

Baatarnaran Tsetsentsolmon

**Constructing
National Culture:
Music and the
Performing Arts
in Mongolia**



AUSTRIAN
ACADEMY
OF SCIENCES
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*For my grandmother Khandbal Badarch,
the most intelligent and strongest woman I have ever known*

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Note on transliteration and names

For transliterating Mongolian Cyrillic, I adopt the Tibet and Himalayan Library system, with the exception of the Cyrillic *B*, which I transliterate with *V*. For Russian transliteration, the ALA-LC system is used. Mongolian names of people are written using the surname (*ovog*, which mainly occurs patronymic) initial, followed by the given name. For Russian names, the initials of the given and middle names are followed by the surname.

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Preface

Mongolia has faced rapid ideological shifts towards global cosmopolitan perspectives since the collapse of the state socialist system in the 1990s. Contemporary Mongolian arts are diverse and dynamic in both their creative productions and their cultural practices. The last three decades of democratic and neoliberal transformation have brought new values and norms in public culture. Mongolian artists enjoy freedom of expression as well as interactions with globalisation and cosmopolitanism that lead them to exercise a variety of art genres, literary works, artistic practices, and cultural events. The recent sensation of a heavy-metal band, The Hu, calling their style 'Hunnu rock' – which had 76 million views on YouTube and reached no.1 on *Billboard's* Hard Rock Digital Song Sales in 2019 – is regarded as Mongolia's utmost achievement in the world creative industry. The Wasabies, a Mongolian pop music girl band is succeeding in the Asian music market, reaching audiences from Japan, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and other Asian countries. International television show franchises such as *Got Talent*, *Your Face Sounds Familiar*, and *The Voice* have a wide range of participants from and an audience in the country. E. Amartüvshin, an opera singer trained in Mongolia and a laureate of the International Tchaikovsky Competition (2011) and BBC Cardiff Singer of the World (2015), is defined as 'a true Verdi baritone' by international music critics and performs at Valencia and the Metropolitan Opera in New York.¹ Young freelance artists aspire more to individually unique expressions rather than fitting into existing institutional patterns and social settings. Regardless of all these changes and achievements, the systems, categories, and ideologies that state socialism shaped remain not only in cultural memory but also embedded in contemporary practices. In the field of artistic practices, there are contrasting constellations between the old state structure, which was left intact as a vessel, and new individual creative content.

The overarching concepts of modernity and tradition drawn by socialist modernisation projects created distinctive and hierarchical genres, which, in effect, indicate social groupings. These socialist modernist categories and systems still channel cultural and artistic practices, although they have overlapped and blurred in the post-socialist era. The state apparatus sticks to

1 Irurzun, José M. 'An impressive Amartuvshin Enkhbat proves to be a true Verdi baritone in Valencia's Nabucco'. *Seen and Heard International*. 16 December 2019. <https://seenandheard-international.com/2019/12/an-impressive-amartuvshin-enkhbat-proves-to-be-a-true-verdi-baritone-in-valencias-nabucco/>.

the old patterns and even resourcifies them (or turns them into a resource) in the new nationalist politics.

This book consequently explores how socialist and post-socialist Mongolia constructs and reconstructs national culture through artistic practices such as music, literature, and film. It further presents transforming spheres of individual artists and the existing institutional patterns and social settings wrought by democratisation and neoliberalism since the 1990s. There are tensions between emerging market-oriented and innovative practices, on the one hand, and social memories of the achievements, systems, and ideologies from state socialism, on the other. The book describes the process by which contemporary notions and strands of thought in culture and arts have been constructed in public culture. In doing so, ethnographic and historical anthropological approaches are noteworthy for showing what was concealed in the official history.

My self-reflective personal experiences of witnessing a socio-political shift from socialist modernism to a capitalist market economy are allied with the discourses and arguments I refer to here. My training in (Soviet-style) classical music, and then in 'Mongolian studies' (*mongol sudlal*), which is a self-claimed discipline with nationalist approaches, in the years of 'transition', help me to frame the conceptual transformation of the two social orders, from socialism to capitalism. While the former was under the supervision of Soviet-trained Mongolian pedagogues and the last Russian professional in Mongolia, the latter aimed to revive the Mongolian 'national culture and civilisation', especially the classical Mongolian script. Revisiting my memories and experiences allows me to see the shift in ideological and cultural constellations rather than in disciplines or institutions. While the former was heavily based on the Russian educational system, the latter was full of nationalist sentiments about history, language, religion, and culture. This book is about contested but interlinked patterns of modernity and tradition drawn by state socialism and further modified after its collapse.

List of Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
GLAVLIT	General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press under the Council of Ministers of the USSR
IMAR	Inner Mongolian Autonomous Republic
MARZ	Mongolyn Assotsiatsyn Revolyutsionny Zokhiolchid
MARL	Mongol'skaya Assotsiatsiya Revolyutsionnykh Literaturrov/ Mongolian Association for Revolutionist Litterateurs
MPR	Mongolian People's Republic
MNFWU	Mongolian National Free Writers' Union
MPRP	Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party
MWU	Mongolian Writers' Union
PRC	People's Republic of China
SEFSD	State Ensemble for Folk Songs and Dance
SHA	State-Honoured Artist (<i>Ulsyn gavyat jüjigchin</i>)
SPW	State Prize Winner (<i>Töriin shagnalt</i>)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WAFF	World Association of Folklore Festivals

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Introduction: Conceptual and categorical legacies of state socialism

Prologue

In July 2023, Mongolia organised the 15th Culture Naadam (*Soyolyn Naadam*) as part of the National Holiday of Naadam at a horseracing field 28 kilometres west of Ulaanbaatar, the capital city. The slogan of the Culture Naadam, unchanged from the festival's inception, is 'Let Us Watch the Horserace² and Glorify Our Culture' (*Soyolon üzey, soyolooroo bakharkhay*). The point is to make horserace visitors proud of national cultural practices that are performed and displayed on the site. The festival, touted as a 'distributor of cultural heritage' (*soyolyn öviig түгээгч*), aims to promote nomadic cultural heritage and folk performances, and to glorify the Mongolian national cultural elements registered in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List. The main sponsor of the festival that year was Rio Tinto, a global mining group that owns 66% of Oyu Tolgoi, a large copper and gold deposit in the South Gobi of Mongolia. The Culture Naadam is one of many cultural festivities in which public and private partners work together to proudly celebrate national culture.

I participated in the Culture Naadam as a concert manager when it was held for the first time in 2008. That year, a performance by leading folk and pop artists was one of the main events. The South Korean cultural consulting firm METAA, Metabolic Evolution through Arts (culture) and Architecture (space), was the key partner that put forward the concept of nomadic spirit as a source of creativity. I remember I felt a distinction between what was imagined as the Korean 'nomadic spirit' and the 'nomadic way of thinking' embodied in Mongolian practices. The Korean partnership in the Culture Naadam ended after a few years, but the festival has remained one of the crucial programs of the National Holiday of Naadam.

A colleague of mine, an ethnologist working on livestock husbandry who was part of the 2023 Culture Naadam organising team, expressed his disappointment that culture is understood by officials and the public only as artistic performances. The notion of *soyol*, or culture, had been mostly perceived within a limited sense of stage performances of folk music and

2 The term *soyolon* refers to a race of five-year-old horses, which are regarded as the strongest and fastest and are believed to bring people good luck. This race is the most highly attended.

dance, games, and calligraphy, among others. Livestock husbandry practices of processing hides, producing fermented mare's milk (*airag*), and shamanic rituals became themes of performance rather than the daily life of herders.

The story of the Culture Naadam sketches the cultural scenes that have been crafted in contemporary Mongolia. Culture, with strong undertones of tradition and nomadism, has come into focus in state policy and general awareness over the course of the transition from socialism to post-socialism. Free enterprises have recently been involved in the process of 'glorifying culture' to gain state and public support. The state features selected cultural aspects, some inherited from state socialism and some added after socialism, as intellectual and economic resources for nation-building. The illusion of culture created by the state strengthens old platitudes about 'nomadic culture' and a deep past, creating distance from the real life of modern herders and cosmopolitan youth. Consequently, '(national) culture' became something glorifying, eye-catching, and market-worthy.

This book is a study of cultural spaces, practices, and discourses forming the concept of 'national culture' (*ünesnii soyol*) in both state socialist and post-socialist contexts in Mongolia. My research interest is in the process of art production as a tension between individual artists and the state. The overarching theme of 'national culture' (*ünesnii soyol*) has ideological and categorical implications rather than being a substantive entity, as it has generally been perceived in public culture until now. Mongolia re-identified as a nation and state by unmaking its socialist identity, and constructed a new national identity through nationalist ideologies (Bulag 1998, Kaplonski 1998, Munkh-Erdene 2008) after the collapse of the state socialist regime in early 1990s. However, constellations and schemas drawn by the socialist state (the Mongolian People's Republic, or MPR) remained operational in ideological and practical platforms in the 'new' state of Mongolia after it adopted a new constitution in 1992.

The MPR's ideology of state socialist cultural construction celebrated some amount of the edited and approved category of 'national tradition' within the wider context of what we might call Soviet cosmology. In the mid-1990s, democratic Mongolia adopted the conceptual and categorical tools of the MPR to craft national culture for itself. Hence, emerging innovative energies and stagnant institutional patterns left over from state socialism are in tension in contemporary practices. To explore the spaces, practices, and discourses that emerged in the transition from Soviet-style modernist to democratic state, it is crucial to look at the process of building 'national culture' during state socialism.

I analyse the notion of ‘socialist era’ not as a singular top-down force in a holistic way but as a complex process that involved resistance, contentiousness, and individual responses. In current collective memory, the state socialist regime is mostly referred to as *sotsializmiin üye* (‘socialist era’), which for some implies 70 years of state control and suppression, and to others implies egalitarian order. The state socialist ideology was introduced in Mongolia in the same vein as the Soviet civilising programme (Hirsch 2000), social engineering based on high modernism (Scott 1999), and nationality policy based on Marxism-Leninism (Gellner 1983, 1988, 1997; Martin 2001). However, it is distinct from other Soviet-bloc countries in many ways, as ‘different cultures, traditions and histories of socialism emerged in different nation-states and regions’ (Højer & Pedersen 2019: 10). While socialism in the Soviet Union grew out of a competition with capitalism as Kotkin (1995) argues, Mongolian socialism was instead a mixture of conforming to the Soviet Union and building a (socialist modernist) nation-state. Mongolia built socialism in its own particular way because socialism had an ambivalent, complicated, or, from some perspectives, in some cases encouraging attitude to national specificity (Bulag 1998, Kaplonski 1998, Højer and Pedersen 2019).

In the making of socialism, various technologies of suppression, reformulation, and erasure were operative in many aspects of previously existing cultural practices. People remained uncertain about the authenticity of their own cultural knowledge and memory (Buyandelger 2007, 2008). Ethnographic data collected within this study allow me to portray the social memory of socialism not as a stagnant ‘whole’ order ruled by the state, but as ambivalent and complex cultural framings within the regime.

The main conceptual tool for constructing the socialist ‘national culture’ was the Soviet formula of ‘national in form, socialist in content’ (*ündesnii khelbertei, sotsialist aguulgatai*), the meaning of which was unclear and manipulative. Intensive state campaigns and official controls were undercut by individual-based shortcuts that made the process ‘(inter)personal’. Individual connections based on family relations, political engagements, and homeland regions (for the notion of *nutag*, or birthplace, in Mongolia see also Namsaraeva 2012, Bumochir 2019) circumvented state control and censorship. Ideological framings seemed to be predominant in official narratives, but remained nothing but superficial slogans in the postsocialist social memory. Narratives and cultural memories concerning the last decades of the state socialist regime, which were labelled as the ‘thaw’, or ‘mature’ or ‘late’ socialism in the context of the Soviet Union, are crucial to

trace historical contexts and cultural transformations in Mongolia after the 1990s. The focus is to show how socialist and post-socialist ideologies and practices interact or contest.

While the ‘nation’ had a strong political implication, the notion of ‘culture’ (*soyol*) was a matter of aesthetics and art (*uran saikhan*). The ‘nation’ is understood here in conjunction with politics and culture brought by socialism in the sense of Verdery’s (1991) description of Romanian socialism. ‘Culture’ is mostly perceived as ‘high culture’ or in connection with (European) aesthetic contemplation and ‘arts’ (*urlag*) in contemporary Mongolia. The conjoined concept of *soyol, urlag* (culture and arts) refers to a field and even a community dealing with artistic creations, practices, events, institutions, and professions. It has been further legitimised as common sense in law, state administrative units, academic institutions, and public discourses. Hence, the term ‘arts’ I use in this book mainly refers to the Mongolian concept of *urlag*, which includes various artistic practices and cultural productions but does not necessarily mean fine art or visual media as it is generally understood in the English-speaking world. My focus is on the (mostly hierarchical and centre-peripheral) categories in cultural practices and institutions such as ‘rural and urban’, ‘professional and amateur’, and ‘classical and folk’, which were crafted by socialist society and remain active today. Mongolian concepts such as *ündesnii soyol* (‘national culture’), *nüüdliin soyol irgenshil* (‘nomadic culture/civilisation’), and *ardyn urlag* (folk art), which had been framed with the Marxist evolutionary paradigm and became normative, are taken as transformative and constructive concepts.

Research scope and methods

Arts and performance have not been in the focus of anthropological studies on socialist and post-socialist cultural politics in Mongolia. The existing scholarly literature on socialist and post-socialist Mongolian cultural production, and related ideologies and transformations in socio-political contexts, is relatively limited. Anthropological research on cultural and social transformations during and after socialism have dealt with power and resistance (Kaplonski 2004, 2014; Stolpe 2008), economical shifts (Humphrey 2002, Empson 2020, Højer & Pedersen 2020), ethnic politics and cultural mapping (Bulag 1998, Munkh-Erdene 2011), and historical and contemporary processes of political economy (Sneath 2018, Bumochir 2020). One of the main transformations after socialism was the revival of religion and spirituality, and multiple studies have been published on the resurgence

of the previously suppressed Buddhist (Wallace 2015, Quijada 2019) and Shamanic practices (Pedersen 2011, Buyandelger 2013, Shimamura 2014, Delaplace 2020). All these works provide insights and theoretical framings for interpreting transformations systematically and ideologically.

Carole Pegg published one of the pioneering monographs on artistic practices in the process of identity construction, titled *Mongolian Music, Dance, and Oral Narrative: Performing Diverse Identities* (2001). Her constructive analysis, and her extensive data collected at the dawn of post-socialism, contribute invaluable to understanding the complexities of cultural life in Mongolia. Pegg's work elaborates diverse identities in musical traditions and their transformation during socialist modernisation. She claims that 'anything that represented past traditions or difference, anything symbolising separate ethnic or group identities, was forbidden and where possible confiscated and destroyed' (Pegg 2001: 256). Reflecting the deconstruction of socialist identity in the early 1990s, when she conducted her field research, Pegg argues that 'the communist regime repressed, assimilated, and refashioned performance traditions, as well as introducing new European art forms, as it attempted to create a socialist national identity' (2001: 284–5).

Peter Marsh presents socialist modernisation and nationalisation in Mongolian music culture in his monograph *The Horse-head Fiddle and the Cosmopolitan Reimagination of Tradition in Mongolia* (2009). Marsh elaborates a history of socialist cultural development through the transformation of the horse-head fiddle (*morin khuur*) and further approaches cosmopolitanism and nationalism in tension. In this book, I examine contemporary artistic practices while situating them in a larger historical context that includes socialism, thus building on Pegg's and Marsh's arguments about musical traditions while expanding on them in temporal and thematic scope. I present multilayers of perceptions and practices in the socialist nation-building process.

Several other doctoral and post-doctoral studies deal with the history of traditional musical forms and identity construction (Yoon 2011, Curtet 2013, Legrain 2014, Plueckhahn 2014, Cowell, 2018). Most previous scholarship has examined the process from the perspective of a specific music and performance genre and its changes. The main argument has been centred on conventional concepts of tradition and modernity in music culture.

Another trending topic for anthropologists is Mongolian hip-hop, which has emerged as a new podium to reflect post-socialist regression,

nationalism, and criticism. Delaplace (2014) argues that nationalistic sentiments about “being a real Mongol” is a central theme for Mongolian rap. Peter Marsh (2006) has also discussed the process of building cultural nationalism through hip-hop performances. Ippei Shimamura (2021) claims that contemporary hip-hop performances have national specificity, not necessarily by expressing nationalist sentiments but by creating their own way of rhyming in connection with oral tradition.

Mongolian scholarship on the topic of national culture had been approached mostly from socialist political history (Natsagdorj 1981, 1986; Dashdavaa 1989; Davaasambuu 1990; B. Sumya 1999; B. Punsaldulam 2018) and narrow discipline-specific angles such as art studies, musicology, and cultural studies (B. Batsüren 1971; G. Tsendorj 1983; J. Enebish 1991; N. Jantsannorov 1989, 2006; J. Badraa 1998, 2005; J. Dolgorsüren 2000; T. Dorjdagva 2003). The notion of ‘culture’ is then analysed mainly from aesthetic and philosophical perspectives rather than anthropological ones. Hence, cultural discourses evolved around ‘professional’ cultural organisations, events, and artistic pieces. Moreover, ethnographic research on music and performance had been heavily influenced by Soviet-style ethnography which focused on folklore and specific features of different ethnic groups. Based on new ethnographic material, in this study I analyse artistic performances as one of the main ideological domains in cultural and social contexts.

This book further contributes to the existing scholarship with expansive perspectives on state socialist cultural politics and (dis)continuity between socialist and post-socialist cultural values and their social effects. Using new materials to provide an update on recent transformations in cultural practices, this book deconstructs contemporary notions of culture by questioning how artists and political regimes understand it. In doing so, I do not focus on a certain art genre or form but rather on shifts in ideologies, spaces, practices, and discourses that emerged between transforming entities. My research interest is in the tensions between individual artists and the existing institutional patterns and social settings during democratisation and neoliberal globalisation since the 1990s. A closer examination of the process of culture and art being nationalised and re-nationalised in socialist and post-socialist societies contributes to the anthropology of music and performance as well as to the anthropology of post-socialism.

I carried out my PhD field research in Mongolia between 2009 and 2020 in the capital city Ulaanbaatar, in the city of Höhhot, and in the provinces of Övörkhangai, Arkhangai, and Khövsgol for periods ranging from two weeks

to one year. I gathered the ethnographic data over the course of multiple fieldwork periods, the latest of which were conducted virtually. I collected narratives and memories from key actors who were actively involved in cultural processes of state socialism and post-socialism, in order to picture historical contexts and social transformations. I was able to obtain 'smooth entry' into the community of musicians and artistic practitioners of both younger and senior generations thanks to my educational and family background. I conducted the first interview with the senior composer D. Luvsansharav, who represented the generation called *Golden Age* (*altan üye*).³ It was a switch in my role from a family friend to a researcher. At this stage of 'grand-tour observation' (Spradley 1980), I could come up with only general and unspecific questions about 'cultural campaign' (*soyolyn dovtolgoon*), 'socialist culture', and 'new culture'.

Throughout my research on the memory of socialism, I noticed at least two general attitudes to one's past activities. Regardless of my bewilderment in the early stage of my research, D. Luvsansharav was excited and proud to talk about what he did in the socialist era. According to him, he had hardly been asked about his past in detail although he often appeared on TV shows and newspapers giving interviews. D. Luvsansharav and others openly and perhaps proudly identified as 'a product of socialism' (*sotsializmiin бүтээгдэхүүн*). These cultural producers are satisfied with what they built in their time and bequeathed to the next generation.

Another attitude towards the memory of one's past in state socialism is the fear of being blamed (for control and suppression) and reluctance (as it was in vain and no longer exists anymore). It was common for senior cultural elites to be protective and take a *safe distance* from the past. It took me years to get consent from D. Tsedev for an interview about his time as the director of the Writers' Union during the socialist period. He was more than friendly and welcoming to me as we had a good relationship over years. However, it happened that D. Tsedev was hesitant not about being interviewed but about talking about the socialist Writers' Union. He had had enough of obtrusive attacks by young activists during the emergence of free press (*chölөөт khevlel*) in the early 1990s. I am incredibly honoured that he finally agreed to share his stories and memories, which are at the center of this book.

3 The *Golden Age* mostly refers to those who started their careers in the 1930s from the first-ever European-style theatre named the People's Stadium (*Ardyn tsengeldekhi khüreelen*), nicknamed the Round Green Theatre (*Bombogor nagoon teatr*).

During my field research, I conducted participant observation at various music recitals, concerts, and events at ‘professional cultural and arts institutions’ (*mergejliin soyol urlagiin baiguullaga*) in the city of Ulaanbaatar as well as performances by freelance artists at night-clubs and restaurants. I did archival research at the National Archive and the People’s Party Archive in the early years. During the participant observation research phase, I interviewed B. Erdenebat, a leader of the ethno-rock band Altan Urag (named after Chinggis Khan’s⁴ lineage), who became popular by introducing a fusion of folk and rock music. During this research phase I also interviewed J. Uugantuya, a manager of the State Morin Khuur Ensemble. We were all alumni of the former Music and Dance College, the main institution providing official music education in Mongolia. B. Erdenebat was full of creative energy to express nationalist sentiments about the history of the Mongolian Empire, whereas J. Uugantuya was institutionally fixed within the existing state apparatus. I began to see the tension between the existing system and new efforts by emerging freelance artists.

It was also during this time that I started to problematise the notion of culture. My study seeks to reconsider and re-identify the understanding of ‘culture’ (*soyol*) and ‘arts’ (*urlag*), which had been defined from elitist and progressivist perspectives directed at aesthetic contemplation and civilisation (contrasted to barbarism). The process of deconstructing the culture concept led to a shift from ‘culture’ backed by Marxist schemas to ‘cultures’ in a sense of daily practices and nonhierarchical equality. In other words, a definition of state socialist culture can be understood in the Taylorian sense of social evolution but in a nationalised way. (Marxist) socialist evolution was used to interpret the past of a particular society and as a universal model for contemporaneously existing society (Gillette 2002: 4). Consequently, both ‘culture’ and ‘arts’ became crucial measuring devices of advancement and sophistication in socialist Mongolia. As Abu-Lughod (1991) argues, the current concept of culture, unlike the nineteenth-century sense as a synonym of civilisation, allows for multiple rather than binary differences. Most importantly, the shift to the concept of ‘cultures’ is that these can change, and that difference between cultures is no longer viewed as necessarily natural and innate (Abu-Lughod 1991: 271).

The following two sections present the transformations of the culture concept in the Mongolian context and the process of nationalising it. The section *Culturising the nation* provides a short historical outline of fundamental shifts in the meaning of the notion of ‘culture’ (*soyol*), while

4 The Mongolian transliteration is used for spelling Chinggis Khan’s name.

the next section *Nationalising the culture* shows the nationalisation and re-nationalisation of the culture. The focus is also to rethink the concept of 'national culture' embodied in state, academic, and public discourses in Mongolia and to contextualise its historical and contemporary transformations.

Culturising the nation

Both 'nation' and 'culture' were primary subjects of a socialist evolutionary framework that Mongolian elites used to interpret their country's political and social insufficiency. The notion of culture – and of 'cultured' (*soyoltoi*) versus 'uncultured' (*soyolgüi*) people – played enormously important roles in the construction of the new society (of the Mongolian People's Republic) in the 20th century. This notion of culture was associated with the Soviet Union's nationalities policy, which promoted the 'national character' (*ündesnii ontslog*) of its subjects and aimed to intensify national-cultural development. The aim was to turn so-called backward peoples into nations and 'to foster national cultural distinctions – within the context of a unified [state]' (Hirsch 2000: 204). The Mongolian word for Stalin's concept of *natsional'naia kul'tura* of the nationalities policy was '*ündesnii soyol*'. Martin (2001) has proposed translating Stalin's *natsional'naia kul'tura* as 'national identity' or 'symbolic ethnicity' but not as 'national culture'. As a result of the Soviet modernisation project in Mongolia, the concept transformed from a category associated with teachings, doctrine, ethics, and nurturing in the pre-revolutionary period to one linked to modernist notions of hygiene, secular education, urbanism, and cosmopolitanism.

The concept of *soyol* may have had an administrative or legislative implication historically. In the decree of the Qing Emperor Kangxi, known as Enkh Amgalan Khan in Mongolia, there is an instruction 'to foster human beings under Heaven with culture' (*khünii utgyg üzej tengeriin doorkhiig soyoloor khümüüjүүлмүй*) (Daichin ulsyn magad khuuli 1990: 1). The Manchu word *wen* ('culture') used to have the meaning of decree or legislation. In the imperial Dictionary of the Manchu Language, *wen* is translated as *soyol* in Mongolian and as *bka' khrims*, meaning order and law, in Tibetan (Dictionary of the Manchu Language 1978: 4-5). As Altanzaya (2007) points out, the term to obey the culture of the Bogd,⁵ expresses both

5 The Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutuktu is the reincarnated spiritual head of the Gelugpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia. Here, the reference is to the Eighth Jebtsundamba, named Bogd Khan (1869–1924), who was elevated to theocratic leader after Mongolia declared independence in 1911.

the historical tradition of the Manchu-Mongol relationship and the new political situation that emerged after the collapse of Qing rule. In the 17th century, the idea of acquiescence to the ‘culture’ of the Manchu Emperor and the Bogd was meant to apply to the sovereignty of Mongol princes and to Buddhist authority. The reference to the ‘Bogd’s culture’ of the early 20th-century Mongolian state also related to the sovereignty of the newly independent state (Altanzaya 2007: 54). Clearly, then, pre-revolutionary conceptualisations of *soyol*, later to become ‘culture’, had various political and religious connotations.

The People’s Republic of Mongolia consolidated its first constitution in 1924, where it states that it is ‘to open the way to be enlightened with “wisdom and culture” (*erdem soyol*) for its people.’ Setting rules to ‘enlighten the people’ (*ardyg gegeerüülekh*) was under the jurisdiction of ‘the highest agency of state power’ (*ulsyn deed erkhiig khadgalakh gazar*) such as the Great State Khural (parliament), Little State Khural (presidium) and the government. The Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (MPRP) gave directions for an intensive conceptualisation of ‘national culture’ (*ündesnii soyol*) and ‘national consciousness’ (*ündesnii medrel*) during the ninth congress, held in 1934. The government (or party) highlighted the revolutionary and political feature of constructing national culture (and education) (*ündesnii soyol bolovsrol*), as this was part of the general revolution. However, the party promised to avoid intervention in cultural development through administrative units, ‘setting deviations’ (*nugalaa üüsgekh*), or restraining the new cultural (re)construction (The MPRP 1981: 402-10).

The MPRP adopted the Soviet policy of promoting distinctive national identities and national consciousness and the ‘national elite became highly familiar with lifestyles and values of the USSR’ (Sneath 2009: 73). To unify non-Russian populations under its political agenda, the Soviet Union promoted forms of national identity to a limited extent. Martin (2001) points out that the Soviet policy systematically promoted, ‘not only through the formation of national territories staffed by national elites using their own national languages, but also through the aggressive promotion of symbolic markers of national identity: national folklore, museums, dress, food, costumes, opera, poets, progressive historical events, and classic literary works’ (Martin 2001: 74). The state socialist modernisation project that the MPR or MPRP adopted under the influence of the Soviet Union has affected the contemporary notion of ‘national culture’. The focal point of my research is constructive social factors that affected and transformed art forms within

state socialist policies to promote a ‘national character’ (*ündesnii ontslog*). Hence, the conjunctive concept of *ündesnii soyol*, or ‘national culture’ was heavily influenced by the Soviet nationality policy.

After the collapse of the Soviet system in the 1990s, state socialist ideologies and values both continued and discontinued in the connotations of ‘national culture’ in Mongolia. With the emergence of the new political culture of democracy and the free market, nationalist sentiments about (pre-socialist) cultural tradition became central in the process of reshaping ‘national culture’. The new policy maintains an essentialist and protective perspective by defining national culture, in the State Policy on Culture (Jargalsaikhan 2012: 5), as the ‘fundamental intellectual immunity’ (*oyuny suuri darkhlaa*). Furthermore, the 1996 Law on Culture⁶ and other legal documents define culture as a ‘value’ (*ünet züil*), ‘basis for development’ (*khögiliin ündes*), ‘guarantee of independence’ (*tusgaar togtmolyn batalgaa*) and ‘source of well-being’ (*saikhan amidralyn ekh survalj*). While maintaining the sense of measuring advancement from socialist modernisation, the connotations of culture as a form of protection to ‘survive in the globalisation era’, and as a resource to be sold at the global level, came to light. Along with socialist modernisation and post-socialist liberalism, the concept of ‘culture’ faced shifts in meaning from (Buddhist) doctrine to socialist evolutionary schema, from Marxist model to capitalist resources of commodification.

Nationalising the culture

The present concept of *ündesnii soyol* or ‘national culture’ in Mongolia is understood as a (substantial) broad entity that includes cultural values such as language, religion, script, literature, and music. It is understood as a conjoined term linking ‘nation’—a collective identity—to ‘culture’ as a set of traditional cultural values. In this context, the ‘nation’ concept has both civic and ethnic nationalist connotations: the former refers to Mongolia as a nation-state while the latter refers to a primordial Mongol ethnicity. The current usage of ‘national’, or *ündesnii* (Mong. *ündüsün-ü*), was formed in association with state independence in the 1920s, although it had many historical implications concerning nationality and ethnicity. As Munkh-Erdene points out, ‘*ündüsü* (nation) was transformed from lineage and lineage nationality to nationality and nation’ (Munkh-Erdene 2006: 92). The concept of *ündesten* (Mong. *ündüsüten*), ‘nation’, was reconceptualised

6 *Soyolyn tukhai khuuli* [Law on Culture] 1996 (State Great Khural), s. 3.
<https://legalinfo.mn/mn/detail/454>

from ethnic implications defined by origin, kinship, and ethno-genesis to the Soviet concept of *natsiya*, ‘as a socialist union of denationalised peoples’ (Hirsch 2000: 203), or a state constituted of multiple *yastan* (literally ‘bone-group’), or nationalities.

The post-socialist conception of *ündersten* further promoted the concerns of the nation, both ethnic and state socialist. According to Bumochir (2020: 9), ‘socialist and post-socialist nationalism successfully incorporated the ideas of modernity such as urbanisation, industrialisation, democracy, human rights, and globalisation.’ He further points out the ‘forms of ethnicised nation-protecting in addition to features of civic nation-building’ (Bumochir 2020: 9). The concept of *ündersten* (‘nation’) or *ündernii soyol* (‘national culture’) that I mainly refer to throughout this book implies a (nation-) state (*uls*), admitting its connotations of ethnic primordialism, state socialism, ethnic and civic nationalism, and neoliberalism. The term ‘culture’ conveys a conceptual categorisation that is mostly interrelated with artistic ideologies, practices, and representations in this context.

The ethnic and static connotations of ‘nation’, or *ündersten*, are clearly seen in the relationship between Mongolians and Inner Mongolians⁷ which will be further discussed in Chapter 7. Each group claims to be bearers of culture and identity, referring to ‘national cultural’ practices that were shared and practiced by both sides. At the same time, in some contexts each group seeks national identity (or ethnic, in this case) among the other. The notion of authenticity of group identity - ‘being Mongol’, or ‘Mongolness’—is something that each group attributes to the other in cultural exchanges developed in the last few decades. National culture is something to be shared by Mongolians and Inner Mongolians in a sense of ethnicity. However, it is also territorialised within the political sphere of the nation-state.

Nationalist elements selected in the old ideology remain as ‘potential resource[s] to mobilise public support’ (Sneath 2010: 251). Past cultural advances, labelled as ‘heritage’, are now a main theme that is retained for resourcification. The implied shift was from the socialist concept of ‘cultural heritage’ to a statist notion of ‘cultural heritage’, classified as ‘tangible’ or ‘intangible’ by UNESCO (Tsetsentsolmon 2012, 2014). With high involvement from international donor organisations and UNESCO conventions for safeguarding cultural heritage, the revival of traditional culture was quickly repackaged as the ‘revitalization of cultural heritage’, as Bumochir and Munkherdene claim (2019: 99). In this way, artefacts,

7 ‘Mongolians’ are people from Mongolia; Inner Mongolians here generally refers to ethnic Mongol people from the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region of China.

cultural monuments, and archaeological findings remain the focus both of academic and political state agencies (Lang and Tsetsentsolmon 2020). Bumochir (2020) describes the political economy of resources in Mongolia as a contest between *indigenisation* and *neoliberalisation*. The former refers ‘to nationalist and statist initiatives intended to transform elements to be ethnically, historically, traditionally and authentically Mongolian’ (Bumochir 2020: 4). The latter refers to the global capitalist free-market economy established by neoliberal policies in Mongolia.

The 1992 constitution states that ‘the history, cultural monuments, scientific and intellectual heritage of the people of Mongolia should be under the state protection.’ Although the concept of national culture seems to be a unifying theme for the new political orthodoxy, it has been manipulated by political parties, mainly the Mongolian People’s Party and the Mongolian Democratic Party, which have ruled the country in turn for the last three decades. The political rivalry for accessing and utilising various past glories continues in the destruction of state socialist ideologies and the construction of pre-socialist history.

Anti-colonial political narratives have caused shifts, such as changing the name of the capital’s main square from Sükhbaatar Square to Chinggis Square, in transforming the Lenin Museum into a Dinosaur Museum,⁸ and in demolishing the Natural History Museum to build a Chinggis Khan Museum.⁹ On the other hand, rulers have been criticised in public debates for the kleptocracy of public spaces in the city centre. Cultural themes became tools to manipulate the structure and functions of government, or ‘fair cake-cutting’ for politicians. The newly established Ministry for Culture in the early 1990s dealt with the revival of pre-socialist culture, including the campaign to rebuild the 26.5-metre-high indoor statue of the Avalokiteśvara, a Buddhist bodhisattva. After three decades, the Ministry of Culture, re-established in 2020, is building a gilded statue of Chinggis Khan (7 meters high and 13 tons) at the top of the Chinggis Khan Museum building. The

8 There was a property dispute between the MPRP and the Ministry for Culture, Sports and Tourism, newly established and ruled by the Democratic Party from 2012 to 2016, over the Lenin Museum built in the 1970s. The Central Dinosaur Museum was opened in the same building, displaying the bones of the ‘Tarbosaurus bataar’, which had been illegally exported to the US before being returned.

9 The government issued a resolution on 3 July 2019 to establish the Chinggis Khan Museum and to merge the Natural History Museum with the Dinosaur Museum. As a result, the Natural History Museum building, dating from the 1950s, was demolished in November 2019 on the grounds that it had deteriorated. There was a protest by a group of Ulaanbaatar citizens who claimed the building as cultural heritage and historic architecture.

concept is contradictory because it aspires to decolonise the conventional representation of Mongols as ‘barbarians’ by putting the imperial concept of Chinggis Khan’s Golden Lineage and aristocracy in light. Culture remains at the centre of political-economy discourses. Local ‘cultural centres’ (*soyolyn töv*) in rural areas, structured units established by the socialist state, became a target for politicians to gain public support by investing in construction. Apart from election campaign meetings, the sub-districts’ cultural centres are mainly inactive ‘empty vessels.’

Chapter overviews

This book is organised in an argument-based structure, driven by emerging concepts and notions, although it follows a rough chronological order from the last decades of socialism to the first decades of post-socialism. I present records and narratives by a variety of stakeholders recalling their involvement in historical and contemporary (national) culture-building processes and the emergence of contested conceptual and ideological tools. The first half of the book discusses artistic practices and the emergence of hierarchical categories within socio-political contexts of shaping national culture within the state socialist regime. It also covers intellectual exercises and their employment in practice to resist the destructive phase of Soviet-style nation-building and further Marxist orthodoxy. Three chapters in the second half of the book elaborate the post-socialist (de)/(re) construction of national culture, (dis)continuity of state socialist values, and the emergence of neoliberal ideology.

The historical context of the MPR’s nation-building, echoing Soviet ideology, is presented in Chapter 1, ‘National in form but not in content’, which further describes how the current notion of ‘national culture’ has been shaped. I present destructive and constructive processes of state socialism dealing with the pre-socialist monastic order and the new socialist order. The Marxist evolutionary notion of culture was also a secularization project. Socialism destroyed or suppressed (in everyday life) much of the Mongolian culture that was imbued with religion and spirituality. Yet, the state also utilized religion as a marker of national identity and as ideological propaganda. I highlight the extent to which ‘national’ (*ündesnii*) was perceived, legislated, and practised under Stalin’s slogan ‘national in form, socialist in content’, which was not clearly explained. The lack of clarity had both positive and negative effects, allowing spaces for artists to create in their own ways and for officials to manipulate censorship. However, it was clearly not to ‘allow for any fundamentally distinctive religious, legal, ideological, or

customary features' (Martin 2001: 12). The propaganda against the Buddhist monastic order, including imagery of Buddhist monks in art productions, was one of many measures that the socialist government took to break the power of the Buddhists (Kaplonski 2011) in Mongolia.

The emergence of artistic genres, hierarchical categories, and social relations shaped by the Soviet model of modernity and backed by Marxist evolutionary ideas are examined in Chapter 2, "The pathway from songs to operas" (*Duunaas duuri khüirekh zam*): Hierarchies in music and society', which deals with social divisions drawn by the music genres of classical music and folk music. State socialism introduced such binaries as 'high art and low art', 'professional and amateur art', 'rural and urban art', and 'classical and folk art'. Moreover, the chapter further explores how collective identities are shaped through cultural productions under the influence of the nationality policy.

Folklore or folk art was not only an art genre but was solidified through academic scholarship and cultural practices in 20th century Mongolia. As discussed in Chapter 3, 'Creating ethnic and provincial diversity', the Soviet nationality policy highlighting specific features or symbolic markers of nationhood had an impact in shaping 'ethnic groups' (*yastan* or lit. 'bone groups') and, respectively, 'multi-ethnic' folklore.

Earlier attempts to resist the deconstructive phases of socialist cultural construction are discussed in Chapter 4, "Nomadic civilisation": Breaking the Marxist orthodoxy', which points out the re-conceptualisation of pre-revolutionary culture and the (first) revival of 'national culture' in the last decades of the state socialist order. It further discusses the emergence of the 'nomadic (culture) civilisation' (*nüüddiin soyol irgenshil*) in academic discourses, which was an attempt to break with Marxist orthodoxy.

Ideological and institutional transformations from socialist literature to post-socialist literature, are explored in Chapter 5, 'Liberating writers, but insufficiently', which elaborates the split between the Writers' Union and Free Writers' Union in the early 1990s as an attempt to defeat the regime and to express nationalist sentiments. This movement arose at an earlier stage of the revival of national culture, which later turned out to be economically 'liberal' (or neoliberal) and politically (ethno-) nationalist. While censorship in socialist Mongolia was personal and manipulative, it became a theme of narratives of state socialist suppression after the regime's collapse. However, the form of the old state structure for the production and control of 'culture' (literature and the arts) was left largely intact. Although

artists enjoy ‘freedom’ of creative expression, the old system of titles, and awards continued to seek to channel the arts within its remit.

The process of re-shaping and re-nationalising *üundesnii soyol* (national culture) after the collapse of the state socialist regime is discussed in Chapter 6, ‘Reprocessing and resourcifying national culture’. This chapter further delineates how categories, and cultural practices (dis)continued in the age of the market. While the pre-socialist-era concept of tradition, particularly from the period of the Mongol Empire, became a key concept for new cultural productions, practices that were routinised in the socialist era remain active.

The cultural mobilisation of the conceptual distinction between the urban and the rural drawn by state socialism is also described in this chapter. It demonstrates the (re)positioning of centres and peripheries within society due to new forms and expressions of cultural practice. The rise of new art forms and economic resources clashed with old cultural values and classes. Themes associated with the urban and the rural remain central (Sneath 2018) not only in political economy, but also in the mobilisation of centres and peripheries in everyday life. While some keep a clear-cut line between urban and rural art genres, others aspire to dismantle existing norms.

The re-categorisation of knowledge and artistic practices after the 1990s is explored in Chapter 7, ‘Contested sentiments about “cultural heritage”’, which deals with the transformation of conceptual tools and the involvement of various stakeholders, including UNESCO. The chapter further explores how the ‘socialist cultural heritage’ of the Mongolian People’s Republic turned into the ‘national cultural heritage’ of post-socialist Mongolia. Dealing with the dispute over registering shared practices between Mongolia and Inner Mongolia in the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the chapter presents the process as the ‘resourcification’ and ‘territorialisation’ of art within the political sphere.

I.

‘National in form’ but not in content

Prologue

This chapter presents historical accounts of the destructive and constructive implications of the state socialist shaping of culture that has been embedded in contemporary Mongolian society. Narratives and memories about conceptual frameworks and practices demonstrate socialist ‘cultural advancement’ as a modernising, nationalising, and essentialising project. They further elaborate state socialist agendas embedded in cultural practices, even though the meaning remains unclear in slogans such as ‘revolutionary realism’, ‘socialist realism’, and ‘national in form, socialist in content’. While ‘socialist content’ was eventually removed from the collective memory, the ‘national forms’ granted by the socialist state remained as resources of re-nationalisation after the regime’s collapse.

In this chapter I analyse elements of the destructive and constructive processes of the Soviet-style cultural campaigns in Mongolia’s artistic practices. While seeing the overarching project of cultural development as part of Soviet modernism, I point out how national identity was shaped in the Mongolian context within the spaces permitted.

The Cultural Revolution process was part of the Soviet regime’s modernisation project, and aimed at turning ‘backward’ people into socialist nations by promoting their rapid national-cultural development. The term ‘Cultural Revolution’, as an inseparable part of Lenin’s plan to construct socialism, was mentioned for the first time in Lenin’s last publication, in his article ‘On Cooperatives’ (Dashdavaa 1989: 15). He drew a clear-cut distinction between ‘advanced’ nationalities, whose nationalistic impulses endangered their less-developed neighbours, and ‘backward’ nationalities and ethnic groups, who needed Soviet assistance to reach a higher level of national-cultural development (Hirsch 2000: 209). Favouring subject groups and fostering their national culture was not to be done for their own sake but for the consolidation of the Soviet Union. Calling this policy ‘state-

sponsored evolutionism', Hirsch argues that the Soviet Union pursued a civilising program based on Marx's proposed stages of human development.

Culture was an ideological weapon controlled by the state to measure advancement and sophistication in the Marxist evolutionary schema. The MPRP, which was gradually transformed into an imitation of the Soviet Communist Party (Atwood 2004: 380), accomplished both destructive and constructive processes of the Cultural Campaign (*soyolyn dovtolgoon*)¹⁰ in Mongolia. The destructive part of the process was associated with the intensification of class warfare against 'bourgeois elements', whereas its constructive aspect aimed at the creation of a new socialist way of life (Martin 2001).

After consolidating power in the 1920s, the MPR set out to radically reform Mongolian society and to overcome 'backwardness' (*khotsrogdol*) through 'culture and enlightenment' (*soyol gegeerel*). The MPR's first constitution states that: 'the state should provide free education for its 'many genuine people' (*jinkhene olon ard*) in various disciplines by opening ways to wisdom and knowledge.' The state promoted mass literacy campaigns and a state schooling system. One of the earlier applications of the term 'culture' was to promote the new secular educational values of the socialist state. The term was linked to '*erdem*' (wisdom/knowledge), '*bolovsrol*' (education/refinement), or '*gegeerel*' (enlightenment), to form terms such as *erdem soyol*, *soyol bolovsrol* or *soyol gegeerel*. Earlier documents show that the aim 'to develop the national culture and education' (*üandesnii soyol bolovsrolyg khögjüülekh*) was put into practice by building secular schools all over the country.

'National consciousness' was granted by the Soviet regime 'to equalise power relations among groups at different levels of national-cultural development' (Hirsch 2000: 207). The MPRP gave directions for the intensive conceptualisation of the 'national culture' (*üandesnii soyol*) and 'national consciousness' (*üandesnii medrel*) during the ninth congress, held in 1934. A resolution to develop national culture (and education) (*üandesnii soyol bolovsrol*) claimed that issues concerning national consciousness should be 'extremely political in nature' (*tuilyn ikh uls töriin chanartai*). This resolution also highlighted that the cultural development was closely integrated with, and could not be separated from, the general revolution process that the party and government were undertaking. However, the party

10 The first Cultural Attack Headquarters (*Soyolyn dovtolgoony shtab*) was built under the Minister for Enlightenment by the decision of the 17th Congress of the MPR in 1932. (The MPR 1932: 60-3).

promised to avoid intervention in cultural development by administrative units, 'setting deviations' (*nugalaa üüsgekh*), or restraining the new cultural (re)construction (Namsrai & Lkhamsüren 1984: 402-10).

The agenda to establish the 'new ideology' and 'national culture and education' was intentionally connected to the political ideology that the government saw in the 'people's revolution against imperialist feudals' (Namsrai & Lkhamsüren 1984: 411). The process was to adapt communist ideology to Mongolian realities as formulated by the party, although some concepts and terms were unfamiliar.

Bureaucrats put effort into transforming culture, introducing new (European) practices through cultural campaigns. The goal was to build a 'new culture', to train cadres, to introduce socialist ideology with a 'national cultural content', and to create 'advanced' new forms in the cultural sector (Natsagdorj 1981: 48). In line with the country's historical development, in the history of the MPR the process of 'cultural revolution' has been classified into three stages: the periods of 1921–1940, 1940–1960, and after 1960 (Shirendev & Sanjdorj 1969: 51-52). During the first stage, the MPRP attempted 'to undertake revolutionary democratic change in the cultural sector, to build a new culture and to eliminate the dominance of the religious ideology of Buddhist monks' (Shirendev & Sanjdorj 1969: 51). The second stage proposed a 'genuine revolution' (*jinkene khuvisgal*) – described as a 'socialist cultural revolution'. From 1961 onwards, the MPRP aimed to intensify and complete the process of building socialism and socialist culture (Shirendev & Sanjdorj 1969: 681).

Cultural campaigns were also aimed at transforming subjects' daily routines and attitudes by identifying three spheres of culture: hygiene, literacy, and public order (Sükhbaatar 1967).¹¹ The emphasis was on hygiene, health, and cleanliness (*ariun tsever*). A major effort was made to introduce urban European habits of personal grooming, including the daily washing of one's hands, face, and teeth, sleeping in beds with sheets, and washing one's body and clothes regularly. These habits were compulsory in the schools that had been established around the country.

In rural districts people were instructed to have washbasins, soap, and clean bed linen available for inspection at all times. Local cadres would tour encampments checking that households complied with these standards. Failure was punished, in some cases by public humiliation – such as having to

11 The MPRP Central Committee passed a resolution *On Evolving Cultural Campaigns All Over the Country*, no. 249, on 13 July 1959, where the three spheres of culture were underlined.

display a large board outside one's home with a painting of a pig. Increasingly, the term 'cultured' came to stand for the new virtues extolled by the secular modernist state and the lifestyle associated with socialism. As Outhwaite and Ray (1960: 88) note, 'Marxism understood itself straightforwardly as a modernising movement whose program was to intensify industrialisation, urbanisation, efficiency, centralisation, and the sweeping away the "idiocy of rural life"'. The new way of life was perceived as modern, educated, and urban, and the 'national elite became highly familiar with lifestyles and values of the USSR' (Sneath 2009: 73).

To unify non-Russian populations under its political agenda, the Soviet Union promoted forms of national identity within a restricted field. Martin (2001) proposes translating Stalin's *natsional'naia kultura* as 'national identity' or 'symbolic ethnicity', but not 'national culture'. Martin further points out that Soviet policy was systematically promoted 'not only through the formation of national territories staffed by national elites using their own national languages, but also through the aggressive promotion of symbolic markers of national identity: national folklore, museums, dress, food, costumes, opera, poets, progressive historical events, and classic literary works' (Martin 2001: 74).

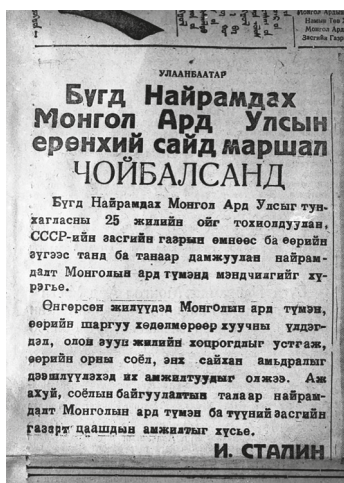


FIG. 1 Stalin's greetings to MPR Prime Minister Marshall Choibalsan for the 25th anniversary of the MPR.¹²

- 12 "To the Prime Minister of the MPR, Marshall Choibalsan: On the 25th anniversary of the declaration of the MPR, on behalf of the USSR Government and myself, I am sending greetings to you and the people of friendly Mongolia. 'In these past years, the people of Mongolia have put efforts and achieved much in destroying the remnants of the old and the backwardness of many years. I wish the people and government of friendly Mongolia success in economics and cultural construction. Y. Stalin".

The state socialist regime proposed to construct a culture designed to be ‘national in form, socialist in content, and international in characteristics’ (*ündesnii kelbertei, sotsialist aguulgatai, internatsionalich shinjtei*). The emphasis was on ‘destroying the intellectual dominance of the exploiting class, constructing a new socialist culture, upgrading the cultural level of the public, and making socialist ideology dominant in the consciousness of members of society’ (Dashdavaa 1989: 18). By condemning some features of pre-revolutionary life and permitting others, the early revolutionary regime set about editing the content of the MPR’s category of ‘national culture’ (*ündesnii soyol*), under which cultural practices and artforms had been identified as ‘national’ (*ündesnii*), ‘people’s’ or ‘folk’ (*ardyn*), and ‘ethnic’ (*ugsaatny*).

The MPRP’s new nation-state produced and guaranteed the nationalisation of culture in line with the policies of the Soviet Union, its ‘elder brother’ (*akh*) – referring to the fraternal relations imposed between Mongolians and Russians (Sneath 2009: 48). The process of cultural campaigns produced ‘national’ art forms and (Soviet-style) modern genres and institutions such as the ‘national theatre’, ‘Mongolian music’, the ‘national symphony orchestra’, the ‘Mongolian national opera’, the ‘national ballet’, ‘Mongolian fine art’, and ‘national film art’ (Natsagdorj 1986). Eventually, as the official culture concept, *soyol* came to contain a wide range of positively valued forms. The conjunctive term ‘culture and arts’ (*soyol, urlag*) was shaped as a discipline that included all sorts of material and immaterial art works and institutions – fine art, films, music, literature, museums, and libraries – and was institutionalised by administrative, academic, and public entities in Mongolia.

The following two sections of this chapter present how the MPR, as a socialist nation-state, shaped the socialist national culture by modernising, nationalising, and essentialising. The first section focuses on the destructive process of the old social order by propagating ‘class warfare’ against the Buddhist aristocracy. This section further elaborates on artworks and narratives about Buddhist imagery in state socialist cultural productions. The second section presents the constructive process of a new socialist culture under political ideologies. It revisits cultural memories about state socialist conceptual tools such as ‘revolutionary realism’, ‘socialist realism’, or ‘national in form, socialist in content’, which remain abandoned as artistic styles but have greatly affected contemporary Mongolian cultural practices. The lack of clarity in the slogans empowered authorities to manipulate and censor but also provided a silver lining in that artists could interpret them

in their own ways. Unofficial historical narratives further reveal that the official formulation could, conversely, become ‘socialist in form, national in content’, in reality. In this way, what the socialist formulations projected produced different layers of artistic expression.

I argue that many aspects of the current understanding of ‘national culture’ (*ündesnii soyol*) in Mongolia, with pre-socialist and post-socialist implications, were shaped in the state socialist period. This reflects Bourdieu’s *symbolic power*, the ability to make categorisations that produce and impose the legitimatised vision of the social world (Bourdieu 1984). Rather than heavily relying on the structure and underrating social agents, I present individual ethnographic cases that can elaborate on contested realities and contradictions in social reality. I take a constructivist approach to the concept of national culture; however, to de-essentialise it as an entity or category is not the main purpose of my analytical investigation. Both culture and national identity are regarded as ‘imagined’, in the sense of Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’ (1983), but not always taken as a whole or as serving an ultimate purpose. Sneath, Holbraad, and Pederson argue that ‘imaginary effects do not need to constitute – or be constituted by – “wholes”’ (2009: 11). An ‘incidental’ source makes the imagination engendered. Hence, in this context, I will examine individual sources that play a part in constituting national culture in turn.

‘A Monk’s Tears’: Destruction of Buddhist representation

*Darling, I love you
Where would I go now?
No matter if you live with someone else
Just don’t leave me alone
(Khüü mini, bi chamd khairtai
Odoo bi khaana ochikh ve?
Öör khüntei khanilakh khamaagui.
Gagtskhüü namaig büü orkhi.)*

Lodon, a Buddhist monk, recited this while shedding black tears like raindrops.’

This is the last passage of ‘Lambugain Nulimas’ (‘A Lama’s Tears’), a well-known story written in 1930 by Dashdorjyn Natsagdorj (1906–1937), often called the ‘father of modern Mongolian literature’. The author scornfully

calls the monk *lambugai*, using the suffix *bugai*, a contracted form of *abugai* – the respectful form of address – rather than just *lam*, and sneers at an immoral Buddhist monk who broke Buddhist vows and fell in love with a drug-addicted, eroticist woman who ultimately cheated on him. When the monk faced the two options of whether to obey his religious rules or to enjoy a secular life, he tried to keep both by earning his living as a monk and getting sexual satisfaction as a lover. Unfortunately, in the end he failed.

This story was intended to debunk the ‘naivety’, ‘levity’, and ‘greed’ of Buddhist monks under the ideological context of modern literature and modern artistic concepts in the early revolutionary years.¹³ It further sought to reinterpret the prevailing image of Buddhist monks through the establishment of ‘a new movement in national literature based on truth’ (Natsagdorj 1981: 206). The story became so emblematic that it became the primary imagery of Buddhist monks in public culture; it was re-produced as an opera in 1986 and revived via reversed (positive) imagery as a hip-hop song in 2005.

‘A Monk’s Tears’ is a metaphor for this section, which elaborates the official and unofficial narratives and imagery of the Buddhist aristocracy within the destruction of the old social order and ‘intensification of class warfare’ in the MPR. The state socialist propaganda persistently reproduced the negative image of Buddhist monks. Nonetheless, the official ideological artistic images were perceived in diverse ways.

After the death of the theocratic leader Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutuktu and the consolidation of the People’s Government in 1924, the MPR intended to draw a clear-cut line between political and religious issues. As the First Constitution of 1924 states: ‘in order to give freedom for beliefs and worship of subjects of the state, religious affairs should be solved by their own free will.’ While presenting freedom and respect for people’s beliefs, the MPRP established a special commission to authorise, implement, and propagate religious policy (The MPRP 1978: 38). The party defined the basis of a new society as ‘one-class of middle and poor people’ and called aristocrats ‘those who make labourers slaves of Mongolian capitalists, black-marketer lords, and khans of ‘wool’ (*üs noos*) and ‘cow’ (*ünee mal*)’ (ibid.: 38). The aim was to ‘cleanse’ (*tseverlekh*) the party (ibid.) and society, as well as to ‘retrograde’ (*khargis üzliin*) aristocrats.

13 E. Oyun (1989: 4), quoting from *Urginskaya gazeta* (Urguu newspaper) dated 14 February 1924, noted that early revolutionary writers such as S. Buyannemekh, D. Natsagdorj, Ts. Gombojav and N. Nasanbat were awarded monetary incentives by the Institute of Sutras and Scriptures, the present Mongolian Academy of Sciences.

The whole process led to a 'gradual transition from a monastic to a socialist society as sacred buildings became either ruins or state premises and monks, disrobed, were laicised' (Lang & Baatarnaran 2020: 263). The 'cleansing' further devastated thousands of monks and hundreds of monasteries in the second half of the 1930s. By 25 July 1938, the Office of Religious Affairs reported that 19,874 monks had been convicted of various crimes, and by 20 May 1938 not a single monastery was left (Kaplonski 2014: 209).

By the beginning of the 20th century, Buddhist monks were 'the biggest, richest, and most privileged strata, the most experienced administrators, educated officials and politicians, and spiritual leaders of the *arad*'¹⁴ (Morozova 2009: 28). Sneath further notes that the pre-socialist aristocratic political discourse had not constructed policy with reference to a single general 'people', but that people appeared in discrete categories as the nobility (*taijinar* and *ijagurtan*), the *shar* (*shira*, members of the Buddhist monastic establishments), and the *khara* (secular commoners or *arad*) (Sneath 2007: 173). The MPRP promoted class warfare between *khar shar feudal* (aristocrats and Buddhist monks) and *arad tümen* (people) in order to reinvent politics defined by aristocracies as a populist nation state (Sneath 2007: 169). In *The Affirmative Action Empire* (2001), Terry Martin points out the destructive and constructive processes of the cultural revolution while examining the impact of Soviet nationalities policy in the Soviet east:

First, there was the destructive process associated with the intensification of class warfare, which involved the mobilization of militant 'proletarian' Bolsheviks against various formerly tolerated 'bourgeois elements' and institutions: academics and universities, priests and religion, fellow-traveling writers and their journals... The second constructive aspect of cultural revolution involved a wave of utopian projects and experiments that aimed at the creation of a new socialist way of life (byt) to replace the bourgeois institutions then under attack (Martin 2001: 155).

In the new political order of class warfare, the *shar* – Buddhist priests – were re-categorised as *angiin daisan* (class enemies), *shar feudal* (yellow feudal [oppressors]), and *shar khuvalz* (yellow parasites) who had 'stupefied

14 *Arad* refers to commoners or the masses. While Morozova (2009) writes that *arad*, as a social stratum, were passive and did not play a significant role in politics. Sneath argues that it turned into an equivalent of the Russian *narod*. Hence, the compound term *arad tümen* was devised, meaning something like 'myriad commoners,' to reflect the notion of the 'whole people,' the masses required by the new political order (Sneath 2007: 73).

people for centuries' and 'violated new revolutionary movements.' Political propaganda against former administrators and nobility further intensified both by involving existing (pre-revolutionary) storytellers, musicians, and monk-artists and by recruiting new ones. Those who were actively involved in earlier revolutionary propaganda were recognised as the founders of new cultural practices in the MPR. The monk-artist Balduugiin Sharav (1869–1939), known as Marzan (Busybody), who used the Buddhist iconographic style in his paintings and had worked for the Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutugtu, started producing revolutionary propaganda posters and portraits of revolutionists in a European artistic style.¹⁵ The skilful *morin khuur* (fiddle) player Ö. Luvsan, who was known for his storytelling, composed the first revolutionary songs.

The Sixth MPR Congress issued a resolution in 1930 that stated: 'giving an emphasis to develop 'artistic culture' (*uran soyol*) and to compose musical dramas (*shii jüjig*), songs, and music, a competition for selected artists, musicians, and revolutionary storytellers should be organised' (The MPR 1956: 1960). E. Oyun, a playwright and theatre researcher, describes the early revolutionary dramas: 'it was hard to propagate revolutionary ideology with *shii* (dramas) to religious people ... hence, they performed just after compulsory meetings at party and union units' (Oyun 1989: 44–45). In this way, new modern and (Soviet-style) European artistic practices were introduced with political motifs. The MPRP gradually established a centralised system to reach the utmost periphery of the country by 'educating the public with revolutionary ideology, controlling branch units of the party, and opening new 'red corners' (*ulaan bulan*)' (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967: 15).

The following paragraphs describe artistic works produced in different stages of state socialism, to show how the socialist ideological image of Buddhist monks was shaped. In autumn 1931 the State Central Theatre (*Ulsyn töv teatr*), defined by the MPRP as 'a pivotal place for political and artistic propaganda' (ibid: 60), opened with a dramatic musical piece titled *Ünen* ('Truth'), based on a story by S. Buyannemekh and staged by the Soviet director A. Efremov. It was composed of symbolic scenes with very few words. As the script was not kept in the archive, D. Namdag, a well-known playwright who witnessed the play, noted:

15 B. Sharav drew the first portrait of Lenin in 1924. His style switched from Buddhist *tangka* paintings (depicting deities [*burkhan*]) and portrait paintings (*gundaa*) for the Bogd Khan to revolutionary art creating posters and portraits for the revolutionary government.

Three tall black, white, and yellow walls were hanging and the thrones of black and yellow feudals were put just in front of them. In the north-east, there was a red stand. It started with an empty stage. Under the loud sound of crying and music, wimpled slaves were presented on the right of the stage holding one another's shirttails. The yellow feudal, stepping over the slaves together with a black feudal, says: 'Be tolerant over prejudice in this life. Do not neglect to make offerings to deities, lamas, and the three jewels'¹⁶ in order to be born in heaven for your next life. Kneel down to the grandeur of aristocrats and be subordinated under them' (Namdag 1988: 24).

The motif shown in this dramatic musical from the 1930s, which depicts aristocrats and monks as villains, continued until the end of state socialism regardless of the relaxing of religious policy that occurred in between.

Stalinist oppression led to massive destruction in Mongolia in the 1930s; however, after World War II the communist regime officially allowed freedom of religion limited to specific space. Along with this wave, Mongolia reconsidered partly reviving what had been destroyed. In 1944, at the time of the visit by US Vice-President Henry A. Wallace, Gandan Monastery, one of the biggest, was re-opened to show respect for freedom of religion. The government of Mongolia made further decisions to restore the destroyed monasteries, such as Erdene Zuu, as historic cultural relics (Lang & Baatarnaran 2016). The historian Myagmarsambuu called the period from 1944 to 1960 'the revival of national religion' (*ündesnii shahsnii sergelt*), as surviving monks regained some of their political rights and re-positioned themselves in society (Myagmarsambuu 2017: 48).

¹⁶ In Buddhist teaching, the Buddha (*burkhan*), the Darma (his teachings, or *nom*), and the Sangha (monks, or *lam*) are considered to be the Three Jewels.



FIG. 2 An act of a play performed in the street [1949].
British Library Collection: EAP264_1_1_2-EAP264AC_02_094_L

As the 1960 Constitution aimed at constructing socialism, anti-religious propaganda was re-intensified to consolidate the revolutionary image of Buddhist monks as counter-revolutionary, anti-socialist, anti-modernist, and backward. Yü. Tsedenbal, the political leader of the MPR (1940–1984), noted in the journal of the ‘Party’s Life’, that:

Buddhism (or Yellow Faith) had been a powerful tool to sermonise the non-resistance against violence and harm and the obedience to one’s destiny, to despoil and enslave labourers, and to strengthen the domination of exploiters. Buddhist monks were further represented as enemies of modern education, medicine, and culture in films (1961: 11).

This statement by Yü. Tsedenbal is fully in line with what was shown in the film¹⁷ *Serelt* (The Awakening) in 1957, considered one of the most popular films in the socialist era. The film depicts a competition between a Buddhist medicine monk, who was respected by local people, and a Russian doctor, who worked hard to introduce (European) modern medicine. The monk was shown as an aggressive old man who was heavy-handed with his

¹⁷ The State Film Committee and film studio Mongolkino was established on 11 October 1935 by the resolution of People’s Ministers’ Council no. 32. From 1936, it started to produce short documentaries titled *The 47th Anniversary of the May Labour*, *Mongolia Today* and the first fiction film, *Mongol khuu* (The Mongol Boy).

students and mean to people with his useless chants and medicine (*tan*). Meanwhile, a Russian doctor, a beautiful young woman, was the one who really healed people with her modern medical treatment and kindness. According to L. Sharavdorj, a senior cinematographer, these were stagnant depictions consistent with political requirements. He claims: ‘monks had to be shown as anti-revolutionary, Japanese as enemies, *gamin*¹⁸ soldiers with protruding teeth, malicious, and pale faced’ (L. Sharavdorj, interview, 14 December 2016).

Among Buddhist monks in general, high ranking monks and monastic noblemen were the main target of the anti-religious policy. The Bogd Khan, the Eighth Jebtsundamba Khutugtu (1869–1924), the last theocratic and political ruler of Mongolia, appeared in an officially permitted way in academic and cultural platforms such as historical narratives, museums, plays, and films. He was assumed to be a ‘fierce feudal’, not the prominent contributor to the independence of Mongolia as he is broadly regarded today. The robes and objects he used were displayed in museums and interpreted as the luxury consumption of ‘feudals’ who exploited ordinary people (Lang & Baatarnaran 2020).

The Bogd Khan appeared in the film *Sükhbaatar* (1942), directed by the Russian director Zarkhi, as a fiend who killed Sükhbaatar, the leader of the People’s Revolution. The Bogd Khan was further shown as blind, sleazy, fierce, and arrogant in several historical (revolutionary) films, such as *Tөгсгөл* (The End) (1967), *Өглөө* (The Morning) (1968), *Тэмтсел* (Fight) (1971), and *Khatanbaatar* (1981). In the film *Khatanbaatar* (1981), the Bogd was someone who dealt with political decisions offhandedly and was easily manipulated by others. Khatanbaatar, an army leader fighting against the White Russian and Chinese forces, requested the Bogd Khan’s seal on a document asking for military assistance from the Red Army. When the Bogd Khan doubted if it was the right thing to do, Khatanbaatar jogged his elbow to get the document sealed. After Khatanbaatar left, the Bogd exclaimed: ‘What have I just done?’ (*Bi yu khiichihev ee*). The film shows Bogd as someone who could not handle political issues and make decisions on his own.

The actor Nyamyn Tsegmed (1910–1997) was primarily selected to play the role of the Bogd Khan in most socialist-era films due to his similar appearance to a photo of the Bogd Khan (B. Nagnaidorj, interview, 11 December 2016). Although Tsegmed did not like his sluggish and idiotic

¹⁸ *Gamin* is a name for the Chinese warlord Xu Suzheng’s revolutionary soldiers.

role, his character embodied the state socialist image of the Bogd Khan in public culture.



FIG. 3 Actor N. Tsegmed playing the Bogd Khan [1940s].
British Library Collection: EAP264_1_1_2-EAP264AC_02_028_L

While the Bogd Khan was portrayed negatively in terms of both theocracy and politics, general lower-ranked monks could be positively depicted only in their secular activities or their life after they became laymen. In his film *Solongyn tavan öngö* (Five Colours of the Rainbow) (1978), film director B. Nagnaidorj showed the monk-artist B. Sharav, later known as the founder of Mongolian realist art, as an artist but not as a monk.

While in this film, the depiction of the Bogd Khan¹⁹ remained the same as in other films, the film highlights the artistic activities of B. Sharav. The only way for Buddhist monks to appear in a positive way was in their secularised image. For example, the incarnate monk or the so-called Lama of the Gobi, the Fifth Noyon Khutugtu Dulduityn Danzanravjaa (1803–1856), was known for his activities in literature, drama, painting, music, and physics. The process was not only secularising the public culture with atheist ideology but also linking the Buddhist tradition with new cultural forms.

From the 1970s, Buddhism started being modernised in Mongolia through various events, such as the establishment of the Buddhist Institute

19 Ts. Baidy, a cartoonist, played the Bogd Khan in this film. It was the only case when someone else besides the actor N. Tsegmed played the Bogd Khan.

and the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace, visits by the Dalai Lama (1979, 1982), and the expansion of international Buddhist relationships and Buddhist studies. According to Shimamura (2020), all these ‘surface freedoms of religious activities were one component in the part of the Soviet propaganda against the Western world’ (Shimamura 2020: 8). Calling it ‘Buddhified Socialism and Socialised Buddhism,’ he further argues that ‘the cultural sets which were secular/atheistic but religious (buddhified), at the same time, they were religious (Buddhism) but socialistic’ (Shimamura 2020: 11).

Consequently, whereas Buddhist images were secularised or socialised, Buddhist manifestations were embedded in socialist representations. Zoltan notes that ‘Tibetan Buddhism had its imprint on another area on the Communist symbolism, namely on the artistic manifestation of the new ideology’ (Zoltan 2005: 550). As the Portrait of Lenin by B. Sharav from 1924 depicts Lenin in a kind of Buddhist pictorial manifestation among lotus flowers, Lenin gradually took the place of Buddha on the household altar. During his speech at a party meeting in 1925, P. Genden, who later became the Prime Minister in 1932, said: ‘Two great bagsh [teachers or spiritual leaders], Buddha and Lenin, were born in the universe.’²⁰

The above examples illuminate the image of Buddhist monks in state socialist propaganda in historical processes and artistic practices. The persecution of the clergy was primarily a political and economic move to destroy the old order. However, cultural propaganda aimed at producing representations of monastic order was a crucial tool to embed and complete the process. Yet, it was not a monolithic spectrum of destruction throughout state socialism. There were shifts and spaces in policy attempting to bring ‘revival,’ ‘restoration,’ ‘re-institutionalisation,’ and ‘modernity’ into Buddhism. The artistic imagery advocating anti-religious ideology was produced in alignment with monastic traditional culture. I will end this section with a stanza from the song ‘Lenin Bagsh’ (Teacher Lenin), which was widely disseminated after it was written by J. Badraa in 1970 for the 100th anniversary of Lenin’s birth. Elevating Lenin to the place of Buddha, the lyrics demonstrate a Buddhist manifestation in socialist ideology. The poem further links to the discussion of the following section on the constructive process of ‘national characters.’ In this sense, the stanza has a reverse representation, putting religious (national) content into a socialist cultural form (or theme).

20 Batbayar. ‘Manlai Lenin bagsh’. [The Leading Teacher Lenin]. *Baabar.mn* 20 April 2018. <http://www.baabar.mn/article/manlai-lenin-bagsh>. Accessed on 21 September 2020.

*The kindness of the sun lights up all things,
 revealing the colours of the world khö!
 Our teacher Lenin responds for future generations,
 welcoming khiimori [good fortune] to the khoimor [altar or place of
 honour].
 He is our great Sun, of unequalled wisdom khö khö!*
*(Khorvoo yirtöntsiin öngö todrokh gaikhamshig
 Khotliig giisen narny öngöö khö!
 Khoimort zalrakh khiimori bolj
 Ail ger tetgekh Lenin bagsh mini
 Khosgüi erdeniin suut ikh nar aa khö khö)*

Construction of ‘national characters’

The previous section suggests that socialism and Buddhism in Mongolia were intertwined frameworks that mutually influenced each other. Consequently, while being defused and institutionalised in a socialist modernist way, Buddhism was also embedded in state socialist cultural forms and practices.

A similar process took place between socialism and nationalism, as the idea of nationality was the foundation of the Soviet political system. Lenin and Stalin insisted on using nationalism to build socialism, and the new order of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was designed to manage regional nationalisms (Christian 2018: 348). As Christian notes, the Soviet Union gave ‘formal recognition to many different national and ethnic groups at different levels’ and ‘Soviet cultural and educational policies would provide them with new national languages and historical and cultural traditions’ (Christian 2018: 348). However, nationalist sentiments described as a ‘bourgeois phenomenon’ were eliminated, because Bolshevik plans for social transformation did not allow for any ‘fundamentally distinctive religious, legal, ideological, or customary features’ (Martin 2001: 12). Accordingly, the MPR government promoted ‘national characters’ (*ündesnii ontslog*) and permitted ‘socialist nationalism’ or patriotism, but drew clear-cut lines for ‘bourgeois nationalist’ sentiments.

This section shows the perception of the ‘socialist’ or ‘national’ in narratives, memories, and cultural practices. What did the state socialist notions of the ‘national’ and the ‘socialist’ retain? The following shows how nationalism and socialism were interactively exercised as conceptual tools

and cultural practices in Mongolia. Although state socialist cultural policies are remembered either just as ‘utopian’, ‘empty’, and ‘nonsense’ slogans, or (partly) forgotten, their reminiscences were embedded in the shaping of the contemporary ‘national culture’.

This section also explains that the process, which I call the ‘(state) socialist boost’ in national characters, had a strong influence on modern nationalism. In his description of nationalism in contemporary Mongolia, Bumochir claims that the division of good and bad nationalism, *ündesnii üzel* and *ündserkheg üzel*, appeared after the collapse of the Soviet regime. The former, *ündesnii üzel*, implies an ideology of roots and origins, which contains both civic and ethnic nationalistic sentiments, whereas the latter, *ündserkheg üzel*, indicates an act of highlighting, ranking, dominating, discriminating, and violating human rights (Bumochir 2020: 10). It is clear that distinctive terms and descriptions appeared to support the post-socialist nation-building process, as Bumochir notes. However, I argue that the divisional concepts of nationalism being ‘good’ and ‘bad’ had roots in the ‘national characters/forms’ (*ündesnii ontslog/khelber*) and ‘(bourgeois) nationalism’ (*ündserkhekh üzel*)²¹ drawn by the Soviet regime. While nationalism incorporated into socialism was supported, it was eliminated when it crossed the line.



FIG. 4. Actress L. Tsogzolmaa singing with a band [1940s].
British Library Collection: aEAP264_1_1_2-EAP264AC_02_264_L

21 It is evident that the party blamed some writers and scholars for their nationalism (*ündserkhekh üzel*) that was contrary to Marxism and Leninism.

The conceptual tool incorporating socialism (or ‘revolutionary’ in the early stage) and nationalism was the popular Soviet slogan ‘nationalist in form, socialist in content’. Furthermore, the ideological styles of ‘revolutionary realism’ and ‘socialist realism’ were asserted in cultural practices. Historical MPRP documents reveal that these concepts were introduced as the main ideological instruments but not clearly formulated in the Mongolian language, using various expressions such as ‘national revolutionary culture’, ‘national revolutionary art’, and ‘arts with national forms and revolutionary meanings’. For example, the resolution of the MPRP Central Committee of 17 January 1935 highlighted the importance of the ‘people’s national revolutionary cultural and education’ (*ardyn үндесний khuvisgalt soyol bolovсроl*). It identified the ‘national revolutionary art’ (*үндесний khuvisgalyn уран саикхан*), or art with ‘national form and revolutionary meaning’ (*үндесний кhelber mayagtai бөгөөд khuvisgalyn utga chanartai*), as the main instrument to erase the remnants of poisonous feudal customs (The MPRP 1978: 57).

While persistently demonstrating the ideology of national character in official documents, the party aimed to promote patriotism oriented to socialist modernisation but not nationalism based on ‘cultural practices of past eras’ (Verdery & Humphrey 2004: 17). The resolution of the Central Committee of the MPRP of 8 April 1943 criticised the Office for Artistic Affairs (*Уран саикханы кherег еrklekh газар*) for insufficient organisation of writers to develop a literature of ‘revolutionary meaning and national form’ (*khuvisgalyn utgатаi, үндесний кhelbertei*). It also denounced the fact that literary works emphasised the historical past, naming *The Hero Magsarsav*, *Three Sad Hills*, and *The Queen Mandukhai* as being of the past but not promoting patriotic labour heroes of the present (The MPRP 1978: 77). In general, (pre-revolutionary) cultural traditions were not supported; however, revolutionary or heroic history was accepted and highlighted.

The first historical film, *Tsogt Taij*,²² was released in 1945. It exemplified both the permitted ‘national character’, as ‘a distinctively national view of history and a famous celebration of nationalism’ (Barnett 2007: 43), and anti-religious socialist ideology. Above all, the film was politically necessary to show the power of the Soviet Union, especially supporting the Allies during the Second World War. Echoing Soviet patriotic films such as *A*

22 Tsogt was a *khalkha taij* or count in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, who was a follower of Ligden Khan (reigned 1604–34), the last direct descendant of Chinggis Khan to rule Mongolia. The film depicts the last years of Tsogt’s life leading to his death in 1637.

Patriot Woman Zoya, there was ‘a need to invoke patriotism and heroism in people after the war’ (B. Nagnaidorj, interview, 11 December 2016). At the same time, it showed the MPR as a (modern) socialist country that could produce a film.

The story of the film was written by B. Rinchen (1905–1977), a well-known writer and scholar. B. Denzen, a grandson of B. Rinchen, says: ‘Choibalsan called my grandfather and asked him to write a historic film script that was heroic and solemn. Choibalsan reminded him that it should not be about Chinggis Khan and Batu Khan because this would upset our Russian brothers’ (Oyunsüren 2020). Because of its heroism regarding the nation’s independence, the film is celebrated as ‘a moment when the curtains of ideological uniformity were parted to reveal a foretaste of contemporary identity in the making’ (Barnett 2007: 46). On the other hand, the film has a great Soviet influence, being directed by the Russian Yurii Tarich. From the perspective of independent cinematic production, some Mongolian film-makers do not regard the film as ‘national’. L. Sharavdorj, a senior cinematographer explains:

Tsogt Taij is not a Mongolian film. It is a Russian film produced on the territory of Mongolia and with a cast of Mongolian actors. Why do I call it Russian? It was the year of 1945. At that time, there were not enough professional cadres (in Mongolia). Very few people spoke Russian. Our people just contributed herds, costumes, weapons, tents, and food. Mongolian actors were original and admirable, though. The Russian director valued Tsagaany Tegmed (who casted Tsogt Taij) as the ‘golden Tsegmed’ (zolotoi Tsegmed). We learned a lot from this work. That was very important. They listed the names of Mongolians who were realistically assistants just to convince [people] internationally that it was a co-produced film. I know the film Daisny tsergüüdee sonsotsgoo! (You Listen, Foe!) co-produced with Russians in the 1970s and 1980s. Although it is said to be ‘co-produced’, we had little involvement. Russians just ignored our opinions (L. Sharavdorj, interview, 14 December 2016).

While L. Sharavdorj was critical about Soviet interference with artistic freedom, B. Nagnaidorj, a film director, takes a positive view, considering *Tsogt Taij* to be the inspiration for patriotism and public interest in the historical past. He says: ‘Since this film was released, people loved the country more and had more interest in the history. The establishment of Mongolian film began with this film’ (B. Nagnaidorj, interview, 11 December 2016). In

short, the film *Tsogt Taij* itself and narratives about the film demonstrate the oxymoron of *socialist nationalism* or *nationalist socialism*.

Although the film was contradictory both as an artistic expression and as a political message, *Tsogt Taij* can be regarded as a literary effort to highlight the importance of the Mongolian national character. The political direction then switched to a stricter position aimed at ‘socialist construction.’ By the 1960s, the MPR had officially declared its transition from feudalism to socialism and the formation of labour, cooperatives, and classes. The MPRP programme approved on 11 Jun 1966 during the 15th Congress indicates that ‘national culture was meant to be advanced and enriched with world culture (*delkhiin soyol*) and socialist literature and art, based on socialist realist, party-spirited (*namch*), and people-spirited (*ardach*) principles’ (The MPRP 1978: 51-52).

Communist ideologies and concepts such as ‘revolutionary realism’, ‘socialist realism’, and ‘nationalist in form, socialist in content’ were more like abstract slogans than a real artistic style. The notorious formula ‘national in form, socialist in content’ (*ündesnii khelbertei, sotsialist aguulgatai*) did not clearly designate what it meant. Stalin deliberately chose not to clarify this concept in order to keep the very existence of national culture controversial (Martin 2001: 182).

How were these controversial slogans and formulas embedded in cultural practice? What did it mean to be ‘national in form’? What was ‘socialist in content’? Below I present the reflections and memories of writers, scholars, film directors, and musicians who dedicated their early and mid-careers to the ‘old system’, to these slogans. It was noticeable that some regret, or were even reluctant to talk about, ‘socialism’ or ‘socialist realism’ as they claim it is ‘unnecessary’ (*kheregгүй*), ‘non-existent’ (*baikhgүй*), or ‘in vain’ (*khoosон*). However, some do not hesitate to reveal that they strongly advocated for it, as it was the social order one had to follow. Despite some general interpretations connected with realism, most of the ideological tools in artistic practices have been ‘forgotten’ or are ‘not remembered’ in social memory (Kaplonski 2004: 13). The interviewees gave no clear definition of ‘national form’ and ‘socialist content’. While the ‘national character’ permitted by the socialist state is remembered as being associated with tradition or artistic excellence, ‘socialist content’ was about artificial positivity and socialist modernity.

The main term used for identifying socialist art was ‘socialist realism’, principally referring to optimism regarding state socialist life. From the formation of the Group of Revolutionary Writers and the Mongolian Union for Revolutionary Writers (called MARZ, as the abbreviation of a

clumsily mixed name of Russian and Mongolian, *Mongolyn Assotsiatsyn Revoliutsionny Zokhiolchid*) in the 1930s, Mongolian writers pursued the political and artistic ideology of the Soviet Union. While Soviet writers were at the stage of building 'socialist realism', Mongolian writers aimed at 'revolutionary realism', which was considered a step behind. Soviet writers formally proclaimed the term 'socialist realism' in 1932 at high-level political meetings, which Stalin himself attended. Maxim Gorky, a proponent of literary socialist realism, published a famous article entitled 'Socialist Realism' in 1933 (Ellis 2012: 37).²³ Meanwhile, the First Writers' Congress, held in 1948, sustained a literary advancement, 'assisted in part through the financial and moral sponsorship of the Soviet Union' (Wickhamsmith 2020: 12).

The term 'socialist realism' was introduced for the first time by D. Sengee, then-director of the Writers' Committee, during the Second Congress from 25 to 27 April 1957. It was framed as 'a method to depict reality within true history and revolutionary development' (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967: 191). The Congress assumed that it would enable writers to improve their talents and skills and write in a form they liked while not eliminating individual characters and styles. After this, the term 'socialist realism' was broadly used in official reports and documents and studied as a methodology²⁴ (D. Tsedev, interview, 15–16 September 2016).

In the report on the MPRP activities of the MPRP Central Committee meeting in March 1959, which followed the results of the 21st Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Yü. Tsendenbal, the general secretary of the MPRP and chairman of the Council of Ministers, criticised the inadequacy of writers and artists in Marxism-Leninism and socialist realism, and signalled an intensification in proficiency, high quality, and modern realist ideology in art works (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967: 45). According to D. Tsedev, who was a director of the Writers' Committee from 1977 to 1990, there was not a big difference between 'revolutionary realism' and 'socialist realism' in principle. Both refer to realism, although Mongolian literature switched from the former to the latter. It was difficult to accomplish 'socialist realism' in artistic works, as it was not precisely defined.

23 During the 1934 Congress, four guidelines were laid out for socialist realism. The work must be: 1. Proletarian: art relevant to the workers and understandable to them; 2. Typical: scenes of everyday life of the people; 3. Realistic: in the representational sense; and 4. Partisan: supportive of the aims of the State and the Party (Juraga & Booker 2002: 68).

24 The literary critics Ts. Khasbaatar and S. Luvsanvandan published an article comparing 'revolutionary realism' and 'socialist realism' in a journal called *Voprosi Literaturi* (Issues of Literature) in 1987.

S. Dulam, a poet and scholar known for his research on mythology and symbolism, sees 'socialist realism' more as a structure than a style. S. Dulam states:

*The socialist aesthetic, to me, was like classicism in a way where the subject matter and way of writing was pre-identified and scheduled. One should write about the working class and the herders. It reminded me of classicist artworks with standards and norms. The main principles that the party urged were Marxism, Leninism, and proletarian internationalism. One could not deviate from these three. There were many novels such as *The Crop* (Taria budaa) by D. Garmaa and *The Echo of the Chimney* (Yandangiin tsuurai) by L. Chojilsüren, which were all about the working class. Ignoring nuances of life, socialist writers mainly wrote about newly built institutions and they were evaluated for this. The reviewers and critics only saw if they followed these principles. However, there were very few attempts to express feelings and psychological issues, for example in short stories by P. Luvsantseren and S. Erdene (S. Dulam, interview, 15 September 2015).*

The role model was the 'socialist new man' (*shine khün*), who were factory workers, 'labour heroes' (*khödölmöriin baatar*), excavator drivers, herdsmen, and others. Despite the thematic range, the main focus was embellishment and beautifying reality, artificial optimism, constant praise, proclamation, and abstraction. Any pessimistic and critical elements were sharply criticised and banned; thus, socialist realism dismissed reality.

B. Baast, a senior writer who had worked for the Writer's Committee for seven decades from 1945, recalls that he was penalised through 'taking measures' (*arga khemjee avakh*) and a 'warning' (*sanuulga*) from the party Censorship Committee for publishing criticism against the Party. During a meeting of writers and factory workers, Ts. Damdinsüren (1908–1986), a writer and scholar, criticised the Party's unfeasible policy and said: 'I do not understand how the Party would mend a hole in herders' yurts' (*malchin ardyn geriin tsoorkhoig nam zasag yugaar böglökh geed baigaag oilgokhгүй байна*). B. Baast received a warning for publishing Ts. Damdinsüren's comment in the *Utga Zokhiol* (Literature) newspaper (B. Baast, interview, 10 August 2017), as it was criticism of the party policy and reality.

Many other attempts at publicising reality or dark sides of real life were censored. The trilogy of novels by J. Byambaa entitled *The Colour of the World* (*Khorvoogiin öngö*) (1971), which realistically depicted the dark sides

of socialist life, were criticised for ‘being unable to see the real colour of life’ and for misrepresenting it. Others such as *The Liana* (*Chödör övs*) by Sh. Gaadamba and *The Store Guard* (*Delgüüriin manaach*) by B. Rinchen were condemned for defaming ‘modern intellectuals.’ Although themes and restrictions were generally defined, ‘socialist realism’ remained unclear as an artistic style for individual writers.

According to D. Tsedev, nobody would consciously decide: ‘Well, I will write in a socialist realist way (*sotsialist realizmaar*)’ (D. Tsedev, interview, 15–16 September 2016). At least, D. Tsedev himself personally, both as a writer and researcher, never set out to write in a style of ‘socialist realism’ and did not even mention it once in his dissertation titled *Tradition and Innovation of Mongolian Literature* in 1974. However, he advocated for a style depicting working class and socialist construction, which he put efforts into during his time as the director of the Writers’ Union. He would categorise the style, which had been regarded as a ‘*communist subbotnik*’²⁵ in post socialist discourses, as ‘documentary literature’ (*barimtat uran zokhiol*).

While socialist aesthetics were associated with ‘optimistic realism,’ national characters were explained in relation either to the pre-revolutionary cultural tradition or to artistic excellence. Neither ‘form’ nor ‘content’ in the slogan ‘national in form, socialist in content’ was clear enough for artists to apply or practice easily. According to S. Dulam, it is hard to identify the ‘national form’ in literature, because styles and forms such as poems, verses, novels, and stories were mainly adopted or translated from foreign literature. He could name very few as ‘national in form,’ if there was such a thing, that had links to folk stories, epics, legends, and tales (S. Dulam, interview, 15 September 2015).

B. Baast defines the national characters and/or the ‘national form’ as the Mongolian language, customs, costumes, yurts, saddles, and the horse-head fiddle (as national music or *ündesnii khögjim*) (B. Baast, interview, 10 August 2017). D. Tsedev also speaks of the lack of clarity of ‘form’ and ‘content.’ For national literature, he would count masterpieces such as *The Secret History of the Mongols* (*Mongolyn nuuts товчоо*)²⁶, *The Turmoil of*

25 *Subbotnik*, from the Russian word *subbota* or Saturday, refers to volunteer community services such as cleaning done on weekends in the communist era. Literary works with themes dedicated to those communist activities were ironically referred to as ‘*communist subbotnik*’ here.

26 A thirteenth century chronicle recounting the biography and history of Chinggis Khan.

Time and Power (Tsag töriin üimeen)²⁷, and *The Crystal Clear Tamir River* (Tungalag tamir)²⁸ as masterpieces of ‘national literature’.

Those created with artistic excellence remained as art works although they had socialist themes, such as the ballet *The Mountain of Treasures* (Erdenesiin uuls) by Z. Khangal, which depicted the construction of the Erdenet Coal Mining Industry as part of building socialism. The scene showing the extraction of treasures, with a duet and a lyrical melody, has remained a ‘classic’ (T. Tsolmon, interview, 12 May 2019).

According to L. Sharavdorj, a well-known cinematographer, by emphasising ‘national in form’, the policy was to retain the national character only in form and to destroy its content (L. Sharavdorj, interview, 14 December 2016). Narratives recalling the national characters reflected in state socialist artistic practices show that neither ‘form’ nor ‘content’ were clearly defined. Thus, neither is ‘national’ nor ‘socialist’. National characters were explained in terms of themes, traditional cultural practices, or artistic excellence. The lack of clarity provided space for both artistic freedom and censorship manipulation.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how destructive and constructive processes of the Soviet-style cultural campaigns became evident elements in the artistic practices of Mongolia. Under the overarching project of cultural development as part of Soviet modernism, the MPR as a socialist nation-state shaped socialist national culture through modernising, nationalising, and essentialising. Affected by the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union, ‘a new culture’ aimed at state socialist modernity and emphasised national characters. However, the process was not a clearly defined and ready-made template imposed on society. State socialist concepts such as ‘class warfare’, ‘feudal’, ‘people’, and ‘revolution’ were re-interpreted in the context of Mongolia both by the party and by individuals. In the process of exploration and realisation, the socialist state constructed models that were expressed in the oxymorons ‘Buddhified Socialism and Socialised Buddhism’ (Shimamura 2020) and *socialist nationalism* or *nationalist socialism*.

The first section of this chapter presents the destructive process of the old social order by propagating intensification of the class struggle against the Buddhist system. Although Stalinist oppression led to massive

27 A well-known novel depicting revolutionary years by D. Namdag.

28 A novel depicting pre-revolutionary and revolutionary times by Ch. Lodoidamba.

destruction of Buddhist temples and the execution of monks in the 1930s, the few Buddhist monks left were able to partly re-position themselves in society in the period from 1944 to 1960 by regaining some political rights. However, the policy of constructing socialism tightened in the 1960s, when anti-religious propaganda was re-intensified. Exploring various literary and artistic practices, this section shows how Buddhist images were represented in stagnant ways as 'anti-revolutionary', 'backward', and 'fierce' in socialist cultural productions. However, they could be shown positively only for lay activities. While Buddhist images were secularised or socialised, Buddhist manifestations were embedded in socialist representations. In this way, socialism and Buddhism were mutually influenced and embedded.

The constructive phase of state socialist culture through the conceptual tools of 'revolutionary realism', 'socialist realism', or 'national in form, socialist in content' is explored in the second section of this chapter. As the terms and concepts were not clear, this was an experimental process both for the party and for artists. As Wickhamsmith notes on the formation of the new revolutionary literature, 'the Party in fact worked together with the writers, with both sensitivity and rigor' (Wickhamsmith 2020: 12). The lack of clarity of the slogans enabled the authorities to manipulate and censor but provided a silver lining for artists who could interpret them in their own ways. Socialist realism referred to embellishing and beautifying reality, artificial optimism, constant praise, proclamation, and abstraction. Meanwhile, 'national characters' had more possibilities for formal and abstract interpretations in terms of (pre-revolutionary) historical cultural practices and artistic excellence.

2.

‘The pathway from songs to operas’ (*Duunaas duuri khürekh zam*): Hierarchies in music and society

Prologue

This chapter explores the introduction of European (Soviet-style) classical music to Mongolia as part of state socialism, and how it became a vehicle for measuring cultural ‘upgrading’, in a sense of progressing in cultural ‘levels’, and for defining social classes. Furthermore, classical music is regarded as one of the few positive achievements that the socialist regime left behind. The Bolsheviks promoted classical music, especially opera, because it was connected to ‘the raising of the cultural level of masses, bringing world cultural achievements’ (Kotkina 2013: 509). As with fine art, ballet and literature, classical music marked Russia as a European and world ‘cultural centre.’ The historical growth of classical music in Mongolia reveals the repercussions of Russian centrality, where Russian culture was identified as ‘the most progressive culture’ and as a model for the other Soviet peoples (Martin 2001: 454). Most importantly, it demonstrates the evolutionary pattern based on Marxist theory, which was exercised both as theory and practice, and how stratifications were shaped through art categories and social classes. The title of the book *Duunaas duuri khürsen zam* (The Pathway from Songs to Operas) (1971), by the musicologists T. Batsüren and J. Enebish, became an emblematic reference to the development of the new music culture in the socialist era. The book covers the ‘revolutionary development’ from 1921 to 1970, highlighting musical achievements aimed at professional singing. By systematising songs as the simplest form and operas as the most sophisticated, and defining the path for moving up evolutionary ‘levels’, this phrase conspicuously discloses the evolutionary approach in music.



FIG. 5 Chorus on stage during a special concert dedicated to Stalin's birthday [1949]. British Library Collection: EA EAP264_1_1_2-EAP264AC_02_068_L

In comparison to socialist realism, which aimed to meet political demands without 'considering the actual tastes and demands of the masses' (Groys 1992: 9), the evolutionary sequence based on Marxist theory left deeper footprints in musical practice and social relations. The hierarchical structure directed at advancement and complexity was embedded in musical genres, forms, categories, and mastery. As a result, distinctive hierarchical categories of 'professional and amateur art' (*mergejliin, sain duryn urlag*), 'rural and urban art' (*khödöönii, khotyn urlag*), and 'classical and folk art' (*songodog, ardyn urlag*) were shaped in cultural practice. The MPRP's sustained attention 'to the development of the cultural institutions in both urban and rural areas helped to transform the musical arts in Mongolia' (Marsh 2009: 52). Backed by the aristocratic link to the tradition of European classical music, elitist perspectives on making classical music superior to popular genres such as folk and pop music were consolidated in official music education (Tsetsentsolmon 2021). In line with this, the MPR used classical music not only to legitimise its power but also to produce distinctive tastes and demands for elites and the masses. Through cultural institutions (such as the Music and Dance School, the Mongolian Composers' Union, the State Opera and Ballet Theatre, and State Philharmonics), musical genres (popular songs, oratorios, symphonic poems, symphonies, and operas), and other activities (competitions, festivals, *Dekadas* (Ten-Days), and Cultural Days), a hierarchical and distinctive structure of European (Soviet-style) classical

music was developed as a way to upgrade within the socialist modernist system in Mongolia.

Bourdieu emphasised the importance of upbringing and educational background for cultural needs, saying that ‘all cultural practices (museum-visits, concert-going, reading etc.), and preferences in literature, painting to music, are closely linked to educational level (measured by level of qualifications and length of schooling) and secondarily to social origin’ (Bourdieu 1984: 1). Although he was critical of hierarchy based on class background, Bourdieu legitimised it in a way with his concept of *habitus* by validating high culture over mass culture. However, his perspective enables us to analyse how the MPR produced ‘cultural needs’ for European classical music through educational systems and national elites. The history of official music education shows a growth of different genres as well as the divisional relations that appeared between them. The first educational institution to train musicians, actors, directors, and singers was established in 1937 as the Artistic School (*Uran saikhny surguuli*), by Prime Ministerial order no. 45, as a part of the Central Theatre. Earlier music students were trained in both traditional and European classical instruments and became the first generation of professional musicians. Although there were some Soviet trainers, their visits had not yet been systematised.



FIG. 6 An Ulaanbaatar school string band. [1940s]
British Library Collection: EAP264_1_1_8-EAP264AC_08_018_L

Ts. Khandjav, a retired violinist and score copyist (*noot bichigch*),²⁹ recalls her time studying in the first music school. In 1940, when she was three years old, she moved from her hometown in the Ongon sub-district (*sum*) of Sükhbaatar province to the capital, Ulaanbaatar. She entered the Artistic School (*Uran saikhny surguuli*) when she was nine, and studied the traditional three-stringed zither (*shanz*) under the mentorship of the State Honoured Artist Bazarragchaa from 1946 to 1948. Then she studied the violin under the Soviet specialist Bilibin and the Mongolian violinist J. Chuluun from 1948 to 1951. In this way, as Ts. Khandjav says, ‘the national music and the world classical music were developed in parallel’ (Ts. Khandjav, interview, Ulaanbaatar, 29 October 2017). However, a distinction between classical and folk art, and professional and amateur art was not clearly drawn at that time.



FIG 7 Ts. Khandjav standing in front of the Bolshoi Theatre in 1955.
Ts. Khandjav's private collection.

The distinction between music genres and professions was gradually institutionalised with the development of official education. Artistic workers, musicians, and singers were identified by the MPRP as ‘the most sophisticated leading students to develop a new culture’ (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967: 61). The music school underwent multiple name changes over the years.³⁰ The school was reorganised with 70 students of piano, violin, and

29 Ts. Khandjav worked for the State Opera and Ballet Theatre from 1951 to 1991 as a violinist and score copyist (someone who copies musical scores by hand), and as ‘repertory keeper’ (*uryn sangiin erkhegch*) for the State Philharmonics from 1991 to 2009.

30 It was renamed the School for Musical Drama (*Khögjimt dramatik surguuli*) by Resolution no 34/30 of the Ministers’ Council and the Central Commission of the People’s Revolutionary Party, and as the Music and Dance Secondary School (*Khögjim*

ballet and with full-time Soviet specialists (*zövlöltiin mergejlten*). Soviet specialists visited annually, and the number increased from nine specialists in 1960 to 15 in 1963 and 20 in 1964 (Saruul & Tarasaov 2014: 73). Tsolmon, a well-known pianist and music educator, was one of the first students to be trained as a ‘professional’. She recalls her childhood memory of joining the piano class in 1958:

The professional (mergejliin) [piano] classes took place in a small red building like the ‘cat house’ (muuryin baishin)³¹ behind the Ministry of Agriculture. My teacher was Sergei Alexandrovich Batov, who was skilful and kind to children. He was very temperamental. Russians are like that, in general. Mongolians are different; they are calm and do not readily express their feelings. When the Russian teachers suddenly exploded, we were frightened as we had not seen such emotional expressions before. Gradually, we got used to it (T. Tsolmon, interview, 12 May 2019).

The image of classical music was to be ‘professional’, ‘perfect’, and ‘strictly disciplined’ from the beginning. The music classes, called *mergejil* (profession), were more highly regarded than other subjects in the Music and Dance School, which ‘general knowledge’ (*yörönkhii erdem*). The ‘profession’ of a classical music performer (e.g., a pianist) gradually became superior to not only other subjects but also to other music genres such as folk music. In the 1950s, a hierarchical educational system was gradually formed for music specialists to train more highly educated professionals in the Soviet Union and secondary level specialists (*dund bolovsroltoi mergejlten*) in Mongolia.

Classical music has been perceived as the paramount art form for its aristocratic basis and long-standing tradition as well as for its perfection, which was achievable through discipline. T. Tsolmon evokes the time when she saw the ballet dance by Olga Lepeshinskaya from the Bolshoi Theatre in Ulaanbaatar. ‘I was in shock so that I could not sleep after I saw the ballet. I was thinking and thinking. I understood that it was beauty and perfection’, Tsolmon says (T. Tsolmon, interview, 12 May 2019). The Bolshoi Theatre was a focus of the Bolshevik authorities and became a symbol of Soviet state power and high Soviet culture. It represented a mixture of aristocratic and

büjgiin dund surguuli) by Resolution no. 385 of the Ministers’ Council of People’s Republic of Mongolia on 12 September 1957 (Natsagdorj 1986: 326). This name was kept until it was changed to Music College (*Khögjiin Kollej*) in 1991 and Music and Dance College (*Khögjiin Büjgiin Kollej*) in 1997. After years of requests and efforts, on 1 August 2017 the school succeeded in being renamed the Mongolian State Conservatory.

31 She is referring to a Russian story, ‘The Cat House’ (‘Koshkin dom’), by S. Marshak.

socialist art appropriated as ‘a continuity between the best achievement of the Tsarist period and Soviet Russia’ (Kotkina 2013: 509). Consequently, the Bolshoi Theatre became the centre of Soviet classical music, from which ideal creations were transferred to all other theatres in the USSR and in its ally, Mongolia.

The common view among cultural practitioners and the general population is that European classical music developed thanks to a strict policy and ‘semi-military’ (*khagas tseregjiltiin*) discipline. Musicians trained by Soviet educators in Mongolia and in the USSR remark on their hard work under strict control. N. Tuulaikhüü, the conductor of the Opera Theatre Orchestra, studied as a conductor and clarinet player in the Music and Dance School in the 1960s. He says he practised 12 hours a day until his lips were swollen. He was locked in a classroom by his Soviet teachers, Vitali Nikolayevich Letvinov and Boris Ivanovich Slabokov, in order to practise. ‘I only stopped to eat’, N. Tuulaikhüü says (interview, 9 May 2019, Ulaanbaatar).

Mongolian educators had positions as ‘assistant teachers’ (*assistent bagsh*) to Soviet specialists and seemed to serve as mediators between Soviet specialists and students by interpreting language and behaviour. From the 1962–63 academic year, the first two assistant teachers, J. Purevdavaa (for the piano) and D. Darizav (for the violin), started teaching independently (Saruul & Tarasov 2014: 74). Regardless of their strict discipline and short tempers, the trainees’ memory of Soviet educators remains positive, due to the Soviet brotherhood policy but also their personal devotion and commitment. Taking advantage of a Russian music education and learning the language, students describe Soviet educators as being ‘from their true heart’ (*ünen setgeleesee*), ‘dedicated’ (*ünench*), ‘just like brothers’ (*akh duu shig*), ‘treating us equal to Russian children’ (*oros khüükhedtei adil üzeh*), ‘giving without any expectation of return’ (*kharamgui ögökh*), ‘right people’ (*zöv khümüüs*) and ‘without double-dealing’ (*khuuramch zangüi*). Regardless of the authoritarian, if not colonial, attitude of the Soviet brotherhood and paternalism, diverse accounts of the relationship between individuals reveal nuances and subtle effects of the whole process. Buyandelger (2019) argues that the rhetorical friendship (and political persecution) made Soviet colonial politics in Mongolia unspeakable and distant. Colonialism is not a conscious and deliberate project on the part of ordinary Soviets. The relationship between individuals who were not aware of their mission and believed in their good deeds reveals the division between political and domestic socialisms (Oushakine 2009).



FIG. 8 N. Tuulaikhüü taking a class by Boris Ivanovich Slabakov, a specialist from the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory at the Music and Dance Secondary School (1971–1974). N. Tuulaikhüü's private collection.

Raising musical elites

Official music education, with its programmes and rules, reinforced the distinction between the urban and the rural culture and further shaped socialist cultural elites. While the earlier musicians, who mostly came from rural areas, were trained in both traditional Mongolian and classical European instruments until the late 1940s, the first professional classical musicians studied in Ulaanbaatar in the 1950s and were then sent to the Soviet Union in the 1960s. In 1963, Mongolia requested to train 20 pianists and violinists in Moscow and Leningrad and 20 to 25 ballet dancers in the Leningrad Vaganova Ballet School (Saruul & Tarasaov 2014: 65). As a result, the first group of pupils aged from 10 to 12 – including T. Tsolmon (1950–), N. Bütenbayar (1951–2018), Ch. Chinbat (1952–), Yü. Oyun (1952–2000), and others – were sent to the Soviet Union in 1964. Most of them were children of orchestral conductors, lawyers, and university professors.

T. Tsolmon, daughter of the minister of health and a university professor, was among them. After studying for 11 years, six in Leningrad and then five in the Gnessin Russian Academy of Music in Moscow, she returned home in 1975. At that time, she found that classical music in Mongolia was at a different stage of development than in Russia. T. Tsolmon says:

When I was young, I was very critical about tuning. The symphony orchestra sounded completely different to me. Later, I thought that classical art had just started then in Mongolia. Now, I realise that we were just nomads who had been looking after herds until recently. Suddenly, we had to learn to play the violin or whatever [...] We were only the second generation. In Russia, it was centuries old. That is why there was a very big difference [...] In Russia, only professionals, sometimes even from the third or fourth generation, could succeed. One cannot come from the countryside and become successful in classical art (T. Tsolmon, interview, 12 May 2019, Ulaanbaatar).

This perspective reveals the consolidation of Mongolian socialist modernism, which was based on the social evolutionary pattern of distinctive cultures of urban centre and peripheries (Tsetsentsolmon 2021). T. Tsolmon now justifies the unequal quality of classical music in Mongolia at the time with a developmental leap from being ‘nomads’ to a more sophisticated cultural stage. The evolutionary perspective, in which Mongolia moved directly from the feudal to the socialist stage, was influential and is still strong among the classical music community.

This elitist prejudice was gradually ritualised in the music education institutions by treating classical music and folk music differently, further referring to urban and rural students. While classical music students (mostly of the piano, violin, and cello) were recruited from the elementary level, the enrolment in folk music classes (*morin khuur* [horse-head fiddle], *yatga* [zither], *shanz* [three-string lute], and *khuuchir* [two-string fiddle]) was only available at the secondary level at the Music and Dance College. This process led to further divergences in qualification, proficiency, and relations between the communities of ‘classical’ (*songodogiinkhon*) and ‘folk’ (*ardynkhan*).

When I was studying in the school from 1988 to 2000, I remember that those who failed the exam and were expelled from the classical music class could easily switch to the folk music class, *morin khuur* and *limbe* (Mongolian flute). The opposite would never happen. This distinction goes far beyond musical genres: an alphabetical order of classes was standard in the state socialist educational system; however, in this case it was not only used to order but to classify art genres as well as social groups (with hierarchical implications). Group A classes were for classical music students, whereas B classes were for folk music students. The former were mostly students from urban elite families and the latter from the countryside. The process was part of the state socialist policy, which drew ‘a distinction

between urban (*khotyn*), with its associations of modernity, and the rural (*khödöönii*), which was regarded as a touchstone of tradition' (Sneath 2018: 10). 'There was a hierarchy where classical music was superior and it went to our [pianists'] heads (*biye tookh*),' T. Tsolmon admits. The conceptual hierarchy was admitted not only by classical musicians but also by folk ones. From my school days in the early 1990s, I remember that a student, who was being trained as a *morin khuur* player, once expressed his jealousy to a cello student: 'You are lucky to study a world-renowned instrument. The instrument I play is not as sophisticated as the cello,' he said.



FIG. 9 The MPR ruler Yü. Tsedenbal with opera singers and pianists in 1982/3. Private collection of the pianist P. Dorjpagma.

A conceptual hierarchy in structures and practices appeared within art genres and social relations implied by socialist modernist projects. Bourdieu, Wacquant, & Farage (1994) demonstrates the power of the state to produce and impose categories, especially through the school system. He states: 'matters of culture, and in particular the social divisions and hierarchies associated with them, are constituted as such by the actions of the state which, by instating them both in things and in minds, confers upon the cultural arbitrary all the appearances of nature' (ibid.: 2). When European classical music education started by training folk musicians in Mongolia, there was no clear distinction between the two. Later on, a clear-cut standard and hierarchy was eventually established through the development of official education. The distinct categories of folklore and classical music, and so of amateurship and professionalism, on the other hand represent developmental stages of 'modernity', 'progress', and

‘civilisation’. This hierarchical structure, embodying the Soviet interpretation of the Marxist theory of social evolution, was formed in the perception and usage of various art forms. This process strengthened and reinforced cosmopolitan national elites as social divisions, which was also the focus of the Soviet Union to ‘create the new Soviet technical *intelligentsia*’ (Martin 2001: 179). D. Tunglag, a pianist and senior music educator, explains: ‘For classical music, one’s background education and surrounding (*khüreelel*) are very important. Parents sending their children to classical music class should be the ones who at least read books and are interested in classical art’ (D. Tunglag, interview, 17 May 2019). Based on the aristocratic origins of European classical music, Mongolian classical musicians held elitist views towards classical art, and therefore they intended to keep themselves within a narrow upper range of society. In this way, classical music was contrasted to the genres appealing to the wider public, such as folk or popular music.

Apart from musical genres, conceptual categories of ‘amateurism’ (*sain duryn*) and ‘professionalism’ (*mergejliin*) were drawn within the socialist modernist project. In the larger context of Soviet ‘amateur activity’ (*samodeiatel’nost’*), the socialist state introduced *multiplication* – the enrichment in numbers and types of institutions, art forms, instruments, and professionals (Tsetsentsolmon 2015: 123). In order to promote amateurs in every corner of the country, a variety of events – including singing competitions, ‘art examinations’ (*urlagiin üzleg*), concerts, and festivals – were held in all types of organisations. These were spread across administrative units and downward to smaller socialist settlements such as collectives (*negdel*), state farms (*sangiin aj akhui*), and brigades (*brigad*). The resolution of the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (February 1952) states that the Central Committee requires the intensification of amateur art (*sain duryn uran saikhan*) by selecting gifted persons from the ‘common people’ (*ard tümen*) in large numbers and by developing all types of activities of amateur folk artists (*uran saikhanchuud*) (The MPRP 1981: 239). Furthermore, the resolution of the 11th Party Congress gave directions ‘to support and control amateur art activities, send specialists to local regions, organise competitions, and annually run examinations of amateur artists at provinces and districts’ (*ibid.*). Statistics indicate that the number of amateur groups and bands (including all musical art genres) increased from 3,293 in 1980 to 4,785 in 1988 (The State Committee for Planning and Economics 1989: 101), and of amateur performers from 284,500 to 350,500 (*ibid.*: 101). Amateur artists, known as *ardyn avyastan* (‘folksy talented people’), were discovered and elevated through structured events. In this way, many drivers, military officers, herders, factory workers, and others

became musicians and singers and enrolled in the State Folk Song and Dance Ensemble (*Ulsyn ardyn duu büjgiin chuulga*).

While ‘professionalism’ was fixed as part of the classical, amateurship could apply to folk or popular music. Still today, the official music institutions highlight professionalism by labelling the class of music one specialises in as a ‘profession’, or *mergejil*. Other subjects are of ‘general knowledge’ (*yörönkhii erdem*). The former is evidently prioritised by teachers and students, and hence parents. T. Tsolmon says that the term ‘amateur’ (*sain duryn*) is very rare among her (classical music) community. The term ‘amateurs’ was used for folk musicians and ‘authentic art performers’ (*yazguur urlagiinkhan*) (T. Tsolmon, interview, 12 May 2019, Ulaanbaatar).

‘Cooking the raw’ in music

The cultural policy of the Soviet Union aimed at something much broader than the assimilation of its people or Russification. Creating a ‘national’ classic music in indigenous languages could unite ‘all Soviet peoples on a more solid basis than the Russian language’ (Kotkina 2013: 518). Under this campaign of nationalising classical music, librettos from Russian and other classical operas were also translated into Mongolian. Musical terminology was nationalised in Mongolian and authorised by the State Commission for Terminology (*Ulsyn ner tomyony komiss*).³² In this way, the names of musical instruments (*tögdödör khuur* [piano], *khiil* [violin], *morin khiil* [cello]), music genres (*duuri* [opera], *büjgen jüjig* [ballet], *nairal khögjim* [symphony orchestra]), and many others were introduced to everyday practice and are still in use.

The first national professional composers, such as S. Gonchigsumlaa (1943–1950), L. Mördorj (1950–1956), and B. Damdinsüren (1954–1956), who were trained in the Soviet Union at the dates indicated in brackets, created the first national operas, ballets, and symphonies. Later, they were recognised as ‘the three keystones’ (*tulgyn gурvan chuluu*) of modern Mongolian music. Following the first national opera, *Three Sad Hills* (*Uchirtai gурvan tolgoi*) (jointly composed by B. Damdinsüren and B. Smirnov) (1942), national versions of ‘socialist realist’ classical music were intensively produced. In 1963 the Opera and Ballet Academic Theatre opened in Ulaanbaatar with Tchaikovsky’s opera *Evgenii Onegin* in

32 The commission issued a series of volumes for terminologies in various disciplines. The volume *Khögjmiin ner tomyo* [Music Terminology] (No.32–33) (1956) was authored by J. Badraa and edited by B. Sodnom.

Mongolian. Nationally, socialist realist classical art was exemplified with operas such as *Jargalyn zam* (The Way to Happiness) (1952), and *Ünen* (Truth) (1956); the ballets *Gankhuyag* (1959) and *Manai negdliinkhen* (Our Collective) (1953); and orchestral pieces *Namyn tukhai udirgtal-nairaglal* (Overture about the Party – Symphonic Poem) (1952), *Oktyabriin tuya* (The Light of October) (1957), *Simfoni nairaglal* (Symphonic Poem) (1957), *Minii ekh oron* (My Homeland) (1955) and many others. National classical art aimed at advocating for state socialism, improving artistic excellence, and generating the cultural needs of the population.



FIG. 10 Singer D. Jargalsaikhan playing the role of Lenin in the opera *The Light of October*. Theatre Museum Collection: No. 04-11-52.

Operas, ballets, and symphonic pieces were identified as sophisticated forms that composers and listeners should aim for. The focus for productions was to amalgamate ‘national characters’ (*ündesnii ontslog*) and ‘socialist advancement’ with ‘successful syncretism of classical art forms and national artistic expressions’ (Natsagdorj 1986: 187). In such contexts, folk songs as representations of ‘national characters’ were assumed to be *raw materials* to be processed in advanced forms as symphonic and operatic pieces. Such hierarchical arrangements were driven not only in music genres but further in relations between institutions and actors. Citing melodies of folk songs in operas and symphonies were for ‘advancement’ (*devshilt*) by professionalising and classicising these songs. As D. Luvsansharav, a ‘Labour Hero’ (*Khödölmöriin baatar*) composer who spent most of his career working for the State Ensemble for Folk Music and Dance, says, it was the

way ‘to reinforce (*batalgaajuulj*) and perpetuate (*mönkölj*) folk songs’ (D. Luvsansharav, interview, 2013, Ulaanbaatar). He recalls how he included the traditional long song *urtyn duu* in his first opera:

In 1951, I wrote an opera called Shivee Khiagt in Ivanovsk, a Russian town. I attended a competition and got a special prize there. On the way back, I visited Boris Petrovich Smirnov and presented my opera in three parts. B. Smirnov asked: “Where is the urtyn duu (long-song)?” Indeed, I did not have one in my opera. He said that no Mongolian opera could be without an urtyn duu in it. I fixed it in my mind. Then, I immediately added an urtyn duu to my opera Shivee Khiagt. I further combined the urtyn duu and khöömii [overtone singing] in my cantata in 1961 (D. Luvsansharav, interview, 24 April, 2013, Ulaanbaatar).

State socialist cultural policy had a developmentalist approach, where national tradition was defined as a ‘past essence to be retrieved through the social and cultural purification of a decadent present’ (Martin 2001: 239). At the same time, at least its interpretation in Mongolian music culture enabled traits both to achieve new cultural practices and to raise the cultural past. During its Fourth Congress, on 7 May 1984, the Mongolian Composers’ Union, a comparable organisation to the Union of Soviet Composers to guide professional composers and musicologists, admitted: ‘Mongolia founded national classical music with symphonies and chamber music works and composers have now succeeded producing all complex forms and genres of music culture’ (Jantsannorov 2006: 9-10). The union praised the combination of traditional and classical music pieces as expressions of the ‘people’ (*ard tümen*), advancement in professionalism, and enrichment with ‘national characteristics.’ S. Gonchigsumlaa was acclaimed for his *Symphony no. 3*, which used Mongolian and Bulgarian folk melodies (ibid.: 10), as it approached the Soviet bloc countries in artistic excellence. The union also acknowledged the ‘expanded scope of national consciousness’ (ibid.) in B. Sharav’s first symphony by using the *morin khuur* (horse-head fiddle) and the *urtyn duu*. In the context of professional music culture, traditional musical elements were regarded not only as raw materials to be processed but also a representation of national identity.

Although it was acceptable to use folk music in classical music pieces, the opposite is undesirable for classical musicians. Folk musicians had always aspired to be aligned with classical music. Performing classical pieces on folk instruments would be an enhancement and upgrade. Playing the Carmen

Suite no. 1 with a *morin khuur* ensemble would be an ‘advancement’ for *morin khuur* players, but probably not from the perspective of ‘classical musical elites’. D. Tungalag says: ‘I am against this. As it was originally composed for the cello, the *morin khuur* could never make those sounds. I do not like it when folk art is engaged too much in classical art’ (D. Tungalag, interview, 17 May 2019, Ulaanbaatar). It has been harder for folk musicians to gain recognition and popularity than for others. Cultural mixing still is an intention of folk musicians but an impurity for classical musicians. Once I was told by a young pianist that for him it would be ‘sacrilege’ (*shüteen buzarlakh*) to play a Rachmaninoff piano concerto on the *morin khuur*.

Conclusion

European (Soviet-style) classical music was one of the significant vehicles of the modernist project of state socialism. It was introduced as a new cultural value and exercised in Mongolia as part of the legitimisation of power and a sign of following the prestigious Soviet model of modernity backed by Marxist ideas about social evolution. Building a centrally controlled and hierarchically structured system, the Soviet Union achieved its aim of changing societal attitudes marking Russia as the ‘world cultural centre’. Through educational systems and upbringing, national elites were formed who strongly believed in the hierarchical system in which classical music was the most sophisticated level of culture. This process involved conceptualising both musical genres and social relationships in hierarchical ways, which has its roots in Marxist evolutionary theory. As a result of this development project, the notions of ‘high art and low art’, ‘professional and amateur art’, and ‘classical and folk art’ emerged.

Under the nationalisation campaign, national classical forms such as national operas, ballets, and symphonies were produced. Moreover, translating operas from Russian and other European languages to Mongolian was part of the policy of embedding them into society and equalising with the Soviet-bloc nations. Within a space drawn by socialist nationalism, the MPR established an indispensable structure of education, production, and consumption. The Soviet ideology of tradition and modernity was embedded in music culture as ‘cooking’ the ‘raw’ (native) music into classical music compositions. It was reinforcement and advancement for the native music but also an expression of nationalistic sentiments.

3.

Creating ethnic and provincial diversity

This chapter describes the process of creating ‘multi-ethnic’ folk music in the socialist era. The process was to categorise, institutionalise, and authorise music practices according to new concepts and administrative units. The creation of ethnic consciousness and its consolidation in academic discourses and artistic practices was indeed a part of Soviet nationality policy. The notion of *yastan* (lit. ‘bone group’ or ethnic minority), translated from the Russian term *narodnost’* (nationality), was constructed in this way as a politicised ethnic unity. The Sixth State Great Khural (the presidium)³³ of the MPR on 1 January 1931 resolved ‘to grant equal freedom to multiple small *yastans* of the country’ (Nasanbaljir 1956: 297). Between 1930 and 1932, a ‘*Baga yastny zövlöl*’ (Council for Small *Yastans*) was established under the State Small Khural, and the presidium of the MPR was charged with implementing the MPRP’s ‘nationality policy’ (*ündesnii bodlogo*) (Bulag 2020: 30). Identifying ‘ethnic groups’ as ‘small’ had an imperialist implication. The concept of *baga yastan* (small ethnic groups), as Bulag notes, followed the same logic of presenting the Mongols as a ‘small and weak nation’, and it was common for many countries at the end of World War I to call themselves ‘small states’, ‘small nations’, ‘small and weak nations’, or ‘small and weak peoples’ oppressed by imperialist ‘great nations’ or ‘great states’ (Bulag 2020: 30). Bulag also points out the formation of ‘ethnic groups’ as follows:

[E]arly ethnographic studies of various groups in Western Mongolia were not just an intellectual exercise; they were in fact part of a larger political operation aimed at destroying aristocratic and ecclesiastical domination in Mongolia through ‘liberating’ smaller Mongolian groups who were called ‘small ethnic groups’ (baga yastan). This operation not only created ‘ethnic groups’, but also created ethnic hierarchy in terms of number, dividing the population into two

33 The legislative body of the MPR.

categories, majority and minority, following the Western model of nation-state building (Bulag 2012: 210).

The Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party resolution of the First Small Khural, the presidium, highlighted the importance of 'all types of distinctive features' (The MPRP 1966: 255). *Baga yastan* became centrally important in consolidating the MPRP's social revolution, and became further embedded in academic and artistic practices. Munkh-Erdene describes the concept of *yastan* (*narodnost*) or ethnic group as 'the system of ethnicisation' for categorisation, diversification, and allocation introduced to state policy, scholarship, and education. As a result of this wider process, the concept of Mongolia changed from a political category to an ethnographic category, and earlier provinces or administrative units such as Khalkh, Dörvöd, Dariganga, and Darkhad became the names of communities or ethnic groups' (Munkh-Erdene 2011: 32). During the Tenth Congress of the MPRP, in April 1940, Choibalsan, the leader of the MPR, resolved: 'it is important to theatricise (*teatrchilakh*) and to advance "clubs of ethnic minorities" (*baga yastny klub*) in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and in provinces such as Dornod, Dornogobi, Ömnögobi, Zavkhan, Uvs and Khovd in order to meet the artistic requirements of the country' (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967: 23). This resolution fundamentally pictures the further development of artistic tradition as, firstly, 'multi-ethnicised' – as a political creation of state socialism – and secondly, centrally controlled and administratively institutionalised. The following paragraphs provide an account of the ethnicisation and folklorisation of cultural practices, namely musical culture that highlighted 'ethnic features'.



FIG. 11 Dancers Ch. Tömör-Ochir and J. Luvsangungaa, and musician G. Jamyan, during the first World Youth and Students Festival in Prague in 1947, Theatre Museum Collection: No. 92/31

The Soviet nationalities policy essentialised the rhetoric of ‘national characters’ as discussed in the previous chapter. Brotherhood and friendship campaigns provoked the exoticisation of national culture and the excessive and uncritical use of folklore. Martin claims this process to be the ‘chief sins attributed both to nationalists and especially great-power chauvinists’ (Martin 2001: 443). Folk music or folklore was a symbolic marker of nationhood that the Soviet policy selected to construct socialist national identity. ‘Folklore in the Soviet Union has been used consciously for propagating the cultural construction and political education of the masses for one goal – the realisation of socialism and communism’ (Oinas 1975: 160). Backed up by a propaganda project officially launched by Lenin, traditional music was appropriated, reworked, and redeployed for propaganda purposes as ‘new wine in old bottles’, as Harris and Norton (2002) describe it. Soviet nationality policies emphasised that ‘distinctive national identities would coexist peacefully with an emerging all-union socialist culture’ (Martin 2001: 74). By the same logic, the MPR intended to form a socialist national culture with distinctive folk identities. Sneath contextualises the emergence of ‘folk’ as a cultural collectivity as follows: ‘Like the nation, society stood for “the people” or *volk*, with its own generalised culture, traditions, and form. In this populist imagination, human aggregates were not simply the subjects of a ruler, but must form social and cultural collectivities, and this was reflected in the emergence of various forms of folk studies’ (Sneath 2007: 158).

The current understanding of ‘ethnic’ or ‘folk’ art forms was influenced by the rise of the discipline of ethnology, which was born in the 1920s, institutionalised in the 1950s and 1960s, and flourished in the 1970s and 1980s (Bulag 2012: 210). Compared to other art genres, folk art or folklore is solidly embedded in society through academic scholarship and cultural practices. Various disciplines such as folklore, oral literature, folk music, and ethnology worked to essentialise the concept of ‘folk’ (*ardyn*). Studies of folk oral literature (*ardyn aman zokhiol sudlal*) were one of the main disciplines that developed at the earliest stage of ‘modern science’ in Mongolia. From the 1920s the Institute for Sutras and Manuscripts (*Sudar bichgiin khüreeleen*), the forerunner of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, held expeditions with Soviet researchers sent by the Mongolian Commission of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union. Following Soviet researchers like A. D. Rudnev, A. M. Pozdneev, V. L. Kotvich, B. Y. Vladimirtsov, and S. A. Kondratiev, who collected Mongolian oral tradition and poetic folklore, Mongolian scholars such as J. Tseveen, B. Rinchen, Ts. Damdinsüren, B. Sodnom, P. Khorloo, U. Zagdsüren, and Sh. Gaadamba conducted the study

of 'Mongolian folklore' (*Mongol ardyn aman zokhiol*) in terms of artistic characteristics and classification of types and genres.

Ethnographic and ethnomusicological studies by Mongolian scholars generally describe the 'tradition' of musical culture under the category of 'authentic art' (*yazguur urlag*), 'folk music' (*ardyn khögjim*), or 'musical folklore' (*khögjmiin ardyn biligzui*). This categorisation includes various types of music, from simple invocation melodies for animals and spirits to more elaborate forms such as *urtyn duu* (long-song) and *khöömii* (overtone singing) (Badraa 1998), which were fitted into an evolutionist scheme of developmental stages. As Mendoz (1998: 183) notes in another context, the concept of 'folklore' is frequently applied to practices in order to validate them, and the concept of 'folkloric performance' is frequently used to refer to both promotional acts and ritual performances. In other words, calling performances or types of music 'traditional' and 'folkloric' is not just simple description, but part of a process of developing strategic normative definitions of public culture.

While the central academic platform for consolidating the concept *yastan* or 'ethnic groups' was through ethnographic and folklore studies, the main institution that implemented the policy of ethnic diversity in artistic practices was the State Ensemble of Folk Songs and Dance (*Ulsyn ardyn duu бүжгийн чуулга*). Folk ensembles, designed to grant professionalisation, standardisation, and nationalisation as well as 'advancement', were one of the main forms of institutionalising music and dancing. The resolution to establish the State Folksong and Dance Ensemble was issued on 1 December 1950 (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967). Until then, musicians of the Central Theatre (*Töv teatr*) played national instruments. A resolution issued by the Politburo on 28 April 1949 indicated the need 'to establish a national music orchestra in which each musician should master both symphonic and national music [...] to train every trainee of school of musical drama (*khөгjimт драматик сургуули*) in national music' (Tsendorj 1983: 29). Another resolution of the Politburo of the MPRP, issued on 23 October 1956, evaluated the work of the State Folksong and Dance Ensemble and criticised it for 'not succeeding in studying and acquiring the rich heritage of multi-ethnic art from all over the country' (Tsendorj 1983: 29). The resolution stated that art organisations were not working sufficiently on ethnic forms of art and music, which had to be collected, developed, and enriched. As in other Soviet satellites such as Armenia (Nercessian 2004), Kazakhstan (Rouland 2004), and others, the Ensemble in the MPR intensified the strategies to collect folk songs as 'raw'

materials to be processed for stage productions and to promote the diversity of songs from different regions.

D. Nadmid, a folk singer mostly known as ‘Nadmid of Khotgoid (and Darkhad) songs’ (*khotgoid duuny Nadmid*), recalls the strategy for ‘multi-ethnic’ (*olon yastny*) songs:

The ensemble used to send us to our hometowns or other parts of the country so that we could learn as many folk songs from the countryside as possible. Depending on their background, singers were asked to specialise in songs of one yastan [ethnic group] such as Buryat, Kazakh, and Darkhad. L. Tsogzolmaa, the artistic director of the ensemble, asked me to learn Darkhad and Khotgoid songs and I was sent to Khövsgöl province, my hometown. In this way, I started to sing Khotgoid and Darkhad songs (D. Nadmid, interview, 29 May 2009).

D. Nadmid’s colleague D. Khorolsüren was known for singing Kazakh songs although she was not from Bayan-Ölgii, a province inhabited mostly by Kazakhs. She appeared on stage in Kazakh dress holding the *dombra*, an instrument considered distinctively Kazakh. D. Khorolsüren states:

The repertoire policy of our ensemble was on a high level. I went to the taiga in Khövsgöl province and collected tsaatan songs (lit. ‘reindeer people’ or the Tuvans inhabiting northern Mongolia). I had performed a potpourri of tsaatan songs, before. For the first time, I sang Kazakh songs such as ‘Akhtama’, ‘My darling is in the city’, and others in a concert called ‘Songs from Altai’ (‘Altain duu’). The audience was very pleased. Later, my friend Zavkhan sent me a score of a song ‘Waltz of Ölgii’ from Bayan-Ölgii. That is how I became a singer of Kazakhs...I have a repertoire of 100 songs and 70 per cent of it consists of Kazakh folk and popular songs. I aim to collect and sing ancient Kazakh songs in a new way.³⁴

D. Khorolsüren’s story describes not only her way of becoming a ‘Kazakh singer’, but also the construction of socialist national identity focused on both ethnicity and the nation-state. While highlighting ethnic identity with ‘Kazakh songs’, the names of the songs (‘Waltz of Ölgii’ and ‘My Darling in

34 Bolod. ‘D. Khorolsürentei khiisen yariltslaga’ [Interview with D. Khorolsüren]. *Bolod*. 27 April, 2011.
<http://www.bolod.mn/News/55487.html>. Accessed on 4 October 2020.

the City’) emphasise the administrative units of the socialist nation-state. Reflecting Lenin’s vision in which each nation had its own music that could be systematically collected, studied, and used as a basis for composition, this understanding found a secure place in the views of Soviet ideologues (Nercessian 2004: 152).



FIG. 12 Dancer Ts. Radnaa performing a Kazakh dance with a knife at the World Youth and Students Festival. Theatre Museum Collection: 89-53-2

D. Luvsansharav continued and further validated the ‘multi-ethnicising’ policy as he worked as the director and (artistic) leader (*uran saikhny udirdagch*) of the ensemble from 1975. Being faithful to the policy, he is dissatisfied with the insufficient diversity in professional music compositions nowadays:

I do not know what the policy was before me. I am still committed to the policy of my time. We have 15 or 16 ethnic groups and two nations: Buryats and Khazakhs in Mongolia. I am still worried about who would develop diverse songs, melodies, and harmonies of the ethnic groups of Zakhchin, Torguud, Ööld, Bayad, Üzemchin, Tsakhar, Barga, and so on today. We need such songs even now. Today composers produce back-to-front (khöl tolgoi n oldokhgüi) Mongol songs that one cannot differentiate from one to the other (D. Luvsansharav, interview, 24 April 2013).

This fully demonstrates the impetus shaped by the state socialist nationality policy to celebrate ethnic diversities. 'Ethnic distinctions' (*ugsaatny ontslog*) of folk music were crystallised in their melodies, dialects, intonations, ornamentations, and singing styles. For example, Khotgoids are an ethnic group who socialist ethnographers identified as having been formed by the end of 16th century (Nyambuu 1992), inhabiting the current Khövsgöl and Zavkhan provinces. They are defined as having more ethnic distinction in their music than in other cultural practices. Khotgoid songs, which were characterised as *gigelgen* (melancholy), range between medium-length *urtyn duu*, longish in rhythms, rich in ornamentation and wide in range (Badraa 1983). Darkhads, another ethnic group in the same area, are also known for their songs specially created and improvised on the spot. Their distinction was characterised in defining Darkhad songs as different from other ethnic groups in scales of melodies, half-tone trills, sharp intonations, and dialect words (Tserensodnom 1961). In this way, the process was to embellish ethnic diversities in artistic performances and academic constructions.

In parallel with the celebration of ethnic diversities, creating a socialist nation-state and its unified national culture was also the focus of the MPR. A state resolution, 'On reviving and developing Mongolian national music' (*Mongolyn үндэсний хөгжмийг сержеэн хөгжүүлэх тухай*), was issued by the Politburo on 17 February 1956 (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967). It emphasised the 'ancient tradition' of 'national music' of the Mongol people and its decline as a result of Buddhist practitioners who, it was claimed, used 'folk' music works and instruments as tools to promote their ideology. The Central Commission of the Party stated that 'it is essential to inherit and apply the wealth of national music in a wider range and to immediately organise the campaign to study and to revitalise historical records, scores, images and other materials related to music used in ancient Mongolia' (ibid.: 141). The resolution also proposed increasing the use of instruments such as the *morin khuur* (horse-head fiddle), and the *khuuchir* (two-string fiddle) with funding from the Ministry of Finance. At this time, the MPRP appears to have been dissatisfied with the limited number of forms of musical expression and decided to enrich them by collecting, redefining, and reconstructing musical instruments. Administrative organisations of the socialist nation-state played crucial roles in constructing the 'national music.' A series of events, actions, and decisions validated the authority of the socialist state through signalling the distinctions of its administrative units. In his book *Musical Culture of Mongolia* (*Muzikal'naia kul'tura Mongolii*) written in Russian in 1963, B. Smirnov highlights the important musical traditions among rural

pastoralists along the Tuul, Orkhon Kherlen, and Onon rivers. He further states: 'the best wrestlers are found in the Bulgan provinces, the best scholars are in the eastern provinces and Khövsgöl province in the north, the best singers and soloists are in Khentii and Arkhangai provinces' (Smirnov 1963: 38). The diversification in provinces as political units of the socialist nation-state, which B. Smirnov noted in the 1960s, was further embodied in music culture.

There was a hierarchical structure of cultural institutions, from 'red yurts' (*ulaan ger*) to 'musical dramatic theatres' (*khөгjimt dramatik teatr*), in both urban and rural areas. The proliferation of cultural organisations in the MPR is indicated by the growth in the number of theatres all over the country, from nine in 1960 to 26 in 1988.³⁵ It was a centrally controlled system with distinct 'urban and rural', 'central and peripheral', 'professional and amateur' performers. Provincial 'cultural palaces' organised a 'Ten Days of Culture and Arts' (*soyol urlаgiin arav khonog*) festival in Ulaanbaatar at least once every five years as part of each province's five-year plan. These ten-day festivals of arts were modelled on the *Dekada* ('Ten Days') in the Soviet Union and were designed to motivate local theatres and performers to enrich their repertoires, as well as providing them with financial support. These were celebrations of 'socialist competition', awarding uplifting titles such as 'State Honoured' artists, 'Musical Dramatic Theatres', and so on. There were numerous cultural activities along these lines, such as nationwide 'art examinations of the people' (*ard түмний urlаgiin үзleg*). The national competition of 1960, like those held in 1936, 1946, and 1956, tested musicians' abilities to play national instruments and read musical scores (Chuluunbat 1972: 12). In particular, the 1980s, the last decade of socialism, saw a significant intensification of activities, events, and academic studies about 'national' music.

The process was to explore talented amateur artists and uplift them to the next step, which varied from rural cultural centres to urban professional stages. It also reflects Soviet 'amateur activity' (*samodeiatel'nost'*) (Lapasha 2004). The statistics indicate that the number of amateur groups and bands (including all musical art genres) increased from 3,293 in 1980 to 4,785 in 1988, and of amateur performers from 284,500 to 350,500.³⁶ The competition was not only between individual artists, but was even greater between administrative units. Provinces competed against each other in numbers of state-awarded artists. For example, during its *Dekada* in 1983, Töv province

³⁵ The MPR 1986; The State Committee for Planning and Economics 1989.

³⁶ *Ibid.*: 101.

succeeded in having three or four artists awarded the State Honour in direct connection with party policies (D. Luvsansharav, interview, 24 April 2013, Ulaanbaatar).

Another aspect of the socialist nationalisation of music was modernisation and standardisation. As the slogan implies, the aim was to create art that was 'national in form' by collecting 'folk' songs and instruments, and 'socialist in content' by 'developing' these genres using European classical models. One of the best examples of 'national' music that was considered developed in form was the *Ündesnii ikh nairal khögjim* (National Great Orchestra) of the State Ensemble of Folksong and Dance, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2012. The first national orchestra, consisting of 60 musicians (Tsendorj 1983: 32), was arranged on stage in the manner of a European symphony orchestra. Each instrument corresponded to a European symphony instrument, so that the *morin khuur* replaced the cello, the *khuuchir* the violin, and so on. On a TV programme dedicated to the anniversary of the orchestra, D. Luvsansharav explained:

When we were establishing the orchestra, it was hard to find a unified harmony for the ensemble of folk instruments that all sounded different. Traditionally, these were quite independent, being used as solo instruments in gers (yurts) (D. Luvsansharav, TV programme dedicated for the 50th anniversary of the State Ensemble of Folksong and Dance, 2012).

Nercessian (2004) notes a similar Armenian experience, when the Soviet republic introduced the 'folk ensemble'. Musicians did not know how to play in such orchestras because none of them had ever played with such a combination of 'folk' instruments before. It seems that it was difficult for both local musicians and the Soviet specialists to engage in the process. N. Jantsannorov, the two-time State Prize winner, composer, and former director of the Union of Mongolian Composers recalls the first attempts at choral singing:

Soviet specialists sickened of teaching scales or songs in choral singing. They barely learnt their parts after practising all day. Unfortunately, none of them recalled what they learnt the day before. There was a letter from a Soviet specialist saying that 'it is impossible to introduce choral singing when they still sing their urtyn duu (long-song)' (N. Jantsannorov, personal communication, November 2012).



FIG. 13 The National Music Orchestra.
British Library Collection: EAP264_1_1_1.

N. Jantsannorov identifies this as ‘a fascinating but difficult period during which national approaches to music, which were conceptually ‘Eastern’, were enriched through encounters with European musical thinking’. ‘Learning to read Western scores contrasted with the Mongolian way of playing music’, he says (Jantsannorov 2006: 64). The party’s policy of creating new ‘advanced’ musical forms and overcoming ‘backwardness’ was implemented, in part, by introducing Western classical musical forms, compositional styles, and instruments. Marsh claims that the newly introduced form was ‘a syncretism of European and Mongolian musical elements’, fusing the ‘best’ elements from European classical music with ‘selected’ elements from Mongolian folk music (Marsh 2009: 54). This process of ‘selection’ was politically driven by the state but was also a profoundly deconstructive and constructive process reflecting enormous talent and dedication among the pioneering generation of Soviet-trained Mongolian musicians.

Carole Pegg (2001) produced one of the first works on Mongolian music in American and European ethnomusicology, outstanding in its scope, depth, and detail, which aimed at describing diverse identities in musical performance and their transformation. In the chapter ‘A Socialist National Identity’ (Pegg 2001: 253) she illustrates how music tradition was ‘neutralised’, ‘stabilised’, and ‘refashioned’ under socialist control. She claims that ‘anything that represented past traditions or difference, anything symbolising separate

ethnic or group identities, was forbidden and where possible confiscated and destroyed' (ibid.: 256). She further argues that 'the communist regime repressed, assimilated, and refashioned performance traditions, as well as introducing new European art forms, as it attempted to create a socialist national identity' (ibid.: 284-85). This might lead to a monolithic perspective of generalisation of the socialist cultural policy. Ethnographic records I noted earlier demonstrate that the ideology of the Soviet-style state was not entirely totalitarian. A certain amount of celebration of edited and approved categories of 'national tradition' were permitted, indeed were expected, within the wider culture of what we might call Soviet cosmology, which was always somewhat broader than the particularities of the party policy of the moment.

Conclusion

Through a series of policies, state socialist Mongolia created a national music tradition that was ethnicised and folklorised. In doing so, both 'ethnic' and 'administrative' diversities were crystalised. Folklore or folk art was a legitimisation device to essentialise the 'national character' under Soviet nationalities policy. The structure of the Soviet Union, which purported to unite a variety of nationhoods peacefully under it, was realised in a curtailed version in Mongolia. The state socialist ethnic policy conceptualised that the MPR would consist of ethnic groups that differ in their cultural features. This multi-ethnicisation was realised through a variety of decisions, activities, events, academic and artistic discourses, institutions, and actors. Along with ethnic and provincial distinctions, the conceptual binaries of 'urban and rural', 'central and peripheral', 'professional and amateur', and 'modern and traditional' were drawn in the process of nationalisation and modernisation.

4.

‘Nomadic civilisation’: Breaking the Marxist orthodoxy

Movements against the ‘uncultured’

The post-Stalinist political climate of the Khrushchev Thaw (*Khrushchevskaya Ottepel’*)³⁷ saw the rehabilitation of some of the intellectuals earlier condemned by the Soviet rulers. Following the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in October 1961, which appealed for overcoming the consequences of the personality cult and an uncompromising struggle against dogmatism (*Great Soviet Encyclopedia* n.d.), during its Second Congress, held in January 1962, the Central Committee of the MPRP issued a resolution aligning its objectives to the CPSU’s plans. The MPR declared a struggle against the personality cult of Kh. Choibalsan, who had led the country for over two decades, and to eliminate the harm done to society. Yü. Tsedenbal, the First Secretary of the MPRP, reports:

The personality cult of Kh. Choibalsan caused damage in the party ideology by spreading dogmatic rote studies and boycotting creativity [...] the Congress affirms the need to take decisive measures to eradicate all harmful consequences in all aspects of our life caused by a personality cult’ (MPRP 1963: 48).

This turn was not only against a personality cult but was ‘a major re-organisation of the entire discursive regime of state socialism: a position external to ideological (political, scientific, artistic) discourse’ (Yurchak 2005: 13). In a similar vein to Soviet intellectuals who gained official

37 Nikita Khrushchev, who became the first secretary of the Communist Party after Joseph Stalin, denounced the former secretary and announced the de-Stalinisation policy at the 20th congress of the Communist Party in 1953. The Khrushchev Thaw is the period when repression and censorship in the Soviet Union were relaxed from the 1950s to the mid-1960s.

recognition in the Khrushchev era, Mongolian intellectuals had a breathing space to raise their voices on re-evaluating the cultural past.

This chapter explores the endeavours to re-identify pre-revolutionary cultural practices, which were not only part of the socialist nation-state's revival of national culture but were also rooted in post-socialist nationalism. These attempts to oppose earlier revolutionary notions about culture – such as that ‘uncultured’ (*soyolgüi*) or ‘backward’ (*büdüüleg*) cultural forms were reminiscent of feudalism – intended to break the Soviet hegemony and further Marxist orthodoxy. This was a significant movement called the ‘revival of national culture’. B. Punsaldulam classifies the history of tradition and innovation of Mongolian national culture into three phases: 1) from the beginning of the 20th century to the mid-1930s, 2) from 1935 to the mid-1950s, and 3) post-1955 (Punsaldulam 2018: 164). She explains the first period as tradition and innovation of Mongolian national culture, the second as building a new society, and the third as the revival of national culture (*ündesnii soyolyn sergelt*) (Punsaldulam 2018: 164). Although the accuracy of the divisions might be questionable, I highlight the approach in order to see the rise of national culture in the socialist era. As a result, the notions of ‘nomadic culture’ (*nüüdliin soyol*) and ‘nomadic civilisation’ (*nüüdliin soyol irgenshil*) were constructed in academic scholarship and public culture. As late socialism in the Soviet Union spanned approximately thirty years between the mid-1950s and the mid-1980s (Yurchak 2005: 4), this period was also the turn of ideology oriented towards the nation, and the precondition for the social transformation of the 1990s in Mongolia. Scholars who acted to revive the pre-revolutionary culture were acknowledged for salvaging the national culture and as nonconformists to the socialist regime.

By the end of the 1950s, members of the national revolutionary elite such as B. Rinchen and Ts. Damdinsüren, writers and scientists who had both served prison sentences under Kh. Choibalsan, were able to teach and publish their views on the (pre-revolutionary) national culture. B. Rinchen and Ts. Damdinsüren were in the limelight for ideological censorship and became ‘taboo’, as ‘everyone sought mistakes in work by these two’ (D. Tsedev, interview, September 15–16, 2016). The MPRP issued a resolution titled ‘On antagonism in Rinchen’s Recent Works’ (*Rinchenii süüliin üeyin zokhiol dakh kharsh ursgalyn tukhai*) (1959). The second part of a film about a charming hard-working teacher, titled *Tümnii Neg* (*One of the Thousand*) (1963), was banned as it was suspected of depicting B. Rinchen. Many other stories exist about the censorship of works by these two figures.

The breathing space of historical national celebration allowed a reconsideration of the portrayal of Chinggis Khan under earlier socialist policy, and resulted in an initiative regarding the memorialisation of Chinggis Khan in 1962. Ts. Damdinsüren took advantage of the initiative to celebrate the 800th anniversary of Chinggis Khan, which was the utmost manifestation of national celebration, to publish and publicly talk about him. At that time, the dual images of Chinggis Khan, official and unofficial, were on people's minds. A special commission was set up in preparation and Chinggis appeared on stamps and newspapers. During the Congress of the Writer's Committee, Ts. Damdinsüren openly said that Chinggis Khan should be praised as Alexander the Great and Mikhail Kutusov were in Europe, but not defamed as the MPR did at that time. His speech won much applause at the time (D. Tsedev, interview, September 15–16, 2016). Before long, however, the party resolved against the initiative for the celebration. In 1963 the Politburo sharply criticised Ts. Damdinsüren for his extensive focus on pre-revolutionary literature, invalidation of party principles, and translation of scientific terms with 'old' words.³⁸ By examining academic discourses raised by B. Rinchen and Ts. Damdinsüren and their fellows, the following paragraphs reveal how the national culture was celebrated and how the appearance of the concept of 'nomadic civilisation' opposed the Marxist orthodoxy of social evolution.

As a linguist and writer, B. Rinchen was also well-known for his nationalistic views and activism; he dedicated most of his scholarly works to praising the pre-revolutionary cultural achievements of Mongolia. He had studied at the Oriental Institute in Leningrad (St. Petersburg). In his work *From Our Cultural Heritage (Iz nashego kul'turnogo nasledia)*, Rinchen presented a compilation of articles he had previously published in *Mongol'skie Novosti* (The Mongolian News) magazine in Russian. B. Rinchen (1959) highlighted the 'rich cultural heritage' (*bogatoe kul'turnoe nasledie*) and condemned ignorance about Mongolian culture and the notion of 'uncultured' (*bezkul'turnyi*) ascribed to the Mongolian people (*Mongol'skii narod*). Just like the 'gong beat' (*udary v gong*) in the eastern orchestra, which was designed to pick out and stress particular sounds from general ones, B. Rinchen argues, so we should recognise the significant and valuable aspects of Mongolian culture (Rinchen 1959: 3). The compilation included articles to show a variety of pre-revolutionary cultural traditions such as archaeological monuments, geographic names, folklore, manuscripts, oral literature, folk

38 In the Politburo Resolution, 'On the Works of the Institute of Language and Literature of the Academy of Sciences', issued on 21 June 1963 (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967: 164).

dances, paintings (*Mongol zurag*), and ornaments. B. Rinchen's work was highly influential; indeed, it is emblematic of a movement that sought to critically re-evaluate the destructive phase of Soviet-style state building. This was a critique internal to state socialism that emerged after the demise of Stalin in the USSR and Marshal Kh. Choibalsan in Mongolia, and it is from this period that much of what is now considered to be the 'nation's cultural heritage' was selected, described, and evaluated. It also reflected a process by which socialist-era intellectuals sought to adapt and improve upon Marxist concepts of civilisation and social evolution.

In his above-mentioned compilation, B. Rinchen (1959) emphasised the value of pre-revolutionary tradition in ethnography, folklore, and oral literature, using modifying terms such as 'wealth' (*bogatstvo*) (ibid.: 37), 'great cultural heritage' (*ogromnoe kul'turnoe nasledie*) (ibid.: 32), 'great treasures' (*sokrovishcha*) (1958: 42), and 'pearl' (*zhemchuzhinyi*) (ibid.: 26). In his article *Among the Manuscripts in the Mongolian Public Library* he contested the 'uncultured' notion as follows:

Our economists often mention that our country has more livestock per capita than any other country. According to this standard, Mongolian people (araty) could establish another record with the number of manuscripts per capita, which would be a fact to disprove the previous notions of illiteracy (negramotnost'), or 'unculturedness' (bezkul'tur'e) of Mongolian people (narod) vulgarising the history of oriental culture. These days, African patriots respond to the colonist conception of the uncultured black with their books about the greatness (velichie) and glory (slava) of Africa. Similarly, Uzbek and Tajik scholars, who grew up under Soviet rule, started to work hard to explore their centuries-old cultural treasures. It is crucial for all Mongolists, either Mongolian or foreign, to study the cultural heritage of our people (ibid.: 42).

B. Rinchen, with his sentimentality and multiplication of pre-revolutionary culture, challenged the Eurocentric concept of 'culture' that had ignored Eastern and African cultures, and called for the destruction of this colonial ideology. Nevertheless, he remained in the same evolutionist paradigm and socialist ideological framings, judging 'culture' based on (il)literacy and taking examples from Soviet models.

Ts. Damdinsüren, who had been the editor of the party newspaper *Ünen* (The Truth) and later became the Chairman of the Writers' Union, criticised older attitudes of what B. Rinchen called 'ideological obscurantism', meaning

the sort of opaque, jargonistic justifications of Soviet policy characteristic of the Stalinist era. In his youth Ts. Damdinsüren had been an active revolutionary, but he later largely devoted himself to scholarship, producing a version of the *Secret History of the Mongols* (1947) and publishing 'Monggol uran zokhiyal-un degeji zagun bilig oroshibai (One Hundred Best Works of Mongolian Literature, 1959a), a pioneering anthology presenting pre-revolutionary works which existed only in manuscript. 'Works covering virtually every field of pre-revolutionary Mongolian literature followed' (Atwood 2004: 391).

Ts. Damdinsüren wrote an article titled 'Let's Preserve Cultural Heritage' ('*Soyolyn öviig hamgaalay*') in 1956 and published it in a compilation of the same title in 1959. He attempted to point out the 'misguided' notions in pre-revolutionary Mongolian culture and national cultural heritage. Ts. Damdinsüren tried to promote the value and variety of Mongolian literature against the 'nihilistic' approach to 'cultural heritage', by which he meant the ignorance of pre-revolutionary culture in calling it 'brutal' (*khargis*) and 'feudalist' (*feodalyn*). 'Some of the nihilists directly deny the existence of cultural heritage of Mongolian people', he says (Damdinsüren 1959c: 24). Ts. Damdinsüren wanted to be neutral. He restricted himself as neither a nationalist, who praised all the old cultural heritage and did not distinguish between feudal and 'common people', nor a nihilist, who damned all of them. He sharply criticised previous approaches to a new socialist cultural construction, which saw pre-revolutionary culture in a monolithic way:

Some people think that there was only brutal culture in a pre-revolutionary period and 'the people's advanced culture' (ardyn devshilt soyol) spread only after the 1921 revolution. This has both correct and incorrect aspects. What is correct? It is true that feudal culture predominated before 1921 and only after the 1921 revolution did folk culture expel the remains of feudal culture. What is the incorrect side? In a pre-revolutionary period, feudal culture predominated but did not completely eradicate the folk culture. Either feudal or the common people, the two opposing classes of feudal society, have their literary culture representing their interests (1959c: 22).

Ts. Damdinsüren further develops his argument by emphasising motifs and representations that are exchanged and missed in literature of both classes, the feudal and the ordinary people. He identifies modernist revolutionary concepts of so-called 'advanced quality' (*devshilt chanar*)

in literary works such as the *Secret History*, *Geser*, and *Janggar* and re-categorises these as ‘cultural heritage’ rather than ‘brutal feudalism works’. At a glance, Ts. Damdinsüren appraises pre-revolutionary literature by blurring a strict boundary between two classes – ‘feudal’ and ‘common people’ – in literary works. In fact, he underlines and further develops the notion of the two classes that Soviet policy projected, as well their representation in literature.

B. Rinchen and Ts. Damdinsüren disagreed on many issues, and their students and followers further built up the undercurrent of rivalry as if there were two distinctive ‘schools’ (*deg surguuli*) in linguistics and literary studies: one named after the former, *Ri bagsh* (the teacher Ri), and the other after the latter, *Da bagsh* (the teacher Da). However, the two men were very much of the same vein when it came to Mongolian cultural heritage. Both stressed the richness of the tradition and tried to establish a corpus of classical literature. Both were key figures in the ‘cultural work’ by which Mongolia gained distinctive national cultural heritage. They opposed the notion of ‘uncultured’ and the classification in a lower stage of development. This might be said to be the original ‘cultural revival’ of Mongolia, and it laid the foundation for much of the succeeding work celebrating the ‘national’ and ‘traditional’ art and literature of the past.

One further example of a category of ‘national culture’ that was politically celebrated within state socialism is folk music. The key person who devoted his academic, artistic, and activist work to appraising ‘folk music’ as part of ‘national culture’ was J. Badraa (1926–1993), a poet, translator, and ethnomusicologist. He was B. Rinchen’s student and known for his nationalistic views, rhetorical writing, and cultural activism, especially in ‘folk music’ in the late socialist era. In 1958, with support of B. Rinchen, J. Badraa was sent with two other students, J. Gendendaram and D. Nyamsuren, to the International Academy of Indian Culture in Delhi. The MPRP’s Central Committee decided to send students to the ‘capitalist’ third countries again after a break since the 1920–30s (Gendendaram 2006). J. Gendendaram recalls:

When Nyamsüren and I were preparing to leave, D. Tsevegmed, rector of the State University, told us that B. Rinchen wanted to meet the students to be sent to India. In March 1958, Rinchen met us and said: ‘I wanted to send my own student but not ‘Russian’ Mongolians (orosyn mongol) like you’. Anyway, D. Tsevegmed sent two of us. On

the way to India, Badraa joined us in Beijing. He said that the White-haired (Buural)³⁹ sent him (2006: 186-87).

Upon his arrival, J. Badraa devoted himself to scholarship praising the achievements of pre-revolutionary music culture and supporting newly developing art forms. According to Marsh, B. Rinchen and J. Badraa were 'rebellious' against 'the MPRP's epochalist lead and censor[ed] themselves on issues of cultural policy' (2009: 97). Marsh also claims that 'J. Badraa's advocacy of the maintenance and study of traditional forms of music and art and his criticism of professional musical practice irritated Party officials' (2009: 98).

Under the denunciation of the personality cult and dictatorship of Stalin at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956, the MPRP started to critically re-evaluate the destructive phase of state socialism. D. Tömör-Ochir, the secretary for ideology of the Central Committee of the MPRP ordered J. Badraa to write a paper to be presented in the State Counsel for Ideological Staff (*üzel surtlyn ajiltny zövlölgöön*) in 1963. In his paper on 'The Harm of Personality Cult on Mongolian Music and the Way to Get Rid of It' (*'Mongolyn duu khögjimd khaldsan negen khüniig takhin shütsenii khor khönööl khiigeed tüünees angijrah zam'*), J. Badraa praises both the history of pre-revolutionary 'national musical culture' as well as a new revolutionary music genre in terms of musical instruments, songs, rituals, and artists. 'The people's revolution had received a stripe of glorious garden of national songs and music from its preceding society,' J. Badraa says. While highlighting the 'heritage' of songs and musical culture (*duu högjmiin soyolyn öv*), he emphasised the contribution of both ordinary people and aristocrats in the transmission of the 'inheritance of national art' (Badraa 1963). According to him, 'many skilful singers and musicians were commoners (*kharts garaltai*), but some of them were aristocrats (*yazguurtan*)'. Furthermore, J. Badraa named several other musicians who were *gün* (dukes), *zaisan* (chiefs), or *khatan* (queens) and worked as artists, such as Sūjigt Beis Demchigvanjil, Gün Pürev, Zaisan Altangerel, and Queen Luvsangompil of Sūjigt Beis. Like Ts. Damdinsüren, J. Badraa sought to distinguish between pre-revolutionary music culture as either 'feudal' or 'folk'.

It is the harm done by deviators (nugalaatan) who manipulated the party's policy and revolutionary aim. As they could not distinguish folk art from feudal 'mire,' they ignored, abused and restricted folk

39 Referring to B. Rinchen.

music [...] it was only the deviators who called national folk music 'feudalist' and 'primitive' (Badraa 1963: 28).

J. Badraa challenged the Eurocentric notion of the classical (*songodog*) and proposed a definition that included non-European art performances. His challenge was not to socialism itself or to cultural development (*khögjil*), but rather to Soviet hegemony. And more than an intellectual intervention, *yazguur* (authenticity) resounded in public life in the form of two landmark cultural festivals and competitions in 1983 and 1988, helping to set the stage for post-socialist revivalism and cultural nationalism.

Yurchak (2005) sought to de-structure the use of binary categories in Western scholarship to describe Soviet reality such as 'oppression and resistance, repression and freedom, the state and the people, official economy and second economy, official culture and counterculture, totalitarian language and counterlanguage, public self and private self, truth and lie, reality and dissimulation, morality and corruption, and so on' (Yurchak 2005: 5). By criticising these extreme binary categories, Yurchak further pointed out the realities of actually existing socialism where 'control, coercion, alienation, fear, and moral quandaries were irreducibly mixed with ideals, communal ethics, dignity, creativity, and care for the future' (ibid.: 10). The efforts of B. Rinchen, Ts. Damdinsüren and their disciples to re-evaluate parts of the pre-revolutionary Mongolian heritage are not assumed to be resistance or a counterculture at the opposite extreme. Rather, these efforts were a drive to revisit the earlier politicised critique in the context of a 'mature socialist' society in which the new order was secure and no longer threatened, for example, by the monastic establishment for political control of the state. This was also a movement of a more self-confident and cosmopolitan national elite who were aware of the national cultures of other socialist elites, particularly Russia. By the 1950s, Mongolia was less reliant upon direct Russian guidance and was taking its place alongside other nations in the Soviet orbit. It was then time to gain recognition and respect for uniquely Mongolian forms in art and literature. Far from being a critical or dissident position, it reflected official party doctrine.

'Nomadic civilisation' as an academic construct

The earlier call against the 'uncultured' conceptions, which can be seen as the 'first cultural revival', further induced a grand narrative of 'nomadic civilisation' (*nüüdliin soyol irgenshil*), which was a break with Marxist theory. To 'upgrade the ideological level' and 'develop history as a scientific

discipline', the MPRP highlighted the Marxist-Leninist methodology by stating: 'the history of social development is the history of production but not of "conquerors"' (The MPRP 1963: 105). Mature Mongolian People's Republic intellectuals developed a number of important innovations and modifications of Marxist thought. One was to remove Mongolia from the five-stage theory of social evolution that Marx had outlined, by which society developed from primitive communism to socialism and eventually true communism. Rather, they argued that Mongolia had moved directly from the feudal to the socialist stage of evolution, and as such had 'bypassed capitalism' (*kapitalizmiig algasaj*).

The 15th Congress of the MPRP, held in June 1966, declared the success of the MPR's building of socialism and most importantly announced the 'complete transition from feudalism to socialism'. It further stated that 'Mongolian society officially formed classes of workers, cooperatives and national intellectuals' (Bira, Natsagdorj, & Perlee 1984: 51). Another break with strict Marxist orthodoxy was the notion of 'nomadic civilisation' (*nüüdliin soyoл иргeншил*) that emerged in the mid-1970s and flourished after the collapse of the socialist regime. This section outlines the pathways through which the concept of 'nomadic civilisation' was shaped in academic platforms.

The evolutionary scheme described by Engels began with 'savagery' and progressed to 'barbarism' and then 'civilisation'. These stages were characterised by a certain level of technology: savagery by fire, hunting, and fishing, and barbarism by pottery and the domestication of plants and animals. Slave-owning society and feudal society were later stages in the evolution of civilisation. In this scheme, nomads were thought to be at the stage of 'barbarism' and essentially pre-agricultural. Engels wrote:

In the Eastern Hemisphere the middle stage of barbarism began with the domestication of animals providing milk and meat, but horticulture seems to have remained unknown far into this period. It was, apparently, the domestication and breeding of animals and the formation of herds of considerable size that led to the differentiation of the Aryans and Semites from the mass of barbarians . . . having accustomed themselves to pastoral life in the grassy plains of the rivers, these barbarians of the middle period would never have dreamed of returning willingly to the native forests of their ancestors (Engels 1986 [1884]: 54–5).

In this scheme, nomads, having branched off from the line of social evolution that led to higher forms of civilisation, had ‘become stuck’ at an early stage (ibid.: 54-55). However, this clearly did not fit the apparent facts. Mongolia must have reached a form of feudalism, since the revolutionary regime had identified the old order as such, and in the 1930s the Russian orientalist B. Y. Vladimirtsov (1934) had coined the term ‘nomadic feudalism’ (*kochevoi feodalizm*) to describe pre-revolutionary Mongolia. It was logical, then, for thinkers in the MPR to argue that nomadism was not incompatible with civilisation but, at least in the Mongol case, a form of it.

The notion that pastoral nomads could constitute a special form of solidified civilisation was first suggested by Toynbee (1934). In Toynbee’s thinking, as Kradin (2002: 376) notes, each civilisation is based on a particular psycho-cultural unity and goes through the stages of growth, prosperity, and collapse. Kradin (2002) argues that nomads did not think of themselves as a unified cultural group standing in opposition to other nations and civilisation, although they had prosperity and collapse in their history. According to Kradin, ‘nomadic civilisation’ is a metaphor, rather than a scientific definition. From the 1970s, debates arose in Russian historical literature (Khazanov 1984, Kradin 1992, Masanov 1995) on the non-feudal nature of nomadic societies: concepts about the pre-feudal and early-class nature of nomadic societies, and a specific nomad form of evolution (Kradin 2003). Gellner (1988) does justice to Soviet ‘nomadology’ and denies Vladimirtsov’s combination of ‘nomadic feudalism’. While criticising Vladimirtsov’s heavy reliance on texts that tend to stress ideal and legal requirements rather than concrete social reality, Gellner notes the discrepancy between the socio-political organisation of nomads and the Marxist conceptual system (Gellner 1988: 98). In the Mongolian case, the theoretical basis appropriated for substantiating a category of ‘nomadic civilisation’, along with Vladimirtsov’s ‘nomadic feudalism’, was from Toynbee (1934). Further debates on nomadic civilisation conformed to Russian historian Lev Gumilev’s (1990) association with the processes of the origin and development of civilisation in geographical regions.

Kh. Perlee, an archaeologist who gained his first doctoral degree⁴⁰ from the Mongolian Academic Commission in 1959, contributed to the consolidation of the history of the nomadic civilisation of the ancient

40 According to the academic degree system used in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, the lower degree is a Candidate of Sciences [*kandidat nauk* in Russian; *ded erdemten* in Mongolian] and the higher degree is Doctor of Sciences [*doktor nauk* in Russian; *doktor* in Mongolian].

Mongols. In 1978, he obtained a doctoral degree by summarising his over thirty research works under the title *Some Issues of the History of Nomadic Civilisation of Ancient Mongols* (*Nekotorye voprosy istorii kochevoy civilizatsii drevnikh mongolov*) in Russian. Kh. Perlee (2012) presented findings of an archaeological expedition of the three river-basins (the Onon, Kerlen, Tuul) from 1952 to 1978. Although Kh. Perlee (ibid.: 248) does not highlight the category of 'nomadic civilisation', he condemns the fact that nomads had been mentioned only in relationship with Chinese dynasties and that there was insufficient information about the main historical facts of Central Asian nomads in the historical writings of 'Oriental' and Mongolian studies until the 1940s. Noting the lack of primary sources for the prehistoric study of nomadic civilisation of Mongolia, Kh. Perlee (1978) underlines archaeological findings as well as oral and written historiography in order to interpret the socio-cultural organisation of prehistoric Mongols. In his work, while he used 'nomadic civilisation' as a legislated term, he adopted Vladimirtsov's 'nomadic feudalism'.

National intellectuals and academics upgraded the notion of 'nomadic civilisation' as a competent stage of civilisation to include a variety of cultural practices in the scholarship of history, archaeology, literature, and ethnography of Mongolia. N. Ishjamts (1975), a historian trained at both Moscow State University and Beijing University, condemns the 'uncultured' (*soyolgüi*) notion and that marginalisation of nomadic culture. However, this time he was writing not against the Soviet policy but against Chinese conceptions. N. Ishjamts argues that 'all historical studies of feudalist China, the *Guomindang*, and the associates of Mao assume China as the world centre, Chinese culture as supreme, and of others not as culture' (ibid.: 30). N. Ishjamts criticises ethnocentrism in Chinese historical records, describing China as 'cultured', 'humane', and 'peaceful' whereas nomads are 'fierce', 'brutal', and 'blood-and-guts'. Furthermore, he attempted to reveal 'a distinctive developmental form of nomads [...] that has an independent state, economics, religion, culture, and customs' (ibid.: 31). N. Ishjamts defines the culture of nomadic pastoralist countries as a 'civilisation of nomads' (*nüüdelchdiin soyol irgenshil*) or a 'mobility civilisation' (*nüüdel irgenshil*). He further legitimates the deep past tradition of 'nomadic civilisation' that consists of 'nomadic culture' (*nüüdliin soyol*) with the predomination of nomadic husbandry and 'nomadic civilisation' (*nüüdel irgenshil*), which had literacy. N. Ishjamts claims that 'Mongolian nomadic civilisation had been chang[ing] for the preceding 70 years' and 'a new developmental era had started with the democracy' (Ishjamts 1993: 221).

In earlier claims, ‘nomadic civilisation’ was a form of civilisation rather than an opponent of it. However, it becomes competent or even outclasses the other types of civilisation in some later scholarly works, especially after the 1990s. N. Khavkh (1995, 2000a, 2000b, 2005), a sociologist and philosophy professor at the National University of Mongolia, made great efforts to theorise Mongolian ‘nomadic civilisation’ and to propose a philosophy of it. He published *Mongolchuudyn soyol irgenshliin gүн ukhaan* (The Philosophy of Civilisation of the Mongols) (1995), *Mongolyn нүүдлийн мал аж ахуйн гүн ukhaan* (The Philosophy of Mongolian Nomadic Pastoralism) (2000b), and *Mongolchuudyn нүүдлийн soyol irgenshliin гүн ukhaan* (The Philosophy of Nomadic Civilisation of the Mongols) (2005), where he solidified his theory of the ‘philosophy of nomadic civilisation’. N. Khavkh interpreted the dialectical relationship between conventional dichotomies such as the centre and the peripheries, the Occidental and the Oriental, the sedentary and the nomadic, and activities to change nature and those to adapt to nature (2000a: 162). He formulated a very contradictory pattern of ‘human development’: the lower stage of nomadic culture, the middle of sedentary, and the upper of nomadic civilisation which appropriated the advancement of sedentary civilisation (ibid.: 201). According to N. Khavkh, the higher level of civilisation, where sedentary and nomadic cultures found their supreme integration, would be the nomad-centred civilisation that inherited all the latest and advanced achievements of sedentary culture (ibid.: 219).

Another attempt to extend the existence of civilisation on the territory of Mongolia was made by J. Batsuuri, a physical anthropologist and Honorary Scientist of Mongolia, who studies human genetics. He gained his doctoral degree in Moscow in the 1980s and his study moves forward the origin of humankind and civilisation on the territory of Mongolia. J. Batsuuri’s main theory is that ‘Mongolian territory is the birthplace of the Mongoloids of American Indians, and Asians [...] it is one of the homelands of human culture and civilisation like in Africa, Europe, Central Asia, and Australia.’⁴¹ J. Batsuuri further reinforced his studies with his team of Traditional Nomadic Cultural Anthropological Study (*Нүүдлийн уламжлалт сойолын antropologiin судалгааны баг*), which aimed to provide basic knowledge of culture and civilisation studies (*soyol irgenshil судлал*) and ‘professional foundational knowledge’ of Mongolian traditional nomadic culture and civilisation (*Mongolyn уламжлалт нүүдлийн soyol irgenshil судлал*) at the School of Culture

41 ‘Mongolchuud түүхийн bayan, urt настай geniin sang teej yavna’. [Mongolians carry a rich and long-lasting genetic heritage]. Gogo. 12 November 2011. <http://gogo.mn/r/96723>. Accessed on 1 April 2014.

and Civilisation (*Soyol irgenshliin surguuli*) of the Mongolian National University of Arts and Culture.

Along with the efforts of national elites and the governmental bodies, another agent involved in the rise of the notion of 'nomadic civilisation' is UNESCO. An international UNESCO symposium on the *Role of the Nomadic People in the Civilisation of Central Asia* was held in 1974 in Ulaanbaatar. UNESCO approved a project on the study of the civilisations of Central Asia during the fourteenth session of its General Conference in November 1966. The purpose of this pilot project, as formulated in the UNESCO programme, was to make the civilisations of the peoples living in the regions of Central Asia better known through studies of their archaeology, history, languages, and literature (Litvinsky 1996: 14). The MPR had been involved in the project since Kh. Tserev, a secretary of the National Committee and vice-president of the Academy of Sciences of the MPR, attended the UNESCO meeting in Paris in 1972. 'Kh. Tserev proposed a new theme, *Roles of Nomadic People in Civilisations of Central Asia*, for the project.' V. Turin, a UNESCO representative to the symposium, said the Central Asian project aimed 'to promote primitive culture of the region, to fight against Eurocentric and neo-colonial analytic concepts and their development, and to enhance the capacity of humanism, peaceableness, and social progress' (Bira & Luvsandendev 1974: 282). UNESCO's involvement in institutionalising 'nomadic civilisation' and further defining cultural practices through its programmes in the post-socialist nation-building process is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

The concept of 'nomadic civilisation' was constructed as a result of a series of academic works and events in both the state socialist and post-socialist eras. The earlier movement of national intellectuals who intended to re-evaluate pre-revolutionary cultural practices reformulated the concepts of 'national cultural heritage' and 'nomadic civilisation.'

Conclusion

The ideology of the Soviet-style state was not entirely totalitarian; some limited space for public difference and discussion was permitted, but remained within politically 'safe' boundaries. A certain amount of celebration of the edited and approved category of 'national tradition' was permitted, indeed was expected, within the wider culture of what we might call Soviet cosmology, which was always somewhat broader than the particularities of party policy of the moment.

One of the most enduring achievements of the state socialist culture was establishing the *ündesnii soyol* 'national culture' category and populating it with 'cultural heritage' constructs. Although there were distinctive national variants in different COMECON countries, there was a great deal of commonality in material and intellectual forms, stretching across the Soviet 'Second World.' The socialist cultural heritage, as a form of 'national' wealth, was developed in line with Soviet thought on which past cultural advances should be retained. The 'national culture' was a way for the state to claim authority and power and thus to order the conceptual space for artists and creators. It was a homogenising narrative of power with everyday surveillance. However, it also allowed breathing room for individual undercurrents.

In the mature Mongolian People's Republic from the late 1970s and 1980s, intellectuals developed several important innovations and modifications of Marxist thought. One was to remove Mongolia from the five-stage theory of social evolution that Marx had outlined, by which society developed from primitive communism to socialism and eventually true communism. As recorded in official history textbooks, Mongolia had moved directly from the feudal to the socialist stage of evolution, and as such had 'bypassed capitalism' (*kapitalizmiig algasagch*). Another break with strict Marxist orthodoxy by Mongolian academics was the notion of 'nomadic civilisation' (*nüüdliin soyol irgenshil*) that emerged in the mid-1970s and flourished after socialism.

5.

Liberating writers, but insufficiently

Prologue

This chapter explores perspectives expressed in Mongolian literature on the edge of the transition from state socialism to liberal democracy and a ‘free-market economy’. It presents the formation of the Writers’ Union, a state socialist ideological apparatus, and how some members formed a splinter group, the Free Writers’ Union, as a strike against the former in the early 1990s. Narratives by prominent literary figures involved in the process of creating socialist Mongolian literature reveal the bureaucracy and censorship that regulated the organisation of literature. Furthermore, complex (unofficial) social relations of ‘sharing the same homeland’ (*neg nutgiin*), connection (*naiz nökhöd, tanil tal*), personal vindictive attitudes, or competition for higher positions were part of the process. Like the Soviet Writers’ Union, the Mongolian Writers’ Union (MWU) was formed as a systematic mechanism for production, censorship, and artistic career development.

With the embrace of democracy in the 1990s, a group of writers who enjoyed the ‘freedom’ of criticising the old system, creating their own artistic styles, and expressing their nationalist sentiments decided to leave the Writers’ Union and establish the Free Writers’ Union. They claimed to be ‘victims’ of the old system and justified themselves through reference to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Mongolia. Despite their stimulating start, the Free Writers’ Union became no more than a weaker version of the former and both remained organisationally and ideologically outmoded. Describing the historical context of the Writers’ Union and the formation of the Free Writers’ Union, I point out that the old state structure for the production and control of ‘culture’ (literature and the arts) was left largely intact but was emptied of most of its old content in the post-socialist era.

Apart from dispensing with party-led control and gaining creative liberty, the earlier concept of ‘freedom’ (*erkh chölöö*) celebrated the glories of Mongolian literary history. Nationalist sentiments later became the

dominant value system in the cultural sphere and the creative arts. With no conspicuous connection with the Western concept of liberalism at the early stage of transition, the Writers' Union split remained in an ambivalent situation as politically (ethno-) nationalist, organisationally state socialist, and economically 'liberal' (or neoliberal).

Politically correct and artistically proven literature

The Writer's Union formed out of the Group of Revolutionary Writers and then became the Mongolian Union for Revolutionary Writers (called *MARZ*, an abbreviation of a clumsy mixture of Russian and Mongolian, *Mongolyn Assotsiatsyn Revolutsiony Zokhiolchid*) by the decision of the Cabinet Secretariat Office on 28 November 1930. In a meeting on 15 January 1931, *MARZ* changed its name to *MARL* (Russian abbreviation *Mongoľ'skaya Assotsiatsiya Revolyutsionnykh Literaturov*), or the Mongolian Association for Revolutionist Literateurs. The main role of the Writers' Union was 'to organise campaigns of literature all over the country through specialists who should be ideologically and artistically educated' (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967: 121). Under the control of the Central Committee of the MPRP and with the attendance of Soviet writers, the Writers' Union spread all over the country as a systemic institution rather than only an organisation for writers.

The Writers' Union had a political ambition to design a new society of state socialism. The close involvement of the Writers' Union with the MPRP over six decades made it ideologically and economically dependent on the party's authority, as a series of official resolutions, activities, and events had institutionalised literature over decades. Consequently, the Writers' Union was formed as an overarching apparatus with provincial branches, literary circles, groups, and newspapers, in addition to having a dedicated fund, museum, and artist residency. Without chronologically outlining the history of the Writers' Union or the development of 'modern literature' in Mongolia, I will now detail how state socialism realised its goals of national development in the context of literature, namely the formation of the Mongolian Writers' Union.

The Writers' Union was formed as an imitation of the Union of Soviet Writers and was a politically significant institution controlled by the Central Committee of the MPRP. The party took steps 'to develop literature and improve ideology and skills of writers and issued the resolutions 'To Establish Writers' Union' (1943), 'The Current State of Mongolian Literature and Its Goals' (1947), and 'On Works of MWU (1953)' (Bira, Natsagdorj, & Perlee

1984: 570). The party appointed its director and other leading officials. These appointments were regarded as ‘party assignments’ (*namyn daalgavar*) and were obligatory for anyone who was selected. They were seldom revised or changed by individual request or complaint.

B. Baast (1921–2019), one of the oldest members of the Writers’ Union, joined due to a ‘party assignment.’ When he published his first poem in 1936, he had a chance to start his career from the *Youth Truth* (*Zaluuchuudyn Ünen*) newspaper in 1945. However, he could only stay there for a half day because the party then decided to send him to the *Revolutionary Youth Union* (*Khuvisgalt zaluuchuudyn evlel*) magazine and the *Central Committee of the Union Periodical* (*Evelelin töv khorooni khevel*). Some months later, the party decided to send him to the newly established Writers’ Temporary Committee (*Zokhiolchdyn tür khoroo*). B. Baast describes the situation of the Writers’ Committee at the time:

Alas, the Writers’ Committee was miserable. It was in a one-bedroom apartment on the right of the Chojin Lama Temple. Before, it had functioned as the literature division of the Office for Art Affairs (Urlagiin khereg erkhlekh gazryn utga zokhiolyn kheltes), which was established after S. Buyannemekh⁴² and M. Yadamsüren⁴³ were arrested. The union only operated nominally. No literary work was done there. There were very few people, such as B. Oidov, Ch. Lkhamüren, Ts. Ulambayar, D. Tarvaa (part-time), and me (B. Baast, interview, 10 August 2017).

B. Baast started his work by organising literary circles in Secondary Schools Number One and Two, the University for Teachers, the Institute of the Party, and the Ministry of Public Security. He gave lectures and talks at these literary circles once a week. Now, he feels ashamed of what he taught back then. Literary circles (*utga zokhiolyn bülgem*) were units to intensify literature campaigns, and the Central Committee of the MPRP resolved to organise them on 6 June 1946 (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967: 81). The Office for Artistic Affairs was responsible for regularly sending writers and art workers out into the countryside to assist provincial writers. The literary groups (*utga zokhiolyn büligemүүд*) were official units under the direct control of

42 S. Buyannemekh (1902–1937) was a pioneering writer known for his political and literary activities. He is the author of the song ‘Mongol International’, which functioned as a national hymn until the 1950s. S. Buyannemekh was arrested in 1932 for unknown reasons.

43 M. Yadamsüren (1904–1937) was a pioneering dramatist. While working as the director of the Central Theatre, he was arrested and shot for political reasons.

the Writers' Committee, whose mandate was to expand and upgrade literary activities. The aim of literary circles based on either local newspapers or provincial literary clubs was 'to unite efforts for literature, to draw out new writers and to assist the improvement of their creativity' (ibid.: 81). The State Great Khural (the presidium) involving representatives of literary groups was to be organised by the Writers' Temporary Committee (ibid.: 95) by the end of 1947.

The MPRP further intensified measures to improve writers' political, ideological, and artistic skills. On 22 May 1947, during the 15th meeting, the MPRP Politburo issued a resolution on 'The Current Situation of Mongolian Literature and Its Goals' ('Mongolyn utga zokhiolyn одоогийн байдал ба түүний зорилтын тухай'). It intended to produce highly artistic and ideological literature showing the new culture, education, morality, and customs in 'higher' forms such as novels, novellas, plays, and poems. The Writers' Temporary Committee (the name of the Writers' Union at the time) was obliged 'to review and strengthen its organisational, ideological and artistic activities so that it could become a centre for literary works in the country' (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967: 91-96). In order to raise the level of political ideology and general education of writers, both the Office for Art Affairs and the Writers' Committee were assigned to run regular classes on theories of Marxism, Leninism, social evolution, classic world literature, and literary techniques. The party thereby took consequential steps to strengthen the Writers' Committee as an institution and to reinforce literature as a justification for the new socialist cultural construction by increasing the number of writers and literary works.

On 13 January 1948, the second meeting of the Politburo then issued a resolution to organise the First Congress of Mongolian Writers. Its agenda was: a) a report of the Organisational Committee of the Writers' Union, b) a report on the results of the 11th congress of the MPRP and the goals of Mongolian writers, c) approving the regulation of the Writers' Union, and d) selecting the directorship of the Writers' Union (ibid.: 97). Although the resolution set the date of the First Congress as 15 March 1948, it was realised on 2 and 3 April 1948.

B. Baast, who witnessed the preparation and organisation of the First Congress, recalls the ambiguity and confusion of that time. According to him, it was rife with personal disputes, unexpected incidents, and unserious attitudes, although it was a long-planned event in official documents. B. Baast claims that B. Shirendev, who was the director of the Department of Ideology of the Central Committee, prepared a report and

randomly announced the congress when many senior members, such as Ts. Damdinsüren, D. Tsevegmed, and D. Sengee, were in Moscow. B. Baast also noted that the attendance at the congress was low, because provinces could not send their representatives due to insufficient funds. Only Arkhangai, Bayan-Ölgii, and Töv provinces sent representatives. Young writers from literary circles (*utga zokhiolyn бүлгэм*) were selected as representatives. B. Shirendev was supposed to deliver a keynote speech but could not because he had resigned from the Central Committee of the Party the day before. Ts. Dүgersүren, the director of the Division for Agitation and Education (*Ukhuulan bolovsruulakh kheltes*) had to present the report. B. Baast recalls the first congress:

I did not know if Ts. Dүgersүren had seen the text in advance. He did not know what 'revolutionary realism' was or what it was not. Ts. Dүgersүren hesitantly read the report. Marshal Kh. Choibalsan and other officials from the Politburo and Soviet consultants of the Committee-in-Charge of Art Affairs took part. The chairs of the congress were mainly selected by members of the Politburo. Marshal Kh. Choibalsan looked askance as he always did when he disliked something. Probably, he exploded... In the key-note speech, four writers – B. Rinchen, Ts. Tsedenjav, B. Oidov, and B. Baast – were criticised for writing inappropriate works with legendary and historical themes. We were condemned for writing about feudal oppressors from the last century and about violence and grief. They deprecated Tsogt taij by B. Rinchen, which had been awarded the State Prize by Kh. Choibalsan two years earlier. Ts. Tsedenjav and B. Baast manifested feudalism in their works, such as Queen Mandukhai and Such a King (B. Baast, interview, 10 August 2017).

The above anecdote about the first congress shows how official agendas were realised in everyday life. The attendance of Kh. Choibalsan and party officials and Soviet advisers showed the political importance of the Writers' Union and its congress. The criticism of writing about historical heroes would fit a socialist modernist programme. However, as B. Baast said, there was a personal incentive to outdo each other. Hence, unofficial and personal agencies operated significantly in shaping what was official. The MPRP further intensified its control not only over policies, but also daily activities. On 17 September 1953, the MPRP Politburo resolution no. 71/187 criticised the Writers' Union and its various branch institutions, such as literary circles

and groups, for their inadequacy, formality, lack of principle, dishonesty, non-seriousness, and alcoholism (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967: 121).

To review the progress in Mongolian literature since the first congress and to discuss tasks set by the MPRP to writers, the Politburo (resolution no. 395, 28 November 1956) decided to organise the second congress in April 1957 in Ulaanbaatar (ibid.: 153-154). In the assessment note for the second congress, the MPRP praised 'the success in depicting the life and struggle of the people realistically under the leadership of the party and with the guidelines and wonderful example of high ideology, artistic skills, and generosity of Soviet literature' (ibid.: 189-192). Compared to the earlier discussions and resolutions, the MPRP was satisfied with the increased number of newly recruited young writers and literary works depicting the real life, struggles, and efforts of the people. Nevertheless, there was a need to intensify the emergence of qualified literature to show the people the process of building socialism. Moreover, the MPRP reminded writers that the fields of agriculture and industry were priority themes for literature, and others were supplementary. Approaches of writing with 'empty ideas' with no political aims and in a variety of styles were viewed as critiquing the regime.

The Writers' Union was built as a nationwide, centrally controlled system that recruited new writers and published their works so they could improve within the system. Exchanges between writers in the central and peripheral regions were regulated, as in 1954 the Writer's Union was directed to publish an anthology of local writers, a result of intensifying literary group activities, and to organise a Ten Days of Literature of Local Writers (*Oron nutgiin utga zokhiolchdyn arvan khonog*) in Ulaanbaatar in 1955 to highlight local writers. These festivals were also modelled on the Soviet *Dekada*. All the MPRP committees in the city and provinces were obliged to control literary groups in their regions (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967: 124). Newspapers and magazines were the main platforms for promoting literature and recruiting new members. On 10 July 1955, the MPRP issued a resolution to start a newspaper titled *Utga zokhiol* (*Literature*) in preparation for the second congress. Its aim was 'to become a platform for writers and readers, to eliminate errors in general literary activities by thriving creative self-criticism, to support junior and provincial writers, to promote practices of Soviet writers, and to improve the Marxist-Leninist education of writers' (ibid.: 134). From the first year of state school, a student would get involved in local literary groups and aim to write and publish. Those who were interested in writing literature and poetry had many opportunities

to publish their works – for example, in newspapers like *Pioneers' Truth* (*Pioneryn үнэн*), *Literature and Art* (*Utga zokhiol, urlag*), or magazines like *Successors* (*Zalgamjlagch*) and *Ember* (*Tsog*). There were different sections (*seks*) for poetry, prose, children's stories, and criticism as well as voluntary literary circles and groups.

In order to become a member of the Writers' Union, one had to have one's work officially approved and published by a committee. D. Tsedev is a key figure in the history of the Writers' Union, as he was its director for 13 years, from 1977 to 1990. He started writing in 1953, when he was 13, with verses about racehorses. On his arrival in the city from Bayankhongor province, his hometown, he became involved in the Writers' Union's literary circles and groups. D. Tsedev recalled his entry into the Writers' Committee by the early 1960s:

The Writers' Committee was in the four-story building of the government house. There was a small white building out the back where one needed to get a written pass (propusk) and then show it to a policeman at the entrance to enter. When you entered the government house, I remember there were doors on the first floor that had the names of the director D. Sengee, editor of the newspaper Literature and Art, S. Dashdende, and secretary B. Baast on them. There was a big hall on the fourth floor where meetings were held [...] Every Wednesday, junior writers gathered to learn from senior ones. When I entered, the senior writers were B. Rinchensambu and Ch. Lkhamsüren. I had my poem titled 'To My Motherland' ('Minii ekh oron') approved by Ch. Lkhamsüren. Poems that had a stamp of the Writers' Union were eligible for publication. One could hardly publish without it (D. Tsedev, interview, 15–16 September 2016).

After years of involvement in the Writers' Union, D. Tsedev became the director in 1977. There had been several directors before him – D. Sengee (1954–1959), S. Udval (1961–1974), L. Tüdev (1974–1975), and D. Navaansüren (1975–1977). When D. Tsedev was the director of the party's Committee of the Ministry of Culture, the then-director of the Office for Cadres and the deputy director of the central committee informed him that the party had proposed him as the Director of the Writers' Union. It was a 'party assignment' (*namyn daalgavar*). During the Politburo meeting to appoint him as director, D. Tsedev for the first time saw people in person whose images are displayed during parades at Sükhbaatar Square. Politburo members interviewed him in Russian for over an hour. D. Tsedev says: 'I was

worried about whether I was saying the endings of sentences grammatically correct' (D. Tsedev, interview, 15–16 September 2016).

D. Tsedev's directorship was the period when the union was to be further systematised and institutionalised all over the country. The sixth (1979), seventh (1984), and eighth Congresses of Writers (1989) were organised. During his directorship, the focus was on building both 'genuine' socialism and internationalism. Activities and events were promoted to reinforce diversities and even competitiveness among administrative units in the same vein as music, as discussed in Chapter 3. Despite provincial literary congresses, the most influential event was the Literature Days (*Utga zokhiolyn ödrüüd*) organised by the Writers' Union and local administration. Övörkhangai and Ömnögovi were the first provinces to hold the Literature Days, in 1978, after which they were organised annually in different provinces. Writers and representatives of the people's deputies (*Ardyn deputat*), who were originally from a given province and living in Ulaanbaatar, joined the events. For example, writers such as Ts. Gaitav, D. Pürevdorj, J. Pürev, and O. Khorloo joined the trip to their hometown of Övörkhangai. Thus, it was not only an opportunity to read and listen to literature, but it also encouraged provincial development and competitiveness. Local manufacturers and farmers (*uls ardyn aj akhuitan*) competed to initiate something new, such as paving a road or setting up a provincial theatre beforehand. Writers were also sent to their hometowns to write a commissioned work. D. Tsedev recalls:

With consultation from the central committee of the Youth Union, the union sent three professional writers to their hometowns: P. Pürevsuren to Baganuur, Jamilkha to Bayan-Ölgii, and Ts. Dorjgotov to Arkhangai. As a result, they wrote novels (D. Tsedev, interview, 15–16 September 2016).

Translation from and into Russian was crucial for shaping 'modern national literature' and engaging in Soviet internationalism. The Writers' Union of Mongolia reflected the Writers' Union of the Soviet Union and had a close relationship with Soviet writers. It was an obligation for the Writers' Committee to translate and study materials from the congresses of Soviet writers. The translation of Russian literature into Mongolian had started as early as J. Tseveen's time in the 1920s. Some Soviet sources give figures regarding the number of translated works: 'between 1925 and 1948, 227 literary works were translated into Mongolian, including 104 works written by Soviet authors, 80 by pre-revolutionary writers and poets, and 43 by authors of all other nations'. Others state that: 'In 1950, about 70 works

of Soviet and Russian classical literature were translated into Mongolian' (Demidov 1952: 53). By the 1960s, Mongolian readers had been introduced to Russian writers such as A. S. Pushkin, L. N. Tolstoy, N. V. Gogol, N. A. Nekrasov, A. P. Chekhov, I. S. Turgenev, M. Gorky, V. V. Mayakovsky, A. A. Fadeyev, N. S. Tikhonov, M. A. Sholokhov, A. N. Tolstoy, B. N. Polevoy, I. G. Ehrenburg and K. M. Simonov (The MPR 1984: 570-1). The list also includes non-Russian classical writers such as Victor Hugo, Louis Aragon, Lord Byron, Honoré de Balzac, Heinrich Heine, Rabindranath Tagore, Theodore Dreiser, André Gide, Guy de Maupassant, Mark Twain, William Shakespeare, Stendhal (Marie-Henri Beyle), and Jules Verne (Bira, Natsagdorj, & Perlee 1984: 571).

At an earlier stage of the Writers' Union, most literature translation was from Russian into Mongolian, but not vice versa. The translation of native literature to Russian only started in the second half of the 20th century, with the appearance of a national literature and professional writers. Furthermore, there were influences of a new wave of nationalist movements raised by writers of 'national minorities' of the USSR. During the 1959 Soviet Writers' Congress, representatives of the national republics criticised the neglect of the literatures of the national republics and highlighted their literary heritage. As the novelist M. A. Sholokhov and poet A. T. Tvardovsky stated at the time, 'it appears that translations from the Russian into the languages of the 'fraternal' peoples are quite plentiful, but that the exchange works only in one-direction' (Friedberg 1960: 276-78).

This new wave of nationalism in the USSR, particularly among the peoples of Central Asia, had an impact on intellectual life in Mongolia. Along with the breathing space to celebrate 'national culture' and mature professional writers, the translation of Mongolian literature to Russian and other languages of the Soviet bloc countries intensified. In the 1980s, D. Tsedev succeeded in publishing 16 volumes by Mongolian writers in the Soviet Union in Russian, from revolutionary ones such as S. Buyanemekh and B. Rinchen to junior ones such as G. Ayurzana.

The Writers' Union employed some writers in permanent positions of 'professional *littérateurs*' (*mergejliin uran zokhiolch*), made contracts with assignments, and paid them monthly fixed salary of 800 tugriks.⁴⁴ Depending on the genre, writers were given a certain period to produce. A professional writer was granted a year for a novel, six months for a novella, and six months for a fiction film script (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967). The Literature

44 About 100 USD.

Fund (*Utga zokhiolyn san*), a public organisation under the Writers' Union, was a source for supporting the creative activities of authors, literary critics, researchers, and translators (The MPR 1962: 249).

The bylaw of the Literature Fund stated that 'the main goal of the fund was to assist with the 'cultural-household' (*soyol-akhuin*) conditions of members of the Writers' Union as well as of promising writers' (ibid.: 251). The members and deputies of the Writers' Union had to be members of the Literature Fund. It was controlled and guided by the general committee of the Writers' Union and was collected from various taxes and dues imposed on member writers and institutions, publications, publishing houses, and performances at central theatres as well as provincial cultural centres and clubs. Generally, most cultural institutions such as operas and plays (but excluding cinemas and the circus) were subject to pay a certain percentage (from 0.5% to 1%) from every stage performance. The fund operated in connection with the state tax system so that the fund itself and its affiliated offices and institutions were exempt from all sorts of state taxes and dues (ibid.: 252).

By the 1980s the Writers' Union had been stabilised as the state socialist body for professionals in the literary arts. As discussed above, the socialist authorities formed an official institution designed both to represent writers' interests with respect to the state and to promote partisan cohesion within literary circles in order to shape public opinion in approved directions. In doing so, the party highlighted both ideological and artistic approaches in order to create a 'modern Mongolian literature'.

Behind the scenes of censorship

The MPR ran the General Authority for Censorship of Literature and Publishing (*Utga zokhiol ba khevel khyanakh gazar*), or 'Glavlit' for short, to censor all kinds of content to be published, including books, journals, and newspapers. Notably, 'Glavlit' is the abbreviation for the same agency in the Soviet Union, the Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs (*Glavnoe upravlenie po delam literaturi i izdatel'stv*). As an agency under the Council of Ministers, it was established by an MPRP Politburo resolution on 4 March 1947. Before its establishment, the Office for Artistic Affairs made decisions and selections for publication based on political ideology and artistic quality. The agency would not approve content that was artistically clumsy and politically incorrect.

Although the official claim was that decisions reflected the quality of the literature rather than subjective criticism, it heavily depended on the personal manipulation of both editors and writers. D. Tsedev states that there were good and bad sides about editors with knowledge of literature and art:

The good side is that they really understood how literary work should be. The bad side is that they were too discerning. There were tough editors like J. Baramsai, known for his critical and satirical stories, and N. Nyamdorj, who often banned writers. Less-competent editors were easy to deal with by convincing and manipulating them in different ways (D. Tsedev, interview, 15–16 September 2016).

Sometimes the Glavlit had to re-examine works that had previously been banned. A commission to review banned songs, plays, and books was established by Politburo resolution no. 251 on 13 July 1959 (Zagdsüren & Tsend 1967: 287).

Editors carefully checked writers who were already in question, or specific themes and subject matter that had been disapproved earlier. Those who were already in trouble, such as B. Rinchen and Ts. Damdinsüren, were on the editors' radar. D. Tsedev recalls the experience of having his monograph on tradition and creativity in Mongolian poetry censored. The editor directly asked D. Tsedev to omit an analysis of the poem 'The Flower of the Bride' (*Ber tsetseg*) by B. Rinchen. Although D. Tsedev explained that the poem was about a protest of the war, the editor decided that it reflected Chinggis Khan, whose discussion had been banned in a resolution.

The topic of Chinggis Khan was always in consideration both for officials and writers. As he was the 'culmination of Mongolia's pride' (*Mongolyn bakharkhalyn deed tseg*), in D. Tsedev's words, many writers such as D. Pürevdorj, Sh. Sürenjav, R. Choinom, and D. Tsedev intended to publish their works on Chinggis Khan for the memorialisation of his 800th anniversary in 1962. When D. Tsedev showed his poem 'Chinggis' to the secretary of the *Tsog* journal Ts. Damdinsüren (nicknamed Övgöödei) to publish, the latter said that the decision to publish D. Pürevdorj's poem instead had already been made because he was close with and from the same hometown as D. Tömör-Ochir, the secretary of ideology of the Central Committee of the MPRP. D. Pürevdorj succeeded in publishing his poem, 'Chinggis', which was widely acknowledged in the post-socialist era. D. Tsedev's narrative shows that personal relations of 'sharing the same homeland' (*neg nutgiin*)

and network (*tanil tal*) served in getting published regardless of official censorship.

Amid this strict policy and censorship, experienced writers had tricks to avoid being banned. In one of Damdinsüren's works, *Dörvön oyutny margasan tüükh* (A Story of How Four Students Argued), prepared in 1959 (Damdinsüren 1966) and edited by Sh. Gaadamba, he depicted a Mongolian and a Central Asian student. When one praises Chinggis Khan the other disagrees. Thus, Ts. Damdinsüren used this trick to express his view through the opposite character and then to deny it through the positive one. Those who did not know the tricks of getting published were banned. B. Rinchen also published a short story, 'Mangaa Doogjin etssiin züüd' (The Last Dream of the Mangaa Do) (1969), also known as 'Delgüüriin manaach' (The Store Guard), where he depicts a fierce clerk of the Manchu period who tortured many innocent people. In fact, B. Rinchen depicted, as hidden texts, the officer of the Ministry of Public Security, B. Jambaldorj, nicknamed the 'monster' (*mangas*), who tortured B. Rinchen when he was imprisoned (see B. Rinchen 1990: 41). These texts, 'which are ambiguous and thus readable in such a manner that it is possible to recover oppositional as well as official meanings' (Kaplonski 2004: 11), are called 'evocative transcripts' (Humphrey 1994: 22) or 'hidden transcripts' (ibid.: 25). Kaplonski argues that 'it was certain key forms of evocative transcripts, to be found in official, approved narratives, that helped propagate and preserve unofficial histories' (Kaplonski 2004: 11).

Personal manipulation of censors is shown in anecdotes that senior filmmakers tell of their productions. Censorship was well-institutionalised, with hierarchical phases for artists to pass through. Films, for example, were examined from the first draft of a script to the last public presentation. They were premiered only after approval by the General Administration for Literature and Publishing, the Artistic Board of the Screening Industry (*Kino üildveriin uran saikhny zövlöl*), the External Artistic Board of the Ministry of Culture, and the Department of Ideology of the Central Committee of the MPRP.

Senior artists who experienced such censorship recall how officials did not have enough artistic education or concern. B. Nagnaidorj, a film director who had worked in the film industry since 1963, described the General Administration for Literature and Publishing as a place that only cared about anti-party or 'indecent' content but had no artistic competency. According to him, a scene showing a Chinese vacuum flask for tea was banned although every household had it at home. B. Nagnaidorj personally

did not have big problems with his film *Khünii saikhan setgel* (The Kindness of a Man) (1980), which depicted a kind old man who helped a couple to cross a river. The film has only three characters. When B. Nagnaidorj worked as an assistant director on the film *Saruul talyn yörööl* (The Blessing from the Vast Steppe) (1984) about D. Natsagdorj, a revolutionary writer and founder of modern literature, he experienced 'great suffering' (*üilee üzej, laigaa barsan*). As B. Nagnaidorj describes it:

It was censored and edited eight times and was approved only on the ninth time. The life of D. Natsagdorj was a real artist's life with ups and downs, love, and passion. Officials behaved as if they personally knew D. Natsagdorj. Nobody else except from D. Namdag [the playwright] knew him in person at that time. They cut the parts showing D. Natsagdorj married to a Russian woman before he went into prison. In the original script, D. Natsagdorj, while reading A. S. Pushkin's poetry in prison, said that a crow was cawing behind the barbwire. The censors asked who we were representing by it. They cut the parts where the 'green-hat' (nagoon malgaitan) [officials from the Ministry for Internal Affairs] were depicted as lumpish. It also depicted him writing a poem 'Minii nutag' (My Motherland) on a candy wrapper with a bear print.⁴⁵ They criticised the fact that it was such a disorder that a prisoner had not been controlled. As I was a 'social product' (niigmiin бүтээгдэхүүн), I followed everything because I had to keep my job and feed myself (B. Nagnaidorj, interview, 11 December 2016).

B. Nagnaidorj condemned artists who were censored for such trifles at that time and yet claim today that they were beaten for their highly artistic works. L. Sharavdorj, a state-honoured cinematographer, reveals that the peak of politicised censorship of trifles was in the 1970s and 1980s. He recalls his experience of the film *Ankhny alkham* (The First Step), which depicted a relationship between a youth and elders through a practitioner student among senior farmers. The first title, *Övöljikh khun* (A Swan to Overwinter), which was artistic and meaningful, was forcefully changed because of the metaphor of a bird representing a human being. L. Sharavdorj further recalls:

45 A Russian candy which had bears on its wrapper is known as 'bear candy' (*Baavgaitai chiher*).

They politicised nothings, such as showing an old scythe man spitting on the ground (as it was polluting nature) and wiping a churn with grass. It was much harder for documentaries. Everything had to be shown as rich and nice. Dairymaids had to wear silk garments while milking. Nobody could say a bad word about the Soviet Union (L. Sharavdorj, interview, 14 December 2016).

A whole framework as a hierarchical system functioned to control and shape the arts. However, it was perfunctory and inconsistent, as the example of the revised criticism discussed above shows. Although the censorship was officially well-institutionalised with hierarchical phases to go through, one could unofficially gain permission to publish through personal connections and acquaintances. Writers manipulated the censorship with their skilled writing of 'evocative transcripts' hidden in approved narratives.

Apart from these tricks to overcome the censorship, there was a way to share the 'not permitted' literature out of the system. Uncensored ideas and styles, not necessarily against the regime, were distributed within limited groups through unofficial correspondence. In studies of state socialism, binary notions of 'official' and 'unofficial' – dealing with domination and resistance – have been widely discussed (Humphrey 1994, Scott 1999, Kaplonski 2004, Yurchak 2005). Critiquing the division of 'official' and 'unofficial' and censored (*podtsenzurnaya*) and uncensored (*nepodtsenzurnaya*), Yurchak (2005) claims that everyday life of socialism is beyond those binary metaphors.

In his article 'The Terrifying Mimicry of *Samizdat*', Oushakine (2011) is also critical about the fact that the oppositional discourse of the dissident movement in the Soviet Union manifested, in his view, merely as a 'surface' phenomenon. He analyses the practice of *samizdat* (self-publishing), which involved reproducing and circulating uncensored texts, as a form of dissident work opposing the state monopoly in the Soviet Union. Analysing political *samizdat* rather than artistic *samizdat*, he argues that the oppositional discourse 'echoed and amplified the rhetoric of the regime, rather than positioning itself outside of or underneath it' (ibid.: 192). Even for the artistic *samizdat*, the aim was more to overcome stylistic restrictions than to criticise the regime, as Oushakine claims.

When it comes to literary censorship and underground texts in the MPR, pocketbooks (*övriin devter*) were a channel for censored texts. Writers and readers circulated poems with censored ideologies and writing styles, distributing them in notebooks. Further, things did not simply flow in two

clear-cut directions of power and resistance. There were turns and returns, ups and downs, and twists and conformities in the whole continuum of socialism as well as in individual life.

R. Choinom (1936–1979) is an interesting person who had a significant role in the cultural life of both socialist and post-socialist Mongolia. He was convicted of ‘agitating against the MPR’ (*BNMAU-yn esreg surtal ukhuulga yavuulakh*) or ‘treason against the state’ (*töriin esreg onts notstoi gemt khereg*) and jailed for four years (1969–1973), then exiled for three years (1973–1976). R. Choinom’s dissident poems, titled ‘Ööröö öörtöö unshikh shüleg’ (Poems to Read Myself) and ‘Uur mini khüurch baina’ (I Am Infuriated) were spread through pocketbook correspondence and read within secret groups. During his investigation he was asked to explain the political implications of each line he wrote. For example, he was asked what he meant with the line saying ‘Alas, poor people, not recognising a great man but crying only after putting him in a coffin’ (*Aguu khüniig amidad n tanikhgui avsand hiigeed uildag ard түмен khöörkhii*). R. Choinom replied: ‘I meant the historical people such as S. Buyannemekh, D. Natsagdorj, G. Ser-Od, D. Sengee, Ts. Gombojav, B. Oidov, who became known only after their death’. Another line he was asked to explain was ‘Everything is closed and strictly regulated’ (*Khamag бүкхен khaalttai, khatuu chand zaalttai*). He answered: ‘There is no freedom (*erkh chölöö*). The censorship in literature is too strict’.⁴⁶

After his release in 1973, R. Choinom was exiled to the Batnorov sub-district of Khentii province. In the same year, he wrote a letter to S. Udval, then-director of the Writers’ Union, asking for support to have his prose published. R. Choinom noted that he was more and more realising his mistake and promised not to repeat it again. He wrote: ‘Officials dealing with publication are always hesitant and refuse to publish my works. I wish they would understand me correctly and publish my works’ (Oyun 2011: 245). Unfortunately, R. Choinom did not succeed in publishing anything more until his death in 1979. However, he later became, as the ‘voice of freedom’ and a ‘radiating fighter’, a symbol of the resistance against the regime. On 26 April 1990, R. Choinom was rehabilitated and his materials were declassified from the top-secret category. His book was published and the State Prize was awarded posthumously.

It is evident that R. Choinom was repressed harshly for criticising the system. He also could not fit within the system because of personal reasons

46 Jacool MVP. ‘Ulsyn onts nuutsyn zereglelt Renchineii Choinomyn khereg’. [The state top secret case of R. Choinom]. *The Coolcast* [video podcast]. 26 June 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dkKSaOBK14>. Accessed on 19 June 2023.

such as health issues, his official education level, previous imprisonment, and alcoholism. R. Choinom was built up as a dissident through poems that could be found in the pocketbooks of any other writers at that time. His tragic fate became the reason to destroy censorship and to express freedom. In his prose titled *Minii Mongol* (My Mongol), R. Choinom indirectly expressed 'evocative transcripts' about writers who were censored by the socialist government and exiled. Later some of them became actively involved in the movement to be free of the Writers' Union.

*In the sixth decade of the 20th century
Sharing happiness and sorrow with city girls
Fighting against the frost together with herders
Sitting in a driver's cabin in the high hills of Khovd
Reading until the heavenly wine sparkles
Toasting until a blue glass breaks
Sprinkling one's youth in the place of sages
To the poems of my dear pure and light-hearted friends
Sharavyn Surenjav, Shagdarsüren, Nyamaa
Shagdaryn Dulmaa, Pürevsüren, Badraa
Peer group of the age standing in lines
Engraved their images in my open heart*

*(Khoridugaar zuuny jaraad onuudyn üyes
Khotyn söösgör okhidtoi jargal zovlon khuvaaltsaj
Khonichin malchny khamt javar salkhi sörölsöj
Khovdyn öndör davaand joloochiin kabind suultsaj
Tsengeliin altan darsand khöös sagatal unshij
Tsenkher shilen jünznii khövöö setertel tulgaj
Tsetsen mergenii odond khoriod nasaa tsatsan
Tsever khöngön setgeltei khongor naizuudyn shüleg
Sharavyn Surenjav, Shagdarsüren, Nyamaa
Shagdaryn Dulmaa, Pürevsüren, Badraa
Tsailgan zürkhen dund mini mönkh dürsee siilsen
Tsaг үеиin chatsuutnuut mor mörөө yarainam) (Choinom 1990).*

The split between 'free' and 'bobbled' writers

In 1989, a group of writers who regretted the leadership of the existing Writers' Union and its close involvement with the MPRP, and who claimed they were 'victims' of the old system, then formed the Mongolian National

Free Writers' Union (*Mongolyn үндесний чөлөөт зохiolchdyn kholboo*), or MNFWU. They sought to differentiate themselves from the old union by emphasising their 'artistic freedom' (*uran бүтeeliin erkх чөлөө*). In their perspective, the 'old' union consisted of people who repressed others while the 'new' one was made up of their victims. MNFWU took an explicitly non-socialist stance, introducing the term 'free' (*chölөөт*) to indicate their commitment to freedom of expression and freedom from party-centred ideology and the 'socialist realist' style.

On 27 September 1990, during its first congress, MNFWU officially declared itself 'a legally competent public organisation for professional writers.' The newly formed union clearly stated that its members 'would fight for the sake of freedom of creation, ideological pluralism (*olon urgalich үзeл*), and free competition by depicting the national characteristics, habit, and lifestyle of a Mongolian man solely in artistic ways and provide every writer with opportunities to develop his or her original style' (National Uplift 1990a: 3).

The aim of the split was not only organisational separation but also ideological diversification. For them, 'being free' meant avoiding political control and censorship, freedom to create a 'national literature' without any external instructions, and creating opportunities for young writers. The ensuing conflict between the two organisations unfolded publicly in newspapers such as *Literature and Art* (*Utga zokhiol, urlag*) and *National Uplift* (*Үндесний devshil*). Writers spoke maliciously about each other, referred to the older union as 'hobbled' (*chödörtei*), and described being controlled and constricted, whereas the new union was 'free' (*chölөөtei*). The former term, 'hobbled', implied party-led political conformity while 'free' referred to freedom of artistic expression. This break from the Writers' Union, one of the main ideological agents of state socialism, provides remarkable insights into the post-socialist transition in Mongolian literature. After the collapse of Soviet-style state socialism, Mongolia 'not only embraced Western liberal democracy but also embarked on building a free-market economy' (Munkh-Erdene 2012: 61).

The transition to a free-market economy challenged 'modern Mongolian literature', which had been constructed both as an art form and as an institutional system by the socialist government, and in particular its economic potential. The newly formed union of 'free' writers aimed at establishing a new way for young writers, but it repeated the organisational structure of the former one. Neither of the two unions flourished in the

market economy once state subsidies stopped, although both still exist, operating in similar ways until now.

The 'free writers' included Sh. Gaadamba, J. Badraa, Sh. Sürenjav, J. Byambaa, and O. Dashbalbar, who had been either dismissed or exiled under the socialist authority, and young writers such as S. Dulam and S. Dashnyam. Part of their protest was against the congress of the Writers' Union, which was quickly announced and organised by S. Erdene, D. Pürevdorj, and D. Maam to dismiss D. Tsedev, who had led the union for nearly two decades, and to appoint D. Maam as the new director. D. Tsedev states: 'until now some say that supporters of D. Tsedev formed the Free Writers' Union but I did not take part in their meetings. I am still a member of MWU' (D. Tsedev, interview, 15–16 September 2016). D. Tsedev further recalls:

S. Udval, the former director of the Writers' Union, was going to a meeting of the 'free' writers as she was interested in seeing what was going on there. On the way, she met Sh. Gaadamba, one of the founders of MNFWU. Sh. Gaadamba told her that the meeting was for those who were repressed but not for repressors like her. Then, S. Udval returned. They claimed they were the suppressed and that those who were praised in the old system stayed in the old union (D. Tsedev, interview, 15–16 September 2016).

S. Udval was one of the most prominent figures in the intellectual and political life of the MPR. S. Udval served as the Director of MWU for 13 years (1961–1974) and as the Chairwoman of the Mongolian Women's Committee for twenty years (1962–1982). Being fit and coherent for the system, she benefited from such high reputation and respect so as to be called 'The Reigning Madame' (*tsagiig ezelsen khatagtai*). However, the political and ideological twist in the system turned her position into that of a 'repressor', as Sh. Gaadamba needled her in the above anecdote.

Although official narratives claimed that writers were intellectual elites who were obedient to the Party's assignments and worked hard to enlighten the public, it is evident that they procrastinated with individual shortcuts and internal inconsistencies, not necessarily resisting openly. The minutes of S. Udval's meeting with senior members and salaried writers of the MWC from 19 July 1971, presents how S. Udval admonished writers for their irresponsibility, arrogance, laziness, and excessive alcohol use. She criticised them for hardly producing new pieces and characters of 'new men' (*shine khün*), but easily earning salaries (of 700–800 tugriks). S. Udval also noted that writers were inconsiderate of letters by Soviet writers published in

newspaper, offended some of them, and stayed dull during the visit of well-known Soviet children's author S. Mikhalkov (Oyun 2011: 263). L. Tudev, the then-vice-director of the Writers' Union, said: 'It is useless to ask anything from them. They have interests in keeping the apparatus working within the extent of their thoughts. Anarchy is all over' (ibid.). Those words were to the ones who earned state favour in publishing their works and receiving prizes. However, the initiators of MNFWU were subalterns in the system.

While the 'free' writers perceive themselves as democrats and fighters and take others as backward, B. Baast, a senior writer who was a member of the old union for over sixty years defined them as 'unformed' (*galbirgüi*), 'contentious' (*khel amtai*), and 'anarchic' (*duraaraa*). 'They did not fit into the activities that MWU runs and wanted to work the way they wanted. However, we have an ethos of working with the line', B. Baast states (B. Baast, interview, 10 August 2017).

The 'free' writers may have been inspired by the Soviet writers who protested against the Writers' Union in Moscow. A group of poets such as Y. A. Yevtushenko, A. A. Voznesensky, R. I. Rozhdestvensky, and A. A. Akhmatova came to prominence during the Khrushchev Thaw. They identified strongly with the politics of de-Stalinisation. These *estrada*⁴⁷ (poets), as they were called, reached a wide audience through mass public readings and achieved fame and notoriety with works that were published in the wake of the Thaw. Hence, they were identified as the Thaw Generation Poets (Lygo 2017: 14).



FIG. 14 An issue of the *Ündesnii Devshil* newspaper about the First Assembly of the MNFWU. British Library: EAP010_1_46_18.

47 The term *estrada* refers to stage performances, mainly popular and entertaining. Here, it refers to popular podium poets.

S. Dulam gave a keynote speech entitled 'Analysing Literature from the Viewpoint of Yin Yang' ('Uran zokhiolyg arga bilgiin үүдnees шүүн тунгаахуй') to the First Congress of MNFWU (National Uplift 1990b). Although they wanted to publish the report and speech of their first congress in the newspaper *Literature and Art*, just as the old union did for their congresses, it was banned. In response, the 'free' writers produced a booklet entitled 'Documents Intended to Be From the Public' ('Түмnees нуух гэсэн бичиг') and also in the newspaper *Үндесний devshil* (National Uplift). In his speech, S. Dulam strongly criticised the party-led control and ideology that made literature a 'weapon' and writers as 'soldiers' of party ideology. S. Dulam was against classifying literature according to the historical phases of the MPRP instead of as an aesthetic form. These phases were 'revolutionary democracy' (1921–1940), 'the fight for socialist construction' (1940–1961), and the 'establishment of the material and technical basis of socialism' (1961–1980). S. Dulam explains what 'free writers' understood behind the notion of freedom then:

For us, to be free meant being independent of state control and enjoying creative expression. The purpose of this freedom was to choose one's creative style, unlike the previous system with its one official style of socialism. The idea was that one could write in different styles and nobody would blame them for that [...] In terms of finances, it was hard for us because we left [MWU] by choice. We could earn money only by publishing a newspaper and organising events. However, we could not stay economically motivated. The honorary director of the union did not get a salary. Those who were paid were the vice-director, the editor of the newspaper, and the typesetter. Although MNFWU survived for some time, it could not stay competent (S. Dulam, interview, 15 September 2015).

For the 'free' writers, the notion of freedom meant 'getting free' of party-centred socialist ideology which might already be affected by the *perestroika* taking place in the Soviet Union. However, they had no idea of the Western concept of liberalism, yet. The intention to be free also implied nationalism by emphasising the national characteristics of Mongolian literature and restoring pre-revolutionary classical literature. For them, the celebration of the nation was an expression of cultural identity more than an action-oriented political credo. They were against taking modern literature, which was referred to as the 'new literature' and 'Mongolian modern literature', as if it were a new phenomenon in Mongolian culture only in the socialist

era. 'Free' writers complained that the pre-revolutionary literature had been imagined for seventy years only as the epics of *Geser*, *Jangar*, and *The Secret History of the Mongols*. Moreover, they raised issues of repression under Stalin in the late 1930s and named writers who had been killed but were no longer remembered. They called religious topics 'sensitive issues' (*emzeg asuudal*) that needed to be clarified and justified in further studies of Mongolian literature (National Uplift 1990b).

In their pursuit of pluralism, freedom of expression, and the rights newly enacted in the Democratic Constitution, MNFWU sought to develop national literature by promoting creative competition and opportunities for young writers (National Uplift 1990a). Apart from seeking freedom and expressing national sentiments, the reasons for creating MNFWU included ambitions of being leader of MWU, the 'suppressed' writers' complaints, and an interest in sharing the Literature Fund. MNFWU failed to obtain a share of the existing material resources of the old union and its Literature Fund. The new union echoed the organisational structure of the old one and founded a newspaper *Zokhist ayalguu* (Harmonious Melody), adopting a Buddhist term for the five minor fields of knowledge. They had an office in a small wooden building of the Elders' Committee beside the present Drama Theatre. Since 1992, the Free Writers' Union has organised a poetry festival called 'Silver Cup' (*Möngön tsom*), which resembles the old union's 'Crystal Cup' (*Bolor tsom*) poetry festival, organised since 1983. In this way, the newly formed union copied the organisation and activities of the old union, although it strongly asserted its stance for change. On the financial side, neither of the unions succeeded, as the state subsidy stopped in the market era. Both unions have gradually become similar, running poetry festivals, hosting awards, and publishing books that are not commercially viable or even widely available on the market. The distinction between the two unions has become blurred. Instead, freelance and self-employed artists define their own positions and market their own work largely independently.

Conclusion

As a professional arts organisation, the Writers' Union was an important institution in shaping public opinion in controlled directions during the socialist era. Through a series of acts by the MPRP, it became a financially and ideologically fixed system. However, unofficial social relations and agendas such as 'sharing the same homeland' (*nutgarkhakh*) and connection (*tanil tal*) and personal vindictive attitudes functioned in parallel with the official relations of state socialism.

The party-led cohesion and censorship aimed at equally political and aesthetic quality, although this was not always accomplished in practice. In post-socialist times, socialist-era elites active in film, literature, or music harbour nostalgic sentiments towards the censorship institution, or the 'Glavlit'. They tend to regard the current creative situation in Mongolia as a chaotic mess because the 'Glavlit' is no longer active. For them, the 'Glavlit' was important as a selector of good quality art. A whole apparatus of censorship functioned to control and shape the arts. However, it was perfunctory and inconsistent. Apart from approved directions, there was space for 'evocative transcripts' that could be readable for oppositional as well as official meanings.

The split in the Writers' Union and the appearance of the Free Writers' Union was a strike for nationalism and 'national cultural revival', which further became the main ideology in post-socialist Mongolia. A group of writers who did not benefit from the Writers' Union challenged the notion of 'modern Mongolian literature' and agitated for 'freedom'. Although their concept of freedom had no connection with the Western concept of liberalism, it is quite possible that the situation turned out to be economically 'liberal' (neoliberal) and politically (ethno-) nationalist.

The form of the old state structure for the production and control of 'culture' (literature and the arts) was left largely intact, but it was emptied of most of its old content – the artists they could no longer support and the works they could no longer produce. The post-socialist creative arts are produced for commercial and personal goals, rather than public ones, and yet the old structure of unions, titles, awards, and cultural centres has continued to try and channel the arts within its remit.

6.

Reprocessing and resourcifying national culture

After the collapse of the socialist regime and the rise of the so-called Democratic Revolution, the country was renamed Mongolia, or to be precise, the State of Mongolia (*Mongol Uls*), and adopted a new constitution in 1992. The state launched a new strategy for nation-building and modernisation along with the introduction of ‘democracy, justice, liberty, equality, national solidarity, and the rule of law and order’ (Article 1, Paragraph 2, Constitution of Mongolia). Nationalism became the chief ideological element in the process of deconstructing the socialist identity and constructing a new identity (Munkh-Erdene 2008). The state set out to ‘strengthen the independence and sovereignty of the nation, respect national solidarity, and cherish the tradition of the nationhood, history and culture’ (Munkh-Erdene 2008: 38). Matching these nationalistic sentiments, there was a tremendous resurgence of interest in Chinggis Khan, Chinggisid legacies, and the Mongolian Empire (Kaplonski 2005, Campi 2006, Munkh-Erdene 2008, Bulag 2010, Shimamura 2012). Bulag (2010: 57) characterised the rehabilitation as a burning enthusiasm for Chinggis Khan at every level of Mongolian society, invoking Chinggis Khan’s historic feat to bolster ‘Mongolian’ national pride against both the Chinese and the Russians. However, discourses to continue state socialist achievements in daily practices were also expressed in public. For example, the Cyrillic script and (Soviet-style) classical music remained as emblems of modernisation and civilisation to align Mongolia with Europe and any other (non-COMECON)⁴⁸ countries. This chapter presents different voices on modernity and tradition, or discontinuity and continuity at the edge of the two systems and transformations in post-socialist nation-building.

Attempts were made to re-connect with the pre-socialist tradition, which was seen as a ‘deep’ and genuine national past (Højer 2019) that was discontinued with socialism (Humphrey 1992, Kaplonski 2004, Højer 2009).

48 The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) was an economic organization under the Soviet Union’s leadership.

Pre-socialism came to be the main ideological source for the nation-state. Højer and Pedersen (2019) further describe the situation:

...the highly modern socialist way of apprehending history as a series of revolutions, i.e. as radical discontinuities between pre-socialism and socialism, in itself created the conditions for imagining the re-emergence of traditional, pre-socialist and national Mongolia in post-socialist times... breaking away from socialism was to return to what socialism had broken away [from]. When socialism was gone, it was thus only to be expected that the imagined alter ego of socialism, pre-socialist 'independent and traditional Mongolia,' would emerge in some form or another (ibid.: 10).

Questions of (dis)continuity of tradition and attempts to connect to the pre-socialist culture were raised in academic and public discourses. Hobsbawm and Ranger argued that tradition is invented and pointed out its acceptance in society as follows:

'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983: 1).

In the case of post-socialist Mongolia, some rituals were re-invented or re-connected from not only pre-socialist times but also further, from the Mongol Empire and the Xiongnu period. At the same time, traditions that had been invented in the socialist era continued to channel socio-cultural life. Kudaibergenova, in her discussion about post-socialist culture, argues that the discourse of tradition became 'a powerful source of legitimization for new elites who can claim to be guardians of the sacred traditions' (Kudaibergenova 2017: 306). She further describes the way traditions were dealt with after the collapse of state socialism:

In the context of post-socialist cultures and their sociocultural and sociopolitical as well as economic traditions, the invention of traditions and even the re-invention of traditions – building upon previously invented traditions – is seen as a stabilising effort (ibid.: 307).

There were public discourses about continuing or discontinuing socialist cultural tradition and (re)inventing tradition from pre-socialist times as practices of the 'new' Mongolia. One of the main domains of national cultural revival defined by the 'new' state of Mongolia was the traditional Mongolian script, which had been replaced by the Cyrillic script in 1946. In the early 1990s, one of the first and most powerful attempts at restoration of 'national culture' was the vigorous debate on the 'national script' (*ündestnii bichig*). The State Baga Khural (Cabinet) issued a resolution in 1991 on a vast campaign to teach, publish, and inspect the usage of the Mongolian script. Parliament discussed the implementation of the resolution and decided that it was not prepared to record official documents in the Mongolian script. The following year, it issued a National Programme of the Mongolian Script aimed at 'training the public and forming the environment for the usage.'⁴⁹

The issue of whether to restore the Mongolian script, which was eradicated during the socialist regime, as the state official script was widely discussed in local daily newspapers by linguists, writers, and journalists. Some, like Choi. Luvsanjav (1992), L. Chuluunbaatar (1990), G. Mend-Ooyo (1990), and G. Akim (1990), condemned the adoption of the Cyrillic script in the 1940s and actively promoted the 'revival' of the 'Mongolian script' as a 'traditional' and 'classical' writing form that should be adopted as the 'state script' (*töriin bichig*). Others, notably A. Luvsandendev (1991), D. Tsendjav (1992), and Sh. Gaadamba (1992), challenged the new policy on the grounds that the Cyrillic script was generally accepted as 'the new Mongolian national script'. Ultimately this position won out, and it was generally accepted that the Cyrillic script would not be replaced.

Some, like Sh. Gaadamba, a linguist and student of Ts. Damdinsüren, who created the Mongolia's Cyrillic script, stood up against the restoration of old concepts and terms that the state proposed. Sh. Gaadamba (1992) vigorously attacked not only the Cabinet's (Small State Khural) resolution to reintroduce the 'Mongolian script' as the official script, but also the wider movement 'to revive national historical and cultural heritage.' In an article titled 'Reasons to Worry Over "Revival" and "Destruction"' ("Sergeekh", "ustgakhyn" tukhaid setgel tügshüürlekх uchir'), he sharply criticised the 'new democratic government' for changing the state name from the Mongolian People's Republic to Mongolia (*Mongol Ulus*), which, he argued, was reminiscent of the Great Mongol Empire (*Yeke Mongqol*

49 *Mongol bichgiin ündestnii khötölböriig batlakh tukhai* [About approving the national programme of the Mongolian script] 1995, <https://www.legalinfo.mn/annex/details/3283?lawid=6353>. Accessed on 19 June 2019.

Ulus) and damaging to relations with the nation's two neighbouring states as they had ethnic Mongolian residents. Sh. Gaadamba also challenged the attempts being made to restore old terms such as 'Great Jasaq' (*Yeke Jasaq*), 'Head of Government' (*zasgiin gazryn tergüün*), 'Deputy Minister' (*shadar said*), 'Aimag Governor' (*aimgiin zahiragch*); old symbols such as the state stamp, state emblem, state fiddle (*khuur*), and ceremonial costumes for the president and army; and the reintroduction of old rituals such as the president's oath-taking ceremony and 'white standard' (*tsagaan süld*) rites that invoked Chinggisid imagery. For Sh. Gaadamba, the process described as 'revival' (mostly in the celebration of Chinggis Khan and the Great Mongol Empire), represented the destruction of 'a newly-built culture' created in the 20th century. He called for the recognition and transmission of what had been constructed in the last several decades of socialism. Sh. Gaadamba's position may have differed from his opponents with respect to what constitutes 'national culture' as he tried not to deconstruct the socialist culture. While some excavated 'culture' from the pre-socialist era, especially the time of the Mongolian Empire, for the newly built nation-state, others, like Sh. Gaadamba preferred to build it on the 'socialist culture'.

Choi. Luvsanjav (1930–1998), a linguist, lexicographer, and disciple of B. Rinchen, established one of the first private institutes, the Academy for Language and Civilisation of the Mongolian Nation (*Mongol ündestnii khel irgenshliin erdmiin khüreeleen*), in 1993. He devoted himself to disseminating foreign language studies and reviving the traditional Mongolian script (*Mongol bichig*). He recalls the last moments of his teacher B. Rinchen's life on 4 March 1977: 'the Great Teacher (*bagshtan*)⁵⁰ preached in undertones twice that it was crucial to revive the Mongolian script for flourishing and prospering many other aspects of Mongolian culture. I replied: "Yes" (*ja*)⁵¹ (Luvsanjav 1990: 2). Through the programmes at his institute, Choi. Luvsanjav aimed to make the Mongolian script and Mongolian studies (*Mongol sudlal*) prosper.

Nationalist sentiments, as expressed by the split of the literary institution (See Chapter 5) and other cultural practices, were assumed to be a 'postcolonial' revolution of independence from the Soviet Union (Kaplonski 2000) and nationalism versus socialism (Højer 2019: 10). Nationalist

⁵⁰ *Bagshtan* is an honorary term for teacher [*bagsh*].

⁵¹ The colloquial word for 'yes' is *za*. *Ja* is a honorary term for *za* used for teachers and elders. Many of the old Mongolian honorary terms were criticised as 'feudal' and 'outdated'. Some people intentionally reuse those terms to oppose the idea that they are 'outdated' and to express the 'richness' of Mongolian.

sentiments were not only expressed about pre-socialist culture but also further led to xenophobic reactions against Russians, as Højer describes:

this nationalism entailed xenophobic reactions directed mainly at Russians [...] because of their association with what had come to be perceived as the colonial and non-Mongolian socialist regime, and also because ethnic and class tensions did exist during the socialist period where the Russian community in Ulaanbaatar was associated with well-educated technical 'specialists', better access to attractive goods and a socialist elite in general (Højer 2020: 758).

The dislike of the former 'colonial' power or Russian people was strong in the early 1990s, although it gradually weakened and, in some ways, turned into a memory of a 'good time'. As a student of the last Russian piano 'specialist' in the Music and Dance College in the mid-1990s, I remember that in some ways she was treated unequally by her colleagues. Her name was M. N. Grigoryeva, and she came to Mongolia because she married a Mongolian man, D. Bandi, an opera singer. Aside from professional competition, personal character, or retirement age, post-socialist xenophobia against Russians may be one reason why she was discriminated against. However, as mentioned in Chapter 2, classical musicians trained by Soviet specialists currently have positive memories of Soviet teachers in general. The 'Russian school' (*Orosyn shkol*) is something to be proud of. Classical music remained as a legacy of state socialism that can be instrumentalised both by cultural elites and politicians to express the level of modernisation and urbanisation of the country.

Apart from discontinuity of state socialism in the newly established state of Mongolia, many systemic and structural elements have continued in the cultural and artistic fields until today. The MPR followed all the trappings of the Soviet-style nation-state: 'secular education system, health service, urbanisation, industrialisation together with the ponderous intellectual apparatus to go with it' (Sneath 2003: 40). (Soviet) classical art turned out to be a source of national pride and became an object of nationalisation and politicisation. Mongolia finds itself 'close to Europe' and 'sophisticated' due to having a comprehensive theatre in the classical style of the 18th century, which includes all theatrical occupations such as tailors, artists, costume-designers, and shoemakers. A popular anecdote that demonstrates the growth of the classical arts in Mongolia is the 1997 official visit by the Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahatir bin Mohamad. He was amazed by the development of classical music in Mongolia, and, on the spot, asked his

officials to establish a children's symphony orchestra in Malaysia (T. Tsolmon, interview, 12 May 2019). Similarly, Singapore, Korea, and Japan are further examples Mongolians like to take as economically advanced countries with less developed European classical music traditions (Tsetsentsolmon 2021: 168).

On 'National Pride Day' (*Ündesnii bakharkhalyn ödör*), 31 October 2016, G. Ariunbaatar, a state-honoured (*Gavyat жүжигчин*) baritone, received the Chinggis Khan Medal from Tsahiagiin Elbegdorj, then president of Mongolia. Mongolia has celebrated National Pride Day, the birthday of Chinggis Khan, since 2012 by decision of the president based on a proposal by the Mongolian Academy of Sciences.⁵² The Chinggis Khan medal was given to 'a citizen who had made a valuable contribution to strengthening the independence, sovereignty, and solidarity [of Mongolia], to transmitting historical and cultural traditions, and to promoting them to the world.'⁵³ G. Ariunbaatar's winning of the Grand Prix of the Tchaikovsky competition was marked publicly as the greatest triumph, gaining worldwide recognition for Mongolian classical music. The president gave his blessing to national ballet competitions and festivals organised by the state-honoured ballet dancer D. Altankhuyag, who is reputed to be one of the top eight ballerinos. Although they were introduced and consistently developed in the 20th century, classical arts and classical music have achieved an enhanced status as a source of national pride in present-day Mongolia. The perspective has changed from 'socialist national' and 'international' to 'state-national' and 'global'.

Cultural practices introduced and routinised in the socialist era, such as cultural days, public dancing (*niitiin бүжиг*), and singing, continued to be popular among late middle-aged people. The fate of amateur art went far beyond this. Socialist-style social activities remained to satisfy not only senior members but also to engage younger ones. For example, the 'Singing Day' (*Duulakh ödör*) event is a monthly social gathering where rural seniors come to Ulaanbaatar from all over the country. It also enables senior amateur and professional artists to enjoy memories and earn money. A TV series titled *Never-Ceasing Melodies* (*Ül tasрах аялгуу*), to popularise songs from the 60s, 70s, and 80s and to motivate singing practice in various social

52 The decree points out that Chinggis Khan's date of birth is to be determined as the first day of the first month of winter of 1162, the Year of the Horse. The decree also states that the birthday of the Great Khan is to be named Mongolian National Pride Day and is to be celebrated publicly.

53 Mongolian Academy of Sciences. 'Mongolyn түүхийн тайлбар толи' [Encyclopedia of Mongolian history]
<https://mongoltoli.mn/history/h/209>. Accessed 10 January 2017.

spheres, has been broadcast on the TV5 channel since 2016. So far, there have been series for students, drivers, teachers, and doctors. While private broadcasters enthusiastically franchise international television productions such as *The Voice* and *Your Face Sounds Familiar*, old-style cultural events still gain public appreciation. Many young opera-trained singers duplicate popular (amateur) singers from the socialist era by singing their songs and imitating their mannerisms. A young singer, L. Banzragch, has reached a wide audience by singing the old songs of his namesake D. Banzragch, who went from being a driver to a well-known singer of the State Ensemble of Folksong and Dance in the socialist era. One can find vocal imitations of P. Adarsüren, Ts. Ölzii-Orshikh, and others who were well-known pop singers during late socialism.

To summarise, nationalism based on a (pre-revolutionary) historical past became the central ideology for the constructs of the post-socialist culture in Mongolia. Regardless of attempts to deconstruct state socialist identities, some remain active to channel everyday artistic life. Furthermore, these emerged as socialist national culture was becoming a vehicle to be (re-)processed and resourcified in the age of the 'free market' and 'democracy'. This chapter has two sections that demonstrate post-socialist ideological manoeuvres coupled with state socialist practices. While the state still deals with what was built in the socialist era, focusing heavily on professional arts institutions, individual freelance artists are more liberated in genres, expressions, and ideologies. The first section shows musical practices that formed an ideological continuum directed to the deep historical past within post-socialist nationalism. It presents the State Morin Khuur Ensemble, established in the 1990s, that has continued the state socialist ideology of modernity and tradition. Attempts to glorify the pre-socialist culture extend to the eras of the Mongol Empire (Altan Urag folk rock band) and further to the Xiongnu period (the Hu folk rock band). The second section describes the (dis)placement and manipulation of cultural centres and peripheries and the emergence of distinctive art genres based on state socialist construction of urban and rural cultures. Post-socialist Mongolia further underlined the urban-centred culture built by state socialism. At the same time, the buildings of 'cultural centres' (*soyolyn töv*) in rural areas remained *carcasses* of centres for cultural activities but also became a means for populist politicians to gain votes. While there is not much cultural content, constructing cultural centres in electoral districts became fashionable among members of parliament. Discourses of manoeuvring 'cultural centres', both ideologically and physically, will be discussed in the second section.

The State Morin Khuur Ensemble

Following initiatives by late-socialist musical figures such as G. Jamyán, N. Jantsannorov, and Ts. Batchuluun, the State Morin Khuur Ensemble was established by Government resolution 123 on 9 July 1992. The First Deputy Chief of the Cabinet Office, D. Ganbold, and the Chair of the Arts Committee, N. Enkhbayar, took particular interest in the ensemble and both were centrally involved in its establishment. With the campaign for cultural ‘revival’ by the democratic state, the *morin khuur* (horse-head fiddle) was elevated as a ‘national icon.’ Along with the process of revaluing the cultural past, the Morin Khuur Ensemble also continued the concept of socialist modernity, being set up with professional musicians trained in the Music and Dance School and in a European-style chamber orchestra. Furthermore, instrument designs, techniques, and tuning were assimilated to European classical cellos. ‘It is significant that our ensemble was established at the same time as the Constitution of Mongolia. We take it as a good omen,’ remarked Ts. Batchuluun (2007), the ensemble’s conductor and artistic director as well as a People’s Artist. The ensemble delivered its first performance in the Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet. According to Ts. Batchuluun, they chose the Academic Theatre because Marshal Kh. Choibalsan, the communist leader of the Mongolian People’s Republic and commander-in-chief of the Mongolian armed forces from the 1930s until his death in 1952, buried a *morin khuur*, a *khadag* (a blue silk scarf), and a block of tea under the theatre building. While constructing a new cultural identity, the ideology still connected to state socialist culture. Moreover, the ensemble was designed as a continuation of socialist policies of modernisation, as, despite the strength of their nationalistic sentiments, the political, intellectual, and cultural elites of the new democratic state were late socialist elites, steeped in the culture that the MPR had constructed.

The state was involved with the Morin Khuur Ensemble not only for its establishment but also for its further maintenance as part of the State Philharmonic, a state-funded organisation, and the *morin khuur* as a state-protected instrument. State support for and public perception of the *morin khuur* as well as the Morin Khuur Ensemble were demonstrated after the riot on 1 July 2008, which was triggered by allegations of electoral fraud. Along with certain complaints about the conduct of the election, there was a wider frustration with the political process and a suspicion that those in power were more concerned with lining their own pockets than serving the public good (Sneath 2010: 255). Rioters set fire to the headquarters of the MPRP and the Cultural Palace housing the National Modern Art Gallery,

the State Philharmonic, and other artistic and cultural organisations. All the instruments and costumes of the Morin Khuur Ensemble were burnt. The public spectacle of Ts. Batchuluun and his musicians lamenting this loss on TV reignited nationalistic sentiment toward the instrument as the iconic symbol of national identity. According to J. Uugantuya, the manager of the Morin Khuur Ensemble, before the incident most of the instruments had been owned by individual musicians. The state attached great importance to the restoration of the ensemble and distributed new instruments, which meant the instruments were now state property. However, according to the manager, the personal loss to individual musicians has not yet been compensated. Several private companies and individuals contributed to the reconstruction of the ensemble. For example, Erel Bank paid for new concert costumes. As Ts. Batchuluun recalls:

We cannot forget all the people who helped us sincerely; an old couple who brought their pension and hardly found their way home and a little boy who gave the money he collected by singing in the street. Clearly, some people were saying for political reasons: 'what an exaggeration! The morin khuur are being overvalued while the lives of the five people, who were shot during the riot, are not.' However, we got back on our feet in a very short time thanks to generous people.⁵⁴

Along with processes that 'nationalise' the instrument and the institution, another dimension is the emergence of a 'market-oriented' sector. Mongolia's transition was not only from Soviet-style communism to a democratic and pluralistic society but also from a centrally planned to a market economy in a way that could be considered 'a shift from the extreme left of this politico-economic continuum to the extreme right' (Munkh-Erdene 2012: 63). From the start, the Morin Khuur Ensemble took market forces into account, stating that 'the quality of artistic production and its financial activities are controlled by the head of the ensemble (Ts. Batchuluun) in accordance with the needs and requirements of the market' (Batchuluun 2007). As part of the State Philharmonic Orchestra with a state budget and a small concert hall, it is difficult to see how the ensemble could realistically operate in accordance with 'the needs and requirements of the market.' As the manager J. Uugantuya points out:

54 News, 'Mongolyn urlagt ingej khandan ter khümüüst gomdood barakhgüi' [Cannot help feeling offended by those who treated Mongolian art this way]. 3 March, 2010. <https://news.mn/r/514147/>. Accessed on 6 July 2013.

We are not a profit-oriented organisation. We have an artistic approach which is distinct from commercial performances. Most of our works are dedicated to the artistic education of the audience. However, as the economy is getting worse, we have become interested in organising commercial concerts. Having a hall with 250 seats, it is impossible for us to make a profit. When composers produce their albums, they pay musicians and give away some copies of CDs. The ensemble produced only one CD commercially. As CDs do not sell very well in Mongolia, most of them were sold when we performed abroad (J. Ugantuya, interview, 5 May 2009).

The Morin Khuur Ensemble arranges and performs commercial concerts by amalgamating popular music repertoires. While state socialist ‘advancement’ meant mixing with European classical music, the post-socialist concept of modernity is understood to be aligned with Western or American popular music. The recital called *Novel Melody* performed by the Morin Khuur Ensemble in December 2011 included Latin American and Afro-American repertoires by artists such as Astor Piazzolla, George Gershwin, Michael Jackson, and Louis Armstrong. In particular, ‘Thriller’, a big hit by Michael Jackson, was appreciated by the audience and gained much attention via Facebook and YouTube. N. Jantsannorov, one of the founders of the ensemble, made a speech at the beginning of the concert:

... Apart from George Gershwin, most of the composers to be heard tonight have not been played in Mongolia before because of the previous social system. The question is frequently asked why we played world classical music on national instruments. The Morin Khuur Ensemble has experimented for 20 years since it was established. This kind of experience is not new. G. Jamyán, the well-known morin khuur player, played pieces by Schubert, Schumann, and others in the 1960s. We do not aim to outperform the symphonic orchestra, as its instruments are perfectly adapted to its needs. [...] The morin khuur has less speed and impulse than the violin, cello, and viola. This experiment is to seek out possibilities for Mongol instruments to play more complex international music. It was initiated by the musicians themselves rather than directed by the Board (N. Jantsannorov, speech, 2 December 2011).

The standardisation of the *morin khuur* and its juxtaposition to Western stringed instruments – the violin, viola and cello – is taken for granted in this narrative. Moreover, the attempt to tie in with the socialist practice of

G. Jamyán, who contributed to the modernisation of the instrument and the establishment of the Morin Khuur Ensemble, shows that the performance somehow echoes the socialist concept of modernisation. In the 1960s the general acoustics and design of the *morin khuur* were 'improved' by the Russian specialist D. V. Yarovoi using European instrument-making techniques (Marsh 2009). The *morin khuur* had always been compared with, and aligned to, the Western cello in particular. The enhancement and upgrading of the instrument provided the means to play foreign pieces, largely from Russia and Eastern Europe during the socialist era, and from Western Europe and America in the post-socialist era. Other popular music projects are a series of performances entitled *Playing Love – I, II, III*, in which pieces were selected from the soundtracks of Mongolian and Hollywood films.

The popularisation and commercialisation of the 'national' musical ensembles involves not only the Morin Khuur Ensemble but also other state institutions, such as the State Ensemble of Folksong and Dance. On 25 August 2012, the State National Great Orchestra (*Töriin үндэсний их найрал khögjim*) organised a concert for the folksong and dance ensemble's 50th anniversary. The State Orchestra was established by presidential decree as 'the representative of the independence of the Mongolian Empire,' the 'musical art of Mongolian statehood' which represents a 'transmission from the period of Hsiung-nu via the Mongolian Empire,' and is to be considered 'the inspiration of the dignity of the state.' The concert was an ironic combination of 'national' and popular music, as indicated by its title – The Great Assembly of Rock and Pop Stars (*Rock, pop oddyn Ikh Quriltai*). The adoption of the name of the political and military council of the 'Great Mongol Empire', the *Ikh Quriltai* or Great Assembly, was intended to link the State National Orchestra expressly and profoundly with the history of the Xiongnu and Mongolian Empire by emphasising 'the 1000-year tradition' (*myangan jiliin ulamjlal*). At the same time, the ensemble performed both Mongolian and foreign popular music. Songs by Queen, Michael Jackson, and the Bee Gees were played during the concert with subtitled videos in the background much like karaoke. Musicians interviewed on TV news expressed their satisfaction at playing international music on national instruments, which was a challenge both for them and their instruments. For them, it was a step forward to upgrade their skills as musicians as well as the acoustic capabilities of their traditional instruments.



FIG. 15 Poster of the film soundtrack recital *Playing Love* by the State Morin Khuur Ensemble.

All these cases are indicative of the importance attached to the popularisation of the State Ensemble and the perceived need to enhance the contemporary relevance of an iconic national instrument. The state ensembles such as the Morin Khuur Ensemble and the State Ensemble of Folksong and Dance claim a greater purity and authenticity of musical form; however, they present ideological shifts from Soviet-style modernism to globalisation, popularisation, and nationalisation.



FIG. 16 The National Orchestra playing Michael Jackson's 'Earth Song' (zindaa.mn).

The following paragraphs show further examples of freelance folk music groups combining nationalist sentiments with contemporary music genres. Altan Urag is a folk-rock band that brought a creative change to Mongolian 'folk' music, then sold it on the market. They strikingly replaced the head of the *morin khuur* with an alien head, electrified the instrument, and called it the *mangas khuur* (the monster-head fiddle). Bearing the name of the Great Emperor Chinggis Khan's lineage, the band – whose performances particularly attract youth by combining European-inspired rock timbre and rhythms with traditional ones – aims to introduce Mongolian 'national music' not only to local but also to global music lovers. Defining their music as 'folk rock,' 'ethno rock,' or 'ethnic contemporary,' they burst onto the music scene in 2004, wearing traditional black costumes and long hair. In their first performances they used the alien-head electric *mangas khuur*, with a heavy beat and a traditional rhythm of one eighth and two sixteenths imitating the gait of a horse. Although inspired by European rock bands and artists such as the Finnish cello rock band Apocalyptica and the American heavy-metal Slipknot, they sought to create and market a new musical voice that they feel is particularly well-suited to the cultural and social landscape of their homeland.

According to B. Erdenebat, the band's leader and *yochin* (dulcimer) player, in the process of exploring a new style of performance that combines rock and folk music, Altan Urag decided to find a way to change the timbre and image of the traditional instrument and considered having a carved snake-head, goat-head, or monster-head on the top. Advised by B. Lkhagvasüren, State Prize Winner and People's Writer, whom they call the 'father' of the band, they decided to choose a monster-head based on an ancient Mongolian legend about a black monster called Inderma, who played a fiddle called the *Inder möngön khuur* (Tribunitial Silver Fiddle). Hence for them it was a link to the historical past (B. Erdenebat, interview, 3 May 2009). Aiming both to connect with the cultural past and at the same time to cultivate a 'Western' (*baruuny*) rock image, the monster-head fiddle combines the evocation of 'national cultural identity' with the global influence of European rock.

Altan Urag tried to modify the instrument by adding a pick-up for amplification to create a guitar-like sound and changed the head to produce a rock image. However, they had no wish to electrify all the instruments in this way but selected only the monster-head fiddle, great fiddle, dulcimer, and drum. They retained the original acoustic timbre of the *morin khuur* in the other fiddle and the *bishgüür* (traditional flute). According to B. Erdenebat, they felt that they had to retain the basic pitches, melodic structures, and

timbres of these national forms, since they use ‘folk instruments’ and describe their work as ‘folk rock’ (B. Erdenebat, interview, 3 May 2009). If all the instruments were electronic, he claimed, the resulting sound would not constitute ‘folk music’ at all. The most important reason to save the original timbre of the *morin khuur*, he said, was to bring the ‘authentic energy’ and ‘sound of the traditional instrument’ to the audience. In performances, the electric and acoustic fiddles can be used either as solo instruments or in accompaniment.

Altan Urag is a freelance group whose main source of income is performing in pubs and restaurants. They have earned a livelihood for several years by performing weekly at the Ikh Mongol pub and Mongolian restaurant. Their CDs have been in the top ten best sellers in the album chart of Hi-Fi Records and other music stores in Ulaanbaatar. Altan Urag’s strategy has been to avoid the niche ‘folk music’ market and instead target the wider popular and youth culture consumers. It is interesting to note, for example, that the two Altan Urag albums are placed in the ‘Mongolian Rock and Pop Music’ section while albums by most other comparable bands are located in the ‘Folk Music’ section. Furthermore, the band was awarded the Pentatonic Award for pop and rock musicians. Despite their commercial success, however, the band sees its work as promoting ‘folk music’, rather than Western rock or pop, among the Mongolian youth. The case of Altan Urag, a commercially and artistically successful freelance group, then, is an example of both the nationalist orientation and the successful popularisation of Mongolian ‘folk’ music in the post-socialist era.



FIG. 17 The Altan Urag folk rock band (published with permission).

Altan Urag’s formation was followed by several other similar groups attempting to combine traditional music with other popular musical genres.

This includes Domog (Legend), Jonon (Viceroy of the Mongol Emperor), Khösögtön (Those with a Cart), Arga Bileg (Yin and Yang), Börte (the name of Chinggis Khan's wife), and Tenger Ayalguu (Heavenly Melody), who have proclaimed themselves as representing 'ethno jazz' or 'ethnic ballad'. Some members of these groups are employed by state-funded organisations. The members of Khösögtön work for the National Song and Dance Ensemble, Arga Bileg for the State Morin Khuur Ensemble, and Tenger Ayalguu for the State University of Culture and Arts. In 2012, five folk music bands (Altan Urag, Arga Bileg, Domog, Jonon, and Khösögtön) performed in a concert, *Mongol*, and two other bands, Börte and Tenger Ayalguu, joined in a concert entitled *Mongol Tögsöshgui* (The Age-Long Mongol) in 2013. The project was initiated and organised by D. Sosorbaram, who is known for his artistic and political activities, and supported by Ts. Elbegdorj, then president of Mongolia. D. Sosorbaram had been involved in political activism since the Conference of Young Creative Artists on 2–3 December 1989, which is believed to have been the start of the democratic movement.



FIG. 18 Poster for the Eternal Mongol concert of Nine Folk Hybrid Band.

The most recent sensation in Mongolian music culture is the emergence of the folk-rock band the Hu and its success in the world music market. Their song and follow-up video *Wolf Totem* have generated over 13 million hits and reached No. 1 on the *Billboard's* Hard Rock Digital chart. The hard-rock and metal newsletter *Revolver* published an article titled 'The HU: Mongolian Folk-Metal Sensations Aim to Conquer the World', where it says that the "Hunnu rock" band are already unlikely viral YouTube stars. Now, channeling the spirit of Genghis Khan, they're ready to expand their

empire.⁵⁵ Calling their style Xiongnu rock and thus connecting to the deep past of the ancient state, the Hu combine sentiments of nationalism, masculinity, the Mongolian Empire, authenticity, and modernity. The band immediately became a source of national pride and the state instrumentalised it very skilfully. President Kh. Battulga handed the Chinggis Khan medal to B. Dashdondog, the band's producer, on National Pride Day, 27 November 2019. There was 'the need to express an identity (*ondooshil*) in the era of globalisation', in the words of B. Dolgion, the president of the Pentatonic Academy and music producer. B. Dolgion states: 'B. Dashdondog did not name it the Hu or Hunnu [Xiongnu] rock by accident. It shows that the tradition came from us. In the past, it sounded far-fetched to talk about "Mongol pop" and "Mongol hip-hop." Now, it is pleasant to see Western music lovers appreciate the Mongolian band the Hu and accept *tovshuur* (traditional two-stringed instrument) as the "Mongolian guitar"' (B. Dolgion, interview, 24 November 2019).

Attempts to construct a national identity based on the deep historical past and to offer it on the global market are not only made by artists but are also part of foreign policy. Recently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have paid great attention to cultural promotion abroad and have issued the title of 'Cultural Envoy' for international and national cultural activists. Kh. Mandakhtsetseg, the Head of the Department of Public Diplomacy and Communication,⁵⁶ states:

I think we should never lose our image and features as nomads. That is the only characteristic making us different from many other nations. We should preserve and combine it with modern styles. Although we are a modern country, we should not lose our original authentic image. Apparently, Mongolia would stay as the only country keeping the nomadic tradition after a hundred years. Making decorations with authentic features, it is right to present our own unique image in the modern world's creative industry'.⁵⁷

55 Reed, Ryan. "The Hu: Mongolian Folk-Metal Sensations Aim to Conquer the World". *Revolver*. 13 September 2019. <https://www.revolvermag.com/music/hu-mongolian-folk-metal-sensations-aim-conquer-world>.

56 The literal translation of the name of the department from Mongolian would be the Department of Foreign Promotion and Cultural Relations (*Gadaad surtalchilгаа, сойoliin khariltsaa*).

57 <https://montsame.mn/mn/read/80158>. Accessed on 24 April 2019.

However, there are alternatives to being based on tradition, which involve being flexible in choosing genres. B. Naranzun, a music producer who aspires to reach the Asian music industry with the girl band the Wasabies, whose music he produces, claims that there should not be a second Hu. For him, the originality of any art production is more important than national characteristics. He explains:

Many people say that one can be successful worldwide by showing national characteristics. That is only one side. For example, Koreans are successful in America with a music based on Western harmony and style. It has to do with performance and originality of productions. There is no rule to be this or that. For the girl band Wasabies, we do not aim to deal with national images such as costumes, traditional long-song, horse-head fiddle, and so on. Our focus is to speak the world language, to follow contemporary trends, and to perform pieces with originality (B. Naranzun, interview, 28 November 2019).

To recap the argument of this section: the ‘national’ or ‘folk’ music culture that was produced under state socialism has undergone a further process that could be described as *re-nationalisation*. During the country’s transition to a market economy, music culture is being commercialised and popularised. Altan Urag and other folk music groups are attempting to incorporate elements drawn from the reprocessed national/folk genre into ‘international’ rock/pop forms, and to generate new forms of musical synthesis for national and international consumption. The idea of combining ‘modernity and tradition’ and the ‘old and new’, which might have an inheritance of a Soviet vision of modernity, is a common strategy for cultural productions in both public and private spheres, for export abroad.

Mobilising cultural centrality

During the parliamentary session to approve the 2021 state budget, issues of constructing ‘cultural centres’ (*soyolyn töv*) in rural places became the focus of public debate. The government has budgeted 1.4 billion tugrik (roughly 490 million euro) for capital expenditure, which includes the construction of cultural centres, sports centres, museums, theatres, and ensembles in different provinces. As an officer of the Cultural Ministry notes, 40 billion tugrik (approximately 14 million euro) are budgeted for completing 32 ‘sub-district cultural centres’ (*sumyn soyolyn töv*), starting to build seven, and

renovating six in 2021.⁵⁸ This raised a dilemma questioning the priority of rural cultural centres not only among opposition parties but also the general public. The main idea that ‘culture is distributed only through cultural centres’ (*soyolyg soyolyn tövөөр л түгеене*) comes from the Soviet logic of ‘bringing culture/civilisation’ to the peripheries.

Cultural centres, previously the main form of outreach to the local public, were units to propagate ‘central’ political and artistic ideologies to ‘remote’ areas. They came from the state socialist hierarchical structure of cultural institutions (Tsetsentsolmon 2012) which took the form of ‘red corners’ (*ulaan bulan*), clubs (*klub*), cultural palaces (*soyolyn ordon*), and ‘musical dramatic theatres’ (*khögjimt dramatik teatr*), spread across provinces and sub-districts. By 1988, the MPR had 445 clubs and cultural palaces all over the country (The MPR 1989: 102). The concept of reaching the local public by organising political, educational, and cultural events has not changed much in post-socialist cultural policy. The Exemplified Regulation of Sub-District Cultural Centres (*Sumyn soyolyn töviin ülgerchilsen дүрөм*) formulates the aim thus: to organise ‘lecture series, meetings, parties, festivals, workshops, competitions, and matches in the direction of politics, economy, society, industry, and services.’⁵⁹ They are supposed to be used for election campaigns, wrestling matches during the Tsagaan Sar (Lunar New Year), New Year’s parties, meetings, and movie screenings. Although officially they appear to be lively places, the population density – with an average of 2.1 people per square kilometres in sub-districts and 327.6 in the capital⁶⁰ – would not make this possible. Hence local ‘cultural centres’ (*soyolyn töv*) have become physical premises like remote ‘empty vessels,’ while the topic of culture is at the centre of political discourse.

58 Bayanzul Zagarjav. ‘*Sumand soyolyn töv shig kheregtei yum baikhgui shүү UIH gishүүд ee!*’ [Nothing is needed more than cultural centres in sub-districts, Members of Parliament!]. [Facebook post]. 2 December 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/bayanzul.zagarjav/posts/3538910012851321>. Accessed on 10 January 2020.

59 <https://www.legalinfo.mn/annex/details/5160?lawid=7673>. Accessed on 25 November 2020.

60 https://www.1212.mn/mn/statistic/statcate/74547312/table-view/DT_NSO_0100_01T20. Accessed on 25 November 2020.



FIG. 19 An old cultural centre built in 1961 in Kharkhorin sub-district, Övörkhangai province, photo by L. Erdenebold.

Like many other construction projects, local cultural centres became a tool for politicians to utilise funding and gain local people's votes. Some provincial theatres enjoy new buildings and new performances with support of politicians elected from the area. At the same time, many sub-district cultural centres built within the systematic cultural projects of the socialist state remained empty and non-functional. According to the officer of the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science, there is a shortage of 300 cultural workers in the countryside (TV News Tsagiin Khüрд on 24 March 2019).

The policy sticks to the old system of eradicating shortcomings rather than re-structuring along with social transformations. As 'cultural centres' from state socialist structuring remained and re-emerged as a subject of post-socialist political economy, the (Soviet) modernist distinction between urban and rural cultures continued to define the centre and periphery, both geographically and culturally. This section presents further practices of manipulating conceptual tools inherited from state socialism in cultural practices in Mongolia today. While late socialist cultural elites aspired to set boundaries between the centre and peripheries, oriented towards the urban culture, a new group based on popular culture and the market economy emerged after the 1990s to dismantle and de-centralise the existing cultural divisions.



FIG. 20 A new cultural centre opened in 2020 in Kharkhorin sub-district, Övörkhangaï province, photo by L. Erdenebold.

B. Dolgion, raised in a (socialist) intellectual (*sekheeten*) family in the downtown area of ‘40 thousands’ (*döchin myangat*),⁶¹ which its inhabitants have claimed is a district of elites with access to ‘Western’ (*baruuny*) (or modern) culture, has a strong belief in ‘urban culture (or music)’ and opposes the popular music genre from the countryside. This mindset of making a clear distinction between urban and rural cultures is connected to the state ideology that was ‘Marxist, modernist, and urban, oriented towards the political centres of Ulaanbaatar, and more distantly Moscow’ (Sneath 2009: 73). A distinctive genre of popular songs labelled ‘public songs’ (*niitiin duu*) – or ironically named ‘invented songs’ (*zokhiolyn duu*) – was launched and intensified in the second half of the 20th century, following migration to the city after the 1990s. Myriad popular songs praising the homeland, love, mother, horses, and landscape were produced in the last two decades. Singers (as well as comic artists) became new cultural ‘elites’ in post-socialist Mongolia. The number of students enrolling in singing and acting classes at the Mongolian State University of Arts and Culture has increased. Freelance pop singers and actors earn much more than classical artists, who work for the state theatres, based on Councils of Provinces (*Nutgiin zövlöl*)⁶² and ‘forced sales of concert tickets’ (*bilet shakhakh*).⁶³ At the same

61 The area is named after the number of apartments. It was common in the socialist era to name them ‘of 50 thousand’ (*50 myangat*), ‘of 120 thousand’ and ‘of 220 thousand’.

62 Each province has its Hometown Council (*Nutgiin zövlöl*), a non-governmental organisation of the people who are originally from that province and live in Ulaanbaatar.

63 This term means ‘pressing’ or ‘forcefully selling tickets’ in large numbers through various connections, especially with those who make financial decisions. Marisa Smith (2017) notes that *shakhaanii biznes* can be translated as *tenevoi biznes* (‘business in the shadows’) in Russia (<https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/mongolian-economy/2017/03/02/>

time, notions of the division between urban music and countryside music, i.e. urban culture and rural culture, appear intense. B. Dolgion describes socialist-era elites as ‘a group who led other members of society with their intellect, knowledge, efforts, and mind’ (B. Dolgion, interview, 24 November 2019). In contrast, he argues that today’s elites, who focus on materiality and commodities such as luxury houses, Jeeps, and clothes, would be called ‘deviated elites’ (*gajsan sekheeten*).

B. Dolgion was the son of a socialist national elite who became highly familiar with the lifestyles and values of the USSR (Sneath 2009: 73). As his father Ch. Balchinjav had a job in Moscow, B. Dolgion received elementary education there and defines himself as having a ‘Russian upbringing’ (*oros khümüüjiltei*) or being ‘completely Russian’ (*shal oros*). Accompanied by his mates such as B. Denzen, the grandson of B. Rinchen, and S. Bayar, then-Prime Minister, he initiated the building of a monument to the Beatles in the city centre in 2008. The Beatles not only had musical but also political and ideological connotations, so they became an emblem of freedom in post-socialist Mongolia. Being ‘a beatleman’ in the socialist era meant being at a higher level of culture, having access to modern cultural assets, and desiring freedom. B. Dolgion made a clear distinction between urban culture and rural culture as follows:

Two distinctive civilisations (irgenshil) are left in modern Mongolia: the countryside Mongol (khödöögiin Mongol) and the urban Mongol (khotyn Mongol). They are completely distinctive. One is the culture surrounded by livestock breeding (mal aj akhuig toirson). The other is in the city. Those who live in the countryside are the freest. They are Mongolians who can do whatever they want. The other part is crowded into a city that was originally planned for 500,000 inhabitants. Now, Ulaanbaatar has 1.5 million inhabitants. I was one of the first activists for urban culture (khotyn soyol) and was accused of discriminating against people. I do not have an antagonistic view. I just talk about how to live in a proper way in such a big city; how to live peacefully without violating the rights of others; and how to behave in a cultured and good manner (soyoltoi, bolovson). Those who came from the countryside drive a car in a city street as if they are admirably racing horses in the countryside. They do not let others go first. I would dedicate the rest of my life to promoting the urban culture under the idea of ‘living correctly’ (zöv amidrakh) and ‘living

[shakhaanii-business-shared-debt-privatization-of-profit-and-re-emergent-corruption-discourses-in-mongolia/](#). Accessed on 29 May, 2019).

cultured' (*soyoltoi amidrakh*) (B. Dolgion, interview, 24 November 2019).

B. Dolgion has a strict view of the clear-cut distinctions of the countryside and city. He produces TV programmes called 'Culture Café' (*Soyol kafe*) and 'Right Brain or Cultural Attack' (*Baruun tarkhi buyu soyolyn dovtolgoon*) to promote urban culture. Migration from the countryside to Ulaanbaatar has been constantly increasing over the last two decades, so that more than half of the population now lives in the capital. As the statistics show, the number of migrants to Ulaanbaatar increased from 10,417 in 1991 to 39,701 in 2010.⁶⁴ Following this increase in inhabitants from the countryside, citizens of socialist Ulaanbaatar who were born and raised like B. Dolgion have conflicts with the newcomers. They are nostalgic for the 'old' Ulaanbaatar and see it now as a 'ruralised' (*khödööjson*) city rather than as metropolitan. The distinction between the urban and the countryside, which was made in the socialist era, has become sharper and more discriminatory in the last three decades. In popular music, two distinctive types of community have appeared: those 'of rock and pop' (*rock popiinkhon*) and those 'of popular/invented songs' (*zokhiolyn/niitiin duuniikhhan*). B. Dolgion highlights the distinction between urban and rural music:

Countryside music exists not only in Mongolia but in any country like the US, Austria, Russia, Germany, and China. For example, country music was based on the cowboy culture in the US. Probably, there is music of herders, pastoralists, or countryside workers (khödöögiin khödölmörchdiin) in Mongolia. In contrast, urban music is based on the city streets, gardens, and buildings. The environment affects the music people produce. I would suggest naming it clearly. The themes of urban music refer to love and relationships that could happen in the city. In the music of the countryside, they praise the vast steppe and so on. They have different harmonies and compositions. That is how they differ. One should clarify the distinction [...] The 'invented songs' (zokhiolyn duu) are easily composed as short folk songs. To be honest, they put songs sung in household fests (nairiin dugaraa) on stage. I am personally against calling it vocal art (duunii urlag). In the socialist era, songs were good quality due to the strict censorship. After the 1990s, these types of songs have become chaotic (zambaraagui) (B. Dolgion, interview, 24 November 2019).

64 Mongolian statistical information service. <https://www.1212.mn>. Accessed on 25 November 2019.

Migration to Ulaanbaatar and old-style popular music praising the lifestyle of the countryside has spurred the notion of ‘city culture’ (*khotyn soyol*) and ‘city music’ (*khotyn khögjim*). B. Naranzun, a music producer who aspires to produce a world-famous Mongolian pop band, describes ‘city music’ as based on settled culture and influenced by the world culture rather than a national one. In contrast, popular or composed songs (*niitiin/zokhiolyn duu*) are based on a national traditional style depicting the nomadic way of life (B. Naranzun, interview, 28 November 2019). However, the issue of the distinction between the two has recently become unpopular. B. Naranzun explains:

Young artists aspire to their original and individual identities such as being Mongolian or being yourself. One should notice that the attitude to distinguish the city and countryside music has decreased. It is true that the popular songs were dominant for some time. Nowadays, songs concerning social issues and lifestyles are more popular. I think it also has to do with the migration of the population stabilising (B. Naranzun, interview, 28 November 2019).

Although this may be the case for popular music, concerns about the need to ‘cultivate countryside people’ (*khödööniikhöniig soyoljuulakh*) and to organise a ‘cultural campaign’ (*soyolyn dovtolgoon*) for newcomers are still active in public discourses, especially on public or social media. B. Naranzun aims to bring Mongolian music to the global music industry not by selling conventional cultural representations such as warriors but by competing with modern cosmopolitan cultural elements. A girl band called the Wasabies, produced by B. Naranzun, succeeded in getting a contract and performing at various stages in Japan.



FIG. 21 The girl band The Wasabies (published with permission).

Conclusion

This chapter presents the (re)emergence, (dis)continuities, and transformations of cultural constructs, ideologies, and settings in post-socialist Mongolia. Along with the Democratic Revolution, nationalism based on a (pre-socialist) cultural past became central. Socialist national culture became a source for the 'market economy' and a vehicle to manipulate political ideologies. The process was *re-nationalisation* of what was nationalised in the socialist era. The state stuck to the system built by state socialism by heavily prioritising professional arts institutions. Meanwhile, freelance (underground) artists have emerged in more liberated styles and ideologies.

The conceptual distinctions drawn by the modernity-oriented socialist project, such as 'modernity and tradition', 'urban and rural', and 'centre and periphery', still channel cultural productions and social relations, both in public and private spheres. The centralised and hierarchical system of 'cultivating' or 'bringing culture' to the periphery persists both geographically and ideologically. As a result, an ironic interpretation of 'cultural centres', which involved building spaces for the arts in remote areas, appeared in the socialist era and was further amplified in the post-socialist era. Moreover, mostly understood as physical premises only, these centres became *carcasses* with not much cultural content.

7.

Contested sentiments about ‘cultural heritage’⁶⁵

To share or not to share

*At my age and with my grey hair
Enjoying my visit to the land of Inner Mongolia
Bound by the same language and culture
Having the future fate
My enduring wish
At last to see the prosperity
Of the culture of miserable Mongols
Clearly fulfilled now.
Fifteen years after (Outer) Mongolia had a university
Inner Mongolia now has one
What a joy it is!⁶⁶*

*(Ötölj üsen buural bolson tsag
Övörmongol nutgiig üzen bayasav
Khel soyol, khelkhee negtei
Khetiin ikh khuvi zayatai
Khöörkhii mongol түмний соёл
Khögjikhii neg üzeesei khemeen
Olon jil khüsen bodson sanaa
Odoо ilerkhiiye setgegchlen бүтєв.
Ar gazar mongol ikh surguuli
Arvan tavan jil bolokhod
Övör mongol gazar ikh surguuli
Önөө болж буи yutai bayar!)*

65 This chapter was written as part of the Dispersed and Connected project (Austrian Science Fund (FWF): PEEK- AR394-G24).

66 <https://www.facebook.com/shuudertsetseg/posts/3313126858746279/>. Accessed on 2 December 2020.

These lines are from a poem ‘What a Joy!’ (‘Yutai saikhan!’) written by B. Rinchen during his visit to the opening of the Inner Mongolia University in Höhhot in 1957. They are more interesting for revealing certain facts than for their artistic expression. The poem describes the connected but also separated relationship between Mongolia, as a Soviet-aligned People’s Republic, and Inner Mongolia, as an autonomous region of China. This event, attended by a Mongolian scholar, occurred shortly before the bilateral ties became tense due to the Sino-Soviet Split. The poem shows sentiments about shared history and culture, long-lasting separation and connectedness, as well as the sense of rivalry between the two in relation to ‘development’ (referring to the gap between the establishment of higher education institutions).

The Mongols in Mongolia and in Inner Mongolia were forcibly separated after the 1911 restoration of the independence of Mongolia. Since then, the Inner Mongolians have ‘alternated between periods of pan-Mongolian agitation and of pursuing educational reform and uplift’ (Atwood 2004: 245). Having been granted autonomy by the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, Inner Mongolia became the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, a mere local administrative unit of the PRC. Claiming ‘autonomous regions, prefectures, counties and villages’ based on the Soviet model, the PRC portrays itself as democratic in name only (Gladney 1994: 96). Furthermore, China introduced an ethnic classification project where ethnic minorities were labelled ‘according to their stages of economic development on a linear path toward communism’ (Hillman & Henfry 2006: 253). Identified as a ‘primitive’ (non-Han) ethnic minority as opposed to the ‘sophisticated’ Han majority, Inner Mongolians played an important role in constructing ‘roots-seeking’ (ibid.) Chinese culture. Along with the Sino-Soviet tensions in the late 1950s, the relations between the Mongols in the MPR and PRC remained inactive until the mid 1980s. As a result of the more friendly ties pursued by Mongolia and China after the 1990s, Mongolians and Inner Mongolians became enthusiastic towards each other and saw themselves as a source of ‘roots-seeking.’

This chapter presents ethnographic cases of multilayered and unpredictable interactions between Mongolians and Inner Mongolians, particularly in the field of artistic practice in the last few decades. Despite the shared ethno-cultural and historical unity, calls to ‘unshare’ arise due to the political bodies as nation-states. While the earlier endeavours sought cultural resources of ‘authenticity,’ ‘originality,’ or ‘Mongolness,’ later relations show a competition over the ownership of cultural heritage. Most importantly, both

sides perceived the other as a cultural paradise based on their imagination but not on real experiences.

Along with a relaxation of the China-Mongolia relationship during the post-Cold-War era, cultural exchanges and communications between Mongolia and Inner Mongolia restarted in the late 1980s and intensified in various fields, particularly in the arts, in the early 1990s. One of the first significant visits to Inner Mongolia funded by the government was in 1989, by cultural figures working for the preparation of the historical film *Mönkh tengeriin khüchin dor* (Under the Power of the Eternal Sky) about Chinggis Khan. The group consisted of B. Baljinnyam (film director), Kh. Nyambuu (ethnologist), L. Zenemeder (film director), S. Erdene (writer), J. Badraa (folklorist), B. Purevsükh (artist), B. Amgalan (artist), and L. Sharavdorj (cinematographer). L. Sharavdorj, a state-honoured cinematographer, was the last living member of this influential group visit whom I could interview. He noted that none of them were familiar with Inner Mongolia. They went there for site research (*gazar üzeh sudalgaa*), which is a crucial part of film production, and searched for materials of historical monuments, records, artefacts, ethnographic materials, customs, and weapons. L. Sharavdorj stated that ‘the trip had some implicit political implication as being shortly after the improvement of the relationship between China and Mongolia’ (L. Sharavdorj, interview, 11 October 2016).

Along with the release from Russian influence and the revival of national consciousness, Mongolians aspired ‘to build their own “identity home” and their search for their “identity home” leads them to their shared cultural and historical heritage’ (Munkh-Erdene 2006: 55). From his experience doing field research in Mongolia in the early 1990s, Bulag points out that Mongolia was practically a paradise of ‘genuine’ Mongolian culture for Inner Mongolians (Bulag 1998). However, the visit by Mongolian artists and scholars searching for ‘genuine Mongolness’ shows that Inner Mongolia was perceived as a source of Mongolian history and culture. The sense of paradise on both sides (Inner Mongolians about Mongolia, and Mongolians about Inner Mongolia) were based on preconceived assumptions and hopes but not on experiences.



FIG. 22 The visit of the film crew of *Mönkh tengeriin khüchin dor* (Under the Power of the Eternal Sky) in Inner Mongolia in 1989. J. Badraa's private collection.

Visiting the Chinggis Khan mausoleum in Ordos, the Great Wall, and other places, the team of cultural representatives learned a lot from historical and cultural practices and locations in Inner Mongolia. When they visited the Chinggis Khan mausoleum, *Chinggisiin Ongon*, which was the most exciting site for them, they were very emotional, singing and crying. They were mostly proud of Inner Mongolians for keeping the *Chinggisiin Ongon* and the classical Mongolian script, which Mongolians had ceased to use. Members benefited a lot from this trip and met the Inner Mongolian scholar Sharaa. 'For my case, I personally decided to shoot the film only in Mongolia as the landscape differed very little in Inner Mongolia,' L. Sharavdorj said (L. Sharavdorj, interview, 11 October 2016).

From then on, along with the breakdown of the Soviet system in the early 1990s, cultural relations between Mongolia and Inner Mongolia flourished in other respects. The following paragraphs provide accounts of the cultural relations and shifts in the last two decades, based on the experiences of Mongolian artists in Inner Mongolia.

Along with the shift to the market economy and the frequency of border exchanges after the 1990s, many Mongolian artists and performers who could not make a living on the black market (*ganzagyn naimaa*) found a way to perform and teach in Inner Mongolia. S. Barkhas, a singer in the pop band *Aizam*, went to Höhhot to play in a big night club. He says, 'at

that time cultural and artistic activities collapsed on the floor in Mongolia. Everyone went to the black market and stayed unemployed. The *estrada* music in Inner Mongolia was backward (*khotsrogdson*) and I think we showed them how it should be' (S. Barkhas, interview, 28 April 2016). Consequently, a number of rock and pop bands appeared: Khökh Kheer, Jalam Khar, Tsagaan Sonkhor, and Khanggai in Inner Mongolia echoed the Mongolian rock bands Chinggis Khan, Kharanga, Kökh Tenger, Khurd, and others. 'Inner Mongolians imitate Mongolian folk-pop songs or 'invented songs' (*zokhiolyn duu*) just like kids,' claims B. Naranbaatar, the Honoured Artist of Mongolia and People's Artist of Buryatia and leader of the first state-produced pop band Soyolderdene. He is nicknamed the 'composer of *Mongol Tuurgatan*' (the term refers to ethnic Mongols living in different countries and has a slight implication of pan-Mongolism) in the Mongolian media, because he worked in the Republic of Buryatia of Russia for 17 years and in Inner Mongolia and other places in China for up to ten years.

B. Naranbaatar has a strong belief that every Mongolian person should aim to share and promote Mongolian culture to Mongols living in different countries. The aim of realising pan-Mongolist sentiments in their artistic works is common for Mongolian artists. Although Naranbaatar spent much more time in Buryatia, he appreciated Inner Mongolians much more for speaking the same language and respecting Mongolians very much. According to him, Inner Mongolians like to imitate '*Khalkhs*' (referring to Mongolians from Mongolia in general) not only in rock and pop music but in fashion, language, and others because they see everything in Mongolia as 'real Mongolian' (*jinkhene mongol*) (B. Naranbaatar, interview, 6 November 2016). Even for food, they now prefer 'Russian-like' food and Russian jam and cookies influenced by Mongolians.

Those who have visited Mongolia, or *Ar Mongol* (Outer Mongolia) in their words, dress almost like '*Khalkhs*' (citizens of Mongolia). Those who studied in Mongolia can get better jobs and higher salaries than others in Inner Mongolia. For example, those who studied and received degrees in Mongolia as composers would be well-reputed in their hometown. In the countryside, one would easily get a promotion to leading positions. In the relations between Mongols separated between two countries, each seeks a 'real' or 'genuine' Mongolian identity or 'Mongolness.' At the same time, Mongolians from Mongolia enjoy economic benefits for introducing 'advanced' or 'modern' Mongolian and European-style cultural practices. Moreover, in their social relations, they have contested sentiments of being connected but separated.

In the last two decades, Mongolians have moved to permanently live and work in Hōhhot in large numbers. Not limited to singers and musicians, the number of Mongolian artists, carpenters, goldsmiths, cooks, journalists, and dressmakers living and working in Inner Mongolia has increased year by year. The unofficial number is roughly 3,000, including students at Inner Mongolian universities. Many women have married Inner Mongolians and lived there over ten years running private businesses such as stores, restaurants, and pawnshops. Except for the very few who settled and are officially contracted with universities and companies, most have no official long-term residence permits and need to re-cross the border once a month to renew their tourist visa. A citizen of Mongolia is permitted to stay visa-free in China for 30 days. One must return to cross the border and re-enter every month, a practice they call ‘turning a flag’ (*tug toirokh*). The process is time-consuming and expensive.

Apart from the economic benefit and preservation of Mongolian identity, Mongolians enjoy the respect that Inner Mongolians show to them, in general. B. Lkhagvasüren has worked for the Inner Mongolian Art University in Hōhhot as the conductor of a symphony orchestra since 2010. He graduated from the Conservatoire in Sverdlovsk, Russia as a pianist and from the Conservatoire in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, as a conductor. From 2006 to 2010 he worked for the Mongolian State Philharmonic as a general conductor and for the Music and Dance College as the head of the Chamber Music Department. B. Lkhagvasüren says that he was shocked at how Inner Mongolians respect teachers, as this was very special for him. ‘They kept the Mongolian tradition of respecting elders very well. Traditional customs ‘penetrated into their bones’ (*yasand n shingesen*). A student meeting their teacher for the first time always hands them a *khadag* (a ceremonial silk scarf),’ B. Lkhagvasüren says. Ironically, Mongolians find that Inner Mongolians know the Mongolian tradition better than they do and care concerned about the condition of Mongolia. Apart from being taught ‘Mongolian art’ by Mongolians, Inner Mongolians seem to be more ‘Mongolian’, keeping the classical Mongolian script and customs. A controversy over ‘being Mongol’ exists because Mongolians teach ‘Mongolian’ music, paintings, handcrafts, and singing to those they think of as more ‘Mongolian’ than themselves.

There has been a sentiment of suspicion, and circumspection, but conversely respect for and attraction to ‘Mongolness’, between Mongolians and Inner Mongolians. The most common words Mongolians use to describe their uncertainty about Inner Mongolians are *naidvargüi* (‘unreliable’), *baritsgüi* (‘hard to handle’), and *yakh geed baigaa n medegdehgüi* (‘hard

to guess what they would do'). It is not only Inner Mongolians only who 'khulkhidakh' (deceive), but Mongolians too. B. Lkhagvasüren disapproves of what Mongolians say about the untrustworthiness of Inner Mongolians. 'To my observation, not supporting any side, I see our Mongolians (but not Inner Mongolians) as being more deceptive,' B. Lkhagvasüren claims.

Mongolians' doubts regarding Inner Mongolians can be detected among teachers of traditional culture. Some folk artists who teach *khöömii*, *urtyn duu*, and *morin khuur* in Inner Mongolia say that they do not teach the 'finesse' (*nariin shiriin yumaa*) of the Mongolian traditional culture, because they have been treated by citizens of their home country as 'traitors' who are selling their culture to China. This is not the case for classical musicians (*songodgiinkhon*). B. Lkhagvasüren is criticised by his colleagues in Mongolia only for not working for his country or paying back what the state spent on his education. He experiences less pressure than folk artists working in Inner Mongolia about 'selling Mongolian culture' (*soyoloo khudaldakh*).

D. Enkhtungalag, a teacher of (European) music theory and piano in Hōhhot and the wife of the *khöömii* teacher Ts. Möngönshagai, admitted that 'traditional' Mongolian musicians are sensitive about being blamed for 'selling their culture' by people from their home country. Here, 'traditional musicians' mainly refers to *urtyn duu* and *khöömii* singers, whereas 'classical' is understood as Western classical musicians. D. Enkhtungalag continues, 'most importantly, we look at the learner's attitude to whether they really intend to inherit the tradition or just to earn money from it. On the other hand, in the end Inner Mongolians are Mongols like us. It is not bad that we share our culture and art with them' (D. Enkhtungalag, interview, 3 October 2017). There is a need for cultural and economic exchanges for both sides, yet it is still controversial for 'traditional' musicians both to share and not to share.

The relationship between Mongolians and Inner Mongolians is complex and contested. Those who teach modern European cultural practices find Inner Mongolians to be masters in history, traditional script, and customs. However, those who teach traditional music practices such as *khöömii* are cautious and uncertain. Apart from nationalist sentiments, Mongolian teachers also have a personal professional motivation to prepare their students well regardless of their ethnic or civic identity.

The khöömii dispute

The fourth UNESCO Inter-governmental Committee to Safeguard Intangible Heritage decided to register *khöömii* in the UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage under the name of (Inner Mongolia) China in 2009. *Khöömii*, mostly translated as 'throat-singing' or 'overtone' in English, is a genre where a single vocalist simultaneously produces two distinct pitches, and it is also known as the Altai-Sayan Mountain phenomenon (Levin & Süzükei 2006). It is practised across the Altai Mountain region in western Mongolia. The registration of *khöömii* as Chinese caused a widespread sense of loss among the public in Mongolia. Many felt robbed of their ownership rights over their intangible cultural property. The strong reaction activated the recognition of a political and cultural boundary. Below I describe a series of events that occurred before and after the UNESCO inscription of *khöömii*, using interviews with key people involved in the process both from Mongolia and Inner Mongolia. I focus on what emerged as a competition for cultural ownership.

UNESCO's initiatives and conventions can have a range of complex and even conflicting impacts on the promotion and enhancement of cultural diversity and the creation of identity. On one hand, the key concept of the convention for 'safeguarding' cultural practice is based on the concepts of 'maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalisation,' 'helping with intercultural dialogue,' and 'encouraging mutual respect for other ways of life.'⁶⁷ The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted in October 2003, has a dual rationale in the areas of conservation and identity creation. UNESCO's concepts of protection, promotion, and revitalisation of cultural artefacts state that it will make it possible to conserve these elements for future generations, providing opportunities to exploit them and create new forms of community identification (Nas 2002: 142). But on the other hand, 'bearers' perceive having cultural elements inscribed in the list as a 'guarantee' of international recognition, or most importantly as a 'license' for the ownership of the cultural heritage by a nation-state. The intangible cultural heritage is seen as property, an asset or resource, to be protected, appreciated, utilised, and managed. The process of inscription based on a 'State Party' submission can therefore potentially cause competition over the ownership of heritage, as the case of *khöömii* demonstrates.

67 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>. Accessed on 19 June, 2012.

After the registration in 2009, a number of claims appeared in Mongolian daily newspapers and on TV. Newspaper headlines included ‘A Discussion Concerning Khöömii and Morin Huur Being Registered Under the Name of China’ (*Khyatadyn ner deer бүртгүүлсэн khöömii, morin khuuryn tukhai yariltsana*),⁶⁸ ‘When to Give Ownership of Historical and Cultural Artefacts to Foreigners?’ (*Tüükh soyolyn dursgalaa hedii boltol gadnykhand ömchliülekh ve?*),⁶⁹ ‘Why Do We Lose Our Horses While Father Is Alive’ (*Aaviin biid agtaa aldakhyn uchir yu ve*).^{70,71} At the same time, the mass media started investigating whose fault it was that China had registered *khöömii* before Mongolia. Several people were blamed for the process: B. Odsüren, a *khöömii* teacher from Mongolia, who had been teaching *khöömii* to Inner Mongolian students for ten times his Mongolian salary since 1994; Inner Mongolian students who were taught by B. Odsüren from Mongolia and then became ‘culture bearers’; the national committee of the Mongolian *khöömii* programme, especially the *Khöömii* Association (*Khöömiin Kholboo*) under the leadership of A. Tseden-Ish, both funded by the government, and the Mongolian National Committee of UNESCO, which could not manage to register *khöömii* before the Chinese did (B. Odsüren, interview, 14 May 2011).

After the incident the secretary of the committee was fired. Also as a consequence, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, Yo. Otgonbayar (2008–2012), was questioned by members of parliament on the ‘policy for the protection and development of *khöömii* art and a solution to the situation’. They intensely interrogated and raised issues on the origin and patent of the ‘national wonder’ (*ündesnii gaikhamshig*), as J. Sükhbaatar referred to *khöömii*. Yo. Otgonbayar admitted that Mongolia was late to register the vocal practice but said that he had reached a mutual agreement with China for further cases.⁷²

68 Mongolnews Today. ‘Khyatadyn ner deer бүртгүүлсэн khöömii, morin khuuryn tukhai yariltsana’. [To Discuss about *khöömii* and *morin huur* Registered Under the Name of China]. *Mongolnews Today*. 3 December, 2009. <http://www.mongolnews.mn/mobile.php/i/1357>.

69 Myagmarsüren, A. ‘Tüükh soyolyn dursgalaa hedii boltol gadnykhand ömchliülekh ve’. [Until When to Give Ownership of Historical and Cultural Artefacts to Foreigners]. *Mobile inet*. 30 April 2010. <http://mobile.inet.mn/shortArticle/?oxnbiz7/20199>.

70 Mongolnews Today. ‘Aavyn biid agtaa aldakhyn uchir yu ve’. [‘Why Do We Lose Our Horses When Father Is Alive’]. *Mongolnews Today*. 24 April, 2010. <http://www.mongolnews.mn/mobile.php/d/2488>.

71 The title plays with a Mongolian saying, “Meet People While the Father is Alive and Visit Places While the Horse is Alive” (*Aavyn biid khüntei tanilts, Agtny biid gazar üz*), metaphorically referring to the loss of belongings while the state exists.

72 Otgonbayar, Yondon. ‘Khöömiin urlag delkhiin 15 orond khögij baina’ [‘*Köömii* Art is Developing in 15 Countries’]. *Unuudur*. 10 March 2010. <http://unuudur.mn/>

Before China's inscription of *khöömii* there was no such reaction of strong nationalist sentiment towards a 'cultural heritage' registration under UNESCO. *Morin khuur* was listed on Mongolia's submission in 2003 and *urtyn duu* jointly by Mongolia and China in 2005. There were also regular cultural exchanges between Inner Mongolian and Mongolian *khöömiich* (throat-singers). For example, the Khöömii Festival, an event for sharing *khöömii* with 'others,' where *khöömii* singers from Tuva, China, Buryatia, and the US attended, was organised before China's registration of this form of singing in May 2009. During the festival, G. Khögjilt, a baritone singer from Inner Mongolia who had been taught *khöömii* by B. Odsüren, received the State Award as the Leading Cultural Worker (*Soyolyn Tergüünii Ajiltan*). On his return, G. Khögjilt then established the Khöömii Association in Inner Mongolia as a branch of the organisation in Mongolia. However, the Inner Mongolia Khöömii Association then cooperated with Qiao Yuguang, the director of the Inner Mongolian Art Research Institute, for the registration campaign (G. Khögjilt, interview, 28 June 2011). This registration itself, and not prior cultural exchanges, provoked many Mongolians to draw a clear-cut cultural boundary between themselves and Inner Mongolians, and to launch a competitive campaign for the ownership of the cultural heritage.

Although the registration of *khöömii* had a great impact on public opinion, boundary maintenance had previously emerged in some prior cultural exchanges. For example, the Inner Mongolian side proposed that Mongolia should jointly submit the inscription when they organised a conference on *khöömii* on 30 December 2008, and invited five delegates from Mongolia: B. Odsüren, A. Tseden-Ish, L. Kherlen (a researcher, lecturer from the National University of Mongolia), J. Enebish (a senior researcher from the Institute for Cultural and Arts Studies), Ts. Jargalsaikhan (an official from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science), and Sh. Enkhjargal (an MA student). G. Khögjilt said 'we had been proposing a joint application for three years, since 2006. The response of Mongolians was that 'Inner Mongolians do not have *khöömii*' (G. Khögjilt, interview, 28 June 2011). According to B. Odsüren and L. Kherlen, the Inner Mongolians asked the Mongolian delegates to sign a document written in Chinese, which they could not read. The document was unexpected, as the aim of the conference was supposed to be academic. In any case, the participants stated that Inner Mongolians had learned *khöömii* from Mongolia; therefore, they were not legitimate partners for joint registration. Mongolian *khöömii* singers disputed the registration by organising a concert to prove that they were the 'real owners'. 'I did not go to

that concert. I might disturb them by my presence,' J. Dalai said (interview, 28 April 2011). He is a student of B. Odsüren from Inner Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar, who spent more than five years in Mongolia and lived with his teacher for a year rent-free. J. Dalai said that he did not have a very close relationship with B. Odsüren's other students in Mongolia. J. Dalai remarked that 'they do not talk to me when they visit B. Odsüren's place during the Tsagaan Sar, Lunar Calendar New Year'. For Mongolian practitioners and researchers, it seems that the relationship between Mongolian and Inner Mongolian *khöömii* singers was of teacher-student rather than of competent and equal colleagues.

The main criterion for boundary maintenance, as Mongolian 'culture bearers' claim, is state-defined citizenship. The right to legitimately lay claim to the 'cultural element' reflected the 'origin' or 'original place' of *khöömii* as being within the national 'in-group'. In this case, *khöömii* became 'diacritical,' in Barth's term (1969), for maintaining boundaries that people were trying to retain. The *khöömii* incident also raised public awareness on the importance of cultural matters. The UNESCO description says: 'A rich variety of regional styles have been preserved until today, and performances as well as contemporary compositions still play a major role in the social and cultural life of nomads living in Mongolia and in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, located in the northern part of the People's Republic of China.'⁷³ Culturally, the blurring of boundaries may be useful for Mongolian sentiments but politically it is sensitive for the relationship between Mongolia and China. Maintaining a contingent boundary by drawing inclusive and exclusive limits is reminiscent of Brubaker's claim (2002) on groups, which he sees as constructed, contingent, and fluctuating. He does not see groups as substantial, bounded entities but as contingent events and suggests shifting attention from groups to 'groupness.' 'It allows us to see "groupness" as an event, as something that "happens"', Brubaker argues (2002: 168).

The key person blamed for 'selling the national culture to China' was B. Odsüren, who had been teaching *khöömii* in Inner Mongolia for the previous twenty years. B. Odsüren, originally from Zavkhan province, was trained and had worked as a driving instructor until he was awarded the Golden Medal at the *Ard Tümnii Uurlagiin Ikh Naadam* ('People's Great Artistic Festival') in 1981, a state socialist project aimed at discovering and promoting practitioners of 'folk art.' B. Odsüren says:

73 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/mongolian-art-of-singing-khoomei-00210>. Accessed on 29 May, 2010.

The first time I went to Inner Mongolia, from October to December 1993, to teach khöömii, there were two Ordos and two Tsakhar guys whose names are Khaakhüü or Dursaakhüü, Juramtu, Tsetsenbileg, and Bold. After two months of lessons, Dursaakhüü succeeded in singing Dörvön Nastai Khaliun. I can surely say that there was no khöömii before I came there. What they call khooloin tsoor is completely different, holding only one tone without making any melodies' (B. Odsüren, interview, Ulaanbaatar, 14 May 2011).

For B. Odsüren, cultural sharing was an acceptable activity, since he taught *khöömii* to Buryats at the Institute of Culture from 1994 to 1996 and to Inner Mongolians since 1993. However, he emphasised the importance of the 'origin,' by saying 'we could learn from each other, but the most important thing is *üüssen gazar* ('original place'), *üüsel garal* ('the origin'). In the fifth session of the intergovernmental committee of UNESCO, in November 2010, Mongolia succeeded in having 'the traditional Mongolian art of *khöömii*' listed and this was greeted with general relief. Public opinion tended to espouse the view that Mongolia had regained its heritage, as demonstrated in the article headlines 'Mongolian *Khöömii* and Naadam Was Officially Registered at the UNESCO' ('Mongolyn khöömii, naadam khoyor alban yosoор UNESCO-d бүртгэгдлээ')⁷⁴ and 'Mongolians Had Their *Khöömii* Art Registered in the UNESCO List' ('Mongolchuud khöömiin urlagaa UNESCO-d бүртгүүлээ').⁷⁵ B. Odsüren continues to visit Inner Mongolia and teach *khöömii*. He pleasantly said, pointing to the certificate on the wall, that, 'now we have gained our stuff back I will proudly teach everywhere' (B. Odsüren, interview, 14 May 2011).

The issue of 'origin' is also important for Inner Mongolian 'bearers'. In particular, they sought to identify an origin for *khöömii* in a more distant local past. In the registration application with a ten-minute video, they sought to connect the tradition of *khooliin tsoor* (lit. 'throat flute'), a vocal style claimed to be practised in Shiliin Gol, to *khöömii*, which had been introduced more recently. Qiao Yuguang, who handled the registration and became the vice-president of Chamber of Culture in Inner Mongolia after the incident, says:

74 http://www.touristinfocenter.mn/news_more.aspx?NewsID=268. Accessed 11 April 2011.

75 News.mn. 'Mongolchuud khöömiin urlagaa UNESCO-d бүртгүүлээ'. [Mongolians had Their Khöömii Art Registered in the UNESCO List]. *News.mn*. 17 November 2010. <https://www.news.mn/r/39920>.

We did not mean to own Mongolian khöömii and to say B. Odsüren is ours by having his face in the video. We only wanted to emphasise his contribution to the development of khöömii in Inner Mongolia. However, we have khooloin tsoor in Shiliin Gol' (Qiao Yuguang, interview, 30 June 2011).

Although an agreement that mutual notice must be given before registering shared 'elements of cultural heritage' was signed between the governments of Mongolia and China, the competition over cultural heritage continues in terms of numbers and types. For instance, a campaign involved 6,002 men from all over Mongolia for the registration of 'Mongolian wrestling' in the Guinness Book of World Records in September 2011, and the 555-camel race in Saikhan tal of Inner Mongolia in November 2011 was part of a campaign to inscribe camel racing. There was a state-funded campaign to enhance public awareness of traditions, customs, and authentic art. Within this project, 15,327 people from all over the country, both adults and children, were trained in *biye biyelgee* (traditional folk dance), which was registered in the UNESCO list in 2009. As a result, 5,204 of them performed during a Naadam Festival in 2012 in order to be registered in the Guinness Book of World Records. All these competitions emerged from the consciousness of cultural heritage registration in the shadow of the *khöömii* dispute and the arguments it raised.

Meanwhile, as discussed in the previous section, the number of Mongolian teachers of *khöömii* and other folk art in Inner Mongolia has dramatically increased in the last decade. While most of them are *ardyn urlagiinkhan* (folk artists), the rest are singers, musicians, artists, carpenters, models, cooks, and tailors. Compared to ten or 20 years before, Inner Mongolians are now competent performers in the arts sector, although they still prefer to have teachers from Mongolia.

Conclusion

Cultural relations between Mongolians and Inner Mongolians are multilayered and unpredictable. They hold contested sentiments of suspicion, and circumspection towards each other, but conversely respect and are attracted by their 'Mongolness'. Both sides perceived the other as a cultural paradise based on preconceived assumptions and hopes. Due to the shared ethno-cultural and historical unity, Mongols in Mongolia and China seek cultural resources of 'authenticity', 'originality', or 'Mongolness'. The relations between Mongolians and Inner Mongolians illuminate an unusual

and exciting position regarding the notion of group identity: identity is both contested and sought somewhere else. Both Mongolians and Inner Mongolians claim to be the bearers of tradition, customs, and identities. At the same time, they attribute the group identity of 'being Mongol' and 'Mongolness' to each other every now and then. In some regards, Buyandelger (2013) connects this to social memory in her work on concerns about forgetting the past and losing identities. Her Buryat Mongolian interlocutors lamented that they did not know their past or their culture and that they lost their culture and past, and that true culture is somewhere else.

Later relations between Mongolia and Inner Mongolia show a competition over the ownership of cultural heritage. Musical art forms such as *khöömii*, *urtyn duu*, and *morin khuur*, which were shaped as the 'socialist cultural heritage' of the Mongolian People's Republic, switched to being 'national cultural heritage' because of the new nationalist politics in post-socialist Mongolia. With UNESCO's involvement in cultural policy after 1990, they were then re-defined as 'national cultural heritage' to be preserved and utilised.

The process of registration can be regarded as a form of 'resourcification' – the state's attempts to extract cultural practices as political and economic resources – within the political sphere to 'territorialise' art and claim it for the nation-state. When it seemed that a valued resource was at stake, a national boundary was invoked. Yet boundaries are still loose, flexible, and ephemeral when it comes to ethnicity and cultural relations.

The *khöömii* dispute is significant for two reasons: first, this was a competition over the ownership rights to intangible cultural properties, which do not have clear-cut ethnic or national boundaries. Second, it poses the question of whether one can share, or 'unshare,' cultural heritage across Mongolian groups divided by the international borders of Mongolia.

Conclusion: Glorifying ‘national culture’

The notion of *ündesnii soyol*, ‘national culture’, has mostly been perceived as a substantial primordial entity in Mongolian society. However, emerging as a category and being reinforced through a series of policies as well as individual efforts, it was one of the most enduring achievements of the cultural construction of state socialism. The current normative concept of ‘national culture’, which was embodied in political, academic, and public discourses, was affected by the Soviet Union’s nationalities policy. Under the Soviet policy, uniting ‘distinctive national identities co-existing peacefully with an emerging all-union socialist culture’ (Martin 2001: 74), ‘national character’ was essentialised in various cultural practices. *Soyol*, ‘culture’, which had slightly different connotations in pre-revolutionary time, was instrumentalised to modernise, nationalise, and essentialise the Mongolian People’s Republic as a socialist nation-state. As a result, the concept itself came to enforce distinctions and hierarchies (between those with or without culture, *soyoltoi* or *soyolgiii*), various social groupings (nationality/ethnicity, social classes, etc.), and artistic practices (high and low art), and so on. Moreover, in the process of deconstructing an old order and constructing a new one, the models could be explained in oxymorons: *socialist nationalism* and *nationalist socialism*.

In order to channel cultural practices, conceptual tools were formulated under the state socialist regime, such as the slogan ‘national in form, socialist in content’ (*ündesnii khelbertei, sotsialist aguulgatai*) and the artistic style of ‘revolutionary/socialist realism’. Narratives recalling socialist culture-building are diverse and controversial. Neither ‘socialist realism’ as a style, nor ‘national in form, socialist in content’ as a slogan, was remembered as a strict rule or remained as a legacy of state socialism. In reality, these took diverse forms through both conscious and unconscious actions that diverged from the official slogans. As Yurchak has noted, “socialism” as a system of human values and as an everyday reality of “normal life” was not necessarily equivalent to the “state” or “ideology” (Yurchak 2005: 8).

Despite the lack of clarity and the delusion in the vision, it was clear for the Soviets not to provoke the (non-socialist) nationalism of nationhood. Hence the ‘national character’ left in cultural practices and art forms was produced in massive and excessive ways in the socialist era. The legacy of state socialism is the Marxist evolutionary scheme of civilisation that categorises societies in developmental stages. Despite some modifications

such as ‘bypassing capitalism’, the evolutionary scheme of the five-stage theory was implicitly codified in cultural practices and people’s perceptions.

* (Soviet) classical music was one of the significant vehicles of the modernist development project of state socialism. It was exercised in Mongolia as part of the legitimisation of power and a sign of prestige. Building a centrally controlled and hierarchically structured system, the Soviet Union managed to refashion visions (Scott 1999), tastes, and needs in society, marking Russia as the ‘world cultural centre’. Through educational systems and upbringing, national elites appeared who deeply believed in the hierarchical system where classical music was at the most sophisticated level of culture. The process, with roots in Marxist evolutionary theory, was conceptualised in hierarchical ways both in musical genres and in social relationships. As a result of the development project, the notions of ‘high art and low art’, ‘professional and amateur art’, and ‘classical and folk art’ emerged.

Under the nationalisation campaign, national classical forms such as national operas, ballets, and symphonies were produced. Moreover, translating operas from Russian and other European languages was part of the policy to become equal to Soviet-bloc nations. The aim of the Soviet Union was not to Russify, but to essentialise new cultural practices in native languages by native elites. The hierarchical distinction went far beyond art forms – classical and folk – to social classes such as cultural elites and the masses, or urban and rural. Apart from the state rhetoric, individual artists aspired to professional and artistic excellence in everyday life.

After the collapse of the socialist regime, however, all the socialist national operas and ballets produced for 50 to 60 years were ‘put into a coffin’ (*avsand orson*). Enjoying the freedom of creativity and aspiring to ‘internationalism’, the theatre adopted a policy of performing classical operas in their original languages – Italian, Russian, French, and German – but not in Mongolian translation. While late socialist elites lament the failure of national cultural productions today, individual artists aspire towards international recognition and the global stage.

* Folklore or folk art was a legitimisation device by the MPR government to essentialise the ‘national character’, in line with the Soviet nationalities policy. The structure that the Soviet Union projected to unite a variety of nations peacefully under it was realised in its modified version in Mongolia. It conceptualised that the MPR would consist of ethnic groups that differ in their cultural features. Multi-ethnicisation was realised through a number of decisions, activities, events, academic and artistic discourses, institutions, and actors. Distinctions between administrative units as political bodies of

the state were also in focus, which led to further differentiation in styles, and many other features in cultural practices.

* The ideology of the Soviet-style state was not entirely totalitarian: some limited space for public difference and discussion was permitted, provided it remained within politically 'safe' boundaries. A certain amount of celebration of the edited and approved category of 'national tradition' was permitted – indeed was expected – within the wider culture of what we might call Soviet cosmology, which was always somewhat broader than the particularities of party policy of the moment. This space for a certain degree of rejection of past revolutionary policy within the broader (Soviet) socialist culture was extremely influential for the thinking of late-socialist elite youth. Consequently, the concept of 'nomadic civilisation' – with its own rich cultural heritage that emerged from a loosely Marxist evolutionary categorisation – was an innovative but acceptable notion in post-Stalinist Soviet society. In this way, Mongolians could integrate 'national characters' not only imposed by Soviet ideology but also include their voices.

* Earlier critiques of the notions of 'uncultured' or 'backward' society, which could be defined as Mongolia's 'first cultural revival', reconstituted 'national cultural heritage' for the socialist state and induced the notion of 'nomadic civilisation', which was retained in the post-socialist political climate. In retrospect, the establishment of the *ündesnii soyol* 'national culture' category, and its population with 'cultural heritage' constructs, was one of the most enduring achievements of state socialist culture – a social order that might itself perhaps qualify for the category of 'civilisation', since although there were distinctive national variants in different COMECON countries, there was a great deal of commonality in material and intellectual form stretching across the Soviet 'Second World.' Socialist cultural heritage, as a form of 'national' wealth, was developed in line with Soviet thought on which past cultural advances should be retained. An important element of this 'civilisation' was the valuation and state sponsorship of the culture category, and this has been adopted and elaborated in new ways in the new Mongolia that emerged in the 'age of the market.'

As a power of 'world making', Bourdieu's 'symbolic power' produces and imposes a 'legitimate' vision of the social world. Bourdieu (1989) further states that symbolic power can not only organise the perception of the social world, but can really organise the world itself. By overestimating state power and underestimating agentive acts, Bourdieu defines categories as being imposed on society through symbolic power. From the current ethnographic research, 'national culture' is seen as a category that is formed not only by

the imposition of symbolic power but also with the active involvement and initiation of individuals at various levels.

* The initiation of the socialist state established a financially and ideologically fixed system, the Writers' Union, to shape public opinion in controlled directions. However, unofficial histories, social relations, and agendas such as locality or sharing the same homeland (*nutgarkhakh*) and connections (*tanil tal*) and personal attitudes of vindictiveness functioned in parallel with the official relations of state socialism. Yurchak discusses the duality of cultural productions: 'creative work is always both "a strictly private affair" of creative individual and a "labour of social utility" that creates "spiritual values" and "socio-moral norms" in society"' (Yurchak 2005: 12). Moreover, party-led cohesion and censorship was not only political, but equally aesthetic. The post-socialist nostalgia of socialist-era elites contains sentiments about the censorship institution, or the 'Glavlit', which tended to produce 'high-quality productions'. They tend to regard the current creative situation in Mongolia as a chaotic mess because the 'Glavlit' no longer exists. A whole apparatus of censorship functioned to control and shape cultural productions and artistic practices. However, it was perfunctory and inconsistent. Apart from approved directions, there was a space for 'evocative transcripts' (Humphrey 1994) into which oppositional as well as official meanings could be read. However, binary metaphors of 'official' and 'unofficial', which further implies power and resistance in Western scholarship, would not fully explain the relationship between rulers and subjects (or writers). They are overlapping, and not clear-cut.

A group of writers who did not benefit from the Writers' Union challenged the notion of 'modern Mongolian literature' developed within the socialist modernist project, and claimed 'freedom' with their establishment of the Free Writers' Union. For them, freedom was linked to nationalism, and they were greatly concerned with 'national cultural revival'. Although their concept of freedom had no connection to the Western concept of liberalism, it is quite possible that the situation turned out to be economically 'liberal' (or neoliberal) and politically (ethno-) nationalist.

* 'Democratic' Mongolia continued and discontinued various cultural practices from 'socialist' Mongolia. To construct a new national identity, not only nationalism (Munkh-Erdene 2008) but also market globalism or globalisation became the main ideology after the collapse of state socialism in the 1990s. Economic disruption led to the closure of state enterprises, a collapse in living standards, declining public services, and rising levels of unemployment (Sneath 2018: 33).

Nationalism, however, remains to channel ideologies in cultural practices and social orders. Hierarchical categories such as socialist constructs based on musical genres – classical music and folk music – remained to some extent. However, a clear-cut distinction has been somehow relaxed and reversed. Matching nationalist sentiments towards traditional culture and folk music, which has been fully transformed and institutionalised, is now elevated as part of national identity. The present focus is on the ‘Mongol nation’ rather than on (multi)-ethnicity, with an intent to link to the history of the Xiongnu expressly and profoundly to the Mongolian Empire. Furthermore, projects oriented towards pan-Mongolism are widely accepted. The *Khamag Mongol* project initiated by singer Javkhlan, who later became a member of parliament, which included Mongolian, Inner Mongolian, Buryat, and Kalmyk singers, was appreciated by music lovers. As Bumochir (2020) argues, the inseparable fusion of both the civic and ethnic principles are embodied in nationalism in Mongolia. The State Ensemble of Folksong and Dance, which turned into a place for tourists, changed its name to the Great Theatre of National Art (*Ündesnii urlagiin ikh teatr*) and had a recital titled *The Global Mind* in English. Efforts have been made to popularise and ‘globalise’ the folk ensemble.

* While experiments in folk music in the early 2000s (by the folk rock band Altan Urag and the folk jazz band Arga Bileg) were oriented towards artistic innovation along with nationalist implications, recent attempts by the Hu heavy metal band managed to ‘reach a global market’ (*delkhiin zakh zeeld garakh*) and charted no.1 on *Billboard*’s Hard Rock Digital Song Sales. President Battulga personally received the band on 17 May 2019 to express his gratitude for promoting Mongolian culture and to discuss further financial conditions.

Meanwhile, classical music maintains the image formed in the socialist era. Switching from elite to the public, classical music is no longer performed within a narrow range but for a wider public.

* Musical art forms such as *khöömii*, *urtyn duu*, and *morin khuur* were reshaped from the ‘socialist cultural heritage’ of the Mongolian People’s Republic into a ‘national cultural heritage’ by the new nationalist politics in post-socialist Mongolia. With UNESCO’s involvement in cultural policy after 1990, they were then redefined as a ‘national cultural heritage’ to be preserved and utilised.

The process of UNESCO registration can be regarded as a form of ‘resourcification’ within the political sphere to ‘territorialise’ art and claim it for the nation-state. When it seemed that a valued resource was at stake, a

national boundary was invoked. Yet boundaries are still loose and ephemeral when it comes to ethnicity and cultural relations.

The *khöömii* dispute between Mongolia and Inner Mongolia is significant for two reasons: first, this was a competition over the ownership rights to intangible cultural properties which do not have clear-cut ethnic or national boundaries. Second, it poses the question of whether one can share, or 'unshare', cultural heritage across Mongolian groups divided by the international borders of Mongolia.

The relations between Mongolians and Inner Mongolians, who share ethnocultural and historical unity but represent different political bodies, are multilayered and unpredictable. Both seek cultural resources of 'authenticity', 'originality', or 'Mongolness' for their nation-building. Eventually, this led to a competition over the ownership of cultural heritage.

Yet, both Mongolians and Inner Mongolians seek the 'authenticity' of group identity from each other. Due to the distraction in tradition, both sides had a sense of loss of national identity. Consequently, national culture became something to attribute to 'others' but not that 'we' bear.

* The impacts of socialist national culture are deeply embedded in contemporary Mongolian society. The notion of 'national', but with diverse implications, was central to cultural productions in both socialist and post-socialist Mongolia. Along with the rhetoric and nostalgia for socialism, diverse models of ideologies such as globalisation, cosmopolitanism, pan-Mongolism, and neoliberalism are under way. In order to orchestrate its nationalist, populist, and neoliberal policy, the state 'hijacks' and manipulates cultural actors and individual achievements through its various technologies inherited from state socialism. Through all these channels, culture crafted as 'national' is meant to glorify, perform, and be utilised, but not to be practised in everyday life.

This process of 'glorifying culture', with strong undertones of tradition and nomadism, has come into focus in state policy. As a result, '(national) culture' strengthening old platitudes about 'nomadic culture' creates distance from the real lives of modern herders and cosmopolitan youth.

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