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Post-Soviet Tuvan Throat-Singing (*Xöömei*)  
and the Circulation of Nomadic Sensibility

By

Robert Oliver Beahrs

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Benjamin Brinner, Chair  
Professor Bonnie Wade  
Professor Alexei Yurchak  
Professor Theodore Levin

Fall 2014



Post-Soviet Tuvan Throat-Singing (*Xöömei*) and the Circulation of Nomadic Sensibility

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by Robert Oliver Beahrs

Abstract

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Guttural singing practices in the Sayan–Altai region of south-central Siberia have been historically framed as possessing “nomadic” qualities linked with pastoral population groups indigenous to the region. As these singing practices were incorporated into a genre of national folk music for Tannu Tuva (1921–1944) and the Tuvan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (1961–1991)—and then later reformulated as the centerpiece of an exotic genre of world music—*xöömei* throat-singing was shaped by contradictory attitudes towards its purportedly nomadic characteristics, which have been essentialized at various times, for multiple reasons, by local and global actors and interest groups. In the post-Soviet era, *xöömeizhi* (master throat-singers) from the Tuva Republic (now part of Russia) express a revitalized nomadic sensibility through *xöömei* singing practices, which has come to operate both as an ideology and a disposition for Tuvan traditional music. Drawing on a selective use of history, cultural memory, and natural environments, post-Soviet *xöömeizhi* construct a nomadic sensibility that is embodied in music and sound-making activities, foregrounded in intercultural exchanges, and circulated as a social disposition.

To Mom, Dad,  
and Matt



In Memoriam

Katherine Hagedorn  
(1961-2013)

and

Kongar-ool Ondar  
(1962-2013)



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Tuvan language is part of the Northeastern Siberian Turkic language family and therefore is related to the Sakha, Altai, Xakas, and Shor languages (and, more distantly, to Kyrgys, Kazakh, Uzbek, and Turkish).<sup>1</sup> About eighty percent of Tuva’s population is ethnically Tuvan. Since the Tuva Republic has long been within the sphere of influence of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, and is now part of the Russian Federation, virtually all of Tuva’s population has learned Russian language in school and can speak it competently, if not fluently. However, most Tuvans continue to speak Tuvan language on a day-to-day basis, and language competence is increasing in the post-Soviet era. The retention of Tuvan language practice is likely due in large part to Tuva’s geographic isolation in the Sayan–Altai Mountains of Inner Asia; the neighboring and less isolated Turkic republics of Xakassia and Altai have a much smaller percentage of their populations using native languages on a day-to-day basis.<sup>2</sup> Tuvan language was written in Latin script during the 1930s, but when the region became part of the Soviet Union in 1944, Cyrillic script became the norm and remains so today.

Given the difficulty in navigating the linguistic complexities of this region, I have chosen to use a simple convention adopted by present-day scholars for transliterating both Russian and Tuvan words into Latin script (see, for example, Levin 2006). In the table that follows, I outline several letters that appear in Russian and Tuvan but are not easily transliterated into Latin script for English-speaking readers.<sup>3</sup> The first two letters (x, y) are used in both Russian and Tuvan languages; the remaining three (ö, ü, ng) are found only in Tuvan (in addition to other Turkic languages). I include example words below in English to show the reader an approximate pronunciation of these letters when they are encountered in Tuvan and Russian words in the main text.

<u>Cyrillic letter</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>	<u>Sound</u>	<u>Example</u>
X	x (kh)	“ch” as in Scottish “loch”	<i>xöömei</i> (throat-singing)
Ы	y	“i” as in “lit”	<i>sygyt</i> (style of throat-singing)
Ө	ö	“u” as in “put”	<i>xöl</i> (lake)
Ү	ü	“u” as in “tutor”	<i>xüree</i> (temple)
Н	ng	“ng” as in “ring”	<i>borbangnadyr</i> (style of throat-singing)

In addition to the above, I deviate slightly from Slavic linguistic conventions for transliterating Russian characters for the following letters—й = i, я = ya. Where conventions

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Krueger 1977 and Tatarintsev 2000.

<sup>2</sup> For example, only ten percent of the population of Xakassia speaks Xakas; see <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/kjh>. All websites were last visited 14 August 2014 unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>3</sup> Table adapted from Levin 2006: xxii.



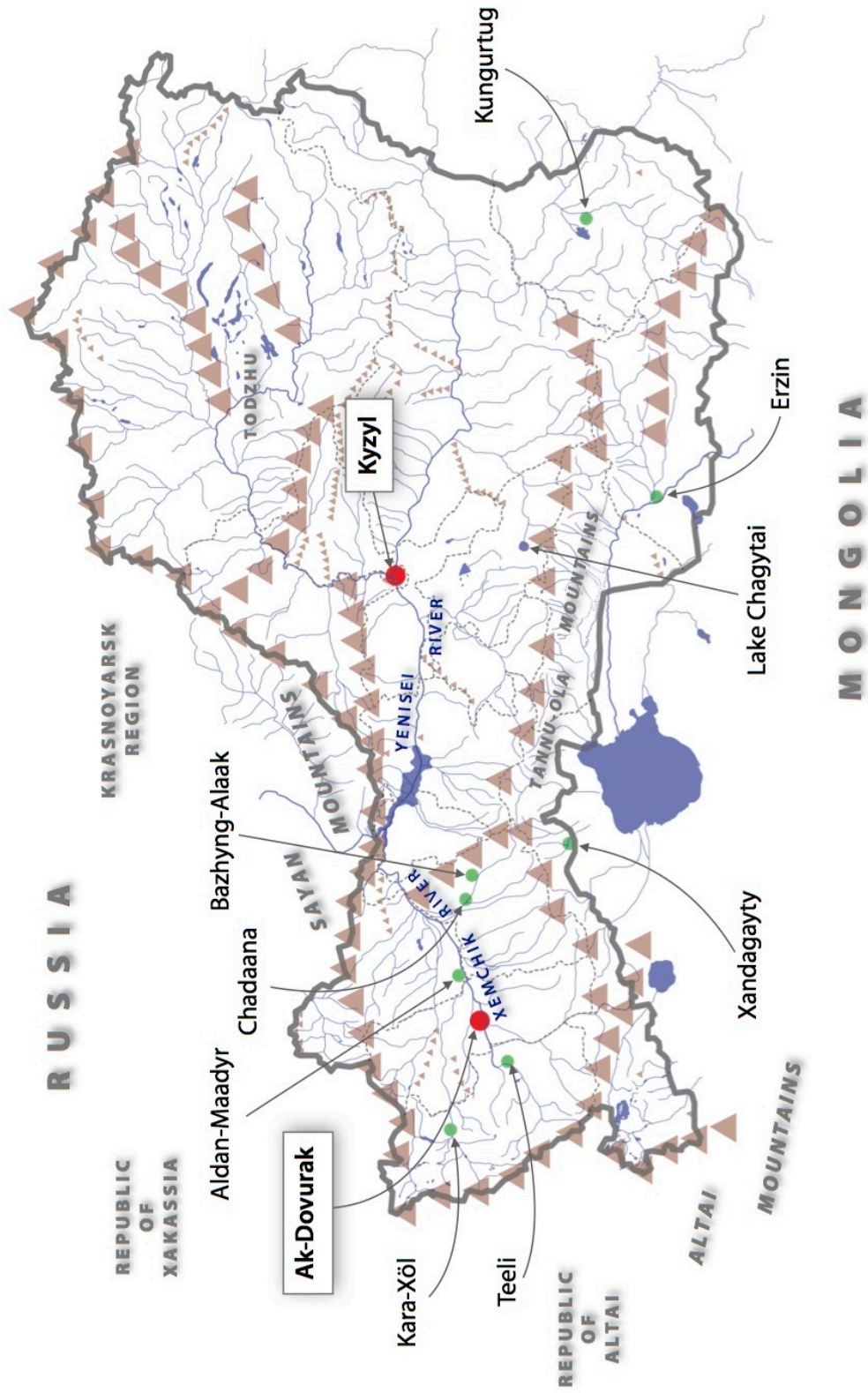
have been established for transliterating particular proper nouns, I defer to conventions (*e.g.*, “kh” instead of “x” in Sakha). For many of the lyrical musical examples in this dissertation, I have transliterated the Tuvan lyrics into Latin script and included English translations. I hope this method most clearly communicates the meaning *and* the sonic and musical qualities of the original text. For their ongoing assistance with Tuvan translation, I am grateful to Aylana Irgit, Arzhaana Syuryun, Victoria Peemot, Valentina Süzükei, Todoriki Masahiko, and Morten Abildsnes. I alone bear responsibility for any errors that appear in this text, and welcome suggestions for improvement.

MAPS OF THE TUVA REPUBLIC

LOCATION OF THE TUVA REPUBLIC IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION



# THE TUVA REPUBLIC



Original map designed by Todoriki Masahiko; labels by Robert Beahrs

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Words cannot express the full extent of my gratitude to the many individuals who have inspired and supported me in a project that began almost ten years ago. Nonetheless, these will have to do.

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I feel privileged to have had training in Tuvan music by my first *xöömei* and *igil* teachers—Evgeni Saryglar and Sergei Ondar—as well as other teachers with whom I have studied and discussed Tuvan music and sound-making practices—Andrei Öpei, Evgeni Oyun, Kaigal-ool Xoalyg, and Aldar Tamdyn. These lessons were the starting point for the empirical research in this dissertation project; they led me to pursue research questions across Tuva and in other countries; and they were the germ of close relationships that have enriched me as a scholar, a musician, and a person. Special thanks also goes to Albert Kuvezin, Vladimir Soyán, and the musicians of Alash, Chirgilchin, Huun-Huur-Tu, and Tyva Kyzy.

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International communities of fans and enthusiasts of throat-singing have been working and studying with me during my entire project, and their role in shaping my ideas and understanding of Tuvan music has been invaluable. I give special thanks to Todoriki Masahiko, Morten Abildsnes, and Pipa Paljakka, whose generosity in sharing their ideas, music, and archival material has shaped my work. I am also grateful for ongoing exchanges with Ralph Leighton and the Friends of Tuva, Sauli Heikkilä, Steve Sklar, Enrique Ugalde, Sami Jansson, Bernard Kleikamp, Michael Edgerton, Koichi Makigami, Eliot Stone, Stefan Kamola, Andrew Colwell, and Sean Quirk.

My experience at U.C. Berkeley has been nothing short of outstanding, due in largest part to the exceptional professors and advisers with whom I had the privilege of working. I would like to acknowledge the influence of my advisor and former Department Chair Ben Brinner, whose tireless support and feedback helped shape my project and guide me even before I knew where I was headed. I would like to thank Professors Bonnie Wade and Jocelyne Guilbault, whose excellent seminars and creative approaches to thinking about music helped me understand what it means to be an ethnomusicologist. I have also greatly benefitted from relationships with Professors Nina Eidsheim, Steve Feld, Alexei Yurchak, James Davies, Tomie Hahn, David Wessel, Lisa Gold, Ken Ueno, Mary Ann Smart, as well as members of the “Keys to Voice Studies” U.C. Multicampus Research Group. This project would not have been possible without the ongoing support and mentorship of Dartmouth Professor Ted Levin; his ethnomusicological contributions have profoundly shaped the field of Tuvan music studies, and his invaluable feedback over the years has encouraged me to settle for nothing less than my best.

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INTRODUCTION

NEAR XANDAGAYTY, TUVA—2005.

The sun descends quickly on a crisp October evening in the Ovür region of southwestern Tuva. Sasha Ondar and his flock of three hundred sheep and goats share a rousing moment of homecoming, passing over a hill and accelerating toward the familiar brook beside the Ondar family's round felt yurt (called an *ög* in Tuvan). Instinctively, the animals finish their drinking and peacefully enter a corral made from silver birch tree branches; they snicker and bleat and hump contentedly. Sasha dismounts his sturdy chestnut-colored mare, closes the gate to the corral, and joins us, along with the rest of his family, inside their warm yurt.

The colorful and toasty interior of the Ondar family's yurt is a clear contrast to the drab and windy autumn weather on the desert steppe in this remote region of Tuva, a Turkic-speaking republic inside the Russian Federation that sits on the border with Mongolia. Ornately painted orange cupboards and sky-blue trunks of clothes, a hodgepodge of oriental rugs and sleeping mats, family photographs and posters tucked here and there in the yurt's wooden frame provide evidence of comfortable, worn-in occupancy. I am an American visitor, a foreigner, a guest, and this evening's activities are clearly being structured around my presence. Aylana Irgit, my Tuvan friend from Kyzyl who teaches English at the local university, informs me that Ondar's family, her relatives, would like to respond to my gift of vodka and chocolate by fetching another bottle from the "neighbors"—ten kilometers away. Sasha sends his older son out on horseback. Before long, he returns and everyone in the family joins together in giving toasts, each accompanied by a finger flick of vodka to the east, to the west, to the upper skies, and to the lower worlds.

Later that night, after salted milk tea, fresh mutton stew, and plenty of vodka, the topic of music and herding comes up. I ask Sasha how he passes the time when he is out with his sheep and goats for so many hours a day. He responds:

Here in Tuva, most every herder sings *xöömei* or *kargyraa*—one of those styles [of throat-singing] or all of them—while herding. I don't really think about it; I just do it. I've done it since birth. It comes out of my soul! I do it for my sheep. I do it because I am Tuvan. It's soothing to the spirits and pacifies the sheep and goats. Spirits always like it when you sing *xöömei* for them, and that's why they keep an eye on you and your flock.<sup>1</sup>

Everyone in the family giggles as Sasha steps outside the yurt to warm up his voice for an impromptu throat-singing demonstration. We can all hear him clearing his throat and tuning up

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<sup>1</sup> Sasha Ondar, personal interview, Ovür, Tuva, 9 October 2005; translation from Tuvan by Aylana Irgit. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of personal, non-English interviews and communications are my own. See the Bibliography for more information.



his *kargyraa*, the deepest of the Tuvan throat-singing styles, which uses the vocal ventricular folds to double the number of audible harmonics in the sound. A few minutes later, Sasha comes back inside and exclaims, “It’s just not working. I have never sung in front of other people before!” His wife, Mariusa, pipes up, “Oh, but I know you can sing; I hear your *kargyraa* from across the steppe when you are out herding!” Filling my bowl of vodka, Sasha says, “it’s better if you come out with me herding tomorrow. My *kargyraa* sounds much better in the open air.”

Sasha’s comments illustrate the role that *xöömei* has played, and continues to play, as a solitary cultural expression of the traditional lifestyle of Tuvan mobile pastoralism.<sup>2</sup> Even though Sasha has practiced *xöömei* and *kargyraa* “since birth,” he expresses discomfort at the idea of “performing” throat-singing. Sasha could be reticent because I am a stranger, but the fact that Mariusa usually only hears Sasha throat-singing from a distance suggests that performing *xöömei* for others is not a part of a Tuvan herder’s traditional musical expression. But that conclusion seemed at odds with my experiences hearing throat-singers perform at the national theater in Tuva’s capital city of Kyzyl, as well as in world music venues back home in the United States. Was Sasha Ondar simply unusual? Or was he showing me a glimpse of the non-institutionalized side of *xöömei* that had lived residually at the margins of the Tuvan state? Sasha’s throat-singing did not seem to be “Europeanized” or “folklorized” as had been the case for *xöömei* singers during the Soviet Union; nor was it flashy or showy, as has become common with internationally touring throat-singers. I began to wonder—what was the relationship between Sasha’s introverted herding pastime and the nationalized genre of *xöömei* that was performed at the House of Folk Arts in Kyzyl? And how had Sasha’s throat-singing been shaped, if at all, by the explosion of global interest in Tuvan music and nomadic culture that has arisen since the late 1980s and continues to rise in the post-Soviet era?

During the night, I was cold even under two blankets and a sheepskin coat. The wind was howling and the yurt’s felt sidings shook violently. The next morning, Sasha’s meteorological prediction from the previous day had come true—a thin layer of fresh snow had dusted the desert steppe landscape overnight (see Figure i.1). Sasha explained that this event meant it was time for the family to pack up and move from their *küzeg* (autumn place) to their *kyshtag* (winter place). They would move in a few days over the nearby hills to a settlement where they had a small house and shelter for the animals to protect them from the region’s fierce winter weather.

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<sup>2</sup> Anthropologists Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath prefer the term “mobile pastoralism” to “nomadism,” because it does not bring with it commonly held assumptions of nomads as “backward” peoples (1999: 1). As they write, “nomadism is a category imagined by outsiders, and it brings with it many suppositions about pastoral life, such as that it is free and egalitarian ... or based on segmentary lineages ... or uses a wandering type of movement .... Other well-known images are of fierce, warlike tribes given to predatory expansion ... or simple folk whose highest cultural achievement is a colourful rug. Another, and influential, view is that nomads have a low technological capacity and are necessarily dependent on the ‘outside’ sedentary world” (*ibid.*).



Figure i.1. The Ondar family’s snow-covered yurt (*ög*, in Tuvan language) and their flock of sheep and goats in a corral; Ovür, Tuva, October 2005 (personal photo).<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime, a cacophony of bleats indicates that the flock of sheep and goats are anxious to leave the corral and start their day of grazing. With the help of Aylana and Alekmaa (Sasha and Mariusa’s daughter), we let them out and spend the next eight hours herding, chewing taiga sap, singing songs, and watching the sheep play, fight and nibble on dry autumn grass. No fences, no property lines, just wide open steppe, taiga, and mountains. The shepherd’s lifestyle is beautifully slow; it is no wonder that such a flowing and subtly changing music as throat-singing developed from it. With that realization (and the chance to try out my meager *xöömei* skills on horseback!), Tuvan throat-singing seemed to make sense to me for the first time. The trot or gallop of the horse creates regular rhythmic interjections in my body that interrupt my steady guttural drone. This is the similar effect that *xöömeizhi* (master throat-singers) create with a whipping of the tongue or nasalization when singing on concert stages. It is difficult, if not impossible, to truly understand *xöömei* until you understand this—it’s so clear that the meter is based on the movements of the horse and the manner in which they actually interrupt the drone of the rider.

Later that evening, after a sheep had been slaughtered for dinner, we chatted more about the Tuvan nomadic lifestyle. Mariusa (helped by Aylana) prepared the digestive organs by meticulously rinsing them and then filling them with the sheep’s blood to make a Tuvan traditional dish called *izig-xan* (“hot blood”) sausage. While I was eager to taste everything, I was not prepared for the seven large helpings I was subsequently given—lungs, liver, heart, ribs, sausage, rump fat, soup, and dumplings. Mariusa commented at how rare it is to be here in Ovür and meet people like Aylana and me—people who are educated, have traveled and can speak in multiple languages. Aylana quickly pointed out that, in today’s modernized world, *they* are more

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all maps, photographs, other figures, and song excerpts are reproduced pursuant to applicable academic fair use guidelines.



rare, as people who still live in a traditional lifestyle as semi-nomadic herders. Aylana said, “do you realize that the world is interested in Tuva primarily because of people like you?” Mariusa seemed perplexed by Aylana’s question. After explaining to them that I was an American researcher who was visiting Tuva to learn more about traditional music, and *xöömei* throat-singing in particular, Sasha replied, “well, you do have one throat-singer over there in America, don’t you? Kongar-ool’s friend! I heard him sing in Kyzyl!” Sasha was referring to Paul Pena, the well-known blind bluesman from San Francisco who was given the name Cher Shimjer (“Little Earthquake”) by *xöömeizhi* Kongar-ool Ondar after he (Pena) learned to throat-sing and competed in the International *Xöömei* Symposium in 1995. In that moment, even a little remote corner in the isolated Inner Asian steppe felt global.

\* \* \* \*

My visit to Ovür and other parts of Tuva in 2005 was made possible by a Thomas J. Watson fellowship, which I received after graduating from Pomona College earlier that year. My visit with Sasha Ondar and his family was one of my first encounters with rural Tuvan culture. That year, I spent three months living in Tuva and a few more weeks traveling in western Mongolia, during which time I became increasingly interested in pursuing graduate research in ethnomusicology. I was especially interested in the interaction of international “fan-practitioners” of throat-singing with local communities of Tuvan musicians, which, it seemed to me, presented a fascinating example of a localized musical practice in global circulation. As a doctoral student at the University of California, Berkeley, I delved more into Russian and Soviet history, Russian and Tuvan language study,<sup>4</sup> and ethnomusicology and cultural studies theory. With the support of an American Councils Title VIII Research Fellowship, an IIE Graduate Fellowship for International Research, a U.C. Berkeley Dean’s Dissertation Award, and a Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Completion Fellowship, I returned to Tuva in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 to conduct ethnographic field research in order to produce this dissertation.<sup>5</sup> In addition, I conducted multi-sited fieldwork in other locations in Russia—Moscow, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), and Xakassia—as well as in Mongolia, Finland, Holland, Belgium, and the United States (Austin, Harrisburg, Minneapolis, and San Francisco).

As a vocalist and musical ethnographer, my research has been motivated by questions about the “meaning of voice” as it moves through various knowledge systems—in particular, how voice is learned, embodied, and understood through practices of traditional singing. Over the past nine years, I have become part of the international community of enthusiasts and practitioners of Tuvan throat-singing, all the while thinking about what it meant to sing and practice *xöömei*. While studying with local revered *xöömeizhi* (master throat-singers) of various ages and aesthetic sensibilities, and then training my own vocal apparatus to emit *xöömei*

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<sup>4</sup> My Russian language study was supported by a CLS Critical Language Scholarship in Kazan, Russia. I also studied Tuvan language at the Tuvan State University in Kyzyl as part of a Title VIII Combined Research and Language Training Fellowship in 2011. Most of my fieldwork and archival research has been conducted in Russian. This, of course, presents certain obstacles to understanding the material from a Tuvan point of view. Where possible, I have confirmed and expanded on my understanding of my fieldwork material with native Tuvan speakers.

<sup>5</sup> I am extremely grateful for the institutional support and flexibility that these grants and fellowships have offered me in making this multi-sited research project possible.

soundings, I began to notice how my and other people’s ontological assumptions about voice were unstable, competing, and contested. Furthermore, many of these assumptions had given rise to differing models for parsing and understanding Tuvan throat-singing as a vocal practice that circulates among local and global actors. This dissertation is an effort to understand these assumptions and models and to comprehend where Tuvan *xöömei* came from and where it is going.

### GENRE, TERMINOLOGY, AND GEOGRAPHY

This dissertation requires proficiency with a few basic terms and facts. Commonly called “throat-singing” in English, *xöömei* refers to a solo-voice drone singing technique traditionally associated with pastoral nomadism, male guttural virtuosity, and multi-phonic overtone melodies with historic roots in the geo-culturally specific region of the Sayan–Altai Mountains in Inner Asia. *Xöömei* singing is most commonly associated with the Republic of Tuva and Western Mongolia (where it is called *höömii*), but related vocal traditions are practiced in Altai (*kai*) and Xakassia (*xai*), Bashkortostan (*özläü*), and in other parts of Central Asia and Inner Mongolia under different names.<sup>6</sup>

In a more general sense “throat-singing” refers to broken voice, high pressure, glottal (or other) techniques of phonation not used in conventional *bel canto* singing. In throat-singing, an emphasis is placed on the exploration of vocal timbre—the texture or quality of sound—instead of pitch. While some scholars have referred to *xöömei* as “overtone” or “harmonic” singing,” I find these terms to be problematic in their emphasis on the manipulation of harmonics, or overtones, as melodies (which many of my Tuvan teachers did not do). Moreover, “throat-singing” and “overtone singing” are, in fact, different techniques that do not necessarily happen simultaneously; either one can exist without the other (see Figure i.2).<sup>7</sup> A better term for describing Tuvan *xöömei* might be “timbral singing.” Nonetheless, for the sake of clarity in this dissertation, I follow the convention of referring to Tuvan *xöömei* as “throat-singing.”

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<sup>6</sup> As Turkologist Boris Tatarinsev writes, “by its form, *khöömei* is indisputably a mongolism, but in its meaning it has undergone considerable changes. *Khöömei* as a musical term developed within a mixed Tuvan–Mongolian environment, most likely among bilingual Tuvans who used the Mongolian names for the speech organs for the purposes of naming a phenomenon of musical culture. In all likelihood, *khöömei* was used not by coincidence. In its semasiological representation, and in addition, by its sound association with other already existing Tuvan words, specifically, with onomatopoetic words and verbs formed from them, such as *khööle*—‘to buzz, to produce a buzzing sound (for example, a bee)’ .... A part of the Tuvan-speaking population, specifically the performers of throat-singing associate the word *khöömei* with this verb. Some suggest that the term *khöömei* comes from Tuvan *khöön* ‘mood, wish, mode, tuning (of musical instrument)’ .... Having become a Tuvan word it was, in turn able to influence the semantics of the Mongolian word *khöömii* ‘throat-singing’ *khöömiilökh*, *khöömiidekh* 1. ‘to perform throat-singing’ 2. ‘throat-singing’” (1998: 65–66). For more on Mongolian *höömii*, see Pegg 2001 and Curtet 2013. For more on Xakas *xai*, see Nyssen 2005 and Levin 2006.

<sup>7</sup> “Harmonic singing” refers to any style of singing or chanting in which individual harmonic components are discernable by listeners, such as in certain types of Tibetan Buddhist chant. There are also practices referred to as “Western overtone singing” that use vocal tract resonance to produce harmonics. Some vocal practices referred to as “throat-singing” do not produce overtones per se, such as *katajjaq* throat games indigenous to the Inuit peoples of Arctic Canada as well as *rekubkara* of the Ainu peoples in Sakhalin (Russia) and Hokkaido, Japan.

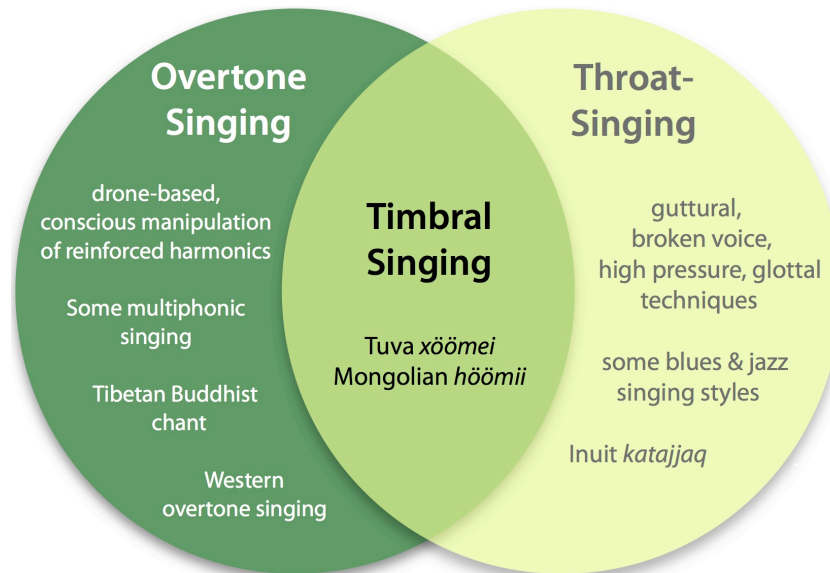


Figure i.2. Chart mapping Tuvan *xöömei* within definitional grids of “overtone singing” and “throat-singing” and their genre associations.<sup>8</sup>

As for Tuva, it is a sparsely-populated Turkic-speaking republic in the Sayan–Altai Mountains of Inner Asia, part of the Russian Federation (see preceding maps).<sup>9</sup> Its capital city, Kyzyl, is located very close to what some have claimed to be the geographic center of Asia.<sup>10</sup> The Sayan–Altai region has historically been a crossroads for a number of diverse practices, ranging from the animal-style “intoned culture” and shamanism of Siberian forest peoples to the drone-based epics in deep guttural timbre of Central Asian Turkic groups and the Buddhist rituals and pentatonic melodies of Mongolians. Tuva was nominally independent from 1921 to 1944, when it was called the Tuvan People’s Republic (or Tannu Tuva). Tuva then became a Soviet autonomous region (1944–1961) and an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) (1961–1991). Since the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991, Tuva has been a federal subject of the Russian Federation with its own constitution and semi-autonomous government. While its official post-Soviet designation is transliterated as “Tyva” (Тыва), I have chosen to use the spelling “Tuva” to match conventions in the English-language literature.

#### *TUVAN XÖÖMEI AND “NOMADIC SENSIBILITY”*

My experience in 2005 with Sasha Ondar suggested that Tuvan *xöömei* has been, and continues to be, intimately related to a nomadic herder’s deep connection with Tuva’s distinct natural landscapes (steppe, desert, mountains, taiga) and cultural-economic activities (herding sheep, reindeer, cows, camels, and yaks). This suggestion was confirmed by my further ethnographic work and research in 2010–2013. Regardless of whether that work took place in

<sup>8</sup> Chart created by the author.

<sup>9</sup> According to the 2010 Russian census, 307,930 people live in the Tuva Republic; of those, about 82% are ethnically Tuvan and the rest mostly Russian. See [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis\\_itogi1612.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis_itogi1612.htm).

<sup>10</sup> See Maenchen-Helfen [1931] 1992: 1–8.

Kyzyl, rural Tuva, Finland, or a library, everything pointed to the relationship between herder and landscape as being at the core of *xöömei*.

*Xöömei*, of course, has a long history. Early accounts by outside ethnographers framed Tuvan throat-singing (and Tuvans generally) as “backward” nomads. When Tuva came under the sphere of Soviet influence during the Tannu Tuva era, Soviet cultural officials worked to acculturate Tuvans and *xöömei* in a manner that comported with engineered folklore. As “inauthentic” as that engineering was (or at least seemed), it continued to draw upon the “nomadic” qualities of Tuvan throat-singers. As the Soviet Union began to disintegrate in the 1980s, international audiences and other global actors who were increasingly exposed to *xöömei* continued to frame it as being the music of nomads on horseback from the ancient steppes of Inner Asia. So, too, did the Tuvan musicians who were touring internationally, though with their own gloss.

All these actors had their own assumptions and agendas, through which they imparted different values to *xöömei*, *xöömeizhi*, and Tuvan people generally. But the common ingredient, in one form or another, was a certain nomadic sensibility. This dissertation uses that term to mean many things or, more precisely, argues that nomadic sensibility itself means many things. “Nomadic” refers to traditional Tuvan mobile pastoralism—namely, herding animals on the open steppe, or at least perceptions of it. “Sensibility,” meanwhile, refers to aesthetics, acuties, sonic qualities, and, most important, *disposition*. “Disposition” expresses “first the result of an organizing action, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination.”<sup>11</sup> Nomadic sensibility, then, is a certain way of being in the world, an orientation or ethos premised on what ethnomusicologist Steven Feld has called “listening in” and “feeding back” to/in/with the natural and spiritual outdoor environment (2009).

What role, then, does nomadic sensibility play in understanding *xöömei* and *xöömeizhi*? This dissertation’s primary focus is on *xöömeizhi* master throat-singers from Tuva, but it also investigates the significant role played by cultural producers, promoters, scholars, scientists, and international throat-singing fan-practitioners in framing the meaning and value of Tuvan *xöömei* at various moments during the late Soviet and post-Soviet eras. Intercultural transmission of *xöömei* throat-singing develops and perpetuates meanings and expectations related to essentialized notions of “nomadic” music through expressive aesthetics and techniques linked with (imagined) Tuvan pastoral life. This intercultural transmission also serves to reinforce particular notions of value by reproducing “nomadic” essentialism that feeds back into local practices in Tuva by Tuvans. Throat-singing lessons and workshops, however, reveal inconsistencies in the coherence of various nomadic essences and aesthetics, as well as fundamental discrepancies between musical practices, musical competencies, and sensibilities that carry social, political, and ethical values.

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<sup>11</sup> Bourdieu 1977: 214, fn.1, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

Previous models, such as Tuvan ethnomusicologist Valentina Süzükei's "timbral listening" model and American ethnomusicologist Theodore ("Ted") Levin's "sound mimesis" model, have successfully described many of the qualities of Tuvan *xöömei*. However, I argue that the nomadic sensibility conceptualization better captures *xöömei*'s character, as well as its role as a process and practice of music and sound-making that is ultimately heterogeneous, individual, and intersubjective (Chapter 4 discusses this theorization at greater length). Nomadic sensibility is therefore both a quality of *xöömei* and a tool for understanding *xöömei*'s history and current practice.

On the basis of all this research, background, and theory, this dissertation asserts the following central thesis: in the post-Soviet era, *xöömeizhi* (master throat-singers) from the Tuva Republic express a revitalized nomadic sensibility through *xöömei* singing practices, which has come to operate both as an ideology and a disposition for Tuvan traditional music. Drawing on a selective use of history, cultural memory, and natural environments, post-Soviet *xöömeizhi* have constructed, and continue to construct, a nomadic sensibility that is embodied in music and sound-making activities, foregrounded in intercultural exchanges, and circulated as a social disposition.

This dissertation is organized in five chapters, each of which advances its own sub-arguments. Chapter 1 examines the documentation of nomadic "backwardness" in Tuvan pre-history (the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early-twentieth centuries), as reflected in outsider ethnography and then reproduced in Soviet cultural policies during the building of Tuvan national culture. Here I argue that early ethnographers constructed *xöömei* in a way that converted value judgments about vocal sound into value judgments about nomadic peoples. Those judgments then influenced, and were reflected in, the goals of Soviet nation-building and cultural modernization policies, including the work of Soviet musicians.

Chapter 2 explores the politics of Tuva's internationalist "socialist culture" in connection with *xöömei* as a nationalized genre of folk music in the late Soviet era (from the 1960s to the 1980s). The chapter contends that, during that period, *xöömei* singers were perceived as uncultured amateurs whose dispositions needed to be reshaped in order to become proper Tuvan folk musicians and to perform Soviet-style nomadic folklorism.

Chapter 3 discusses how the "discovery" and revival of Tuvan throat-singing during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s set the stage for *xöömei* to reach international audiences in the post-Soviet era. Chapter 3 argues that, consistent with the historic framing of *xöömei* as having a nomadic sensibility, international audiences and other global actors have framed *xöömei* as being rooted in the sonic and musical sensibilities of nomads on horseback from the ancient steppes of Inner Asia. However, the chapter also argues that the actual *aesthetics* of post-Soviet *xöömei* have been shaped to a large extent by a small group of traveling Tuvan musicians whose aesthetic might be described as "neo-traditional nomadic minimalism." That aesthetic has become dominant internationally as well as in Tuva in the post-Soviet era.

Chapter 4 ties Chapters 1, 2, and 3 to the dissertation's central thesis: nomadic sensibility has emerged as an ideology for revitalizing Tuvan expressive cultural practices, including *xöömei*,

in the post-Soviet era. Drawing on music theory and my own ethnographic work, Chapter 4 shows that nomadic sensibility has emerged not just in international Tuvan music, but also in the traditional music scene in places like Kyzyl, Tuva's capital city. The chapter demonstrates how, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, various Tuvan and non-Tuvan actors have drawn selectively on historical documents, cultural memory, and natural environments in order to revitalize Tuvan musical practices, especially *xöömei*, and imbue it with nomadic sensibility.

Finally, Chapter 5 explores how nomadic sensibility works as an intangible link between the mastery of throat-singing techniques and highly praised performance aesthetics. Like Chapter 4, Chapter 5 relies heavily on my own ethnographic work to argue that Tuvan *xöömeizhi*, alongside global fan-practitioners, circulate and foreground dispositions of nomadic sensibility in international workshops and cross-cultural collaborations. In so doing, they forge alliances that continually reshape local cultural politics and performance practices in Kyzyl's traditional music scene.

\* \* \* \*

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Major ethnomusicological studies of Tuvan throat-singing have been conducted in Russian by Anokhin ([1903-10] 2005), Aksenov (1964), Vainshtein (1979-80), Maslov and Chernov (1979-80), Kyrgys (1992, 2002, 2008, 2013), Sundui (1995), Tatarintsev (1998), Süzükei (1993, 2007, 2010), Badyrgy (2008), Karelina (2009), Mongush (2010), Levin and Süzükei (2012), and Samdan (2013). In English, several notable studies address Tuvan *xöömei* specifically: Bloothoof et al. (1992), Adachi et al. (1999), Levin and Edgerton (1999), Sakakibara et al. (2001), van Tongeren (1995, 2002), Glenfield (2003, 2007), Kob (2004), Levin (2002), Levin and Süzükei (2006), Grawunder (2003, 2009). Other studies engage with related throat-singing and overtone singing practices from Mongolia: Walcott (1974), Gunji (1980), Zemp and Trân (1989, 1991), Pegg (1992, 2001), Lindestad (2001), Curtet (2013), and Colwell (forthcoming). From my review of the literature, I find that many English language studies fail to engage fully with indigenous Tuvan ways of knowing and conceiving of the voice, with the notable exception of Levin and Süzükei (2006). Russian scholars, on the other hand, have tended to downplay or under-acknowledge the role international fans, musicians, producers, and scholars have in shaping local practices in post-Soviet Tuva. This dissertation seeks to connect these scholarly bodies with the goal of making a contribution to both.

Starting with the basic premise that musical ecologies are profoundly shaped by how music is learned, my aim in engaging with this body of scholarship is to be able to think critically about musicking minds and bodies in relation to pedagogy and practice. The most influential insights for the evolution of my project have come from the disciplinary areas of cognitive ethnomusicology (Lakoff 1987, Bregman 1990, Brinner 1995 and 1999, Zbikowski 1998, Snyder 2000, Fales 2002, Rockwell 2012), music education (Campbell 2001, Stock 2003, Hill 2007), embodiment (Blacking 1977, Csordas 1990, Le Guin 2006, Hahn 2007, Eidsheim 2008), and anthropology of the senses scholarship (Seremetakis 1996, Geurts 2002, Howes 2005, Serres

2008). In addition, I draw from a rich genealogy of methodologies in ethnomusicology related to knowledge and insight gained through learning to make music with research collaborators (Hood 1960, Brinner 1995, Rice 1994 and 1996, Bakan 1999, Hagedorn 2001, Rahaim 2008, Fatone 2010), as well as from scholarship that examines socially learned disposition, sensibility, and ethics in connection with practice (Mauss 1934, Bourdieu 1977, Wacquant 2004, Hirschkind 2006, Rahaim 2012).

Key theoretical areas that have been most influential in my thinking include: voice and voice studies (Barthes 1977, Wade 1984, Zumthor 1990, Feld et al. 2003, Cavarero 2005, Ihde 2007, Neumark 2010, Kreiman 2011, Eidsheim 2011), cultural and collective memory (Casey 1987, Halbswachs et al. 1992, Boym 2001, Misztal 2003), tradition and traditionality (Williams 1977, Briggs 1993, 1996, Noyes 2006), sonic ways of knowing place and space (Feld 1982, 1994a, 1996, Levin and Süzükei 2006, Brinner 2009, Järviluoma et al. 2009), “deterritorialized” space (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987, Yurchak 2006), socialist conceptions of time and space (Verdery 1996, Humphrey 1998, Yurchak 1999 and 2003, Buck-Morss 2000, Zizek 1993), Soviet and post-Soviet cultural politics of music (Djumaev 1993, Levin 1996, Frolova-Walker 1998, Bennett 2007, Süzükei 2007), as well as ideas about movement and affect (Massumi 2002, Brennan 2004).

In relation to theorizing global flows, I have been most influenced in my thinking by Vertovec’s ideas about transnationalism (1999, 2009), Guilbault’s concept of “audible entanglements” (2005), Diamond’s idea of “alliance studies” (2007), Brown’s arguments on neoliberalism (2003), and Appadurai’s notion of five dimensions of global cultural flow (1990): (1) ethnoscapas, (2) mediascapas, (3) technoscapas, (4) finanscapas, and (5) ideoscapas. The work of Lee and LiPuma (2002) has been helpful in theorizing “cultures of circulation” as “a cultural process with its own forms of abstraction, evaluation, and constraint, which are created by the interactions between specific types of circulating forms and the interpretive communities built around them” (2002: 192). Finally, Fiske (1992), Negus (1997), and Hills (2002) have produced key studies dealing with audience and studies of fan cultures. These studies have been pivotal in providing tools for considering internationally-based fans and practitioners of Tuvan throat-singing as key agents (alongside Tuvan musicians) in my research project.

#### METHODOLOGY

The study focuses on two main groups of participants: (1) the community of *xöömeizhi* (master throat-singers) recognized by the International Scientific Center “*Khöömei*” in Kyzyl (Tuva, Russia), and (2) the internationally diffuse and diverse community of fans, practitioners, researchers, and enthusiasts of *xöömei* throat-singing, more broadly defined. Most participants for the study will fall into one of these two groups. The first group is created by a nationally-recognized Tuvan research center motivated by cultural preservation and pride, and is fairly homogenous in its composition (with only a small number of women and non-Tuvans included). The second group, in contrast, is determined only by adult-age consent and does not discriminate based on gender, race, ethnicity, language or other restrictions. These two groups allow me to examine various intercultural dynamics between “tradition-bearers” (as registered by

a local government) and “fan-practitioners” who actively engage in applied study of practices associated with Tuvan throat-singing.

#### ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD SITES

Since I aim to examine transnational cultural circulation, I have structured my project around multiple field sites: namely, the Republic of Tuva (Russia), as well as several sites in Northern Europe and the United States. I conducted the majority of my fieldwork in Tuva during five separate visits in 2005, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013, totalling twelve months. In 2012, I spent three months in Helsinki, Finland with the Finnish Throat-Singing Society and, while there, made occasional visits to Holland and Belgium in conjunction with a European tour of Tyva Kyzy (2012). I also conducted fieldwork during various tours of Ensemble Alash in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (2011) and Austin, Texas (2012), as well as Chirgilchin and Huun-Huur-Tu in San Francisco between 2007 and 2012.

#### FIELD METHODS

I have interviewed and studied *xöömei* with a number of different Tuvan musicians in order to explore how individuals conceive of their throat-singing voices—how they discuss listening practices, sound-making techniques, and musical aesthetics. In dealing with live musical processes, I draw on a methodology referred to by anthropologist Steven Feld as “listening in” and “feeding back” (2009). This methodology involves collecting audio (and video) recordings of music lessons and performances and then using the process of playback with musicians to (1) explore how the process by which musicians reach certain musical decisions; (2) identify which sonic aspects musicians listen for or emphasize in talking about a performance; and (3) tease out the larger artistic and political goals that guide the musicians’ practices. To work with musicians from different generations, I borrow Finnish ethnomusicologist Helmi Järviluoma’s methodology (2009) for conducting group interviews as a way to generate conversations about collective memories of nomadic life, experiences of cultural policies during the Soviet Union, and the connections that contemporary musical practices may draw from these different sources. Through this research, I seek to understand how Tuvan *xöömeizhi* construct aesthetics in contemporary musical performance and negotiate difference and alliances in the post-Soviet era.

In relation to global circulation and the world music industry, I examine local impacts of the “cultures of circulation” created by the fascination with and consumption of Tuvan throat-singing by European and North American audiences and fan-practitioners. Record labels around the world have invented marketing categories for Tuvan throat-singers, thereby drawing attention to nomadic, shamanist, or animist qualities of Tuvan and Mongolian musical culture, as well as carving out new niche communities of listening, consumption, performance, and study. I am interested in exploring how Tuvan and Mongolian musicians engage with these marketing categories and their imagined international listening communities as they begin to appear in world music markets in the late 1980s and early 1990s. How do representations—in terms of sounds, images, fashion, publicity, and program notes—shift in accordance with marketability and the creation of particular exoticized nomadic voices? In what ways do musicians in Tuva and



Mongolia emphasize, communicate, and create distinctions between national practices? This dissertation begins to explore those questions and their answers.

#### DATA COLLECTION

In following and tracing musicians' practices, alliances, and intercultural exchanges, relevant data include: uncut audio/video recordings of participant-observation at public music performances and throat-singing workshops; audio/video recordings of voice lessons; personal interviews with musicians, scholars, and fan-practitioners focusing on throat-singing and music-making; methods of learning and teaching; experiential and embodied knowledge gained by singing; personal memories encountering Tuvan music; interviews regarding reactions to post-Soviet cultural politics and globalization; speculation about the future vitality of musical ecologies in Tuva; archival materials, published documents, newspaper articles, and other types of informal media. Informed consent was acquired in English, Russian, or Tuvan, where possible. Email and Skype were valuable tools for verifying information and quotations during the analysis and dissertation-writing phase of my project.



## Nomads and Nation-Building: The Voices of Tannu Tuva

*It is unnatural for a human being to make two sounds simultaneously  
.... [T]he need to hold one's breath for a long time is unnatural as well.*  
—L. Lebedinskii<sup>1</sup>

*The people create the music—we, the composers, merely arrange it.*  
—Mikhail Glinka<sup>2</sup>

*The problem with musicology is telling other people what kind of music  
they can and can't play.*  
—Valentina Süzükei<sup>3</sup>

In 1910, British naturalist and explorer Douglas Carruthers (1882-1962) passed through the Sayan–Altai Mountains of southern Siberia on his way to Mongolia. In his ethnographic account of the expedition, later published as *Unknown Mongolia: A Record of Travel and Exploration in North–West Mongolia and Dzungaria* (1914, vol. 1), Carruthers describes the Uriankhai peoples, a population group that would subsequently become part of the Tuvan ethnicity. In the passage that follows, Carruthers describes a memorable encounter with one Uriankhai's unfamiliar way of singing:

We remember encountering an old Uriankhai on a raft on the Bei-Kem [Upper Yenisei] as we drifted down the river .... As we allowed him to tie up his raft alongside of ours and to continue in our company, he sang us melancholy songs in appreciation; drawing in his breath to the full, he made a sound far down in his throat—by slowly letting out his breath—resembling that of bagpipes. This is a custom peculiar to the Uriankhai; the nature of the sound produced being not only impressive but strangely in accordance with their somewhat melancholy character (Carruthers 1914: 229-230).

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<sup>1</sup> Lebedinskii 1948: 50-51; my translation.

<sup>2</sup> Zhdanov 1950: 60.

<sup>3</sup> Valentina Süzükei, personal communication, 12 July 2011.

In another passage, Carruthers writes, “Uriankhai music is probably of special interest to the ethnologist, being peculiar to these people, and filled with the melancholy of the race. Amongst the Mongols we never heard any music resembling it” (1914: 223; Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1. “A melancholy Uriankhai” circa 1910.<sup>4</sup>

Given the scarcity of historic documentation of indigenous groups in Inner Asia, ethnographic accounts by outsiders like Carruthers have been extremely influential in framing representations of the groups and their cultural practices. What Carruthers heard as a “sound far down in his throat ... resembling that of bagpipes” has since been identified as one of the earliest written accounts of *xöömei*, or throat-singing. Carruthers describes the Uriankhai man’s throat-singing as both being “impressive” and “peculiar” as well as “filled with the melancholy of the race.” This account not only describes a cultural practice; it links that practice with the disposition of a particular person, and, indeed, of an entire population group. Moreover, the nature of this man’s melancholic guttural singing is identified—that is, ethnographically produced—as a distinct type of guttural singing that has since been described in connection with “nomads.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Photo and original caption from Carruthers 1914: 214.

<sup>5</sup> As Carruthers wrote, “[t]he Uriankhai must undoubtedly be placed amongst the category of nomad races, although, as a matter of fact, their nomadic tendency is somewhat undeveloped. It remains an advantage to them to be able to shift their abodes; for this reason their dwellings, in all cases, are portable and easily moved. There are occasions when settled abodes would be an advantage, and the building of them quite feasible, yet so far they have not found it necessary to erect permanent homes” (Carruthers 1914: 208).

This chapter draws on eighteenth, nineteenth- and early- to mid-twentieth-century ethnographic accounts of Inner Asian mobile pastoralism to explore how historic attitudes and assumptions about nomads have helped shape the production of knowledge about guttural singing practices. As Carruthers's account demonstrates, published ethnographic descriptions of guttural singing were often cursory and not rigorously musicological. Nonetheless, they are the earliest recorded representations of throat-singing practices that subsequently became incorporated into Tuvan folk music. Produced in large part by European and Russian explorers, ethnographic knowledge of nomadic cultural practices and beliefs from remote regions such as the Sayan-Altai (present-day Tuva) was mobilized as part of the early twentieth century Russian/Soviet project of constructing regional ethnic identities, building Soviet nationalities, and modernizing mobile pastoralist population groups to take part in the proclaimed revolutionary socialist future of the Soviet Union—processes now commonly referred to as the “colonization” that occurred along the border regions of the Russian empire.<sup>6</sup>

More specifically, this chapter argues that early ethnographers constructed *xöömei* in a way that converted value judgments of vocal sound into value judgments concerning nomadic peoples. Those judgments then influenced, and were reflected in, the goals of Soviet nation-building and cultural modernization policies, including the work of Soviet musicians. These goals were contradictory, even paradoxical; on the one hand, claims that equated the “backwardness” of nomads with beastliness reflected policies that sought to neutralize, and provide a remedy for, a “primitive” condition that had no place in the socialist modernization of the independent republic of Tannu Tuva. On the other hand, claims that equated the “backwardness” of nomads with innocence and uniqueness were used to justify the colonization of mobile pastoralists and were mirrored in the promotion and celebration of ethnic cultural particularity—“proof” of a distinct voice for a new nationality inside the internationalist framework of the Soviet empire. The historical framing of *xöömei* by ethnographers and, later, by Soviet musicians and composers, worked to institutionalize *xöömei* as a genre of Tuvan national folk music.

Part I of this chapter describes how ethnographers framed *xöömei* as a distinctive cultural practice of mobile pastoralists and shows how ethnographic data was used to frame Tuvans as an ethnic group. Part II explores how contradictory attitudes towards the purported backwardness of nomads shaped policies that were used to construct Tuvans as a nationality and forge the nominally-independent nation-state of Tannu Tuva. Finally, Part III analyzes how Soviet cultural policies worked to institutionalize *xöömei* as a genre of Tuvan national folk music based on contradictory attitudes towards its nomadic qualities.

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations* (2005) and Moore 2001. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said writes that Russia “acquired its imperial territories almost exclusively by adjacency. Unlike Britain or France, which jumped thousands of miles beyond their own borders to other continents, Russia moved to swallow whatever land or peoples stood next to its borders, which in the process kept moving farther and farther east and south” (10).

## NOMADIC “BACKWARDNESS”

Guttural singing practices have stood out as notable objects of ethnographic interest for outside travelers, geographers, and folklorists who have surveyed the Sayan-Altai region of southern Siberia, the location of the present-day Tuva Republic inside Russia. While most ethnographic accounts are cursory and vague in their use of sonic or musical descriptors, they nevertheless reflect normative judgments about guttural singing practices. Those accounts tend to link judgments about guttural singing practices with judgments about nomadic ethnic groups and populations. This ethnographic data was selectively used to construct coherent population groups during the late Russian Imperial period (circa 1890s to 1917).

*ETHNOGRAPHERS AS PRODUCERS*

Historic accounts of guttural singing practices are found in ethnographic descriptions of many different clans and ethnic groups in the region surrounding the Altai Mountains of Inner Asia, including the Uriankhai, Soyots, Todzhans, and Kachin-Tatars. Early accounts tend to be vague and general, but they nonetheless exhibit a relatively consistent interpretation of nomadic practices that later came to play a pivotal role in shaping Tuvan ethnicity. For example, one of the earliest descriptions of guttural vocal practices is a Chinese document composed by Xiao Da-heng (1532-1612) during the Ming Dynasty. The document describes “the customs of the northern slaves”—a people with “pale eyes” and “Russian beards.” One section, translated into French by Henri Serruys, reads:

*Leur parler possède beaucoup de sons qui viennent de la gorge et de la langue; il n'est pas clair et coulant. Dans leurs chansons il y a beaucoup de sons de la gorge et des lèvres; elles ne sont ni sonores ni claires.*

Their speech possesses many sounds which come from the throat and from the tongue; it is not clear and flowing. In their songs there are many sounds from the throat and the lips; they are neither sonorous nor clear.<sup>7</sup>

Mongolian music specialist Carole Pegg cites this description as “one of the earliest apparent references to overtone singing” (2001: 61).<sup>8</sup> An aesthetic evaluation of the sounds as being “neither sonorous nor clear” suggests a lack of perceived aesthetic beauty that is likely a reflection of this Chinese writer’s notion of what constitutes “musical” sound.

Similar sentiments appear in the accounts of later ethnographic expeditions to the Altai Mountains. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Imperial Academy of Sciences (founded in 1724) funded expeditions to gather knowledge about the outer fringes of

<sup>7</sup> Serruys [1945] 1970: 153; my translation from French. Serruys was a French missionary stationed in Inner Mongolia.

<sup>8</sup> Given that Xiao’s main knowledge about Mongolia was obtained from eastern Mongolians belonging to the *orda* group, it seems unlikely that he would have been familiar with *oirat* groups in the West whose cultural practices have come to be associated with contemporary throat-singing (Todoriki Masahiko, personal communication, 14 August 2014).

Russia's multi-ethnic empire. Peter Simon Pallas (1741-1811), a German botanist and foreign member of the Imperial Academy, visited the Turkic-speaking Kachin-Tartars (the "unmixed Siberian Tartars") who lived along the Abakan River valley near the Sayan Mountains, in present-day Xakassia, a Turkic republic neighboring Tuva. In his journals, Pallas recorded a description of a type of singing, "a monotonous, gargling tone, which sounded almost like the softly buzzing violin string" (Pallas [1771-1776] 1967: 399).<sup>9</sup> Turco-Mongol music specialist Emsheimer noted that Pallas found the guttural singing to be "particularly pleasant to hear in the open air" (Emsheimer 1991: 244). Later, Russian ethnographer and folk song collector Sergei G. Rybakov (1867-1922) described guttural singing practices of the Bashkir peoples (elsewhere called "uzlyau")<sup>10</sup> as representing the "wildness" of the Bashkir peoples of the forest:

The Bashkir himself bore the imprint of a forest wildness; his voice sounded muffled, as if closed, and he did not speak in an open way, like other countrymen not living in the forest, his face was swarthy and hardened.<sup>11</sup> When he sang with his throat, the impression of forest wildness was further increased.<sup>12</sup>

Rybakov, like his contemporaries and predecessors, linked guttural singing practices with the "wild" or "backward" qualities of various nomadic and forest peoples. In so doing, these ethnographic investigations established discursive trends whose value judgments were echoed and reproduced in subsequent studies. This trend was especially significant because subsequent studies drew on guttural singing practices as cultural evidence for theories of "ethnogenesis" and migration of specific Turkic-speaking population groups across Siberia, Central Asia, and the Ural Mountains.<sup>13</sup>

This linking of judgments about practices with judgments about peoples is even more apparent in four accounts of ethnographic expeditions conducted between 1898 and 1910 among the Soyot peoples of the Sayan-Altai Mountains, in present-day Tuva. Unlike earlier descriptions, these four accounts provide enough context to link them to the contemporary

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<sup>9</sup> Pallas further linked this singing with "the Kalmyk manner of singing." The Kalmyk peoples had lived in southern Siberia and then migrated to present-day Kalmykia (see Emsheimer 1991: 241-259).

<sup>10</sup> Bashkir "uzlyau" (*özläü*) had been described earlier in Spanish voice scientist Manuel Garcia's well-known *Traité Complet de l'Art du Chant* (1847). Garcia writes: "Some [Bashkir] individuals possess the astonishing faculty to produce two perfectly distinct parts at one time: a pedal and a piercing melody. The singer begins with a long note that he attacks on a very hoarse sound that is high-pitched; then he drops the sound to a note that serves as a pedal and that he holds continuously. Above this note there is heard a *cantilena*" ([1847] 1985: 13).

<sup>11</sup> *Zaskoruzloe* can be translated as "hardened" but also as "backward."

<sup>12</sup> Rybakov 1897: 271; my translation.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Anokhin [1903-10] 2005, Lebedinskii 1948, and Aksenov 1964. Sevyan Vainshtein writes that "the Bashkirs incorporated groups of Uigurs, Tumats, and others of Turkic origin known among the peoples of the Saiano-Altai, including Tuvans. In the past these groups were probably ethnically associated with the ancient Uigurs, who to one or another degree became part of all the peoples among whom the tradition of throat singing has now been identified. If among the Bashkirs this tradition originates among those components of their ethnogenesis involving the ancient Turkic groups coming from Central Asia and the Saiano-Altai (and that is perhaps the only possible explanation), then the origin of throat singing has to be dated from a time no later than the second half of the first millennium [A.D.]" (Vainshtein 1979-80: 156). Tatarintsev disagrees with Vainshtein's hypothesis, noting that "such historical-logical constructions have no serious factual basis" and the appearance of throat-singing among the Bashkirs likely dates back to "a narrower historical period (for instance, a few recent centuries)" (1998: 48). See also Mannai-ool 1995, van Tongeren 2002, Pegg 2003, and Karelina 2009 for alternative theories on the dispersion of throat-singing across Eurasia.

singing practices referred to as Tuvan *xöömei* throat-singing.<sup>14</sup> The first account comes from ethnographer Pyotr E. Ostrovskikh (1870-1937), who conducted fieldwork in the Upper Yenisei river region (present-day Tuva) among the semi-nomadic Todzhans between 1898 and 1899. Writing about the practices of *xomiler-kizhi* throat-singers he heard during his field research in the region, Ostrovskikh wrote:

Most distinct is the so-called ‘xomiler-kizhi’—throat singer. As is typical of many Asian peoples who use throat sounds, the singer, over the background creates highly characteristic melodies with his throat, as if on a flute; in doing so, he accompanies himself on a wooden *topshyulyur* [plucked lute] (1927: 89-90).<sup>15</sup>

While Ostrovskikh does not appear to make value judgments about the singing he heard, he does impute the characteristics of that singing to entire peoples. That is, while Ostrovskikh identifies throat-singing as a “distinct” practice, he actually describes his observations as “typical of many Asian peoples who use throat sounds.”<sup>16</sup>

A second account, from Russian folklore collector E.K. Yakovlev, was equally sweeping and much more judgmental. In 1898 Yakovlev was living in exile in Minusinsk, a Russian town several hundred miles downstream from Tuva on the Yenisei River. During his time there, Yakovlev wrote that *kumayler* (*xöömeileer*) was a “song without words” peculiar to the Soyots, and that:

Throat-singing—*kumayler* consists of a whole gamut of wheezes. Deeply inhaling air, the master of his craft begins to extract a kind of strange rumbling from the depths of his insides until he has used up all the air. Again, deep sighs and mysterious sounds. In addition to this singing is a different type with pronounced words—*yrlar*, and—finally—a mixture of both these types of singing (Yakovlev 1900: 114).

Yakovlev’s descriptions construct *xöömei* sound in vaguely pejorative terms—“a whole gamut of wheezes,” “strange rumbling,” “mysterious sounds.” That framing makes his account more exoticizing than Ostrovskikh’s, but it also provides a useful musicological observation regarding the absence of text in *kumayler*, compared to *yrlar* or a mixture of the two.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> They are cited by Tuvan musicologist Zoya Kyrgys (2002) as among the earliest references. *Kai-* (*xai-*) and *kaila* (*kailau*) are generally considered to be the older Turkic words meaning “to sing with the throat” and are used to describe guttural singing styles in Yakass, Altai, Shoorian, Chuvash, Yakut, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh languages—however, mostly in connection with epic singing. It has been hypothesized that Tuvans gradually shifted usage away from *kai-* and *kaila* towards *xöömei*, *xöömeile*, or *kumayler* around the mid to late nineteenth centuries. See Tatarintsev 1998: 59-72 for a linguistic discussion of Circa-Altai throat-singing terminology.

<sup>15</sup> Tuvan musicologist Zoya Kyrgys writes: “The full diary of the Uryankhai trip, with numerous drawings and photographs and a description of the entire ethnographic collection brought from the Uryankhai land (at present in the Berlin Museum of Ethnic Studies) was, at that time, presented to the Russian Geographical Society, which had provided a considerable portion of the finances for the trip, but because of the significant cost of publication, it was not published” (2008: 11).

<sup>16</sup> Tuvan musicologists have since debated the connection of *xöömei* singing with the Todzhan people of northern Tuva. See, for example, Kyrgys 2002: 49.

<sup>17</sup> Due in part to this distinction, Tuvan musicologists such as Valentina Süzükei have linked *xöömei* more with instrumental music than with vocal music.

The third account comes from French geographer Paul Chalon. During an expedition in the Pays des Saïotes (the Land of the Soyots), Chalon wrote about the Soyots as possessing a face “accentuated with sadness. He knows neither how to have fun nor how to joke. When he sings, he is not exhaling but inhaling the air, and this results in horrendously dreadful sounds” (1904: 229). Thus, like Douglas Carruthers, who described Tuvans as having a “melancholy character,” Chalon defines the disposition of all Soyots as being marked by sadness or melancholy (see Figure 1.2). Similarly, Chalon’s description of “horrendously dreadful sounds” echo Yakovlev’s “a whole gamut of wheezes” in its negative aesthetic evaluation.<sup>18</sup>



Figure 1.2. “Une famille de Saïotes devant leur yourta” (“A family of Soyots in front of their yurt”).<sup>19</sup>

The final account comes from Russian ethnographer, folklorist, and specialist on Turco-Mongol music, Andrei V. Anokhin (1874-1931). Anokhin conducted fieldwork in the Tannu-Uriankhai region in 1909-10 (Aksenov 1964: 5), during which he made the first sound recordings of Tuvan *xöömei*.<sup>20</sup> In “Musical Folk Song Arts of the Altaians, Mongolians, and Shorians,” he describes “throat singing” (*gorlovoe penie*) as “double-voice singing” (*dvuxgolosnoe penie*), describes its characteristics, and, in this excerpt, responds to E.K. Yakovlev:

This kind of throat singing is by far simpler. It has a strict definiteness, such a definiteness that can be easily brought within the laws of existing music. And finally, the singing is not a wheezing sound in which it is difficult to define the height of the sound. The sounds are not produced with an open, free throat but a slightly pressed one, the height of the sound quite clear .... When you start to listen to it for the first time, it leaves an unfavorable impression, but in the course of time

<sup>18</sup> It is unclear whether Chalon correctly documented the Soyots’ singing as produced by “inhaling the air.” Contemporary practices of *xöömei* use *exhaled* voice production.

<sup>19</sup> Photo and original caption from Chalon, *En Mongolie: Le pays des Saïotes*, 1904: 201.

<sup>20</sup> The recordings are currently held in Russian state archives, but Zoya Kyrgys writes that they are in “very bad condition, and unfortunately, at present, it’s nearly impossible to annotate them” (2002: 14).



the ears get used to it so much, that it begins to please them and to calm the nerves. For the Asian ear, this singing is undoubtedly pleasant.<sup>21</sup>

Anokhin's observation of a "strict definiteness" suggests a uniqueness associated with the Soyots' way of singing. Anokhin's claim that this definiteness "can be easily brought within the laws of existing music" suggests that the Soyots' unsophisticated vocal sounds could be cultivated into systems of *music* consistent with European standards and aesthetics. Moreover, throat-singing became tolerable to Anokhin after leaving an "unfavorable impression," but to "the Asian ear," it was "undoubtedly pleasant." These assessments not only imply that Soyot singing is unsophisticated, it otherizes Soyots and essentializes the perceived aesthetics of their singing across Soyot peoples, and indeed across all Asian population groups.

Anokhin's aesthetic judgments were not uniformly negative, especially compared to those made by Yakovlev and Chalon. He acknowledges the sounds he heard became pleasing and calming over time (recalling Pallas' description of the Kachin-Tartars). Anokhin also observes musicological details, such as voice production with a "slightly pressed" throat. Tuvan musicologist Valentina Süzükei argues that Anokhin was the first non-Tuvan account that recognized *xöömei* as a musical form operating within its own sonic-aesthetic system, especially after Anokhin later wrote that "the throat-singing of the Tuvans stands outside all established theories and [perhaps] constitutes a unique phenomenon in the arena of vocal art" (Süzükei 1993: 4).

In sum, early ethnographic accounts of *xöömei* from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries documented cultural difference alongside ethnic difference. The accounts employed terminology that portrayed *xöömei* singing—and more importantly, *xöömei* singers—as "backward" people with unsophisticated practices. While those aesthetic judgments exposed patronizing and Eurocentric attitudes towards nomads and forest peoples generally, they also praised the unique and particular aspects of their singing practices. This duality is not surprising, since "backwardness" is a judgment that tends to reflect contradictory attitudes. "Backwardness-as-beastliness" frames nomads as savage and threatening; "backwardness-as-innocence" suggests a sympathetic gaze on a primitive group; and "backwardness-as-uniqueness" goes furthest in judging certain nomadic qualities as special. In framing cultural practices of individuals as "backward" and then associating the qualities of those practices with groups of people, early ethnographic accounts of *xöömei* expressed contradictory attitudes towards nomads as imagined others.<sup>22</sup> These contradictory attitudes informed subsequent Soviet policies towards Tuva and Tuvans.

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<sup>21</sup> Anokhin archival material from Gorno-Altai variously dated 1903, 1908, 1910: Anokhin, A.V. "Musical Folk Song Arts of the Altai, Mongolian, and Shorians." Gorno-Altai Museum, archival material. Collected and published in 2005: 55. Translated into English in Kyrgys 2008: 13-14. Special thanks to Todoriki Masahiko for sharing archival materials from his fieldwork in Gorno-Altai with the author.

<sup>22</sup> For a historic exploration of otherness in connection with the perceived "backwardness" of the small peoples of Russia's north, see Yuri Slezkine's *Arctic Mirrors* (1994a).

## CONSTRUCTING TUVAN ETHNICITY

Regional cohesion in the Sayan-Altai region of southern Siberia, and the Tuvan ethnicity to which it gave rise, was not inevitable. Rather, such cohesion was a conscious construction by local administrators who reported to Russian government officials in Moscow. While some ethnographic accounts describe the nomadic peoples of the Sayan-Altai region as being more culturally linked with the Mongols, Tuvans became unified as a Turkic-speaking ethnic group from various population groups, including the Soyots, the Uriangkhai, and the Todzhans. Russian government agents and, later, Soviet cultural officials deliberately mobilized ethnographic knowledge about these groups' traditional practices and regional affiliations, along with contemporary linguistic data, to orient the groups towards Turkic Siberia. The agents and officials then used this orientation to draw the political borders of the People's Republic of Tuva (Tannu Tuva).

Understanding this sociopolitical process requires understanding the Sayan-Altai region's early history. Historians trace the Tuvan ethnic group to Turco-Mongol clans intermingling over many centuries in the Sayan-Altai region. The region has been, at various times, the outer province of the great Eurasian empires—the Mongol Empire (1206-1368), Zhunghar Khanate (1630s-1758), the Qing Dynasty (1758-1911), and only more recently, the Russian Empire (1911-1921) and Soviet Union (1944-1991).<sup>23</sup> During the Qing Dynasty, the region was known as Tannu Uriangkhai and was divided into nine districts, or *kozhuun*, half of which were ruled by hereditary Uriangkhai princes (*noyons*) and the other half by Mongol princes (Krueger 1977: 43).<sup>24</sup> Both halves ultimately reported to the Chinese emperor and collected tribute from feudal subjects called *arat* (peasant-shepherds), who consisted of various Oirat (Western Mongolian) and Turkic ethnic groups. Even while the Uriangkhai territory was a remote district of the Qing Dynasty, Russian colonial expansion continued into the Sayan-Altai region throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> Russian colonists traded tobacco, tea, and alcohol in exchange for furs, livestock, and labor from the local shepherds (Forsyth 1992: 226).

The central valley of the Xemchik (“Kemtchik”) and Yenisei (“Ouloukem” or “Ulug-Xem”) Rivers formed a geographically isolated basin for social exchange among nomadic herders, separated from Mongolia by the Tannu-Ola Mountains to the south, and from Xakassia and Altai by the Sayan-Altai Mountains to the west (see Figure 1.3). This is the region that geographer Paul Chalon referred to as the Pays des Saïots (the Land of the Soyots). Given the relatively small amount of grasslands available, nomads by necessity moved their livestock up into the forest wilderness (taiga) areas of present-day Barun-Xemchik and Süt-Xöl (“Milk Lake”) in

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<sup>23</sup> The Tuvan People's Republic was a nominally independent state from 1921-1944, with strong connections to the Soviet Union.

<sup>24</sup> Khasut, Tozha, Salzhak, Oyunnar, Shalyk, Nibazy, Davana (or Mady) and Choodu, Beyse, Kemchik (Krueger 1977: 43).

<sup>25</sup> “The indigenous peoples of the Altai-Sayan region were referred to by the Mongols as *Uriyangkhai*, and in the eighteenth century the Russians adopted this term, especially with regard to the natives of Tuva” (Forsyth 1992: 123).

the northwest, the mountainous regions of Môngün-Taïga and Bai-Taïga to the southwest, the desert-steppe regions of Ovür and Erzin to the south and east.<sup>26</sup>

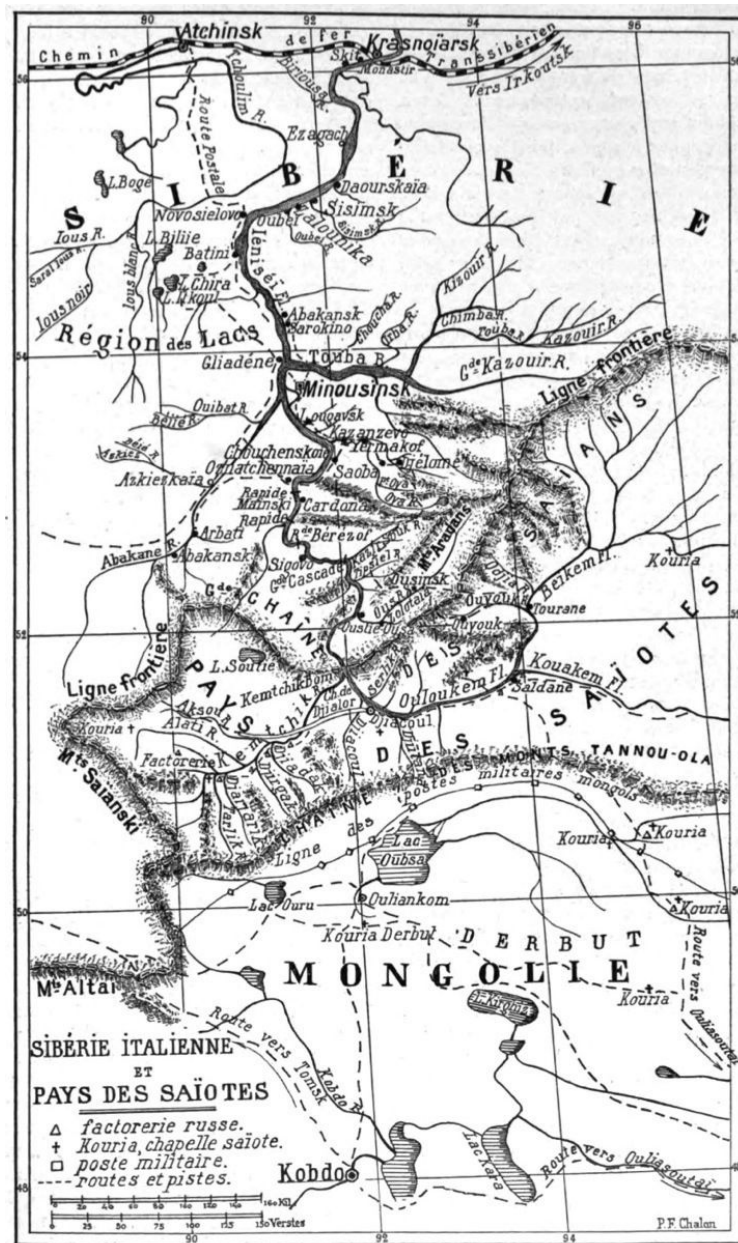


Figure 1.3. Map of the Sayan-Altai region from 1904 showing the Pays des Saïotes (the Land of the Soyots) located between Siberia in the north and west and Mongolia to the south and east.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The regions of Ovur and Erzin, south of the Tannu-Ola Mountains, are geographically more connected with Mongolia. In fact, those regions were part of Mongolia until the Soviets redrew the boundary to include the southern slopes of the mountains. Outsiders have speculated that this border re-alignment was a move to isolate Tuva and Tuvans geographically from Mongolia, thereby culturally linking Tuvan people with Turkic rather than Mongol groups. The re-alignment also may have served to isolate a mineral-rich region for uranium enrichment during World War II. See Fedor S. Mansvetov, "Tannu Tuva—the Soviet 'Atom City?,'" *Russian Review* 6, no. 2 (1947): 9-19.

<sup>27</sup> Image reproduced from Chalon 1904: 165.

Russians gradually gained more influence in the region in the early twentieth century. With the construction of several settlements, they were successful in presenting themselves as an alternative to the Chinese feudal system, making a populist appeal to the *arat*. As Forsyth writes, “so ineffectual was the jurisdiction of the Peking (Manchu) government in this remote region that by the early years of the twentieth-century, Tuva was to all intents and purposes already a protectorate of Russia” (1992: 226-7). In 1914, the Uriangkhai protectorate was established as part of the Russian Empire. The use of “Tuvan” as an ethnonym did not come into wide use before 1914-1918, and carried possible connections with an ethnic group further north along the Yenisei called “Tuba.” Russian efforts to link Uriangkhai and Oirat ethnic groups with Siberian Turkic tribes to the northwest worked to solidify the region even further as one distinct from Mongolia. Colonialists asserted that Tuva was a “natural appendage” of Siberia and was destined to “gravitate towards Russia” (Forsyth 2002: 227). As Carruthers recounted in *Unknown Mongolia*, “it is certain that Russian protection would be welcomed by the natives, and in view of recent advances made by Mongol princes to Russia, and in consideration of the preference for Russian rule over Chinese rule, it would be strange indeed if these regions do not, some day, fall under the protectorship of the Russian Empire” (1914: 166).

After a brief period of political unrest following the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 (during which Tuva again came under the control of the Chinese), the independent socialist People’s Republic of Tannu Tuva was formed in 1922. Despite many cultural links with Mongolia, the “independent” status of Tuva primarily reflected Russian/Soviet domination in the region. It was to the Soviets’ advantage to maintain Tuva as a “puppet state” rather than allow it to join the recently independent Mongolia (Forsyth 1992: 280). Russian policies, then, were largely successful in defining Tannu Tuva in opposition to a feudal past that was linked (or perceived as being linked) with foreign rulers from Mongolia and China.

## PART II

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### BUILDING THE NATION

Following the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, Soviet colonization and nation-building within the former Russian Imperial territory mobilized ethnographic knowledge about indigenous groups in the Inner Asian region (Hirsch 2000: 5-12). That nation-building effort sought to end nomadic backwardness by framing it as a kind of innocence, which was then used to justify colonization as a means of saving the nomads by helping them become more sophisticated. Soviet policies also framed nomadic backwardness as beastly and in need of neutralization. To this end, mobile pastoralists were made to live settled lives and cultural practices were desacralized and institutionalized.

#### *LEGITIMIZING RUSSIAN TERRITORIAL EXPANSION*

All pre-revolutionary culture in Tuva was re-interpreted in terms of struggles to overcome “feudal slavery” from the Mongol and Chinese *noyon*. The predominantly peaceful *arat*

peasants—that is, shamanist-Buddhist nomadic shepherds and hunters in the Xemchik River Valley—periodically revolted against rule by the Chinese and Mongolian foreigners who controlled their land. The most famous such incident is said to have occurred during 1883-1885, when a militia of herders called the *Aldan Maadyr* (“The 60 Heroes”) mounted an uprising on horseback to fight off the Chinese and Mongol *noyon*. The uprising was suppressed and the heroes and their families were publicly humiliated, tortured, and beheaded. Many *arat* fled further into the Siberian taiga, and some found refuge in Russian communities in the nearby regions of Altai and Xakassia. An entire genre of songs celebrates the heroic activities of these warriors in protecting and maintaining the Tuvan people.<sup>28</sup>

Consistent with the basic logic behind the Great October Revolution of 1917, class struggles of the masses—in this case, the *arat*—were seen as a uniting symbol in the formation of the Tuvan People’s Republic. In deliberate contrast to Western European systems of colonial and capitalist oppression, the Bolsheviks justified their presence in the Sayan-Altai as helping the feudal Tuvans liberate themselves from the Mongol-Chinese feudal oppressors.<sup>29</sup> Part of this project involved selectively drawing on historical events and mythologizing them towards particular political ends. This is evident in the mythologization of the *Aldan Maadyr* as quintessential heroes whose cause—defending their territory against Chinese forces—was later co-opted and interpreted by the Soviets as a fight against feudalism and for socialism.

Well before the codification of a formalized Tuvan writing system in 1930, song texts were seen as the most important tool for orally conveying and transferring messages of socialism. Tuvan revolutionary poets such as Salchak Toka (1901-1973) and Stepan Saryg-ool (1908-1983) composed songs of the new socialist life—not only with new lyrical content but also melodic styles influenced by Russian revolutionary songs and songs by Soviet composers (Süzükei 2007: 131). In the case of the Glorious Internationale, an anthem composed for the new republic, a traditional folk melody was set to new lyrics in the Tuvan language that depicted the revolutionary spirit of Soviet internationalism (see Figure 1.4).

Glorious Internationale (lyrics):

*Kadagaaty kargyzynga*  
*Kachygdady choraan arat*  
*Kachygdaldan charyp algan*  
*Kaigamchyktyg Internatsional*

For centuries, the *arat* were tormented  
 Under the rule of foreign masters  
 Out from torment they were liberated  
 By the Glorious International

*Ishtikining ezergeenge*  
*Ezergedip choraan arat*  
*Ezergekten charyp algan*  
*Enereldig Internatsional*

For centuries the *arat* toiled in drudgery  
 Under the rule of domestic masters  
 From suffering they were liberated  
 By the Renowned International

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, the well-known song “Buura” (Aksenov 1964: 125), performed to this day by contemporary ensembles such as Alash.

<sup>29</sup> The United States, however, used similar claims in the Philippines vis-à-vis the Spanish in 1898. See, for example, Kramer 2006.

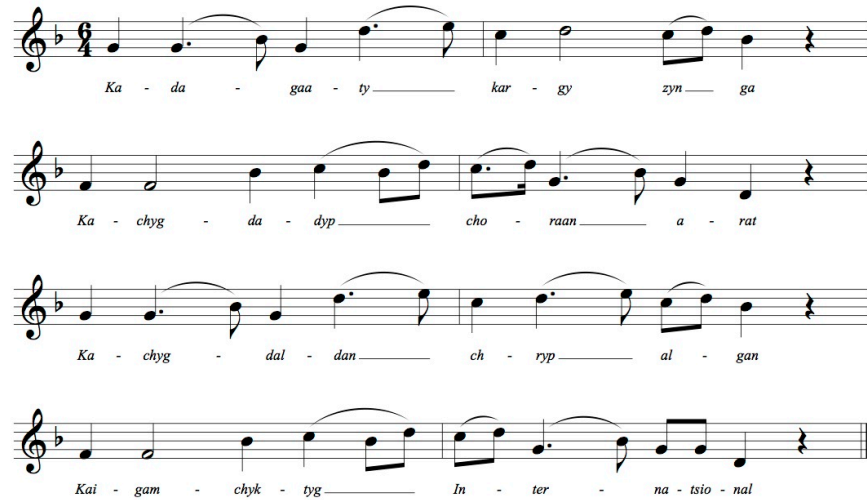


Figure 1.4. Melodic transcription of the “Glorious Internationale,” also called the “Tuvan Internationale.”<sup>30</sup>

### SETTLING AND EDUCATING TUVAN PEOPLES

In 1921, The Tuvan People’s Republic of Tannu Tuva declared itself an independent nation. World atlases depicted the new republic even though only the Soviet Union and Mongolia recognized it as independent (Paine 1996: 329; see Figure 1.5).<sup>31</sup>

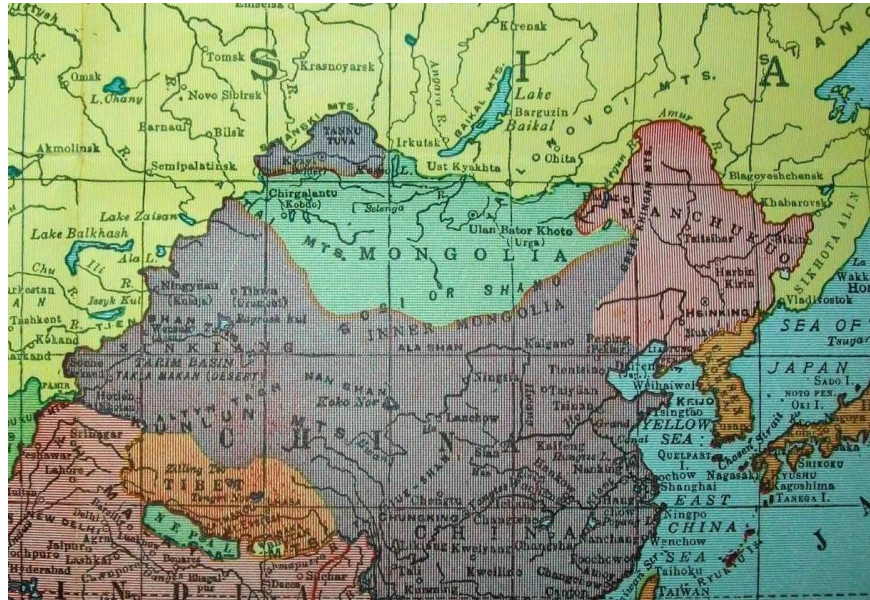


Figure 1.5. Map of East Asia showing independent country of “Tannu Tuva” (northwest of Mongolia) with a capital city called Kyzyl, circa 1938.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Aksenov 1964: 139; my transnotation and translation.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the role that Tannu Tuva played in the global imagination of nomads.

<sup>32</sup> Map originally in *Goode’s World Atlas*, Rand McNally (1938), reproduced from the Internet Map Archive, <http://www.probertencyclopaedia.com/photolib/maps/index.html>.

Aside from the delineation of political borders, the Soviet project of nation-building involved bringing nomadic shepherds into settlements where they could be more easily educated, civilized, and incorporated into Tuvan culture and society. In her monograph *Musical Culture of Tuva in the Twentieth Century* (2007), Tuvan musicologist Valentina Süzükei describes the main goals of socialist modernization in Tannu Tuva:

Collectivization in the TPR [Tuvan People's Republic] was undertaken on the basis of forced transfer of the nomadic *arats* to a sedentary, socialist culture and way of life—all of these activities were closely associated with the idea of denying all previous centuries of lived experience for the sake of 'ending feudal and colonial slavery'—in order to, 'within the span of one generation, put an end to the backwardness, poverty, and ignorance' [of the Tuvan people] and rise to the level of the 'new revolutionary [art and culture] of Soviet Russia' (Süzükei 2007: 120, quoting *Istoria Tuvy*, ed. Toka 1964).

To effectuate this “forced transfer,” Tuvan students were sent to Moscow during the early years of Tannu Tuva to become educated in socialist revolutionary ways. They were later sent back to their homeland to accelerate the socialist modernization and transformation of their “feudal” society. German traveler Otto Maenchen-Helfen wrote about this practice in *Journey to Tuva: An Eye-Witness Account of Tannu Tuva in 1929* (1931):

In 1929, the *Kommunisticheskiï Universitet Trudyashchikhskaya Vostoka [imeni Stalina]* (the Joseph Stalin Communist University of the Workers of the East—abbreviated KUTV ...) fitted out an expedition to investigate the economic conditions and potential of Tuva. The university, on Moscow's Strastnaya Square, is a strange institution. Behind the great red monastery, after which the square is named, stands an inconspicuous two-story building where human bombs are manufactured. Hundreds of young Orientals—Yakuts, Mongols, Tuvans, Uzbeks, Koreans, Afghans, and Persians—are trained there for three years to explode the old ways in their homelands. In three years shamanists are turned into atheists, worshippers of Buddha into worshippers of tractors. Equipped with soap, toothbrushes, and meager Russian, these fine fellows—crammed with catch-words and slogans and fanaticized, as missionaries surely must be if they are to accomplish anything—have the mission of pushing their countrymen straight into the twenty-first century ([1931] 1992: 4-5).

These young “missionaries” were taught to “explode the old ways” by spreading political message of modernization in rural nomadic areas of Tuva. The revolutionary youth movement moved through the countryside in what became known as “red yurt” (or “red corner”) encampments, using local language to increase literacy and educate rural pastoralists in Soviet ideologies of cultural and political modernization (Süzükei 2007: 145, 164).<sup>33</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, after traveling from Moscow to Tannu Tuva with one such group of revolutionary students in 1929, wrote that:

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<sup>33</sup> Olson writes that “political pressures helped to ensure that when folklorists went on expeditions into the countryside, they functioned not only as collectors but also as propagandists of the new Soviet viewpoint, which centered on a critique of the Tsarist regime” (Olson 2004: 36).

[i]n a single month ... the five students with whom I went to Tuva expelled two thirds of the [Tuvan People's Revolutionary] Party [TPRP] membership and raced across the steppes, forcing the confiscation of all livestock over twenty head from the nomad families in order to set up government herds of camels, sheep, goats, and cattle—an original way indeed of socializing the means of milk production! ([1931] 1992: 5)<sup>34</sup>

As the collectivization of livestock and settlement of peoples began to reshape rural lives throughout the 1920s and 30s, many Tuvans chose to follow socialist reconstruction. In particular, they embarked on the creation of a new culture by rejecting nomadic elements as “backward” vestiges of rural, pastoral clans. In the same way that living in a nomadic yurt came to be considered an embarrassing relic of the past, *xöömei* began to be seen in a manner that was consistent with the early ethnographers' accounts—as “backward,” and therefore as antithetical to the Soviet project of modernization (see Part III of this chapter). To be sure, many Tuvan herders complied with social and economic transformations but maintained traditional customs and beliefs, which they practiced away from the structures of official state power.<sup>35</sup> But by and large the Soviet socialist reconstruction was achieving its goals.

#### *PARADOXICAL GOALS OF NATION-BUILDING*

Constructing ethnicity and nationality as part of a new Tuvan People's Republic relied on contradictory, even paradoxical, goals. As explained above, through their music and their larger culture, Tuvans were framed as “backward” nomadic herders who needed to be developed and modernized in order to catch up with the rest of the Soviet Union, and various projects were carried out to this end. At the same time, Soviet officials felt compelled to present Tuva as a unique and distinct nationality, one whose existence was the result of “successful” Leninist-Stalinist nationalities policies of the early Soviet period.

For Lenin (and, later, Stalin), nationalism was “a belief that ethnic boundaries are ontologically essential, essentially territorial, and ideally political” (Slezkine 1994b: 418). The Bolshevik approach to the “nationality question” was one that placed all peoples on a teleological progression of development from feudalism to capitalism and eventually socialism. By altering the economic “base” of a society, Karl Marx had theorized that changes would correspond in the society's “superstructure”—*i.e.*, culture and social forms.<sup>36</sup> As Hirsch argues, the Bolsheviks set out “to accelerate the historical process by acting on the economic base, social forms, and culture *all at the same time*” (2005: 6). Pursuant to this logic, “[n]ationality equaled backwardness, but backwardness did not equal nationality” (Slezkine 1994a: 144).

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<sup>34</sup> One of the younger students who accompanied Maenchen-Helfen on his journey to Tuva in 1929 was Salchak Toka, a writer who came to work in the Ministry of Culture of the TPR and who later became General Secretary of Tuva (Maenchen-Helfen [1931] 1992: 8, fn. 1).

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion of ways in which mobile pastoralists maintained traditional practices and beliefs during the Soviet era.

<sup>36</sup> Marx, preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, [1957] 1970.



State-sponsored efforts to turn so-called “backward” peoples into nations required drawing new political boundaries and emphasizing national and cultural distinctions (Hirsch 2000: 204). Policies regarding the lesser developed nationalities sought to:

- (a) develop and strengthen their own Soviet statehood in a form that would correspond to the national physiognomy of these peoples;
- (b) introduce their own courts and agencies of government that would function in native languages and consist of local people familiar with the life and mentality of the local population;
- (c) develop their own press, schools, theaters, local clubs and other cultural and educational institutions in native languages (Slezkine 1994b: 423).

Since the system of ethnic nationalities depended on “difference” to function properly, policies of indigenization (*korenizatsia*)<sup>37</sup> worked to shape each national category as truly distinct, even if this involved altering languages, cultural practices, or ethnic boundaries. Hirsch claims that these categories were “neither primordial nor totally artificial, but were labels that became meaningful through a combination of official policies, expert input, and local initiatives” (Hirsch 2005). Where national particularity was not already evident or obvious, it was constructed.<sup>38</sup>

National categories effectively functioned in a system of hierarchies. Depending on its context, the Russian word *narodnost'* referred to “folk” or “people” but also to “nationality.” While *natsional'nost'*—another term for “nationality”—was reserved for those population groups who were already “united into a nationally self-conscious community” (Hirsch 1997: 260),<sup>39</sup> *narodnost'* was used to describe those groups who were perceived to be less organized or at an “earlier” stage of social and cultural development.<sup>40</sup> Relations between various *narodnosti* and *natsional'nosti* within the Soviet Union were spoken of as “internationalism” (Olson 2004: 37-38). The context of “a unified state with a colonial-type economy and administrative structure” gave the Soviet Union its “distinctive form” (Hirsch 2000: 204). Specifically,

people did not passively submit to the imposition of national identities, but learned to manipulate them for their own ends .... In learning the ‘proper’ ways to be national—in mastering the official language of nationality—the Union’s peoples also became ‘Soviet’ (Hirsch 2000: 205).

The results of such “affirmative action” policies, as they have come to be called (see Martin 2001), were forcefully emphasized everywhere in the USSR, as exemplified in the Agricultural Exhibit of 1923 that featured multiple nationalities living and working together in one “happy Soviet village” of marked ethnic and cultural difference (Slezkine 1994b: 434).

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Giuliano 2006 and 2011.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors* (1994).

<sup>39</sup> Hirsch draws this definition of *natsional'nost'* from census category data in the early 1920s (1997: 260).

<sup>40</sup> *Narodnost'* was often used to refer to Tuvans and several other Turko-Mongol peoples in the Soviet Union.

In short, Soviet colonization and nation-building within the former Russian Imperial territory mobilized ethnographic knowledge about Tuvans in order to nationalize and “modernize” them. The Soviets simultaneously framed Tuvans’ nomadic backwardness as beastly, innocent, and unique to transform their way of life from mobile pastoralism to a settled life more consistent with the Soviet project.

### PART III

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## INSTITUTIONALIZATION

One of the most important ways in which the Soviet Union sought to transform Tuvan culture and society was by reframing Tuvan music. Throughout the Soviet Union, policies of “cultural enlightenment” (*kul'turnoe prosveshchenie*; *kultprosvet* for short) worked to transfer aesthetic and social values of the European art music tradition onto regional folk musics of the Soviet Union.<sup>41</sup> Values were instilled through practices of editing, arranging, “consortizing” (making folk instruments into orchestras), and elevating aesthetic judgments to match the perceived qualities of superiority in European art music.<sup>42</sup> These policies also sought to standardize a common language of musicianship throughout the entire Soviet Union, even when each republic’s folk music was theoretically a “national” form.

In the young republic of Tannu Tuva, Soviet nationalist policies and “cultural enlightenment” sought to institutionalize *xöömei* as a genre of Tuvan national folk music.<sup>43</sup> The Soviets’ contradictory attitudes toward nomadic backwardness were reflected in the position of *xöömei* vis-à-vis national Tuvan culture. *Xöömei* was cited as evidence for ethnic cultural particularity (backwardness-as-uniqueness). At the same time, the backwardness-as-beastliness framing of Tuvan nomadic herders required that nomadic cultural practices, including traditional throat-singing, be abandoned in the project of modernization; a new repertoire of civilized “songs of the new life” was composed and circulated as a corrective (Aksenov 1964). Only through documenting, categorizing, and folkloricizing *xöömei* with European aesthetic values was *xöömei* able to become “appropriately” national.

### DOCUMENTING XÖÖMEI VOICES

In 1934, on the order of the People’s Republic of Tannu Tuva, a delegation of a dozen Tuvan musicians was sent to Moscow to make a series of recordings of Tuvan folk music. Following on Anokhin’s recordings from 1909-10 (which have since become damaged and unusable), the delegation’s recordings contributed significantly to the documentation of ethnic

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<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Djumaev 1993, Levin 1996, Frolova-Walker 1998. The idea of *kultprosvet* is credited to Anatoly Lunacharsky, the first Soviet Cultural Commissar (Levin 1996: 58). Djumaev writes that “the main goal of official cultural policy [in the USSR] regarding [traditional] music was not to forbid, but to cleanse” (1993: 44).

<sup>42</sup> Folk instruments were organized into Europeanized orchestras following the “Andreevski Orchestra” model. Vasilii Andreev (1861-1918) founded the first orchestra of Russian folk instruments, after which many more were patterned in the non-Russian republics (Olson 2004: 152).

<sup>43</sup> See Levin 1996: 58 for a discussion of cultural enlightenment in Uzbekistan.

and national difference by presenting *xöömei* singing as a uniquely Tuvan cultural form. That cultural form, according to many, had not yet been modernized and represented a glimpse into the “primitive” past, depicted in the accounts of early ethnographers of Tuvan *xöömei*.

Then, in the 1940s, when Tuva was quietly “absorbed” into the Soviet Union and lost its status as an independent country, these early recordings of throat-singing musicians from the Tannu Tuva era were used as raw sonic materials for the construction of a Tuvan national musical repertoire. Specialists in music, theater, and dance were sent to Tuva from Moscow to oversee the development of the professional arts and culture of the republic.<sup>44</sup> Russian composer Alexei N. Aksenov (1909–1962) was one such individual, sent from Moscow in 1943 by the Arts Council of the People’s Commissar of the USSR to oversee the creative and musical-pedagogical work in the theater in Kyzyl. While teaching music there, Aksenov increasingly began to understand his students, who hailed from all over Tuva, as “living bearers of the folk song art who had not lost touch with their nomadic families” (1964: 225–6). Aksenov’s observation ignited an interest in folk song collecting, which grew by means of the theater brigade’s musical performances in various regions of Tuva and the use of recordings from the Tannu Tuva era.

Taking on the role of both composer and folklorist, Aksenov used the 1934 recordings of the Tuvan delegation to construct musical transcriptions and analysis of these early examples of Tuvan throat-singing. Aksenov’s transcriptions and analysis were collected in the book *Tuvan Folk Music* (published posthumously in 1964) and formed the basis for institutionalizing *xöömei* as Tuvan folk music during Tuva’s Soviet era (1944–1991). In sharp contrast to the value judgments of late nineteenth-century ethnographic accounts of nomadic backwardness described earlier in this chapter, Aksenov sought to recognize *xöömei* as a distinct and coherent musical form. Moreover, his discernment of four distinct styles of *xöömei*, combined with his use of aesthetic terminology common to Western European music theory, helped elevate *xöömei* to a genre of folk music.

Aksenov’s study of throat-singing centered primarily on recordings of two *xöömeizhi* (master throat-singers) who were members of the 1934 delegation—Kombu Ondar, from the Dzun-Xemchik region of western Tuva, and Soruktu Kyrgys, from the southeastern region of Erzin. After meeting the two musicians in person during his fieldwork in the 1940s, Aksenov describes them as follows (see Figure 1.6):

Soruktu—50 years old, slightly grey-haired (Tuvans rarely grow grey hair) with sharp, angular features. He held himself with dignity, and was treated with honor and respect. His manner of execution differs with startling clarity, strong and pure melodic overtones, without any strain, pouring out in a continuous stream. Operatic ostinato sounds of throat-singing he brings softly, sonorously, in a timbre reminiscent of the bassoon in the lower register. The performative composition of his musical pieces strikes a measured form; he is a genuine master, virtuoso ....<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> S. Bulatov, R. Mironovich, and L. Izrailevich were sent to direct the choir, music, and theater programs respectively (Karelina 2009: 158, 194). See also Süzükei 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Aksenov 1964: 226–7; my translation.

Kombu—a lively, cheerful old man, tall with a youthful posture; he holds himself with great dignity, says little, but is thoughtful and convincing. He has a strong high voice with a guttural timbre. He sings in the typical style of western Tuva with a high *tessitura*, sparingly and restrained, ornamenting the melody on a fundamental supporting sound; he mostly sings old songs in the melodic variants that differ from the commonly occurring recitative character of melodic style with peculiar modal coloring.<sup>46</sup>

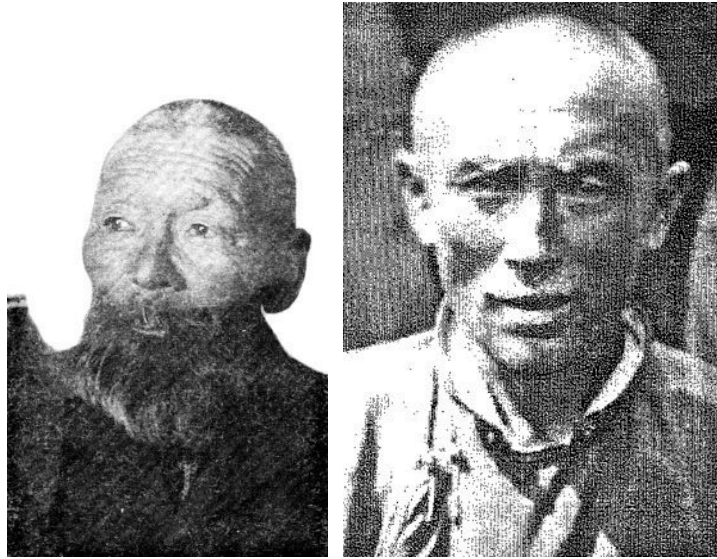


Figure 1.6. *Xöömeizhi* Soruktu Kyrgys (left) and Kombu Ondar (right), circa 1940s.<sup>47</sup>

Particularly notable is Aksenov’s emphasis on the musicians’ “dignity,” “honor,” and virtuosity as *xöömei* performers. Moreover, he links their singing with structural (“operatic ostinato,” “modal coloring”) and aesthetic (timbre like a “bassoon,” high *tessitura*) associations of European performance practices.

#### CATEGORIZING XÖÖMEI STYLES

Aksenov’s musicological description of throat-singing frames *xöömei* as a melodic vocal genre produced by singing a “fundamental” vocal drone and adjusting upper “partials” (also called overtones or harmonics):

In throat singing the performer sings only a single low fundamental rich in upper partials; the partials, forming a melody, are selected from this unceasing sound through changes in the width of the mouth cavity just as in playing on the jew’s-harp (Aksenov 1973: 12-13).

Aksenov subdivides throat-singing into four “genres” or “styles”—*kargyraa*, *borbangnadyr*, *sygyt*, and *ezengileer*, each associated with different melodic styles and European orchestral

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 230; my translation.

<sup>47</sup> Photos from the International Scientific Center “*Khöömei*” website, <http://www.khoomei.narod.ru/>.

instruments (*ibid.*: 13).<sup>48</sup> For example, for the first style, *kargyraa*,<sup>49</sup> Aksenov recorded Soruktu, whose singing he describes as follows:

The fundamental, similar in timbre to the lower register of the French horn, is produced by the singer with half-opened mouth .... The partials forming the melody sound cleanly, are heard clearly and distinctly and are reminiscent of reed-pipe tones in bright and whistling timbre. Each partial sounds to a specific vowel and the melodic change from one partial to another is accompanied by a change in vowel-sounds (Slobin 1973: 13).

In contrast with *kargyraa*, Aksenov describes *sygyt* as involving a higher and more tense fundamental:<sup>50</sup>

The [pitch] height [of *sygyt*] varies according to performer around the middle pitches of the small octave, and is similar in timbre to a muted French horn or at times to a cello playing *ponticello*. It is produced by a strained position of the vocal cords with half-open mouth .... At the beginning a special melody (not from a song) of recitative nature is sung with the fundamental to the words of any song. Next ... the melody remains on a held pitch (the fundamental) on the basis of which the performer selects partials for a second, ornamented melody in a higher register .... The partials on which ornamented melodies are built in *sigit* [*sygyt*] sound in a very high register ... in a sharp, whistling timbre reminiscent of the piccolo in the same register (Slobin 1973: 15).

Valentina Süzükei points out that Aksenov's inventory of *xöömei* styles from his fieldwork in the 1940s and 50s was not exhaustive (2007: 400). Nonetheless, it is clear to Aksenov as a general matter that

[t]hroat singing is known not only to the Tuvins [Tuvans], but also to several neighboring peoples (Mongols, Oirats, Khakass, Gorno-Altai and Bashkirs). However, among the Tuvins it has been preserved in the most developed and widespread form, in that there is not one, but four stylistic variants of throat-singing. It appears that Tuva is the center of the Turco-Mongol culture of throat singing (Slobin 1973: 12).

Comparing music from different regions of Tuva, Aksenov came to the conclusion that Tuvan *xöömei* exhibited noticeable regional differences. The western regions of Tuva had a characteristic manner of singing in a high tessitura with an intense guttural sound (typical of Ondar, from Dzun-Xemchik). Meanwhile, the singing style of the southeastern regions was

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<sup>48</sup> Tuvan musicians still practice these four styles today, along with a few others (most notably the *xöömei* style), which together form the standard repertoire at festivals and competitions. Tuvan musicians and scholars continue to debate the names, definitions, and performance techniques associated with various *xöömei* styles; some argue that there are 30 to 40 major styles while others contend that there are just two basic techniques, which form the basis for all styles.

<sup>49</sup> The word *kargyraa* is “linked with the Turkic words forms *kargaar* (to curse, scold, swear, be horse, chuckle, seethe), which by its meaning also denotes ‘to conjure,’ and *yraa* (song), i.e.: song-conjuration. It is very possible that in the old days conjurations of shamans were realized in such a way” (Shchurov 1993: 4).

<sup>50</sup> “This Turkic word [*sygyt*] consists of two composite parts: *syg* (“to press, suppress”) and *yyt* (“voice”). Without any doubt this points to a way of producing sounds: ‘pressing out a whistling sound by one’s throat’, or ‘to whistle with one’s throat’. But at the same time the words *sygyt*, *syg*, *sy-t* and *yg* denote ceremonial weeping or lamentation with several Turkic peoples” (Shchurov 1993: 4).

characterized by a natural *tessitura* voice, unstressed sounds, and ornamental decoration (Soruktu, from Erzin). Notably, there was a higher concentration of Mongolian folk songs along the border regions with Mongolia to the southeast. And in central Tuva, there was a synthesis of both these styles. Of course, these interpretations were cursory and came from one individual; for those and other reasons, they do not reflect contemporary Tuvan scholars' views on the schematic diversity of Tuvan music.<sup>51</sup>

#### TRANSCRIBING XÖÖMEI MELODIES

Aksenov's original transcriptions in Western musical notation of the first two breaths of Kombu's performance of *sygyt* are presented in Figure 1.7 (see Listening Excerpt #1 in Appendix III), in alignment with sonogram analyses of the original 1934 recordings (digitized from Melodiya gramophones in Moscow).<sup>52</sup> My own sonogram representations of the original recordings are included as a tool to visualize the complexity of timbral components in the recorded vocal sound, most of which is not included in Aksenov's musical transcription. Furthermore, while Aksenov's transcriptions reflect certain components of *xöömei* sounds that might be heard as "fundamental" and "overtone melody" in Kombu's *sygyt*, they nevertheless represent types of framing and codification within a system of European musical analysis. Representations of sound, moreover, necessarily represent how the listener actually listens to a performance.

In the case of Kombu's *sygyt*, Aksenov's selection of fundamental and overtone melody in his transcription succeeds in capturing many important sound components in the voice recordings. But Aksenov's choices in framing Soruktu's performance in the *borbangnadyr* style are more perplexing (see Figure 1.8; see Listening Excerpt #2 in Appendix III). The timbral variation and complexity in the *borbangnadyr* sound texture make it difficult to discern a coherent melody in the audio recording, and this difficulty is reflected in Aksenov's odd transcription of the singing using 32<sup>nd</sup> note triplets and 64<sup>th</sup> note quintuplets, as well as unconventional meter markings such as 13/8 and 9/4.

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<sup>51</sup> Zoya Kyrgys, for example, claims that it is difficult to distinguish which styles of *xöömei* are indigenous to each region because all styles are performed throughout western, central, and southeastern Tuva (2002: 116-17). Sevyan Vainshtein's observations (from the 1950s-60s) support the claim that *xöömei* was practiced more often along the Mongolian border. He writes: "as a general designation for throat singing, the term [*xöömei*] is used only in southern Tuva, while in the rest of the republic it denotes only one of the styles of this type of singing" (1979-80: 72).

<sup>52</sup> Special thanks to Todoriki Masahiko for sharing excerpts of these digitized recordings.

## Sonogram and Transcription of Kombu's *Sygyt*

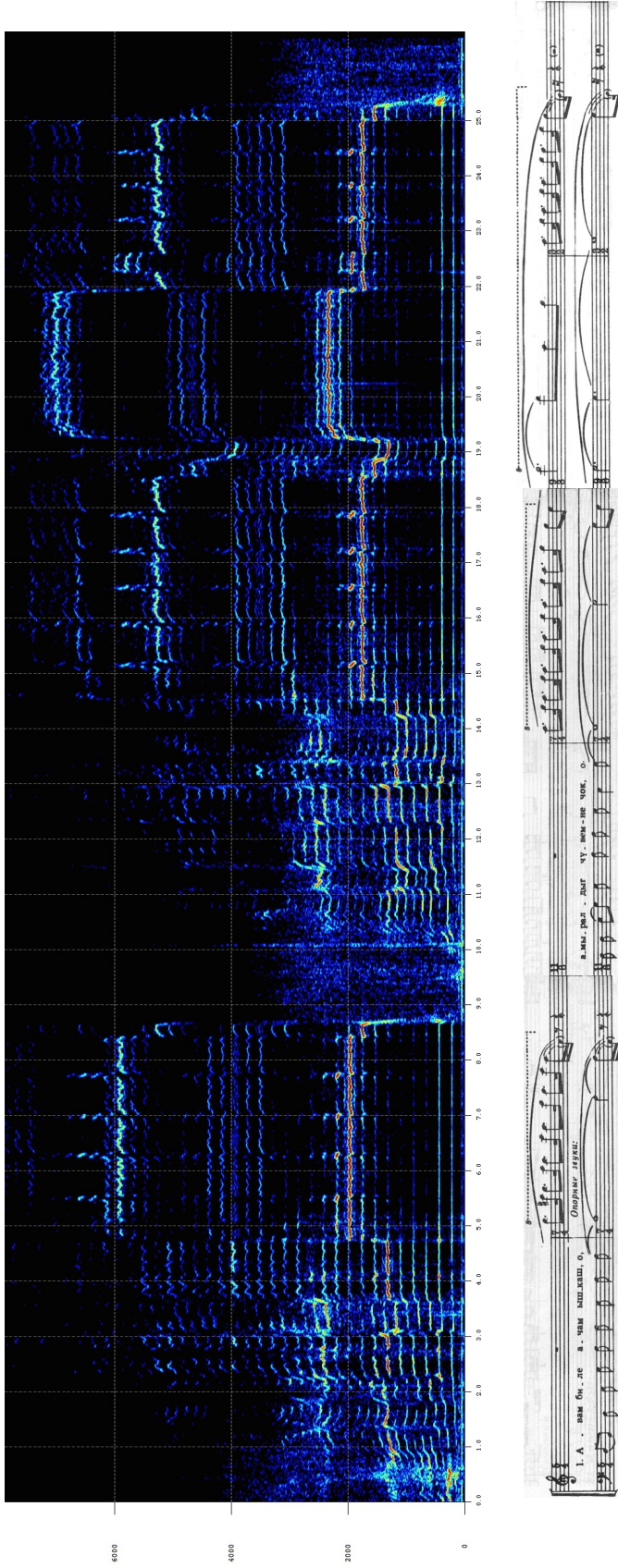


Figure 1.7. Aksenov's musical transcription of the first two breaths of Kombu Ondar's performance in the *sygyt* style (from Aksenov 1965: 180) overlaid with a sonogram analysis of the original sound recording (conducted by the author using AudioSculpt v3.2.6; x-axis is time in seconds, y-axis is frequency in Hertz)







While Aksenov conducted his own fieldwork with some rural musicians (such as Kombu and Soruktu), he also relied heavily on a core group of key informants in Kyzyl, in addition to several recordings and works that had already been published or were available in archives. His work was focused largely on gathering, categorizing, and notating music, not conducting expeditions to find rural musicians himself. Members of the Tuvan cultural elite acted as influential mediators between Aksenov and Tuvan culture, and included young writers, poets, and student musicians brought from various regions of Tuva. Most notable were Maksim and Kara-Kys Munzuk, who were particularly influential in shaping and performing arranged versions of Tuvan folklore (Figure 1.9). Munzuk’s collection *Yrlar* (“Songs”) in Tuvan language was published in 1956, and the follow-up *Tyva ulustung yrlary* (“Tuvan folk songs”) was published in 1973.<sup>53</sup> Many of Munzuk’s collecting efforts were undertaken with his wife Kara-Kys, a similarly eminent musician who recorded and performed widely.<sup>54</sup>



Figure 1.9. Artists from the theater performing on the radio, Kyzyl, 1936. Aleksandr Laptan (center, *byzaanchy*) and Maksim Munzuk (right, on *doshpuluur*).<sup>55</sup>

### THE POLITICS OF FOLKLORIC IDEOLOGY

Aksenov was influenced by the methods of his mentor, Russian musicologist and folklorist Evgenii V. Gippius (1903-1985), who emphasized using the “descriptive method” in order to record “everything that sounds.” The goal was to better understand the dynamic nature of folklore as an “organic” and “irrational” process characterized by “spontaneity” (*stixiinost*).<sup>56</sup> Throughout his career, Gippius emphasized recognizing and describing local styles rather than selecting and codifying a “unified national style” of folk music, despite Stalinist ideology that

<sup>53</sup> Munzuk’s musical notations were preceded by a collection of song lyrics co-edited with S. Saryg-ool entitled *Chyyndy yrlar* (“Collection of Songs”) in 1947.

<sup>54</sup> For samples of musical collaborations with Maksim and Kara-Kys Munzuk in the 1950s, see Alan Lomax’s archival recordings from the Melodiya recording label recorded in Moscow in 1964, available at <http://research.culturalequity.org/home-audio.jsp>.

<sup>55</sup> Photo from Karelina 2009: 204, used by permission from Dom Kompozitor, Moscow.

<sup>56</sup> E. V. Gippius, ‘Krest’ianskaia muzyka Zaonezh’ia,’ [Peasant music of Zaonezhia] in *Iskusstvo severa: Zaonezhie* (Leningrad, 1927; quoted in Olson 2004: 77).

explicitly discouraged such local practices.<sup>57</sup> Later, following the Khrushchev “thaw” of the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the collection of “authentic” folklore became common practice, Gippius was praised as a folklorist who had maintained his views throughout the Stalinist era at great personal risk (Olson 2004: 78).

Aksenov’s training as a composer shaped his skills in the “descriptive method” of folklore collection. That shaping was reflected in his detailed transcriptions of hundreds of Tuvan songs, alongside throat-singing, that appeared in *Tuvan Folk Music*.<sup>58</sup> In the book’s forward, Gippius claims that Aksenov was “masterful at notating recordings,” and that he “managed not only to have exceptionally accurate and sensitive ears but also had the ability to grasp subtle shades of particular national forms of folk music as well as their modal and rhythmic systems” (1964: 4).

As the first musicological work devoted exclusively to Tuvan music, *Tuvan Folk Music* is a significant contribution to the study of Tuvan *xöömei*. With detailed transcriptions of dozens of songs representing different genres in Tuvan folk music, the book is an invaluable record of pre-revolutionary song forms and early twentieth century “songs of the new life” from the Tannu Tuva era that were collected and saved (if somewhat arranged and altered). Aksenov had died early in 1962, before he could complete the manuscript. Believing in the value of the material that Aksenov had collected in Tuva, Gippius—along with Bashkir specialist L. Lebedinski—took it upon himself to compile and edit Aksenov’s work into the volume that was published posthumously in 1964.

Further institutionalization of *xöömei* followed the publication of *Tuvan Folk Music*. That institutionalization was justified on the ground that *xöömei* was a unique, ethnic-particular type of folk art. Some scholars, including Süzükei, also believe that *xöömei* was institutionalized because it challenged European academic models for studying music theory. In her view, Aksenov’s view that Tuvan *xöömei* was worth preserving stemmed from the fact that it did not fit into any musical-theoretical system in the *academic* music system (Süzükei 2007: 174). This claim is substantiated by Gippius’ statement, in the forward to *Tuvan Folk Music*, that “the most important and valuable part of [Aksenov’s] research is the section that contains the rationale for vocal solo two-voice technology Tuvan throat-singing” (1964: 11).

In short, the process of documenting, categorizing, and transcribing Tuvan *xöömei* by Aksenov and other Russian musicians institutionalized *xöömei* as a “voice” of the Tuvan nation. Equally instrumental in that process was the contemporaneous effort by Tuvan elites, who included composers and artists, to transform their language into poetry and then set that poetry to music. The collection of musically rich folk practices that emerged from these efforts gave the impression that Tuva was a republic with a long-standing, cohesive history, when in fact the nation was *imagined*; the Uriangkhai Krai was created only in 1914 and Tannu Tuva in 1921.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, what we think of as Tuvan history and the history of *xöömei* is largely a construction.

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<sup>57</sup> In the 1940s, Gippius was found guilty of using ‘bourgeois’ formalistic and sociological methods, which indicated he was more interested in style than content (Olson 2004: 77).

<sup>58</sup> See Karelina 2009 for an examination of Aksenov’s compositions based on Tuvan folkloric material.

<sup>59</sup> See Anderson 1983.

Early ethnographers, followed by Soviet musicians, constructed *xöömei* as a “backward” disposition of Tuvan nomads. As subsequent chapters explore further, that construction provided a historic basis for framing Tuvan *xöömeizhi* according to contradictory attitudes about perceived “nomadic” qualities and sensibilities in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras.



## Amateur Artists, *Xöömei* Collectives, and Romantic Nomadism in Late Soviet Tuva

*Internationalism in art does not spring from the depletion and impoverishment of national art, on the contrary, internationalism grows where national culture flourishes. To forget this is to lose one's individuality and become a cosmopolitan without a country.*  
—Andrei Zhdanov<sup>1</sup>

*I am most enthusiastic about throat-singing, and I usually perform it at public festivals [of amateur arts]. I endeavor to constantly perfect this skill. I am happy, that today I am not performing alone, but in an ensemble of throat-singers .... I summon our young, all who possess pride in delivering their art—harness your talent and bring it to the people.*  
—Maksim Dakpai (1967)<sup>2</sup>

Following Tuva's change from an "Autonomous Region" to an "Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic" (ASSR) in 1961, collective agriculture was further centralized and massive industrialization projects were carried out in the Tuvan countryside. Industry increased sixty-seven times, especially in the areas of steel, mining coal, asbestos, cobalt, gold, and timber.<sup>3</sup> Numerous socio-economic "achievements" in the "modernization" of Tuva from feudalism to socialism led General Secretary of the Tuvan Communist Party Salchak Toka to proclaim:

In only a quarter of a century, in Tuva, where before the revolution, patriarchy and semi-savagery reigned (these precise words were used by Lenin to describe the outer edges of Old Russia), there

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<sup>1</sup> Zhdanov 1950: 62-63.

<sup>2</sup> "Ne pryach' te cvoi talent" ("Do not hide your talent"), *Tuvinskaya Pravda*, 28 September 1967.

<sup>3</sup> Tuvan ASSR reference book (1985: 34), cited in Karelina 2010: 247.

has been created a socialist culture of the Tuvinian people, which is successfully developing both in depth and extent.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter explores the politics of Tuva’s “socialist culture” in connection with *xöömei* as a nationalized genre of folk music in the late Soviet era (from the 1960s to the 1980s). The chapter argues that, during this period, *xöömei* singers were perceived as uncultured amateurs whose dispositions needed to be reshaped in order to become proper Tuvan folk musicians and to perform Soviet-style nomadic folklorism. This argument consists of several sub-arguments. First, despite the continuation of indigenous practices and beliefs at the periphery, regional Houses of Culture in the Tuvan ASSR were effective in the 1960s and 1970s in shaping rural cultural practices, including *xöömei*, into amateur arts through the cultural capital imbedded in institutionalized forms, repertoires, and meanings deployed from Tuva’s urban center of Kyzyl. Second, having a nomadic sensibility became a cornerstone of Soviet and Tuvan ideals in the 1970s and 1980s. During that period, Soviet and Tuvan cultural officials and scholars continued to shape rural amateur *xöömeizhi* into folk musicians and then relied upon them as sources for folkloric material. They also launched expeditions to collect and record different *xöömei* styles and songs, especially in the 1980s. As a result of these efforts, *xöömei* became inscribed as a quintessentially “nomadic” art form in folkloric representations.

This chapter has three parts. Part I discusses the intersection of mobile pastoralism and collective farm agriculture within the Tuvan ASSR as it relates to the incorporation of *xöömei* as part of Tuvan amateur arts (*samodeyatel’nost’*). Part II discusses the institutionalization of “romantic nomadism” alongside state-sponsored efforts to professionalize amateur artists into folk musicians. Efforts to develop *xöömei* as a professional art form eventually had the effect of reinforcing the perception that rural amateurs—and not professionals—were the authentic bearers of *xöömei* as a “nomadic” tradition. Part III examines the role that the 1987-88 “Joint Soviet-American Musical-Ethnographic Research Expedition,” organized by American ethnomusicologist Theodore Levin, had in re-shaping *xöömei* before the fall of the Soviet Union.

## PART I

### XÖÖMEI AND AMATEUR PUBLICS

#### *AMATEUR CULTURE AND THE COLLECTIVE ECONOMY*

The Soviet economic system played an increasing role in the lives of rural Tuvans as they became more sedentary in the 1940s and 50s. Structures of economic modernization functioned as organizing institutions—factories and processing plants in Tuva’s urban areas of Kyzyl and Ak-Dovurak, and collective agriculture in more rural areas. Because most of Tuva was rural, its seventeen regions (*rayon* or *kozhuun*) were each divided into districts (*selsoviet*) usually dominated by one large state farm (*sovхоз*).

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Vainshtein 1980: 248.

The collective or state farm organization shaped a sense of community and identity for rural workers and their families. In her groundbreaking ethnography in Soviet Buryatia (a Mongolian ethnic republic in Siberia nearby Lake Baikal), anthropologist Caroline Humphrey examines the complex and hierarchical structures in two collective farms that form “a microcosm of the state” and affect “the way in which Buryat farm people themselves think about Soviet reality” (1998: 3).<sup>5</sup> In particular, Humphrey explains that collective farms (*kolxoz*) were created by combining a number of small farms into a collective whose administration was local and semi-independent. Meanwhile, state farms (*sovkhoz*) were created on state-owned land and workers were drawn from landless residents of the region (in the case of Tuva, these were mobile pastoralists).<sup>6</sup> Contrary to many people’s assumptions, Humphrey (along with anthropologist David Sneath) show that “state socialist regimes in fact supported long-distance pastoral movement systems in many areas, recognizing their productive value, while settling other parts of the rural population” (Humphrey and Sneath 1999: 1). In rural areas, state farms would rely on herders regularly to herd sheep in the countryside, which consisted of mountains, taiga, and river valleys. In so doing, many herders were able to maintain various practices and beliefs in ways that were not always consistent with official cultural policies.

Nonetheless, “cultural enlightenment” policies were deployed to rural areas of Tuva through regional Houses of Culture and Trade Unions in connection with collective agriculture and industry. Tuvan musicologist Ekaterina K. Karelina explains:

Public participation in amateur arts reached a scale as never before [in the Tuvan ASSR in the 1960-70s]. A distinctive ideological approach to engaging people in amateur creativity was assured by the supervision of authorities (Party and executive) in its organization both at the local and regional levels as well as throughout the Republic. A big role in this process was also played by Trade Unions [*profsoyuzy*]—essentially, the third level of power in the socialist era [after Party and executive] (2009: 247).

In addition to their Europeanizing effects discussed in the previous chapter, Soviet policies of “cultural enlightenment” projected a utopian vision of workers embodying socialist values through distinctly “national” cultural practices.

As part of Soviet “cultural enlightenment,” amateur performing arts (*xudozbestvennaya samodeyatel’nost’*) were promoted as an outlet for spending one’s leisure time engaged in appropriate forms of social interaction. Drawing together the concepts of *sam* (self, oneself) and *deyatel’nost’* (activity, work), the concept of *samodeyatel’nost’* is often translated from Russian as

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<sup>5</sup> *The Karl Marx Collective: Economy, Society and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm*, 1983, republished in 1998 as *Marx Went Away—but Karl Stayed Behind*.

<sup>6</sup> Humphrey summarizes the difference between a collective farm and a state farm: “The collective farm has an administrative hierarchy (the enterprise management, the brigade or sector, the production team, and the household), and the structures transmitting information and commands between these levels again are three: the functional organization of the *kolxoz* [*kolxoz*], the Soviets, and the Party. In a state farm (*sovkhoz* [*sovkhoz*]) all three of these are direct continuations of the national institutions, while in a collective farm the lowest level of ministerial organization is replaced by the semi-independent structure of the *kolxoz* administration” (1998: 3).

“the act of doing or making for oneself” or “do-it-yourselfism.”<sup>7</sup> As anthropologist Joachim Habeck explains, “the worker achieves creative self-fulfillment through playing an instrument, or a role in the lay theater, and developing a personal sense of aesthetics and taste, to be employed in life more generally” (Donahoe and Habeck 2011: 15). Activities that modeled good Soviet citizenship and appropriate social interaction were paramount, such that musical activities conducted in groups were highly valued as communal processes that reflected Soviet collective ideology.

Amateur performing arts encompassed “a wide range of local, state-encouraged musical activities by amateur collectives” (Slobin 1993: 57), which were selected, arranged, and directed in order to meet the needs of the community. In Tuva, these activities included, for example, the study of musical instruments such as classical guitar, Russian *balalaika*, Kazakh *dombra*, as well as Tuvan folk instruments, such as *byzaanchy* (spike fiddle), *chadagan* (zither), *limbi* (transverse flute), *igil* (upright horsehead fiddle), *xomus* (jew’s harp), *chanzy* and *doshpuluur* (plucked lutes). The activities also included participation in folk orchestras, wind bands, choirs, musical-theater performances, and dance groups (Karelina 2009: 249). Clubs or performance troupes would perform informal concerts, called *smotry*. These were public “showings,” commonly translated as “festivals.” Troupes of amateur artists in herding settlements, cattle farms, or machine brigades would occasionally travel to regional centers or to Kyzyl to compete in amateur arts festivals.<sup>8</sup>

*Xöömeizhi* regularly appeared in amateur arts festivals and in official public discourse professing their pride for the amateur arts. In the following excerpt from the *Tuvinskaya Pravda* (“Tuvan Truth”) newspaper, the official arm of the Tuvan Communist Party, Marzhymal Ondar—an amateur artist, *xöömeizhi*, instrument-builder, and teacher—describes the state of affairs in his home village in the Süt-Xöl region of western Tuva:

In the village Bora-Taiga, we have amateur artists and audiences who share a special admiration for the Tuvan folk arts. The ensemble of national instruments in the village House of Culture—one of the best in the region—is in good standing, as are our performers of classic throat-singing. It should be noted that many folks here have long been playing on *igil*, on *byzaanchy*, on *limbi*, on *chadagan*, on *doshpuluur*, and, of course, on *xomuses* [jew’s harp] metal and wooden. I have taught young ones all this from our elders ... And now I myself teach the youth of our village what I know and can do. So this is how our time is spent in the pursuit of regional amateur arts, and people come to me from other villages and settlements in the district of Dzun-Xemchik asking for help to make musical instruments. Sometimes I sit in on rehearsals of folk music ensembles. I agree willingly—always ready to help our comrades with art!” (*Tuvinskaya Pravda*, 18 July 1974).

Ondar clearly places value on the appropriateness of time spent in pursuit of Tuvan folk music as an activity of amateur arts. In so doing, he emphasizes his role as someone who appreciates local music practices, and who directs and transmits those practices to the youth of Bora-Taiga. But

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<sup>7</sup> See Slobin 1993: 57 for a larger discussion of *samodeyatel’nost’*.

<sup>8</sup> Karelina provides data demonstrating the growth of performance clubs in Tuva between 1945 and 1985—in 1945, there were 69 clubs; in 1966, 175 clubs; and in 1985, 208 clubs (2009: 248).

while official public discourse presented one picture, musicians' experiences often reflected another.

### XÖÖMEI IN THE AMATEUR ARTS

As a traditional solo vocal practice of mobile pastoralists, *xöömei* did not fit neatly into the social goals of the amateur arts. *Xöömei* was unlike other instrumental or vocal practices that had been fashioned after imported European classical traditions (e.g., operatic art music, folk instrument orchestras, musical theater productions) and, as a result, was not easily turned into an amateur replica of a professional art form. Because *xöömei* was related to *kozhamyk* (ditties), *öpei* (lullabies), and various sound-making activities of herders and hunters that were not usually considered to be “musical,” it resisted classification within the systems of European musical genres and musical aesthetics (Süzükei 1989: 13).<sup>9</sup> *Xöömei* performance depended on idiosyncratic faculties of soloists and spontaneously improvised forms, and, as such, was a genre that came to occupy a position in and out of European systems of musical organization and classification.

Furthermore, *xöömei*, as a traditional singing genre within the domain of *somodeyatel'nost'*, remained connected with mobile pastoral practices of state farm workers, away from state cultural control. Herder-musicians attached to state farms negotiated this dynamic by participating in musical activities at regional Houses of Culture and amateur arts competitions, but also by singing alone while herding sheep or in family settings within yurt camps that were beyond the ideological control of regional cultural officials. One such herder-musician was People's *xöömeizhi* Andrei Öpei. Born in 1957, Öpei has described some of his experiences growing up in the Bai-Taiga district of western Tuva during the late Soviet era. In particular, he remembers learning to sing *xöömei* out “in the taiga” (forest wilderness) in settings where musical practices and beliefs were practiced and transmitted *away* from the state apparatus:

As a kid, I lived in the taiga. My father was a herder. This is why I sing. For those who live in the villages or the city, they don't sing like people from the taiga .... People learned *xöömei* by being alone. You sit alone and sing. You sing by yourself. You teach yourself. So, every *xöömeizhi*, if you ask, who taught you? They will say, of course, ‘I did!’

I remember hearing older *xöömei* singers when I was a child growing up in Kara-Xöl. Sometimes I forget, but then, immediately, I remember them. Even when I was small and living in the taiga in my father's yurt, there were amateur artists who would come to visit. Veterinarians would come [to check on our animals], also guests would come—friends would come.<sup>[10]</sup> In the summer, we would drink *araka* and then everyone would start to sing! I have a good ear, so I quickly picked up how to sing from them. Once our guests had left, I would imitate them and sing for Mama and Papa. So I decided to learn from these singers of folklore. I knew that they were also composers—they made up their own styles and songs.

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<sup>9</sup> See also Süzükei 1993, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Here Öpei refers to the periodic visits by veterinarians during Soviet times to remote regions such as Kara-Xöl to assist with livestock health.



At that time [1960s-70s], there were many state farms. Everyone had their work to do. Even my parents would herd sheep for the state farm. There were all these collectives. There were those who wanted everyone immediately to modernize and be a part of civilization, even though no one really knew what civilization was. They said: we must build communism, and everything must be done in the Russian way!<sup>11</sup>

I remember that there were those who were against *xöömei*, against all folklore. Shamanism was forbidden, but throat-singing was not forbidden.<sup>[12]</sup> We kept our rituals, the shamans would still do ceremonies. Yes, there were these secrets. Even in the taiga, it was also a secret. Life was like this—we as Tuvans understood this, and we lived a Soviet life. During the Soviet times you had to live in the Soviet way. You had to live by the rules. And so who is guilty? Of course, in these collectives, we would organize ourselves, and we had to find a way to live. Everyone lived by their beliefs, but no one talked about it. We knew the rules, but it didn't matter. We were twisted in a certain direction, and we dreamed of a bright future. That's what it was like.<sup>13</sup>

Öpei's engagement with *xöömei* as a young child during the 1960s and 1970s presents one perspective on the circulation of cultural practices and beliefs, which were enabled by state-sponsored mobile pastoralism but also "deterritorialized" from it. That is, for Öpei and many others like him, "Soviet life" in Tuva involved living "by the rules" but also finding "a way to live" with "secrets," which meant living "by their beliefs" but not talking about it. And even though everyday life took place at the periphery of the state in ways that were simultaneously consistent and inconsistent with state-sanctioned activities, Tuvans did not experience their lives as contradictory. Öpei's memories of late Soviet cultural life in rural Tuva were almost certainly colored by his subsequent experiences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, especially as they contrast with "official" portrayal of *xöömei* as an amateur art (as in Marzhymal's account, above). Nonetheless, those memories demonstrate the importance of ethnographic research in capturing the complexities of rural peoples' experiences of Soviet-era cultural and economic policies.

#### CONFIGURING AMATEUR ARTS WITHIN POWER RELATIONS

As Öpei's account makes clear, *xöömei* was at the center of rural Tuvans' effort to negotiate Soviet "cultural enlightenment," particularly in regional Houses of Culture. In that setting, *xöömei* reflected the encounter of rural individuals with a Soviet system of cultural framing based on "acceptable" cultural practices. Rural practices of *xöömei* as performed in amateur Houses of Culture become a kind of *bricolage*—"poetic ways of making do"—in the theorization of Michel de Certeau's *The Practices of Everyday Life* (1984: xv). Amateur artists

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<sup>11</sup> During my interviews, rural Tuvans who grew up during the Soviet era often described their experiences of the Soviet state as a force of Russification. According to their accounts, this Russification was reflected in Soviet language policies and, by extension, in the Europeanization of Tuvan musical practices.

<sup>12</sup> As Glenfield writes, "unlike forbidden activities such as ritual and concomitant spiritual belief systems [*i.e.*, animism, shamanism] and freedom of speech, Tuvan folklore remained acceptable" (2003: 32).

<sup>13</sup> Andrei Öpei, personal interview, Teeli, Tuva, 2011.

worked with official Soviet traditions but “subverted them from within, not by rejecting them or transforming them (though that occurred as well), but by many ways of using them” in unintended ways (*ibid.*: 32).<sup>14</sup>

*Xöömei* was shaped by ideologies of amateur music making in order to make it “socialist in content,” but more often than not that shaping was just a superficial nod to the cultural authorities. Moreover, as a largely solo practice, *xöömei* proved difficult to “cleanse” ideologically in a meaningful way, and musicians found “poetic ways of making do” within structures that otherwise constrained their expression. Tuvan musician Andrei Mongush (born 1976), a well-known soloist and member of the Tuvan National Orchestra, recalls how Soviet musicians used text and symbolic imagery on their instruments to engage in a kind of complicity with official cultural policy:

During the Soviet Union, it was required that one sing certain words—singing about the glories of the Party. Those who were wise, they would take their *igils* and put a red [Soviet] emblem on the top. And then when musicians began to revive traditions and officials asked—what are you doing with that *igil*?—the wise musicians would show that they were playing music for the Party! The more clever musicians painted the emblem of the Soviet Union on their instruments so they could keep them, even when playing the *igil* was banned.<sup>15</sup>

Another example of Tuvans only appearing to comply with Soviet cultural policy comes from the *xöömeizhi* and amateur artist Sat Manchakai. In 1948, Manchakai famously performed for General Secretary of the Communist Party Joseph Stalin and was said to have been received with a standing ovation.<sup>16</sup> During a personal voice lesson in 2011, Kaigal-ool Xovalyg demonstrated the not-so-subtle transformations that *xöömeizhi* like Manchakai would often make to the text of *kozhamyk* (ditties) in official *xöömei* performances of this era:

Original text:

*Bazalangai, shymdalangai,  
Baksyravas ool boor men.  
Baksyravas chüngdel dize,  
Bashky Tangdym achyzynda!*

I will not be bad,  
But if you ask why,  
I will say—it is thanks  
to our mountainous taiga!

Altered text:

*Bazalangai, shymdalangai,  
Baksyravas ool boor men.  
Baksyravas chüngdel dize,  
Bashtap turar partiyamda!*

I will not be bad,  
But if you ask why,  
I will say—it is thanks  
to the Party leadership!

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<sup>14</sup> Russian historian Susan Costanzo argues that de Certeau’s notion of bricolage is “an unusually apt term for *samodeiatel’nost’*” (1998: 374). Costanzo relies on de Certeau to analyze amateur theater artists in Russia during the late Soviet era, and I make a similar claim here with respect to Tuvan *xöömei*.

<sup>15</sup> Andrei Mongush, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 14 June 2012.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, the Dzun-Xemchik district website: <http://chadan.tuva24.ru/>.

## SHAPING SOCIAL RELATIONS THROUGH MUSIC

For all of Tuvans' efforts to retain their traditional practices in the face of Soviet "cultural enlightenment," the system of Soviet patronage (*sheftsvo*) in regional Houses of Culture was built on "a hierarchy in which villagers and amateurs were the beneficiaries of the important blessings of their educated, city-dwelling, professional comrades. Ironically, 'amateur' village carriers of local folk traditions were implicitly told that 'their' traditions were 'safe' in the hands of professionals" (Olson 2004: 61). Regional Houses of Culture participated in what Caroline Humphrey calls "nested hierarchies" of power relationships, where regional subjects were both beholden to Republic-wide cultural policies while also in charge of deploying these policies over regional subjects (1994).

Music directors in the regional Houses of Culture were often conservatory-trained artists and musicians who deployed Europeanized musical values and aesthetics from the center to the periphery. Many had received musical performance training from the Kyzyl College of the Arts (established in 1960) or conservatories in the Russian cities of Novosibirsk or Krasnoyarsk. One such musician, Semyon Buxtuev, was a Russian who was born and raised in the Dzun-Xemchik region of Western Tuva, and who founded the first music school in Tuva in Chadaana in 1959. Buxtuev had studied accordion (*bayan*) in Abakan and Krasnoyarsk before being drafted as a soldier in World War II. After the war, he returned to Tuva and also spent time in Moscow studying composition and choral conducting at the Gnessin Institute. Buxtuev appeared frequently on Tuvan radio performing on the *bayan* and eventually became a public advocate of the amateur performing arts. In 1966-67, he organized and founded the very first ensemble of Tuvan *xöömeizhi*, with singers from Dzun-Xemchik and nearby Süt-Xöl districts. The ensemble, directed by Buxtuev, would later take the name Sygyrga (in Tuvan, "Oriole").

Like many Tuvan folk music ensembles in the Soviet era, Ensemble Sygyrga (officially founded in 1976) made a number of aesthetic negotiations. In an interview with Tuvan musicologist Ekaterina K. Karelina, Buxtuev recounted the difficult task of trying to unify the audible idiosyncrasies of the Tuvan *xöömeizhi* amateur artists, each of whom sang in his own style with his own rhythm and played an instrument in his own tonality. The goal was to coordinate these musicians' activities within a European-style chamber music ensemble that would elevate the musicians' practices and make them more engaging and enjoyable for general audiences of Tuvans and Russians. Buxtuev recalls:

During the period of 1964 to 1966 in Chadaana [Dzun-Xemchik] there were regular spectacles of amateur arts collectives. Of particular interest were the final concerts, in which participants of the best songs would perform and the results of the spectacle would be declared. I always sat in the jury, and even then there was a problem related to the participation of the masters of throat-singing in the final concerts: as a rule, they would all take part in the final event, and the question arose—how do we include them all into the program of the final concert? Then I offered to put them in a group and give them the opportunity to perform together, as if they were competing with each other. As far as the song for the program, [we] didn't rehearse anything in advance, and everything turned to confusion, but it was fun, and the novelty continued in subsequent spectacles.

Serious work began during the preparation of the collective from Dzun Xemchik district in preparation for the All-Russia Festival dedicated to the 50th anniversary of Soviet rule. That was the end of 1966 and beginning of 1967. The first line-up included: Kara-Sal Ak-ool, Maksim Dakpai, Marzhymal [Ondar], [Sat] Manchakai and three (whose names I do not remember). Later, the team was joined by Xunashtaar-ool [Oorzhak]. Once rehearsals began, there were immediate challenges—every singer came with his own instrument and accompanied himself. So there was Ak-ool propping up his *igil* [horsehead fiddle] in his boot and accompanying himself on *igil*. Dakpai brought his *balalaika*, there was a *byzaanchy*, and the youngest sang with a guitar.

The difficulties were not only how to set up the instruments, but that each throat-singer would be singing a different melody. Each sang his own version of the melody and lyrics. During rehearsals there were other obstacles, which caused some rivalry. In life, every master would polish his skills in seclusion. They would elaborate on a particular style, and it would become their own style. Bringing it all together into a united ensemble was not easy. But all were united by a sense of community, the desire to create something new and interesting.

We decided to make a bit of a script: Ak-ool was charged with starting us out, singing in a drawling manner, aided by his virtuoso playing on his *igil*. After him in the bass register Marzhymal entered, and he, in turn, would ‘express’ his basic mastery. Manchakai demonstrated *kargyraa*. A breathing technique that I taught them in the choir helped to unify the group ... After each soloist performed, one of the members would pick up the sound where the previous soloist had left off, after him another, and a third, creating an extended sound resembling a three-way echo in the mountains. This seemed to work in uniting everyone. The novelty was very well received by the audience.

The finale featured a brisk song that everyone knew (those who did not know learned). It was fun, competitive, singing all at the same time and in turn, accompanied by Kara-Sal Ak-ool (other instruments were not used). The ringleader in the finale was played by Maksim Dakpai, who had a natural sense of humor. In the republic-wide festival in the city of Kyzyl, the ensemble took first place and, at the recommendation of the jury, the ensemble was sent to perform in the All-Russia Festival where they became laureates. As the director of the ensemble, the diploma was given to me.<sup>17</sup>

Buxtuev saw his role as giving regional Tuvans the opportunity to perform together. For Buxtuev, that meant elevating individual Tuvans’ music to a higher level of sophistication by employing a Europeanized musical organization and social hierarchy in which Buxtuev would be seen as being more cultivated than the amateur artists he was conducting. The Tuvan musicians played on instruments that were both Russian (*balalaika*, Russian guitar) and Tuvan (*igil*, *byzaanchy*), in addition to performing their own styles of *xöömei*. Contrary to the traditional approach (where “every master would polish his skills in seclusion”), Buxtuev’s ensemble sought to develop and portray “a sense of community.” In that way, Ensemble Sygyrga acted as a unifying force modeling social values through musical metaphors of unification and cohesion.

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<sup>17</sup> Karelina 2009: 250–251 (based on an interview with Buxtuev in Sosnovoborsk, 10 January 2007); my translation.

Buxtuev also applied his own choral breathing techniques and made the overall performance one of novelty and humor.



Figure 2.1. Ensemble Sygyrga performing in Kyzyl in 1980 with Marzhymal Ondar (back row left), Xunashtaar-ool Oorzhak (front row left on *balalaika*), and Kara-sal Ak-ool (front row right on *igil*).<sup>18</sup>

Buxtuev’s reflections on Ensemble Sygyrga’s formation and performances reveal the aesthetic negotiations that *xöömeizhi* often made during the Soviet era. The social framing of Ensemble Sygyrga produced *xöömeizhi* as simple, happy, silly, and funny amateur artists.<sup>19</sup> Sygyrga’s musicians, separated from their traditional context and transformed into a folk orchestra, interpreted their music through humor, romance, and ethnic pastiche. Indeed, while Buxtuev’s description focuses on his own contribution, it acknowledges the role that each individual played in negotiating the consortization of a solo art form.

#### COLLECTION AND ARCHIVES AS SOURCES OF LEGITIMACY

By the late 1960s, amateur publics represented a new kind of “folk resource” for the continual production of Tuva particularity and distinction by folklore researchers, ethnographers, cultural officials, and professional musicians. As discussed in Chapter 1, Aksenov’s seminal book, *Tuvan Folk Music* (1964), identified four distinct styles of *xöömei*. Whereas the older masters of *xöömei* had traditionally specialized in only one style or performance practice typical of a single region in Tuva, Aksenov’s classification suggested the possibility that a single musician could master all of the four major styles. It was no surprise, then, that, in the late 1960s, folklorist Daryma Ondar “discovered” Xunashtaar-ool Oorzhak

<sup>18</sup> Photo from A. Mongush for *Tuvinskaya Pravda*, 1 February 1980.

<sup>19</sup> The silly and happy characterizations of Tuva amateur artists stand in contrast to the melancholic emotions ascribed to Uriankhai singers by foreign ethnographers (see Chapter 1).

(1930-1992), a collective farm herder from Süt-Xöl Region, as someone who had mastered all four styles (see Figure 2.2).<sup>20</sup>

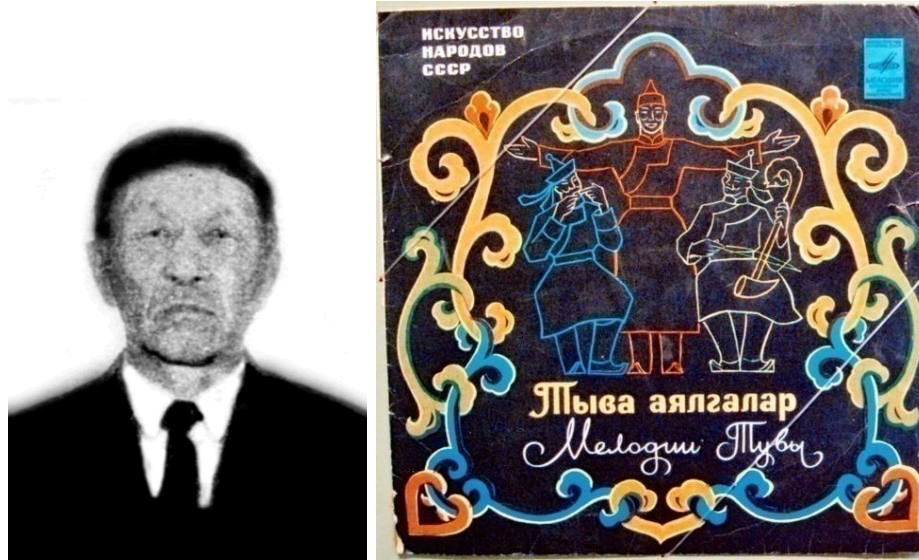


Figure 2.2. Xunashtaar-ool Oorzhak and the original cover of the LP *Pesni i Instrumentalnye Melodii Tuvy (Tyva Ayalgalar)* (Melodiya D-030773, Moscow, 1968), which features multiple “classical” styles of Tuvan throat-singing.<sup>21</sup>

Xunashtaar-ool’s *xöömei* was shaped by living in multiple regions of Tuva and being exposed to many different styles of throat-singing. Born to a herding family in the mountainous region of Mungush-Ak in Western Tuva, Xunashtaar-ool (meaning “young man-deer” in Tuvan language) grew up imitating the *xöömei* styles of his uncles in a region known for its singing traditions.<sup>22</sup> After spending a brief period in a military camp in Moscow, Xunashtaar-ool returned to Tuva in the 1950s to work on a state farm. Xunashtaar-ool practiced his *xöömei* while alone herding sheep, but never in front of others. In 1957, he and his wife, a milkmaid, moved to the state farm Aldan-Maadyr. There he met the family of Kish-Chalaa Ondar, who lived near the Manchurek River. In a biography of Xunashtaar-ool published in 1995, Mariata Sundui writes that Xunashtaar-ool was inspired by the skills of Kish-Chalaa, who was a “great connoisseur of Tuvan folklore” in the Süt-Xöl region, “well-versed in various styles of *xöömei*, and [who] knew some of the secrets of this art” (Sundui 1995: 14).

Xunashtaar-ool’s ability to sing multiple *xöömei* styles likely derived not only from his experience herding sheep but also from making cultural exchanges with herders in the various places in which he lived, including Barun-Xemchik and Süt-Xöl. In 1967, when the art of *xöömei*

<sup>20</sup> Daryma Ondar was working as a folklorist at the “Tuvan Scientific-Research Institute of Literature, Language, and History” (hereinafter “TNIYYaLI”), in Kyzyl (Sundui 1995: 15).

<sup>21</sup> Photo from the International Scientific Center “*Xöömei*,” <http://www.khoomei.narod.ru/>; album image from personal archives of Morten Abildsnes.

<sup>22</sup> Shchurov, *Uzlyau* liner notes, 1993: 6.

was on the verge of dying out (see below), Xunashtaar-ool performed for the first time on stage at a farm meeting hall. It was there that Daryma Ondar is said to have “discovered” Xunashtaar-ool, although it might be more accurate to say that a series of dispersed social networks identified Xunashtaar-ool as an ideal voice of the nation. Thereafter Xunashtaar-ool made his seminal recordings for *Pesni i Instrumentalnye Melodii Tuvy* (Melodiya, 1968), an album whose significance in shaping the future of *xöömei* is difficult to overstate.<sup>23</sup> It was the first album of Tuvan music to be heard outside Russia (with limited circulation among specialists), and it became a guidepost for future generations of singers. Even today Tuvans continue to revere Xunashtaar-ool as perhaps the best *xöömeizhi* of all time and as a national hero.<sup>24</sup> And it remains customary for present-day *xöömeizhi* to learn all four of the major *xöömei* styles, in addition to some more idiosyncratic ones (see Listening Excerpt #3 in Appendix III).<sup>25</sup>

Back in the 1960s and 1970s, it was Xunashtaar-ool’s unusual ability to sing multiple *xöömei* styles that made him influential. Before Xunashtaar-ool, most *xöömei* singers had confined themselves to one or two styles; “[t]here was a widespread idea that trying too many styles could have adverse [health] effects on the voice,” explains Dutch ethnomusicologist Mark van Tongeren. Nonetheless, “Xunashtaar-ool taught himself all the basic techniques and derived over a dozen more from them” (van Tongeren 2002: 88). Tuvan musician Sayan Bapa, of ensemble Huun-Huur-Tu, remembers hearing Xunashtaar-ool perform live:

Every time he sings it is different. He makes his own improvisations, yet the tune remains the same. Some notes are the most important ones, they are there every time. Others he does differently, depending on his mood. Those important notes are beautiful and perfectly timed. If he wants to perform *kargyraa*, he just sings ‘I am going to sing *kargyraa*, my *kargyraa*’ or something like that. There are hardly any words, but there is feeling. You listen and might just want to cry. It sounds heroic, very manly and courageous.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, informed by his own life experiences, Xunashtaar-ool romanticized mobile pastoralism when he spoke of his *xöömei*. In an exchange with Shchurov, Xunashtaar-ool described:

I’m sitting on a hilltop, I’m watching a flock of sheep grazing, and then I sing, so that my family in the yurt (house tent) below can hear that everything is fine with me.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Xunashtaar-ool was recorded by Daryma Ondar at TNIYaLI along with Vyacheslav Shchurov, a music folklorist from Moscow who was working for the Department of Folk Music of the Moscow Conservatory. Shchurov wrote the liner notes to *Melodii Tuvy* (1968).

<sup>24</sup> See *Tuvinskii Fol’klor* (Melodiya 14937-42, Tashkent, 1980), *Uzlyau* (Pan 2019, 1993), *Deep in the Heart of Tuva* (Ellipsis Arts, 1996), for re-released tracks of subsequent recordings of Xunashtaar-ool.

<sup>25</sup> Contemporary practitioners of *xöömei* usually cite five main styles, which include the four styles outlined by Aksenov (*sygyt*, *kargyraa*, *borbangnadyr*, and *ezengileer*) with the addition of the *xöömei* style. This distinction causes some confusion in terminology, as *xöömei* can refer both to the genre as well as to one particular style within the genre. Unless otherwise specified, I use the term *xöömei* to refer to the genre.

<sup>26</sup> As quoted in van Tongeren 2002: 88.

<sup>27</sup> Shchurov, *Uzlyau* liner notes, 1993: 3.

Xunashtaar-ool's mastery of multiple *xöömei* styles, combined with the nomadic sensibility with which he imbued his music, meant that he could successfully communicate, even embody, multiple narratives. Those narratives allowed Xunashtaar-ool's voice to function symbolically on at least two levels—first, as an ethical, dutiful, and model Soviet citizen worker, and second, as a shepherd who embodied the romance and simplicity of pre-Soviet nomadic life and sensitivity to the natural world, despite Soviet modernization. Indeed, by linking together all four of the major styles of *xöömei*, Xunashtaar-ool came to be seen as the embodiment of an “ideal” voice of Tuva, such that every region could hear some part of their own locality in his “national” (Soviet) voice. This development makes sense. Aksenov's ethnographic data from the 1940s showed that there were real differences in eastern and western *xöömei* styles (Soruktu and Kombu, respectively; see also Chapter 1). Because Xunashtaar-ool embodied styles from both regions, he was able to symbolically unite disparate regional variations under something that could be celebrated as quintessentially “Tuvan.” Put another way, Xunashtaar-ool became an archetype for the *xöömei*-singing herdsman who was an assemblage of various persons, places, aesthetics, acuties, and vocal and musical skills—a person with a certain nomadic sensibility. Xunashtaar-ool Oorzhak was not just a *xöömeizhi*; he had become a model of what it meant to be Tuvan—a modest herder, a worker on Aldan-Maadyr State Farm, an ethical “good” Soviet, and a master of many different *xöömei* styles.

The peculiar circuit of production that began with Aksenov and centralized folkloric collection and publication turned into the reproduction and deployment of *xöömei* in the form of *samodeyatel'nost'* at regional festivals (*smotry*). Those events made it possible for Xunashtaar-ool's *xöömei*—indeed, his nomadic sensibility—to be “discovered” and become symbolic of an ideal ethical disposition. As subsequent sections show, Tuvan and Soviet folkloric researchers increasingly promoted that sensibility and offered it as proof of the successful cultural and ethical socialization of Tuvans by the Soviet state.

## PART II

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### PROFESSIONALIZING NOMADIC PRACTICES AND ROMANTICIZING NOMADIC SENSIBILITY

Being a *xöömeizhi* with a nomadic sensibility became a cornerstone of Soviet and Tuvan ideals in the 1970s and 1980s. During that period, Soviet and Tuvan cultural officials and scholars continued to shape rural amateur *xöömeizhi* into folk musicians and then relied upon them as sources for folkloric material. They also launched expeditions to collect and record different *xöömei* styles and songs, especially in the 1980s. As a result of these efforts, *xöömei* became inscribed as a quintessentially “nomadic” art form in folkloric representations. Indeed, by the 1980s, Tuvan scholars and cultural officials had rearranged Tuvan musical traditions into staged performances of romanticized nomadic folklorism, with professional *xöömeizhi* singers performing the role of nomads.



## INSTITUTIONAL PROMOTION AS IMPETUS FOR XÖÖMEI REVIVAL

In the 1970s, many people thought that *xöömei* was a dying art form. Most of the people who practiced it belonged to an older generation of aging amateur musicians born in the Tannu Tuva era. In response, institutions like the Tuvan Ministry of Culture and TNIIYaLI, as well as young scholars such as Zoya Krygys, started and then fostered *xöömei* youth ensembles that became instrumental in keeping *xöömei* alive and vibrant.

In the late 1970s, Ensemble Sygyrga, which by then was a group of about eight older musicians, continued performing at regional gatherings and garnered ever more attention (Karelina 2009: 252). Simultaneously, the Tuvan Ministry of Culture promoted a number of state-sponsored music and dance ensembles through the Tuvan Filharmonia, including Ensemble Sayan (named after the mountain range) and Ensemble Ayan (“Harmony”). Sayan Bapa, former member of Ensemble Ayan, recalls:

There was a competition at the Filharmonia in 1979 and those guitarists, singers, etc. who won were sent to Leningrad. It hardly was finished [and] whoosh, off we went. We studied for a year and made a whole program of folk songs from Tuva and Russia, popular songs of our Tuvan composer [Chyrgal-ool], Soviet and Japanese songs .... Then we made a tour through Russia. In 1980, we went to the festival of the bathing resort Sochi, the San Remo of the Soviet Union. We became winners with the Ensemble Ayan. Then for three years we played in practically every Tuvan village, really to the furthest outposts. We flew to Kungurtug, we took motorboats, you name it, we came everywhere. The people bought tickets, we did our concerts, and the state gave us a percentage.<sup>28</sup>

In 1975, TNIIYaLI organized a republic-wide meeting of folk singers and musicians to generate interest in creating youth ensembles. TNIIYaLI’s specific goal was to encourage the younger generation to remain connected to, and further develop, Tuvan traditional culture. Celebrating the progress of encouraging intergenerational participation in *xöömei* singing, this article appeared in the *Pravda* newspaper in Moscow in 1979:

The old-fashioned tradition of the Tuvans—*xöömei*, or throat-singing—is receiving a revival with the folk art ensemble of youth called ‘Pevchaya Ptitsa’ (Songbird) founded in the State Farm ‘Aldan-Maadyr.’ From time immemorial to the present day, the folk ‘secrets’ of this unusual performance of song—the peculiar vocal techniques that permit a singer to create the illusion of multiple voices—have been carried forward. Until recently, this art was not practiced by many, but now in the autonomous republic there are several male ensembles of *xöömei*. Directing the ensemble of young talented herders is Xunashtaar-ool Oorzhak. The older master—zealot and enthusiast of *xöömei*—maintains that there are no longer gifted masters. Rare sounds of richness distinguish his singing. For this reason, when Xunashtaar-ool Oorzhak suggested to the young guys to form an ensemble, there weren’t any objections.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> As quoted in van Tongeren 2002: 90.

<sup>29</sup> “Tuvinskaya ‘pevchaya ptitsa’” [Tuvan ‘singing birds’] in *Russkaya Pravda*, 16 November 1979 [no author].

These increasingly popular ensembles were significant for a number of reasons. First, thanks to the ensembles, *xöömei* became a viable and attractive career path for youth for the first time in the 1980s. Second, the ensembles and their trained musicians were state-sanctioned and served the function of “culture-bearer.” As a result, they worked to disseminate Tuvan national culture with approved values. And third, the ensembles helped construct a narrative about *xöömei* culture, just as Houses of Culture and other institutions had previously done with Ensemble Sygyrga and the “older master” Xunashtaar-ool Oorzhak. The emphasis on “secrets” that have been passed “from time immemorial” in the 1979 *Pravda* news article suggests that folkloric producers, musicians, and audiences were constructing a narrative about *xöömei* culture. The rhetoric of romanticism, “backwardness-as-innocence,” and the search for authenticity that undergirded this narrative were consistent with the trappings of various “folk revival” movements that had begun in Russia in the 1960s and spread throughout the cultural agendas of the regional republics.<sup>30</sup>

Whereas the 1970s saw *xöömei* ensembles being created (see Appendix I), in the 1980s those ensembles (and individual musicians) entered into *xöömei* competitions. The First Republic-Wide Festival of *Xöömei*, held in 1981, was instrumental in employing *xöömei* competitions to promote and legitimize *xöömei*’s revival through prizes, monetary awards, and respected professional status.<sup>31</sup> An article that reviewed the competition described two young performers: “With a purity and ease of sound, as if it required no effort from them, the youth were a hit—Gennadi Tumat, in the 9th class from Ovür, and his contemporary Aldyn-ool Sevek from Möngün-Taiga” (*Tuvinskaya Pravda*, 30 June 1981). One of the Festival’s performers, *xöömeizhi* Andrei Öpei (see Figure 2.3), described how the Festival highlighted the ways in which *xöömei* had changed over the years, as well as how *xöömei*’s revival generated renewed interest in Tuvan traditional instruments:

Before 1980, most people sang *xöömei* as a solo or accompanying themselves on one instrument—*chanzy*, *doshpuluur*, or earlier the *balalaika*. The first time I ever heard an ensemble of *xöömeizhi* perform was around 1981 at the first Republican Festival of *Xöömei* in Kyzyl. At that time there was this new ensemble Sygyrga from Chadaana and Süt-Xöl area—this one had all the famous older *xöömeizhi* in it like Xunashtaar-ool, Sundukai, Marzhymal ....

At this time Tuvan folklore was only beginning—there were many seminars, many conferences. At that time, Tuvans were also starting to revive national instruments. I remember participating in a festival with the older instrument makers from Bai-Taiga—Idamchap Xomushku and many other masters who made instruments.

In older times, there were no ensembles. And people would play *xomus*, *byzaanchy*, *igil*, *chanzy*, you would play for yourself. It was just one, soloist. That was it. No one could play with anyone else because, every individual had his own tonality. And this is not only true with *xöömei*,

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Levin’s chapter “Dmitri Pokrovsky and the Russian Folk Music Revival Movement,” in *Retuning Culture: Musical Changes in Central and Eastern Europe* (1996: 14-36).

<sup>31</sup> These competitions persist even today in the form of the *Xöömei* Symposium, which has taken place six times from 1991-2013. See “Proceedings of the 6th International Symposium *Khöömei* (Throat-Singing)—A Cultural Phenomenon of the Peoples of Central Asia,” Kyzyl, Tuva, 13-16 June 2013.

but also *igil*, different instruments have different intonations, and so people couldn't play together. They had different tonalities.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 2.3. A young Andrei Öpei—seen here playing his *igil* held horizontally like a *doshpuluur*—as well as an award from his performance at the First Republican Festival of *Xöömei* (Kyzyl, 1981).<sup>33</sup>

One note about these ensembles and competitions and the larger revival of which they were part: the academic folklore and music specialists behind them worked with and against the official ideology of national cultural production. Contrary to some historic characterizations, the very mechanisms that made Soviet policies centralized and efficient made indigenous revival possible. For example, some of the institutions established in Tuva in the late 1980s and early 1990s (*e.g.*, the International Scientific Center “*Xöömei*”) centered power around one person (*e.g.*, musicologist Zoya Kyrgys), while others (*e.g.*, Tuvan Institute for Research in the Humanities, formerly TNIIYaLI, and the *Xöömei* Symposia) were comprised of group of musicians and scholars and used a jury system. The format of ensembles and festivals allowed for a reasonable amount of control, and academics such as Süzükei at TNIIYaLI each had their specialty within the domain of cultural studies (*e.g.*, Süzükei focused on traditional musical instruments). As folkloric ideologies gradually loosened in the 1980s, each specialist began concentrating on developing different cultural practices and reviving traditional meanings and belief systems (see Chapter 4).

<sup>32</sup> Andrei Öpei, personal interview, Teeli, Tuva, 3 August 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Öpei's inversion of his *igil* to play like a *doshpuluur* could be seen as evidence for a lack of rigorous instrumental musical competence in connection with *xöömei* singing in this era (see Süzükei 2007).

### PROFESSIONALIZING AMATEUR ARTISTS

Süzükei notes that the formation of *xöömei* ensembles occurred alongside a shift in what the ensemble members were called. Around the time that Ensemble Sygyrga was formed, throat-singers were increasingly referred to not as amateur artists but as folk musicians (2006: 132). This change in nomenclature was significant. Unlike an amateur artist, a professional folk musician typically began a professional career at Kyzyl College of the Arts or at a Conservatory in a larger city in Russia, such as Novosibirsk. There the musician would receive a diploma in the department of national instruments or folk singing. In contrast, the traditional *xöömeizhi* was someone who came from a rural district in the countryside, had not received any formal music education, and therefore did not have the status required for teaching, working, or performing in a professionalized performance system. By formalizing *xöömei* in ensembles and designating *xöömeizhi* as “real” folk musicians, cultural officials and professional musicians engaged in a form of cultural formatting that was modeled after European models of music theory and musicianship.

The institutionalization and professionalization of folk music in the Soviet Union, including *xöömei*, meant that only those who possessed diplomas from music schools were “musicians.” That cultural formatting also designated the values of “musicians,” such as arduous practice and rehearsal, meticulous technique and musicality, aesthetics, and music literacy. Like the music diploma itself, these values were commonly associated with European classical concert music.

These changes were challenging for *xöömei* and *xöömeizhi*. In the 1970s, *xöömei* had become valued for its nomadic sensibility—its romantic representations of a rural life herding sheep and singing. Those aesthetics remained important in the 1980s, but they were no longer enough; being a proper throat-singing musician had come to mean training on European musical instruments in a formal music institution and using European musical notation. The result was that the rough, raw, untreated qualities of *xöömei* were disfavored, and once again throat-singing and its “nomadic qualities” came to be seen as backward and unsophisticated because they did not conform to the models, standards, and processes of European concert music.

### SHIFTING FOLKLORIC IDEOLOGIES

In the mid-1980s, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev instituted his reforms of *Perestroika*, which generally worked to lessen Moscow’s ideological control over cultural policies. Whereas in the 1970s and early 1980s state ensembles such as Ayan were brought to Leningrad to format their repertoire, during *Perestroika* Tuvan folk ensembles enjoyed more autonomy in the Tuvan republic.

One of the products of this “restructuring” was the Tuva Ensemble, founded in 1987-88. Its originators were *xöömeizhi* and folk musician Gennadi Tumat and musicologist Zoya Kyrgys, and it included several dozen of the Tuva Republic’s most revered *xöömeizhi* throat-singers (see Figure 2.4 and Appendix I). The Tuva Ensemble was a radical departure from the earlier,

enormous Tuvan state music ensembles (such as Sayan and Ayan). According to Kyrgys, the central goal of the Tuva Ensemble was to organize and delegate more efficiently individual musicians' activities—concerts, touring, and recording projects—and extend work and support to a wider group of regional government-approved musicians (Levin 2006: 22-23). The Tuva Ensemble also sought to re-arrange *xöömei* as a revival of Tuvan pre-Soviet forms, to shift *xöömei*'s aesthetics from “state farm worker, ethical Soviet citizen, and amateur artist” to “herder, ethical Tuvan, *xöömeizhi*.”<sup>34</sup> This shift was most evident in Kyrgys' choices for song arrangements, which were drawn from materials collected during expeditions to the Tuvan countryside, and in the re-sacralization of various Tuvan themes, such as a Buddhist prayer, which became a standard Tuva Ensemble number in the late 1980s.<sup>35</sup> “The art of throat-singing,” Kyrgys wrote in 1988, “is considered a priceless monument of the past, which should be protected by the state. It carries a tremendous aesthetic impact for audiences, and will continue to serve as a means of ideological and moral education for the workers.”<sup>36</sup>



Figure 2.4. The Tuva Ensemble posing near Lake Bai-Xöl, Erzin, Tuva (1991); sitting, left to right: Anatoli Kuular, Gennadi Tumat, Radomir Mongush, Sergei Ondar, and Kaigal-ool Xovalyg.<sup>37</sup>

Albert Kuvezin, who was born 1965 in Kyzyl, reflected in an interview on the state of *xöömei* in professional music concerts during his adolescence in the mid-1980s. In particular, he recalls how the changes that occurred during *perestroika* enabled musicians to develop an ambiguous relationship between their personal musical practices and “professional folk music”:

At that time, in the mid-1980s, I began to work at the Tuvan Filharmonia, and I remember there were some specialist composer-arrangers who came from Leningrad .... They would come and

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, van Tongeren 2002: 100-102.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*: 102.

<sup>36</sup> *Sovesbchanie po problemam razvitiya xöomeya* [Conference on the problem of developing *xöömei*] (1988: 8).

<sup>37</sup> Photo from the International Scientific Center “*Xöömei*” (Kyzyl, Tuva).

orchestrate our whole program—songs, arrangements, dance, choir, orchestra. They showed our musicians how to read notation, where to start and where to end, how to work the rhythms—1-2-3-4 rhythm—and they tried to rein everyone in with a common rhythmic base.

The folk concerts during the late Soviet era were often based on a potpourri of Tuvan folk themes, and in order to do a correct potpourri, material was used from folk song collections; so, for example, a famous dancer would dance to a Tuvan melody and put on the exterior of being a Tuvan country girl. The choreography was made to look Tuvan, but the dances were taken from other cultures—China, Indonesia, Philippines, Mongolia, and so on. And it was all put together by some Russian-Jewish choreographers from Leningrad!

Then by the late 1980s, the Tuva Ensemble was formed by Zoya Kyrgysova [Kyrgyz]. At that time, *Perestroika* had begun and ideological control was quite small. And the Tuva Ensemble was able to do a concert in Kyzyl of only *xöömei*. No dance, no orchestra, just *xöömei*. This had never happened before! You see, every Tuvan throat-singer was considered to be an amateur artist, and it was very popular in the Soviet times to organize amateur arts festivals. Every region of Tuva came with a delegation of amateur artists, and maybe they would have two songs with *xöömei*, and the rest would be folk songs, dances, and other performances.<sup>38</sup>

As if to echo Kuvezin's observations, Yurchak writes that, in the period of late socialism,

[t]he acts of copying the precise forms of ideological representations became more meaningfully constitutive of everyday life than the adherence to the literal ('semantic') meanings inscribed in those representations. In the Soviet case, this emerging relationship did not necessarily preclude Soviet people from continuing to be invested in the ideals and ethical values of socialism. It rather implied a more complex and shifting relationship to Soviet ideological form, a form that claimed and was once seen to represent these ideals and values, but during Late Socialism decoupled from them (Yurchak 2003: 481).

By the late Soviet era, *xöömei* and *xöömeizhi* had come a long way from their perceived status as uncultured music and uncultured amateur performers in the 1960s. The mid- to late-1980s ensemble model eliminated the Europeanized harmonizations of earlier folkloric ensembles, although the representation of collectivity was still valued. Whereas the aesthetic model of the 1970s was romantic nationalism and an imagined ethnic pastiche, the *xöömei* revival of the 1980s was an ethnographically-based nomadic folklorism. *Xöömei* singers were reconfigured as rural and non-Soviet, re-valued for their role as individual herders. Nomadic themes were not only embraced; they turned into an affirmative performance of nomadism. This was the state of Tuvan *xöömei* when an enthusiastic American ethnomusicologist visited Tuva for the first time.

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<sup>38</sup> Albert Kuvezin, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 4 June 2012.

THE JOINT SOVIET-AMERICAN MUSICAL-ETHNOGRAPHIC  
RESEARCH EXPEDITION, TUVA, 1987-88

According to American ethnomusicologist Theodore (“Ted”) Levin, *xöömei* “ranks as one of the world’s strangest forms of music-making” (1991: 56). Having spent several years conducting research in Soviet Central Asia in the 1970s, Levin was the first American researcher to visit Soviet-era Tuva when he arrived there in 1987 with the goal of studying Tuvan music. Levin recalls:

In the mid-1980s, I [began] conspiring to travel to a part of the Soviet Union that had aroused considerable curiosity in the West, but that was diplomatically closed to foreigners from what were then called in the Soviet political lexicon—“Capitalist Countries” . . . . The off-limits destination that interested me was Tuva—a small autonomous region in south Siberia. And the specific object of my interest was the musical practice known in English as throat-singing, in which a single singer can produce two or more pitches simultaneously by selectively amplifying harmonics or overtones that are naturally present in the voice. I was able to cut through the red tape that barred capitalist foreigners from traveling to Tuva, and, on assignment from National Geographic Magazine, I went there in 1987 to study and record throat-singing, thus becoming the second American to be allowed to conduct field research in Tuva.<sup>39</sup>

Central to Levin’s plan was his relationship with Russian-Sakha folklorist and musicologist Eduard Alekseev, who helped to organize the necessary sponsorship from the Union of Composers for Levin, along with photographer Karen Sherlock, Buryat ethnographer Dashinima Dugarov, and Tuvan folklorist Zoya Kyrgys. Together they would participate in what came to be known as the “Joint Soviet-American Musical-Ethnographic Research Expedition” (1991: 56).

*RURAL TRADITION-BEARERS*

News traveled fast of the “*Xöömeizhi* from America” who was collecting songs of throat-singers.<sup>40</sup> Levin’s Tuvan hosts were “excited and wary at the prospect of American visitors venturing off the beaten track” (1991: 57). In preparation for the arrival of the expedition, the Tuvan government had repainted the entire village of Teeli (Bai-Taiga) and organized a number of folkloric concerts in Teeli’s regional House of Culture. The government even staged a fake wedding. Levin explains: “The choreographed performances of these amateur groups did not offer the sort of musical authenticity that stirs ethnomusicologists. We are more interested in the rough edges of music—the unpolished, spontaneous performance that signals new musical

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<sup>39</sup> Levin, “Why Music Matters,” 24<sup>th</sup> Faculty Presidential Lecture at Dartmouth College (28 February 2012). The first American researcher, according to Levin, was biologist Katherine Wynne-Edwards, who visited Tuva to study the Siberian dwarf hamster.

<sup>40</sup> Levin explains: “A melody or two from me has become a standard part of our yurt visits. My performance often turns into an impromptu jam session with fellow musicians” (1991: 60). Levin had previous experience with reinforced harmonic singing when he participated in David Hykes’s famous Harmonic Choir founded in 1975 (Levin 2006: xviii).



creation, the cracked wispy voices of old people offering reminiscences of their society's past" (1991: 57-8). In an interview for the *Tuvinskaya Pravda* newspaper, Levin explained:

The goal of our expedition was to gather material for a record, which will be made by the firm 'Melodiya' in the USSR and USA. To this end, we needed traditional singing without manipulation or arrangement. The greatest interest in the world calls for pure folk melodies. We also liked the singing of Gennadi Chash from Shagonar, who participated in the folklore festival in USA, and construction worker Mergen Mongush from Kyzyl. We made video camera recordings of them on film. Music is a living organism that constantly changes. What we recorded today may be forgotten in a year .... I think that we have fulfilled our task and in a year will release a scholarly recording with text in English, Russian, and Tuvan languages with notated transcriptions .... I am sure that the materials from the expedition will promote the singing art of the Tuvan people."<sup>41</sup>

Levin similarly recalled folklorist Alekseev's reaction to a performance by a musician in a yurt:

It's not authentic .... It's been influenced by professional cultural workers who come here and think they can improve Tuvan folk music by polishing it up. But these traditions have evolved and changed slowly over centuries. The people themselves know what the music should sound like (1991: 60).

Alekseev's reaction reveals three things: his view that *xöömei* is an age-old cultural practice that changes very slowly, that the arrangement of *xöömei* was an unwanted act of outside interference, and his romantic belief that Tuvan people felt the same way. For Levin and Alekseev, the 1987 expedition was, in common parlance, a bust.

In 1988, a Second Republican Festival of Throat-Singing took place in Kyzyl. One of the festival's events was the "Conference on the Problems of Developing *Xöömei*," during which Sundukai Mongush, a master *xöömei* performer from the Dzun-Xemchik district, asked a question about the Joint Soviet-American Musical-Ethnographic Research Expedition:

Sundukai Mongush: Will we see in Tuva the work of American professor Theodore Levin?

Zoya Kyrgys: The work of last year's expedition [1987] was not accepted due to the lack of natural conditions for the performers, so this year we will undertake another expedition, where recordings will be made under conditions in which *xöömei* performers live day-to-day (1988: 3).

Kyrgys's answer supports Levin's statements that 1987 expedition was overly "staged," and that the real goal of the expedition was to collect raw and un-arranged folkloric material from rural performers for whom *xöömei* (and other sonic-musical practices) were part of their "day-to-day" lives.

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<sup>41</sup> Levin, interview in *Tuvinskaya Pravda*, 8 September 1988 ("Xoomeizhi' iz Massachusetts" [*Xöömeizhi* from Massachusetts]); my translation.



Levin and Alekseev had greater success on their second visit in 1988. The expedition recorded about 500 melodies of throat-singing, lullaby songs, folk tales and legends. Forty-two minutes of this material was edited and produced for the Smithsonian Folkways album *Tuva: Voices from the Center of Asia* (1990).<sup>42</sup>

#### AUTHORITY AND PERESTROIKA

What was the Soviet-American expedition really about? And what implications did it have for *xöömei* and the people who sang it?

The expedition, it turns out, was driven mostly by the aesthetic agendas of Levin and Alekseev, which Kyrgys supported. For the previous 20 years, Tuvans had been developing, improving, and modernizing Tuvan *xöömei* by cultivating competence in musical instruments, forming ensembles, making their music more interactive, and crafting an arranged aesthetic based on Tuvan folkloric themes. Levin and Alekseev sought something different—a raw, “traditional,” “non-Soviet” aesthetic.<sup>43</sup>

This aesthetic was evident in the singing of an older generation of *xöömeizhi*, such as Sundukai Mongush (b. 1926), Fedor Tau (b. 1929), and Marzhymal Ondar (b. 1932), but also in a younger trio called Ensemble Amyrak (in Tuvan, “Beloved”).<sup>44</sup> As the liner notes to the album describe, Amyrak demonstrates an “attempt to carry forward traditional music in the context of contemporary performance conditions, including the concert stage, recording studio, and television”<sup>45</sup> (see Figure 2.5). In contrast to earlier state ensembles, Amyrak typically performed with one *doshpuluur* or multiple *xomus* (jew’s harps), as they do in track #17 included on *Tuva: Voices from the Center of Asia*. Amyrak also was the earliest example of a smaller, more intimate three- or four-person ensemble, a model that would become the norm in the post-Soviet era (with the addition of more instruments). Building on the trends of *xöömei* under *Perestroika*, Amyrak had an ambiguous relationship with authority, which allowed the group to be professional “folk musicians” or “village amateurs” depending on the situation. Instead of self-conscious folkloric cultivation, Amyrak’s performances embodied the “authentic” regional amateurism that Levin and Alekseev sought and promoted. Indeed, Levin brought Gennadi T. Chash, Ensemble Amyrak’s leader, to the United States to perform in 1988, making him the first *xöömeizhi* to do so.<sup>46</sup> *The New York Times* reported that

[t]he most exotic sounds, to an American ear, came from Gennadi T. Chash, a singer from the Tuva region near Mongolia. Mr. Chash can vocalize both a fundamental tone and its upper

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<sup>42</sup> Levin presented digitized copies of the raw archival materials from the 1987–88 expedition to the Tuvan people during a public presentation at the VI International *Xöömei* Symposium in Kyzyl on 14 June 2013.

<sup>43</sup> The aesthetic agenda of this folkloric expedition cannot be attributed to Levin and Alekseev alone; it is best understood as part of a larger folk revival movement active in the Soviet Union since the 1960s. See, for example, Levin 1996.

<sup>44</sup> Ensemble Amyrak also performed as a four-person ensemble with the addition of Kara-ool Tumat (b. 1935).

<sup>45</sup> Levin, Kyrgys, Alekseev, liner notes, *Tuva: Voices from the Center of Asia*, 1990: 2.

<sup>46</sup> Contrary to certain claims (see Levin 2006: 235, fn. 13), Chash was not the first Tuvan *xöömei* singer to perform in the United States. That honor goes to Vladimir Soyan, who performed *xöömei* as part of Igor Moiseyev’s Russian Festival of Music and Dance in New York City in 1976. See Christopher S. Wren, “The Russians are Coming—With Dancing Eskimos,” *The New York Times*, 27 June 1976. Also Vladimir Soyan, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 22 June 2013.

overtones—harsh lower tones, which he produces in either a nasal baritone or a subterranean bass topped by clear, flutelike harmonic, connected and trilled as smoothly as a *bel canto* singer’s best register. In one piece, he plucked a *xomus* (jew’s harp) to add a third note between vocal lines.<sup>47</sup>



Figures 2.5. On the left, *xöömei* Ensemble Amyrak (Mergen Mongush, Kara-ool Tumat, Gennadi Chash, and Evgeni Oyun). On the right, Gennadi Chash, Amyrak’s leader.<sup>48</sup>

The significance of ethnomusicological work by Levin, Alekseev, and Kyrgys during the Joint Soviet-American Musical-Ethnographic Research Expedition appears to be twofold. First, after decades of isolation from non-Soviet foreigners, the presence of an American academic carried considerable cultural capital and bolstered the prestige of local traditions. Levin helped re-orient Tuvan music towards its “rougner edges.” Second, that re-orientation suggests that Levin, like the first ethnographers who visited Tuva, was a cultural producer alongside some of his subjects. If we accept that music and culture produce, and are produced by, musicians, consumers, promoters and producers, we understand that Levin was himself someone who promoted and re-oriented the aesthetics of *xöömei*. In privileging certain aesthetic qualities over those that had come before, Levin worked to disrupt a Soviet teleology of folk music aesthetics and replace it with something different.

Returning to Yuri Slezkine’s “backwardness-as-beastliness” versus “backwardness-as-innocence” models, we can say that the cultural work of the American-Soviet expedition of 1987-88 worked to elevate “backwardness-as-innocence” as the preferred aesthetic of Tuvan

<sup>47</sup> Jon Pareles, “Music from the Villages of the Soviet Union,” *The New York Times*, 8 July 1988.

<sup>48</sup> Photo source: Karelina 2009: 390, used by permission from Dom Kompozitor, Moscow.

*xöömei*.<sup>49</sup> As Ssorin-Chaikov and others have argued, following collectivization, the romantic past returns when the state can no longer promise to construct the future (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003: 140-169).

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<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 1; see also Slezkine 1994.



## Nomadic Experimentalism in Tuvan World Music

*They are high and whistling, like bird calls. Sometimes they are croaking, down toward the nether reaches of detectable pitch. Sometimes they have a pulsing, rolling quality sustained for lung-aching duration, sounds that seem to capture the essence of ever-flowing water and ever-blowing wind.*  
—David Brown<sup>1</sup>

*In serving their community, the members of Huun-Huur-Tu have of necessity reverted to their forebears' way of life: nomadism—but nomadism that takes place largely beyond the borders of Tuva. We can only wish the group well in their travels, and hope that the collage of landscapes and soundscapes they encounter can continue to nourish their music and help it remain vital and relevant—to their lives and ours.*  
—Theodore Levin<sup>2</sup>

The “discovery” and revival of Tuvan throat-singing during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s set the stage for *xöömei* to reach international audiences in the post-Soviet era. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Tuvan music—with *xöömei* throat-singing as its trademark—has influenced, and been influenced by, world music ensembles, producers, and international audiences. Consistent with the historic framing of *xöömei* as having a nomadic sensibility, those international actors have framed *xöömei* as being rooted in the sonic and musical sensibilities of nomads on horseback from the ancient steppes of Inner Asia.

However, this chapter will show that the actual *aesthetics* of post-Soviet *xöömei* have been shaped to a large extent by a small group of traveling Tuvan musicians whose aesthetic might be called “neotraditional nomadic minimalism.” That aesthetic not only resonates with international and Tuvan audiences, it has been stabilized as the *sine qua non* of Tuvan traditional music—something now *expected* in *xöömei* performances. Furthermore, that aesthetic has circulated back

<sup>1</sup> “Tuvan Throat-Singers Perform Feats of Harmonic Acrobatics” in *Washington Post*, 15 January 1996.

<sup>2</sup> 1999, quoted in Huun-Huur-Tu concert program, Great American Music Hall, San Francisco, 21 September 2012.

from the international stage to Tuva, where it remains influential in shaping the work of a younger generation of musicians.

This chapter has three parts. Part I contends that conditions surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 allowed and inspired global actors to become interested in Tuva and Tuvan music. Those global actors and the larger “global imagination” of which they were part were especially enamored of the perception of Tuvan *xöömei* as possessing positive, ancient, nomadic qualities. This interest in Tuva began in the 1930s with the international circulation of exotic Tuvan imagery, but accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s as the Soviet Union began to disintegrate. The sound recordings of imagined Tuvan nomads, and the rise of international affinity groups, or “Tuvaphiles,” played a central role in this trend.

Part II discusses how a small group of traveling Tuvan musicians, eventually calling themselves Huun-Huur-Tu, consciously sought to re-define their musical aesthetics by moving away from the folkloric model of the Tuva Ensemble in two new directions—“experimental-ambient” and “neotraditional-groove.” In particular, Part II examines how Huun-Huur-Tu’s members united over their reactions to the Soviet folkloric models of the 1970s and 1980s. Part II moves on to explore some of the aesthetic negotiations Huun-Huur-Tu made in producing their first album, *60 Horses in My Herd* (1993), which launched the group’s experimental-ambient aesthetic. It concludes with a comparison of two recordings of the same Tuvan song “Eerbek-Aksy”—one by Ensemble Ay-Kherel, which reflects the Soviet folkloric aesthetic, and one by Huun-Huur-Tu, which represents the group’s “neotraditional-groove” aesthetic.

Part III discusses Huun-Huur-Tu’s continuing success in the 1990s and 2000s; the important role of ethnographer, musicologist, and executive producer Ted Levin in shaping the group’s music; the new Tuvan ensembles that Huun-Huur-Tu inspired; and the significance of Huun-Huur-Tu’s work in recapturing and reinventing Tuvan music.

## PART I

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### NOMADS IN THE GLOBAL IMAGINATION OF TUVA

#### *CIRCULATING EXOTIC NOMADIC IMAGERY*

Tannu Tuva probably first entered the global imagination through its quirky postage stamps. Minted between the years of 1934 and 1936, the stamps came in seventy different varieties, “more than the rest of western Europe and the U.S. combined,” reported Andrew Higgins.<sup>3</sup> The stamps came in odd shapes—diamonds, triangles, rectangles—and depicted the traditional cultural and economic life of Tuvan nomads, including images of yaks, reindeer, and camels alongside traditional sports like horse racing, wrestling, and archery (see Figures 3.1 and

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Higgins, “Tuva Hopes Philately Will Get It Everywhere,” *The Independent*, 27 April 1995.

3.2).<sup>4</sup> Representative of Tuva's period of accelerated socialist modernization (see Chapter 1), some of the stamps depicted dramatic juxtapositions of technology and nomadic life that, in some cases, were fictitious.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 3.1.** Postage stamps from the 1934 Registered Post Series featuring images of traditional economic activities alongside their rapid modernization during the Tannu Tuva era (1921-1944): a woman milking a yak (5 kopeks), a man lassoing a reindeer (15 kopeks), and a man driving a tractor (4 kopeks).<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 3.2.** Released in 1936 for the Jubilee of the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Proclamation of the People's Republic of Tannu Tuva, these postage stamps depict the three traditional Tuvan sports of horse racing (50 kopeks), wrestling (4 kopeks), and archery (5 kopeks). The remaining stamps depict a camel chasing a train (30 kopeks) and a nomad's yurt at a festival (3 kopeks).<sup>7</sup>

Although the stamps from the 1930s allegedly represented life in Tannu Tuva, they were, according to Higgins, “designed in Moscow, printed in Moscow, franked in Moscow and sold abroad by a Moscow state trading firm to earn hard currency for Moscow” (1995).<sup>8</sup> In other

<sup>4</sup> The original Tannu Tuva stamps were released as the Registered Post and Air Mail series (1934), the Landscape and Zoological series (1935), and the Jubilee and Jubilee Air Mail series (1946). See, for example, Blekhman, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> For example, there were never any train tracks in Tuva until 2011, when the first railway extension to Tuva began construction. See, for example, the announcement that “Vladimir Putin took part in the ceremony laying the railway line Kyzyl-Kuragino” on the website of the “Plenipotentiary for the Government of the Republic of Tuva in Moscow,” 19 December 2011, <http://www.pprrt17.ru/pprrt/249-nachalo.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Images from Friends of Tuva website: <http://www.fotuva.org/stamps/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Images from Friends of Tuva website: <http://www.fotuva.org/stamps/index.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Higgins, “Tuva Hopes Philately Will Get It Everywhere,” *The Independent*, 27 April 1995.

words, Tuvan people had no role in shaping the stamps' representations, and foreign audiences, not Tuvans, were the intended consumers.<sup>9</sup> Because Tuvans were a largely unknown population group from an obscure country in Inner Asia, the stamps were usually the only representation of Tuvan life for the people who bought them.

### *THE QUEST FOR TANNU TUVA*

As the stamps circulated among international stamp collectors, they inspired fascination with Tuva as a twentieth-century “Shangri-La” in the global imagination. One young boy was especially captivated. In the 1930s, decades before he became a Nobel prize-winning physicist, a young Richard Feynman (1918-1988) became aware of the postage stamps from Tannu Tuva during conversations with his father in Queens, New York. In a video-taped interview for a documentary film about his life, Feynman recalls:

I knew that there was this country when I was a kid that my father explained to me was an independent country, [and] they had these interesting stamps. I think he had shown me on the map where it was. And it was a purple area in the middle of some big green thing in the middle of Asia somewhere! And as time went on, I never heard of it again. And it's supposed to be an independent country so it must have disappeared somehow ....<sup>10</sup>

Feynman grew up to make important discoveries in quantum electrodynamics, which launched his prestigious career as a professor at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena. Still, he never lost his boyhood interest in Tannu Tuva. He remembers fondly a 1977 dinner conversation on world geography with his friend Ralph Leighton, in which Feynman asked a provocative question:

“OK, so what ever happened to Tannu Tuva?” And [Ralph] said I'm making up a country that doesn't exist. “Oh yeah?” I said. And I got out the encyclopedia and we looked it up on a map and sure enough there's Tannu Tuva and where was it? Just outside of Outer Mongolia in the middle of Central Asia in the depths of Russia far away from anything. And it was no longer an independent country—it was part of Russia! And we saw that the capital was—this is what did it—the capital was K-Y-Z-Y-L. My wife, and I and he, at the same time, grinned at each other because any place that's got a capital named K-Y-Z-Y-L has just got to be interesting ....<sup>11</sup>

This conversation referred to the “absorption” of Tuva by the Soviet Union in 1944, when the nominally independent republic literally disappeared from world maps. More important, the conversation inspired a quest by Feynman and Leighton to find out what had happened to the isolated Tuvan republic in the geographic heart of Asia (see Figure 3.3):

[So] we decide it would be fun to go there because it's so obscure and peculiar .... It's just the fun of having an adventure to try to go to a land that we'd never heard of—to find out what it's like

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<sup>9</sup> See Blekhman 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Feynman, quoted from the documentary film “Tuvans Invade America” (1994, Friends of Tuva). See also “Richard Feynman: The Last Journey of a Genius” (1988, NOVA).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

and discover [things] as we went along .... We didn't have any deeper understanding of what we were doing—if we tried to understand what we were doing we'd go nutty!<sup>12</sup>

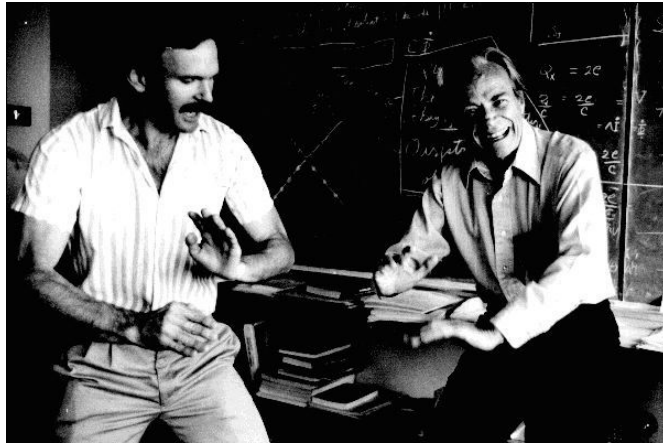


Figure 3.3. Ralph Leighton (left), founder of Friends of Tuva, and Nobel laureate Richard Feynman photographed during an imaginary drumming ritual.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 3.4. Leighton and Feynman designed this custom California license plate to attract the attention of anyone on the public roadways who might be able to share information about Tuva. *Touva* is the French spelling for Tuva, commonly used in the postage stamps from the 1930s.<sup>14</sup>

But Feynman and Leighton faced a problem. Apart from a few quirky stamps and isolated references to Tuva in maps and books, there was little information (especially reliable information) about it available in the United States in the 1970s. The Soviet Union had severely restricted travel into the USSR by foreigners, as well as the export of information from it. Information about the political changes that led to Tannu Tuva's disappearance from world atlases—its quiet “annexation” or “absorption” by the Soviet Union in 1944—was not easily accessible in the West (Lewis 2001). The little scholarly information that was available were ethnographic accounts of travelers to the Sayan–Altai mountains (for example, Carruthers 1914), Soviet anthropological accounts of nomadic pastoralism from the pre-Soviet era (*e.g.*, Vainshtein 1980), as well as the rare philological or linguistic handbook. This limited information about Tuvan people and their cultural practices likely worked to mythologize Tuvan people as nomads isolated deep in the heart of Asia.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Photo courtesy of Ralph Leighton and Friends of Tuva, personal archive.

<sup>14</sup> Photo courtesy of Ralph Leighton and Friends of Tuva, personal archive.



Faced with this paltry information, Feynman and Leighton set about trying to find everything out they could about Tuva (see Figure 3.4). In addition to consulting the few sources described above, Feynman and Leighton relied heavily on the recently published *Tuvan Manual* (1977) written by John Krueger at the University of Indiana.<sup>15</sup> As Leighton later wrote, “the *Tuvan Manual* became our Bible” (1991: 36). The 261-page manual contains two passing references to Tuvan throat-singing, the more specific of which stated:

A characteristic and specific feature of Tuvan music is the so-called two-voiced or “throat” singing commonly found among native Tuvans and hardly observed anywhere else. The singer sings in two voices. With his lower voice he sings the melody and accompanies it at the same time with a surprisingly pure and tender sounds similar to that of the flute (1977: 79).<sup>16</sup>

This reference piqued Feynman and Leighton’s interest in Tuvan throat-singing. Using the *Tuvan Manual* to cobble together a letter in Tuvan language (as Leighton explained, “for Feynman, communicating with native people in their native language was a priority”), the two men eventually reached Tuvan folklorist Daryma Ondar, who worked at the Tuvan Scientific Research Institute of Language, Literature, and History (TNIYaLI).<sup>17</sup> The three men wrote letters back and forth; in one, Ondar indicated that there had been recordings made of Tuvan throat-singers.<sup>18</sup>

#### HEARING THE POSTAGE STAMPS

Feynman and Leighton continued to pursue their interest in Tuva, and in *xöömei* in particular. A few years after they struck up a correspondence with Ondar, they got in touch with Russian/Soviet anthropologist Sevyan Vainshtein, whose monograph *Nomads of South Siberia* (1980) had been recently translated and published in English.<sup>19</sup> Feynman and Leighton also received an LP entitled *Iskusstvo Narodov SSSR: Melodii Tuvvy* (“Art of the Peoples of the USSR: Melodies of Tuva,” 1978) from a colleague who was returning from a research trip in Moscow (see Figure 3.5).<sup>20</sup> Leighton remembers their first experience listening to the record, which included hearing the guttural timbres of Tuvan *xöömei* for the very first time (see Listening Excerpt #3 in Appendix III):

Richard [Feynman] was holding a 12-inch phonograph record called Melodii Tuvvy .... As euphoria set in, Richard took the record out of its jacket. I went over to the record player, dusted it

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<sup>15</sup> Krueger, John Richard. *Tuvan Manual: Area Handbook, Grammar, Reader, Glossary, Bibliography*. Bloomington: Indiana University, 1977.

<sup>16</sup> Another reference in Krueger reads: “Music is apparently a popular pastime in Tuva. A feature of Tuvan singing is the so-called ‘throat’ singing in which the singer sings the melody in a lower voice, accompanying it in a higher, flutelike voice” (1977: 16).

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion of Daryma Ondar in connection with “discovering” and recording Tuvan throat-singer Xunashtar-ool Oorzhak in the 1960s, and for a discussion on TNIYaLI’s role in shaping *xöömei* in the 1970s and 1980s.

<sup>18</sup> As Feynman and Leighton roughly translated from Ondar’s letter: “Record-in written song, tune is” (1991: 41).

<sup>19</sup> The monograph included a forward by anthropologist Caroline Humphrey, whose work I cite in Chapter 2.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 2 for an account of Ondar Darynma’s and Vyacheslav Shchurov’s efforts to organize this recording project in Tuva in the late 1960s.

off, cleaned off the needle, carefully placed the record on the platen, and took a deep breath. When my hand stopped shaking, I placed the needle carefully on the record ....

We were in shock. Tuva, isolated in the center of Asia—that little lost land of enchanting postage stamps—had transcended our wildest dreams. The sounds on the record were stunning: how could two notes be produced simultaneously by a single singer? At first the higher ‘voice’ sounded like a flute, several octaves higher than the fundamental tone. Then came even stranger styles of *höömei*, the most bizarre of which was the ‘rattling’ style, which sounded like a long-winded frog .... It took us several days to recover (Leighton 1991: 61-2).



Figure 3.5. *Iskusstvo Narodov SSSR: Melodii Tuvy* (“Art of the Peoples of the USSR: Melodies of Tuva”), released by the Soviet state recording firm “Melodiya,” 1978.<sup>21</sup>

And the thing is, when we first put the record on, it was a performance in the *sygyz* style by Xunashtar-ool Oorzhak .... After hearing that, we were just mesmerized. We were just like: ‘Oh my God! This is amazing!’ And we did kind of interpret [*sygyz*] as sort of like a whistle. I don’t recall [Feynman] ever saying: ‘Oh, of course, I know how he did that! It’s that harmonic series and he simply isolated separate harmonics out of the harmonic series and that’s what he’s doing.’ He didn’t analyze it in the physical sense and I’ll bet he could have .... He was listening to it from the cultural side.<sup>22</sup> And just blown away by it emotionally. ‘Oh my God—we’ve got some sounds from Tuva!’ .... [It] was an emotional experience, and we were so excited to get this audio description to complement the images in the postage stamps ....

You see, the stamps were our only image of Tuva. We only had a couple other photos and they were of a car on a street in Kyzyl in front of the Parliament building out of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia .... No nomads! Because the Soviets wanted to show the world how advanced Tuva was. But we also had photos taken in 1929 from Otto Maenchen-Helfen’s book—now that was the Tuva we wanted to see. And we wondered: is that still alive?<sup>23</sup> When we heard throat-singing

<sup>21</sup> This LP was a reprint of the original *Pesni i Instrumentalnye Melodii Tuvy (Tyva Ayalgalar)*, Melodiya D-030773, Moscow 1968. See Chapter 2.

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the “scientific” and “cultural” aspects of *xöömei*.

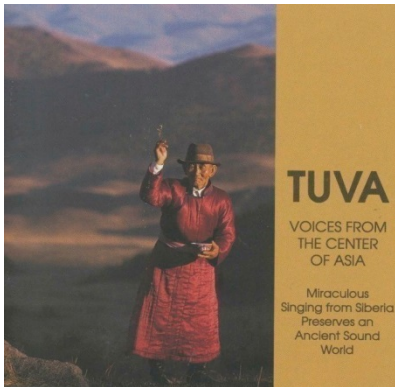
<sup>23</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, Otto, *Journey to Tuva: An Eye-Witness Account of Tannu Tuva in 1929*, edited by Alan Leighton. Los Angeles: Ethnographics Press: University of Southern California, [1931] 1992.

on the *Melodii Tuvy* LP, it made us think: yes it is! At this moment, Feynman was so close to Tuva—he was in Tuva with his imagination.<sup>24</sup>

The distribution of *Melodii Tuvy* outside the Soviet Union was very limited. Given the scarcity of this and other sound recordings from Tuva, it is no surprise that *xöömei*'s unusual guttural timbre was intriguing and mysterious to Feynman, Leighton, and the other international enthusiasts who managed to hear it.<sup>25</sup>

#### ASSEMBLING “TUVAPHILLA” CULTURE

By the mid-1980s, during *Perestroika*, the Soviet Union had become less closed, and the possibility of international travel to Tuva became more attainable. As Chapter 2 explains, in 1987, American ethnomusicologist Ted Levin became one of the first foreign (or at least non-Soviet bloc) researchers to gain access to Tuva in almost fifty years. His ethnographic expedition, the “Joint Soviet-American Musical-Ethnographic Research Expedition” of 1987–88, produced the first widely-available commercial recording of Tuvan throat-singing. Evocatively entitled *Tuva: Voices From the Center of Asia* (1990, Smithsonian Folkways), the album claimed on its cover to feature “miraculous singing” from Siberia that “preserves an ancient sound world” (see Figure 3.6).



**Figure 3.6.** The album *Tuva: Voices from the Center of Asia*—“Miraculous Singing from Siberia Preserves an Ancient Sound World”—featured a photograph of Tuvan musician Idamchap Xomushku, engaging in a ritual staged for Karen Sherlock’s photograph (1990, Smithsonian Folkways, produced by Ted Levin, Eduard Alekseev, and Zoya Kyrgys).

Behind the cover, *Voices From the Center of Asia* was purposeful in its selection of “non-Sovietized” Tuvan cultural practices. The tracks stripped away the veneer of the Soviet nomadic

<sup>24</sup> Ralph Leighton, personal interview, Tiburon, California, 17 April 2014.

<sup>25</sup> In Finland, for example, the *Melodii Tuvy* LP was played on a radio program in the late 1970s called “Pororumpu ja balalaikka” (Saunio and Immonen 1979: 246–249), which prompted jazz musician Ilpo Saastamoinen to become one of the first foreigners to learn to sing *xöömei* and incorporate it into his music on an album called *Pohjantahti* (Polydor, 1986). See *Kurkkulaulajan äänen kannattaja* “Höömei” [Throat-Singers Voice of *Khöömei*], Newsletter of the Finnish Throat-Singing Society (2007), <http://users.jyu.fi/~sjansson/finnishthroat.htm>.

folklorism—the highly-stylized, vaguely ethnographically-informed aesthetic discussed in Chapter 2—in favor of something more “authentically Tuvan.” This intent and effect is evident in the album’s liner notes, where Levin, Alekseev, and Kyrgys describe how they gathered the field recordings for the album:

We recorded music in yurts, the circular felt and canvas tents that are home to the nomadic herders, and in the rural “houses of culture” that serve as official cultural centers for the small settlements that have sprouted on the Tuvan steppe since the onset of collectivization in the late 1920s.

We sought musicians whose repertory stems from the oral tradition of a family or community .... In compiling this recording, we have eschewed arranged and modernized versions of Tuvan folklore in favor of traditional forms that most directly illuminate the style and role of music among the Tuvan herders (liner notes, 1990: 1-2).

As Chapter 2 argues, Levin’s work was itself a form of folkloric musical production. *Voices From the Center of Asia* seemed to demonstrate that the global imagination of Tuva as a mystical land of nomads was correct—or, at least, that some of the aspects of Tuvan culture that were thought to have been lost during the Soviet cultural folklorization in the 1970s and 1980s could be recovered. Alongside the postage stamps, “Voices From the Center of Asia” became the first widely-circulated representation of Tuvan culture since the postage stamps of the 1930s. The album’s diverse and varied examples of *xöömei* singing styles, in addition to other traditional singing styles and jew’s harp performances, helped shape the perception and expectation that post-Soviet Tuvan music was part of an “ancient” and nomadic “sound world.”

At the time that Levin was visiting the Tuvan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1987-88, Feynman and Leighton were planning a trip of their own. Unfortunately, Feynman’s struggles with cancer led to his death in 1988, only a few days before an official invitation was finally arranged for him and Leighton to visit (Leighton 1991: 219). Leighton, though, followed through on the visit as planned:

So when Feynman died, I thought—well, OK, I’ll still go [to Tuva] .... But that whole adventure was about doing it together. That’s why it was such a huge disappointment to go there but without him. It was just kind of empty .... If Feynman had been there, he would have charmed them to get us out into the countryside to see a real yurt and meet a real shepherd and that kind of stuff.<sup>26</sup>

Leighton’s visit led him to write the often hilarious, sometimes emotional book *Tuva or Bust!* (Leighton 1991), which chronicles Feynman’s and Leighton’s goal to visit Tuva and Leighton’s experiences there. In addition, after Feynman’s death, Leighton founded Friends of Tuva, an organization that became a primary collector and disseminator of information in English about Tuvan history and culture, including *xöömei*, between 1991 and 1999. By 1993, there were said to be Friends of Tuva in every U.S. state, as well as in Canada, Europe, and Japan (see Figure 3.7), and *Tuva or Bust!* had been translated into Japanese (1991). Friends of

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<sup>26</sup> Ralph Leighton, personal interview, Tiburon, California, 17 April 2014.

Tuva annually distributed three or four newsletters per year to several thousand members, including travel narratives of foreign tourists to Tuva in the early post-Soviet era; information about the concert tours of traveling Tuvan musicians; and films, exhibitions, newspaper articles, and stamps. Friends of Tuva even inspired similar groups in other countries, including the Finnish Throat-Singing Society (founded in 1997) and the Tuva-Japan *Khöömei* Association.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 3.7. Members of the Oklahoma chapter of Friends of Tuva and “Tuva Astronomy Organization” pose on Mount Feynman near Checotah, Oklahoma.<sup>28</sup> Followers of Feynman’s achievements in the field of physics also connected with each other through the Friends of Tuva organization.

Together, *Voices From the Center of Asia, Tuva or Bust!*, Friends of Tuva, and other organizations started a groundswell of global interest in Tuva—a “Tuvaphilia” that peaked in the early to mid-1990s and waned in the 2000s. Sound recordings, meetings, newsletters, classes and other things served to collect, produce, and circulate knowledge and mythologies about Tuvan people and cultural practices. But there was another, equally instrumental player in that process: the Tuvan musicians who, beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, traveled, performed, and made sound recordings in Europe, North America, and Japan.

## PART II

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### INVENTING TUVAN WORLD MUSIC

As members of the Tuva Ensemble began to tour internationally in the early 1990s, their performances were often perceived as shocking, titillating, and exotic by Western audiences. Many Tuvan performers were understood to be representatives of Tuva’s ancient nomadic culture, which seemed to clash with their folkloricized Soviet-style performances of theatrical

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<sup>27</sup> Sauli Heikkilä, personal communication, 11 August 2014; Koichi Makigami, “Tuva and Japan via *khöömei*” in Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> International Symposium “*Khöömei?*” (Throat-Singing)—A Cultural Phenomenon of the Peoples of Central Asia, Kyzyl, Tyva, 13 June 2014: 214.

<sup>28</sup> Photo courtesy of Ralph Leighton and Friends of Tuva, private archive.

nomadic folklorism. First, I briefly discuss two recordings made during the first European tours of the Tuva Ensemble in 1991-2 in order to establish the precedent for a Soviet-style folkloric aesthetic. Then, I examine the aesthetic negotiations that took place in a music studio in London in 1992, where a small group of Tuvan musicians who broke away from the Tuva Ensemble recorded their first album with a British producer. Ultimately, it was the Huun-Huur-Tu aesthetic that became synonymous with post-Soviet Tuvan music, although both models have maintained some presence in post-Soviet music scenes.

### PRESENTING THE TUVA ENSEMBLE IN EUROPE

The first Tuvan musicians to travel abroad in the late 1980s and early 1990s consisted of various lineups of the Tuva Ensemble. The ensemble's most notable visits were made to Amsterdam in 1991 and 1992, during which they recorded one studio album and one live concert album. Both albums were produced by Bernard Kleikamp on the Paradox/Pan Ethnic Series label (see Figure 3.8). The album's aesthetic attributes included fast-paced tempi, theatrical staging and delivery, and elaborate ethnic costumes—in short, a version of the nomadic folklorism that was preferred during the Soviet Union. Cover art on the albums *Tuva: Voices from the Land of Eagles* (1991) and *Tuva: Echoes from the Spirit World* (1992) drew on Scythian animal-style art in bronze<sup>29</sup> and statues of “stone men” (*kizhi közbe*)<sup>30</sup> with inscriptions in Ancient Turkic (Orkhon script)—both artifacts from past civilizations that ruled in the Sayan-Altai mountains where Tuva sits (see Figure 3.8).

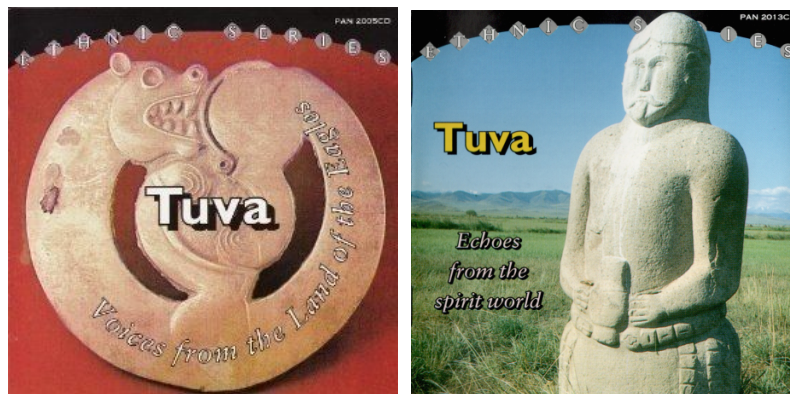


Figure 3.8. *Tuva: Voices from the Land of Eagles* (1992) and *Tuva: Echoes from the Spirit World* (1992), both released on Paradox/Pan Records and produced by Bernard Kleikamp.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> “Scythian bronze plaque from the eighth century B.C, excavated in Tuva, showing a panther biting its own tail, coiled around yin and yang, symbolizing male and female; beginning and end, which is still characteristic for Tuva nowadays” (Kleikamp, liner notes, *Tuva: Voices from the Land of Eagles*, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> “Stone man from the Turkic period (6th-12th centuries) found near Bizhiktig Khaya (‘Written-on-Rock’) on the flood plain of the Barlyk River in western Tuva. Statues of stone men are thought to be tombstones, and this one is the largest in Tuva” (Kleikamp, liner notes, *Tuva: Echoes from the Spirit World*, 1992).

<sup>31</sup> Photo courtesy of Bernard Kleikamp, Pan Records, via personal communication, 10 August 2014.

While the musical aesthetics of the early touring ensembles were heavily influenced by the Soviet folkloric aesthetic, the throat-singing of solo artists seemed to international audiences to stand out as something different. Those audiences typically perceived the sounds coming from the throat-singers' voices as shocking. In an interview, Bernard Kleikamp recalled audience reactions during the performances of the Tuva Ensemble in Amsterdam in the early 1990s:

I have seen people literally with their mouths wide open or eyes popping out while watching the Tuvans throat-sing. I've seen people in the audiences who were totally amazed and flabbergasted, who couldn't comprehend what was going on! And that was part of the magic. And it was helped by a couple of very skilled publicists, who created a hype .... If you don't create good publicity you can't create a hype. In the newspapers, the Tuvan concerts read like an adventure story!<sup>32</sup>

There was certainly much "hype" in the representations of various smaller lineups from the Tuva Ensemble as they toured Canada and the United States. Newspaper articles described the singing of the traveling "Throat Singers from Tuva," as one lineup of the musicians were called during their tour, as "ancient, unearthly singing" (Wilson 1993) whose "mesmerizing" sounds were "astoundingly pure" and "seemed to come directly from another world" (see Figure 3.9).<sup>33</sup> One reviewer in San Francisco said it this way:

Imagine a lone horseman on the windy steppes of central Asia, trotting lazily alongside his herd of reindeer .... The music native to these nomads comprises a wide range of styles and moods. Undoubtedly the most astonishing is the khoomei style—the 'throat singing' that utilizes overtones to produce voicings in two or even three distinct registers when the mouth, tongue and velum are positioned in a certain way.<sup>34</sup>

The Tuvaphilia of the 1990s and the Tuva Ensemble's performances combined to create and reinforce expectations of Tuva as a mystical land of nomads. But for many, including the Tuvan musicians themselves, the Soviet folkloric model of staged and theatricalized nomadic singing left something to be desired. So it was no surprise when a small group of innovative musicians broke away from the Soviet model and creatively re-imagined the musical aesthetics of post-Soviet *xöömei*. The aesthetics were at once new and ancient; they seemed fresh but also more clearly, more honestly connected to pre-Soviet Tuvan nomadic pastoral culture, at least as that culture was imagined.

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<sup>32</sup> Bernard Kleikamp, personal Skype interview, 20 August 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, "This time Tuvans seen, heard," *Los Angeles Times* (6 January 1993); "The Singing Cowboy," *Los Angeles Weekly*, 12 February 1993; Bob Young, "A World of Sound from Tuvan Singers," *Boston Herald*, 26 January 1993.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Fleming, "Asian singers bringing their unique style to S.F.," *Time Out*, 1993.



Figure 3.9. Promotional photo for the “Throat Singers of Tuva” during their first tour in the United States—(from left to right) Anatoli Kuular, Kaigal-ool Xovalyg, and Kongar-ool Ondar (1993).<sup>35</sup>

#### ESTABLISHING THE HUUN-HUUR-TU AESTHETIC

To understand the genesis of a new *xöömei* aesthetic, we must rewind to 1992. That was the year when a small group of innovative Tuvan musicians, who would later call themselves Huun-Huur-Tu, assembled in a London studio and made recordings that would become the group’s first album, *60 Horses in My Herd* (1993, Shanachie). That album is one of the first post-Soviet music projects made by Tuvan musicians that strays significantly from the Soviet-style aesthetics of the Tuva Ensemble.

#### A CHANCE ENCOUNTER IN SIBERIA

*Novosibirsk, Russia.* It was March 1992, three months after the Soviet Union had ceased to exist. Trevor Goronwi, a British-Welsh sound engineer and former member of the rock band *This Heat*, met a young Tuvan musician named Albert Kuvezin by chance at a vodka bar in Siberia. According to Goronwi, Kuvezin “seemed like somebody who was prepared to stick his neck out and do his own thing in a culture that wasn’t historically very welcoming of that.”<sup>36</sup> As

<sup>35</sup> Photo by Clark Quin and provided courtesy of Ralph Leighton and Friends of Tuva, personal archives.

<sup>36</sup> Trevor Goronwi, personal Skype interview, 11 April 2014.



the two conversed about various musical interests, it dawned on Goronwi that Kuvezin's awareness of a "Western aesthetic" stood out from other musicians he had met in the former Soviet Union, especially from its ethnic republics. Goronwi explains:

Albert seemed to have some obscure musical interests, and I thought: 'Wow—you're interesting! How do you even know that this stuff exists let alone are you able to have quite an informed opinion about it?' You see it was a bit of a cultural wilderness at the time and, even at this festival, a lot of the participants were really not the sort of people I could relate to. It was often a futile thing for me to talk to people from the former Soviet Union about Western rock music, because they just weren't aware of most of it. I mean there was a real divide at that time. People really weren't aware of anything beyond Elton John, Queen, Deep Purple, the Beatles, and Led Zeppelin. But Albert was different! Albert showed an awareness of lots of what you might call a 'Western aesthetic,' which was very rare in the former Soviet Union in 1992 and if anybody showed any awareness for a 'Western aesthetic' it was always very mainstream.

We saw each other a few more times during those five days of the festival, and at some point he gave me his phone number, and I said, 'OK, well I'll give you my phone number, too!' In 1992, just months after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the thought of somebody from Tuva giving me his phone number and saying 'I'll give you a call'—I mean it was like meeting somebody from *a distant galaxy* and exchanging things on the odd chance that you're going to meet up again!<sup>37</sup>

Several months later, after Goronwi had returned to London, he received a telephone call from Kuvezin. Kuvezin, along with several other Tuvan musicians, was returning from a performance at the International Eisteddfod festival in Wales. At that time, the group of Tuvan musicians were calling themselves Kungurtuk.<sup>38</sup> In addition to Kuvezin, the group consisted of brothers Sayan and Alexander ("Sasha") Bapa, who had played together with Albert in the large Tuvan state ensemble Ayan, and Kaigal-ool Xovalyg, a star musician from the Tuva Ensemble (see ensemble chart, Figure 2.2). The four men had previously met in Tuva and recorded some Tuvan songs with a decidedly rock-inspired aesthetic.<sup>39</sup> Now, on their way to London, they were looking for a place to stay, and Goronwi had a large flat and plenty of floor space. Goronwi recounts the events that followed:

Basically the Tuvans stayed in my home [in London] for about two weeks. It was clear that this was precious time for them—being on their own in the U.K. for two weeks in 1992—and they saw this as an opportunity to try and do something for themselves. As things turned out, at the time I had access to this 24-track recording studio [the Watershed] and there was a weekend when it

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Kungurtuk is the name of settlement near an eighth-century Uighur fortress called Por-Bajin. Por-Bajin was built on an island in Lake Tore-Xöl, in a remote region of southeastern Tuva. See, for example, Arzhantseva et al., "Por-Bajin: An Enigmatic Site of the Uighurs in Southern Siberia," *European Archaeologist*, 35, Summer 2011, available at [http://e-a-a.org/TEA/archive/TEA\\_35\\_SUMMER\\_2011/rep2\\_35.htm](http://e-a-a.org/TEA/archive/TEA_35_SUMMER_2011/rep2_35.htm).

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, *The ReR Quarterly* (vol. 4, no. 1), RéR: 0401, 1994. Koongoortoog: Track [*Kizbi bazhyn*]. From the liner notes, the song was "performed by Kaigal-Ool Khovalyg (voice), Albert Kuvezin, Sayan Bapa, Alexander Bapa. This piece is taken from a cassette and is used by permission. At time of going to press further information has not yet reached us." Special thanks to Morten Abildsnes, personal communication, 2 August 2014.

wasn't booked. The studio was very ill-equipped and a bit run down. We recorded everything on secondhand 2-inch analog tape—everything was ramshackle! There were a lot of very inappropriate condenser microphones—the kind of thing you would normally use as overheads for cymbals on a drum kit. We had to make do with what we had available, and the studio itself was in an old coach house. The controller room was upstairs, the studio was downstairs, and there was no video link, so there was no visual communication. I basically went downstairs and got [the musicians] set up and positioned the microphones as appropriately as I could, and then went back upstairs and that was it. It was rough and ready! It really was. There was no fine tuning to the recordings at all.<sup>40</sup>

The Tuvan musicians had previously developed new arrangements of a number of “old songs and tunes of Tuva,” as they later described on the front cover of *60 Horses in My Herd* (released after the group changed their name from Kungurtuk to Huun-Huur-Tu).<sup>41</sup> In an interview, Kuvezin recalled some of the roles the musicians played in negotiating the process of recording the album:

It all happened in London [in 1992], where we met up with Trevor Goronwi and he recorded us in his friend's studio. Alexander (Sasha) Bapa directed the process—he was like the producer, who was saying ‘this is good, this is not good.’<sup>42</sup> Sayan [Bapa] and myself, we were the arrangers. This is how Tuvan ‘traditional’ music was born. The paradox is that today Huun-Huur-Tu is considered to be the classic example of Tuvan traditional music, but, in actuality, Huun-Huur-Tu is fusion music! It did not exist like this in the past. Even 20 years ago [in the early 1990s], people were not playing this way. We came up with this ‘traditional’ Tuvan music—it was Kaigal-ool [Xovalyg], Sayan Bapa, Sasha Bapa, and me ....<sup>43</sup>

Myself also, I was interested only for rock music at that time, but then he pushed me to study *kargyraa* singing and also he helped me with some Tuvan music, some cassettes, like moral support; it's very important, moral support.<sup>44</sup>

#### THE EXPERIMENTAL-AMBIENT AESTHETIC

In many of the tracks on *60 Horses in My Herd*, Huun-Huur-Tu performs Tuvan songs using an aesthetic approach that was completely new for Tuvan music. It was expansive and ambient—a “fusion,” as Kuvezin called it, most likely inspired by some of the experimental rock and jazz that Kuvezin and the Bapa brothers had been listening to in the 1970s and 1980s. For

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<sup>40</sup> Trevor Goronwi, personal Skype interview, 11 April 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Sasha Bapa described the meaning of the ensemble's name: “Huun-Huur-Tu means the vertical separation of light rays that you often see out on the grasslands just after sunrise or just before sunset .... Tuvans call their open countryside Huun-Huur-Tu because they are awed by the beauty of its light. Our ensemble used the name because the music we perform is rooted in that countryside and because the light rays on the steppe remind us of the separate lines of sound in throat-singing, except that in throat-singing, you're working not with light rays, but with sound rays” (liner notes, *60 Horses in My Herd*, 1993: 2).

<sup>42</sup> In an interview for *Folk Roots Magazine* (Lusk, 2000, vol. 21, no. 7-8), Kuvezin expanded on Sasha Bapa's role in the formation of Huun-Huur-Tu: “[Sasha] was a kind of producer and manager of the band and actually .... In the beginning he spent his own money to create projects .... He found money for travel, for example we came to England on his own money. For maybe three years while the band was growing slowly, he paid all [the] musicians like a kind of salary. He bought all [the] instruments, all [the] costumes .... ”

<sup>43</sup> Albert Kuvezin, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 4 June 2012.

<sup>44</sup> *Folk Roots Magazine* (Lusk, 2000, vol. 21, no. 7-8).

example, Kuvezin has noted the influence of Led Zeppelin on his work, and Sayan Bapa has pointed to jazz artists such as Weather Report and Frank Zappa.<sup>45</sup> The aesthetic of *60 Horses in My Herd* is characterized in part by the sparse use of non-metrical percussion found in traditional Tuvan culture, which was not previously used in performances of Tuvan folk music. Percussion instruments include a *xapchyk* rattle made from a dried bull’s scrotum and filled with knuckle bones from sheep, *syngyrash* bells (traditionally used as horse tack), a *tun* conch shell horn used in connection with Buddhist ritual, and a *tungur* shaman’s frame drum (see Figure 3.10).



**Figure 3.10.** Percussion instruments (clockwise from top left): *xapchyk* rattle (dried bull’s scrotum filled with sheep knuckle bones), *syngyrash* bells (horse riding gear), and *tun* conch shell horn (from Buddhist ritual).<sup>46</sup>

During the recording of *60 Horses in My Herd*, Sasha Bapa played these instruments in free meter to create a minimalist, ethereal, almost haunting ambience. That ambience appeared alongside minimalist guitar, played by Kuvezin; *igil* (horsehead fiddle), played by Kaigal-ool Xovalyg and Sayan Bapa; and Kuvezin’s distinctive basso-profundo style of *kargyraa* throat-singing called *kangzyp*. We can see how these elements come together in Huun-Huur-Tu’s arrangement of an old Tuvan folk melody called “Mezhegei” (see Figure 3.11; see also Listening Excerpt #4 in Appendix III).

<sup>45</sup> Yat-Kha, liner notes *Re-Covers* (2005, Sony/BMG International); Levin 2006: 223-224.

<sup>46</sup> Photo from Alash Ensemble website, <http://www.alashensemble.com>, and Süzükei 2007: 120.

Figure 3.11. Melody and lyrics to the Tuvan folk song “Mezhegei.”<sup>47</sup>

“Mezhegei” lyrics:

*Ulug-Xem tavangailaan  
 Ulug-Iiim, Kadyr-Iiim.  
 Urug chashtan oinap ösken  
 Ulug shynaa Mezhegeiim*

Oh, my high slopes, my steep slopes,  
 Stepping their feet into the Ulug-Xem [River].  
 Oh, my big valley, Mezhegei,  
 Where I, as a child, grew up playing.

To be sure, “Mezhegei” and the entire album’s experimental-ambient aesthetic was shaped by Kuvezin’s use of guitar—an idea for which he takes credit<sup>48</sup>—and Sasha Bapa’s minimalist percussion. However, the aesthetic was also informed by Kaigal-ool Xovalyg’s technique for playing the *igil* in a manner that recalls his teacher, the famous Tuvan musician Kara-Sal Ak-ool,<sup>49</sup> and by subtle studio reverb and overdubbing. Goronwi recalls his role as the studio engineer and sound mixer:

Most of the album was recorded live. I didn’t direct what they did at all, I was just there to record it. Although, I do remember there were one or two overdubs—Kaigal-ool did a vocal overdub on the track called ‘Mezhegei,’ as far as I remember. There was a little bit of reverb and possibly a little bit of delay [added] as well. There was one track where Kaigal-ool was asking for some

<sup>47</sup> Aksenov 1964: 82-83; my transnotation and translation. “Mezhegei” was collected and transcribed by Saryg-ool et al. (1947: 13-14), Munzuk et al. (1956: 9), and Aksenov (1964: 82-83). See Chapter 1.

<sup>48</sup> Kuvezin takes credit for this idea in *Folk Roots Magazine* (Lusk, 2000, vol. 21, no. 7-8). In one review of *60 Horses in My Herd*, a critic wrote of the musical accompaniment that the “persistent, Velvet Underground-like drone-strum guitar is a highlight” (Steven Rosen, “CDs from around the world carry emotional power,” *Denver Post*, 4 February 1994).

<sup>49</sup> For an example of Ak-ool’s *igil*-playing style, see *Melodii Tuvvy* (1968, Melodiya). See also online recordings made by Alan Lomax in 1964 from radio archives in Moscow: <http://research.culturalequity.org/home-audio.jsp>.

distant reverb like it's coming off a distant mountain or something like that. But it wasn't overdone.<sup>50</sup>

In sum, Huun-Huur-Tu's *60 Horses in My Herd* created an innovative aesthetic model for presenting the "old songs and tunes" of Tuvan music, one that stood in sharp contrast to the Soviet folkloric aesthetic. Building on Ted Levin's work in the late 1980s,<sup>51</sup> Huun-Huur-Tu's new model worked to frame throat-singing in a fresh way—one that was more evocative of the "ancientness" of the Inner Asian steppe from which Tuvan music is said to have originated. Goronwi, for one, found his experience with Huun-Huur-Tu transformative:

Those guys were really special. After hearing them record, I just thought, 'Wow! This is some of the best stuff I've ever heard in my life! I've always been involved in quite left-field music and then suddenly I'm presented with this traditional music. I remember thinking, this is like listening to music from Mars! It was not like anything I'd ever heard before. I like ancient, I like edgy and this was both. And to this day, it's the most extraordinary sudden exposure to something unusual and something hitherto unknown—I mean, really special.'<sup>52</sup>

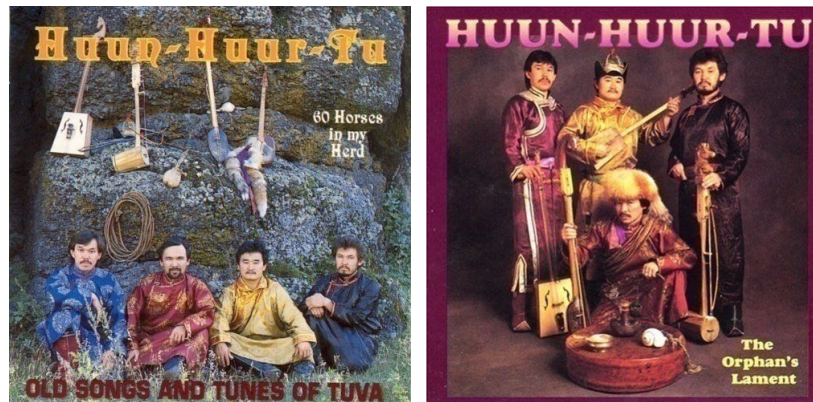


Figure 3.12. Cover art from Huun-Huur-Tu's first two solo albums released on the Shanachie record label: *60 Horses in my Herd: Old Songs and Tunes of Tuva* (1993) and *The Orphan's Lament* (1994); both albums produced by Alexander Bapa and executive produced by Ted Levin.<sup>53</sup>

#### THE NEOTRADITIONAL-GROOVE AESTHETIC

By 1993, Huun-Huur-Tu had settled firmly into being an ensemble, but only after Kuvezin had parted ways based on creative differences. "I left Huun-Huur-Tu because I wanted more experimentation," Kuvezin described in an interview. "I wanted more expression, more rock n' roll. They didn't want this energy."<sup>54</sup> Anatolii Kuular, who had been part of the Tuva

<sup>50</sup> Trevor Goronwi, personal Skype interview, 11 April 2014. In a review of *60 Horses* in *The Musical Times*, Jonathan Stock writes: "[t]he quartet of Tuvan performers have assembled folk material and perform it in an innovative ensemble context. For instance, the song 'Mezhegei' combines various singing styles—throaty, growling bass reaching down to G below the bass stave and distant tenor—with the sounds of the guitar, bells and *igil* traditional fiddle" (Stock 1994: 301).

<sup>51</sup> Levin was an executive producer of Huun-Huur-Tu's first three albums; his influence is discussed further below.

<sup>52</sup> Trevor Goronwi, personal Skype interview, 11 April 2014.

<sup>53</sup> Photo courtesy of Shanachie Record Label, via personal communication, 11 August 2014.

<sup>54</sup> Albert Kuvezin, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 4 June 2012.

Ensemble and had toured the United States with Kaigal-ool Xovalyg as part of the Throat Singers of Tuva trio (1992-93), was invited to join Huun-Huur-Tu in Kuvezin's absence. Throughout their subsequent tours and a studio recording that produced their second album, *The Orphan's Lament* (1994), Huun-Huur-Tu began to expand their aesthetic model in new directions that marked an even greater departure from Soviet folkloric aesthetics (see Figure 3.12). This new direction can be called a "neotraditional-groove aesthetic." Two different arrangements of the same Tuvan song, "Eerbek-Aksy," show how this aesthetic took shape in contrast to the Soviet folkloric model.

That model is evident in a performance by the Tuva Ensemble. Following its European tours in the early 1990s, the Tuva Ensemble fractured. Its star performer, Gennadi Tumat, took the opportunity to form a new group, Ensemble Ay-Kherel. In the Netherlands in 1995, Ay-Kherel worked with Bernard Kleikamp to record *Gennadi Tumat: My Homeland Ovür* (2000, PAN records). One of the album's songs is "Eerbek-Aksy," and was recorded by several of Ay-Kherel's members, including Gennadi Tumat (*doshpuluur*, *xöömei*), Nadezhda Kuular (vocals), and Stanislav Danmaa (*limbi*). The group's approach is consistent with a Soviet folkloric aesthetic—a strict rhythm within an unaccented metrical structure, subdivided mechanically at the level of the eighth note by the *doshpuluur* (see Figure 3.13). Equally typical of the Soviet-era style is the performance of the melody with a unison group sound (Kuular using her idiosyncratic vibrato) and with the *limbi* following in line with the melody (see Figure 3.13).

Huun-Huur-Tu also recorded an arrangement of "Eerbek-Aksy" on *The Orphan's Lament* (1994). This arrangement, in contrast to Ay-Kherel's version, employs a more hybridized and "groove-ful" aesthetic. Most significant is Sayan Bapa's technique of playing his *doshpuluur* using a syncopated rhythm, which, while decelerated, has a much stronger metrical drive created by accenting beats one and three. Moreover, Sayan Bapa uses a finger-plucking technique on metrical pulsations of strong and syncopated weak beats that conveys the sonic image of a horse's gentle and undulating trot. As Sayan Bapa described in a published interview, his *doshpuluur*-playing is "syncopated, yes, but like a horse galloping .... Swing gets around the world, you know. It didn't just come from Africa."<sup>55</sup> Alongside the *doshpuluur* riffs, Sasha Bapa plays on the *syngyrgash* bells and *tungur* drum in the recording. Huun-Huur-Tu had created another new aesthetic: the neotraditional-groove aesthetic (see Listening Excerpt #5 in Appendix III).

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<sup>55</sup> Ruffin Prevost, "Central Asian throat singers bring their ancient art to region," *Billings Gazette*, 17 October 2007.



Figure 3.13. Melody and lyrics for the Tuvan song “Eerbek-Aksy” (top staff) with comparison of metric subdivisions used in recorded performances by Ay-Kherel (middle staff) and Huun-Huur-Tu (bottom staff). See Listening Excerpt #5 in Appendix III.<sup>56</sup>

*Eerbek-Aksyn Saiyr-Aksyn*  
*Een kurug kagbaan-na men*  
*Erge kara ezbikeide*  
*Eeledip kaggan-na men*

Eerbek-Aksy and Saiyr-Aksy [Rivers]  
 I did not leave them deserted and empty  
 I left, letting my beloved  
 Manage the household

*Oorargan Saiyr-Aksyn*  
*Onga kurug kagbaan-na men*  
*Ortun kara kulugurnu*  
*Olurtup-la kaggan-na men*

Saiyr-Aksy with deep ravines  
 I did not leave it forever  
 I left, letting my true love  
 Dwell there

As Huun-Huur-Tu developed their newest aesthetic in further projects, they added *kengirgei* drum sounds as well as a *duyuglar*—a pair of horse hooves that are struck together to evoke the sounds of a trotting horse (see Figure 3.14). These new sounds appear in Huun-Huur-Tu’s updated rendition of “Eerbek-Aksy,” which they released on a more recent album, *Ancestors’ Call* (2010, World Village). Meanwhile, in the liner notes to their third album, *If I’d Been Born an Eagle* (1997), Huun-Huur-Tu wrote about their emerging neotraditional-groove aesthetic:

<sup>56</sup> Aksenov 1964: 113, where the song is called “Een Kurug Kagbaan-na Men;” my transnotation and translation. “Eerbek-Aksy” is based on an old Tuvan folk song called “Een Kurug Kagbaan-na Men,” which was collected and transcribed by Saryg-ool et al. (1947: 39), Munzuk et al. (1956: 50), and Aksenov (1964: 113). Ay-Kherel performance is from track #11 on *Gennadi Tumat: My Homeland Ovür* (2000, PAN records); Huun-Huur-Tu performance is from track #4 on the *Orphan’s Lament* (1994, Shanachie).

It's impossible that people who spend so much time around horses—one of the most rhythmic animals alive—would not have absorbed their sense of rhythm. Horses have a harmonic rhythm. People who ride horses absorb the horse's rhythm physically into their bodies, and this rhythm is reflected in music. It's not like a metronome, that is, it's not stable; rather, it's alive, and the rhythms change, the lengths of the phrases change. The music is continuous, but it doesn't break down into square phrases. Melodies can be elongated—they're a function of the length of a singer's breath. You can hold notes for as long as your intuition tells you they should be held. The phrase lengths of our melodies are based on a singer's intuition, not on preserving a strict metric sense in the music. For example, the way we use the *doshpuluur* hasn't been heard recently in Tuvan music. It's been used mainly as an accompaniment to throat-singing. But the *doshpuluur* must have once been played the way we're doing it—that is, as if representing a horse. It could have been used rhythmically, or as a solo instrument, or even harmonically. We're trying to recover a sense of what might have been.<sup>57</sup>



Figure 3.14. Tuvan *doshpuluur* (plucked lute), *kengirge* drum, and *duyuglar* (horses' hooves).<sup>58</sup>

Albert Kuvezin observes that the effect of the *doshpuluur* riffs, and of Huun-Huur-Tu's aesthetic more generally, on how people perceive post-Soviet Tuvan music has been significant. "Many of the rhythms and grooves we came up with ourselves in the studio ... For example, the riffs we played on the *doshpuluur*, people usually say how much it sounds 'traditional', but how could it be 'traditional'? It was quasi-popular! It's contemporary!"<sup>59</sup> In a published interview,

<sup>57</sup> Liner notes: *If I'd Been Born an Eagle*, 1997: 3.

<sup>58</sup> Photo from Alash Ensemble website, <http://www.alashensemble.com>.

<sup>59</sup> Albert Kuvezin, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 4 June 2012.



Kuvezin also claimed: “We came up with this style—this aesthetic, and now today this is how everyone plays [in Tuva]!”<sup>60</sup> Although Kuvezin had already parted ways with Huun-Huur-Tu by the time they developed their neotraditional-groove aesthetic, his observations about its impact were prescient; Huun-Huur-Tu’s nomadic minimalism has since come to dominate Tuvan music as it is played in Tuva and around the globe.

PART III

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CIRCULATING NOMADIC MINIMALISM

Between 1992 and 1999, Huun-Huur-Tu released four solo albums on the Shanachie label. Huun-Huur-Tu’s membership changed repeatedly over this period, which significantly shaped their aesthetic approaches (see Figure 3.15).<sup>61</sup> For example, after Kuvezin left the group following the release of *60 Horses in My Herd*, and Sasha Bapa after *The Orphan’s Lament*, new member Alexei Saryglar helped solidify Huun-Huur-Tu’s new rhythmic energy. Likewise, Andrei Mongush and Radik Tyulyush were influential in invigorating the ensemble with younger talent.

**Huun-Huur-Tu Ensemble Membership, 1992-2014**

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005-2014
Kaigal-ool Xovalyg	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Sayan Bapa	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Alexander Bapa	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Albert Kuvezin	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Anatoli Kuular	□	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	□
Alexei Saryglar	□	□	□	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Andrei Mongush	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	■	■	□
Radik Tyulyush	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	■

**Figure 3.15.** A chart representing the changes in membership of the Huun-Huur-Tu quartet from 1992-2014 (above) and a list of Huun-Huur-Tu’s first four albums (below). Instrumental roles vary, but a typical arrangement would include Xovalyg on *igil*, Sayan Bapa on *doshpuluur* or guitar, Saryglar on *kengirge* or *duyuglar*, and Tyulyush on *byzaanchy* or *sboor* (end-blown flute).<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Folk Roots Magazine* (Lusk, 2000, vol. 21, no. 7-8).

<sup>61</sup> Huun-Huur-Tu’s aesthetics were also shaped by their tours in the United States, where there was a conscious preference placed on an academic chamber music performance model (Ralph Leighton, personal interview, Tiburon, California, 17 April 2014).

<sup>62</sup> Data assembled from album liner notes, the ensemble’s website, and other sources representing approximate time frames of transition in group membership. See, for example, Levin 2006, Karelina 2009, and the liner notes from Huun-Huur-Tu’s albums (1993, 1994, 1997, 1999).

<u>Years</u>	<u>Album title (label)</u>	<u>Producers</u>
1993	<i>60 Horses in My Herd</i> (Shanachie)	Sasha Bapa, T. Levin
1994	<i>The Orphan's Lament</i> (Shanachie)	Sasha Bapa, T. Levin
1997	<i>If I'd Been Born an Eagle</i> (Shanachie)	Sayan Bapa, T. Levin
1999	<i>Where Young Grass Grows</i> (Shanachie)	Sayan Bapa, Niall Macaullay

There was also someone behind the scenes who was helping shape Huun-Huur-Tu's music: Ted Levin. Levin was an executive producer of Huun-Huur-Tu's first three albums, during the period when Huun-Huur-Tu's aesthetics were first taking shape. He was also the author of the albums' ethnomusicologically-informed liner notes, which were organized as interviews and conversations with the band members about their aesthetic choices. Levin's involvement, though, should not be taken as evidence of direct control over Huun-Huur-Tu's music; Huun-Huur-Tu embraced Levin's effort to "de-Sovietize" Tuvan music, but their music was their own. Levin's influence likely was more subtle; in his liner notes, for instance, he gave a poetic voice to Huun-Huur-Tu's imaginative re-formulation of Tuvan history from the perspective of nomads. Levin's liner notes were significant for another reason: they brought to light and legitimized the project of re-asserting and sharing traditions. Levin helped write a narrative in which Huun-Huur-Tu's work was not a mere exotic curiosity, but rather a worthy and valuable contribution to the global soundscape. "At the same time that the members of Huun-Huur-Tu have devoted themselves to learning old songs and tunes," Levin wrote in 1993, "their performances reflect the values of innovation as much as tradition" (liner notes, 1993: 3).

During the 1990s, Huun-Huur-Tu received generally positive reviews by international critics and audiences. Listeners found their music relatable and honest, but also just weird enough to still be exotic; one reviewer referenced the "stillness and natural rhythms of old Tuvan music" (van Tongeren 2002: 107), while another said that Huun-Huur-Tu created a sound that "manages to sound utterly 'foreign' yet accessible to audiences" (Winders 1997: 40-41). Huun-Huur-Tu's music also was perceived as providing a glimpse into the world of nomads. Jon Sobel of *Blogcritics Magazine* said that the musicians managed to "emulate biological rhythms in song: heartbeats, breathing, a brain drifting in dreamland, and not least (for a nomadic people), a horse's trot."<sup>63</sup> Huun-Huur-Tu's music, the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* crowed, "will ride into your brain and leave hoof-prints up and down your spine."<sup>64</sup> As popular music scholar Jonathan Stock writes, Huun-Huur-Tu is an example of the "progressive preservation of indigenous musical traditions through the international market" (Stock 1994: 301).

Huun-Huur-Tu's international success gave rise to other Tuvan ensembles and inspired them to emulate (or at least draw from) the group's innovative approaches. Ensemble Chirgilchin, for example, was founded by Sasha Bapa in 1996 after he left Huun-Huur-Tu in

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<sup>63</sup> Sobel, *Blogcritics Magazine*, 15 January 2014, available at <http://blogcritics.org/huun-huur-tu-live/>.

<sup>64</sup> The *San Francisco Bay Guardian's* critical reception of Huun-Huur-Tu is listed on the back of the group's 1994, 1997, and 1999 albums.

1994.<sup>65</sup> Chirgilchin (in Tuva, “mirage” or “miracle”) was comprised of younger musicians—Aldar Tamdyn, Mongun-ool Ondar, and Aidysmaa (and later, Igor) Koshkendey—and released their first album, *The Wolf and the Kid*, in 1996 (Shanachie). The tracks “Homudal” and “Konturei” feature an aesthetic inspired by Huun-Huur-Tu’s experimental-ambient approach—unsurprising given that they were both arranged by Sasha Bapa and, in the case of “Konturei,” accompanied by Bapa on guitar. Likewise, Ensemble Alash, which was founded by Kongar-ool Ondar<sup>66</sup> and included a number of his students, also emulated Huun-Huur-Tu aesthetic of neotraditional groove aesthetic on their first album, *Alash* (2007). As Albert Kuvezin later explained:

Through these early recordings, Huun-Huur-Tu started a renaissance for Tuva music. [My band] Yat-Kha did this also, but we had fewer followers. And this ‘traditional’ sound spread beyond Tuva—to Xakassia, Altai, and to different regions of Siberia and Mongolia. Now it’s everywhere. In Bashkortostan, there is a group that sings rock and does *uzlyau* [throat-singing], also now in Sakha-Yakutia, in Kalmykia.<sup>67</sup>

Sasha Bapa’s California-based record label and concert tour agency, Pure Nature Music, was influential in forming and shaping a number of these world music projects across Siberia and Central Asia. Those groups have included the Xakas group Sabjilar, the Altai group Aiaim, the Kyrgyz group Ordo Sakhna, and the Kamchatkan group ELVEL.<sup>68</sup> In addition, Sasha Bapa has organized throat-singing camps, in conjunction with Chirgilchin, which took place over multiple years in California in the mid-2000s.<sup>69</sup>

Huun-Huur-Tu’s emergence, aesthetic innovations, and international success signify several important things. First, throughout Huun-Huur-Tu’s more than twenty-year career, they have forged and normalized innovative aesthetic approaches to Tuva music. These experimental-ambient and neotraditional-groove approaches were fashioned mostly in the group’s first four albums, and reflect the influences and imaginative vision of its original members. There is the ambient sound of minimalist experimental rock (Albert Kuvezin and Sasha Bapa); the decelerated tempo and simplified sound (Kaigal-ool’s influence on *igil*-playing styles of Ak-ool Kara-Sal); the “groovification” of the *doshpuluur* (Sayan Bapa); and the addition of unconventional Tuva percussion instruments and arrangements (Sasha Bapa). These

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<sup>65</sup> Ralph Leighton cited Sasha Bapa’s parting with Huun-Huur-Tu as being caused by irreconcilable creative differences with the other members of the ensemble (Leighton, personal communication, May 2014).

<sup>66</sup> During the second tour of the Throat Singers of Tuva in the United States (1993), there was a bifurcation among the musicians that led to Huun-Huur-Tu forming without Kongar-ool Ondar. Kongar-ool returned to Tuva and launched a throat-singing training program for youth at the Republic Arts High School in Kyzyl (Ralph Leighton, personal communication, 17 April 2014). Kongar-ool toured again in the United States later in 1993 along with one his students, Bady-Dorzhu Ondar (b. 1984), and they gave numerous performances together, including one on the Chevy Chase Show (3 October 1993). Kongar-ool’s throat-singing performances were more consistent with the Tuva Ensemble aesthetic and theatrical showmanship of Gennadi Tumat (see Chapter 2). See Chapter 5 for a discussion of Kongar-ool’s influence in post-Soviet Tuva music education. See also Süzükei 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Albert Kuvezin, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 4 June 2012.

<sup>68</sup> See Sabjilar’s album *Syr chome* (1999) and Aiaim’s album *My Altay* (1999), both produced by Sasha Bapa on the Pure Nature Music label (previously available on [www.purenaturemusic.com](http://www.purenaturemusic.com); last visited 18 August 2010, website now defunct); Sasha Bapa, personal communication, 18 August 2010.

<sup>69</sup> Aldar Tamdyn, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 27 July 2011; see also Chapter 5.

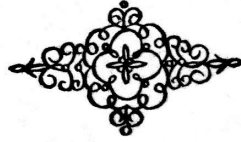
aesthetics are evident not only in their music, but also in their liner notes and stage talk. And while Huun-Huur-Tu's repertoire has remained fairly consistent, the group has subtly altered their interpretations over time and experimented with various new interpretations, particularly as new members come and old ones leave.

Second, underlying Huun-Huur-Tu's success is a tacit approval of their musical aesthetics. Those aesthetics are best understood as a conscious rejection of the Soviet folkloric model. On the one hand, the group's creative quest "to recover a sense of what might have been" (liner notes, *If I had been born an Eagle*, 1997), involved forging an aesthetic sensibility that was more experimental and avant-garde than their representation would suggest. On the other hand, Huun-Huur-Tu, with the inestimable help of ethnographer, musicologist, and executive producer Ted Levin, gave agency to their forebears; they remembered, recovered, and reinvigorated songs of the Tuvan past. The group's neotraditional innovation has worked to codify an aesthetic approach to Tuvan music that is fresh while being (or rightly perceived as being) traditional, ancient, and nomadic.

Third, Huun-Huur-Tu had great success in the 1990s and 2000s as a post-Soviet Tuvan world music ensemble, and as an influence for a younger generation of Tuvan musicians and ensembles. The large-scale Tuva Ensemble model has shrunk in popularity over the past 20 years while Huun-Huur-Tu's aesthetic approaches have become popular, even expected. To be sure, many vestiges of the Soviet folkloric aesthetic are alive and popular in Tuva today, particularly in the performances of the Tuvan National Orchestra, whose members include many of the musicians in Tuvan traveling ensembles. But for international audiences, Huun-Huur-Tu's sound has become synonymous with post-Soviet Tuvan music, and in Tuva, it has become accepted as an appropriate, agreeable way of presenting Tuvan traditional music.

More than anything, Huun-Huur-Tu's "neotraditional nomadic minimalism" is a musical language for voicing a revised narrative for post-Soviet Tuvan music. That narrative's galloping rhythms and evocative soundscapes of birds and nature on the open steppe suggest not just a *type* of music-making, but *a way of being in the world*. Chapters 4 and 5 examine how the nomadic sensibility of Huun-Huur-Tu's music continues to be expressed and stabilized in post-Soviet Tuvan music, by local and international participants.

CHAPTER FOUR



Recovering Nomadic Sensibility:  
History, Memory, and Landscape in Post-Soviet Tuva

*It is the nomads ... who remain an abstraction, an Idea, something real  
and nonfactual.*  
—Gilles Deleuze<sup>1</sup>

*For understanding all that is connected with nomadic culture, it is  
important to look through the prism of a resident of a yurt. An urbanite  
raised within four walls sees the world differently; he cannot hear the  
sounds of nature as a nomad can in his yurt.*  
—Valentina Süzükei<sup>2</sup>

*Maybe from here [in Tuva], far from civilization, large  
noisy cities and main roads, it is possible to sense  
the breath of nature and history—to stop time and motion,  
looking on ancient mounds and majestic rocks to  
track the development of the Earth and Human culture.*  
—Albert Kuvezin<sup>3</sup>

*Do not forget the old melodies! You must stitch them into your insides.*  
—Kaigal-ool Xovalyg<sup>4</sup>

By this point it should be clear that *xöömei*, and Tuvan music generally, have a long and winding history. In Chapter 1, we saw how ethnography by outsiders and racist policies in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early and mid-twentieth centuries framed *xöömei* as nomadic and backward, and institutionalized it as a genre of Tuvan national folk music. Chapter 2 helped us

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987: 420.

<sup>2</sup> Lamazhaa 2009: 521.

<sup>3</sup> Yat-Kha, liner notes, *Dalai Beldiri*, 1999: 2.

<sup>4</sup> Kaigal-ool Xovalyg, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 28 August 2011.

to understand that, between the 1960s and the 1980s, *xöömei* singers were generally perceived as uncultured amateurs whose dispositions needed to be reshaped in order to become proper Tuvan folk musicians and to perform Soviet-style nomadic folklorism. Chapter 3 explored how, in the 1980s and 1990s, global desires and expectations reshaped this nomadic folklorism into a new aesthetic—global nomadic minimalism.

These chapters provide the foundation for fully understanding post-Soviet Tuvan music. But they are just that—a foundation. Like all things cultural and musical, post-Soviet Tuvan music, including *xöömei* singing, is a complex product of many interwoven threads. Relying heavily on my own ethnographic work in Tuva, this chapter seeks to tease out a few more threads, to elaborate more fully what post-Soviet Tuvan music is and how it got to be that way.

In particular, this chapter shows that nomadic sensibility has not just emerged in international Tuvan music, in the work of groups like Huun-Huur-Tu, but also in the traditional music scene in places like Kyzyl, Tuva's capital city and even in the countryside. More importantly, this chapter examines *why* nomadic sensibility has emerged as a revitalized expression for *xöömei* singing in the post-Soviet era. I argue that, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, various Tuvan and non-Tuvan actors have drawn selectively on historical documents, cultural memory, and natural environments in order to revitalize Tuvan musical practices, especially *xöömei*. In some senses, this revitalization has been a post-colonial project with a nationalist twist—a re-interpretation of Tuvan people's historic "backwardness" in ethnographic literature and a pushback against their perceived amateurism in Soviet-era folk music. But the revitalization of *xöömei* in the post-Soviet era has also been an effort to make sense of and celebrate Tuva's complex and rich cultural history for its own sake. Traditional Tuvan expressive practices have never fit any simple definition of "music," for at least two reasons. First, because Tuva is uniquely located in relation to several distinctive socio-cultural areas, its people historically have drawn on the diverse practices of Siberian forest peoples (animal-style "intoned culture" and shamanism), Turkic groups (drone-based epics in deep guttural timbre), and Mongols (Buddhist ritual, pentatonic melodies). Second, traditional Tuvan expressive practices have been, and continue to be, intimately related to a nomadic herder's deep connection to Tuva's natural landscapes—steppe, desert, mountains, and taiga—and cultural-economic activities—herding sheep, reindeer, cows, camels, and yaks. For post-Soviet Tuvan musicians, revitalizing *xöömei* means recovering this interregional, nomadic experience through inventive acts of cultural memory. The result is that *xöömeizhi* have come to express an urbanized, even cosmopolitan, nomadic sensibility in their contemporary music-making practices.

This chapter has four parts. Part I examines Tuva's post-Soviet political instability and brief nationalist movement as an impetus for revitalizing indigenous cultural practices and belief systems. These activities happened alongside the surge in global interest in Tuvan musical culture and throat-signing. Part II looks at the post-Soviet recuperation of nomadic experience during the Tannu Tuva era in one small village in Western Tuva. Part III examines the recovery of older "intoned" culture from rural economic lifestyles whose sonic expression depends on natural environments, using my own ethnographic work alongside various models for

understanding the sound of Tuvan music. Finally, Part IV discusses how the act of partaking of those rural lifestyles and natural environments—having a deep connection to them—has served as the foundation for revitalizing a nomadic sensibility that continues to inform traditional Tuvan music-making activities.

## PART I

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### HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

For many Tuvan people, the reforms of *Perestroika* and subsequent political reorganization after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 set the stage for re-evaluating Tuvan national and cultural identity. Musicians and scholars have focused on figuring out what was “lost” during the Soviet era and then revitalizing traditional cultural practices and beliefs, including *xöömei*, by way of texts and sound recordings previously collected by folklorists and field research in rural areas of Tuva. The result of these efforts has been an imaginative reconstruction of Tuvan musical practices, one that draws on cultural memory, Tuva’s natural landscapes, and those landscapes’ semiotic animation in Tuvan traditional cosmology.

A brief period of Tuvan political nationalism and interethnic violence occurred between 1990 and 1992, during Tuva’s political reorganization as a post-Soviet Republic within the Russian Federation.<sup>5</sup> Tuvans’ desire to secede from Russia eased after Tuva’s constitution was signed in 1993, which declared Tuva to be a sovereign democratized state within the Russian Federation (and retained Tuva’s right of secession). With the easing of secessionist tensions, focus turned to revitalizing Tuvan national culture and beliefs as a politically “safe” endeavor. Particular attention was paid to “shamanism, the unique Tuvan musical practice of ‘throat singing,’ and Tuvan language revival” (Giuliano 2011: 161).

Shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism (Lamaism) have a long history in Tuva. Shamanism was the original religion in Tuva when Tibetan Buddhism was imported during the thirteenth century rule of Genghis Khan. Buddhism became more popular during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the first temples, or *xüree*, were built and a Buddhist clergy was formed (Walters 2001: 23-25). Beginning in the late 1920s, interest and practice in these and other indigenous belief systems were increasingly suppressed (Van Deusen 2004: 3-12). Conducting fieldwork in Tuva right after the fall of the Soviet Union, Mark van Tongeren wrote, “[i]n 1993 most Tuvans were still nervous talking about shamanism openly, but during my second visit, two years later, the revival of shamanism was as strong as that of *khöömei*” (van Tongeren 2002: 80-81). One reason for this change was the visit to Tuva in 1992 by the His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, which for many Tuvan people was a welcome invitation to articulate their post-Soviet religious identity as Buddhist peoples. Another reason was global

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<sup>5</sup> Beginning in the late 1980s, a rise in nationalist fervor in Tuva became linked with perceived economic disenfranchisement of Tuvan people as compared with Russians living in the Tuva Republic (Giuliano 2006: 281). This fervor resulted in a period of interethnic violence that peaked between 1990 and 1992 (Anaiban 1999: 74) and caused an estimated ten thousand Russians to emigrate from Tuva (Giuliano 2006: 303).

synergy; the re-emergence of Buddhism and shamanism in Tuva during the early 1990s was correlated with a renewed interest in indigenous epistemologies more generally (Lindquist 2005). The syncretism of Buddhism with indigenous varieties of Siberian shamanism has had a strong hand in shaping Tuva's post-Soviet heterogeneous religious affiliations.

Along with renewed national interest in Buddhism, shamanism, and the role of *xöömei* in Tuvan culture came anxieties about how to manage Tuva's national cultural emblems in the global economy. Renewed interest in traditional cultural practices and belief systems emerged at the same time that international interest in throat-singing was exploding (see Chapter 3). This confluence prompted both celebratory and anxious discourses about Tuva's sudden entrance into the global world music marketplace. *Xöömei* was the proud product of Tuva—Sherig-ool Oorzhak, the Tuva Autonomous Republic's first president, viewed *xöömei* as the “eighth wonder of the world” (Higgins 1995)—but what exactly was *xöömei*? To maintain control over the answer to that question, President Oorzhak, supported by a number of cultural officials,<sup>6</sup> advocated for licensing all Tuvan *xöömeizhi* who traveled abroad to perform for international audiences:

They should be licensed .... They should be tested so that only high-quality groups, real professionals not weak performers, travel abroad .... America does not send low quality goods out to us. They don't supply the world with poor quality merchandise. The same holds for bad actors and singers. They do not let them out of the country. Why should we?<sup>7</sup>

This call for control was reinforced by the establishment of events and institutions in Tuva that showcased and indirectly regulated *xöömei*. In 1992, for example, Tuvan musicologist Zoya K. Kyrgys organized the first International *Xöömei* Symposium in Kyzyl with the support of Tuva's Ministry of Culture and UNESCO. The Symposium included participants from Austria, Holland, Germany, Sweden, Mongolia, and Japan, and from other regions within the Russian Federation.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, in 1993 the Scientific Center “*Xöömei*” was founded, with Kyrgys as the director. In a newspaper article in the *Tuvinskaya Pravda* published that same year, Larisa S. Artynam, another of the Scientific Center's organizers, called for even stricter regulation of Tuvan *xöömeizhi* who travel abroad:

The regional departments of culture have for many years ... worked to reconstruct the classical styles of *sygyt* and *xöömei*. This has happened through the realization of high quality concerts, contests, and festivals as well as the founding and creation of folkloric collectives. Many years of work should not be allowed to ‘sail away!’ .... Every foreign departure of a *xöömei* performer must be managed and organized through the Ministry of Culture. This should not be delayed ....<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Tuvan musicologist Zoya Kyrgys, for example, had previously advocated for copyrighting Tuvan throat-singing through the Tuvan Ministry of Culture (Levin 2006: 23).

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Andrew Higgins, “Tunes of war as throat singers go for the jugular,” *The Independent*, 27 April 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Sherig-ool Oorzhak, “*Ob itogax mezhdunarodnogo muzykovedcheskogo simpoziuma 'xöömei'*” [On the results of the International Musicological Symposium ‘*Xöömei*’], *Tuvinskaya Pravda*, 26 June 1992; my translation.

<sup>9</sup> L.S. Artyna, “*Xöömei dlya vsego mira [Xöömei for all the world]*,” *Tuvinskaya Pravda*, 8 April 1993; my translation.



Meanwhile, the Tuvan musicians who were traveling abroad were doing their own self-regulating and aesthetic negotiation. When musicians from the Tuva Ensemble returned from international tours in Europe and the United States, they were interviewed about their experiences engaging with foreign audiences regarding Tuvan culture. Those interviews suggest that presenting Tuvan music on world stages had brought Tuvans face-to-face with outsiders' expectations for their music, which usually centered around some idea of nomadism. The musician's interaction with global audiences also made them at least wonder whether Tuvan history had been obscured during the Soviet era. More than anything, it became clear that foreigners placed a high value on throat-singing as a distinctly Tuvan cultural form.<sup>10</sup> This interest was reinforced by the emergence of foreign affinity groups like Friends of Tuva, which gathered and disseminated historic and ethnographic knowledge about Tuvan peoples that was not easily available in Tuva (see Chapter 3). Musicians Kongar-ool Ondar, Sayan Bapa, and Kaigal-ool Xovalyg said as much after their return from their American tour in 1992-1993:

The 'Friends of Tuva' live in practically all the states. They have a genuine interest in our country, its culture, and, in particular, throat-singing .... They have literature about the Center of Asia.<sup>11</sup> For example, at the beginning of this century, the German Maenchen-Helfen visited our area and has written a book about it, rich with illustrative photographs. [Inside] there is a photograph of the Chadana *xüree* [Buddhist] (temple), of which practically nothing remains today .... There is a great opportunity here for us to learn a lot more about Tuvans of the past.<sup>12</sup>

What emerged from Tuvan cultural officials' desire to regulate *xöömei*, and from Tuvan musicians' realization that their fans expected something particular from their music, was a sort of self-searching. As Tuvan musicologist Valentina Süzükei writes, Tuva's post-Soviet national cultural renaissance offered the opportunity to reexamine the "gains and losses" from Tuva's period as part of the Soviet Union (Süzükei 2007: 392). Many scholars tried to "make ancient" the Tuvan people, and "to present them [historically] in as significant a way as possible—mention was made of golden ages, scientific achievements and famous names" (Mongush 2006: 284). One such name was General Subedei (in Tuvan, Subudai), a respected military strategist in Genghis Khan's thirteenth-century Mongol Empire, who was said to be of Tuvan origin (*ibid.*: 285).<sup>13</sup>

The problem was that historical sources about Tuvan people and their cultural practices were seen as shoddy; they exoticized Tuvan people, made untested assumptions, and imposed outside ideologies. Accordingly, the project of defining and revitalizing Tuvan cultural practices and beliefs, including *xöömei*, required a selective use of documentary history—favoring some sources over others and reading substandard sources in preferred ways. For example, historical documents that had originally used names of clans or ethnic groups—Uriankhai, Soyot, Tuba,

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, archives of Steve Sklar's online *xöömei* discussion forum from the early 1990s, available at <http://www.khoomei.com>.

<sup>11</sup> Referring to the claim by a nineteenth century traveler to have located the geographic center of Asia along the Upper Yenisei River. A monument in Tuva today stands near this location.

<sup>12</sup> Marina Kenin-Lopsan, "V Gostyx U Druzei Tuvy [Guests of Friends of Tuva]," *Tuvinskaya Pravda*, 25 March 1993; my translation.

<sup>13</sup> Subedei's name appears on many Tuvan consumer products, including a brand of vodka.

Todzha, Kyrgys—to describe peoples in and around Tuva have been read to instead support the notion of a longstanding Tuvan national identity.<sup>14</sup>

The theory of cultural memory provides an excellent model for understanding and exploring historical nomadic recovery in post-Soviet Tuva. In her influential book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), Svetlana Boym examines post-socialist Russian and Eastern European re-interpretations of various epochs in twentieth century history through the lens of cultural memory, which she defines as “shared social frameworks of individual recollection” (53). Boym makes a distinction between “national memory” and “cultural memory” that is particularly useful in understanding the recovery of nomadic history in post-Soviet Tuva. Whereas national memory “tends to make a single teleological plot out of shared everyday recollections,” cultural or collective memory “offer us mere signposts for individual reminiscences that could suggest multiple narratives. These narratives have a certain syntax (as well as a common intonation), but no single plot” (2001: 53).

The remainder of this chapter draws on Boym’s theory of cultural memory as a way to explore post-Soviet Tuvans’ selective use of ethnographic and documentary history in reconstructing a nomadic history. Boym’s theory helps us see that Tuvans’ cultural memory—their “shared social frameworks of individual recollection”—is animated by experience, imagination, and nature, and that it shifts over time and among individuals and groups. We also see that cultural memory has the power to promote and stabilize selective (and sometimes tendentious) readings of history in order to meet the needs of various groups—what Michel Foucault has referred to as a “genealogy.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, “cultural memory” can become “national memory” as it becomes accepted and stabilized. That is precisely what has happened with *xöömei* and nomadic sensibility in post-Soviet Tuva.

## PART II

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### MEMORY AND LANDSCAPE IN BAZHYNG-ALAAK

In the course of Tuvans’ efforts to recover a sense of cultural identity in the post-Soviet era, many musicians have turned their attention to the Tannu Tuva era as a reservoir of pre-Soviet Tuvan culture. To date, that era remains Tuva’s longest period of political independence (1921-1944) and so has become a symbol for national identity and pride (Mongush 2006: 289). This framing is somewhat ahistorical; Tannu Tuva was effectively a satellite state of the Soviet Union, and it was during the Tannu Tuva era that Soviet reforms of socialist modernization began to forcibly settle nomads, repress shamans, and destroy Buddhist monasteries.

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<sup>14</sup> It is perhaps ironic that “national” identities have become so prominent after the Soviet Union’s dissolution, given that nationalism was an explicit goal of Russian colonization and Soviet modernization. Even more ironic, these post-Soviet national identities have, by and large, been more powerful in forming a collective consciousness than any of the socialist or internationalist values that the Soviet Union sought to impart to its nationalized subjects. See Mongush 2006.

<sup>15</sup> See Foucault [1969] 2002, 1980.

Nonetheless, these facts have largely been overlooked to paint the Tannu Tuva era as a time when Tuvan throat-singing nomads were the citizens of an independent and prosperous sovereign nation.<sup>16</sup>

Animating these developments is cultural memory, which, in becoming national memory, has mythologized the voices and practices of re-imagined Tuvan nomads. The most striking aspects of this cultural memory, palpable in my own ethnographic work in the small village of Bazhyng-Alaak, are (1) a focus on regional variations and connections to places, and spirits of places, and (2) the centrality of these things in post-Soviet *xöömei*. Indeed, the sense of being embedded in the Tuvan countryside now inspires the music of even urban-dwelling Tuvan musicians.

#### REMEMBERING TANNU TUVA THROUGH THE ÜSTÜÜ-XÜREE FESTIVAL

Situated along the Chadaana River not far from the village of Bazhyng-Alaak in western Tuva are the remains of a famous temple called Üstüü-Xüree. It was a Buddhist monastery constructed in 1905-1907 by Tibetan lamas and Chinese builders under the authority of the Xaidyp *noyon* (see Figure 4.1). The temple was closed in the 1930s, during the initial phase of Tannu Tuva's socialist modernization, and in 1937 it was burned to the ground under the orders of the Tuvan People Republic's leader Salchak Toka. Between 1931 and 1937, the same fate befell twenty-three of Tannu Tuva's Buddhist monasteries; they were destroyed and virtually all lamas and shamans were killed or disappeared.<sup>17</sup> Shortly thereafter, a large state farm (*sovхоз*) called *Iskra* (meaning "Spark" in Russian) was built to serve the community living in the village of Bazhyng-Alaak. Gradually, the name *Iskra* took hold and is still in use today.



Figure 4.1. Üstüü-Xüree Temple, circa 1929.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The fact that the first sound recordings of nomadic *xöömei* singers were made during the Tannu Tuva era probably made this historical revisionism easier.

<sup>17</sup> There were at least twenty-eight Buddhist temples, 4800 lamas, and 725 shamans reported in Tannu Tuva's 1931 census. By 1937, there were only five temples, sixty-seven lamas, and an unknown number of shamans (Walters 2001: 24-25).

<sup>18</sup> Photo taken by German explorer Otto Maenchen-Helfen during his 1929 visit to Tannu Tuva (reproduced from Maenchen-Helfen 1992: 136); see Chapter 1.



Figure 4.2. What remains in 2011 of the original Üstüü-Xüree Temple, burned in the 1930s during the Tannu Tuva era (personal photo).



Figure 4.3. Standing a few hundred meters from the site of the original, a reconstruction of the Üstüü-Xüree Temple has been built from funds raised during the annual Üstüü-Xüree Festival of Live Music and Faith, which has been ongoing since 1999 (personal photo, 2011).

As discussed above, part of post-Soviet Tuvans' cultural memory is a renewed interest in Buddhism and shamanism. One of the best examples of this interest is the annual Üstüü-Xüree Festival of Live Music and Faith. The Festival has taken place in Chadaana, a few miles from Bazhyng-Alaak, and has been at the center of Tuva's post-Soviet renaissance of spirituality, since 1999. In 2011, I attended the Festival for the first time. On the second day, all the participants marched for three miles from the camp site, through the town of Chadaana and along the Chadaana River, to the ruins of the old Üstüü-Xüree Temple (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3). If I can take the reader back to that day ....

A marching band drones a repetitive musical passage for the entire duration of the march. Monks and shamans join in the ceremony. I am marching next to a throat-singer from Ukraine, a young woman from the Republic of Altai, a photographer from France, and a musician from Colombia, all of us international guests in Tuva for the Festival. After a few hours we finally arrive at the site of the old Üstüü-Xüree temple and walk around it three times. I take a short break and sit watching the beautiful Dugai Mountains in the distance. I turn around and, out of nowhere, Kaigal-ool Xovalyg—People's *Xöömeizhi* of the Tuva Republic and member of Huun-Huur-Tu (see Figure 4.4)—is walking towards me in an open meadow. Because I took throat-

singing lessons with Kaigal-ool before, and saw him perform in numerous international venues in the Russia and the United States, he recognizes me. We have a short conversation in Russian, during which I ask Kaigal-ool how it was to be back in the area where he grew up. He answers:

I was born here in the Dzun-Xemchik region, in the nearby village of Iskra [Bazhyng-Alaak]. As a child, my life was very closely connected to nature. This influenced my desire to sing and play music. When I was growing up, my parents were leading a settled life, but my ancestors, my grandparents, they were nomadic. But after the eighth class, my mother and I started herding and we moved to our nomadic relatives out in the countryside. And when I turned 19, I became a professional musician without having a high school diploma or any musical education, and to this day I have been playing my music.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 4.4. Kaigal-ool Xovalyg (left, on *igil*) performing an informal concert outdoors.<sup>20</sup>

Kaigal-ool was being modest. In 1978, cultural workers from Kyzyl came to Bazhyng-Alaak to hold a talent competition to find amateur artists. The workers knew what they were doing; a number of rural provinces in western Tuva are known for producing famous throat-singers, but the small village of Bazhyng-Alaak boasts a particularly high share. A popular saying goes something like, “If you ask the people of Bazhyng-Alaak, ‘How do you explain the talent of your people—is it in the grass or the water?’ they will answer, without question, ‘It is the Dugai [Mountains]!’” (Mongush 2010: 100; see Figure 4.5). Among the famous throat-singers native to Bazhyng-Alaak was Kombu Ondar (1892-1947)—the *Xöömei* Singer, as he was known, one of

<sup>19</sup> Kaigal-ool Xovalyg, personal interview, Chadaana, Tuva (Üstüü-Xüree Festival), 15 July 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Photo courtesy of Steve Sklar (Tuva, 1995), <http://khoomei.com/gal1.htm>



the first Tuvan voices to be recorded on gramophone in 1934.<sup>21</sup> Kombu Ondar, I learned, was Kaigal-ool’s great uncle (see Figure 4.6).<sup>22</sup>



Figure 4.5. The village of Bazhyng-Alaak in 2011, more commonly referred to as Iskra (“Spark”), which was the name of the main state farm in the region during the Soviet era. The foothills of the Dugai Mountains are visible in the background (personal photo).

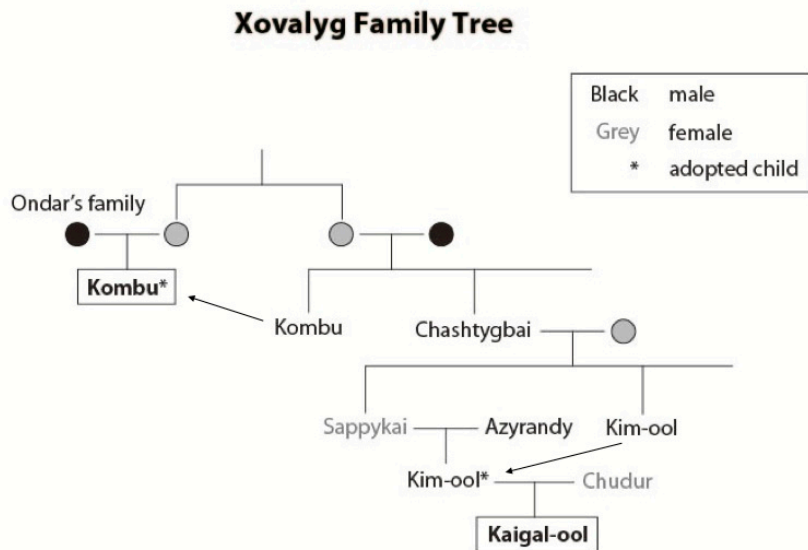


Figure 4.6. A diagram of Kaigal-ool Xovalyg’s family tree linking him to his great uncle Kombu Ondar (after Mongush, 2010). Arrows indicate adoption from the family at arrow end into the family at arrow head (note that this means Kim-ool was adopted by his older sister, and Kombu was adopted by his aunt).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Other significant figures from Bazhyng-Alaak include Mongun-ool Ondar (of ensemble Chirgilchin), Oleg Kuular (of ensemble Shu-De), as well as various shamans and cultural figures.

<sup>22</sup> Kaigal-ool explained that Kombu was the seventh child of Kaigal-ool’s great-grandfather; Kaigal-ool’s grandfather Chashtygbai was the third child. This statement contradicts Mongush 2010: 103, fn. 15, who wrote that Kombu was older than Chashtygbai (Todoriki Masahiko, personal communication, 6 April 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Todoriki Masahiko, personal communication, 6 August 2014. Figure designed by Todoriki.

When the cultural workers discovered Kaigal-ool at the 1978 talent competition, they convinced him to move to Kyzyl to join the Tuvan state ensemble Ayan, in which he had great success. One reason for that success, according to the former Tuvan Minister of Culture Matpa Xomushku, was the expression in Kaigal-ool’s music of his experiences as a herder and his connection to the Tuvan countryside. As she said to Kaigal-ool, “the fact that your face is burnished by the winds shows that you are truly a child of nature, riding freely in the expanses of Bayan-Dugai” (U. Mongush 2010: 112).

The minister of culture was on to something. Though Kaigal-ool never met his great uncle Kombu, who died in 1947 (thirteen years before Kaigal-ool was born; see Figure 4.6), the two men infused their music with a similar sensibility. Just as Kaigal-ool herded sheep in the countryside after him, Kombu herded sheep only a few miles away from the Üstüü-Xüree temple and would have lived to see its destruction in 1937. Kombu’s voice is memorialized in the 1934 recording in Moscow made “by order of the Tuvan People’s Republic” (Aksenov 1964: 3), a voice that continues to reverberate through cultural memory, just as it once did in the mountainous taiga:

*Ödek maly üngesh ottaar*  
*Öleng ottug Bayan-Dugai*  
*Aal maly üngesh ottaar*  
*Agylyg-la Dugaiymny*

Bayan-Dugai with its rich grass  
 where my herd of sheep is grazing,  
 The Dugai with its wormwood  
 where my herd of sheep is grazing<sup>24</sup>

Singing with a tense guttural voice quality, Kombu pauses after each line of the quatrain (*kozhamyk*), raises his tongue to the roof of his mouth, and sounds a long and powerful drone whose sound fractures into multiple voices (*ünner*) that wash melodiously across the landscape. Kombu’s *sygyt* (whistling throat-singing) is audible over the mountains of Bayan-Dugai from his wife’s yurt camp. Tuvan musicologist Mariata Badyrgy recorded Kombu’s nephew, Kim-ool Xovalyg (Kaigal-ool’s father; see Figure 4.6), describing Kombu’s singing in similar terms:

My parents and grandfather Kombu usually spent the autumn together in the place called Kushtug-Alaak. One evening, when we (the children) were playing nearby the yurt of grandfather Kombu, grandmother (Kombu’s wife) hastily began to warm tea and bring us into their yurt. Then I was puzzled, but only later as an adult, I recognized that my grandfather Kombu on his way home, at the foot of the mountains of Bayan-Dugai, liked to sing *sygyt*. His *sygyt* was audible in the mountains of Kuu-Dag and Ulug-Shanchi, across from the Kushtug-Alaak. It turned out that Kombu’s wife, hearing the singing of her husband, began to prepare for his arrival. The distance from Bayan-Dugai toward Kushtug-Alaak was quite large, but Kombu’s voice was surprisingly strong, clear, and resonant (Badyrgy 2008: 8-9).

The imagined connections—the cultural memory—between Kombu and Kaigal-ool are reflected in post-Soviet Tuvan newspaper accounts and biographies that reference the two

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<sup>24</sup> Kombu’s text was recounted by Maadyr-ool Mongush in Badyrgy 2008: 6-7; English translation by Arzhaana Syuryun, personal communication, 10 August 2014.

musicians' kinship and shared connection to place. Moreover, cultural memories of the singers foreground a sensibility that seems to be linked with the musicians' shared pasts as herders. For example:

*Xöömeizhi* Kombu, passing by the Bayan-Dugai on horseback, in the place of Durug, performed his *sygyt* so that his voice—resonant, piercing, delicate—could be heard even in the *aal* [yurt camp] of Dungurluga .... Kaigal-ool Xovalyg is [grand]son of his brother. As soon as you know this fact, we are reminded of the success of the great *xöömeizhi* Kombu ....<sup>25</sup>

Journalist Adygzhy Saaya wrote more directly that

Kaigal-ool Xovalyg is not only a blood relative of the famous singer, but an heir to his artistic style. One could say that the unique aspects of the Dzun-Xemchik school of *xöömei*, *sygyt* and *kargyraa* were borrowed from the voice recordings of Kombu Ondar.<sup>26</sup>

And another journalist named Baiyr-ool Mongush wrote:

The most famous *xöömeizhi* in all of Tuva must have passed on his talent to someone. It was certainly possible to foresee this. His name is Kaigal-ool and he became the successor .... His grandfather [*i.e.*, great uncle] was raised in a Tuvan yurt, and was the first to go abroad to performed *xöömei* in Moscow, where they recorded his voice. And Kaigal-ool has continued and expanded this path, charming [audiences] with astounding *xöömei* melodies for the people of the United States, Canada, England, Holland, Belgium, Sweden, and so on.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, from the mobile pastoral lifestyle of Kombu Ondar to the “hypernomadic” circuits of Kaigal-ool’s international career with Huun-Huur-Tu,<sup>28</sup> the two musicians share a cultural sensibility that is rooted in herding life, has been validated by outsiders, and stands in as the authentic expression of Tuvan *xöömei*.

It is therefore no surprise that, as I was standing next to Kaigal-ool in a field at the Üstüü-Xüree Festival of Live Music and Faith, listening to the cries of the occasional overhead hawk or rustling sounds of the wind in the taiga, I drew an instant sonic connection to the sounds of birds and wind that Huun-Huur-Tu uses regularly in its live performances. Using vocalizations, an *amyrga* (a deer horn),<sup>29</sup> and an *ediski* (a piece of birch bark played by pressing

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<sup>25</sup> As quoted in Mongush 2010: 104, Newspaper *Leninskii put'* Mergen-Xerel Mongush, 27 June 1992.

<sup>26</sup> As quoted in Mongush 2010: 104, *Tyvanyn anyyaktary* no. 43, 2 November 1993. It should be noted that Kaigal-ool developed his *xöömei* performance styles well before hearing Kombu’s recordings from 1934 (Mongush 201: 105).

<sup>27</sup> As quoted in Mongush 2010: 104; *Bayan-Dugainyng toolchurgu xöömeizhi* (Tyvalar., Kyzyl, 2005: 164); my translation.

<sup>28</sup> Drawing on Jacques Attali (2003), Levin described Huun-Huur-Tu as “hypernomads” whose global routes are determined “not by the turning of seasons and ripening of grasses but the exigencies of commerce—the release dates of recordings, the contracts of festival programmers, or the collaborative proposals of artists higher up in the pecking order of the music business” (Levin 2006: 221-2).

<sup>29</sup> “Amyrgaa—a hunting horn—was used to hunt maral (Siberian deer). An *amyrga* imitated the call of the male maral” (Kleikamp, liner notes, *Tuva: Echoes from the spirit world*, 1992: 7).



between the lips),<sup>30</sup> the musicians of Huun-Huur-Tu evoke nature and spirit sounds from Tuvan landscapes in their song “Ödugen Taiga,” on *The Orphan’s Lament* (1994).<sup>31</sup> Put another way, the group’s “experimental-ambient” sound aesthetic (see Chapter 3) serves to translate traditional herder-economic experience into an aesthetic framework that resonates with international audiences.

When I asked Kaigal-ool how he experiences his connection to Tuva’s natural environment, he referenced the taiga and the sound of local birds, and said that

[i]t doesn’t matter where I perform, be it in Tuva or abroad, I close my eyes and then I come back here to Iskra [Bazhyng-Alaak]. I imagine whatever I’m singing about .... When you are in nature, nothing forces you. You feel that you are free, quiet, and in harmony with your surroundings.<sup>32</sup>

And Kaigal-ool retains, or rather cultivates, his cultural memory of Kombu Ondar and his nomadic sensibility. In Kaigal-ool’s performances with Huun-Huur-Tu, he performs interconnections with Ondar that draw from the Tannu Tuva era and manifest as creative modes of intertextuality. For example, on the album *60 Horses in My Herd*, Kaigal-ool performs *sygyt* on a track called “Kombu,” whose liner notes refer to “the style of his great-grandfather [*i.e.*, great uncle] Kombu, known as Kombu, the *Khöömei* Singer” (1993: 5). The reference is accurate: Kaigal-ool’s melody and *sygyt*, accompanied by *doshpuluur*, in “Kombu” (track 5 at 3:02 to end) closely match Kombu’s melody and *sygyt* delivery in the 1934 recording (transcribed in Aksenov 1964: 180-182, and in Chapter 1 with a sonogram). In short, Kaigal-ool’s and Huun-Huur-Tu’s music performs a connection to Kaigal-ool’s home, great uncle, and the pre-Soviet nomadic herders of Tannu Tuva.<sup>33</sup>

#### A NOMADIC SENSIBILITY THAT GROOVES

Countless other examples in my fieldwork evince cultural memory in modern Tuvan *xöömei*, and of the connection between global and local music. One in particular, though, stands out. In 2011, before I left for Kyzyl after the Üstüü-Xüree festival, I visited Orlan Mongush, the half-brother of Kaigal-ool Xovalyg.<sup>34</sup> During a conversation in the Mongush’s living room in Chadaana, we talked about how he is proud of his half-brother’s (Kaigal-ool’s) success in bringing the sounds of Tuva to the world. Picking up his *doshpuluur*, Orlan asked if I wanted to hear an original song he wrote in 2009 and premiered at the Üstüü-Xüree festival that year. He explained:

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<sup>30</sup> “When hunting roe-deer or musk-deer, the Tuvans used a special squeaker, called *ediski*, a piece of birch bark about 4.5 by 5cm which is folded double .... The *ediski* was used to lure the animal by imitating its call” (Kleikamp 1992: 7).

<sup>31</sup> The liner notes describe “Ödugen Taiga” (track 16) as a “song from Todja, in the east of Tuva, which is covered with the ancient Siberian coniferous forest called taiga. A reindeer sings about his habitat, and about being so much at one with the taiga that its aroma is alive with him” (1994: 7).

<sup>32</sup> Kaigal-ool Xovalyg, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 16 October 2005.

<sup>33</sup> The track “Bayan-Dugai,” on *60 Horses in My Herd*, further emphasizes Kaigal-ool’s evocative lyrical mapping of song to place (see Levin 2006: 95-96). Besides Kombu Ondar as his ancestor, Kaigal-ool’s singing style also derived from his *igil* teacher, Kara-Sal Ak-ool.

<sup>34</sup> Orlan’s son Mengi Mongush is a promising young *xöömeizhi* and former student of Kongar-ool Ondar at the Republican School of the Arts in Kyzyl.

[T]his song is dedicated to a real horse named Shavydar. As a kid I used to visit my [half] brother Kaigal-ool, who, at that time, was a herder of the flock of sheep that belonged to the Iskra *sovхоз* [state farm]. Shavydar was the nickname of Kaigal-ool's horse, and this horse had many wonderful gaits and a spirit that I remember very clearly! Shavydar ["flaxen chestnut"] is a Tuvan word for the color of the horse. It is common in Tuva to name your horse based on the color of its coat, its gaits, and its character.<sup>35</sup>

Mongush began playing his *doshpuluur* and dancing the gait of Shavydar while singing *kargyraa* in between the verses (see Video Excerpt #1 in Appendix III):



Figure 4.7. Orlan Mongush playing *doshpuluur* in his home in Chadaana, Tuva, 2011 (personal photo).

Shavydar ("Flaxen Chestnut Horse") lyrics:<sup>36</sup>

*Saglangnadyr chelip-chelip  
Sayak choduun xostug bazyp  
Salgyn-syryn estengnedir  
Chelip oram, Shavydarym.*

Freely stepping in  
From a flying trot to an ambling gait,  
Bringing (with you) wind and breeze—  
Trot, my Shavydar.

*Karbap-karbap, chelip-chelip,  
Kash chüzün choruun kirip,  
Kalbak delgem xovularga  
Kazyrgy deg Shavydarym*

Cantering and cantering, trotting and trotting  
Changing between different gaits,  
In the wide and spacious steppes  
Like a whirlwind, my Shavydar.

*Chügen-sugluk shynggyradyr  
Chüldü-chüreem shimiredir*

Bits and bridle are ringing  
My heart is shuddering,

<sup>35</sup> Orlan Mongush, personal interview, Chadaana, Tuva, 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Special thanks to Victoria Peemot for providing the translation from Tuvan.

*Chügürükter arazynga*  
*Chüglüg kush deg Shavydarym.*

*Ezerteeshing munuptarga,*  
*Eres kirip kishtegilep*  
*Ezerligden Burgannygzhe*  
*Estep oram, Shavydarym.*

Among the steeds  
Like a winged bird, my Shavydar.

Saddled up and ridden  
Frisky and neighing,  
From Ezerlig to Burgannyg  
Fly, my Shavydar.

Orlan Mongush's *doshpuluur* playing fit the music well; in fact, it was reminiscent of the "neotraditional groove" aesthetic that Huun-Huur-Tu invented while touring globally in the early 1990s (see Chapter 3). As the international success of Huun-Huur-Tu began to trickle back to Tuva, some people in the countryside adopted this aesthetic as a more contemporary, even hip, way to perform old and new Tuvan songs. As previously discussed, the aesthetic was a distinct move away from the Soviet folkloric aesthetic of earlier *xöömei*, and it represented an updated aesthetic for Tuvan traditional music that was reflective of the animal "spirit" and "character" of a horse.

#### CULTURAL MEMORY AS SELECTIVE MEMORY

The cultural memories of Kaigal-ool Xovalyg and Orlan Mongush are, of course, selective ones. Post-Soviet Tuvan identity is bound up in celebrating a Soviet past as a Tuvan past, in celebrating a designation of difference that was meant to divide a region where *xöömei* is still practiced. It is not surprising that post-Soviet nationalism sees *xöömei* as uniquely Tuvan, despite the great variation of people and music in the Sayan–Altai region.<sup>37</sup> As Levin, Süzükei, and others have convincingly demonstrated, the masking of inter-regional variation and diversity has often been a cultural tool for nation building.<sup>38</sup> Underneath these tools and the borders, language, and ideology they strive to erect, there are complicated interconnections, hybrids of musical practices, and trans-boundary affinities and circulations among musicians.

Likewise, underlying post-Soviet *xöömei* is a tension between localism and nationalism. Tuvan scholar Marina Mongush writes that, "[i]n the Soviet period, emphasizing the connections with one's clan was condemned as 'localism' [*mestechkovost*] or 'narrow-minded patriotism' [*uzkolobiy patriotizm*]. Any manifestations of such loyalties were suppressed by the party organs" (2006: 277). Anti-localism remains a residue in Tuvan music; songs about building socialism and performing in folkloric ensembles are still valued, but usually in a superficial way. As the liner notes to an arrangement of the Tuvan Internationale (see Chapter 1) on Huun-Huur-Tu's album *60 Horses in My Herd* (1993) explain, "the words are Soviet, but the melody is a Tuvan folk melody. Tuvans didn't stop being Tuvans just because they lived under the Soviets" (1993: 3).

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<sup>37</sup> Indeed, there has not yet been any kind of return to pan-Mongolianism in Tuva or its surrounding areas. Nowhere is the absence of this sentiment or orientation more visible than in recent *xöömei* symposia, where Tuvans explicitly express themselves as distinct from Mongolians. By contrast, Mongolians (and Inner Mongolians, even Chinese) typically view Tuva as a former territory of their country. Andrew Colwell, personal communication, 26 June 2014. See also D'Evelyn 2014.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Levin 1996 and Süzükei 2007.

Finally, Tuva’s landscape is critical to revitalizing post-Soviet *xöömei*. But this landscape is also covered in the ruins of abandoned Soviet-era industrial projects. As a result, Tuvan people draw selectively from landscape to re-interpret their nomadic history. During a voice lesson with my teacher, Zhenia Oyun, we went out to Lake Chagytai to study *xöömei* outdoors—to imitate birds and water and wind so as to heighten my aesthetic sensibilities as a foreign student of *xöömei* (see Chapter 5). But in the middle of our lesson, we stumbled across an abandoned Soviet pioneer camp and state farm that were active when Zhenia was a kid growing up in the Tangdy region (see Figure 4.8). I realized that, as Tuvan people reclaim nomadic sensibility using landscape, they tend to tune out the Soviet-era “junk”—abandoned state farms, asbestos mines, unfinished projects—in order to re-imagine their landscape more poetically as one from bygone centuries.



**Figure 4.8.** Images of the contemporary Tuvan landscape (clockwise from top left): a children’s Pioneer Camp called “Metallurg” in the taiga near Lake Chagytai (2012); a building once part of the “Red Partisan” collective farm in Sosnovka, Tangdy Region (2012); the massive abandoned Tuva Asbestos mining project dominates the skyline above Ak-Dovurak, Barun-Xemchik Region of Western Tuva, as horses graze in foreground (2011); a Buddhist-Shamanist *ovaa* cairn marks a mountain pass (and its spirit-masters) on the road to Teeli, Bai-Taiga, 2011 (personal photos).

Even Huun-Huur-Tu engages in selective memory of landscape in its concerts, by performing with iconic animal sound imitations against projected photos of Tuva’s pristine taiga wilderness (see Figure 4.9).





**Figure 4.9.** Kaigal-ool Xovalyg performs *igiil* horsehead fiddle and *xöömei* along with his ensemble Huun-Huur-Tu, during the Naadym Festival in Kyzyl (2011); nature imagery from the Tuvan countryside is projected on a screen behind the musicians to highlight the places and sensibilities that inform their music (personal photo).

### PART III

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## RECOVERING NOMADIC SOUND

What exactly is the sound of Tuvan music? Previous chapters in this dissertation have talked about how Tuvan music has been culturally framed, and how its aesthetics have changed over time, but they have not focused on the indigenous sonic expression of Tuvan music and sound-making practices.

Remember from Chapter 1 that early ethnographers described various singing practices in the Sayan-Altai region as “neither sonorous nor clear” (Serruys 1945: 153); “filled with the melancholy of the race” (Carruthers 1914: 223); and “wheezes” (Yakovlev 1900: 114). Many historical sources about Tuvan musical culture have tended to dismiss its sonic practices as being outside settled European concepts of “music.” In her book *Tuvan Traditional Musical Instruments* (1989), Valentina Süzükei discusses sonic and musical practices of the “indigenous social-economic lifestyle” of traditional economic nomadic activities, such as herding and hunting. With the exception of the *amyrga* and *ediski* (see footnotes 29-30), she explains that these expressive practices were not accurately documented by outsider ethnographers or previous researchers (1989: 13). Süzükei posits:

Sounds produced on some of these instruments do not always have a purely musical effect. In the ‘intoned culture’ of the Tuvans, they represent the systematic formation of the sonic environment among the conditions of social-psychological activities. Intonation carries important meaning for understanding the specificity of cultural dissemination as onomatopoeisis of the natural environment: the rolling of thunder, the rustling of rain drops, the howling of wind, the babbling of a brook, the voices of domestic animals, wild beasts, birds, and so forth (1989: 13).

As a remedy, Süzükei has sought to reconstruct Tuvan instrumental musical practices and theories of sound organization. Her research has been influenced by what Siberian musicologist Yuri Sheikin has called “intoned culture” (1986: 235), as shaped by a “paleosonic system” (2002: 167) that includes expressive sounds used in animal domestication, hunting, and herding.<sup>39</sup> Süzükei explains: “I began to search for what these instruments meant to the traditional players themselves and tried to understand the way musicians thought about their instruments and the sound they produced” (as quoted in Levin 2006: 46). Süzükei has proposed a model for “timbral listening,” which American ethnomusicologist Ted Levin has expanded upon to describe “sound mimesis” and its inter-regional connections with animal-style art and music. Other scholars have devised different models, all of which are potentially useful for understanding Tuvans’ attempts to recover “intoned” culture from rural economic lifestyles whose sonic expression depends on natural environments.

#### *TIMBRAL LISTENING, INTONED CULTURE, AND ÜNNER VOICES*

After the 2011 Üstüü-Xüree Festival of Live Music and Faith, Valentina Süzükei invited me (along with another American researcher named Eliot Stone) to come with her to conduct a field interview at the home of a 73-year-old *xöömei* singer named Duktumei Dorzhuoglu Ondar (b. 1938) in Bazhyng-Alaak. Duktumei’s son Mongun-ool Ondar and his band, Chirgilchin, won the grand prize of the First International *Xöömei* Competition in 1992 (and would do so again in 2013). The band’s poster hung on the wall and somehow seemed out of place in the rural Tuvan village where we were sitting (see Figure 4.10). Knowing that younger generations of internationally-touring musicians have increasingly dominated the Tuvan post-Soviet music scene in Kyzyl, Valentina (as my Tuvan translator) consciously encouraged me to listen to how Duktumei described experiences of sound and listening growing up in Bazhyng-Alaak during the Soviet era:

When a person is placed out in nature, he learns to listen by default. If he doesn’t have talent, then he can’t sing *xöömei*. Talent mostly depends on yourself. You have to study by yourself. Before the start of collectivization, every Tuvan was a nomad. When they started to gather up those who were nomadizing, they brought them here. My family used to herd near the Xaiyrakan [sacred bear mountain]. As small children, my brothers and I listened to our relatives sing and tried to repeat it back—*xöömei*, *sygyt*, *kargyraa*. Since Ondar was our family name, everyone performed. And, of course, I would also imitate Kombu. His voice had a flow like milk! When my son [Mongun-ool] was young, I would sing lullaby (*öpei*) *xöömei* to him and rock him to sleep.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See also Levin and Süzükei 2006: 134-144.

<sup>40</sup> Duktumei Dorzhuoglu Ondar, personal interview with Valentina Süzükei, Bazhyng-Alaak, Tuva, 2011.



Figure 4.10. Duktumei Dorzhuoglu Ondar (b. 1938) at his home in Bazhyng-Alaak in 2011 (left). Posters of his son, People's *Xöömeizhi* of Tuva Mongun-ool Ondar, and his world-famous music ensemble Chirgilchin are displayed prominently on the wall in the background (right).

Valentina focused on Duktumei's use of the phrase "*saamchyp kelgen*" to describe the sound of flowing *xöömei*. "When a cow gives milk, it needs a calf to start sucking, then the milk comes faster!" she explained. "This also happens with the voice—when the intonation is good, *xöömei* is flowing like milk." She was alerting me to the fact that Tuvan language, with its links to Tuvan traditional nomadic life, was also a potent carrier for nomadic sensibility.

Similar lessons can be drawn from what Levin and Süzükei describe as *ünner* voices. Following up on his early forays into Tuvan music in the late 1980s, Levin continued to conduct fieldwork in the region for almost two decades before overhauling and expanding his initial description of throat-singing to include local modes of understanding and conceptualizing throat-singing. In 2006, he and Süzükei co-authored a monograph on Tuva called *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing: Sound, Music, and Nomadism in Tuva and Beyond*. They wrote there that, for Tuvans, "harmonics represent not harmony, either cosmic or human, but, metaphorized as 'voices,' they are the sonic embodiment of landscapes, birds, and animals along with the spirits that inhabit them" (77). These voices, or *ünner* in Tuvan language, are produced as sonic praise and offerings to spirits inhabiting topographic features of the natural environment—mountains, rivers, caves, and animals. The voices emanate from both human and non-human forces.

*Xöömeizhi* often conceptualize this "timbre-centered aesthetic" not as discrete entities of "drone" and "overtone," but rather as three inter-mingling voices emanating from a singer's body with particular spatial, bodily, and sensuous characteristics. Xunashtaar-ool Oorzhak, the most revered *xöömeizhi* of the late Soviet era and the first modern Tuvan musician to codify *xöömei* training methods at the Kyzyl College of the Arts in the early 1990s, explains:

In each of the major *khöömei* styles one sings with several voices .... For example, a master of throat-singing in the style of *khöömei* can produce three different voices, and a master-performer in the style of *sygyt* can sing in two or three voices. The types of voices are different—one voice is long and flowing; another is very wide and expansive; the third voice is felt deep in the chest (1995: 20).

Levin and Süzükei similarly describe Tuvan practices of “timbral listening”—that is, an emphasis on listening holistically to a subtly changing timbral profile of one’s natural environment, much like watching a landscape that changes dynamically throughout the day (Levin & Süzükei 2006: 47). In a conversation with Levin, Süzükei describes:

Imagine being out in the steppe—nomads didn’t have limitations on time. There were no boundaries. Performances could be extremely varied in length, from very short to very long, depending on the atmosphere and the mood of the performer .... The eternity of being was part of the herders’ sense of time (Levin 2006: 54).<sup>41</sup>

And:

When I listen to this *xöömei*, I have a physical sensation of three different levels or planes of sound that you could call lower, middle, and higher. But the planes don’t correspond to pitch height. It’s like being weightless in space, where there’s no up or down. You have to let go of our habitual tendency to hear the harmonics as forming a melody (*ibid.*: 55).

In conversations with Süzükei in which I participated, she described her memories of working with Tuvan herder-musician Idamchap Xomushku, from the mountainous Bai-Taiga region of Western Tuva, who drew on spatial and light metaphors in the visual domain to emphasize sonic analogies to volume, depth, and, I would add, sensuousness and tactility. This and other fieldwork with urban and rural musicians in Tuva provides evidence that listening is an act that involves not just ears, but also eyes, nose, tongue. According to *xöömeizhi* Aldar Tamdyn of ensemble Chirgilchin, even one’s teeth are involved (see Chapter 5).<sup>42</sup> *Xöömei* voice, then, is a vehicle for multi-sensory expression, not so much “music” as *zvukotvorchestvo* (the Russian word for “making something artistic with sound”).

#### SOUND MIMESIS

Levin has expanded upon Süzükei’s timbral listening model to describe “sound mimesis” and its inter-regional connections with animal-style art and music. This model presents another useful way for examining and understanding Tuvan *xöömei*. Following the Joint Soviet-American Musical-Ethnographic Expedition of 1987-88 (see Chapter 2), Levin took inspiration from a research observation by Eduard Alekseev, who once said that, to a foreign listener,

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<sup>41</sup> This is also true of oral epics and shamanic notions of space/time. See, for example, Humphrey 1995 and Balzer 1996, 1997.

<sup>42</sup> Aldar Tamdyn, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 27 July 2011.



[t]hroat-singing is only one part of a larger sound world ... and you'll come to understand it only when you look at this world as a whole—at the musical instruments like fiddles and jew's harps, at the articulatory features of language, at natural sounds and animals sounds—and not only in Tuva, but in surrounding parts of the Inner Asian nomadic world (Levin 2006: 23).

After returning to Tuva to conduct ethnographic fieldwork in 1995 and 1996, Levin invited Boston-based sound engineer Joel Gordon to accompany him in 1998 to undertake a recording project with the goal of re-connecting Turkic nomadic sound-making practices (including animist beliefs) with the soundscapes in which they might have been traditionally practiced in the pre-Soviet era.<sup>43</sup>

Drawing on some of the musical-theoretical ideas of Süzükei (timbral listening) and on several musicians from the Tuvan ensemble Huun-Huur-Tu (namely, Kaigal-ool Xovalyg, Sayan Bapa, and former member Anatoli Kuular) as his guides, Levin argued that the context for Tuvan traditional music had been lost somewhere during the fifty-year-long Soviet project to dismantle it and the unexpected Tuvan world music craze in the 1990s. Especially problematic was Western fascination with *xöömei* throat-singing (see Chapter 5). The goal of Levin's project, evocatively titled *Tuva, Among the Spirits: Sound, Music, and Nature in Sakha and Tuva* (1999, Smithsonian/Folkways), was to provoke a way of listening that might be closer to the “timbral listening” aesthetic advocated by Süzükei. The concept of a “Turkic sound ideal” is performed through this recording project and actively embraced by many Tuvan musicians in an effort to reclaim and revitalize indigenous epistemologies of “nomadic” sound and listening practices.

A brief aside is necessary to explain what is meant by a “Turkic sound ideal.” Süzükei and Levin have drawn from contemporary practices across a wide geo-cultural area in Inner Asia and Siberia to make a persuasive argument that there is a common proto-Turkic sound-making aesthetic.<sup>44</sup> From the sixth to the eighth centuries C.E., the Turks were united in a nomadic state known as the Turkic Khaganate, centered around the Sayan-Altai Mountain region of present day Tuva and Western Mongolia (Levin 2006: 50). As ethnic groups migrated in various directions—the Yenisei Kyrgyz south to their present-day nation (Tchoroev 2002), the Sakha further north in Siberia, and the Bashkirs west to their current home near the Ural Mountains (Russia)—they continued to practice this particular sound-making aesthetic, which Süzükei calls the “timbre-centered system” (Levin 2006: 47). Along with striking similarities in musical instruments—jew's harps, horsehair spike fiddles, end-blown flutes, and drone-based singing techniques—these groups are united by common aesthetic and perceptual strategies for listening to, creating, and manipulating timbre as part of expressive practices in sound-making. Süzükei writes:

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<sup>43</sup> Levin writes about a continuum from sound mimesis to song in Tuva, including representational practices (iconic animal imitation), aestheticized imitations of natural sounds (e.g., *xöömei*), and abstract musical forms (e.g., *uzun yr*, or long song) (Levin 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Their ideas relating to a “proto-Turkic sound world” are inspired in part by Alekseev (1986).

The [timbre-centered] system has held together for fourteen centuries. To survive this long, it has to be really solid, and backed by a musical logic, by a specific form of musical thinking. And where it doesn't survive as a living practice, it survives in cultural memory (Levin 2006: 51).

Due in part to its relative geographic isolation from the majority of sedentary cultures of Russia and Central Asia, the Sayan–Altai region (Tuva and Western Mongolia) remains one of the most active nomadic and shamanic centers in Eurasia today. Perceptual strategies in traditional sound-making practice—precisely what Süzükei claims link Bashkir and Xakas sound-making aesthetics to those of the Sayan–Altai Region—have persisted even as these regions have experienced a much higher rate of cultural Russification throughout the twentieth century, largely in the form of imported ideas of European music theory, tonality, and instrumentation, as compared with other ethnic groups.<sup>45</sup>

Levin's "sound mimesis" project tried to capture this proto-Turkic sound ideal. High fidelity recordings made by Levin and recording engineer Joel Gordon, along with the musicians of Huun-Huur-Tu (and others), were staged next to creeks or in caves in order to heighten the juxtaposition of the musicians with particular acoustic environments.<sup>46</sup> Levin and Gordon's production mediates Tuvan sound-making in order to heighten the listeners' awareness of the birds, insects, flowing water, wind, and spirits. The production also layers in and resituates traditional vocal and instrumental music that many believe was practiced in these natural settings during Tuva's nomadic past. The liner notes to *Tuva, Among the Spirits: Sound, Music, and Nature in Sakha and Tuva* explain (see Figure 4.11; see Listening Excerpt #6 in Appendix III):

When Anatoli [Kuular] jumped into the rock streambed and tried singing *borbangnadyr* with the water, we noticed that, when he produced a harmonic melody of just the right rhythm, pitch, and timbre, his vocal harmonics melded with the dancing harmonics produced by the rushing stream. Eureka! Many attempts later, Anatoli had become something of an expert in the art of listening carefully to the pitch, rhythm, and timbre of flowing water and matching his vocal harmonics to the harmonics produced by the water. For the recording on track 7, we chose a location which best represented the sound ideal of flowing water as my Tuvan companions characterized it: omnidirectional 'surround-sound' which covers a wide frequency range, yet at the same time creates discrete rhythmic, timbral, and melodic patterns. Tuvans like to hear streams that 'speak,' 'sing,' or 'converse' .... Too great a rate of flow is unappealing because it produces white noise without identifiable patterns, while stream with too little flow lack the constantly shifting sonic drama which holds a singer's interest."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Alekseev 1986, Balzer 1998–99, and Nyssen 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Gordon previously had been involved as a sound engineer and producer on a number of new music albums with Ensemble P.A.N. (1991, 1992, 1994), Stephen Drury (1991, 1994, 1998), Metamorphosen Chamber Orchestra (1995), as well as other experimental music projects.

<sup>47</sup> Liner notes: 9–11, *Tuva, Among the Spirits: Sound, Music, and Nature in Sakha and Tuva* (1999).



**Figure 4.11.** Joel Gordon (left) records Anatoli Kuular singing *borbangnadyr* next to a stream in the Tuvan countryside (from liner notes to *Tuva, Among the Spirits*, 1999: 10). Kuular was also recorded singing *xöömei* on horseback (see Listening Excerpt #6 in Appendix III).

The liner notes also minimize the role of technological mediation, and present the recorded material as (1) a way to access the natural world as nomads might have heard it and (2) a demonstration of how aesthetic representations of this world (“sound mimesis”) play out in various sound and music-making acts. Joel Gordon is quoted in the liner notes:

With the goal of presenting as vividly as possible the wonderfully permeable border between sounds of the human world, human imitation of that world, and musical constructions involving those imitations, we have used some very long, transitional crossfades—up to 30 or 40 seconds—which juxtapose two or even three elements at once (e.g. between tracks 2 and 3, 11 and 12, 12 and 13). Beyond these transitions all is as it was collected by our two mics for your two ears (1999: 13).

Similar relationships are forged in the recordings of Albert Saspyk-ool recorded near Chadaana. As Levin described later in *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing* (2006), Saspyk-ool’s animal mimesis sounds were recorded and later edited together into a sonic pastiche—“leaving out the police cars et al. and adding additional bird sounds that we’d recorded elsewhere” (2006: 85). In a review of *Tuva, Among the Spirits: Sound, Music, and Nature in Sakha and Tuva*, ethnomusicologist Keith Howard wrote:

The sequences of tracks, and the way that they merge into each other, is a result both of careful ordering of content (sequences of bird imitations, tracks relating to water, homesteads with domestic animals, and so on) and aural matching. We move, for example, from Tuva to Yakutia, and between distant and diverse places, in adjacent tracks. We are, though, told that apart from crossfades, ‘all is as it was collected by our two mics for your two ears,’ an aspect that it could be

argued allows us to ignore the very real juxtapositions of time and place.<sup>48</sup> The details given in the extensive booklet notes are, however, precise about exactly what each track is and, in addition, provide plenty of academic meat (2004: 177).

In short, in Levin’s “sound mimesis,” aesthetics are attuned to relationality: if the rocks are not placed exactly right, the collaboration is not complete (*e.g.*, Anatoli Kuular in *Tuva, Among the Spirits*). In this sense, Levin’s work is a kind of intervocality or intersubjectivity—the voices of rivers and mountains intermingle with the voice of a human throat-singing next to a stream.<sup>49</sup> Levin’s “sound mimesis” model makes us more cognizant of the sonic and aesthetic dimensions of throat-singing and Tuvan sonic-musical practices.<sup>50</sup>

#### OTHER THEORIES

Some of the concepts that emerge from Süzükei’s “timbral listening” model and Levin’s “sound mimesis” model are evident in other nomadic music theories, all of which further our understanding of Tuvan *xöömei*. Consider, for example, the concept of “nomadic sound” (*kochevoi zvuk*), originally proposed by D.K. Mikhailova, developed by M.I. Karatygina and O. Dorvolzhingii, and presented here by Tuvan musicologist Ekaterina K. Karelina:<sup>51</sup>

Our concept of ‘nomadic sound’ is based on a broad range of different types of eco-culture (steppe, taiga, tundra, alpine, desert) united by a common type of nomadic civilization. The natural characteristics of sound assimilate here in the image of a spatial-acoustic plan, in other words, the sound ideal of nomadic civilization (in the performance of throat-singing) is connected, in fact, with the process of free manipulation of space in sound, as evidenced by the latest musical-acoustic research (2012: 9-10).

Karelina models the concept of nomadic sound in *The History of Tuvan Music* (2009) using a table that is translated (from Russian) and reproduced in Figure 4.12.

Karelina argues for an understanding of Tuvan *xöömei* as “absolute music,” writing that “[t]he history of gradual recognition of throat-singing as art by representatives of Western civilization itself is revealing in terms of intrinsic aesthetic differences in the understanding that there is Music” (89). Regarding a nomadic worldview and its connection to notions of space, she says:

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<sup>48</sup> The distance between Kyzyl and Yakutsk, Sakha (Yakutia) is 1,511 miles. See <http://www.aroundtheworld360.com/>.

<sup>49</sup> “Intervocality” is a term that ethnomusicologist Steve Feld has used to signify “the inherently dialogic and embodied qualities of speaking and hearing. Intervocality underscores the link between the felt audition of one’s own voice, and the cumulatively embodied experience of aural resonance and memory” (1998: 471). See also Zumthor 1990 and Ihde 2007.

<sup>50</sup> It is notable that Levin’s project was conducted in collaboration with members of the ensemble Huun-Huur-Tu. While recovering “old songs and tunes of Tuva” (1993) and trying “to recover a sense of what might have been,” Huun-Huur-Tu’s musicians also became Levin’s central research associates in the production of his monograph on Tuvan music *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing* (2006), co-published with Süzükei. In the book, Levin discusses his adventures with the musicians on their international tours, but also on a trip to Tsengel-Sum in Western Mongolia in the Trans-Mongolia Expedition. Levin, by using Huun-Huur-Tu as his research subjects, reveals that nomadic recovery and artistic expression and innovation happen contemporaneously.

<sup>51</sup> See Karelina 2009: 82-87; see also Mikhailova et al. 1990.

Representatives of the nomadic type of civilization—the older, historically preceding sedentary agriculture<sup>52</sup>—see the world differently; vital for them is the ability to notice and remember details of the landscape, to know the types and properties of plants, the behavior of animals and birds. In other words, they learn a lot of visual information about the world. The requirement for life, in this sense, is the ability to navigate within space .... The essential property of throat-singing is the ability of a performer to single out various overtone components, thereby changing the overall sound configuration in terms of spatial-acoustic character (Karelina 2009: 85-87).

NOMADIC type of civilization	SEDENTARY type of civilization
Total involvement with the surrounding landscape; the subordination of people’s lives to the laws of nature (migrations, constant change of pasture, searching for new hunting grounds)	Conversion of the natural environment; domination of natural conditions of life to the needs of people (plowing, leveling land, diversion channels, deforestation)
High dispersion of people in the territory; small settlements removed from each other; the complexity of communication between them	High concentration of people in one place (the city is result of this concentration); the formation of stable transport links
Property—the most mobile (easy to disassemble, lightweight, transportable), economical to manufacture eco-friendly; generally round in shape and small size (yurt, tent, canopy, etc.) blends with the surrounding landscape (in these dwellings the sounds of nature are audible)	Property—stationary house, rectangular shape, rationality of urban environment (structured in different levels as a way to save space); stands out from the surrounding landscape (shape, color, material, soundproofing)
Mode of transportation—on horseback, reindeer, camels, etc.; migrations—using pack animals; the dominant form of transportation is individual	Method of transportation—on foot or in a vehicle (car, train, ship, plane, where the dominant form of transportation is group)

Figure 4.12. Table comparing characteristics of “nomadic” and “sedentary” types of civilization, reproduced in part from Karelina’s *The History of Tuvan Music* (2009).<sup>53</sup>

Karelina also uses evidence from sonograms to show that *xöömei* singers are “playing” inside multiple layers of timbre while singing different styles of *xöömei* (see Figure 4.13). Rather than link this with any kind of representational mimetic faculty, she argues for a consideration of Tuvan *xöömei* as a total abstract art.

<sup>52</sup> The notion that pastoralism is older than sedentary agriculture has been widely disproven. See, for example, Robert Guisepi, “Agriculture and the Origins of Civilization” in the International World History Project (2007), available at <http://history-world.org/>.

<sup>53</sup> Karelina 2009: 84-85; my translation from Russian. See also During 1998: 21 for a similar diagram.

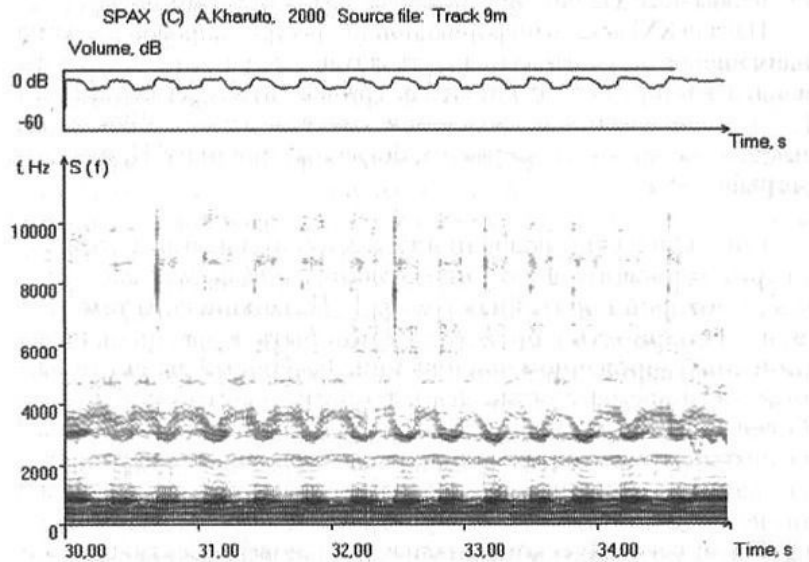


Figure 4.13. Sonogram of Albert Kuvezin performing *borbangnadyr*. Karelina argues that sonograms are visual evidence for conceiving of *xöömei* as abstract (“absolute”) music.<sup>54</sup>

Certainly *xöömei* expression is related to the manipulation of timbre in various outdoor spaces; however, Karelina’s use of sonograms as evidence for a “spatial acoustic character” is sophisticated and not reflected in Tuvan musicians’ conceptualizations of their practices (based on my fieldwork).

Valentina Süzükei is critical of Karelina’s use of “absolute music,” due to its connotation of Eurocentric music. For Süzükei, indigenous models for listening and sound production have been subordinate to European sound systems during the Soviet era. She argues that Tuvan musicians, while training in a new system of European music values, “actually cease to be the bearers of their cultural traditions, while acquiring the status of professionals, that is, educated or graduate students” (Süzükei 2010: 136).<sup>55</sup> Expressing her ambivalence about the values of the Western music education system, Süzükei writes:

As a consequence [of Tuva’s history as part of the Soviet Union] today a younger generation of Tuvan musicians is ‘bilingual.’ Along with traditional arts, these Tuvan musicians have mastered the professional expertise of the European type. At the moment they have no problem switching from one musical language to another, just as there is no problem switching from the Tuvan language to Russian and vice versa (Süzükei 2010: 136).

<sup>54</sup> Sonogram image reproduced from Karelina 2009: 89.

<sup>55</sup> Süzükei draws on similar ideas by Kazakh musicologist A.I. Mukhambetova, who wrote: “The written method of teaching and transmitting musical culture were not simply an alternative to the traditional interpretation. They brought a whole new conception for music based on a fundamentally different aesthetic criteria, asserting a different creative psychology, and using a different system of auditory tuning” (2002: 462, quoted in Süzükei 2010: 11).

Süzükei uses linguistic metaphors to point out the two overlapping sound systems at play in Tuvan musical practices today—the pitch-centered system “in which pitch height and melody are the predominant organizing principles, just as in Western music” and the timbre-centered system (Levin 2006: 50). *Xöömei*, then, presents an interesting example: while clearly timbrally-based, musicians sing on a drone and often perform “melodies” by selectively attenuating various harmonics in the overtone series.<sup>56</sup> But if the singing were truly timbrally-based, as some have argued, then why do musicians stylistically avoid the seventh and the twelfth harmonics (creating most of an anhemitonic pentatonic scale)?<sup>57</sup> Levin has pointed out that in *xöömei*, “the harmonic series is not used naturalistically, in its raw form, but selectively, within a tonal system rooted in cultural preferences” (2006: 53).

These questions and debates allow us to highlight another important point in Süzükei’s scholarship, one rooted in her emphasis on “cultural memory.” In her monograph about Tuvan music in the twentieth century, Süzükei shows that sonic knowledge in Tuvan musical practices is informed by meteorology, cosmology, and ecology (2007). This nomadic ethos remains “lodged” in the cultural memory of nomads even when they transition to a sedentary or urban life (2007: 392), including as part of Soviet-era upheavals in the traditional nomadic lifestyle. Süzükei suggests that Western music theory is unable to account for these aspects of Tuvan music, particularly the drone-overtone system on which, she argues, Tuvan traditional music is based (Süzükei 2010):

The nomads’ experience of acoustical upbringing in the sounds of their natural environment, and the subsequent interpretation (transformation) of this experience into its artistic and creative consciousness gives rise to a unique effect that is a considerably broader conception of music and musicality than that which is imparted by academic (classical European) theoretical musical knowledge (Süzükei 2007: 393).

Süzükei expresses dismay at the disconnect between indigenous Tuvan music theory and performance practice and pedagogy, as well as the implications of this disconnect for the future of cultural policy in Tuva and other Turko-Mongol republics in Russia and Inner Asia (2010: 125-168).

We may never finally resolve whether past Tuvan music embodied the “Turkic sound ideal” Süzükei and Levin have described and sought to capture, or whether Tuvan *xöömei* is, as Karelina argues, “absolute music.” But we do know that a Turkic sound ideal and a nomadic sensibility are being actively promoted through new recording projects in connection with the cultural revival movement in Tuva, including by Süzükei (see Chapter 5). In this sense Süzükei, like other scholars and musicians, engages politically through her aesthetic commitments.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> For Süzükei, focusing on the “melodies” of Tuvan throat-singing is not the point. Rather, it is tuning in to the multiple layers of simultaneously occurring frequencies allows one to appreciate the full timbral spectrum that many Tuvan musicians hear holistically when they sing or play the *igil*.

<sup>57</sup> See Walcott 1974 and Gunji 1980.

<sup>58</sup> The idea of “commitments” comes loosely from Jacques Rancière: “It can be said that an artist is committed as a person, and possibly that he is committed by his writings, his paintings, his films, which contribute to a certain type of political

Süzükei's goal might be best described as constructing and popularizing an indigenous epistemology to confront the aesthetics that have emerged in Tuvan music over time (which she found useful in studying her own music). Some might critique this effort as essentializing Tuvans and their music, akin to the Soviet folkloric model. Others might complain that Süzükei is essentializing Eurocentric models of music-making. Even if one or both critiques are fair, Süzükei (and, for his part, Levin) place more emphasis on perception, listening, and understanding the ways in which Tuvans live in the world. As a response to *xöömei*'s framing and commodification first by Soviet and then by global actors, the work by Süzükei, Levin, Tuvan musicians, and others attempts to re-appropriate *Tuvan* place and *Tuvan* experience.

#### PART IV

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### THEORIZING NOMADIC SOUND AND SENSIBILITY

As with any complex subject in ethnomusicology (is there any other kind?), there is the danger that writing about *xöömei* will turn it into something it isn't; that an author's imagination and speculation will become an accepted narrative. To minimize that risk, this dissertation draws on primary historical sources, scholarly works and theories, and, most importantly, field work focused on the ways in which Tuvans experience their lives and express their experiences in their music. This is the power of ethnography: observing how people articulate their own lives. We have seen from this and the preceding chapters that *xöömei* is the product of individual and collective discourse in response to a traumatic history of Soviet colonization. A certain "nomadic sensibility" can be seen in that history, and its best evidence comes from trying to understand *xöömei* as Tuvans sing and experience it.

My goal is to represent and historicize the construction of nomadic sensibility; at the same time, I try not to essentialize it or the people whom it assembles. Forces and processes shaping nomadic sensibility in *xöömei* and Tuvan traditional music generally are never merely local, nor are they generalizable globally. Nomadic sensibility is, in part, an invention by outsiders, whose expectations, desires, and reification of nomads are reflected onto Tuva and, in some cases, reproduced by local Tuvan musicians and cultural producers. But nomadic sensibility is also organically Tuvan—a post-Soviet reinterpretation of indigenous history, a re-sacralization of natural landscapes, and a recuperation of Tuvan peoples' ancestors as nomads in cultural memory. The fact that nomadic sensibility has been essentialized at certain times by certain people for various reasons does not discount its power as a real and productive source of identity.

So what exactly do I mean by nomadic sensibility? Certainly much of the answer lies in the Tuvan landscape, which serves as a source of and a repository for Tuvans' experiences and histories, whether real or imagined. *Ovaa*, *kizhi kozhee*, animal rock carvings, and toponyms are evidence of ancestors having been there and left traces of their lives behind. Trees, mountains, rocks, light, space, and wind are not only places where Tuvans herd and hunt, or only things that

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struggle" (2004: 60). Arguably advocates, promoters, and curators of particular artistic practices, such as Süzükei, are similarly "committed" to the politics of aesthetics even when they are not the actual producers of the art.



they see and feel; they represent spiritual interrelationships that guide how many Tuvans experience their lives and the world around them. Tuvan musicians express these relationships in their songs, and in *xöömei* particularly. In this sense, nomadic sensibility refers not just to a musical aesthetic but to a way of being in the world—a disposition by which relationships with, and perceptions of, history, nature, and music are expressed and lived. It is a unique combination of musicality, competence, aesthetic sensitivity, relationality, and positionality.

Nomadic sensibility can be understood as that thing, that almost indefinable essence, which distinguishes highly valued interpretations in performances of *xöömei* from mere technical mastery. An intercultural community of musicians, audiences, and producers of various kinds endeavor to express and produce nomadic sensibility in and with their music. In other words, nomadic sensibility is not “merely musical;” it is also an aesthetic and a social disposition.<sup>59</sup> As an expression of being “emplaced” in natural landscapes animated by the voices of spirit-masters, nomadic sensibility has spiritual meanings for many practitioners.

My research demonstrates that nomadic sensibility is an emergent ideology in the post-Soviet era for characterizing and expressing qualities in Tuvan people that appear to be at least residual at various moments in their history. In this sense, nomadic sensibility is shaped by the burden of historical precedents for understanding Tuvans as nomadic peoples—precedents offered by ethnographic interpretations of early outsiders, Soviet cultural officials, international producers and academics. Given the dynamic history of Tuvan throat-singing, nomadic sensibility seems almost paradoxical; something that was perceived as essential to, and normatively negative about, Tuvan people at one point in time is later embraced as being essential and positive. That positive view of nomadic sensibility persists in contemporary music practices. And why? Is it because nomadic essences are perceived as “real” and authentic? Can these phenomena be explained as a result of Soviet national and cultural formatting? Or is it because world music marketing categories import so many desires and expectations? This chapter and those that precede it suggest that the true answer lies in a combination of these perceptions and forces. In any event, it is clear that various groups and individuals, both local and global, *want* to believe that nomadic sensibility is real, and so try to produce it in *xöömei*, whether as listeners or throat-singers.

To the extent that Tuvan nomadic sensibility is valued by global consumers, it has been constructed and re-affirmed by the world music industry. Many international “fan-practitioners” have gone further than merely exoticizing Tuvan throat-singing by developing relationships with Tuvan musicians on a deeper level—studying in Tuva for years, sometimes decades, studying Tuvan language, and learning *xöömei* alongside instrumental musical practices. These fan-practitioners of throat-singing—“Tuvaphiles” and “*xöömei*-niacs”—study music with Tuvan musicians, learn songs, and develop techniques, but the “real” thing they learn (or try to learn) from Tuvan master musicians is how to have nomadic sensibility. This sensibility is what Valentina Süzükei has attempted to codify in her music-theoretical work (2007, 2010), and what

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<sup>59</sup> As ethnomusicologist Jocelyne Guilbault writes, “far from being ‘merely’ musical, audible entanglements ... assemble social relations, cultural expressions, and political formulations” (2005: 41).

Chirgilchin and other ensembles try to teach through their workshops with foreigners out in nature. In the chapter that follows, I explore how the revitalization of a nomadic sensibility in the post-Soviet era has become codified in institutionalized interpretations of throat-singing styles in Kyzyl's traditional music scene, and how this sensibility is foregrounded in intercultural exchanges and aestheticized as a disposition that reflects the desires of local and global actors.



## *Xöömeizhi* Dispositions: Expressing Nomadic Experience

*All sounds are in a broad sense 'voices,' the voices of things, of others, of the gods, and of myself.*  
—Don Ihde<sup>1</sup>

*Xöömei is like handwriting, and every xöömeizhi is a composer.*  
—Andrei Öpei<sup>2</sup>

*The voice connects the many parts of the body; by resounding in the head and chest, the full body is always present in the 'flow' of the voice, just as the connections of land are always present in the 'flow' of water.*  
—Steve Feld<sup>3</sup>

*For we must also remember that even such a great discovery as electricity, belongs not only to inventors or their country or nation, but to all mankind. Likewise xöömei also does not belong exclusively to people who have created and developed this remarkable phenomenon of art. Xöömei belongs today to the world and to mankind.*  
—Uve Rönström<sup>4</sup>

In Kyzyl's post-Soviet traditional music scene, nomadic sensibility has been codified as an ideology, one which operates by canonizing indigenous interpretations of *xöömei* styles and sub-styles performed by respected *xöömeizhi* past and present. But the embodiment of nomadic sensibility in *xöömei* singing is not reducible to its ideological codification within throat-singing styles or techniques. Nomadic sensibility also works as an intangible link between the mastery of throat-singing techniques and highly praised performance aesthetics. As international fan-practitioners increasingly develop throat-singing pedagogies, participate in throat-singing competitions, and earn accolades alongside Tuvan musicians, nomadic sensibility is cultivated as

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<sup>1</sup> Ihde 2007: 147.

<sup>2</sup> Andrei Öpei, personal interview, Teeli, Tuva, 3 August 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Feld 1994a: 12.

<sup>4</sup> Rönström 1994: 72.

an aesthetic and a social disposition within the *xöömeizhi* community. Tuvan *xöömeizhi*, alongside global fan-practitioners, circulate and foreground dispositions of nomadic sensibility in international workshops and cross-cultural collaborations. In so doing, they forge alliances that continually reshape local cultural politics and performance practices in Kyzyl's traditional music scene.

This chapter has four parts. Part I examines how global interest in Tuvan *xöömei*—alongside other non-Western vocal techniques—spawned an interest in developing methodologies for teaching *xöömei* to foreigners. While some foreigners have achieved high levels of technical mastery and developed effective ways to teach *xöömei* to other foreigners, the consensus among traveling Tuvan musicians tends to be that foreigners' interpretations of *xöömei* are disconnected from indigenous *xöömei* and its expressive sensibilities.

Part II of this chapter draws on some of my fieldwork, consisting of *xöömei* voice lessons with three *xöömeizhi* in Tuva between 2011 and 2013. Here I argue that these musicians explicitly sought to foreground nomadic sensibility during voice lessons as a pedagogical method. By teaching me about how to experience multi-sensory resonance with animals, herding activities, and natural outdoor environments in Tuva, these *xöömeizhi* used nomadic sensibility as a corrective for the perceived sensory deficiencies of an outsider. The lessons also worked to codify nomadic sensibility in tropes that essentialize and foreground “experience” as a type of cultural tourism.

Part III explores how the typical path to becoming a professional *xöömeizhi* in Kyzyl requires institutionalized training in European art music, in addition to social status acquired by winning honors and awards in throat-singing competitions. Musicians negotiate how institutional modes of training are at odds with reinvented methods for teaching foreigners how to throat-sing using the oral tradition. As a result, lessons in outdoor settings have become standard practice for teaching foreigners, and Tuvan musicians continue to revitalize their own nomadic sensibilities during regular trips to the countryside to visit friends and relatives.

Part IV closes the chapter with a brief discussion of how nomadic sensibility has been codified as an aesthetic and a social disposition within Kyzyl's *xöömeizhi* community. It then examines several notable intercultural musical exchanges between Tuvan and international musicians that draw on interpretations of nomadic sensibility. These projects demonstrate how creative interpretations of nomadic sensibility express alliances and intimacies that occasionally circle back to Tuva to shape local understandings of Tuvan traditional music.

## PART I

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### DRONES AND OVERTONES

International audiences commonly hold two assumptions when they first encounter Tuvan throat-singing. First, they assume that *xöömei* involves vocal *techniques* that can be learned

by anyone. Second, they assume that these vocal *techniques* involve the simultaneous production of a *drone* and an *overtone* melody (see Chapter 4). This orientation or conceptualization of *xöömei* might be called “melody-centric.” These assumptions are not necessarily wrong, but they are incomplete. Moreover, they have had a hand in shaping the emergence of nomadic sensibility in the global circulation of post-Soviet Tuvan music.

European and North American interest in so-called “harmonic chant” and “overtone singing” grew dramatically with the appearance of ethnomusicological field recordings of Tibetan Buddhist chant in the 1960s<sup>5</sup> and Mongolian *höömii* throat-singing (a vocal practice related to Tuvan *xöömei*) in the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> A number of experimental musicians had already begun working with overtone singing techniques in European art music as early as the 1950s—principally, German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen in his piece *Stimmung* (1968).<sup>7</sup> Around the same time, David Hykes, an American filmmaker with an interest in world music began experimenting with Western and non-Western singing traditions. He founded the Harmonic Choir in 1975 around the concept of “harmonic chant.”<sup>8</sup> As Hykes described in program notes to one of his later concerts, “I found myself listening in a new way .... I felt called by a special quality of these musics. I knew it wasn’t just technique, but there was plenty to learn about that, too. I set to work.”<sup>9</sup>

The field recordings made by anthropologist Roberte Hamayon in Mongolia featuring *höömii* throat-singing incited something of a craze in Western Europe. As a result, amateur and professional musicians began to examine the acoustics of throat-singing in various recordings and written studies, including in ethnomusicology. For example, Ronald Walcott at UCLA traced overtone melodies in Mongolian *höömii* recordings using the melo-graph invented by Charles Seeger as a mechanical aid to transcription (1974). The research by Walcott and other scholars helped set a melody-centric precedent for parsing out *drones* and *overtones* in European scholarly music scenes in the 1970s and 1980s. This precedent shaped how Tuvan *xöömei* was received when the album *Melodii Tuvy* (1968, re-released in 1978) began to circulate outside of the former Soviet Union around the same time.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, an American musician from Minnesota named Steve Sklar had begun experimenting with learning Tibetan *gongpo* harmonic chanting, Mongolian *höömii* overtone singing, and the “Western overtone singing” that was being performed by David Hykes and his Harmonic Choir. As Sklar recalled in an interview, “I thought that stuff sounded really cool, and I experimented with it a little bit. Never figured it out, though.”<sup>10</sup> Then Sklar

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<sup>5</sup> *Music of Tibet* (LP)—“Huston Smith’s Historic Recording of The Gyuto Multiphonic Choir” (Dalhousie, North India, 1967).

<sup>6</sup> LP *Chants mongols et bouriates* (1973, Collection Musée de l’Homme) recorded by Roberte Hamayon (featuring recordings of Mongolian *höömii* throat-singing).

<sup>7</sup> See also drone-based music by La Monte Young from the 1960s.

<sup>8</sup> While the Harmonic Choir later became a magnet for adepts of New Age practices, members of the group actively rejected any identification with the New Age movement (Ted Levin, personal communication, 3 August 2014). From 1979–1984, Ted Levin was a participant in the Harmonic Choir. For more information on the Harmonic Choir, see <http://www.harmonicworld.com/>

<sup>9</sup> David Hykes, Concert Notes, New York, 20 May 1981, quoted in Shelemay 2006: vi.

<sup>10</sup> Steve Sklar, personal Skype interview, 30 May 2014.

heard Tuvan *xöömei* for the first time in the 1990s, as part of the Smithsonian Folkways album *Tuva: Voices from the Center of Asia* (1990). “When I heard that stuff, I was like—OK, this is it. This is the real deal.” Then, after meeting and working closely with Huun-Huur-Tu during their first tours of the United States in the early 1990s (see Chapter 3), Sklar recalled the events of one memorable day in Minnesota in the winter of 1996:

I remember hanging out with the guys from Huun-Huur-Tu during a stop on their tour in Minnesota. At the time it was Kaigal-ool [Xovalyg], Sayan [Bapa], Alexei [Saryglar], and Anatoli [Kuular]. We were all sitting in the van and I remember saying: ‘So, who’s going to lead the throat-singing workshop tonight?’ The guys looked over at me and smiled. Then I asked, ‘is Ted [Levin] going to do it?’

They replied, ‘No—you’re going to do it!’

And, I said, ‘Come again?’

And they insisted, ‘No, *you* are going to lead the workshop tonight! We will sing some songs, and we’ll demonstrate the *xöömei* styles but you’re going to explain it all.’

And then I said, ‘Hold on wait a minute guys! Let’s back up here. I don’t think I’m ready for that.’

And they said, ‘We’ve performed *xöömei* on stages all around the world, but you’re the first person we’ve met who actually has an understanding of how to explain it.’ They said, ‘Don’t worry about it—just do it.’

And so that was how I came to teach my first-ever Tuvan throat-singing workshop. And very soon afterwards, I started hearing from other ‘Tuvaphiles’ that this was a *wrong* thing to be doing—that I was misappropriating Tuvan culture. Yet, here I was with the guys in Huun-Huur-Tu—some of the best *xöömeizhi* in all of Tuva—and they were actually telling me to do it. They didn’t just encourage me to do it, they said: ‘Our workshop—tonight—*you’re* teaching it!’ So I got comfortable with it in a hurry. And ever since, I always try to teach throat-singing in a way that honors the people and the music and the place.<sup>11</sup>

After being authorized by the Tuvan musicians in Huun-Huur-Tu to explain and teach *xöömei* workshops to international audiences, Sklar continued to develop and refine his methodologies for teaching *xöömei* as a vocal technique. Sklar’s online forum became a common meeting place for global fans and practitioners of Tuvan throat-singing (as well as other styles), and Sklar’s downloadable video lessons, about thirty U.S. dollars each, carried the promise of being able to explain the various techniques of *xöömei* in simple and straightforward ways.<sup>12</sup> Following the mantra, “if it sounds good, then it *is* good,” Sklar developed pedagogical strategies such as the “yuh!” and “bubble” techniques, which circulated quite widely within communities of international throat-singers in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

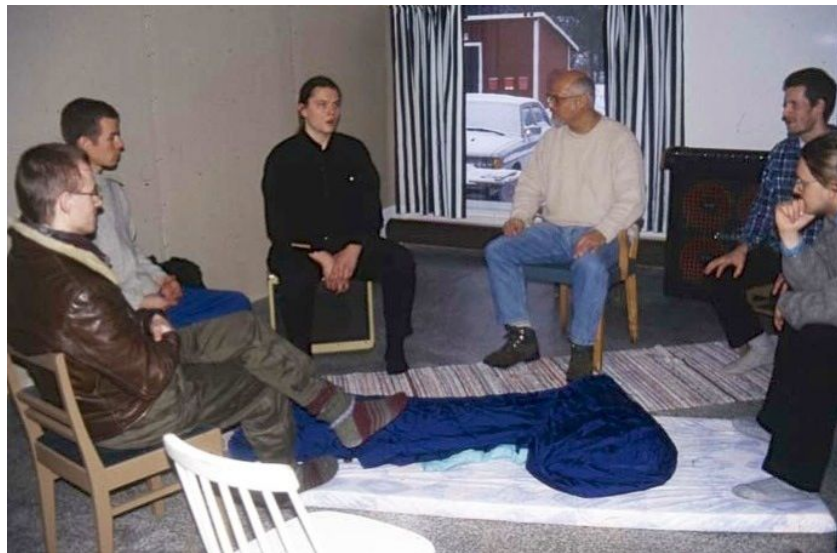
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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Steve Sklar’s online web forum and voice lessons are available at <http://www.khoomai.com>.

By 1999, news had spread via the Internet that Sklar’s online techniques were effective. A Finnish folk musician named Sauli Heikkilä, who had co-founded the Finnish Throat-Singing Society several years earlier in 1996, recounted his memories from this time period (see Figure 5.1):<sup>13</sup>

Tuvan throat-singers usually teach by imitation, but it’s not a real pedagogy. So when I heard about this American throat-singer named Steve Sklar, I invited him to Finland in 1998 to give a workshop for us at the Finnish Throat-Singing Society. I thought, if there’s a Westerner who could explain throat-singing with a similar point of view, then we [here in Finland] could all more easily learn how to master *xöömei*. On the last night of Steve’s visit, he taught me to open up a space in my throat using the back of my tongue while singing *sygyt*. I had real breakthroughs with Steve’s techniques! He laid out the approach in a good ‘American’ way by being slow, exact, and giving useful tips and tricks along the way.<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 5.1.** Steve Sklar, fourth from the left, leading a throat-singing workshop in Helsinki, Finland in 1998. Sami Jansson, a devoted Finnish fan-practitioner of Tuvan music, is on the far left.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time that Sklar and others were giving throat-singing workshops, Tuvan musicians were performing globally. From both sources, international fan-practitioners of *xöömei* tended to understand Tuvan *xöömei* in terms of a fundamental *drone* and the manipulation of an overtone *melody*. In 1999, Michael Edgerton, a composer and voice researcher, organized a research study at the University of Wisconsin to elucidate some of the precise mechanisms behind the production of the “reinforced harmonic melodies” that were produced during Tuvan

<sup>13</sup> By this time, a number of Tuvan musicians such as Vladimir Soyan and Albert Kuvezin had given workshops in Finland, but their method of explaining throat-singing to Finnish audiences had not been particularly effective in teaching participants to throat-sing (Heikkilä, personal interview, Helsinki, Finland, 9 April 2012).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Photo courtesy of the Finnish Throat-Singing Society, 2007.

throat-singing performances.<sup>16</sup> Steve Sklar and the members of Huun-Huur-Tu were invited to participate in the study, along with the crème-de-la-crème of Western overtone singers at the time: Trần Quang Hai (Vietnam/France), Rochele Rollin (United Kingdom), David Hykes (USA), and Bernard Dubrueil (Quebec). The musicians performed various styles of Tuvan *xöömei* while cameras were threaded down their throats and video images of their vocal cords were produced (see Figure 5.2). X-ray video fluoroscopies were also performed.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 5.2. American throat-singer Steve Sklar (left) and an image captured from video endoscopy of his vocal folds while performing in the *kargyraa* style during a study at the University of Wisconsin conducted in 1998 (right).<sup>18</sup>

The following year, an article appeared in *Scientific American*, co-written by Michael Edgerton and Ted Levin, which described *xöömei* as “at once a part of an expressive culture and an artifact of the acoustics of the human voice” (1999: 80). The article drew on data from the University of Wisconsin study to show how “reinforced harmonic melodies” were created in voice production by: (1) “tuning a harmonic in the middle of a very narrow and sharply peaked formant;” (2) “lengthening the closing phase of the opening-and-closing cycle of the vocal folds;” and 3) “narrowing the range of frequencies over which the formant will affect harmonics” (1999: 84). In providing a scientific explanation for the mechanism behind some Tuvan throat-singing techniques, the researchers asserted that, “despite a widespread misconception, [these mechanisms] do not involve any physiology unique to Turco-Mongol peoples; anybody can, given the effort, learn to throat-sing” (1999: 84).

Even if anyone can indeed learn to throat-sing, can anyone also emulate Tuvan musicians’ conceptualizations of *xöömei*? Michael Edgerton thinks the answer is “no.” The Tuvan musicians in Huun-Huur-Tu, he explains, “thought that folks like Hykes or Sklar were fine as singers,” but that what most Western throat-singing musicians do is “simply something different

<sup>16</sup> “Recent research by us and by others has made it clear that the vocally reinforced harmonics are not an artifact of perception but in fact have a physical origin” (Levin and Edgerton 1999: 84).

<sup>17</sup> Using sonograph computer-based technology at the Musée de l’Homme, Trần has calculated real-time Fast Fourier Transform (sonograms) of throat-singing from recordings, and then used his own voice to imitate these sounds until the sonogram image of his voice matched that of the recording. In a film he co-produced with ethnomusicologist Hugo Zemp entitled *Le chant des harmoniques* (released in 1989), Dr. Francis Besse examines Trần’s voice in the “cath-lab” of Centre Cardiologique du Nord (St-Denis) by video fluoroscopy.

<sup>18</sup> Photograph and laryngoscope video image from Steve Sklar’s website [www.khoomei.com](http://www.khoomei.com). Special thanks also to Michael Edgerton for sharing images and unpublished information about this study.



from Tuvan *xöömei*.<sup>19</sup> Edgerton added that the Tuvan musicians “seemed more interested in the notion of throat-singing as a particular cultural practice” and less an “extended vocal technique” that involved manipulating *drones* and “reinforced harmonic melodies.”<sup>20</sup> Sami Jansson, a devoted Finnish fan-practitioner of Tuvan music who participated in one of Steve Sklar’s throat-singing workshops in Helsinki (see Figure 5.1), essentially agrees with Edgerton: “if you use X-rays in your approach to learning throat-singing, then you are already doing it in a non-Tuvan way.”<sup>21</sup>

What is the difference between a scientific approach and a Tuvan approach to throat-singing? What is the gap between “technique” or “reinforced harmonic melody” and “authentic” or a cultural approach to Tuvan *xöömei*? The next section delves more deeply into the contrast between the conceptualization of *xöömei* as a drone and overtone and the indigenous conceptualizations of *xöömei* that I encountered during my fieldwork in Tuva. I argue that the “gap” between vocal technique and successful performances of *xöömei* can be understood to be nomadic sensibility. That nomadic sensibility includes experiential skills and sensitivities for expressing a *xöömeizhi* disposition that can, at least in part, be cultivated by outsiders.

## PART II

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### EMBODYING NOMADIC EXPERIENCE

#### *A LESSON WITH ANDREI ÖPEI*

In the summer of 2011, I spoke over the phone with People’s *Xöömeizhi* of Tuva Andrei Öpei (b. 1957) from Kyzyl. A few days later, I jumped on a *marshrutka* (a small bus) for ten hours and arrived in the village of Teeli, in the western Tuvan province of Bai-Taiga. Andrei met me at the bus stop and, for the next few days, showed me around this beautiful and rural corner of Tuva where he had been born and raised and lived his entire life (see Figure 5.3).

Andrei also gave me *xöömei* voice lessons during my visit, which focused on tuning in to the outdoor Bai-Taiga environment. I engaged in multi-sensory interactions with animals—touching, smelling, and listening to cows, horses, and sheep—and participated in various herding activities. Andrei’s method of teaching me how to throat-sing was about developing not a technique (let alone a melody), but rather an aptitude for “listening in” and “feeding back” to/in/with the natural and spiritual outdoor environment. Andrei wanted me to learn how to embody an experience, to cultivate a nomadic sensibility premised on the fundamental, *intangible* features of expressive *xöömei*.

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Edgerton, personal communication, 5 March 2014.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Sami Jansson, personal interview, Turku, Finland, 11 April 2012.



**Figure 5.3.** Andrei Öpei sitting atop a hill near Teeli, Bai-Taiga. During our voice lesson, he pointed out the *huun-huur-tu* (“sun propeller”) effect of the sunlight passing through the clouds on the mountains in the distance. Tuvan people often link the effect of splitting light to a similar effect of splitting sound while singing *xöömei*, and playing the *xomus* (jaw harp), *igil* (horsehead fiddle) and other Tuvan instruments (personal photo, 2011).

Faculties that Ted Levin and Valentina Süzükei call “ludic mimesis” are cultivated by young Tuvan children in and around traditional herding activities (Levin 2006: 82-84). Andrei’s cultivation of a nomadic sensibility began as a child growing up in Bai-Taiga during the late Soviet era (see reference to Andrei’s early life in the taiga in Chapter 2). He described this cultivation during our first lesson, explaining that “voices” (*ünner*) come from humans *and* other, outside sources such as animals, wind, and grass—in a word, the landscape:

Tuvans came up with this themselves. They found *xöömei*. [W]ithout cows and without herding you wouldn’t have people singing like this! When you sing *xöömei*, it resounds with the calls of different wild beasts. It is created with different sounds, not man-made sounds but from wild animals, from mountains, from outside your body. As a child, I understood this very early on, while herding with my brother who sang *xöömei*. I was always making sounds to myself, but then they encouraged me to become a *xöömei* singer.<sup>22</sup>

As we walked with Andrei’s cow out of the village of Teeli and toward a nearby ridge of foothills where there was brown August grass, we were intercepted by a herder returning from the taiga with a large flock of sheep. Andrei took the opportunity to teach me something about *xöömei*:

Robert—every master is different and learns differently. But in order to start learning *xöömei*, one must imitate sheep. Imitate goats! As the goat cries, you can learn to imitate it. The best advice from my brother was to imitate sheep. For example—‘baaaah!’ This is the exercise. Go ahead.

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<sup>22</sup> Andrew Öpei, personal interview, Teeli, Tuva, 3 August 2011. All subsequent quotations from Öpei in this section *ibid*; my translations from Russian. Additional Tuvan terminology translations by Victoria Peemot.

“This is what I came here for,” I think to myself. So I tense my throat and produce a muffled bleat. At first, it sounds much less like the animals around us and more like a child’s styled impression of what a sheep is supposed to sound like. Andrei:

I’ll say it again. Tuvans are herders. So usually they will sing these sounds. These are our most original sounds—our sweetest sounds—for use in *xöömei*. And Tuvans love it! We speak about nature. Also we imitate cows—‘moool!’—and this is also an exercise for learning to sing ....

Andrei cups his hands around his mouth and begins to make sheep sounds again, this time with a muffled timbral effect as a result of his hand placement. He explained:

I usually begin with breathing. Start with learning to hold your breath. Just breathe and then start. It’s an exercise of the throat. When you stop the air and then begin to sing—‘Baaah .... Beeeey .... Boooo ....’ Sit and practice. Start with this and then soon you will start to sing *xöömei*.

In the distance, we see a herder approaching the flock of sheep on horseback. When he approaches Andrei, the two shake hands and Andrei asks the herder for a cigarette. Andrei points to the stirrup on the herder’s horse and says:

For the herder on horseback, *ezengi* is the stirrup. You sit on the horse, and the stirrup clinks along with the rhythm of the horses trot. It’s variations on this sound that we sing in the throat-singing style *ezengileer*.

In this lesson, Andrei was foregrounding his rural experiences from childhood and accentuating the sounds of rural Tuva, all of which enabled him to know and understand *xöömei*. But Andrei’s pedagogical approach was reflective of something larger. Despite living in a rural region of Tuva, Andrei has been deeply involved in the traditional music scene in Kyzyl since the early 1980s, when he competed in throat-singing competitions and won various awards (see Figure 2.4). Indeed, Andrei earned the title of People’s *Xöömeizhi* of the Tuva Republic, an honor that came with the imprimatur of Tuvan cultural institutions and other musicians. The landscape-listening quest on which Andrei was guiding me, then, was not just about his childhood, but about the aesthetics, politics, and culture of a larger discourse surrounding *xöömei*. That quest was informed also by—and indeed foregrounded—the nomadic sensibility that emerged from this discourse in the post-Soviet era.

After our first throat-singing lesson, we sat on Andrei’s back porch. He pulled out photos and exclaimed, “Here is Mark van Tongeren, he visited me here in the early 1990s!<sup>23</sup> Also, here are some Finnish and Norwegian musicians who came to visit me.<sup>24</sup> Japanese musicians came. Many people came here from all over the world to learn *xöömei* from me.” Was Andrei foregrounding nomadic sensibility because I was a foreigner? Is imitating animal sounds a new narrative for interpreting *xöömei*, an old practice that was never conscious, or both?

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<sup>23</sup> van Tongeren wrote the book *Overtone Singing: Metaphysics of East and West* (2002).

<sup>24</sup> Pipa Paljakka (Finland) and Morten Abildsnes (Norway) of ensemble Moldurgaa were among Öpei’s past visitors. See Part IV of this chapter.

*A LESSON WITH ZHENIA OYUN*

I first met People's *Xöömeizhi* of Tuva Evgeni ("Zhenia") Oyun (b. 1958) in summer 2012, at the brand-new Center for Tuvan Traditional Culture in Kyzyl. When I asked him if we could arrange a throat-singing lesson, he told me it would be best if we go to Lake Chagytai in the Tangdy region where Zhenia had been born and raised (see Figure 5.4). Zhenia remembered growing up listening to lots of Soviet rock and *estrada* (pop) music in Tangdy, but he became interested in folk music during the 1980s. His interest was so great, in fact, that he became a member of the first small ensemble of throat-singers called Amyrak.<sup>25</sup>

By choosing to locate our lesson in a natural outdoor place where he remembered growing up, Zhenia foregrounded an intimate knowledge of place that had been distilled from his many years spent there. In his performances of *xöömei*, Zhenia moves through the place as a multi-sensory scenic play-by-play.

You must sing from your home—the place you know best. For me, this is the Tangdy region—the steppe, taiga, and foothills around Lake Chagytai. For you, it will be different. You must learn how to hear your own music from inside yourself. There's no need to write anything down. It's a spontaneous act. In-the-moment. You see the mountains, and immediately the inspiration comes. That's how it works. It happens almost automatically. And then you might see a bear, and you start to sing *xöömei* from the bear's voice. And then you might see a mountain goat and you take out your *amyrgaa* [deer horn] and begin to play it! That's how it works. This is what you are trying to do.<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 5.4.** Zhenia Oyun during our voices lesson outdoors at Lake Chagytai in the Tangdy Region of Tuva, 2012 (personal photo).

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<sup>25</sup> A track by ensemble Amyrak ("trio of *xomus* players") was included on *Tuva: Voices from the Center of Asia* (1990). See Chapter 2.

<sup>26</sup> Evgeni Oyun, personal interview, Lake Chagytai, Tuva, 12 June 2012. All subsequent quotations by Oyun in this section *ibid*; my translations from Russian. Additional Tuvan terminology translations by Victoria Peemot.

In our voice lesson, Zhenia did the same thing—he guided me through a process of watching landscapes and translating them into shifting timbre scenes. But he also told me that I was a source of the landscapes I would be singing about, that I needed to “emplace” myself differently for different kinds of throat-singing styles:

But before you sing, you must go inside yourself. Do you find yourself on the steppe or in the mountains? Or somewhere else? What are you singing about? We must be able to hear a difference depending on your inspiration. Start from the resonance in your own body. Begin with your nose open and your lips pressed together—sing from inside yourself! Then begin to open up gently. And you will find that you have already begun to sing *kargyraa*.

By claiming that “we must be able to hear a difference depending on your inspiration,” Zhenia points out that places are experienced not only viscerally, but through tropes that have been codified into styles of *xöömei* singing. In the case of *kargyraa*, the lowest-sounding of Tuvan guttural throat-singing styles, there are many variations with different Tuvan words. Zhenia explains and then demonstrates (see Video Excerpt #2 in Appendix III):

*Kargyraa* is the most free style. It can be steppe *kargyraa* (*xos*), it can be nasal *kargyraa* (*dumchuk*), it can be mountain *kargyraa* (*dag*), it can be hoarse, it can be pressed, it can be loose. Tuvans usually begin by singing from either the steppe or the mountain. If it’s mountain *kargyraa*, then it is deep and echoing with many bends and crooks, but if it’s steppe *kargyraa* then it’s flat, rigid, and pulsating.

With these principles in mind, Zhenia asks me to sing my *kargyraa*. When I do, he listens and then says:

Your voice is approaching steppe *kargyraa*. It’s not too high or too low. But you have to work at it. It will take a long time to pull it out of you. You should sing for a long time on just one breath. On the one hand, steppe *kargyraa* is not difficult to learn; but, on the other hand, it’s difficult to go there inside yourself. When you do let yourself go there, you will be sitting on a horse and herding sheep. It’s as if you can’t actually see any mountains in the distance, but in every direction, all you see is endless *steppe!* And the steppe shows itself to you. And you feel this open condition and immediately *kargyraa* comes out, and, in this case, we will know that you are singing steppe *kargyraa*. And you must draw it out of you over a long time. Why sing like this? Because the steppe is flat—it’s not irregular or mountainous. So your steppe *kargyraa* should be very crisp and precise but also open. Sometimes it can be rigid and pulsating, like a tractor moving along the steppe and ploughing the ground. If you just imagine yourself sitting on a mountain looking down on the vast steppe, and you see a tractor in the distance slowly ploughing the earth—this is what is happening. You don’t need to think too long about it in order to understand it. It’s very beautiful if you do it right!

In contrast, Zhenia explained, mountain *kargyraa* represents a different kind of experience:

For mountain *kargyraa* you need to use your voice to explore high and low. You need to listen to the echoes and chart the rugged terrain. If you do this, it will be clear that you are singing mountain *kargyraa* . . . . You have to imagine what you are performing. If you perform mountain *kargyraa* and want to do it really well, you need to sit and find yourself in the mountains—the steep mountains! And you absolutely need to hear echoes, but you don’t need to be loud. You don’t need to go fast. Just be very attentive and, at first, gentle. Then you can build the sound over time.

These lessons make clear that Zhenia Oyun experiences landscapes phenomenally and spiritually. The steppe “shows itself to you,” and throat-singing styles involve not only being in particular natural landscapes, but also animating spirit-masters, animal voices. Furthermore, remembrances of place are not just a “sonic snapshot” or even a “sonic holography” (see Levin 2006: 95-99); they are a synaesthetic walk down memory lane. Zhenia’s advice, at the beginning of the voice lesson, to “sing from my home” seems to suggest that nomadic sensibility is transportable—that my best *xöömei* will be rooted in my memories of, and experiences in, my home state of Minnesota.<sup>27</sup>

#### A LESSON WITH ALDAR TAMDYN

I first met Aldar Tamdyn at a concert that his ensemble Chirgilchin gave in San Francisco in 2008. Aldar has been very active in shaping post-Soviet traditional music in Tuva, particularly by collecting and cataloging *xöömei* styles more rigorously than any previous folklorists, musicologist, or musician. We met up again in 2011 for voice lessons at his instrument-building workshop in Kyzyl (see Figure 5.5). Our voice lessons often digressed into theoretical or philosophical treatises on Tuvan music theory and cosmology, but also into contemporary cultural debates about teaching *xöömei* to foreigners. He observed:

What’s interesting today is that more foreigners are learning *xöömei* than Tuvans. Many people learn *xöömei*, and then they go and teach others. And the heart of the problem is that when foreigners start to sing, they instantly begin to work with their overtones. This is a big problem, because if you can’t find the right chest voice sound, you will never know how to shape this sound correctly. But the bigger problem is that foreigners don’t know how to listen. They don’t know how to use their chest—but also their ears, lips, tongue, nose, eyes—everything, even teeth should be working!<sup>28</sup>

When Aldar was a young musician at the Kyzyl College of the Arts, he briefly studied *xöömei* with the famous *xöömeizhi* Xunashtaar-ool Oorzhak, who was the first *xöömei* teacher to work there in the early 1990s. Aldar explained:

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<sup>27</sup> Oyun’s suggestion spawned an arts-research project that involved a number of emplaced listening in and feeding back experiments in my various “homes” in the United States that are an ongoing part of my research. See also the conclusion of this dissertation. Examples of this work are available on my website: <http://www.robeahrs.com>

<sup>28</sup> Aldar Tamdyn, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 27 July 2011. All subsequent quotations from Tamdyn in this section *ibid*; my translation from Russian. Additional Tuvan terminology translations by Victoria Peemot.

Xunashtaar-ool used to yell out to his students: *xörektevit, xörektevit* ('give a sound from your chest')—*xöreeng-bile yr-la* ('sing by/with your chest')! This is because even Tuvan students sometimes sing incorrectly and immediately start to work with their overtones. And usually in this case, the quality of the sound is not correct. So this is why he would cry out *xörektevit, xörektevit!* He meant that you must start with the pure sound from your chest. Only after that, should a student begin to work with tuning different voices.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 5.5. Aldar Tamdyn in his traditional musical instrument workshop in Kyzyl, 2010 (personal photo).

As students learn to sing *xöömei*, they must cultivate the correct “pure” timbre of the main guttural chest sound before they move forward with anything else.<sup>30</sup> They must also conceive of throat-singing as old *xöömeizhi* like Xunashtaar-ool used to: as singing with multiple voices, not using drones and overtones. Proper *xöömei*, then, is a proper tuning of these voices into a unified sound. Asking me to imitate him during one voice lesson, Aldar and I take turns singing. He then says:

There are three voices. Let’s count them. How many voices do you hear? One low one, and one very high. That’s two voices. So when you sing *xöömei*, this voice also comes out also the same. And listen *now*—[he sings]—here is the third voice.

Aldar then pauses to sing a style called *mungash sygyt*, a nasal style of *sygyt* where the third voice is more pronounced than in other styles. He says:

And when *sygyt* is very beautiful, we hear this third voice. When the second and third voices come together in one stream, that’s when you get this very beautiful *sygyt*. And if the two voices do not

<sup>29</sup> In response to a prominent debate in the *xöömeizhi* community regarding terminology, Aldar explains his position: “In Tuvan, *xorek* means chest. Musicologist Zoya Kyrgys says that *xorekteer* means ‘to sing with the chest,’ and she defers to Xunashtaar-ool on this. But she made a big mistake. *Xorekteer* has the meaning ‘to scold/curse’—to shout loudly at someone. This is the meaning of *xorekteer!*” Kyrgys, on the other hand, uses the term *xorekteer* to refer collectively to Tuvan throat-singing styles and techniques as a way to distinguish them from other vocal practices in neighboring regions in Siberia and Mongolia (see Kyrgys 2002).

<sup>30</sup> From my experience, this timbral cultivation can take years of practice; I still can only approach the correct sound.

coincide, in that case you have nothing. So Xunashtaar-ool was correct to point out that there are three voices. And we can understand the third voice to be a kind of spiritual voice.

Many foreigners in workshops place their attention on the overtone melody, and do not listen for the qualities of the third voice in the sound that Aldar was foregrounding for me. Aldar also seemed to be suggesting that, while singers may produce different kinds of sounds in different situations, these sounds only become “voices” (*ünner*) when they are correctly tuned. Building on my voice lessons with Andrei Öpei and Zhenia Oyun, I learned from Aldar Tamdyn that tuning the “voices” in throat-singing is intertwined with listening to the animal and spirit voices that inhabit them (see Video Excerpt #3 in Appendix III for a *xöömei* performance by Ayan-ool Sam of Ensemble Alash, where three voices are clearly audible).

### PART III

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## TRANSMITTING NOMADIC SENSIBILITY IN AN ERA OF URBAN *XÖÖMEI*

### *BECOMING A XÖÖMEIZHI IN MODERN-DAY TUVA*

In contemporary post-Soviet Tuva, about half of the population lives in urban areas (such as Kyzyl and Ak-Dovurak), and the other half lives in the countryside in regional villages or in semi-nomadic herding encampments (2010 Russia census data).<sup>31</sup> However, the traditional music scene is mostly centered in Kyzyl, and virtually all musicians who become professional *xöömeizhi* go there to study, perform, teach, compete and tour. The European model for music education remains dominant as a professional path for Tuvan musicians in Kyzyl, which sits in tension with “traditional” or “indigenous” transmission in the oral tradition.

The typical career path to becoming a *xöömeizhi* in Tuva today is to begin studying at a regional musical school or cultural center. A student with talent and desire can then compete for a coveted spot at the Republican Arts High School in Kyzyl. From there, students move to the Kyzyl College of the Arts or, in some cases, to an urban center in Russia such as Moscow, Kazan, Novosibirsk or Krasnoyarsk, where they complete their studies at a conservatory in a Department of Folk or National Instruments and receive a diploma. As part of this education, folk musicians learn to read Western music notation and become fluent in multiple styles of musical performance, ensemble playing, and various European and folkloric aesthetics. Many musicians and advocates believe that the current music education model, which has its roots in Soviet and European systems of cultural formatting (see Chapter 2), inherently devalues traditional Tuvan music and should be abandoned.<sup>32</sup> Formal modes of teaching *xöömei* are much more common in Kyzyl. These formal modes place less emphasis on values associated with traditional *xöömei* transmission, including self-trained musicality, multi-sensory oral and aural learning, and experience in nomadic pastoral contexts.

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<sup>31</sup> [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis\\_itogi1612.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis_itogi1612.htm).

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Süzükei 2010. Others, such as Karelina 2009, disagree.



As part of my fieldwork in rural Western Tuva, I commonly asked *xöömei* singers, “who is your teacher?” Though many people answered by listing the names of family relatives, it was clear that none of them perceived their throat-singing practices as being the product of formal teacher-apprentice relationship.<sup>33</sup> Rather, they tended to describe the auto-pedagogy that has been traditional for most *xöömei* singers, especially rural ones, in Tuva’s history. In this self-teaching model, the initial stage of learning to play a musical instrument or to sing *xöömei* is “directed at hearing the ‘voices’ of the instrument itself”—at focusing on the “timbral turbulence,” or what Süzükei had previously called the “drone-overtone system of sound organization.”<sup>34</sup> For young children living in rural Tuva, most of this “work” was (and continues to be) done by listening to and emulating the skills of older family members or traveling masters—but always at a distance, and rarely through direct or formal study. After months or years of self-directed practice, a young Tuvan might approach a master and demonstrate what he or she has learned. Süzükei argues that

[i]n the Altai region ... [influenced more by Buddhism and Shamanism than by Islam] there is no formal admission of [music] students, no rite of passage to celebrate the completion of [a particular] training [program]. The most important thing—there is no concept that the authority of a musician depends on his origin. ‘So-and-so studied with X and Y’ .... In many sedentary cultures in Central Asia, the idea of self-teaching might raise suspicion. In the Sayan-Altai region, the formula is the reverse. Those musicians whose performances are the result of formal training, musical recordings, or written texts are seen [by the larger community] as lesser, while self-taught musicians, inspired by the spirits, are perceived as the most ideal (Süzükei 2010: 163).

As my ethnographic work demonstrates, a young *xöömeizhi* learns from living in and amongst nature and engaging in activities like herding animals. These experiences are perceived as being essential to developing the sensitivities and sonic nuance needed to become a great throat-singer. Playing “with notes”—indicating a European modality of music literacy and aesthetics (“striating” the sound, as French philosopher Gilles Deleuze called it)<sup>35</sup>—or “without notes” is a distinction often used by Tuvan musicians to value more highly those students who belong to the latter camp and are trained through the oral, aural, and experiential tradition. The individuality and idiosyncrasy that emerge from this tradition are highly valued in *xöömei* singing, and the best singers are all instantly recognized by their distinct timbral signatures.

Is the growing professionalization and urbanization of *xöömei* and *xöömeizhi* compatible with traditional *xöömei* expression and transmittal? Can we square “new” institutions of Tuvan

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<sup>33</sup> Öpei, Xoalyg, Oyun, and others describe their *xöömei* singing abilities as self-taught (personal communications, Öpei, Teeli, Tuva, 3 August 2011; Xoalyg, Kyzyl, Tuva, 28 August 2011; Oyun, Lake Chagytai, Tuva, 12 June 2012). As Levin claims, “in the historically Muslim cultural context [of Central Asia] ... the master-disciple relationship of oral transmission—known in the Persian and Central Asian Turkic languages as *ustaz-shagyrđ*—is fairly ubiquitous.” But further to the northeast, among the Altaic pastoralists, including Tuva, Levin observes that “the *ustaz-shagyrđ* model does not really exist” (Süzükei 2010: 162). The question of how musicians acquire particular kinds of musical knowledge through experience can be compared with other musical cultures. See, for example, chapter 6 in Brinner 1996, “My Experience is My Teacher: The Acquisition of Javanese Musical Competence” (133-166).

<sup>34</sup> Süzükei’s “drone-overtone system of sound organization” has been developed into a theory that is more about timbre than discrete entities of drone or overtone (Süzükei 1993, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, “Treatise on Nomadology: The War Machine” from *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1980.

music-making with many Tuvans' apparent preference for “old” traditions? The answers are “yes,” and the reasons lie in the transmittal of nomadic sensibility by older *xöömeizhi* to younger *xöömeizhi*.



Figure 5.6. People's *Xöömeizhi* of the Tuva Republic, at the VI International Xöömei Symposium, Kyzyl, 2013. Back L-R: Bady-Dorzhu Ondar, Boris Mongush, Valeri Mongush, Kongar-ool Ondar, German Kuular, and Evgeni (“Zhenia”) Oyun. Front L-R: Evgeni Saryglar, Andrei Mongush, Igor Koshkendey, Mongun-ool Ondar (personal photo).

Levin observes that “when actual schools of throat-singing [began] to appear in Tuva in the late twentieth century, older singers did not demonstrate to younger ones where to position the tongue to yield a certain overtone, how to move the lips to produce a certain rhythm, and so on. Rather, a teacher might ask a student to imagine a pastoral scene from his own experience and then illustrate it in sound” (Levin 2006: 62). My own voice lessons underscore Levin’s observation, as do my interviews with Tuvan *xöömeizhi*. For example, People’s *Xöömeizhi* Andrei Mongush recalls his training by Kongar-ool Ondar, who has been highly influential in launching a younger generation’s careers in the model of Huun-Huur-Tu:

When I applied to the Kyzyl College of the Arts, at that time Kongar-ool [Ondar] was beginning to teach. At that time, I already knew how to sing *xöömei*. And [Kongar-ool] Borisevich then taught me more. He taught many people, especially all the young masters. He would use photographs. He would teach us about *xöömeizhi* from the past—this is Sat Manchakai, he would

say, this is Maksim Dakpai, this is Ondar Kombu. This is how [Kongar-ool] taught. And after him, Vladimir Mongush was the teacher who also taught *xöömei*.<sup>36</sup>

Andrei Mongush's recollection shows how the cultural memory of nomadic life (see Chapter 4) is transmitted to young urban *xöömeizhi*. The same basic idea—transmitting cultural memory by imparting nomadic sensibility—appeared in my interviews with contemporary *xöömeizhi* living in urban Kyzyl. In addition to asking, “who is your teacher?,” I more specifically asked how younger musicians learn to throat-sing when they are disconnected from sensory, first-hand knowledge of Tuvan natural environments, animal sounds, and so on. Aldar Tamdyn gave me the most succinct response:

Basically, *xöömeizhi* come from the rural regions. Most all of our well-known *xöömeizhi* came from the countryside to live here in Kyzyl. They brought *xöömei* with them—literally. And when older people die, younger singers continue to come from the regions. Among the people who grew up here in Kyzyl, there are very few *xöömeizhi*, but they are still able to learn to sing. They have relatives in the countryside, and they visit them. But the people who come to this city are the ones who save *xöömei*.

Younger generations of Tuvans have styles of *xöömei*, not birds. Our great, great grandfathers listened to birds. I don't listen to birds. I listen to the sounds of the city. And on the *igil*, I often imitate car horns, machine sounds. I can even do helicopter *xöömei* style! Sounds of the city naturally work their way into my throat-singing. But every year, in the summer, Tuvans do enjoy traveling out into the taiga to visit relatives; they go there to relax. When they hear a bird or a babbling brook, they immediately think, they feel—ah! *borbangnadyr!* [a style meaning “round”]—that style already exists! And then they sing *borbangnadyr*.<sup>37</sup>

Aldar sees no need for urban-dwelling musicians to live in rural settings in order to be connected with the source of inspiration for their artistic work. However, he recognizes that spending time in rural areas with friends and family, some of whom live semi-nomadic pastoral livelihoods, grounds his music.

In some sense, Aldar's model is one response to a perceived problem. Many younger *xöömei* students who lack experience living as mobile pastoralists draw on essentialized tropes—stereotypes—of what nomads are “supposed” to hear in nature—the wind, a waterfall, an insect. Experiential orientations of pastoral life have the tendency to become somewhat distorted in institutionalized school settings, as they did in Soviet-era romanticized folk music.<sup>38</sup> These representations of nomadic life, along with a preference for only particular throat-singing styles such as *sygyt*, get emphasized in formal music schools and exported to foreign audiences by young touring musicians. This emphasis comes at the expense of a number of more nuanced aspects of Tuvan musical aesthetics, philosophy, and cosmology. Put another way, some aspects

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<sup>36</sup> Andrei Mongush, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 14 June 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Aldar Tamdyn, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 27 July 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Stereotypical imitation of sounds of nature also has a long tradition in Chinese music and in various twentieth-century folkloric adaptations of traditional practices for urban audiences. See, for example, Lau 2008.

of nomadic sensibility are hard to transmit; there is a difference, it seems, between romanticized notions of wind, waterfalls and insects and their experiential embodiment as expressed in highly valued *xöömei* interpretations.

Aldar tries to counteract this trend with regular visits to the Tuvan countryside. But he and other prominent cultural figures in Tuva are undertaking more institutional approaches, too. Aldar and other eminent *xöömeizhi*, such as Kongar-ool Ondar, have succeeded in making the Tuvan government at least somewhat aware of the role that ethno-pedagogy can play in maintaining the vitality of Tuvan musical ecologies. In the early 2000s, for example, Kongar-ool Ondar launched a *xöömei* education program at the Republic Arts School in Kyzyl, and in 2013, Aldar Tamdyn founded the new *Xöömei* Academy.<sup>39</sup> Other musicians, such as Choduraa Tumat, have turned their attention to foreign pedagogical systems like those used in the Sibelius Academy Department of Folk Music in Helsinki, Finland or the Almaty Conservatory in Kazakhstan (which uses Raimbergenovyi's "ethno-solfège" system to teach *kui*).<sup>40</sup> These programs offer models for embracing ethno-pedagogy and updated forms of oral tradition learning that help to reduce the gap between revitalized indigenous systems of music theory and institutions of European music practice.

Other efforts are underway. Key *xöömeizhi* including Andrei Mongush, Aldar Tamdyn, and Choduraa Tumat have launched their own music pedagogy book projects. The books are written in Tuvan for a Tuvan audience.<sup>41</sup> For her part, Valentina Süzükei (along with scholars Ekaterina Karelina, Ulyana Mongush, and others) has devoted attention to articulating a new vision for Tuvan music theory and practice based on an indigenous Tuvan model (rather than a Soviet or Russian one) of sound production. And there are efforts to combat some of the consequences of the commercialization of Tuvan throat-singing. Sasha Bapa (formerly of Huun-Huur-Tu) observes: "I know that many go in Tuva, then begin to learn (teach) others. In one year they become professors. It is sad." (Lusk 2000: 30-31). The foreign interest in Tuvan throat-singing, combined with the relative scarcity of Tuvan *xöömeizhi* who know how to teach *xöömei*, means that international fan-practitioners have cornered the market of *xöömei* voice lessons. In response, *xöömeizhi* Zhenia Saryglar and his wife Anai-Xaak have launched summer throat-singing camps for foreigners in Sai-Khonash, Tuva. The camp received funding from Tuva's Ministry of Culture during the 2010 Year of Tourism campaign. Finally, Aldar Tamdyn has opened an instrument-building business geared mostly toward selling traditional, custom-made lacquered *igils* (horsehead fiddles) and *doshpuluurs* (banjo-like lutes) to tourists.

#### XÖÖMEI ENTREPRENEURSHIP

These efforts to preserve and transmit Tuvan cultural memory were in evidence in my own trips to Tuva. When I first visited in 2005, the Scientific Center "*Xöömei*" (directed by Zoya

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<sup>39</sup> Aldar Tamdyn, presentation at the VI International *Xöömei* Symposium, Kyzyl, Tuva, 13 June 2013.

<sup>40</sup> As Choduraa recalled, "I found a similarity between Finnish and Tuvan traditional methods and techniques [for learning music]—the importance of ear training and *not* using musical notation" (Choduraa Tumat, personal communication, 14 August 2014). See also Tumat 2013 and Süzükei 2010: 154-168.

<sup>41</sup> Note that the musicians who are at the forefront of indigenous musical activism are the same musicians who spend the most time touring abroad with ensembles and teaching international audiences.

Kyrgys) was the only organization offering throat-singing lessons for foreigners. I studied *xöömei* for several months there with Sergei Ondar at a rate of ten U.S. dollars per hour. In addition, I found it very easy to seek out other voice and *igil* (horsehead fiddle) teachers in Kyzyl through word of mouth. I also studied throat-singing and *igil* with a young musician whose fame grew as I knew him—Evgeni Saryglar (then a member of Ensemble Tyva), at a rate of fifteen U.S. dollars per hour. Since there were no stores or organizations from which I could purchase an *igil*, a member of Ensemble Tyva, Eduard Tamdyn, custom-built one for me for about 200 U.S. dollars.

Five years later, I returned for the first of three trips (2010-13) to conduct dissertation fieldwork in Kyzyl and other parts of Tuva. Much had changed, including the formalization of *xöömei* lessons for foreigners and the proliferation of private companies offering such lessons. In 2008, during the *Khöömei* Symposium, a group of prominent Tuvan *xöömeizhi* led by Aldar Tamdyn had established an informal cultural gate-keeping agreement. Tamdyn's concern was that many tourists were learning "incorrect" throat-singing and teaching it to others; in addition, awareness of the high prices for throat-singing lessons taught by non-Tuvans in Europe and North America had been causing a stir.<sup>42</sup> They agreed to set a minimum price for music lessons to foreigners at eighty U.S. dollars per hour, and of 600 U.S. dollars per folk instrument (prices went as high as several thousand dollars for an ornately-decorated instrument). Private companies offered these lessons and instruments; some specialized in constructed folk instruments while others offered summer throat-singing excursions for tourists in the Tuvan countryside (at a price of 4,000 U.S. dollars for two weeks).<sup>43</sup> While these prices (gathered in 2010) are astronomically high compared to the cost of other goods and services in Tuva—a typical salary for a teacher was 200 U.S. dollars per month in 2010—they were an effort to match the value of similar services in Western Europe and North America (e.g., opera singing lessons at the San Francisco Conservatory, which run between eighty and 120 U.S. dollars per hour). Given the cultural monopoly on *xöömei* by the Tuvan musicians, the gate-keeping that arose after 2008 likely was effective in ensuring that a larger share of money associated with the commodification and circulation of Tuvan culture stays with Tuvan people in the future.

There are key points to be made here. Prominent Tuvan musicians such as Kongar-ool Ondar, Choduraa Tumat, and Aldar Tamdyn have played and continue to play important roles as cultural workers alongside academics such as Süzükei and Levin. As a result, the stabilization of a particular traditional music aesthetic marked by a nomadic sensibility is a conscious effort by many figures, not the inevitable outcome of sixty years of Soviet rule. At the same time, Soviet promotion of amateur art activities and ensembles made the endeavor of revival possible in the first place (see Chapter 2), and throat-singing was always seen centrally as something quintessentially Tuvan and therefore worth cultivating (as we saw during the early Soviet era with Aksenov, Guippius as well, see Chapter 1). As I said at the beginning of Chapter 4, *xöömei*, and Tuvan music more generally, have a rich and complicated history.

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<sup>42</sup> Steve Sklar of Minnesota, for example, typically charges forty U.S. dollars per hour for private, in-person lessons, or sixty dollars for three hours of online throat-singing lessons at <http://www.khoomei.com>.

<sup>43</sup> An example of this is Evgeni and Anai-Xaak Saryglar's *Sai-Khonash* Tourist Base in Western Tuva, <http://saixonash.wordpress.com/>

To summarize this section, the European model for music education remains dominant as a professional path for a growing number of urban Tuvan musicians, which sits in tension with “traditional” or “indigenous” transmissions of oral tradition. *Xöömeizhi* teachers try to bridge the gap by imparting nomadic sensibility to their students, but, absent real time spent in the Tuvan countryside, at least some of that sensibility’s ethos is lost along the way. Many musicians and scholars are engaged in a multi-pronged effort to reform musical education in Tuva, so as to better transmit and preserve what they see as indispensable Tuvan cultural memory.

#### PART IV

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### NOMADS AND COWBOYS

Though there is much debate about how to best transmit nomadic sensibility, there is relatively little debate that it *should be* transmitted. Indeed, nomadic sensibility is cultivated in Kyzyl’s urban *xöömeizhi* community not just as a music aesthetic, but as a social disposition. Nomadic sensibility manifests in sports, gender norms, dress, leisure activities, and intercultural collaborations.

#### *SPORTS AND GENDER NORMS*

In July 2011, the *xöömeizhi* community of Kyzyl gathered for the celebration of the newly constructed *Xöömei Ova*. The six cairns were built by a team led by Aldar Tamdyn with the support of Tuva’s Ministry of Culture, in a pristinely beautiful spot along the Yenisei River called Aldyn-Bulak (see Figure 5.7). The cairns are dedicated to spirit-masters associated with each of the main styles of Tuvan throat-singing: *xöömei*, *sygyt*, *kargyraa*, *borbangnadyr*, *ezengileer*, and *kumzattaar*.<sup>44</sup> In one sense, the *xöömei* cairns can be understood as a “re-sacralization” of the landscape and of *xöömei* in post-Soviet Tuvan culture. In another sense, it is a tourist destination, backed by a new complex of mansion-sized yurts for wealthy foreign tourists to stay in during their visits to Tuva, away from the city in a place where Tuva’s countryside can be viewed with a romantic gaze (see Figure 5.8).

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<sup>44</sup> While Aksenov (1964) identified four major styles (*sygyt*, *kargyraa*, *borbangnadyr*, *kargyraa*), there are two other styles represented here in the *ova*—the *xöömei* style, as well as the *kumzattaar* style. Zoya Kyrgys writes that *kumzattaar* (also called *kanzyp*) “is a sentimental lamentation (reminiscent of a wolf howl) of tragic character mainly performed by men... [and] the sound production is between bull’s *xöömei* and *kargyraa*” (2002: 93).





Figure 5.7. The *Xöömei Ovaas*, which opened in 2011 at the tourist complex “Aldyn-Bulak” along the Yenisei River. There are six cairns dedicated to spirit-masters associated with each of the main styles of Tuvan throat-singing: *xöömei*, *sygyt*, *kargyraa*, *borbangnadyr*, *ezengileer*, and *kumzattaar* (personal photo).



Figure 5.8. Yurt camp hotel and restaurant at the tourist complex “Aldyn-Bulak” on the Yenisei river near Kyzyl, Tuva, July 2011 (personal photo).

The opening ceremonies for the *Xöömei Ovaas* include a number of traditional Tuvan festivities, including informal throat-singing and *xüresh* wrestling competitions. *Xüresh* wrestling is considered the highest of the Tuvan masculine arts, one in which many Tuvan men—especially *xöömeizhi*—take pride.<sup>45</sup> The wrestling is done shirtless (in national competitions, only ornately decorated briefs are worn), and before an audience, whose members sing, chant, and root for their favorites during the matches (see Figure 5.9).

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<sup>45</sup> Based on survey data I collected regarding the characteristics of an ideal *xöömeizhi* in Tuva (2012-13).



Figure 5.9. Andrei Mongush (left) and Aldar Tamdyn (center) engage in a traditional eagle dance before an informal *xüresh* wrestling match near Aldyn-Bulak, 2011 (personal photo).

Masculinity or machismo is key in *xüresh* wrestling, and it echoes stories of masculinity or gendered norms being asserted in other venues. Many such stories depict *xöömeizhi* as being prone to violence under the influence of alcohol—knife fights, sexual violence, and murder, for example.<sup>46</sup> But in *xüresh* wrestling *xöömeizhi* also express a sensitivity to the natural world. Competitors, for example, engage in a ceremonial eagle dance before they square off, as Andrei Mongush and Aldar Tamdyn do in the photograph above.<sup>47</sup> In this way, *xöömeizhi* cultivate and express an extra-musical disposition that is performed in formal settings and informal social interactions.

It is generally taboo for women to perform *xöömei* in Tuva, but that is changing. Women are slowly reviving historical music practices, including *xöömei*.<sup>48</sup> For instance, in 1998, Choduraa Tumat founded the all-women’s traditional music ensemble Tuva Kyzy (“The Daughters of Tuva”), along with Aylanmaa Damyran, Valentina Chüldüm, Shonchalai Oorzhak (now Oorzhak-Choodu) (see Figure 5.10). All the musicians in the group had previous training in *xöömei* excerpt for Choduraa, who, in addition to performing, acted as the group’s musical director:

I was the director. I gathered everyone together, found a rehearsal room, instruments, outfits—all of the headaches of organizing a newly-formed group. After the [1998 *Xöömei*] Symposium, we agreed to meet in a year’s time; those of us who were not able to perform had to learn. It was

<sup>46</sup> The Tuva Republic has the highest regional murder rate in Russia. Most crimes are committed under the influence of alcohol. See, for example, Sullivan 1995 and Anaiban 1999.

<sup>47</sup> Based on survey data I collected regarding the characteristics of an ideal *xöömeizhi* in Tuva (2012-13).

<sup>48</sup> The daughter of legendary *xöömeizhi* Soruktu Kyrgys was said to have been able to sing *xöömei* in the 1940s, although it brought much shame to her family, so she abandoned it (Aksenov 1964: 227). Valentina Chüldüm was the first woman to sing publicly in singing competitions in the early 1980s. See, for example, Kozlova, S., “Smotr unikal’nogo isskustva” [“A festival of unique art”], *Tuvinskaya Pravda*, 30 September 1980.



1998. I saw that Kiva from Canada also performed [*xöömei*]. I thought—if a foreigner can learn, why couldn't I?<sup>49</sup>



Figure 5.10. Women's throat-singing ensemble Tyva Kyzy during a rehearsal in Kyzyl, 2013. From L-R: Choduraa Tumat, Olcha Saryglar, Aylanmaa Damyran (personal photo).

About female *xöömei* singers, Sean Quirk, the American manager for the Alash Ensemble who has been living in Kyzyl since 2003, says:

People will say grumpy things about female throat-singing, but that's about the worst you'll see these days. Nobody really is going to chase you down and tell you to stop anymore. But you might have old men saying grumpy things. Kaigal-ool says: '*seren chok*,' which means there's no breeze to it, because women's voices don't have a deep guttural foundation.<sup>50</sup>

Quirk is hinting at the gendered coding of nomadic sensibility in highly regarded *xöömei* performances. The reference to the lack of “breeze” in women's throat-singing is, really, a judgment that women simply cannot sing *xöömei*. One of Tuva's more accomplished female throat-singers, Sonchalai Oorzhak, responds: “How could I grow up in a place with such a beautiful art and not want to do it just because I'm a woman?”<sup>51</sup>

#### INTERCULTURAL PARTICIPATION

There is another arena in which nomadic sensibility is cultivated and transmitted as a musical aesthetic and social disposition: the international music community. In recent years, international singers have increasingly participated in *xöömeizhi* community, and their *xöömei* interpretations have gained some legitimacy, primarily through winning entries in national

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<sup>49</sup> Choduraa Tumat, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 26 July 2011. Choduraa was referring to a performance by female Canadian musician Kiva at the International *Xöömei* Symposium in Kyzyl in 1998. The impact of foreign women undertaking study of traditionally male-only performance art in other contexts (such as Bali) has been cited as an important impact of global circulation (Ben Brinner, personal communication, 5 August 2014).

<sup>50</sup> Sean Quirk, personal communication, Austin, Texas, 20 April 2012.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

*xöömei* competitions. Those musicians who are accepted in the *xöömeizhi* community are interpreted by insiders and outsiders as possessing Tuvan nomadic sensibility—or at least a workable synthesis of that sensibility and other aesthetics and orientations.

The most famous non-Tuvan *xöömei* singer was Paul Pena, a blind blues musician from the United States. Pena became interested in Tuvan throat-singing by tuning in to short-wave radio broadcasts from Radio Moscow during the 1980s and listening to those *xöömei* recordings that managed to find their way outside the Soviet Union. Pena began throat-singing himself, drawing on similarities he saw between American “gutbucket blues” and, in his words, Tuvan *xöömei*’s “down-home” sound. He traveled to Tuva in 1995 to compete in the Second International *Xöömei* Symposium, where he won the audience favorite award (see Figure 5.11). Pena, who took on the Tuvan nickname Cher Shimjer (“Little Earthquake”), also collaborated with Kongar-ool Ondar on multiple albums and concerts. Pena’s story was featured in the Academy Award-nominated documentary, *Genghis Blues*, a 1999 film that helped raise Tuva’s international profile. In the film Pena and Kongar-ool Ondar tromp around the Tuvan countryside like wild cowboys of the East.



Figure 5.11. American/Cape Verdian blues musician Paul Pena (left) and Kongar-ool Ondar at the Second International *Xöömei* Symposium in Kyzyl, 1995.<sup>52</sup>

#### LEARNING *XÖÖMEI* ALONGSIDE NOMADIC SENSIBILITY

Other foreigners have followed Pena’s lead. Some come from nearby Tuva, such as the Inner Mongolians who performed at the 2013 International *Xöömei* Symposium in Kyzyl and

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<sup>52</sup> Photo courtesy of Ralph Leighton and Friends of Tuva, personal archive.

won prizes in the *kargyraa* division.<sup>53</sup> Others, like Japanese biologist and folk musician Todoriki Masahiko, have come from farther afield. Masahiko first became interested in Tuvan music while he was studying Siberian plants in the late Soviet era:

Actually my first interest in Siberia itself was in local flora and geology.<sup>54</sup> So that was in 1990, still during the time of the Soviet Union. But then my dream came true, and I succeeded in visiting Tuva [in 1992]. The first time I learned that inside of Siberia there's a land called Tuva, it was through the Richard Feynman story [see Chapter 3]. It's not very easy to get to, but I heard that Tuva was such a beautiful place. So for me, the interest in music came later. The second time I was in Tuva [in 1993], I began to study music with Kaigal-ool Xovalyg, and it was a shocking experience! I felt like there's something very mysterious going on, but also I was much more connected with myself. So I learned to sing *xöömei* from the local people like this.<sup>55</sup>

Kaigal-ool taught me so differently from how the younger teachers teach foreigners in Kyzyl today.<sup>56</sup> He taught me to sing verses in Tuvan. I think at first it was: *Aal malym üngesh o'ttaar, oo ...* ["My cattle are eating grass, oo ..."], and *Borbak borbak badyrgyjaar, boostaamnyng shaa-la yndyg ...* ["My voice is round, as you can hear ..."]. Whenever I sing, I have to recall the meaning of the words in the Tuvan language. But the images are sometimes very different than rivers, mountains, or streams. Even on the stage, I can flash back to some certain kind of memories. Sometimes I experience a very strong flashback related to a personal memory. Smelling or listening to something. The more I study Tuvan music, the more I know something about what the work of the nomad is—squeezing milk from the cow, for example, or maybe smelling some dung from the horses. For those musicians who live in urban centers, you have to be experimental. Sometimes I imagine scenery in Tuva. Sometimes I travel to other places in my mind like maybe to California; or maybe I go to places where I grew up. I spent my childhood near a mountainous area in Japan, so maybe that's why I feel so much like I'm at home when I stay in Tuva.<sup>57</sup>

In 1997, Todoriki began performing with a Japanese musician named Saga Haruhiko, who specialized in Mongolian music. Calling themselves "Tarbagan," the ensemble competed and won the first prize (second place after the grand prix) at the II International Throat-Singing Festival in Kyzyl, Tuva, in 1998 (see Figure 5.12).

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<sup>53</sup> This dissertation has focused on Western European, North American, and Japanese encounters with Tuvan music, but there are many interregional connections with people from Xakassia, Altai, Yakutia, and Inner Mongolia. These groups have seen and/or participated in their own nomadic revitalizations of indigenous epistemologies in the post-Soviet era. See, for example, D'Evelyn 2014.

<sup>54</sup> In particular, Todoriki was interested in researching the Siberian dwarf pine (*Pinus pumila* (Pall.) Regel).

<sup>55</sup> Todoriki Masahiko, *xöömei* workshop at the University of California–Santa Cruz, 6 November 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Todoriki adds: "Since the 2000s, it seems like many younger ensembles are teaching foreigners in a way that is much more systematic. It seems more like a European way to me, and I think this way of teaching is a new phenomenon" (Todoriki Masahiko, personal Skype interview, 27 May 2014).

<sup>57</sup> Todoriki Masahiko, personal Skype interview, 27 May 2014.



Figure 5.12. Ensemble Tarbagan from Japan; Saga Haruhiku (*morin xuur*, Mongolian horsehead fiddle) and Todoriki Masahiko (with Tuvan *doshpuluur*).<sup>58</sup>

Todoriki explained that the prize gave him and Haruhiko a certain amount of permission from other Tuvan musicians to experiment:

After about ten years, I slowly began to realize that I do have my own style—something that’s very personal, but I think it sounds pretty cool. And no other guys can do this. Now I’m believing that it’s my style. I sing in Tuvan language, but my style is clearly different from the Tuvan way. It’s a Tuvan song, but it’s my music being played through it. It’s like I’m singing my song through Tuvan music.<sup>59</sup>

#### MOLDURGAA: ON BECOMING A COW

Finno-Ugric folk singer Pipa Paljakka (from Lappeenranta, Finland) and Morten Abildsnes, a jew’s harp (*munnharpe*) player and ethno-deejay from Norway, formed Ensemble Moldurgaa in the early 2000s.<sup>60</sup> In Tuvan, the name Moldurgaa means “one-to-two-year-old-calf” (see Figure 5.13). As students of Tuvan language, culture, and music, Pipa and Morten have a more than ten-year relationship with visiting Tuva and taking private lessons with various Tuvan *xöömeizhi*. During the registration for their first performance at the Üstüü-Xüree Festival in 2003, the organizing committee asked Moldurgaa to name their genre. Their reply: “avant-garde folk music.”

<sup>58</sup> Photo from Tarbagan website, <http://www.tarbagan.net/>.

<sup>59</sup> Todoriki Masahiko, personal Skype interview, 27 May 2014. For more information on Tarbagan’s albums, see <http://www.avantart.com/tuva/tarbagan.html>

<sup>60</sup> Pipa and Morten are both linguists by profession and members of the Finnish Throat-Singing Society. In Moldurgaa, Pipa plays *igil*, *byzaanchy*, and throat-sings. Morten also throat-sings and plays *xomus* and *doshpuluur*. See Figure 5.13.



Figure 5.13. Ensemble Moldurgaa (in Tuvan, “one-to-two-year-old-calf”), made up of Pipa Paljakka (Finland) and Morten Abildsnes (Norway), circa 2007.<sup>61</sup>

During a *xöömei* workshop organized at the University of Helsinki in 2012 in conjunction with the “Throat-Singing Study Circle” (of which I was a participant), Pipa described in detail the process of “letting go” of the voice which she normally hears and feels in her throat such that a new voice—part animal, part spirit—could emerge. She explained, “when I sing *xöömei*, it feels like someone else is in my throat.”<sup>62</sup> She went on to describe in detail a process of pretending to become a cow as an embodied exercise in order to emplace herself in the Inner Asian pastoral environment that her *xöömeizhi* teachers had so evocatively described to her during lessons. Pipa explained during the workshop:

Just imagine you are a cow and you are by a foggy lake in the morning. It’s misty and you say ‘moooo!’ This is nearer to the voice quality for *xöömei*. It’s using the muscles in those areas [pointing to the neck]. Now try some more sounds—cow or sheep. Try to constrict your throat around the place where the cow mooing happened. And then breathe so that it feels very humid and then something starts vibrating. You might be a cow breathing by the foggy lake. And you might also mix in some ‘ghost’ sounds. Because then the constriction is around the right place.<sup>63</sup>

Pipa’s directives suggested something interesting: when a person takes on a different voice, and when he or she can see that “new voice” as something other than his or her own voice, the person loses first-person subjectivity and gains the possibility of becoming something or someone else.

In the VI International *Xöömei* Symposium in 2013, Moldurgaa teamed up with Andrei Öpei to perform an old song from Kara-Xöl, Bai-Taiga, which Öpei had learned from a *noyon* named Anandy Chagalche. Chagalche had lived in Kara-Xöl and sung the song in 1913 or 1914 to a man named Balgan Nenzhaivche, who in turn had taught it to Andrei when he was a young

<sup>61</sup> Photo courtesy of the Finnish Throat-Singing Society, 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Pipa Paljakka, personal communication, University of Helsinki, Finland, 27 March 2012.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

child growing up in the taiga (see Chapter 2). Reviving the song in 2013, Öpei composed the lyrics according to the Tuvan tradition of *kozhamyk* (lyrical ditties), drawing on several popular Tuvan sayings, among them *Sagysh yshkash bolgan bolza* (“If it were like a dream”). Moldurgaa joined Öpei on the choruses, playing *igil* and jew’s harp, and Öpei played his *chanzy*:

*Er-le changys bolur dushta*  
*Ezir-kush deg bolurum-kai*  
*Engmek xaya baarynga*  
*Uya tudup alyrym-kai*  
*Eerergen eer Xemchiim*  
*Ergii xaigaarap uzbarym-kai*

If I were not born a lonely man,  
I wish I had been born an eagle, or a bird,  
I wish I had built a nest by the curved rock  
I wish I could fly around  
Above my whirling river Xemchik<sup>64</sup>

Tuvan musicians play creatively with lyrics in a similar way to Finnish and Norwegian traditional folk songs. As Morten describes, “you take a few lines from here, a few lines from there, combine them, make variations and add a few more lines of your own.”<sup>65</sup>

During an interview, I asked the members of Moldurgaa what their goals were with uncovering and performing archaic Tuvan folk songs.<sup>66</sup> Pipa responded:

Choduraa [Tumat] is good at finding old melodies that are rare and making new musical arrangements. She is also very active in teaching a younger generation of Tuvans to performing traditional music and perform it well. She makes Tuvans proud of their own music. I think Choduraa is a very good pedagogue, so I think she’s part of Tuva’s future.<sup>67</sup>

Morten jumped in:

And also, Tyva Kyzy doesn’t sound like Yat-Kha; they don’t sound like Huun-Huur-Tu, or Alash or Chirgilchin ....<sup>68</sup> But then there’s also GEN-DOS [Gennadi Chamzyryn]. The interesting thing about GEN-DOS is that he is doing *all* styles of Tuvan music and sound-making, but he’s only one person. There’s no other solo artist doing as much in one concert. If you see GEN-DOS in concert, he’s one of the only Tuvan artists who can use shamanism while keeping it as a natural part of the sound world. And he’s quite avant-garde.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Translation from Tuvan by Arzhaana Syuryun, personal communication, 10 August 2014.

<sup>65</sup> For an alternate version of this text, see the first verse of “Song of a Lonely Man” (track #15), the title track from Huun-Huur-Tu’s album *If I’d Been Born an Eagle* (1997).

<sup>66</sup> Paljakka also sings archaic Finno-Ugric music in two ethnofuturist women’s ensembles called Inehmo (<http://www.inehmo.fi/>) and Ehivaija (<http://www.kolumbus.fi/pipa.paljakka/ehivaija.html>).

<sup>67</sup> Morten Abildsnes and Pipa Paljakka, personal interview via Skype, 15 June 2014.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* As Morten acknowledges, even these groups are constantly experimenting with different approaches.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* To listen to cross-cultural musical collaborations by GEN-DOS, see, for example, K-Space *Bear Bones* (2002, SLAM) featuring British improvisers Tim Hodgkinson and Ken Hyder. See also GEN-DOS solo albums SHIZO I.D. (2007) and *Bay-Tayga* (2008) both on the Sketis Music label. Morten is currently compiling a discography of Tuvan music on CD (forthcoming publication by the Tuvan Institute for Humanitarian Research).



Thus, from their name to their pedagogy to their performances, Moldurgaa embraces and seeks to exhibit the nomadic sensibility of contemporary *xöömei*.

#### NATIVE AMERICAN SHAMANISM IN SIBERIA

American Enrique Ugalde (using the stage name “Soriah”) has also become a *xöömei* singer. He described the process of how this happened in an interview (see Figure 5.14). Ugalde’s performance skills as a foreigner warranted his inclusion as a track on Chirgilchin’s album *Will Teach* (2009); indeed, Ugalde has coined his own signature throat-singing style called *uvula kargyraa*, which is featured on recent Soriah albums and in Ugalde’s performances at the 2008 and 2013 International *Xöömei* Symposium competitions in Tuva. His experiences being taught by the members of Chirgilchin during a series of camps in California helped Ugalde cultivate his new passion.

I studied at Chirgilchin camps in California (2005 in Sebastopol, California and then in 2006 at Harvard Hot Springs), and then 2007 with Chirgilchin here in Tuva. That was the first international throat-singing camp here in Tuva. And from that experience, I got to meet a lot of other *xöömeizhi* who would never travel or who had never traveled to the United States at that time.<sup>70</sup>



Figure 5.14. Enrique Ugalde in a Tuvan *ton* (traditional robe) at the *Xöömei Ovaas*, Aldyn-Bulak, Tuva, 2013; posing outdoors in costume during a performance as Soriah (on *igil*).<sup>71</sup>

In 2008, Ugalde competed in the International *Xöömei* Symposium in Kyzyl, where he won third prize in the overall competition. That prize helped Ugalde legitimize his position as a *xöömeizhi*. Also helpful has been Ugalde’s Aztec heritage; as a musician deeply engaged with

<sup>70</sup> Enrique Ugalde, personal interview, Chadaana, Tuva (Üstüü-Xüree Festival), 16 July 2011.

<sup>71</sup> Photo on left by the author; photo on right from <http://www.last.fm/music/Soriah>

Native American shamanic traditions in addition to Eastern and Western ritual and ceremonial magic, Ugalde articulates an intercultural intimacy with Tuvan *xöömeizhi* regarding spatiality, energy, and their manifestation in natural Tuvan landscapes and herding activities.<sup>72</sup> In his words:

So what is it that makes good *xöömei*—being Tuvan or the Tuva experience? I found that being a student of voice for most of my life, I've got a really good ear, and I can mimic most anything. But what's the difference between me doing the exact same things as these guys? When you take apart the elements of what you have to do in order to [express] this art form, I found that I can't do it. I have to implement my own associations into what I do—which is actually exactly what they're doing! And so, I hung out with these guys and got to know what they were doing. The lifestyle has a lot to do with it.

For example, when Tuvans process their sheep, something about the energy they utilize on their sheep is the same as when they use their voices for *xöömei*. It's a very natural state. It's like the effort involved in hunting for [wild] animals. You apply that same essential energy when building a fire, herding sheep, riding a horse. *Xöömeizhi* are not singing about *what* that effort is, they are just applying it rather naturally and you can hear that in their singing. So what do I need to do in order to sing *exengileer* ['stirrup' style]? I need to ride a horse. I need to embody that application of energy onto nature—or maybe even what I need to do is learn to break in a horse, learn how to masterfully process a sheep, and so on.<sup>73</sup>

Enrique's comments are rich. They make clear that through his *xöömei* he reproduces local discourses about nomadic life. They also make clear that, in the global arena, knowledge travels alongside *xöömei*. That is, *xöömei* is not simply a commodity that circulates in world music markets. Rather, traveling Tuvan *xöömeizhi* and their promoters have been successful in exporting to the world a particular kind of Tuvan self or way of being in the world—a nomadic sensibility. That disposition is exciting and enlightening to many non-Tuvans, and, for some, represents a contemporary fascination with the exotic.<sup>74</sup> Tuvan nomadic sensibility is evident in non-Tuvan *xöömei* workshops, as well. Students who take the workshops are taught not only how to make throat-singing sounds, they are expressly taught to embody a certain vision of what it means to be a Tuvan *xöömeizhi*. Lessons transmit the “techniques of the body” (to use Marcel Mauss's terminology), as well as a kind of *xöömeizhi* habitus that can carry ethical and political dimensions.<sup>75</sup>

The foregoing examples show that the nomadic sensibility that underlies post-Soviet Tuvan *xöömei* continues to be cultivated in Kyzyl's urban *xöömeizhi* community and around the

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<sup>72</sup> Enrique Ugalde, personal interview, Chadaana, Tuva, 16 July 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Enrique Ugalde, personal interview via Skype, 11 May 2012.

<sup>74</sup> While it could be argued that aestheticizing *xöömeizhi* dispositions is akin to a contemporary orientalism, certain aspects of orientalism that Edward Saïd saw as fundamental to the concept do not appear to be operative in the case of Tuva; for example, a gendered domination by the “masculine” West of the “feminine” East, or the idea of Eastern decadence. See Saïd 1979.

<sup>75</sup> See Mauss 1934 and Bourdieu 1977. Bourdieu defines habitus as a “system of dispositions” (1977: 214, fn.1). See also Wacquant 2004.



globe. That sensibility is a musical aesthetic and a social disposition, whose characteristics manifest in many different ways. Nomadic sensibility means respecting shamans and spirits in the natural world and having a certain synergy with the natural environment. Nomadic sensibility also underlies the gender norms that connect *xöömei* with masculine *xüresh* wrestling; to be an ideal *xöömeizhi* is to be strong, a sportsman, self-reliant. As a constructed cultural memory, nomadic sensibility is engineered; there is a conscious and subconscious selection of which *xöömeizhi* characteristics are cultivated and exported. Touring *xöömeizhi*, for example, are often forbidden by their managers from drinking alcohol. But engineering only works to a point; stories of drunkenness, belligerence, and escapade among Tuvan *xöömeizhi* circulate internationally, for example, and usually only work to increase the fascination with Tuva as being ancient, free, natural, and nomadic—a contemporary Wild Wild East.<sup>76</sup>

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In 2012, Sean Quirk, bicultural American musician, Tuvan translator, and tour manager for ensemble Alash, told the audience at an Alash concert in Austin, Texas:

It's really easy for outsiders to make the assumption that the music we're playing [with Alash Ensemble] and the music of Tuva is something that's extremely heavy and it's something that needs to be taken with great weight and consideration and, in a sense, that might be the case, because this music is very old. Some scholars talk about it going back to a time before language, and it's certainly very connected with nature—with both imitating and participating with the sounds of nature and so maybe a touch of something really deep and human inside of us that we didn't really know we had. But at the same time Tuvan music is folk music. This is people music. This is country music. It's cowboy music—it's just from the East instead of the West.<sup>77</sup>

That same year, Quirk and the Tuvan National Orchestra performed a mash-up of the American cowboy song “Ghost Rider in the Sky: A Cowboy Legend,” by Johnny Cash (originally written by Stan Jones in 1948) and “Chylgychynyng yry” (“The Herdsman Song,” also known as the “Tuvan Cowboy Song”)<sup>78</sup> in a Soviet-style folkloric aesthetic on a stage in Moscow (see Figure 5.15).<sup>79</sup>

“Ghost Rider in the Sky” lyrics:

An old cowboy went ridin' out  
one dark and windy day,

“Chylgychynyng yry” lyrics:

In the ghostly moonlight  
Autumn freshness caresses my cheeks,

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, the Tuva section of Lonely Planet guide book for Russia (5<sup>th</sup> edition, 2009: 597–603).

<sup>77</sup> Sean Quirk, opening comments of Alash Ensemble concert, University of Texas–Austin, 20 April 2012.

<sup>78</sup> The song “Chylgychynyng yry” was originally composed by either Alexei Chyrgal-ool or Rostislav Kendenbil during Tuva’s Soviet era and appears on Chirgilchin’s album *Aryskan’s Wind* (1999). The idea for the mash-up with Johnny Cash’s “Ghost Rider” originated between Enrique Ugalde, Nachyn Choodu, and Sean Quirk in 2009 (Sean Quirk, personal communication, 29 July 2014). The mash-up was arranged for the Tuvan national orchestra by Oksana Tyulyush (Victoria Peemot, personal communication, 14 August 2014).

<sup>79</sup> Tuvans cite affinities to American cowboy and Indian themes by feeling a kinship with the character Chingachgook from James Fenimore Cooper’s novels (for example, *Last of the Mohicans*, 1757), which were popular in Tuva during the 1970s and 80s through East German “Ostern” films that were regularly shown on Soviet television (Victoria Peemot, personal communication, 29 July 2014).

Upon a ridge he rested as he went  
along his way,  
When all at once a mighty herd  
of red-eyed cows he saw  
Plowin' through the ragged skies  
and up a cloudy draw.

Their brands were still on fire and their  
hooves were made of steel,  
Their horns were black and shiny and their  
hot breath he could feel,  
A bolt of fear went through him as they thundered  
through the sky  
For he saw the riders comin' hard and he  
heard their mournful cries.

Yippie i ohhh ohh ohh!  
Yippie i aye ye ye!  
Ghost riders in the sky.

With a lasso tied to the saddle  
I ride my fast horse into the starry night  
Rushing my herd forward.

At dawn, when the sun looks out  
After passing a herd to my mate,  
I ride on my trusted bay to my beloved girl  
With the saddle and bridle tinkling, I am trotting.

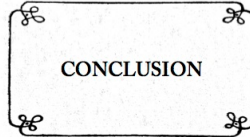
When my buckskin-trotter is trotting,  
mist from the ground clears away.  
When my buckskin-pacer is pacing,  
early mist clears away,  
My *sygyt*-song, my *xöömei* gently  
Chasing the breeze as I sing.

In the ghostly moonlight...  
I ride my fast horse into the starry night  
Rushing my herd forward.<sup>80</sup>



Figure 5.15. The Tuvan National Orchestra, performing “Ghost Rider in the Sky / Chylchyngyng Yry,” directed by Ayana Mongush (left) at the Concert Hall “Korolevskii” in Moscow, 14 December 2012. Soloist (right) is Sean Quirk, American musician, Tuvan translator, and tour manager for ensemble Alash (personal photo).

<sup>80</sup> Translation from Tuvan by Victoria Peemot.



CONCLUSION

How is *xöömei* configured in post-Soviet Tuvans' understanding of their place in history, and in their imagination as contributors to the contemporary global soundscape? How can we de-essentialize *xöömei* as a producer of difference, deterritorialize *xöömei* vis-à-vis various colonial frameworks, and truly understand *xöömei* as it is practiced in Tuva and around the world today?

Many scholars have argued that *xöömei* is, at its core, one part of a larger Turkic or nomadic “revival” of pre-Soviet cultural forms. I submit, however, that the history and practice of *xöömei* reflects a more nuanced “political imagination” (to use the phrase of Caroline Humphrey, 2002) for Tuvan people living within the Russian nation-state. That imagination has emerged from, and continues to shape, the ways in which Tuvans situate themselves in the world and contribute to the global soundscape, which over time has become defined by a certain nomadic sensibility. *Xöömei* throat-singing therefore is a dynamic force, one which circulates among and is constructed at the nexus of multiple interconnected cultural politics. Alongside Tuvan *xöömeizhi*, international fans and enthusiasts who actively throat-sing help shape how Tuvan throat-singing is learned, taught, and practiced in Tuva today.

One of my primary goals in examining the history of *xöömei*, and its global circulation and nomadic sensibility in the post-Soviet era in particular, is to empower Tuvan people to negotiate and manage their music and their culture on their own terms. This is a tall order, for this dissertation is in many ways a study of difference. By studying cultural difference we risk essentializing it, which is the last thing I want to do. On the other hand, to understand something—to wrestle with what it has been, what it is, and what it might be—is necessarily to attempt to describe and explain it. Fortunately, understanding difference in a sensitive and respectful way is perhaps the most important lesson I have learned from my studies of Tuvan *xöömei* and *xöömeizhi*. I have learned that to appreciate difference, one must deterritorialize it—*i.e.*, be aware, and try to let go, of any attachment to the particular qualities or characteristics that define (or that we perceive to define) someone or something as different. Proper appreciation of difference always involves a displacement. I hope the reader finds that this work advocates for respecting and appreciating difference without commodifying or objectifying it.

Ethnomusicology also depends on open-minded curiosity. In conducting my fieldwork, analyzing the data, participating in voice lessons, and writing this dissertation, my thesis did not come first. Rather, the concept of nomadic sensibility and its place in the history and practice of *xöömei* emerged only after I had engaged in these experiences and thought and wrote about them at great length. This dissertation is a synthesis of my research and experience, its thesis an articulation of what that research and experience stand for from my perspective.

At the end of the day, nomadic sensibility is not a product—a song, a text, a costume—and so cannot be evaluated like one. Nor is it just a technique or an aesthetic. Rather, it is a *sensibility*—a disposition, a “musical intuition within the animistic universe,” as German Popov, long-time collaborator with Huun-Huur-Tu and Sainkho Namchylak, recently put it. “I think it has to do with archaic society, where all members are to some extent musicians” whose “musical intuition” has since been normalized and institutionalized.<sup>1</sup> Whatever we call it, nomadic sensibility is perhaps akin to “soul” in jazz or blues, “*rasa*” in Hindustani classical music, or “*crack*” in Irish traditional music. As an embodied set of musicianship skills for a personalized approach to music-making, it can be exported to other musics, as the examples in Chapter 5 show. Thus, nomadic sensibility is a model for illuminating various aspects of culture and history; rethinking relationships between fan culture, practice, and circulation; and more fully understanding how we learn and shape our music and our voices.

To apply that model to Tuvan music, nomadic sensibility presents an alternative to traditional Eurocentric and Soviet-centric notions of music and musicianship. It employs multi-sensory acuity, a “listening in” and “feeding back” with one’s natural surroundings—landscape, cultural memory, animals, spirits. Nomadic sensibility demands skills and techniques that can be refined and cultivated, but only partly in urban voice lessons and professional music schools. The outdoors in Tuva, or places to which musicians feel a strong connection, remain central to cultivating nomadic sensibility. Tuvan nomadic sensibility is a reflection of the spirit of a nomadic worldview and subject position, one that has been and continues to be constructed and consumed by Tuvans and people around the globe.



Figure c.1. The author competing in the VI International *Xöömei* Symposium in Kyzyl, Tuva (14 June 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> German Popov, personal communication, 10 August 2014. Popov collaborated with Huun-Huur-Tu on *If I'd Been Born an Eagle* (1997) and legendary Tuvan free jazz musician Sainkho Namchylak on *Naked Spirit* (1998) and *Stepmother City* (2002). Visit German’s website to hear more about his music: <http://www.omfo.net/>.

Taking the advice of my Tuvan teachers after our voices lessons over multiple years, I decided to go back home and explore my own sounds of the lakes growing up in Minnesota, and then later the ocean and the mountains of California as a college and graduate school student. I close with an excerpt of the Tuvan poem that I wrote and sang in the VI International *Xöömei* competition in June 2013 to accompany my throat-singing performance in the *kargyraa*, *xöömei*, and *sygyt* styles.<sup>2</sup> Though I have not (yet) earned much praise for my throat-singing, the experience was edifying and brought me much closer to the music and the people with whom I have been studying. There is much work left to do, and I cannot wait to do it.

*Xöömeimni salgyn-xat deg  
Kargyraamny deerge chedir  
Kaas-charash ezhimeige  
Yrak cherden salyp berein.*

*Uzhen, dürten mung xölder  
Minnesota churtumaida  
Chalgyg yshkash xöömeimni  
Charazhymga salyp berein.*

*San-Frantsiskodan batkan suunga  
Balyk oglu bailan-na men  
Xooraiymda uruglaryng  
Badylgalyg ezhi-le men.*

*Aldan-bezhen daglarymny  
Kaliforniya churtumaida  
Aldy karysh tatushkalyg  
Aldyn xoldug charazhymda.*

*Tuman bar-daa bol, chok-daa bol  
Dalaiymga salyp berein.*

My *xöömei* is like the wind  
I can sing *kargyraa* to the skies,  
For my beautiful friend  
I sing to you from far away.

The thirty or forty thousand lakes  
across my Minnesota,  
*Xöömei* like waves  
Flows to my darling.

In the San Francisco Bay  
I feel like a fish,  
Playful people in the city  
I am their trusted friend.

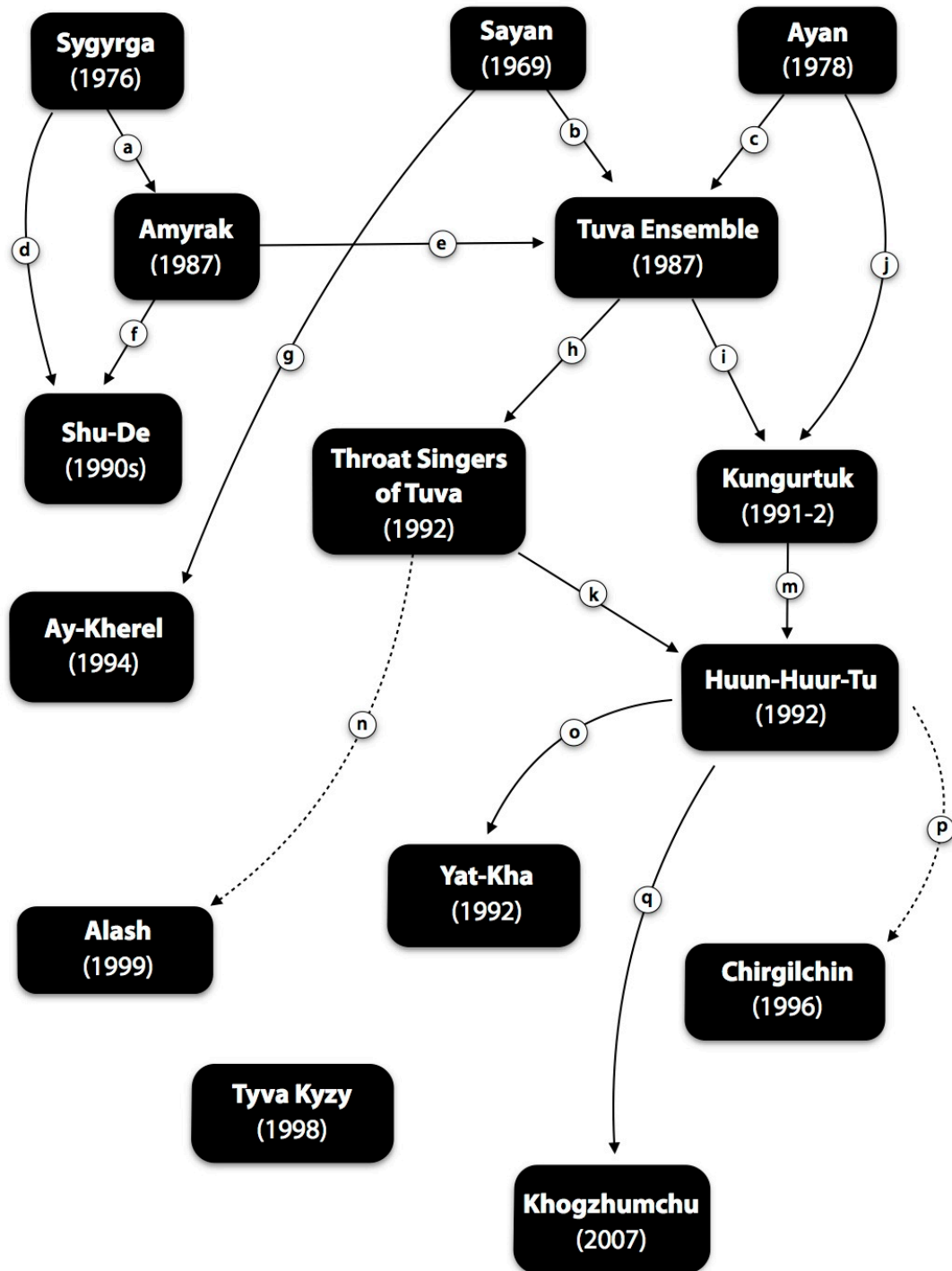
The fifty or sixty mountains  
In my home of California,  
The six spans of tattoo  
On the golden arm of my beloved.

If there's fog, or if there's no fog—  
I sing to the ocean.

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<sup>2</sup> Special thanks to Sayzana Tovuu for help editing my Tuvan poems.

MAJOR TUVAN MUSIC ENSEMBLES, 1969-2014



Sygyrga (founded 1976)

Kara-Sal Ak-ool  
Marzhymal Ondar  
Sat Manchakai  
Maksim Dakpai  
Xunashtaar-ool Oorzhak  
Gennadi Chash (joined later)  
Oleg Kuular (joined later)  
and others

Amyrak (founded 1987)

Gennadi Chash  
Kara-ool Tumat  
Mergen Mongush  
Evgeni Oyun

Tuva Ensemble (founded 1987)

Gennadi Tumat  
Stanislav Danmaa  
Damba-Dorzhu Sat  
Maryam Sat  
Anatoli Kuular  
Kaigal-ool Xovalyg  
Idamchap Xomushku  
Sergei Ondar  
Ivan Saryglar  
Boris Xerlii  
Radomir Mongush  
Kongar-ool Ondar  
and others

Shu-De (founded early 1990s)

Oleg Kuular  
Mergen Mongush  
Leonid Oorzhak  
Nadezhda Shoigu  
Alexei Shoigu  
Boris Salchak  
and others

Ay-Kherel (founded 1994)

Vladimir Soyán  
Gennadi Tumat  
Nadezhda Kuular  
Stanislav Danmaa  
Sergei Ondar  
and others

Throat Singers of Tuva (1992)

Kaigal-ool Xovalyg  
Anatoli Kuular  
Kongar-ool Ondar

Kungurtuk (founded 1991)

Kaigal-ool Xovalyg  
Sasha Bapa  
Sayan Bapa  
Albert Kuvezin

Huun-Huur-Tu (founded 1992)

Kaigal-ool Xovalyg  
Sasha Bapa (former member)  
Sayan Bapa  
Albert Kuvezin (former member)  
Andrei Mongush (former member)  
Alexei Saryglar  
Anatoli Kuular (former member)  
Radik Tyulyush  
(for changes in Huun-Huur-Tu  
ensemble over time, see chart in  
Figure 3.15)

Yat-Kha (founded 1991)

Albert Kuvezin  
Ivan Sokolovsky (former member)  
Alexei Saaya  
Sholban Mongush  
and others

Chirgilchin (founded 1996)

Mongun-ool Ondar  
Aldar Tamdyn  
Aidysmaa Koshkendey  
Igor Koshkendey

Alash (founded 1999)

Bady-Dorzhu Ondar  
Ayan-ool Sam  
Ayan Shirzhik  
Sergei Sotpa (former member)  
Mai-ool Sedip (former member)  
Nachyn Choodu (former member,  
previously in the Tuva Ensemble)

Tyva Kyzy (founded 1998)

Choduraa Tumat  
Ailanmaa Damyran  
Valentina Chuldum (former  
member)  
Shonchalai Oorzhak (former  
member)  
and others

Khogzhumchu (founded 2007)

Andrei Mongush  
Evgeni Saryglar  
Kan-Xuler Saaya  
and others

Tracking Movements Between Ensembles

- (a) Gennadi Chash
- (b) Gennadi Tumat (later to Ay-Kherel)
- (c) Kaigal-ool Xovalyg
- (d) Oleg Kuular (also briefly in the Tuva Ensemble)
- (e) Evgeni Oyun (also in Erteneelig Tyva and Chedi Tei)
- (f) Mergen Mongush (also in Biosintez with Gennadi Chamzyryn)
- (g) Vladimir Soyán and Nadezhda Kuular
- (h) Kaigal-ool Xovalyg, Kongar-ool Ondar, and Anatoli Kuular
- (i) Kaigal-ool Xovalyg
- (j) Sayan Bapa, Sasha Bapa, and Albert Kuvezin
- (k) Anatoli Kuular
- (m) Kaigal-ool Xovalyg, Sasha Bapa, Sayan Bapa, Albert Kuvezin
- (n) Kongar-ool Ondar founds Alash
- (o) Albert Kuvezin founds Yat-Kha and later leaves Huun-Huur-Tu
- (p) Sasha Bapa founds Chirgilchin
- (q) Andrei Mongush joins Huun-Huur-Tu and later forms Khogzhumchu



APPENDIX II

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PEOPLE'S *XÖÖMEZHI* OF THE TUVA REPUBLIC<sup>1</sup>

Marzhymal Ondar (1928-1996)<sup>†</sup> <sup>Ω</sup>  
Maksim Dakpai (1928-1999)<sup>Ω</sup>  
Fedor Tau (1929-2006)  
Sundukai Mongush (1930-1996)  
Xunashtaar-ool Oorzhak (1930-1992)  
Kara-ool Tumat (1932-2002)  
Nikolai Mongush (b. 1942)  
Valeri Mongush (b. 1953)\*  
Andrei Opei (b. 1957)  
Evgeni Oyun (b. 1958)  
Boris Mongush (b. 1959)\*\*  
Gennadi Chash (1960-1998)  
Kaigal-ool Xovalyg (b. 1960)\*\*  
Aldyn-ool Sevek (1962-2011)  
Kongar-ool Ondar (1962-2013)\*\*  
German Kuular (b. 1962)  
Gennadi Tumat (1964-1996)  
Mongun-ool Ondar (b. 1975)\*\*  
Igor Koshkendey (b. 1978)  
Bady-Dorzhu Ondar (b. 1984)  
Andrei Mongush (b. 1976)\*  
Evgeni Saryglar (b. 1980)

\* Honored Artist of the Tuva Republic

\*\* Honored Artist of the Tuva Republic and Honored Artist of Russia

† Master Builder of Tuvan Musical Instruments

Ω Honored Culture Worker of the Tuvan ASSR

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<sup>1</sup> Special thanks to Valentina Süzükei, personal communication, 14 August 2014.



LIST OF AUDIO AND VIDEO EXAMPLES<sup>2</sup>

Audio and video files can be found as a supplemental download from ProQuest alongside this dissertation PDF document. Follow references in the text.

**Listening Excerpt #1:** Kombu Ondar performing “Avaiymny” in the *sygyt* style (1934, Melodiya 3010). See Chapter 1, Figure 1.7.

**Listening Excerpt #2:** Soruktu Kyrgys performing *borbangnadyr* (1934, Melodiya 3009). See Chapter 1, Figure 1.8.

**Listening Excerpt #3:** Xunashtar-ool Oorzhak performing “Reka Alash” in the *sygyt* style (1968, Melodiya D-030773). See Chapters 2 and 3.

**Listening Excerpt #4:** Huun-Huur-Tu performing “Mezhegei” from *60 Horses in My Herd* (1993, Shanachie 64050). See Chapter 3, Figure 3.11.

**Listening Excerpt #5:** Ay-Kherel performing “Eerbek-Aksy” (from *Gennadi Tumat: My Homeland Ovür*, 2000, PAN 2090) followed by Huun-Huur-Tu performing “Eerbek-Aksy” (from *The Orphan’s Lament*, 1994, Shanachie 64058). See Chapter 3, Figure 3.13.

**Listening Excerpt #6:** Anatoli Kuular performing *borbangnadyr* next to a stream and then *xöömei* on horseback (1999, Smithsonian Folkways 40452). See Chapter 4.

**Video Excerpt #1:** Orlan Mongush performing excerpt of his original song “Shavydar” on *doshpuluur* with *kargyraa* (Chadaana, Tuva, 2011). See Chapter 4.

**Video Excerpt #2:** Evgeni Oyun performing *dumchuk* (nasal) *kargyraa* (Kyzyl, Tuva, 2012). See Chapter 5.

**Video Excerpt #3:** Ayan-ool Sam of ensemble Alash performing *xöömei* in (Austin, Texas, 2012). See Chapter 5.

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<sup>2</sup> Permission to use audio excerpts in connection with this dissertation was granted by Shanachie Entertainment, Smithsonian Folkways, and Pan Records (August 2014). Special thanks to Todoriki Masahiko for sharing excerpts from digitized archival recordings. All videos filmed and edited by Robert Beahrs, who is the copyright holder. Supplementary audio and video content is provided to amplify the dissertation text and is not intended for reproduction or distribution.

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