

Visual, Zoological Metaphors and 'Urtiin Duu' (Long Song) in Alshaa, Inner Mongolia

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Abstract : This study examines how musicians use visual and zoological metaphors for singing technique and voice quality in a genre of traditional music called urtiin duu ('long song') in Alshaa, Inner Mongolia, China. Previous studies have discussed melodic contour in Mongol music, but little study of the intersection of singing technique, visual and zoological metaphors has yet been undertaken. The purpose of this study is to address this lack by analysing urtiin duu itself, traditional pedagogy and performances, all of which have been inspired and are assessed by reference to nature and mobile pastoral herding practices. This study investigates the visual and zoological metaphors related to urtiin duu especially colour, the shape of the circle and animals in the Mongol community. Urtiin duu singing is associated with certain colours in song texts, in selection of repertoire and in the status of singers. Musicians also use colour to describe timbre. These colours in turn reference worship of nature, religions, and daily practices of most Mongols in Alshaa. Moreover, voice quality and singing technique are often related to the animals not only in song text but also in the approach to breathing and to melodic contour. Additionally, the concept of boronhoi ('the shape of circle'), not only is applied to the melodic contour but also to the voice quality and singing technique. These three factors illustrate the connections among nature, spiritual world and everyday herding life of Mongols. These different connections provide evidence of multi-layered meanings. In contemporary Alshaa, urtiin duu singers received Western musical training from the city and returned to their homelands to perform urtiin duu. In doing so, they are also trying to reconnect with the history, nature and spiritual world in order to achieve their ideal sound. Within a multicultural society, singers negotiate amongst themselves, and with ethnic groups, audiences and government officials. The power of the metaphor therefore assists and reconnects the strength of regional identity and ethnic identity in Alshaa.

Keywords : Alshaa, urtiin duu, visual, zoological metaphors

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