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On the Mongolian Folk Drawling Song

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Despite globalization, the Mongolians have not neglected their melodious folk drawling song, national wrestling, folk dance, or morin khuur instrument with its carved horse head at the top. If we cannot respect, love, inherit, and learn our culture, it will disappear quickly through globalization. This article discusses some specifics of the Mongolian folk drawling song, which is a part of Mongolia's national etiquette.

Key words: Mongolian folk, melodious, folk drawling song, music, globalization

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1. Introduction

Culture is a nebulous concept linked to various aspects of social relations and consciousness. Mongolians have been protecting their national culture since ancient times, passing it down through generations. Even with accelerating scientific and technical progress, deepening relationships among countries, and ongoing processes of globalization, human culture will never be homogeneous.

With its unique expression of nomadic culture, its combination of music and words, and its perfect development of content, the folk drawling song contributes to what is a valuable repertory of Mongolian national arts. The song contains an ancient tradition, a historical culture, an aesthetic consciousness, a moral philosophy, and holistic cognitive methods.

2. The classic type of Mongolian folk drawling songs

The folk drawling song is uniquely amazing among the folk songs of the world. Researchers claim that over 6,000 folk drawling songs exist in the repertory, though only about 60 are sung today.

Art critic D. Oyuntsetseg says that “First of all, the folk drawling song was created from the idolatry of ancestral spirits, then continued its formation process during the development of the medicine-man, Buu, and Lam religious etiquette” (Oyuntsetseg 2010: 34).

Creation of the folk song drew upon various sound techniques that nomads found in inanimate nature and used in shamanism; sources included hunting, husbandry, and the first spiritual melodies. These formed the natural order of Mongolians’ music mentality and created the folk drawling song, the great gift of Mongolian culture.

Because nomadic herders depend on nature for their livelihoods, they are familiar with nature’s sounds and can discern important information in them, as when they relate to animals. They can reproduce the gushing of wind, emit sounds from the throat (*khuumii*), howl, call, influx, and in short do everything required for the development of folk drawling song.

Critic J. Badraa says, “First, early men used ready materials, like their tongues and throats; then, they started to seek the bulrush, bamboo, and rock to reproduce sounds, telling us that they developed specific methods to express themselves through music” (Badraa 1973: 42).

The heroic, a kind of Mongolian folk tale, expresses various human types and many meanings depending on the folk song and thus provides fruitful material for artistic development. The folk song not only communicates beauty to its audience but also helps them understand reality and make judgments through art and educates young people by giving them examples of a community hero’s wishes, desires, and thoughts.

The folk song is classified by melody into Borjigon, Bayanbaraat, Central Khalkh, Western Mongolian style (Baruun Mongolian), and the Zuun aimag; their content and volume can be short, *suman*, longer, or *aizam* (rhythm). These categories are described by J. Dorjdagva:

1. Borjigon style: This type of folk song is diminutive and has more trappings. The melody is exquisite, spacious, and free—a little shorter than by Mastery and more specific in its dexterously jaunty coloratura, bump, and falsetto.
2. Bayanbaraat style: This has less mien and trappings and is a modish style similar to a Lama’s preaching—that of the Bogd Gegeen’s progeny, for example, with its impetuous nature and few small coloratura. It is an ascending and sloping style.
3. Western Mongolian style: This has a particular composition and well-planned trappings. A little shorter than the Zuun/Eastern Mongolian/aimag melody, it has more rhapsody than the Borjigon melody, more oscillation, and fewer bumps. This is a simple folk song accompanied by a sung rhythm with a wider range of volume; it is sacramental and combined with rhapsodic coloratura, trappings, and extreme leaps.
4. Zuun or Central Khalkh style: This is a combination of the above three styles. The melody has great scope; it is spacious and loose, with outstanding composition. (Dorjdagva 1959: 44).

The rhythm folk drawling song was developed primarily in the Zuun/Eastland area of Mongolia, drawing on its pleasant environment and climate. During the summer there,

Mongolians commemorate their holidays. On all holidays, they gather together as tribes and invite their best folk singers, welcoming and learning from their singing methods and sharing their creative experience and talents. The people from this area extol and support their best singers, and many great singers have come from there.

3. The Oirad Mongolians' folk drawing songs

The Oirad(Oirat) people live in Uvs, Khovs, Bayan-Ulgii aimags, Mongolia and Bayangol, Khovog sair, Tarvagatai, and Bot tal in Shinjan Uigur. Oirad Mongol is the motherland of the Khalkh, Bayad, Durvud, Zakhchin, Torguud, uuld, Uriankhai, Khoton, and Kazakh ethnic groups, whose songs have unique features. For instance, Badraa notes about their folk song chorus that “it is interesting that they all fizz together at the wedding parties, and they have a tradition of singing more than 365 songs.”

Oirad Mongolians' songs and folk literature have been attracting researchers' attention since ancient times. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Mongolists A. Pozdneev, G. N.



Photo 1 Traditional musical instruments tovshuur and ikel of oirad. Collection of Khovd Museum. Photo by T. Siguyama.

Potanin, and B. Ya. Vladimirtsov traveled around Mongolia and noted that most of the folk songs were created by the Oirad people, especially the Durvud. Durvud songs have very rich sub-varieties and generally divide into tractate, rhythm, and vicious songs.

Folk songs deal with life, ordinances, and traditions; thus, the songs of different nationalities have their own peculiarities. For instance, most Durvud songs are about horses, including the “Thirteen Horses Song,” while most Zakhchin folk drawling songs talk about the homeland, nature, cattle, love for the mother, romance, and the morality of the younger generation from the elders’ point of view.

The folk drawling song divides into the “Aizan thirty two” and the “khangain eight.” The Aizan starts with “Aya zee hu” (hence the name) and is mostly an immense, outstanding melody; it is used ceremonially for its philosophical lyrics and themes of state appreciation.

4. The ritual for singing folk drawling songs

People sing folk drawling songs not in spontaneous situations but during parties, ceremonies, and public occasions that do not require gestures rather than the lower Deel’s National costume of sleeves and cup signifying deep respect. A Mongolian party may start with one of the following five long aizam songs: “Uvgun Shuvuu,” “Tegsh tavan khusel,” “Durtmal saikhan,” “Asriin undur,” or “Tungalag tamir.” Each has its own characteristics.

The folk drawling song is an element of a civilization conditioned by nature, climate, anthropology, religion, and other social factors. It relates closely to Mongolian society and its traditional outlook. The tradition, daily disciplines, religious views, race, nobility, physiology, and psychological facts of the Mongolian nationality are therefore matters of great significance. The Mongolian folk song has several distinguishing features:

1. Richer rhythm. If you cannot understand the rhythms or follow the song, divide the aizam/rhythm.
2. Wider volume. The folk lay has one octave of Terzi (or more quart volume), but the folk song has more than two octaves of quart volume. To compare the drawling singer’s voice with European singers, a baritone tenor and an alto soprano can sing a drawling folk song.
3. It has longer leaps, as from falsetto to baritone and from baritone to falsetto.
4. In its musical language, it has more deflection. In other words, the folk song has imperfect key changes, deflecting from a major tuning into different tunings, then returning to the major tuning.
5. It has an euphonic priority that includes many more than five tunes.

The folk song is a great melodic art that requires very particular talents—voice volume, artfulness, imagination, personal coloratura, sift, bump, falsetto, and correct breathing. Expressing the folk drawling song’s coloratura through the twisting of musical sound and bumping requires a breathing movement. The “sift” is a sifting of breathing in the throat that gives the voice more thickness and clarity.

The singer should have a rich, free, and lively voice. The nature song divides into throaty, chesty, and stomachic. People who say that singing through the throat is tiring cannot sing the folk drawling song. Chesty and stomachic people do not weary easily but have lively

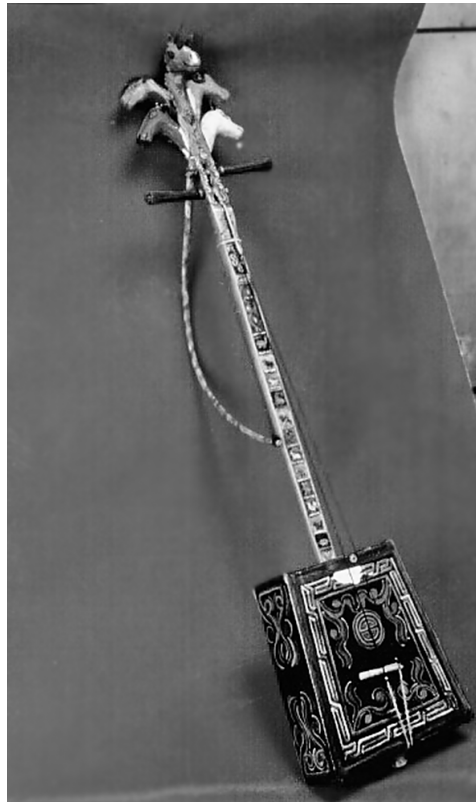


Photo 2 Traditional musical instrument- morinkhuur of Mongols. Collection of Khovd Museum. Photo by T. Siguyama.

voices, patience, and more opportunities to perform a variety of songs.

The folk drawling song has several technical methods, each with unique features such as breathing, faucal, swaying movement, coloratura, and breaks. For example, the trilling voice produces a pleasant sound and has important characteristics, such as overcoming bumpiness and flying.

Every singer has his own approach, and every song has its own norm and inside throb. After passing through many centuries, though, the genre has found advanced and stable styles. The technical methods and skills of folk drawling pass from one singer to another and from generation to generation. We know of the ancient singer Argasun-khuurch (a fiddler) and the Khukhuu Namjil legends. The heritage of the modern folk drawling song is linked to people like Luvsanbaldan Mergen, Luvsangompil Balin, Dashrinchin Maidar, Jurmed Nyam, Damba Shukher, Samdan Davkhar, and Damdin Davkhar, who wrote their works in the 19th and 20th centuries, joining Gombo Sam, Dugarjav Magsar Khurts, Tumur Tsendjav, Damchaa Seserjaa, Povron Gelenkhuu, Gonshig Sonompil, and Dorjdagva Jigzav.

The following singers have shown the 20th century a modern image, resonating in the global arena as well as in Mongolia: N. Norovbanzad, M. Dugarjav, J. Dorjdagva, Lamjav,

Ch. Sharkhuukhen, and J. Nergui. New singers continue to inherit the folk drawling tradition. For instance, Erdenechiimeg, Nomin-Erdene, and Uriintuya of the “Shurankhai” group were the first to sing the folk drawling song with three voices and in an ethnic style.

Researchers and critics classify folk drawling songs into laboring, ceremonial, wedding, berceuse, philosophic, amorous, and laudable types, but Western Mongolian folk songs fall into just two groups—the Thirteen Altain songs and the Thirteen Horse songs. The Thirteen Altain category includes songs about various aspects of the homeland, so that subcategories include the Altain 13 forest; Altain 13 pasture; Altain 13 spirits, Altain 13 rivers, lakes, and springs; and Altain 13 animals and birds.

In Western Mongol, “Altai” means “world,” “motherland,” “country,” and “homeland.” All parties therefore begin with the songs “Sav ikh ertunts” and “Oyun khukh ogtorgui,” which are followed by heroic poems in praise of the Altai, in a tradition flowing from their love of their world and homeland. Different songs are sung to open and close parties; attendees usually begin with “Khuuriin magnai” and end with “Enkh mendiin.” People sing 32 songs at bigger parties and 12 at smaller ones.

Something unique to the Western Mongol folk song is the “Thirteen Horse Song,” which describes horses that are yellowish, filthy, black, alezan, and chestnut. The first two verses praise the good characteristics of the horse, and the next two verses express the song’s main idea. The song about the yellowish horse starts, “My rakish yellowish horse runs far away”; the following verses say that there is nothing more valuable than the homeland and country and describe a happy life in the Durvud Oirad homeland.

The Zakhchin have folk songs about 9 yellowish, 9 chestnut, 9 brown, and 9 red horses, and the Myangad have songs about 5 chestnut, 5 yellowish, and 5 black horses. Some singers know more such songs than others. Some of the Oirad songs have come from Khalkh, and other nationalities say that their songs have a much wider scope. The Mongolian folk song is sung in many different areas in many different versions.

Mongolians registered their folk songs with UNESCO on November 25, 2005, as a human verbal and nonphysical cultural masterpiece. They consider that the Mongolian language, the Morin Khuur, and the folk song are the three stones on which the hearth of Mongolian culture stands. The folk songs inherited from their ancestors have played important roles in expressing culture, respect for elders, and ways of bringing up young people.

We find research on the folk drawling song from both lyrical and musical perspectives in *Folk Drawling Song* by J. Badraa, *About the Mongolian Folk Drawling Song* by J. Dorjdagva, *Issues in the Drawling Song’s Specific Particulars* by Kh. Sampildendev, *Mongolian Folk Song* by Khorloo, *History of Mongolian Music* by G. Badrakh, and *History of Mongolian Songs* by D. Sodnom. Detailed research has been done on the structure of the “Zambuu tiviin naran” folk drawling song produced by Japanese critic Nakagawa Sin. There also exist many note compilations and copies of the “Horse of Horse Riders, Mongolians” in Mongolian, Latin, and Cyrillic with full notation, as well as *Mongolian Singing-poem Type Folk Song: Birth and Revolution*, a theoretical work by D. Oyuntsetseg, a music critic and professor of art criticism who has played a key role in folk song research.

5. Conclusion

The folk song has historically cohered with the Mongolian mentality, conditioned as it is by the unlimited steppe; high, gorgeous mountains; and wide hillocks. All nomadic herders have a little of the folk singer in them when, for instance, they copy the rhythm of a lamb goatling, soothe an animal by saying “toig toig,” make a cattle’s whoop, say “guurgii guurgii” to make a camel run, or bellow. Folk songs issue from the Mongolian environment. To offer such songs and research and inherit such splendid artistic creations gives Mongolians pleasure and dignity while contributing to not only Mongolia’s art treasury but also the world’s.

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