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New Representations of the “Golden Lineage”: The Mongolian Folk Rock of Altan Urag

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SIT Study Abroad

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New Representations of the “Golden Lineage”:
The Mongolian Folk Rock of Altan Urag

Jonathan Heins
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Fall 2011
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Abstract

This project will examine the ways in which the self-proclaimed Mongolian “folk rock” band, Altan Urag, combines elements of both traditional Mongolian and Western music and culture in order to recast and recreate Mongolian tradition. These new representations of Mongolian tradition occur within the context of a young and rapidly developing democratic nation which looks both deeply into its own past to construct a strong national sense of identity and looks increasingly outward to the international community with aspirations of establishing itself as a recognized and respected member of that community.

Altan Urag’s new representations of Mongolian national heritage are both audial and visual in nature, and occur in live performance, album packaging, and digital mediums. Accordingly, this investigation will use data from all three mediums, as well as personal interviews with the band members and with persons related in various capacities to the band. In order to analyze these diverse data, both musical and sociological analytical methods will be used. The result will be a comprehensive understanding of the interaction between Mongolian tradition and Western ideas in the music of Altan Urag on all levels of musical experience.
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**Introduction**
Motivation

Over the past two decades since the democratic revolution of 1990, Mongolia has experienced rapid development, driven primarily by foreign investment in large mines like Oyu Tolgoi and Tavan Tolgoi. In particular, the capital city, Ulaanbaatar, has changed dramatically. New apartment blocks seem to sprout from the ground almost sporadically, outdated and inadequate roads are constantly jammed full of Land Cruisers, and new shops, stores and restaurants can be found everywhere. But it is not only the physical face of Mongolia that is changing: a Mongolian-socialist culture and worldview has given way to a Mongolian-global culture as “global culture” from America, Germany, Korea, Japan, Russia and China increasingly penetrates Mongolia’s political borders. Even in the more remote areas of Mongolia like the northernmost aimag, or province, of Huvsgul traditional pastoral lifestyles are changing due to increased exposure to global culture (G. Serdamba, IN). This rapid physical and social change combined with the democratic freedom for self-expression has prompted Mongolians to recreate their identities as individuals and as a nation.

One way they have done this is to create a strong sense of national identity that is deeply rooted in Mongolian history and culture, including the conquests of Chinggis Khan in the late 12th and early 13th centuries, the semi-nomadic and pastoral lifestyle still practiced by about a third of the Mongolian population, and musical traditions such as hoomii (throat singing or overtone singing), urtyn duu (long song), and those of the morin khuur (horse-head fiddle). Indeed, the significance of Mongolian musical traditions in constructing a national Mongolian
identity is evidenced by the presence of such state ensembles as the National Folk and Dance Ensemble and the National Morin Khuur Ensemble, by the substantial collection of Mongolian traditional music records for sale in stores like Hi-Fi Records in Ulaanbaatar, and in the use of hoomii, long song, and morin khuur in various television advertisements and programs.

More interesting however, and more prominent, is the integration of elements of traditional Mongolian music into Western musical styles and forms, like pop music. Mongolian pop music videos are broadcast on several television stations devoted to music in homes and restaurants throughout Ulaanbaatar and the countryside, and these Mongolian pop songs often feature melodies and lyrics taken directly from traditional Mongolian bogino duu, or short songs (in contrast to long songs, which have a very different style and structure). This integration of traditional Mongolian musical elements into Western musical forms and styles, which ethnomusicologist Carole Pegg describes as “hybrid Mongol-Western music” (293) is not limited to pop musical genres, but also occurs in rock music genres. Bands such as Hurd and Kharanga, which began in the 1990s, first introduced the Western heavy metal and hard rock styles to Mongolia and gained significant popularity.

There are varying degrees of Mongol-ness and Western-ness in “hybrid Mongol-Western” music, however. Bands like Hurd and Kharanga, as well as many contemporary rock outfits like The Lemons and Fire, adopt a straightforward rock instrumentation, sound, and style, but incorporate traditional Mongolian melodies and lyrical themes. Some groups, however, like Khusugtun
and Altan Orgil, use traditional Mongolian instruments like the morin khuur, the traditional singing styles of hoomii and long song, and even adorn traditional Mongolian dress during performances. Such instrumentation, sound, and appearance make their music seem more immediately Mongolian, and the Western-ness of the music is apparent in more subtle elements like harmony and musical structure. The result is a musical style that is in some respects traditionally Mongolian and yet distinctly modern, and which deliberately evokes images of a perceived Mongolian traditional heritage.

*The Music of Altan Urag, the “Golden Lineage”*

Perhaps no such hybrid Mongol-Western band is more well-known, more commercially successful, or more influential than the self-proclaimed “Mongolian folk rock” band Altan Urag. Altan Urag, which loosely translates to “Golden Lineage” in reference to the royal ancestral line of Chinggis Khan, is unique among the aforementioned bands for the innovative ways that they blend Western rock sounds and imagery with traditional Mongolian sounds and imagery with the intention of not merely being traditional, but of deliberately recasting tradition. Their masterful mixture of old and new has resulted in the production of seven studio albums, several music videos, participation in two full-length films, participation in several international music festivals, and appearances on national Mongolian television. They claim, justifiably, to be “one of the pioneers” of the Mongolian folk rock genre which bands like Khusugtun and Altan Orgil arguably fall into (B. Erdenebat et al., IN). Their success and popularity means that they
have a prominent role in shaping a modern, post-socialist national Mongolian identity within contemporary Mongolian-global culture, one which looks to Mongolia’s perceived ancient traditions and heritage.

Methodology

This paper will therefore investigate the ways in which Altan Urag combines elements of both traditional Mongolian and Western music and culture in order to recast and recreate Mongolian tradition. Because traditional practices and representations are both audial and visual in nature, this investigation will use both audial and visual data. Audial data consist of songs from Altan Urag’s albums, music videos, and live performances. Visual data consist of Altan Urag’s presentation and appearance in their album packaging, music videos, live performances, the movie “Khadak,” in which they both performed music and played minor roles as characters, and on the internet. These data are acquired through the purchasing of their albums in local record shops, watching the films “Khadak” and “Mongol,” and observations at many local live performances. Finally, interviews with the band and other professionals, as well as interactions with random attendees at local shows and with other fans, provide first-hand insights into Altan Urag’s creative process, artistic intent, and general reception in Mongolia, all of which provide a necessary context for detailed analysis.

Analysis of these data will be both anthropological – that is, concerned with the actions and interactions of cultural agents – and musical. While it is important to discuss representations of tradition in an anthropological sense, as
other ethnomusicologists like Peter Marsh and Carole Pegg have done, it would be a mistake to leave out a detailed analysis of the music that Altan Urag plays – a mistake that ethnomusicologists like Peter Marsh and Carole Pegg have made. This is not to say that their work is incompetent or of no use. On the contrary, both have made great contributions to understanding the ways in which Mongolian society has changed entering and exiting the socialist period, and particularly to the roles that music has had in those changes. I therefore rely on their work later in the interpretation of my analysis of Altan Urag’s music. However, any work which sets out to analyze music as a medium for expressing and recreating traditions is incomplete if it does not pay due attention to the music itself. Music by definition has structure, and its structure is the fine work of the musicians who make it – structure is part of their craft. Analyzing musical structure and elements is therefore an important part of investigating just how representations of tradition are created.

In the Theoretical Framework section, I will raise issues concerning the dichotomy between traditional and modern with regard to Mongolian music, drawing from the works of Carole Pegg and Peter Marsh, as well as a correspondence with an ethnomusicology student and associate of Altan Urag’s, Andrew Colwell. The works of Pegg and Marsh are chosen because they are some of the most recent comprehensive studies undertaken of Mongolian music, an otherwise significantly understudied topic for which there are few resources available. I will also briefly touch upon the issues of nationalism in music, drawing upon Marsh’s concept of “cosmopolitan nationalism” as it relates to
Mongolian music in the late socialist and post-socialist eras. This discussion of tradition will provide a more sophisticated framework in which to understand all the data gathered in the next step, yielding a clearer picture of the way that traditional and Western elements interact in the music of Altan Urag.

In the Investigation and Analysis section, analysis of the data will occur as the data is presented. I will begin by providing a brief history of Altan Urag as a band to provide a context for discussing their albums in music in depth. I will then describe in detail, utilizing both musical and anthropological analysis, how various aspects of Altan Urag’s music, in the broad sense of the term, blend the traditional and the modern, the old and the new, and the local and foreign to create new representations of the past.

Theoretical Framework

“Traditional” Mongolian Music?

There are problems in discussing “traditional” Mongolian music that we must first address before beginning an analysis of Altan Urag’s music. Generally, when we speak of traditional Mongolian music, we are referring to pre-socialist period musical practices. The socialist period, from 1921 – 1990, is generally regarded now as a period of foreign ideological rule and of suppression of Mongolian cultural expression in favor of Russian and Western cultural expression (Munkh-Ochir). Therefore, “real” Mongolian traditions are that were practiced before this period of ideological rule and socialization.
Unfortunately, the historical connection between the pre-socialist period and the post-socialist period is extremely tenuous, at least with regard to traditional musical practices. Current “traditional” morin khuur repertoire has almost no documented connection to the pre-socialist period, as melodies were not really written down until during the socialist period using Western musical notation (T. Mend-Ooyo). Morin khuur performance practice, training, and even the instrument itself have been thoroughly modernized and Westernized during the socialist period by state cultural institutions, leaving few traces of performance practice or sound from the pre-socialist period (Marsh, 54 – 67). The morin khuur was not alone; other Mongolian instruments and singing styles faced similar reclassification, restructuring, and standardization of performance practices (Pegg, 256 – 261). Thus in many ways what is now called traditional folk music in Mongolia is really the heavily Westernized product of 70 years of socialization and standardization aimed at modernization.

This is significant, because it is this kind of traditional Mongolian music that is taught still in the Mongolian Music and Dance College, where Altan Urag was trained. Thus Altan Urag’s traditional music is in no way pure or authentic, in the sense of being totally pre-socialist. Indeed, these facts about Mongolian traditional music call into question the distinction between traditional and modern/Western that we have used thus far in this paper. It would seem that the “‘traditional’ elements of Mongolian music are themselves a mixture of all kind of influences, from pre-socialist to socialist to post-socialist” (Colwell, email correspondence).
Nevertheless, even if the line between traditional and Western is blurred or altogether nonexistent, the fact remains that Mongolians continue to practice these “traditional” musical forms with an eye to the past. This past is not necessarily authentic; but then again that is not the point. The real goal in performing “traditional” music is to evoke images of a perceived past with practices that are tied, however loosely, to that past. In this way one can say that the relevant sense of tradition here is as something imagined or created by a process that “utilizes selection and invention of materials” (Sue Tuohy qtd. in Marsh 13).

New Representations of the “Golden Lineage”

Altan Urag has been “selecting” elements of this socialized tradition, created initially to support a national socialist identity, and appropriating them for the creation of a national Mongolian identity. That Altan Urag connects Mongolian traditional music to ideas of nationality and Mongolian-ness is undeniable – see song titles like “Mother Mongolia,” “Great Mongolia,” “Temuujin,” and “Blue Mark.” In their music, Altan Urag appropriates elements of socialized traditional Mongolian music in order to point to a romanticized history and identity that is distinctly non-socialist and distinctly Mongolian.

However, they do not attempt to be “purely” traditional or to create a national identity that excludes other nations or influence. Altan Urag’s brilliance lies in the fact that they can take these Westernized traditional musical elements, acknowledging their Westernization as a distinct part of Mongolia’s own history, and blend them with contemporary Western and modern musical styles to create a
national identity that looks to the nation’s proud past and places it in the context of a changing and globalizing Mongolia. This is much like Marsh’s idea of “cosmopolitan nationalism” in his discussion of late-socialist period musicians who, though concerned for the nation’s modernization and integration into the international arena, sought to retain a national identity that would distinguish it from other cosmopolitan nations (79). This then is how we should understand Altan Urag’s innovative fusion of traditional and western musical elements: as the creation of a national Mongolian identity that is rooted in its own past and yet also embraces exchange and interaction in an increasingly connected world – as new representations of the “Golden Lineage” for a new Mongolia.

**Investigation and Analysis**

*Altan Urag’s History*

Altan Urag was formed in 2002 by seven recent graduates of the Mongolian Music and Dance College. These founding members have been and continue to be the lineup of Altan Urag. They are B. Erdenebat, band leader and yochin player (Mongolian hammered dulcimer); B. Burentugs, morin khuur player and hoomii singer; B. Bolortungalag, drummer and percussionist; M. Chimedtogtokh, throat singer and bishguur player (Mongolian horn, similar to an oboe in sound); H. Erdenetsetseg, long song and short song singer; Ts. Gangaa, ikh khuur player (great fiddle, like a bass morin khuur); and P. Oyunbileg, morin khuur player and throat singer. From the beginning, Altan Urag was the livelihood and sole career for all of its members. This is contrast to other bands like
Khusugtun or Arga Bileg, where their members are all typically also members of either the National Song and Dance Ensemble or the State Morin Khuur Ensemble.

For two years, Altan Urag performed a more straightforwardly “traditional” repertoire. Then, in 2004, the band independently recorded and released its first album *Foal’s Been Born*. This album, deemed the “official beginning” of Altan Urag by B. Erdenebat (a.k.a. “Erka”) marked the band’s first experiments with the new genre of “Mongolian folk rock” (B. Erdenebat et al., IN). This album was actually more stylistically diverse than the term “folk rock” might indicate, as it also contained some tracks like “Aliens” and “Unsteady” which experimented with elements of 20th century postmodern Western music. Altan Urag would eventually revisit and rearrange nearly every song on this record in future albums.

Altan Urag promoted this album with a debut concert on 18 December, 2004 and continued to promote it in small performances at local pubs and restaurants and at a large local concert hosted in 2005. In 2006, Altan Urag was able to sign a contract with the local record label Sonor Records, the largest and most experienced label in Ulaanbaatar. Under this new contract they recorded and produced *Made in Altan Urag*, which has since become their most popular and well-known album. Eschewing the more abstract experiments from *Foal’s Been Born*, Altan Urag pushed its new genre of “folk rock” on *Made in Altan Urag* with bold and energetic tracks like “Mother Mongolia” and “Blue Mark,” which would eventually become crowd favorites and live performance staples. The time
around *Made in Altan Urag* marks a significant point in the band’s development of its sound and image. Just before the recording of this album, Altan Urag acquired two new and original morin khuurs: instead of horse heads, these new black fiddles were adorned with the head of the Alien monster from the famous Western sci-fi horror movie “Alien.” Additionally, the band modified one of their morin khuurs and the yochin so as to become “electric” instruments, capable of producing a distorted sound similar to an electric guitar, the instrument so emblematic of the rock music style. These and other developments around this time will be discussed in greater detail later. Also around this time, Altan Urag was involved in the production of the movie “Khadak” by directors Peter Brosens and Jessica Woodworth, where they performed the song “Mother Mongolia” in one of the scenes and even played minor roles as outlaws in the end of the film.

The time spent and the experienced acquired working with Sonor Records, as well as the publicity gained from the distribution of the album, was enormously beneficial for Altan Urag (B. Erdenebat et al., IN). However, for whatever reasons, the band did not sign another contract with Sonor Records. Instead, at the end of 2007, Altan Urag signed a one-year sponsorship contract with Khan Bank, Mongolia’s largest banking corporation, worth approximately 500 million MNT. This sponsorship provided Altan Urag the means to afford a private rehearsal space, funds for recording and producing new albums, and the equivalent of a year’s salary for each band member to allow them to continue to focus exclusively on writing and performing music. In return, Altan Urag would play at various Khan Bank-hosted events and acknowledge Khan Bank as a sponsor at
live performances and on album packages (Ts. Oyuntsetseg, IN). In 2008, Altan Urag received an extension to the contract for another year, providing them funding through 2009.

During this time, from 2008 up to and through 2010, Altan Urag independently recorded and produced no less than five albums: Blood, Hypnotism, Once Upon a Time in Mongolia, Mongol, and Nation. Mongol is actually a soundtrack album (though not the official soundtrack) from Altan Urag’s collaboration with Tuomas Kantelinen for the 2007 movie “Mongol;” the rest are each studio albums which experiment with different musical styles and are even given different genre-based subtitles such as “Contemporary Album” (Hypnotism) and “Ethnic Album” (Once Upon a Time in Mongolia). These albums will also be discussed in greater detail later. Also during this time, Altan Urag gained greater performance experience, performing both locally and at international music festivals in Japan, China, and even the United States (Ts. Enkhchimeg, IN).

Driving all of this production and live performance is Altan Urag’s stated goal to “promote Mongolian culture to the world and to introduce traditional music to the young people of their country” (Altan Urag’s website). The band also has the desire to create “something new,” to make music that has not been heard before (B. Erdenebat et al., IN). To accomplish both of these goals, Altan Urag sought to blend the traditional Mongolian music that they were all taught in college with the Western musical style of hard rock that they, and the younger generation of urban Mongolians, were familiar with. We will now begin our
analysis of Altan Urag’s music and presentation in various media, examining in detail how traditional Mongolian and Western elements are mixed.

**Structural Analysis: “Blue Mark” and “Mother Mongolia”**

We will begin with the music itself by examining excerpts from two songs from the album *Made in Altan Urag*: “Blue Mark” and “Mother Mongolia.” These songs were chosen because they are highly representative of Altan Urag’s “folk rock” style and because they are two of Altan Urag’s most popular songs. Altan Urag always plays these two songs at every one of its local performances, and they are even featured in the movies “Mongol” and “Khadak” respectively. The following transcriptions were done by ear and are taken from the album versions of these songs (there are slight variations in live performance). These transcriptions are simplified abstractions and do not account for every sonic detail, but are sufficient for the present purposes of this paper.

Let us first consider the song “Blue Mark.” Before delving into melodic details, we can note from the outset that this song is performed on traditional instruments (morin khuur, ikh khuur, yochin, bishguur) without the use of any electronic distortion. The sound may then be described as being very traditional, except for the use of the rock drum set. This is a big exception of course; for any listener familiar with western rock, pop, or jazz (which certainly includes younger urban Mongolians), the sound of the drum set will immediately evoke associations with these genres. Thus in terms of instrumentation and sound we can already see a combination of “folk” with “rock.” We can further explore this
by examining the melodic, rhythmic, and structural characteristics of “Blue Mark.”

The following figure is the yochin part for the chorus, which also introduces the song:

The “x2” at the end of the bar indicates the entire figure is repeated twice in order to form one 8-bar phrase grouping. After one of these phrase groupings to introduce the song, the chorus melody is introduced on the bishguur:

This melody coincides with the yochin figure above in terms of length – each are repeated twice in order to form one 8-bar phrase grouping. This melodic line is introduced on the bishguur, but on subsequent performances of the chorus the line is sung instead with the bishguur accompanying at the end of the song.

From these two figures we can see that the chorus is set in the key of F minor. However, notice that while the yochin part has a steady presence of the note F, creating a strong grounding in the tonic (the “home” note or first note in the scale), the chorus melody strongly emphasizes C, the dominant (the fifth note of the scale). Thus there is a steady sense of the open fifth (F – C) in the chorus which is most noticeable in the final bar of the figures above, where the melody
ends on C and the yochin plays the notes F and C. The open fifth is a prominent interval in rock music, and its presence here is part of this song’s rock sound.

As well, we can see that only six of the seven notes of the F minor scale are used in these figures, namely [F, Ab, Bb, C, Db, Eb]. This collection of pitches can be viewed as a possible F pentatonic scale, [F, Ab, Bb, C, Eb] with the addition of the pitch Db, the minor sixth in the F minor scale. This possible F pentatonic scale, [F, Ab, Bb, C, Eb] is suggested in the chorus melody by the steady presence of C, the dominant, in combination with the strong motion towards and around C by notes in this pentatonic scale – motions which are strongly reminiscent of the melodic phrasing in many traditional Mongolian short songs (which always use pentatonic scales). The additional pitch, Db, can be seen as a passing note in the descent from Eb to C, but its close proximity to C (one half-step away) and placement in the melody are very reminiscent of its use in Western melodic phrasing. Thus we can see hints of the combination of traditional and Western in the melodic phrasing and pitch collection as well.

Let us now briefly examine the verse melody of “Blue Mark”:

Notice here that this figure, as I have transcribed it, is repeated six times. This does not add up to one 8-bar phrase grouping, but instead 12 bars, or 1.5 8-bar phrase groupings. This shall be remarked upon shortly.

This verse melody is sung by P. Oyunbileg (a.k.a. “Oyunaa”) in a style of hoomii and is also played by the yochin and the morin khuur. There is a strong,
almost overwhelming, presence of C in this melody, even more so than in the chorus melody. In fact, there is only one F in this entire two-bar figure. In the verse sections then the F minor tonality is seriously challenged, with C sounding more like an alternative tonic. The surrounding pitches of Bb and Db which embellish and emphasize the C augment this tonal ambiguity. Additionally, the use of pitches a whole step below and a half step above the perceived tonic is a common melodic structure in “harder” styles of rock, especially metal. This association is reinforced by Oyunaa’s hoomii vocal style which is like a declamatory growl, similar in sound to the growling vocal style found in death metal. This vocal style is still, of course, a type of traditional hoomii.

Though these melodic elements are all present in the song, the greatest elements of the rock style are found in its rhythm and structure. The following is a structural map of “Blue Mark,” with type of section, primary instrumentation, duration in terms of number of 8-bar phrase groups (abbreviated as pgs), and temporal location in the track:
### Section Type | Instrumentation | PG Length | Time
---|---|---|---
Intro [Chorus]) | yochin, bishguur | 2 pgs | (0:00 – 0:30)

Verse 1) | hoomii verse x3 | 1.5 pgs | (0:30 – 0:52)

Chorus) | singing x1 | 1 pg | (0:52 – 1:06)

Verse 2) | hoomii verse x3 | 1.5 pgs | (1:06 – 1:28)

Chorus) | singing x1 | 1 pg | (1:28 – 1:42)

Break) | instr. Break | 1 pg | (1:42 – 1:56)

Solo [Chorus]) | bishguur | 2 pgs | (1:56 – 2:25)

Verse 3) | hoomii verse x3 | 1.5 pgs | (2:25 – 2:46)

Chorus) | singing, bishguur | 2 pgs | (2:46 – end)

As we can see, the track can be divided into two main musical sections of verse and chorus. The terms “verse” and chorus” were chosen because these sections function as verses and choruses in typical rock-pop fashion: during the verses Oyunaa sings all of the lyrics of the song, while chorus sections follow verse sections with a catchy melody. There is even a break section, with rhythmic and melodic material not found elsewhere in the song, which leads directly into a solo section where the bishguur improvises a melodic line over the chorus melody in the yochin and morin khuur, much like a standard guitar solo section in rock music. Furthermore, these sections are divided into phrase groups 8 bars in length, a typical phrase grouping length in rock, pop, and blues. The exceptions are the verse sections, which are instead 12 bars in length (or 1.5 phrase groups). This is a common phrase group length in blues as well (“Twelve-bar blues”), and its mix
with 8-bar phrase groupings is interesting. It is also interesting to note that during these verse sections, 8-bar structures are marked in the music with a crash cymbal hit in the drum set and the entrance of some minor electronic, ambient sound effects.

Finally, perhaps the most sonically obvious characteristic of rock music present in “Blue Mark” is the steady and driving rhythmic pulse. This can be seen in the yochin chorus figure, which consists entirely of steady eighth notes. It is most apparent in the drums, however (not transcribed). Throughout the song, except for the Break section, the drums provide a steady beat in 4/4 time, with a bass kick on beats 1 and 3 and snare hits on 2 and 4 of each measure. This pattern is often called a “backbeat,” and is a staple of rock music. As soon as the drums give four beats on the hi-hat to introduce the song and subsequently launch into the backbeat pattern, any listener at all familiar with western rock and pop musical styles is likely to identify this song as a kind of rock song.

Let us now just briefly examine excerpts from the song “Mother Mongolia,” which Erka claimed was one of the band’s favorite songs to play because it contains “many different rhythmic and melodic styles” (B. Erdenebat et al., IN). The following is the main yochin part throughout the song:
As in “Blue Mark,” we see a definite key of F minor and an 8-bar phrase grouping. The meter is different though – whereas “Blue Mark” was in 4/4 meter, “Mother Mongolia” is in 6/8 meter, meaning the pulse of the song has a triple (“1-2-3”) feel instead of a duple feel (“1 – and – 2 – and”). The drums (not transcribed) play another backbeat pattern with the bass kick falling on beat 1 and the snare falling on beat 4 (“ONE-two-three-FOUR-five-six”). After one repetition of this figure, one morin khuur enters playing the following:

As in “Blue Mark,” there is a strong sense of beat and strong rhythmic pulse in this song as the morin khuur duplicates the yochin’s driving rhythmic pattern. Furthermore, the morin khuur here plays many open fifths, just as a guitar would play many open fifths in rock music. The morin khuur here also suggests a harmonic structure, creating a movement from the minor tonic (F minor) in bars 1 – 4 to the minor subdominant (Bb minor) in bars 5 – 6 and then back to tonic in bars 7 – 8. This harmonic structure is depicted below, where ‘i’ indicates the
minor tonic of F minor and ‘iv’ indicates the minor subdominant of Bb minor:

This harmonic structure is confirmed when the solo morin khuur enters after another 8-bar phrase playing the following:

The Bb at the beginning of the fifth bar confirms the harmonic movement to Bb minor, and the C at the beginning of the seventh bar the move back to F minor. This harmonic structure is something we did not see so clearly in “Blue Mark,” and is a distinctly western musical element. Also, notice that the morin khuur’s solo melody strongly emphasizes the pitch of C with frequent ascending motions from Bb below and with descending motions from Db above – just as in the chorus melody of “Blue Mark.” This melody also contains the same characteristics of traditional pentatonic pitch collections and Western minor sixth emphasis that was discussed regarding “Blue Mark.”
While “Mother Mongolia” and “Blue Mark” have many melodic and rhythmic similarities, there are interesting differences in terms of overall structure. The following is a structural map of “Mother Mongolia”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section Type</th>
<th>Instrumentation</th>
<th>PG Length</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro)</td>
<td>yochin, morin khuur</td>
<td>2 pgs</td>
<td>(0:00 – 0:46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody 1a)</td>
<td>solo morin khuur</td>
<td>2 pgs</td>
<td>(0:46 – 1:09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody 1b)</td>
<td>solo mk + bishguur</td>
<td>2 pgs</td>
<td>(1:09 – 1:31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break)</td>
<td>yochin, long song</td>
<td>free time</td>
<td>(1:31 – 2:28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge [2a])</td>
<td>hoomii</td>
<td>2 pgs</td>
<td>(2:28 – 2:51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody 2b)</td>
<td>bishguur</td>
<td>2 pgs</td>
<td>(2:51 – end)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike “Blue Mark,” “Mother Mongolia” cannot be said to have a verse-chorus structure, as there is no strophic text or lyrics. Instead, I have labeled the sections by what type of melody is present. Sections “Melody 1a” and “Melody 1b” have the same melody present, but I have distinguished them by the instruments performing that melody. Sections “Bridge [2a]” and “Melody 2b” contain the same melody, which is different from that of the previous sections (and which is not transcribed). Nevertheless, the 8-bar phrase grouping is still the fundamental structural building block of the song, as can be seen above.

The exception to this is the Break section. While this section has the same driving pulse as the rest of the song (the yochin simply repeats the eighth-note, four-sixteenth-notes rhythmic figure over and over again), there is no sense of
overall phrase structure as the drums drop out. Instead, the structure becomes “free” as Erka enters singing long song. Though this free-time section conflicts with the phrase-group structure of the rest of the song, it accommodates the long song performance, as long song is traditionally performed in free time without any strong sense of rhythm, much less structure (Pegg, 45). Thus in the middle of a song which follows a fairly conventional rock song structure based on 8-bar phrase groupings is a temporal expression of traditional long song performance, and we can see a structural combination of traditional and western musical elements.

Other Musical Styles

The previous songs were chosen as examples of Altan Urag’s “folk rock” style. This style defines the band: they label themselves as a folk rock band on their albums and on their website, and for live performances they play their folk rock repertoire. However, since the release of Made in Altan Urag, Altan Urag has experimented with other musical genres on subsequent albums, combining traditional Mongolian music with various modern styles. We will now briefly discuss three of these albums.

In 2008, Altan Urag recorded two albums, one of which, entitled Blood, continues in the vein of “folk rock” established in Made in Altan Urag. The other album, Hypnotism, is very different: subtitled as “Contemporary Album,” it is a bold and venturous exploration of contemporary classical music styles and elements. Some tracks like “Unsteady” and “The Foreign Khan” come directly
from their first album *Foal's Been Born*, while others like “Drumming” are new and original. The songs on *Hypnotism* can all be described as being very experimental and perhaps as more “abstract” in that their message and form are not simple. Instrumentation on these tracks often goes beyond the band’s typical seven-piece setup, including full orchestration, as in “The Foreign Khan,” or extensive use of percussion not normally associated with rock or classical music, as in “Drumming.” Some songs make use of extended playing techniques and bizarre sounds, like “Unsteady.”

Perhaps the most interesting song with regards to our present purposes is “Kherulen River.” This song is performed by H. Erdenetsetseg (a.k.a. “Erka”) as an unaccompanied long song with additional reverb effect in the recording. In a sense, this could be called very traditional: Mongolians nomads would often sing long songs unaccompanied while simply going about their daily routine and carrying out mundane tasks (Pegg, 47). However, given the context of this song as an audio recording on a CD subtitled “Contemporary Album” and preceded by an intro track consisting of 64 seconds of silence, and the deliberate digital alteration of the sound, the listener hears “Kherulen River” not so much as a traditional song but as a contemporary work of high art. Or rather, the listener hears “Kherulen River,” as well as the rest of the album, as a traditional art form being abstracted and elevated to the arena of reflective high art. Thus *Hypnotism* both mixes elements of traditional music with modern music and encourages a new perspective on traditional music.
The second album we will discuss is *Once Upon a Time in Mongolia*, recorded in 2010. This album is subtitled “Ethnic Album.” “Ethnic music” is not a well-defined or insightful label for a musical genre or style, and it is not to be confused with “folk” music (Altan Urag also has a “folk” album, *Nation*, which will be discussed next). Its vagueness does, however, adequately capture the stylistic eclecticism of the album which contains a folk rock song, “Temuujin;” a sort of ethno-dance fusion (for lack of a better term) song, “Four Kinds of Khoomei Singing;” two odd songs featuring accordion, guitar, and singing in French in addition to morin khuur called simply “Version I” and “Version II;” and a very poppy song called “Kadarchy Kys,” among others. Coinciding with this album’s experimentation with many different musical styles is its experimentation with instrumentation. The drum set is used in only three songs, while the others all make great use of various percussion and hand drums; acoustic guitar is prominent in “Version I” and “Whistling;” and even beat-boxing is used, courtesy of collaborating artists I Project, in “Four Kinds of Khoomei Singing.” However, there is also extensive use of traditional instruments beyond those used on the folk rock albums *Made in Altan Urag* and *Blood*, such as the mouth harp in several tracks and the limbe (flute) in “Whistling.” One song, “Tatar Tatлага,” utilizes and explores a specific type of playing technique for the morin khuur according to the album cover.

This whole album is focused primarily on exploring the sounds of different traditional instruments, including non-Monglian instruments (e.g. acoustic guitar and accordion). As well, digital effects and other kinds of studio
magic are audibly apparent, but there is no use of electric distortion on morin 
khuurs or yochin as in the folk rock albums. Finally, these “ethnic” sounds are 
blended together in very non-traditional, modern song styles and forms; one need 
look no further than “Four Kinds of Khoomei Singing.” The idea in *Once Upon a 
Time in Mongolia*, then, is to expand upon the kind of stylistic exploration found 
in the folk rock albums by not only blending traditional sounds and styles with 
modern sounds in a verse-chorus format, but also by blending different kinds of 
traditional sounds together that do not, traditionally, go together.

Finally, we will examine the album *Nation*, also recorded in 2010 and 
subtitled “Folk Album.” Whereas *Hypnotism* and *Once Upon a Time in Mongolia* 
both explicitly sought to combine the traditional with the modern, *Nation* is much 
more outwardly traditional, albeit in a very classicized sense of “traditional.” This 
is evident in tracks like “Kherulen River” and “Farewell” which feature long song 
and short song accompanied by morin khuur, respectively – a traditional 
performance arrangement (Pegg, 44).

Interestingly, this album features two songs which appear on other albums 
and which we have already discussed: “Kherulen River” and “Four Kinds of 
Khoomei Singing.” Or rather, *Nation* features alternate versions of these songs, 
for they arranged and performed differently in order to fit the album’s stated 
“folk” aesthetic. Whereas *Hypnotism*’s version of “Kherulen River” featured 
unaccompanied and digitally augmented long song, *Nation*’s version features 
“raw” long song accompanied by solo morin khuur. Likewise, while “Four Kinds 
of Khoomei Singing” on *Once Upon a Time in Mongolia* is a bold and intriguing
dance fusion song, on Nation it is simply four different styles of hoomii singing accompanied by morin khuur. By using the same songs with different arrangements on multiple albums, Altan Urag encourages the listener to pay attention not merely to the song, but also to focus explicitly on the difference in style, sound, and aesthetic that each album strives toward.

It would be uncharitable to Altan Urag’s artistic intentions to simply view Nation as a record of strictly traditional music. Nation contains several tracks, like “The Light” and “Mirage of Far Land,” which are distinctly modern in style and composition, even using some extended techniques on the yochin. More subtle elements of deliberate modernity can be found in other songs as well, such as in the harmonies of the accompanying morin khuurs in “Farewell.” Nation as an album, then, is perhaps more outwardly traditional than other albums, but this is only because it seeks to combine elements of traditional music with elements of modern music in a traditional musical medium, a goal that is line with the band’s stated goal of encouraging appreciation of traditional Mongolian music by younger urban Mongolians.

Album Packaging

Having discussed these albums with regard to auditory elements, let us now consider the visual elements of these albums’ packaging. We will begin with Made in Altan Urag, the album that marks a major point in Altan Urag’s history as a band, where it consolidated its image and sound as a folk rock band. As mentioned earlier, just before this album’s production Altan Urag acquired two
new, custom morin khuurs that boasted the head of the monster Alien of Western sci-fi – horror lore in place of a horse’s head. A close-up image of the “monster-headed fiddle,” to use the term of Professor B. Tsetsentsolmon from the Mongolian National University, and its Alien head makes up the cover for Made in Altan Urag. It is a bold statement of the band’s artistic intent; the monster-headed fiddle is a symbol of the deliberate blending of Mongolian tradition with modern, global popular culture (B. Tsetsentsolmon). Furthermore, the frightening and grotesque nature of the Alien-head and the black color of the instrument evoke associations with a dark, aggressive style of rock or metal. Thus the morin khuur, thought of as a traditional Mongolian folk instrument, is transformed into a new folk rock instrument, and its image on the cover of Made in Altan Urag proclaims the album’s aggressive folk rock sound. More importantly, as Altan Urag’s breakout, definitive album, it defines the band’s overall artistic goals.

Subsequent albums each have individual stylistic goals, and these are reflected in the albums’ respective covers. Blood, the “Folk Rock Album,” features two of the band members dressed in all black, wearing black T-shirts and some kind of black masks which completely cover all facial features, and holding morin khuurs. One of them is seated and playing while the other holds the fiddle in one hand and the bow like a spear while facing the other player. The image is obviously aggressive and evokes the aggressive and dark images associated with rock and metal music. 

Hypnotism, the “Contemporary Album,” instead features black and white stripes with images of each band member’s eyes staggered in the white stripes. In
contrast to *Blood*, this cover is not aggressive or dark but rather abstract, challenging, and even piercingly reflective as the eyes stare straight at the viewer. Here there are no images or depictions of tradition. The presence of only human eyes with no accompanying bodily or facial features creates a sense of impersonality and detachment from the physical, emphasizing instead the abstract. This denial of traditional images and emphasis on the abstract fits the ideas of modernity in music and thus represents the “contemporary” nature of the album.

*Once Upon a Time* features a picture of the band members, dressed casually, holding up and looking up through the circular wooden structure that forms the structural centerpiece of a Mongolian ger, or felt tent home. This is a particularly interesting image, as the band members are all dressed casually in modern fashion, clearly of the modern and urbanized age in Mongolia. Nonetheless, they look up through the central structure of a ger, symbolizing the constant looking to the past and to traditions. Thus this image adequately captures the distinctly modern sound combination and arrangement of the songs which are composed at their base of traditional instruments and sounds.

*Nation* does not feature the band members or any human beings at all on its cover. Instead, it features only writing in the traditional Mongol Script in red ink on a brown, parchment-like surface. The use of Mongol Script very strongly conveys the sense of nationality that is so present in this album’s “folk” music. Additionally, the lack of any human presence emphasizes a sense of collective, national identity over individual identity. This in turn emphasizes the role of
tradition as providing a framework within which to build this national identity in modern times.

The album package for Nation is noteworthy for its inclusion of not a lyric booklet, but a booklet containing images from the Khan Bank (their primary sponsor at the time of this album’s production) Contemporary Art Collection. This is interesting not only because it represents a combination of different artistic mediums in one package, but also because it presents the new (contemporary visual art) with the old (traditional “folk” music). Thus the packaging for the album reinforces the artistic goals of the album’s music.

In general, Altan Urag’s albums all contain song titles on the back cover in both Mongolian and English. Interestingly, only the “folk rock” albums contain lyric booklets, and only Made in Altan Urag contains English translations of the lyrics. Perhaps this is because the band places priority on its folk rock music and does not think it necessary for lyrics to be included in its other albums, wanting instead to emphasize its rock music and allow fans to become familiar with that music. Regardless, the listing of song titles in English as well as Mongolian, a practice on albums of strictly “traditional” music by other musicians as well, is evidence of the band’s concern for foreign audiences in addition to its Mongolian audience. Indeed, the album titles and subtitles on the covers are written only in English; a consequence perhaps of the prevalence of English in the global music industry and indicative of Altan Urag’s presence in this industry as it targets the younger generations of Mongolians who are familiar with the music produced by it.
Overall, by producing albums with clearly stated stylistic mediums and goals, Altan Urag demonstrates both its high level of musicianship and its dedication to being innovative, exploring different combinations of traditional Mongolian musical elements with various modern musical elements. It also demonstrates the versatility of Mongolian traditional instruments and playing styles, another of the band’s goals (B. Erdenebat et al., IN). Furthermore, the combination of traditional with modern that results from this versatility and innovation is captured visually in the album covers and overall packaging. Having considered Altan Urag’s discography, let us now examine their live performances.

*Live Performance*

In the month of November, 2011, Altan Urag performed five nights every week. Each week I was able to attend four of these weekly performances. On Monday and Tuesday nights at 8:00pm they would perform at Mongolian’s restaurant in the Sansar district of Ulaanbaatar, and on Sunday and Thursday nights at 9:30pm at Ikh Mongol pub and restaurant. The following observations are drawn from my notes taken at these concerts.

Regarding song choice, Altan Urag always played songs in the folk rock style, taken from the albums *Made in Altan Urag* and *Blood*. Their sets were short, typically consisting of only five songs (one time they played six). Additionally, 2 of these 5 songs were always “Mother Mongolia,” which they always opened the show with, and “Blue Mark.” The other songs varied and were rotated, though at Ikh Mongol they always performed “RaaKH II.” They even
occasionally performed a new song not yet recorded on any album. Every member of the band was always in attendance with the exception of the long song singer, Erka, who only performed at a few of the shows I attended, always at Ikh Mongol. Her presence affected the choice of songs for the set: if she were there, they would play a new song which is a folk rock version of “Farewell” from the album Nation. Altan Urag likely sticks only to folk rock repertoire in live performance because it is easier to perform live (as it does not require any additional orchestral instruments or unconventional percussion), is more exciting for live performance, and most importantly because it is the identity that Altan Urag has built over the years since their formation. It is the most accessible, most exciting, and most well-received mixture of traditional and modern popular music.

The live performance of their songs were more often than not consistent with the album versions of the songs. In general they played faster than on the album versions, especially on “Blue Mark” and “RaaKH II.” These two songs also had other minor differences. In the chorus of “Blue Mark” there was often hoomii singing instead of just conventional singing as on the album, and “RaaKH II” featured much more lively and impressive drumming than the album version. These differences can be attributed to the band’s extensive experience in playing them live and the subsequent desire to add interest and variety to their performance, for both the audience and their own sakes.

In all performances Altan Urag wore the same dress consisting of black tunics with silver embroidery in a common pattern in traditional Mongolian dress and blue jeans (occasionally the drummer would simply wear a black Altan Urag
T-shirt). This dress is interesting, for as far as I can tell it is not actually authentic Mongolian traditional dress. Instead, its silver embroidery patterns evoke images of traditional dress while it is actually modern with a color scheme that evokes images of darkness associated with rock and metal. Thus Altan Urag’s costume, while modern through and through, yet evokes images of traditional dress, creating a new picture of tradition and encouraging the audience to hear the music the same way that they see the dress.

The instrumentation has already been addressed, but the physical arrangement of the musicians on stage is also noteworthy. Whereas bands like Khusugtun, who describe themselves as more a traditionally focused band on their website, tend to sit ordered in a straight line, Altan Urag arranges themselves much more like a conventional rock band with the drums at center and backstage, the ikh khuur (bass) and bishguur next to the drums, the two morin khuurs (guitars) front stage on each side, and the yochin (lead singer) front stage and center. The morin khuurs arrangement is much like that of rhythm guitar and lead guitar in a rock band, as one morin khuur sometimes uses electric distortion for leads and solos (lead guitar) while the other remains undistorted and often plays more accompaniment-style parts (rhythm guitar).

Both venues where I attended performances, Mongolian’s and Ikh Mongol, were relatively large and somewhat upscale. Ikh Mongol had a much greater pub atmosphere about it, created by the large bar nearby and the large alehouse-style wooden tables which strangers often shared. Mongolian’s in contrast was more of a restaurant with separated tables capable of seating groups
of 4 and 2. Additionally, whereas the stage at Ikh Mongol was situated directly in front of rows of large wooden tables, the stage at Mongolian’s, though larger, was oddly placed away from most of the seating, facing only a few small tables for two. Unlike many “concert venues” in the United States, which are designed solely for the purpose of musical or theatrical performance, these venues were both restaurants. Therefore the only seating available was seating at a table, and this put Altan Urag (and any other band that would play there) in more of a secondary role, as guest entertainment, rather than in a primary position where everyone present was present with the specific purpose of seeing Altan Urag.

Nevertheless, concerts at both venues were always well-attended and well-received by the audience. Endings of songs were always greeted with appreciative applause, with especially loud applause and cheering coming from tables containing greater numbers of empty liter-sized beer glasses. Audiences seemed to especially enjoy drum solos, electric morin khuur solos, and increases in tempo – all standard fan-favorites of rock music.

More importantly, though, the audience seemed to especially appreciate the more traditional qualities of Altan Urag’s music. Whenever the long song singer, Erka, was present and they performed the new folk rock arrangement of “Farewell,” there were especially loud and enthusiastic responses. One astute Mongolian audience member I spoke to observed that whenever Altan Urag played “more traditional” songs that were not “so rock,” the audience generally appreciated it more. In some sense this seemed plausible; however another Mongolian attending a show at Ikh Mongol said to me that he loved listening to
Altan Urag perform “Blue Mark,” one of their more aggressive-sounding rock songs, because it made him “feel proud to be Mongolian” – so much so that he would get pumped and “just want to yell ‘Fuck you!’” This conversation, as well as others and observations of the crowds led me to the conclusion that Altan Urag’s music is popular and well-received neither strictly because of its traditional elements or because of its rock elements, but precisely because it blends the two so that the traditional and the modern, the old and the new, complement each other in a way that is meaningful and accessible to many contemporary Mongolians.

Other Media

In addition to their albums and live performances, Altan Urag utilizes other media including movies, music videos, and the internet. As previously mentioned, Altan Urag was involved in the production of the movies “Khadak,” directed by Peter Brosens and Jessica Woodworth, and “Mongol,” directed by Sergei Bodrov. In “Khadak,” Altan Urag actually makes an appearance in the film as a band of outlaws. They perform the song “Mother Mongolia” and then play minor roles as bandits assisting in the reclamation of state-seized meat. The entire film is a magical-realist film that focuses on the rapid social change that Mongolia is currently experiencing. Altan Urag’s musical and especially physical presence in this move then places their music and their identity as a band in this context of social change, reinforcing and affirming their place as connectors of the traditional with the modern.
This is in contrast to the movie “Mongol,” where Altan Urag was involved only in parts of the soundtrack. While they collaborated with Tuomas Kantelinen on parts of the score, an arrangement of their song “Blue Mark” appears during a major battle scene and during the end credits. Whereas “Khadak” was an artistic, thoughtful, social commentary, “Mongol” was a high-budget, special-effects driven thriller aimed more at providing entertainment through spectacular and over-the-top fight scenes. In this context, Altan Urag’s music can be seen as a kind of modernized glorification of a romanticized past.

Altan Urag has said that they greatly enjoyed working on the films, as they are major artistic creations (televised interview). This is evident in their many music videos produced to date. They have produced approximately ten music videos, mostly of songs from *Made in Altan Urag* and *Blood*, but also of “A Tale of Old Spirit” from the album *Once Upon a Time in Mongolia*. These music videos sometimes tell stories and sometimes simply feature the band playing a song on an elaborate set. The video for “Blue Mark” fittingly includes video clips from the movie “Mongol.”

One of the most interesting videos however is for the song “Abroad” from *Made in Altan Urag*. Musically this song features hoomii, hand drums, and guitar work by collaborating artist Andrew Colwell in 15/8 meter and in a very dark, modal chord progression. The resulting sound is very dark and intentionally exotic, coinciding with the title “Abroad.” The video features the band, plus Andrew Colwell (a non-Mongolian), playing music while circling an ovoo, a traditional Mongolian religious structure, and paying respect to it. The band is
dressed in their black performance robes, while Andrew is dressed in a typical Western fashion. Thus, there are multiple levels of interaction between the traditional and the modern – between the ovoo and Altan Urag, modern Mongolians who pay tribute to the past in a modernized musical medium, and between Altan Urag and Andrew, a Western foreigner playing a Western instrument who is nonetheless integrated into the music and the overall scene. It is worth noting also that Andrew does not circle the ovoo or perform any sort of ritual regarding the ovoo. Instead, his connection is to the band, again placing Altan Urag and their music in the role of a link or communicator between past and present. As Andrew himself puts it: “My interpretation is that they are all about synthesizing the new with the old, the past with the present, the local with the foreign. Collaborating with me, my presence in the video, engaging the ovoo respectfully with a ‘hybrid’ song is all part of this message and aesthetic” (email correspondence).

Finally, Altan Urag makes use of the internet in promoting themselves and their artistic goals. They have a relatively new website, designed by Baadai (who also developed Khusugtun’s website), that features nifty flash animation, contains biographical information of the band, showcases their sponsors, has links to music videos, and the latest Altan Urag news – all available in both Mongolian and English. The home page is designed like the inside of a ger with an old television set and one of Altan Urag’s signature monster-headed fiddles resting inside. All of Altan Urag’s music videos can be found through the television. Most notable of all is the online “Audio/E-Shop” where users can purchase and download Altan
Urag music online. By offering their music online Altan Urag is specifically catering to a younger, urban generation of Mongolians and is attempting to make their music as accessible as possible.

Along the same lines, Altan Urag also makes use of social networking, like Facebook and MySpace. Altan Urag’s social networking is handled by O. Enhmandah (a.k.a. “Mandi”), a young, tech-savvy Mongolian who has had the job for only about 9 months. Additionally, Mandi is responsible for managing Altan Urag’s band channel on YouTube, where anyone online across the world can view Altan Urag’s music videos and other relevant videos. He works essentially as a volunteer, driven by his intense appreciation for Altan Urag’s music (O. Enhmandah, IN). His recent enlisting by the band shows that Altan Urag has only recently made the move to social networking, but also that it is keenly aware of what methods are most effective for reaching their target audience of young Mongolians. Mandi is central to this, and the story of his getting the job – being offered it via email correspondence – is another example of Altan Urag’s dedication to promoting their art and the traditional music of Mongolia to a new audience.

**Conclusion**

Altan Urag successfully blends traditional music with rock and other Western/modern musical styles in order to share Mongolian culture with the world and in order to inspire new urban generations of Mongolians to appreciate traditional Mongolian music. This blending occurs on audial and visual levels and
in many different mediums: in album music and packaging, in live performance, movies, music videos, and online. The traditional elements are never strictly distinguishable from the non-traditional, because tradition is not a static object – it is constantly reimagined and recreated. By creating their unique style of Mongolian folk rock, Altan Urag has used traditional elements and rock elements to point to a national identity rooted in a perceived past which also openly embraces interaction with the rest of the world. In blending old with new and local with foreign they create new representations of the past that are meaningful and accessible in the present.

“The Mongolian nation of this time
Inherited this motherland.
Blessed with having
The sun, rising in the morning
Born the Mongolian fate, eternal
Inheriting the custom and tradition.”

- from “Blue Mark”
Glossary

Bar – temporal unit in music consisting of a certain number of beats (e.g. 4 beats in 4/4 meter)

Bishguur – traditional Mongolian musical horn, associated with Buddhist ritual

Dominant – the fifth note in a traditional seven-note scale in Western music

Hoomii – traditional Mongolian overtone singing, where a single performer sings one note in his throat and manipulates his moth, tongue, etc. to amplify harmonics and create the effect of singing multiple pitches at once; there are many styles of hoomii involving different techniques and producing different sounds

Half step – a distance in pitch-space equal to the movement from a white key to a subsequent black key on a piano

Harmony – refers to the arrangement of multiple voices sounding simultaneously in Western music

Ikh khuur – traditional Mongolian instrument like a bass version of a morin khuur

Key – a seven-note scale in Western music defined by a particular pitch center or home (e.g. key of F minor indicates the use of an F minor scale and that F is the pitch center)

Long song – traditional Mongolian singing genre that involves a very small amount of text and which emphasizes melismatic ornamentation and large vocal leaps

Melody – the main tune or singing line
**Meter** – rhythmic structure indicating the number of beats in a bar (e.g. 4/4 meter indicates 4 beats as one temporal unit)

**Morin khuur** – traditional Mongolian horse-headed spike fiddle

**Pentatonic scale** – a scale of five notes

**Phrase (grouping)** – a unit of notes which coheres and is identifiable as a unit

**Pitch collection** – a set of pitches not necessarily with the structural qualities of a scale

**Scale** – a set of pitches which has a defined order between pitches and which typically has a pitch center or tonal home (e.g. F minor or F major)

**Short song** – traditional Mongolian singing genre with more text, shorter duration, and simpler melodic organization than long song; strophic in structure

**Subdominant** – the fourth note of a traditional Western scale

**Tonic** – the home pitch of a scale or key

**Whole step** – a distance in pitch-space equal to two half steps

**Yochin** – traditional Mongolian hammered dulcimer
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