushu-tushu" (sheep), "tü-tü-tü" (camels), "gurai-gurai" (horses), and "ü-u-ü-u" (cattle) (interview, June 24, 2017). She noted that animal vocalizations vary from region to region. E. Khüürelbatar, a singer from Nalaikh, a suburb of Ulaanbaatar, had been a herder in the province of Gobi-Altai, in the far southwest. He recalled his youth in the countryside where he had observed herding practices and told me that, without understanding how animals make sound, and without knowing the way to talk to them, it is hard to explain urtyn duu techniques such as *tsokhilgo* (glottal vibrato). He emphasized that it is difficult to teach students who grew up in

the city since they are unfamiliar with the rural context (interviews, September 26 and November 24, 2009). When I visited L. Ragchaa in Darkhan, north of Ulaanbaatar, she also illustrated how she honed her singing techniques by demonstrating animal sounds:

> horse: gurai-gurai (*gurailakh* as a verb)
> cow: khör-khör
> sheep: toil-go, toil-go (*toiglokh* as a verb)
> goat: jig-jig-jig (*jiilekh* as a verb)
> camel: khösöö-khösöö

She added that the horse vocalization, *gurai-gurai* was used to help mares that rejected their foals (interview, December 15, 2009).

In demonstrating these sounds,[8] singers usually extended or emphasized one syllable more than the others. For example, singing to a cow, using the syllable *khör*, L. Ragchaa sang *khöö-r*, emphasizing the vowel *ö* in order to develop the throat, while the sound for goats, *jig*, was repeated without syllabic extension or emphasis, in order to practice relaxing the lips. Such practices with animals reflect the micro-rhythmic sense of urtyn duu (J. Enebish, n.d.), in that, when the vowels are elongated, the syllables give the feeling, both of being "drawn out" and also of regularity, conveyed through techniques developed for and through such vocalizations. In fact, Ts. Örlög claimed that these vocalizations are the basis of urtyn duu singing, demonstrating how she extends the huchements into musical syllables, sometimes adding lyrics, developing these improvisations into a simple song. She also illustrated the function of this vocalization, singing to comfort and settle (*jivekh*) the livestock, and to help them to accept their babies (interview, June 24, 2017).

The Mongolian language has two terms for the process of domesticating horses, *nomkhruulakh* (to tame, or make peace) and *surgakh* (to instruct, teach). Surgakh is the first step of domestication, which is breaking a horse when the horse reaches two years of age. Mongolians use nomkhruulakh to refer to the process of breaking a horse with an especially wild personality. The second meaning of nomkhuurlakh, to make peace, accurately illustrates how Mongolians try to calm their animals, how they listen to and sense their horses before trying to mount. One of the Mongolian sports contests held during the *naadam* festival in the summer measures how long a jockey can remain on a wild horse and successfully calm it. As part of taming in this sport, herders certainly use their strength, but they also communicate (*khariltsakh*) with all their senses and control the animals by sensing their physical movements.

Milking

Milking in the nomadic landscape of Mongolia brings together and connects sounds, songs, animals, and herders. On the way back from the countryside to Ulaanbaatar, on my very first visit to Mongolia in summer 2006, my friend wanted to get some milk. We stopped somewhere in the suburbs of Ulaanbaatar and asked a woman if she would give us some. She took a bucket while her husband brought a foal and had him stand beside a mare. The woman sat next to the mare and started milking while singing a long-song. Milking is a special process, not only for mares, but also for cows and goats, commonly accompanied, as I noted, by singing in the presence of the foal (or calf, or kid). The milking songs, which are meant to stimulate the flow (*ivlekh*) of milk, are usually animal vocalizations which are elongated into a kind of song, but it is also possible for a simple long-song to be sung during the milking.

Milk, *süü*, has a sacred symbolism in Mongolia. Milk is something that Mongolians offer to the highest entities, such as *Tenger* (the sky) or Buddha. They scoop up the milk and, flicking it, request good fortune. Milk also cleanses sickness from animals and cleanses rivers, streams, wells, and springs when these are felt to be polluted. One particular reason why Mongolians drop milk into streams is to offer the milk to the water deity whom they believe to be angry (*bohirdoh,* polluted) (G. Süld-Erdene 2014: 377). In fact, when I got extremely sick with a high fever on the road, Mongolians constantly asked me to drink milky tea (*süütei tsai*) and fed me fresh, baked animal organs.

When I stayed overnight in a ger, I often noticed that when the mother woke up in the early morning, the first thing she did was sprinkle milk into the sky, which dropped onto the land right outside the ger. Oberfalzerová explains the way milk is used in expressions such as *su'u o'rgo* [*süü örgökh*], which literally means "to raise up milk" or "to make an offering, to worship." This expression is used when the first drop of fresh milk is offered to the spirit of the earth after milking. Another expression is *su'u bariz' zogso* [*süü barij zogsokh*], which is used when a mother's children move away from her: she holds a bucket of milk that she sprinkles after them (Oberfalzerová 2006: 102-103). When I left after an interview, singers often sprinkled milk, wishing me a safe journey.

Respect for milk comes not only from the meaning that the milk itself conveys, but more importantly from the process of milking, from the physical interaction that happens between the milker and the animal. The importance of the interaction is implied by the process of removing the foal prior to milking (*ürs gargakh*), necessitating the milker's sensitivity to the mare who is losing her foal, and to the foal, who is not only losing its mother, but also needs to be physically capable of surviving on grass alone. Fijn notes that "milk is

indeed of utmost importance in Mongolian pastoral society" and this is because milking is "a crucial part of the one-to-one interaction necessary for an animal to remain tame," and possibly creates "a strong mechanism for the continuing co-domestic relationship" (2008: 133). Thus, herders choose an auspicious day (i.e. the "tiger day" before the summer returns) on which to remove a foal from its mother and to start to milk the mare themselves (G. Süld-Erdene 2014: 485).

In my observation, herders continue to take the foal to its mare when they milk, and the herders mimic the sucking noise made by a foal and make it sound like a song. I heard such singing not only when herders milked mares, but also when they milked goats and sheep on the steppe in summer. Fijn mentions that "using young animals to stimulate the flow of milk is also practiced with bovines in Tibet, Africa, and India, but using this method [i.e., utilizing the sound] to obtain milk from mares may be unique to Inner Asia" (2008: 134). As I noted above, herders direct sounds to their livestock in many different circumstances, such as when they take them out, graze them, ride them, comb them, catch them, feed them, and so on. The way Mongolian herders treat their livestock is particularly sensuous. Herders become quite gentle and calm, especially when they milk, and in that case, their voices change to become more musical. When herders need to control their animals, their voices become harsh (not necessarily loud), using words with "ch" or "kh" sounds such as "choo" (go), "khui" (no), and so on, while their singing becomes more elongated when they want to calm the animals down.

The importance of the milking process in nomadic life is, then, to encourage physical contact between herders and their livestock while meeting the herders' need for food. The close physical contact between foals and mares, as well as between the mare and the milker, is the basis of their close relationships and motivates the participation of the actors, each sensing the other's smell, touch, taste, and sound. David Howes and Constance Classen, drawing on sensory studies, use three examples — from Tibet, the Andes, and the Amazonian rainforest — to introduce the concept of "cosmic and sensory integration" as a necessary process connecting the human body with the environment and with the universe, particularly in the healing process (2014: 57). They explain that "cosmic integration" is rooted in a belief system in which the natural, human, and sacred realms merge, and "sensory integration" is how "different senses are stimulated and interrelated in healing … deliver[ing] complementary treatments and messages through a variety of sensory channels" (57). The physical activity of the milking process, although it is not presented explicitly as a healing process, achieves "cosmic and sensory integration" through the milker's physical stimulation, while the singing participates in,

or even reinforces, their sensory integration through their sonic stimulation. The vocalization and singing, then, become instruments for transcending the physical distinctions among humans, non-humans, and nature by connecting them through sound, providing life-giving comfort and sensory connections among all the agents who are participating in any given domestication process involving humans and their livestock.

Giingoo

In the milking process, singers become mediums who seek to connect with non-humans through their animal vocalizations, urtyn duu, and their understanding of milk in their pastoral lives. Similarly, the prayer-chant style of song known as giingoo, sung before a horse race, transforms a singer into a medium able to connect with a higher entity. The race can be quite dangerous for the young jockeys, and the giingoo is a song, or call, borrowed from Tibetan Buddhist prayer, requesting protection from a horse-headed protector deity called Tamdrin. I have frequently found in my interviews that singers also refer to giingoo using the term (*um)marzai*, which I was frequently told has a Buddhist origin. The meaning of the verb *marzaikh* is "to grimace," suggesting the terrifying grimace seen on wrathful protector deities (such as Tamdrin) in Tibetan Buddhist iconography, used to scare off malevolent forces in a dangerous situation such as a horse race (Hagin 1986: 306).

Among Mongolian livestock, horses have been most closely associated with, and are indeed essential to, nomadic life. Mongolian horses are frequently the subject of urtyn duu, whose lyrics often speak of the speed of a horse and their different colours, gaits, and ages. Sometimes horses are personified in order to describe nomadic life. Mongolian herders learn to ride a horse at a young age, when they also learn to train their horses. After a horse is broken (surgakh) at age two, it becomes a racehorse (*khurdan mor'*). These racehorses are trained by skilled herders (*uyach*), and they are sent to race during the summer naadam festivals, from the smallest district (*sum*) naadam, to the provincial naadam (*aimgiin naadam*), to the national naadam in Ulaanbaatar. In these races, the jockey is usually a child between 5 and 12 years old who also takes care of the horse. In learning to ride a horse, and in taking care of horses, they learn giingoo.[9] Most urtyn duu singers were able to sing giingoo in my interviews, but this song varies according to region, and even according to individual households and people. Some exhibit slightly different melodic lines.

In my interview with D. Tömörsükh, I heard very different melodic lines from those of other giingoo I had heard. She told me, "The giingoo you

hear nowadays is not real giingoo. It is not so much lengthened and nicely ornamented. We learned from our mother and father, and now I am teaching this granddaughter," and she indicated one of four girls, who had been picked to ride a racehorse. Then, she sung me the giingoo, saying that in her region, it is called *(um)marzai* — "[um-] mar za - i-e-i-e, na-ma-sü- ü" — creating elongated vowels and breaking consonants with slight pitch changes, glottal vibrato, and vibrational movements (interview, July 12, 2017).

Traditionally this giingoo singing has been understood as the primary means by which children are identified as long-song singers. Giingoo's form of melisma (*nugalaa*) is improvisatory, involving syllabic elongation and changing timbres, which is also fundamental to urtyn duu's ornamentation. Often a young jockey who has a good voice, and who shows the ability to elaborate this nugalaa, is praised for his chanting. Mongols often say that the horse listens to the young jockey's singing. I observed that, before a race, a pre-pubescent jockey uses a "pressed" voice (*kharkhiraa*, *khargiraa*) to produce a particularly clear and powerful tone, capable of echoing over a long distance. While milkers' vocalizations and singing are gentle, calming, and soft, these young jockeys' voices are forceful, creating a strong sonic vibration. Before a boy's voice drops at puberty (most jockeys are boys, although there are occasional girl jockeys), the rather high, piercing sound of their giingoo expresses the strength of herders in the harsh nomadic environment. Furthermore, as the jockey's voice when singing giingoo can easily resonate on the open steppe (*tal*) as well as in the training space (*uya*), their strong vocal vibrations will resonate with the body of the horse on which the jockey is riding.

After conducting a number of interviews, I also came to realize that giingoo is a profoundly spiritual form of protection that connects the horse, the child jockey, and the landscape through which they gallop. In a horse race, the first-place award is not given to the jockey, but to the horse and its trainer. The jockey, then, as the sonic body, is a medium that connects horse, landscape, spirits, earth and sky, and even the other participants in the race. The jockey connects them all, and the song sung at the beginning of the race becomes the sonic ritual through which they are spiritually integrated:

> In pre-communist Mongolia, the need to negotiate with nature was fueled by the belief that it was inhabited by truculent master-spirits that actively affected people's everyday lives. The force or power of nature (*baigaliin hüch*), and the spirits or gods that both inhabited and comprised it, had to be placated with libations and offerings and charmed with music, dance and song. (Pegg 2001: 100)

Landscape and Singing

Carole Pegg has shown that the topography of the Mongolian (Inner Asian nomadic) landscape can be compared with the melodic contours of urtyn duu, serving as a prime example of sonic mimesis (2001: 106). The subtle changes in the mountain ridges on the open steppe are depicted in the melodic movements of urtyn duu. Western Mongolia, with its mountainous topography, is reflected in the undulating lines of local singers, accompanied sometimes by exclamations with echo-like tone colours. Depending on the region, certain places are known to produce many good singers, while some places seem to produce none. For example, Dundgov' province, about 600 km south of Ulaanbaatar, is famous for having numerous good singers, especially in the eastern part of the province, around Deren, Gurvansaikhan, and Bayanjarglan sum.[10] Meanwhile, in places such as Matdad sum in Dornod, about 800 km east of Ulaanbaatar, it is very hard to find any singers at all (see Fig. 1).

When I met singers in eastern Dundgov', they seemed to be convinced that people from this area naturally had good voices, which is why so many of Mongolia's famous singers, such as N. Norovbanzad (1931-2002), are from the area. Close to Gurvansaikhan sum, there is a place called Ikh Gazryn Chuluu, which is famous for its granite rocks and relatively grassy steppe, in contrast to the shrubby desert in the south and west of the province. Ikh Gazryn Chuluu has a rich ecosystem, with its wild animals and birds, as well as mineral wealth. One of the urtyn duu singing styles in this region, the Borjigin style, has many small ornamentations and nasal sounds, reflecting this ornate granite landscape, a landscape quite different from that of central Mongolia (see Fig. 2).

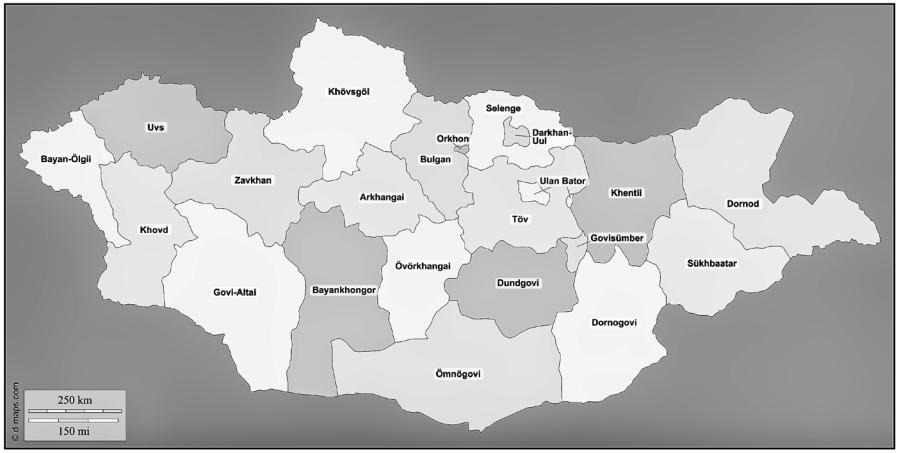

Fig. 1. Map of Mongolia

The Borjigin style of urtyn duu singing is highly ornamented and nasal. Singers told me that the region's topography, with its deep recesses and hollows, is different from neighbouring areas such as that of western Dundgov', which is close to the Khangai area, and whose extended pastureland is reflected in an extended, stretched, and strong vocality utilizing more of the back of throat than the nose, as well as extended breathing techniques. Sükhbaatar province to the east is different again, with a less sharp and less nasal sound, but with a wider vocal range than that used in the Khangai area. Singers mentioned that the rather distinctive singing techniques of the Borjigin style arise from the regional topography, producing an echoing sound and intense resonance with their busy and detailed ornamentation and their nasal timbre, as well as with the relatively short breathing that marks phrasing and which is different from the breathing practiced in other regions.

This echo of the landscape in a melodic line is frequently found in other techniques used in the urtyn duu tradition. As herder-singers often mentioned the sacredness of, and their respect for, their geographical landscape, they also expressed this concept in their singing. For example, the urtyn duu technique

Fig. 2. Gurvansaikhan and Ikh Gazryn Chuluu seen at the bottom of the map. (Google Earth accessed September 22, 2018.)

known as *shuurankhai* (falsetto on the highest note) is taken to symbolize the sky or the highest point in a mountain ridge, since it is used to perform the highest pitch of the song, and because it is employed in the most respected category of long-song, *aizam duu* (extended long-song).[11]

Herder-singers' connection to their land exists not only in their singing practices and song structures, but also in particular words that they use in place-names, lyrics, song titles, and local legends (*domog*). For example, some Mongolian toponyms are sonically related to songs. The name Uliastai, in Zavkhan province to the northwest, where I frequently saw poplar trees in my travels, comes from *ulias,* which means "poplar tree." When the wind blows across a poplar tree's branches, it makes a sound, which is rendered in Mongolian by the verb *ulikh* (to howl), an onomatopoeia which informs the geographical name (Legrain 2014: 234). There is a well-known long-song, "Tungalag Tamir," in which *Tamir* not only refers to a local river name but also means "power." *Tungalag* means "clear" and "transparent," and it is often used to describe sound as "bright and clear." Thus, the first verse of this song portrays clear and powerful waters, as well as the sound of water, contrasting with the weakening autumn flowers, and the sound of the wind.

TUNGLAG TAMIR	CLEAR RIVER TAMIR
Tungalag tamiryn zülgend ni	In the meadows along the clear Tamir
züül olon tsetsgüüd	grow flowers of many kinds.
namryn serüün senst salkhind	In the fresh fanning of the autumn wind,
uitai gankhaj naigana	they sadly sway and wither.[12]

(Kh. Sampildendev and
K. N. Yatskovskaya 1984)

Long-songs also relate local legends. For example, the song "Toroi Bandi" is related to the legend of Toroi Bandi[13] in the region around Dar'ganga in Sukhbaatar province. In the story, when Toroi Bandi is escaping from the authorities who are chasing him, he takes advantage of a hill in Dariganga called Altan Ovoo, and successfully escapes (Ch. Namdag 2005: 40). The legend details the paths around Altan Ovoo. For this reason, the song "Toroi Bandi" is famous as a Dar'ganga regional song and is favoured by singers, such as Sh. Chimedtseyee, who grew up in this area. Such long-song legends are common and very often carry a specific regional name or involve dialect words relating to the landscape. Sh. Chimedtseyee explained that the wind from Khentii province to the north pushes down to Sükhabaatar province, to a place called Shilingol

and so to Altan Ovoo, mentioned in "Toroi Bandi." She explained how that wind's energy merged with the power of their songs:

> The fresh wind of the Khentii and Khangai ridges follows the mountains down onto the steppe, and swirls in the direction of Dar'ganga, where it meets with the warm and gentle winds from the Himalayas, generating great strength. The concentration of this great power across the area of Dar'ganga around Shiliin Bogd and Altan Ovoo is the influence which produces songs of such extraordinary energy and power. (2013: 94)

Singers engage with their geography through their embodied local legends and ecological knowledge, which they express through their singing and in their songs. Singers are more than just makers of music and makers of sound: they play the role of recipients and communicators of the knowledge and wisdom embodied in the local landscape.

Singers, Songs, Nature, and Sonic Ritualization

The Mongolian word *duulah* means not only "to sing," but also "to listen" and "to obey." The connection, by which singing and listening exist together in this one word, duulah, seemed to come alive in the practice of singers. I learned this particularly through my conversation with S. Mönkhtuyaa, one of the young urtyn duu singers, who had grown up in a herder family and was now studying at the Music and Dance College in Ulaanbaatar after learning songs from a local singer. I asked in frustration how I could produce a better *tsokhilgo* (glottal vibrato). She said to me, "Listen; if you listen a lot, you will be able to do it" (personal communication, September 27, 2009). The "listening" that Mönkhtuyaa was talking about, which also appears in singing and through humans' expressive and performative response to the environment, refers to the act of sensing and feeling the bodies surrounding her, along with that of the entity initiating the sonic vibration.

What connects all the activities of the herder-singers described above — vocalization, milking, giingoo, and the participation in the sonic landscape — is that they all require great sensitivity, specifically with the ears, but also with the body, as well as learning to experience and embody a large amount of local knowledge from the environment. Knowledge is embodied in sound and song. Laurent Legrain mentions that, depending on the location of their encampment, Mongols hear different sounds, and that hearing different sounds

increases the variety of technical skills and musical expressions in their singing. The perception of a variety of sounds is made possible through attention and sensitivity:

> All the attention of those with whom I spoke appeared directed toward the perceived differences between the interpretation they heard here and the numerous others which they had experienced. The cause of these differences, often barely perceptible to an inexpert ear — but yet at the same time well-presented — can in the large majority of cases be attributed to the regional origin of the singers. These are the nugalaa — a vocal inflection, the pronunciation of a word, a slightly different melodic turn, the melodic approach to a note from beneath as well as from above — detected in the sonic material which reveals to those with whom I spoke the reality of the *usnyhan*, the communities or "people of the water," an expression used to signify in a particular way those families who place their seasonal encampments along the same river. (Legrain 2014: 269)[14]

Close coexistence with the environment is essential, then, to Mongolians' sound making. Building on Thoreau's awareness of "resonance," the "vibrating body," and the quality of "echoes" in *Walden*, Titon emphasizes the importance of "co-presence," arguing that, for Thoreau, "echo was not merely a reflection; it was interactive, signalizing presence opening to co-presence" (Titon 2016: 72). Applied to urtyn duu singers immersed in a non-human environment, the concept of "co-presence" refers to the singers' sensing of other animals and their surroundings. Co-presence is a fundamental experience in herders' everyday lives. When I asked herder-singers how they practice glottal ornaments, most answered that they did not know (*bi medekhgüi shüü dee*). I asked where this tradition came from historically, and they answered in the same way with a smile: "I don't know." Then they unfolded stories explaining toponyms in the lyrics, the legends of the songs, the landscape of their birthplaces — usually how beautiful it is, how they endure the cold winter, how they enjoy their summer pastures, and where they move for their summer and winter encampments. So in fact it is not that they do not know, but that they do not know how to explain, because the singing, the songs, and their history are all so deeply embodied in them.

Because herder-singers are together on the steppe with their parents from childhood, interacting with livestock both directly and indirectly, they learn "a variety of modes of communication involving different senses such as visual

displays, physical contact, vocalizations, and social odours" (Fijn 2008: 106). Moreover, their listening becomes attuned to the "resonance" and "vibration" of their ecological system, so they become integrated with the environment beyond mere imitation of sound. The role played by the human herder-singers is to connect all that is present in "sounds originating in nature itself," as Levin notes: "The spiritual quality of acoustically resonant landscapes can be evoked not only by human sound-makers but also by sounds originating in nature itself" (2011 [2006]: 38).

Anthropologists have begun to understand the relationship between indigenous cultures, ideas, environments, and ecology beyond the socio-political. Leslie Sponsel, an anthropologist of religion, suggests the term "spiritual ecology," encompassing indigenous ideas of spirituality and religion, and contrasting with earlier anthropocentric religious understandings, in order to conceptualize interactions between humans and their environment (Sponsel 2007, 2012). Taking spiritual ecology as a juncture between materialism and mentalism, Sponsel believes that current environmental issues can be studied, advocated for, and understood through the practice of spirituality, which covers native values, philosophies, and moral traditions in close relation to their natural environment: "the natural and the supernatural are not necessarily separate and incompatible domains, but instead they are often interwoven into the very fabric of human experience" (2007: 346).

In an earlier study that discusses the links between religion and nature, Roy Rappaport examines a pig-slaughtering ritual among the Tsembaga people of New Guinea. Rappaport explains that the ritual not only connects with the supernatural and non-empirical agencies, but also, as he argues, is a necessary act and mechanism for survival among humans, non-humans, and the environment, as well as a mode of communication among the participants. Thus, Rappaport's study of the Tsembaga suggests that human behaviours are, after all, empirically "operational" in adjusting to the natural environment, although this process can present as cultural, or political, or religious (1984).

Rappaport's observation of "empirical and operational" conservation in an ecosystem in the form of ritual and Sponsel's effort to investigate indigenous spirituality/religion's support of the values found in the natural environment both connect with the main philosophy of deep ecology, emphasizing the ecocentric as opposed to the anthropocentric. Furthermore, the empirical and practical reasoning of ecological movements from Rapapport's case study and Sponsel's approach closely reflect one early idea of deep ecology, that "reality as spontaneously experienced binds the emotional and the rational into indivisible wholes" (Naess 1989: 63). This "reality" is what underpins Arne Naess's strong advocacy of biodiversity (1995a).

Although urtyn duu might be seen as a skillful musical performance to non-practitioners of this tradition, as a nomadic activity, it actually functions in a similar way to the Tsembaga people's ritual, as part of a conservational ecosystem. Using a vocality that is close to non-human and singing urtyn duu in the countryside are not simply about creating sound, but are rather ways of being a part of the environment. In the act of singing the urtyn duu songs, Mongolian herders "ritualize" everyday music-making and, to use Sponsel's definition of spiritual ecology, create an interweaving of natural and supernatural "into the very fabric of human existence" (2007: 346).

In discussing how sustainable resources are balanced and conserved through the interrelationship of humans, non-humans, and the environment, Eugene Anderson discusses the need for morality, which requires tolerance and respect for one another, and suggests that "emotion" is the basis on which positive morality can operate within an ideal environment (2010).[15] Urtyn duu singing provokes emotions and connects individuals with their environment. Anderson, Rappaport, and Sponsel illustrate, as with Naess' understanding of deep ecology, the relations between the ecological system, environmentally-rooted spirituality, and the worldviews of actors in a given system, which are essentially reciprocal and complementary to one another. This approach to the interface between spirituality and ecology can be applied directly to the worldview of Mongolian herders. Herder-singers are not so much mediums for the religious or shamanistic world, but are instead empirical ecologists, similar to Sponsel's description of indigenous peoples as "original spiritual ecologists" (2007: 346), who best understand their ecological environments through their herding lives, and who are able to yield to, negotiate, adjust, and control their environment without recourse to "scientific sobriety" (Naess 1989: 63).

Herder-singers' technical prowess goes far beyond simple sound imitation and sound-making: it expresses and embodies their environment as a whole. Each becomes "a deep listener and a deep learner," who "often can have near-religious transcendental experiences" (Becker 2004: 2) and who has embodied experiences not only with the physical body and the "inner mind," but also by being "involved with other bodies in the phenomenal world, that is, as being-in-the-world" (8-9). Although they may not know technical musical terms, and although they may be unable to explain what they do, they still make an enchantment of song that, through their nomadic sensibility, transcends the individual and sound. In this way, the songs, which emerge from the minds and the physical sounding bodies of herder-singers, function as an "energy" (*enyergi*) (Ts. Örlög, interview, June 24, 2017). This "energy" is itself the spiritual sensibility they feel and which is interwoven

with their natural surroundings through the sound of their singing. It does not exist for some elevated religious purpose or particular spiritual intention, but rather simply exists as part of their everyday lives, celebrating who they are with what they have. In this act of singing, the essential and the spiritual conjoin, while for outsiders, their song is simply a beautiful and unique sound of "exotic" nomadic culture.

Notes

1. This article is based on extended fieldwork undertaken in Mongolia between 2007 and 2017. A list of singers' names and the dates and locations of the interviews can be found at the end of this article. The fieldwork was conducted, generally between May and August, in 2007, 2012, 2015, 2017 and for six months (basically between September and February) during 2009-2010, and 2013-2014. I travelled to both the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar, and to the rest of Mongolia's rural provinces, including Sükhbaatar, Dornod, Khentii, Dornogov', Töv, Bulgan, Övörkhangai, Arkhangai, Bayankhongor, Khövsgöl, Zavkhan, Gov' Altai, Uvs, and Khovd.

2. In Mongolia, there is also a spiritual belief in the sky as a deity, to whom Mongolians pay respect through certain rituals. This spiritual practice, often described as "tengerism," is found broadly in Inner/Central Asian regions.

3. The audio example is available here: https://youtu.be/Wjc9g3wKefQ

4. The changes in the ecological aspects of the urtyn duu tradition due to the transformation of contemporary Mongolia is beyond the scope of this article.

5. E.N. Anderson coined the term "ecotopia" in 1973, suggesting ideal, ecologically advanced societies. Anderson emphasized "ecotopia" as "a process goal" providing many means of pursuing this ideal, rather than offering it as a single ecological movement and view (2010).

6. Here "singers" means those performers who sing professionally or make a living from singing.

7. There are two main conservatories that produce professional urtyn duu singers in Ulaanbaatar. One is SUIS (Soyol Urlagiin Ikh Surguul'/ University of Culture and Art), and the other is Khögjiim Büjgiin Surguul' (Music and Dance College).

8. The audio example is available here: https://youtu.be/0KcFamNqDNs. Please note that the demonstration of camel call is not included in this example.

9. Musically speaking, this chant-style song is a combination of call and singing. The singer shouts out the chant style of a call, followed by a melody of elongated syllables.

10. Smaller administrative district of a province (aimag).

11. *Aizam duu* is the most respected form of long-song both because of its longer length and because of its philosophical poetry. It can be contrasted against *jiriin duu*, *suman duu* (both denoting regular long-song), and *besreg urtyn duu* (abbreviated to *urtyn duu*). Pegg considers *tügeemel urtyn du*u to be the most common long-song

category (Pegg 2001: 44) while I more frequently heard *jiriin duu* in the field.

12. Translation by author

13. Toroi Bandi was a bandit who helped the poor, in the manner of Robin Hood.

14. Translation from French by the author.

15. Anderson, furthermore, addresses "caring" as an aspect of emotion necessary to move morality and rationality towards an "ecotopia" (Anderson 2010). This concept had already been suggested by Naess (1989), who suggests that "the activism of the ecological movement" is not "a 'mere' emotional reaction" and "irrational" compared with "the rationality of a modern Western society." Rather it is the possible basis for valuing thinking that embraces "strong feelings, but with a clear cognitive function" (Naess 1989: 63-67).

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