MEMORY OF THE GRASSLAND: HOW TO KEEP SINGING MONGOLIAN GÜR SONGS IN MODERN ORDOS CITY, CHINA

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Abstract

Ordos is a prefecture-level city of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Besides the famous Genghis Khan's Remembrance Place[2] as its significant feature of the past, it also features some gür songs of the Mongolian grassland. Although little known to the world, gür songs have long served in Mongolian rulers' circles from ancient times. Through reconstruction, revitalization, and re-textualization over three millennia, gür songs are regarded to represent the local Mongolian culture, as they are deeply rooted in Hangin (a special district of the city) of Ordos. Crises of a heritage solely built on a single inheritor are emerging: Will the cultural memory of the community decay after the demise of the 'inheritor'? Will there be a memory gap? Does the orally transmitted ritual music preserve the cultural memory of the Mongolian community in the process? How does the century-old music tradition find its connection to Ordos, a city with an urbanization history of less than 20 years? This discussion queries the reconstitution of memory through an ethnography of this Mongolian heritage example in Ordos, expecting it to be a critical inspection for the persistence of the cultural memory of the community.

Keywords

Mongolian traditional music, gür songs, city feeling, cultural memory, urbanization

INTRODUCTION AND APPLIED RESEARCH METHODS

Situated within the northern confines of China and enveloped by the Yellow River, the city of Ordos is a crucial nexus of historical narratives. This geopolitical entity contributes prominently to the overarching cultural and historical tapestry of the region. Its radiance symbolizes not merely its aesthetic value but also its historiographical significance. Ordos is surrounded by the Yellow River on three sides and bordered by the Great Wall to the south. With a history of 70,000 years, Ordos is now considered one of the cradles of human civilization and the provenance of the Yellow River Culture and various northern clans throughout eras. This area is the final resting place of Genghis Khan, the first Khagan of the Mongol Empire in the 13th century. It has a harmonious blend of traditional musical styles, such as the long song, called urtyn duu, and a unique vocal performance known as overtone singing or khöömei, apart from being home to other items, including yurts, loess soils, Yellow River, and generally grassland cultures.

Gür songs, one of the remarkable achievements of the Mongolian Grassland, marked a significant status in the ancient Mongolian palaces as a vital music heritage in the Mongolian culture. Gür songs are deeply embedded in the Mongolian culture, with a rich history of over three millennia. Throughout the river of time, these songs have been evolved, reconstructed, revitalized, and recontextualized to adapt to changing times and maintain their cultural significance. The evolution of gür songs can be traced back to the nomadic lifestyle of the Mongolian people, which is integral to the vibrant songs and dances. Through generations of oral transmission, they have melodies and lyrics adapted to the changing social and political landscape of times. In 2008, they were listed as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage, one of China's strategies

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to preserve and pass on this unique cultural treasure. To ensure its sustainability, this cultural heritage's 'national inheritor' is always appointed officially.

This article aims to exhaustively explore the memory capability of gür songs by examining its historical and contemporary cultural bearers. Within the framework of ethnography, this paper also considers the foreseeable crises of gür-song-production from the personal viewpoints of the authors, such as decline, alteration, misrepresentation, or destruction as the worst case, and illustrates how Ordos City is connected with gür songs as the mediator of preservation and sustainability of this cultural legacy.

In Hangin Banner[3], a region situated within the administrative boundaries of Ordos City, despite encountering inevitable limitations, extensive fieldwork fulfilled data collection utilizing rigorous ethnographic research methods such as auto-ethnographical elements and data interpretation from personal views. This scholarly treatise adheres to a bilingual orthographic standard and incorporates both Mongolian and Chinese scripts. Considering Mongolian scripts being affected by ongoing reforms, Mongolian names were transliterated into English with extraordinary care; nevertheless, a glossary is there to inform about transliterations.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF GÜR SONGS

The term 'gür songs', alternatively known as 'gür duu' or 'guri dao' in Chinese, is derived from Mongolian language. The connotations of the polysemous lexeme 'gür' vary with linguistic paradigms. The word signifies 'nation' or 'state affairs' in Mongolian language (Liu Yanyu [刘彦宇], 2020: 1); in the Sanskrit lexicon, it is equated with 'ancestors' (Chu Gaowa [楚高娃], 2018: 67); in Tibetan, it is interpreted as 'dào qíng' in Chinese pinyin, implying a sense of moral or ethical admonition, which is usually expressed through religious lyrics that are amenable to poetic rendition (Chu Gaowa [楚高娃] 2018: 66). The term 'dao' is another transliteration from Mongolian. In the context of the Chinese linguistic milieu, it denotes 'songs'.[4]

gür songs encapsulate localized musical themes and predominantly circulate in the northern regions of Hangin Banner in Inner Mongolia's Ordos City and specific areas in Mongolia, such as Bayankhongor Province's Garutu [Баянхонгор аймгийн Гаруту] Sum and Saynshand in the East Gobi province. In 2007, gür songs from Hangin Banner in Ordos were inscribed on the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and, a year later, of China. Most Mongolian scholars engaged in extensive research on gür songs concentrate on literature and musicology, generally characterizing gür songs as religious or spiritual music in the Buddhist tradition. A prominent Mongolian scholar Le Khürelbaatar elucidated that gür songs served as pedagogical material for esoteric yoga practices. They may belong to Buddhist ritual chants, which symbiotically integrate music and Tantrism. These chants originated in India and disseminated into Tibetan regions through religious figures, such as Jetsun Milarepa and the Sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso (Le Khürelbaatar, 1998; Chu Gaowa [楚高娃], 2018). The scholar Bayindorj (1997) posited that gür songs were designated by the Mongolian populace of Ordos as songs performed during grand courtly ceremonies, rituals, and matrimonial celebrations. Subsequent scholars hold identical views. This manuscript principally focuses on the analysis and investigation of gür songs manifested within the socio-cultural landscape of Ordos City (Bayindorj, 1997; Chu Gaowa [楚高娃], 2018).

The necessity for reestablishing and reanimating gür songs arose, according to the knowledge gained during fieldwork and analysis, as certain facets of this traditional art form suffered dissolution or fragmentation over time. Academics and musicians have collaboratively engaged in the investigation, documentation, and resurrection of these antiquated songs, ensuring that their intrinsic cultural identity can be preserved while accommodating contemporary scenarios. The

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[3] Hangin Banner is known as 𐰇 in Mongolian or 杭锦旗 in Chinese. It is the name for a wider region.

[4] This term has been transliterated as 'gidi' from Sanskrit, 'gur' from Tibetan, and 'duulal' from Mongolian (Le Khürelbaatar 1998; Chu Gaowa [楚高娃], 2018).

recontextualization of gür songs enables them to flourish from local celebrations to international performances. With the aid of their versatile nature, these songs appeal to a wider audience while being associated with their distinctive Mongolian features in the ears of the listeners.

The Hangin Banner of Ordos, where the Mausoleum of Genghis Khan is located, plays a pivotal role in the development and preservation of gür songs. In 1633, Ligden Khutugtu Khan (Lindan Han) was defeated by the Jurchen (former Jin) people. Then, he led 100,000 people of the Chakhar clan to retreat to Qinghai. During the journey, they passed through the Hangin Banner of Ordos. The Khagan left behind approximately 1000 Chakhar households to settle down in this region. These Chakhar people were responsible for not only guarding the Khan's mausoleum but also carrying on the tradition of performing gür songs during annual and regular ceremonies. Consequently, the Hangin Banner of Ordos is regarded as the 'home' of gür songs, where this ancient art form took root and thrived (Shi Yongqing [史永清], 2017: 77).

The decline of gür songs partly resulted from the repressive policies enforced on the Mongolian populace during the Qing Dynasty. Due to the Mongolian people's perceivable strength, their growth and development were curtailed by the Qing government through multiple measures, including prohibiting the Mongolians from learning Han Chinese culture and etiquette, utilizing Han Chinese characters and names, and the intermarriage between the two ethnic groups. These restrictions enormously impeded the progress and preservation of Mongolian culture and aggravated its stagnation. Additionally, the regime of the Qing Dynasty mandated that families with five sons should send two or three boys to officially constructed lamaseries to become Buddhist monks. It controlled and hindered the growth of the Mongolian population, thus facilitating the Qing Dynasty's domination over the Mongolians. These policies constrained the Mongolian people's economic and cultural progress and accelerated the decline of gür songs accordingly. To sum up, as far as the authors are aware of the long-lasting tendencies, the restrictive policies imposed by the Qing Dynasty on Mongolians constituted a vital factor in the decline of gür songs.

The decline of gür songs can also be attributed to the Cultural Revolution in China from 1966 to 1976, a tumultuous era that significantly impacted every aspect of life. During this decade, various cultural practices, particularly among ethnic minorities like the Mongolians, were restricted. For example, traditional Mongolian wedding ceremonies were required to comply with the Han Chinese customs and were notably simplified. Moreover, the use of Mongolian scripts and literature in households was curtailed (compare the terms of use in the Annex), leading to the suppression of gür songs. This period exerts a profound effect not just on diminishing the prominence of gür songs but also degrading the traditional high culture in the country.

türleg →	main song 1 →	türleg →	main song 2 →	türleg →	main song 3

Figure 1: The form and an example of türleg in a gür song. Notation transcribed by Liu Yanyu [刘彦宇] (2019). The lyrics *aya han sai, wai dun sai* generally mean 'may you always be in peace and happiness'.

Gür songs are unaccompanied choral music. At the beginning of a feast, male singers perform the türleg first, a type of prelude. 'Türleg' in Mongolian has three meanings: 'insertion' or 'intrusion'; 'derivation'; and 'transition' (Su Nihan [苏尼罕], 2019: 24). Therefore, türleg connects one song to the next song as a bridge. It has a derivative structure of the preceding song while laying a foundation for the following. In comparison to the main songs, the türleg is subordinate, serving as a temporary insert between the songs. After

the türleg, three main songs will be performed: 'Chaozheng Dasha' (praising the court's policies), 'Tianma Ju' (celebrating fine horses), and 'Gao Gao de Jimiliang' (expressing gratitude to parents). The türleg in gür songs is fixed, necessitating a chorus by male singers. The following first main song is sung in unison by all participants. This illustrates the format of gür Song performance, representing its unique and highly structured nature. Different regions perform türlegs diversely. For instance, in the Xilingol area, türleg is performed after each main song. However, in gür Songs, türleg has a fixed structure and most of the time is sung by a single male or the male choir before the first main song is performed in chorus. The format of an example involving türleg is shown in Figure 1. For more information, the study of He Yu's writings is recommended (He Yu [贺宇], 2015a, 2015b, 2018, 2019).

CHALLENGES IN GÜR SONG SURVIVAL

Situated in the heart of China, Ordos's urbanization steamrolls forward at an unprecedented pace. As the vibrant cultural phenomenon in Ordos, gür songs have extended their niche from the grassroots as local ethnic minority folklores on stages to a definitive emblem of the region's cultural identity. Subsequently, the city's swift urban growth and socioeconomic transformation has brought gür songs to undergo a dramatic transformation. However, this journey of transition is far from seamless. The accelerated evolution that bolsters the prominence of gür songs in the public consciousness also precipitates a myriad of challenges that threaten the preservation and continuation of this cherished art form.

Intangible cultural heritage should be handed down from generation to generation and centers on people, which is possibly a crucial link in the chain of cultural sustainability. Since 2008 in China, the process of 'inheritance' bears endorsement of the government either in the provincial or on the state level[5]. In this 'inheritance' system for a listed item of intangible cultural heritage, an 'inheritor' whose job is to educate younger generations with the designated tradition is therefore appointed and engaged officially (Zhang Boyu [张伯瑜], Yao Hui [姚慧] & Huib Schippers, 2015). Succession necessitates careful selection of individuals who comprehend the essence and purpose of intangible cultures. The paramount role of 'inheritors' should be underlined in this process. However, the absence of willing and able 'inheritors' endangers cultural traditions, putting the tradition at risk of extinction. Moreover, the preservation of gür songs faces challenges due to traces of not appropriate transmission methods and a scarcity of skilled successors. First, the chosen method of transmission significantly impacts the effectiveness of cultural preservation. Only with appropriate methods can the 'inheritance' process yield optimal results. Conversely, an ill-suited method can lead to numerous obstacles and endanger the survival. gür songs, as an acknowledged form of court music of the Mongolians, have historical limitations. The traditional transmission of master–apprentice by oral instruction and imitation lacks diversity and innovation, contributing to the decline in following successors.

Second, from the perspective of 'inheritors', the development of intangible cultural heritages is a complex task that demands a breakthrough in artistic barriers to align closely with contemporary life other than passive transmission. However, many 'inheritors' of gür songs are typically preoccupied with learning the form, features, and inner meaning of the cultural heritage to remain somewhat conservative without creating a link to modernity. Some 'inheritors' may solely pass on the 'techniques' without comprehending and conveying the underlying 'spirit'. Limited by their recognition, they usually fail to adapt to the aesthetic demands of contemporary audiences in immediate surroundings and struggle to attract wider engagement. In the current era,

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[5] The Regulations for the Identification and Management of National Representative Inheritors of Intangible Cultural Heritage have been approved and implemented since March 1, 2020. The provisional regulations previously issued by the Ministry of Culture on May 14, 2008, are hereby repealed (The State Council of the People's Republic of China 2019). As of September 6, 2021, the Regulations for the Identification and Management of Regional Representative Inheritors of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region have been approved by the Party Committee of the Office of Culture and Tourism of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region on February 22, 2021, and are now implemented (The People's Government of Kangbashi District in Ordos City, 2023).

especially in the context of globalized economic integration, cultures of otherness are constantly introduced into China. Correspondingly, traditional intangible cultural items without innovative capacity will inevitably be marginalized or even eliminated from the marketplace of cultural commodities. Such culture requires adaptability and relevance to survive and maintain their position on the narratives of history.

The inherent uncertainty in orally transmitted music poses specific challenges to the performance of gür songs. Although these traditional Mongolian folk songs were handed down through generations orally, each song in performance, whether by the same individual or different persons, narrates the same story yet projects a new creative interpretation. The continuous performance of these songs exists and includes a repetitive cycle of creation and re-creation. On one hand, this fosters the dynamism and vitality of gür songs. On the other hand, it can lead to variations during transmission that makes the originating intention diminishing. Striking a delicate balance between the original essence of the current songs and encouraging artistic innovation is crucial for this oral transmission.
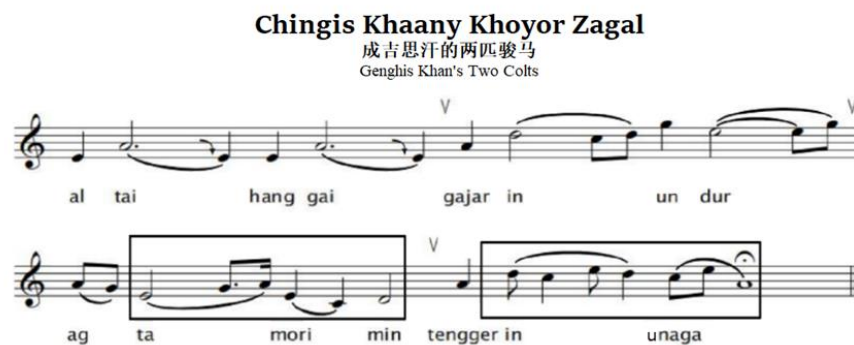

Figure 2: Excerpt from the performance of 'Genghis Khan's Two Colts' in the 1980s. Notation transcribed by Liu Yanyu [刘彦宇] (2020).

The song *Genghis Khan's Two Colts* was first performed in 1984 by Surifu, Yirenfu, Chaganqiqige, Wulenmiduge, and Erjehosang. The currently prevalent version is performed by Balaji and Serijihorile. The song vividly portrays the sacred figure of Genghis Khan and his loyal equines.

There are two versions of that song existent through social media impact. They have the same title and first melodic lines. The second line of the melody presents a significant divergence as highlighted in two boxes shown in the lower line. Moreover, the biggest difference lies in the lyrics. The depiction in the 1984 version can be roughly translated as 'at the top of the Altai mountains, there are divinely gifted colts', while the currently circulating version portrays 'the holy lord's two fine horses, how good it would be if the little colts didn't leave'. Comparing similarities in the melody, musical framework, and tonality, one can clearly indicate that the two versions belong to the same song. It is still unknown how long the performing practitioners took to re-create the second version that is newer and currently popularized, but this case exemplifies the dynamic nature of oral tradition and the intriguing modifications that occurred in persistent reinterpretation and transmission.

URBANIZATION OF ORDOS CITY

Ordos City, representing a 'conglomeration of palaces' in Mongolian, has a storied history dating back to 221 BCE, when Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of a unified China, established administrative districts in its present vicinity. Subsequent epochs saw further geographical reorganization.[6] The current economic boom of the city is largely fueled by its most abundant

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6   This city was formerly known as Yikezhao League since the Qing Dynasty regime. In 1907, the Qing government established the Dongsheng Hall in the eastern part of Ordos. On December 28, 1949, after the establishment of the People's

natural resources. Although Ordos is renowned for its cashmere garments, the most vital resource of this mineral-rich metropolis is coal, which constitutes a significant portion of its Gross Domestic Product. Coal mines in Ordos are among the most extensive multi-period coal basins in China. Furthermore, the city is endowed with substantial reserves of rare earth elements and natural gas. These four richest resources in Ordos are colloquially known as 'yang mei tu qi'.[7]

However, Ordos started to capture global attention in 2010 and 2012 when Time Magazine (Brown, 2010; Otede, 2017) and BBC Studies (Day, 2012; BBC Studies, 2016; Cox, 2018) published reports that speculated the Kangbashi district of Ordos as a 'ghost city', which is a megacity devoid of inhabitants. In fact, Kangbashi, situated in south-central Ordos, was an ambitious urbanization project with a staggering investment of six billion Chinese yuan by the municipal government. Before its development in 2004, the area was a barren expanse ensconced between the Kubuqi and Maowusu deserts, characterized by an unfertile, sandy terrain. As one of Inner Mongolia's most impoverished regions, it has a scant population of fewer than 1400 people. In 2004, the local administration undertook the ambitious task of transforming this deserted wasteland (The People's Government of Kangbashi District in Ordos City [鄂尔多斯市康巴什区人民政府]. 2023). After five years, a relatively ultra-modern cityscape emerged. Architectural marvels imbued the desolate region with a veneer of modernity. Despite these grandiose efforts, the district, originally conceived to accommodate a million inhabitants, still suffered from underpopulation due to geographical and other contingent factors. Most of the buildings constructed with high expectations remained vacant. Essential amenities found no takers. Sparse human activities lent the area an eerie desolation. At night, sporadic lights emphasized its emptiness, making Kangbashi synonymous to a 'modern ghost city'.

This economic ascendancy in modern Ordos, as reflected in its overdevelopment and underpopulation, leaves an intriguing remark about the discussion of some cultural implications: How can the Mongolian people, that is increasingly overshadowed by the lavish physical development of the megacity planned by the Han Chinese, find its connection to the narrative of the city that was once a 'ghost city'?

In a conscious effort to reinvigorate this previously indigenous culture, governmental bodies and scholars have embarked on the meticulous rediscovery and reorganization of local artistic expressions, encompassing rituals honoring Genghis Khan, traditional Ordos weddings, and a diverse array of performing arts. Moreover, the historical intertwining of gür songs with Ordos can be retraced to Genghis Khan, whose mausoleum resides within the confines of the city. It is said that in 1632, after his defeat at the hands of the later Jin Dynasty [后金], Lindan Khan led a multitude of Chakhar people and retreated to Qinghai. During their westward exodus in 1633, Lindan Khan strategically left a thousand Chakhar households in the Hangin Banner of Ordos. The Chakhars, originally vassals of the Khanate and primarily engaged in nomadic pastoralism, were entrusted with the guardianship of the mausoleum. It is speculated that before vacating Ordos, Lindan Khan reverentially visited Genghis Khan's remembrance place and acceded to the request from the Darhad[8] people to fortify their defense by leaving a segment of his populace. These households most probably included individuals proficient in courtly music that contributed to the sustenance of gür songs in Ordos (Shi Yongqing [史永清], 2017: 75).

Although having a historical trace, gür songs are teetering on the brink of extinction. Sociopolitical movements, particularly the Cultural Revolution, caused their near erasure from historical and cultural archives. In the 1990s, Guru Jibasir[9] spearheaded efforts to revive this

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Republic of China, it was included in the map of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. On April 30, 2001, Yikezhao League was officially renamed as Ordos City with approval from the State Council.

[7] This is a homophone originating from a Chinese idiom 'yáng méi tǔ qì 扬眉吐气', meaning 'holding one's head high and feeling the pride'. It is then modified as 'yáng méi tǔ qì 羊煤土气' in a Chinese wordplay with four separate signifiers: 'sheep', 'coal', 'earth', and 'gas', which denote the four richest resources of Ordos as described above.

[8] Darhad people were people closely related to today's Mongolian, living in Inner Mongolia and had a large overview about land and agricultural movements in the region.

[9] He was a solely appointed 'inheritor' by the State Council in 2018.

imperiled tradition, thereby rejuvenating its cultural vitality. Nevertheless, the pervasive force of urbanization poses dilemmas for the preservation of gür songs. Over time, traditional art forms usually find themselves marginalized and outshined by the emergent and mainstream cultural paradigms.

STRATEGIES FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF GÜR SONGS

The most formidable challenges for the sustainability of gür songs lie in the construction of collective memory and its perpetual integration with the rapidly evolving urban landscape of Ordos.

Memory serves as a critical underpinning in the epistemological structure of cultural heritage, effectively functioning as a repository for the collective intangible assets embodied by the heritage (Assmann, 2008: 15), such as gür songs in this study. This form of collective memory is not solely an aggregation of individual remembrances but a complex interplay of shared narratives and cultural signifiers. It is molded by, and in turn molds, the sociocultural milieu, often mediated through social institutions, rituals, and communal interactions (Connerton, 1989: 40). Memory is an intricate neural activity containing encoding, storage, and retrieval. Encoding these collective memories is a sociocultural practice impacted by prevailing ideas, systems of authority, and historical narratives. Storage is the long-term preservation of encoded information within the brain circuitry, which is typically aided by synaptic plasticity and consolidation processes. Retrieval takes two forms: recognition and recollection. When previously encoded information is met again, the former recognizes it, and the latter reproduces it in its absence.

As for the preservation method for the gür songs in Ordos, revivalist efforts cannot solely depend on the labor of Guru Jibasir, who is the officially appointed 'inheritor' of the tradition (The People's Government of Kangbashi District in Ordos City [鄂尔多斯市康巴什区人民政府]., 2023). Much of extant repertoire of gür songs is a product of recall, inherently prone to inaccuracy regarding similarities of the songs. Therefore, any effort to preserve gür songs must rigorously engage with this nuanced construct of collective memory, which serves as both the reservoir and the conduit for this invaluable knowledge. As such, multi-disciplinary scholarly interventions are crucial for the accurate restoration and sustainable transmission of gür songs.

The Hangin Banner gür songs have thrived and been transmitted within the community as a valuable genre of folk music. Therefore, their development should be closely aligned with the local context of the Hangin Banner. This requires planning around three key aspects: policy-making, the cultivation of 'inheritors', and the maintenance of an 'inheritance' system.

In terms of policymaking, the authors recommend through their insights that the Hangin Banner government could slightly increase financial inputs, ensuring that funds are effectively channeled to grassroots' work and the community of 'inheritors'. The Hangin Banner gür-song Research Association and local enterprises should be encouraged to co-host exhibitions and performances, thereby alleviating funding pressures. For instance, when the cultural history and unique natural landscape of Ordos are gradually leveraged to associate with the promotion of tourism industry, Gür songs can be integrated in various promotional events, such as 'A Week of Gür songs' events, special concerts, and experiential museums. This approach can eliminate the lack of diverse platforms for gür song performances as well as the issue of unemployment among some performers of gür songs.

In September 2022, the First Ordos Gür song Festival was held in Hangin Banner and featured a series of cultural activities (Figure 3), including gür song competition, a massive choir performance (Figure 4), an exhibition and merchandising of gür songs-related products, and a music concert. The festival saw over 1200 participants, aged from 6 to 90. Choir members dressed in traditional attire passionately delivered the unique melody of gür songs. As emphasized in the closing speech by Qi Muren, the President of the Hangin Banner Gür songs Association, this first-of-its-kind festival will play an essential role in the 'inheritance' of gür songs, as they

will be 'passed down' to younger generations, despite making this national intangible cultural heritage be 'understood' and 'loved by more and more audiences'.

Figure 3: Massive choir performance during the 1st Annual Gür songs Festival in 2022. Photograph by Wu Ruiping, 2022.

Figure 4: The poster for the 1st Annual Gür songs Festival in 2022 Source of the poster: Hangin Banner Cultural Centre, fair use.

To ensure a sustainable 'inheritance' system, the welfare for the 'inheritors' of Hangin Banner gür songs should be improved. It is rather crucial to ensure the wellbeing of elderly 'inheritors', as an improved quality of life would allow them to focus on the transmission and dissemination of gür songs. In the opinion of the authors:

1) efforts should be made to record and compile the gür songs sung by elderly 'inheritors' and to support activities led by 'inheritors' with policies and secured funding (Zhang Boyu [张伯瑜], Yao Hui [姚慧] & Schippers, 2015).

2) the performance styles of elderly 'inheritors' and artists native to Hangin Banner should not accentuate erratic individuality, which may lead to inconsistency in the music practice.

To achieve this goal, songs sung by elderly 'inheritors' can be recorded in high-definition audio in order to preserve the Sarizhao Gacha gür songs in a 'static' format as a reference to the current state of standards. This means to capture the essence of the gür songs' performance in a preserved medium in order to transform an ever-changing, dynamic music performance of a specific time and space into a static code of digital data archive, therefore enabling the learning of gür songs through repetitive retrievals of music data with deeper technical accuracy. This could lead to better performance outcomes. Besides, and that is also a very useful step in the opinion of the authors, elderly 'inheritors' should be invited more often for music teaching to real-time classrooms in order to exchange singing experiences and techniques with the currently younger generations.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, many folk activities in Hangin Banner have been simplified and are no longer conducted in traditional ways. Wedding ceremony procedures have a gradually reduced duration and minimized content of gür songs, stripping off the cultural significance of gür songs in their home ground. The simplification of wedding ceremonies, which functions as a crucial social institution, signifies more than a mere procedural alteration; it embodies the diminishing prevalence of gür songs in their native environment. In some wedding venues in Hangin Banner, the gür songs' performance exists as an obligatory but rather a shallow program as could be observed personally by the authors. The simplification of wedding ceremonies has directly narrowed the survival space for gür songs and obstructed their transmission. In many cases, these songs have been relegated to obligatory performances in the wedding events. To counteract this decline, it is essential to revitalize the cultural identification with gür songs through the measurements mentioned above. In this context, it is proposed to implement the mentioned steps to fortify the cultural identification in gür songs among cultural bearers of Hangin Banner. Subsequently, there is a need to assimilate these cultural elements into diverse contexts—at personal, educational, and professional levels—to not only preserve but also intensify their cultural memory capacity (Cox, 2018: 82). By adopting this approach, one not only plays a role in safeguarding the tradition but also strengthens the cultural fabric, ensuring the sustainability of gür songs within the shifting sociocultural landscape in Hangin Banner (Zhang Boyu [张伯瑜], Yao Hui [姚慧] & Huib Schippers, 2015).

With the continuous globalization and the exchange of culture and technology inside China, the natives' living conditions, ideas, and beliefs have changed. The current youth, particularly in Hangin Banner, does not actively acquire a deeper understanding about their regional traditional culture of Hangin Banner, resulting in an indifferent attitude toward the gür songs.

Long-term exposure to Western music and popular music production has led to the youth's current understanding of traditional music culture, eventually losing their interest in acquiring the knowledge and aesthetics for gür songs. To overcome this 'disconnection', gür song-themed lectures, traditional music showcases, and gür songs' appreciation sessions could be organized with the support of higher education institutions and launched for younger people in all regions to possibly stimulate their enthusiasm in learning gür songs. This is the opinion of the authors. In addition, music practitioners and institutions such as Hangin Banner Gür-song Association should take good advantages of popular internet platforms, like WeChat and Douyin (or TikTok), to frequently spread and promote the music and connect the traditional values of gür songs. It is not contradictory to render internet technology in the promotion of the tradition, especially the music in this case, as it can become a rapid, progressive, and effective means to encourage currently young people to appreciate and respect the tradition of gür songs, despite fostering their conscious commitment in helping the efforts in sustaining their living environment.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the importance of gür songs, which are vital for the grassland identification in Ordos City, China. As stated by the authors, the challenges local Mongolian communities

encountered in maintaining the cultural memory of gür songs include the potential decline of their cultural memory following the demise of an 'inheritor', the existence of memory gaps, and the technical accuracy of orally inherited ritual music. Additionally, this study highlights the role of institutions in preserving and promoting gür songs and discusses multiple feasible strategies as seen from the viewpoints of the authors who undertook deep investigations to address these challenges.

To persist the sustainability and cultural memory of gür songs, this study proposed several approaches, including engaging currently young generations through educational programs, introducing innovation and incorporating contemporary elements, and integrating gür songs with other cultural heritages. These strategies are intended to address the concerns of whether the cultural memory of the community will further decline, memory gaps will persist and expand, or the technical accuracy of orally inherited ritual music of the Mongolian community will diminish.

Furthermore, this study emphasized the importance of finding connections to bind this music tradition with Ordos, a modern city with an urbanization history of not more than 20 years. By incorporating gür songs into local events, such as weddings and local tourist performances—solely in the consideration of the quantity of performances that keeps on transmitting the sounds for a memory recall—the cultural memory of the grassland can be preserved and promoted in modern-day Ordos City.

In conclusion, preservation and promotion of gür song is essential in maintaining the cultural memory of the Mongolian community in Ordos City. Implementing multiple efficient strategies, such as engaging currently younger generations, establishing educational programs, and leveraging advanced technologies to document and share this precious cultural heritage, can guarantee the sustainability of gür songs and their cultural memory, ultimately contributing to their ongoing being appreciated and protected.

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ANNEX 1: TABLE OF TERMS IN USE

Romanized Mongolian	Traditional Mongolian	Cyrillic Mongolian	Chinese (Simplified)	Romanized Chinese (Pinyin)	English
Chakhar khümüüs		Чахар хүмүүс	察哈尔人	Chaha'er ren	Chakhar people
Chingis khaany khoyor zagal		Чингис хааны хоёр загал	成吉思汗的两匹骏马	Chenjisihan de liang pi junma	Genghis Khan's Two Colts
*Dör-Giin Dom Aashaar (Shüükhiin bodlogyg magtaj baina)	unknown	Дөр-Гийн Дом Аашаар (Шүүхийн бодлогыг магтаж байна)	朝政大厦	Chaozheng dasha	Praising the Court's Policies
Gür duu		Гүр дуу	古如歌	Guru ge	Gür songs
Kangbashi		Кангбаши	康巴什	Kangbashi	Kangbashi
Khangin khoshuu		Хангин хошуу	杭锦旗	Hanjin qi	Hangin Banner
Khöömei		Хөөмий	呼麦	Humai	Overtone/ throat singing
*Öndör Jimmi tuyaa (Etseg ekhchüüded talarkhal ilerkhiilj baina)	unknown	Өндөр Жимми туяа (Эцэг эхчүүдэд талархал илэрхийлж байна)	高高的吉米梁	Gao gao de jimiliang	Expressing Gratitude to Parents
Ordos khot		Ордос хот	鄂尔多斯市	E'erduo si	Ordos City
*Tianmaju (Saikhan moridyn bayar)	unknown	Тианмажу (Сайхан морьдын баяр)	天马驹	Tianma ju	Celebrating Fine Horses
Türleg		Түрлэг	特日格勒	Terigele	Türleg
Urtyn duu		Уртын дуу	长调	Changdiao	Long song

These are approximations. Some expressions are not used by the inhabitants anymore in their traditional Mongolian way of writing. Most relevant items can exist only in a Chinese version, as many people did not learn older Mongolian scripts (Chuluunbaatar, 2008; 2019).