

## 2. ORAL LITERATURE THAT USES MELODIES

### ❖ BENEDICTION

Mongolian benediction is the powerful expression of the miraculous capacity of words. It is one of the genres of Mongolian oral poetry that uses melodies. Briefly, benedictions propitiate people's future happiness and well-being through skillfully composed and recited poems. There are thousands of benedictions on various subjects, for instance there are benedictions recited while beating the sweat-cloth of the saddle, while distilling milk-vodka, while celebrating a birth, and while cutting an infant's hair for the first time. We have benedictions to request the consent of a bride's future parents-in-law and to offer them gifts after the wedding. In addition, we have benedictions to mark the start of a wedding or feast, to toast, to serve a bowl of fermented mare's milk, and to bring a feast to a close. Only people or minstrels with a good voice can recite benedictions. They may be sung completely from memory, and some sections could be improvised to fit particular situations.

Minstrel can perform benedictions at the request of the head of a family or the host at a feast. He begins by placing a bowl of fermented mare's milk on a long *khadag* (sacred scarf). There is a specific way of uttering a benediction. He starts by reciting the benediction in a constant, flowing way, and finishes by wishing all the best. At the end of benediction there is an established refrain that states that the well-wishing has unified all of those present at the wedding or feast and calls upon everyone to feel happiness, enthusiasm, and elation. For example, it is very common to end benedictions with everyone stating, "May this benediction come to pass!"

• The following is an example of a wedding benediction:

*Well, you both are born on this planet  
 You both became precious human beings  
 By virtue of the auspicious omens.  
 Your kind parents  
 Who venerate the earth  
 Wrapped your fragile bodies  
 With soft cloths  
 Swaddled you in your cradle  
 With long narrow strips of cloth  
 And raised both of you  
 Without coldness  
 And warmed both of you  
 From the cockles of their hearts  
 They taught both of you  
 With correct instructions.  
 You both became adults  
 The hands of yours  
 Reach the saddle thongs  
 The legs of yours*



*Mongolian state merited cultural worker, minstrel Tserendorj*

Photo by "GAMMA" agency



Reach the stirrups.  
 Our earth is spacious  
 But linked with rivers and oceans  
 Human beings are many  
 But they can be related by their mind and hearts.  
 A institution of marriage  
 Which is very old  
 Increases our communities.  
 You two were neighbours  
 And well-acquainted  
 And fell in love with each other  
 And determined to marry and to become engaged;  
 You two are now bride and groom.  
 We wish both of you that  
 Your fates will be sealed  
 Your luck will be favourable  
 Your parents will be happy  
 Your relatives will be enjoyable.  
 By opening the door of your home  
 You two have invited your parents  
 And your friends here.  
 You two requested me to utter a benediction;  
 By raising a toast  
 My benediction is that  
 You two be a large family  
 Forever happy.  
 By enjoying it  
 And respecting it,  
 Be happy in this  
 Auspicious house.  
 May you raise many children,  
 And raise much livestock  
 May your children be well educated.  
 When we visit again  
 Your family must be like an ocean;  
 When we visit again  
 Your family must be like a spring.  
 May your deeds be like a stormy rain;  
 May your every wish come true;  
 May your benevolence be increased;  
 May your happiness be constant!  
 Please live long.  
 I wish you both all the best.  
 May this benediction be promoted forever!

- The benediction is linked to other important customs. Let us introduce the benediction to brand a foal or colt:

The propitious omens are formed,  
 The beneficent bounties are distributed.

The auspicious destiny  
 Of the past year is deserved  
 The best day is appointed  
 Among the important days.  
 This beneficent brand was initiated  
 By Chinggis Qahan,  
 And has continued up to now.  
 This brand was invented by the ancestors.  
 This is the mark of the owner  
 And is worthy of treasure.  
 The fame of this brand is known  
 Throughout the banners and provinces.  
 This brand has a good reputation.  
 Its lustre dazzles in ten directions  
 This brand was invented in the period of heroes.  
 Today branded animals are abundant  
 On the plain steppe;  
 Branded animals are abundant  
 The world over.  
 May this family and  
 Power of administration  
 Be firm and develop  
 In such a way!

- The following is a benediction recited when distilling milk vodka:

The stove of ancient provenance is  
 Placed in the exact centre of the ger;  
 The cauldron is balanced on the stove  
 The fermented mare's milk is poured  
 Into the cauldron;  
 The bürkheer (a cone-shaped wooden vessel) is then set  
 On the top of the cauldron,  
 The funnel is hung upon the  
 Inside hooks of the bürkheer;  
 One end of funnel is open to receive,  
 The other end pierces  
 The wall of bürhéer and  
 Projects its lip to  
 Discharge the milk vodka into the tub.  
 The wok is placed on the top of the bürkheer.  
 The space between the base of the cauldron  
 And the brim of bürkheer is wrapped closely.  
 When the cauldron is hot we pour cool  
 Water into it.  
 This condenses as liquid;  
 The milk-vodka that is captured  
 Into a porcelain-like bottle.  
 Its smell is lovely.  
 Let's have a lively time!



## ❖ ODES

An ode is an expression of noble feelings of some events and it is linked to certain ceremonies. There are many common characteristics among benedictions and odes. People who recite odes can perform them to a very specific tune. Benedictions are rich in expressing future dreams and fantastical thinking. But odes express present events, as well as people's pride, admiration, and enthusiasm. The subjects of odes can be classified in these ways:

1. Odes to mountains and water
2. Odes to the five kinds of domesticated animals
3. Odes to the three manly sports
4. Odes to the properties and belongings
5. Odes to the cycle of twelve years

Odes to the mountains and water are meant to invoke and extol mountain and water spirits, typically while also making milk-libations. Such odes are recited at the beginning of *Oirad* Mongolian heroic epics. *Oirad* epics traditionally began with an eulogy to the *Altai* Mountains; *Khalkha* epics, with eulogies to the *Khangai* Mountains. Later, these odes to the mountains and to water became independent compositions. In the ode to the *Khan* of *Khangai*, there are passages that speak about going up a withered ridge of the *Khangai* Mountains. This kind of song begins by describing the mountains from its base upwards, in the process eulogizing the opulent trees and abundant game on the mountains:

*For the hobbled horses  
You are a sanctuary;  
For orphaned weaklings  
You are a sanctuary;  
The Ider, Terkh rivers  
Are a part of the grey and rich Khangai mountains.*

This is the description of Mongolian virgin lands. These mountains are places of worship for shamanists and they provide bounteous incomes for our hunters and pastures for the local people. They are, therefore, eulogized.

Odes to mountains typically describe their loftiness. They

often also use onomatopoeic words to depict the sounds of nature, such as the singing of birds and the roars of wild beasts.

### THE ODE TO THE FIVE KINDS OF ANIMALS

There are two types of the odes to the five kinds of animals. One speaks of all five kinds of animals and the other speaks about each animal individually. The ode to the five kinds of animals is linked to the folk approbation and invocation. The beginning of the ode to the five kinds of animals starts by describing the attributes of the warm muzzled animals, such as the sheep and horse. For instance, they say about sheep:

*White-faced sheep,  
Which straggle over the pasture,  
They are not easy to tend.  
They are not easy to pen.*

They also say about camels:

*Let your camels straggle over the pasture.  
Let your baby camels straggle over the tethering line.  
Let your camel population grow into the thousands.*

Individual species of animals are eulogized by their age, character, movement, body shape, and fertility. For example:

*A herd of horses;  
If you chase them, they run away;  
If you lead them, they can amble.  
They can run at full speed.  
They neigh to find the wild horses.  
They straggle over mountains.  
There are groomed and clipped manned horses,  
Weaning and baby foals,*



Гэрэл зургийг Ш.Гэрэлсайхан



*Old and young mares,  
Rollicking yearlings,  
Good racing horses,  
Good catching steeds,  
Good riding geldings  
Among them.*

Above eulogy extols horses by distinguishing ages, while the next one praises the gait and disposition of horses as:

*Among these horses  
There is the jubilant walker,  
The measured ambler,  
The excited tosser,*

*The lively pacer,  
And the trotter, canterer, and galloper.  
Among them  
There is a spirited one.  
There is a horse that runs back  
To the place of his birth in a spring.  
There are bucking, prancing, and balking horses;  
Some of them shy away and some are vicious.  
There are gentle ones among them.  
They are all together  
Admirable horses.*

They are eulogies that speak how horses can have roofs of steel in rocky places.

## Ode to the cycle of *Twelve years*

The odes to the cycle of twelve years identify the years, months, days and hours by the animals of the lunar months of the Mongolian traditional calendar.

*The white mouse  
Which vomits ten iridescent colours  
Which is taken up by a wholesome provider  
And which is living in a divine abode is the first year.*

*The beneficial cow  
Which has two prominent horns  
Which walks peacefully  
And which has cleft hoofs is the second year  
The yellow skinned tiger with black stripes  
Whose lair is in the mountains  
Who has the power equal to ten bulls  
And who terrorizes everybody is the third year.*

*The grey hare  
Who jumps nimbly and swiftly  
And who crouches with popped eyes  
Is the fourth year.  
The benevolent dragon  
Which has its abode in the cerulean air  
Which has eighteen variables  
And which produces rumbling sounds is the fifth year.*

*The hissing snake  
Which has its lair at the foot of the mountains  
Which has a long mottled body  
And which startles everybody who sees it is the sixth year.*

*The state-courser  
With its black round eyes  
With its four sacred hoofs  
And which always rejoices in its owner, is the seventh year.*

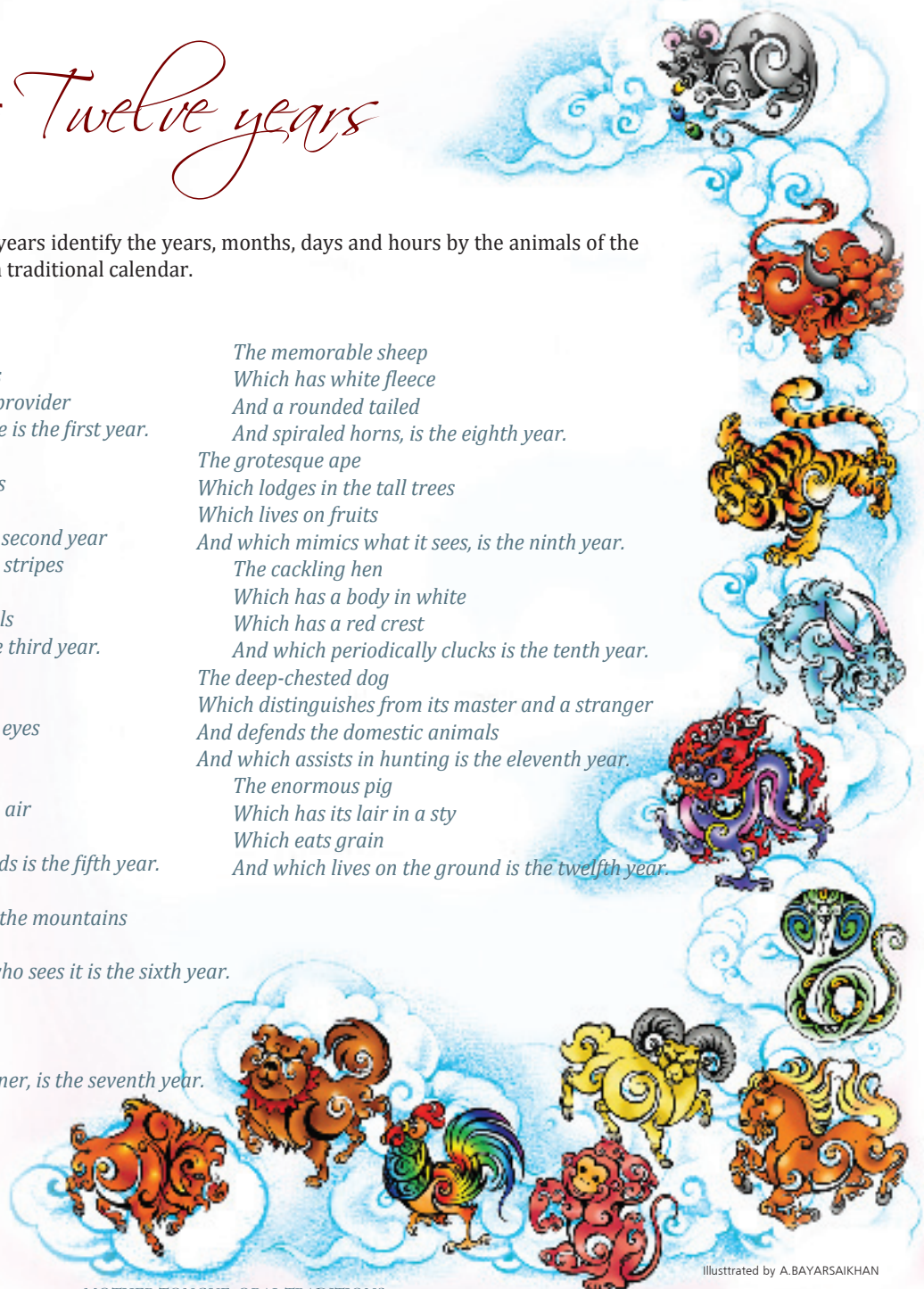
*The memorable sheep  
Which has white fleece  
And a rounded tailed  
And spiraled horns, is the eighth year.*

*The grotesque ape  
Which lodges in the tall trees  
Which lives on fruits  
And which mimics what it sees, is the ninth year.*

*The cackling hen  
Which has a body in white  
Which has a red crest  
And which periodically clucks is the tenth year.*

*The deep-chested dog  
Which distinguishes from its master and a stranger  
And defends the domestic animals  
And which assists in hunting is the eleventh year.*

*The enormous pig  
Which has its lair in a sty  
Which eats grain  
And which lives on the ground is the twelfth year.*



## ❖ MONGOLIAN EPICS

One of the richest legacies developed by Mongolians for many centuries is the lengthy heroic epics. An epic is the largest genre of poetry and it was formed in the process of folklore development. Everybody is interested in how and when the epics originated. These magnificent expressions of the cultural legacy of Mongols likely originated as tales that spoke about the gallant deeds of our ancestor-chieftains and brave warriors.

Scholars believe that epics were developed into their sophisticated form in the sixth century CE. They are performed by a minstrel who is gifted at relating stories or in speech-art and can accompany themselves with a tuneful melody on a horse-head fiddle, *tovshuur* (two-stringed lute), *ekil* (western Mongolian fiddle with two strings), or *huuchir* (four-stringed bowed instrument) according to established rules and customs.

The ambitions of ancient nomadic people who seek to live in harmony and quest for peace are reflected in the actions and views of the epics. Famous Mongolist J. Vladimirtsov noted that Mongolian epics are strongly linked to life on the steppe. The epics are national poems gracefully expressing nomadic views and ambitions by describing their conditions. The subjects of Mongol epics include gallant knights, beautiful damsels, romances, trusty steeds, marriages, and struggles. They are typically divided into one of several types of forms: 1.) folk-tale types of epics; 2.) narrative-types of epics; 3.) anthology-types of epics. Still, all Mongolians call them heroic epics.

The art of reciting the Mongolian epic thrived until the beginning of the twentieth century. These epics can be enormous - the *Jangar* epic consists of several thousands of lines of text - and several of the most famous Mongolian epics, such as the *Jangar*, *Geseriin Tuuj*, *Khan Kharangui*, and *Bum-Erdene* epics, have become the subject of studies at the worldwide-level nowadays. Over 280 epics are registered at present. Today there are about ten minstrels of different ethnic groups, including the *Uriankhai*, *Bayad* and *Khalkha* nationalities in the western part of Mongolia. These artists have inherited the rare cultural legacy of several thousand years of history and they are making contributions to revive the epic reciting traditions and bequeath them to the young generations. The epic reciting art is called “*tuul' khailakh*”. A person who is skilled at reciting epics is called a “*tuulchi*”.

Mongolian epics consist of from hundreds to thousands of lines of text. To become minstrel (*tuulchi*) it is necessary for a person to have a good memory, good imagination, and great interest in reciting epics. This is the skill which can be taught by minstrels and obtained with one's own efforts. There is a very strict rule not to change a hero's name or to re-order the actions of the epics. Nor is it acceptable to recite an epic at every place. The recitation of an epic is acceptable only at solemn state ceremonies, weddings, *Naadam* festivals, children's hair-cutting ceremonies, child-naming ceremonies, new ger-warming ceremonies, ceremonies held before hunting, mountain-worship and cairn-worship ceremonies. They symbolize the good future for coming generations.

Some epics can be recited in summer. For instance, it is forbidden to recite the epic *Khan Kharangui* in summer. The reason is that the hero of the epic rebelled against heaven and earth and rescued the populace from lightning. Thus, Mongo-



Renowned epic performer Parchin

lians believe that if one recites the epic *Khan Kharangui* in the summer, lightning may strike. It is unacceptable to recite epics on ordinary days in one's household. The recitation of an epic should begin at the moment when the stars appear at night. The head of the household brings the *tovshuur* to one's home and places it in the honourable part of the home and spent several nights there. Then the minstrel is invited to the household. A ghee lamp is kindled. The offerings are prepared. The epic is selected by discussing with people who are present. If one wishes to have a child, the epic '*Erkh nachin khartsaga*' ('Spoiled tierce-hawk') is performed; if one wishes to be without misfortune, the epic '*Khan Kharangui*' will be performed; if one wishes to be fortunate, the epic '*Bayan tsagaan övgön*' ('Rich white old man') will be performed. If one wishes to exorcize evil spirits, the epic '*Taliin khar bodon*' ('Black boar of the steppe'), and '*Khürel arslan magnai*' ('Forehead of bronze lion') is recited.

The Mongolian epics are very lengthy. The recitation of epic breaks several times during the night. Some epics are recited for several nights. There is a forbiddance to make a noise while minstrel starts reciting an epic. If you knew one or two epics, you were not recognized as *tuulchi* or minstrel. There was a custom to eulogize the rich resources of the local mountains, rivers and game before a minstrel starts reciting an epic.

*Mongol Tuuli: Mongolian Epic* was inscribed on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2009.



• **THE ACTION AND CONTENT OF THE EPIC  
'ERIIN SAIN KHAN KHARANGUI'**

About the epic '*Eriin sain Khan Kharangui*', the beginning is the unusual birth of the hero, its power and eulogy of the mountains and rivers. In the first part of the epic '*Eriin sain Khan Kharangui*' we hear:

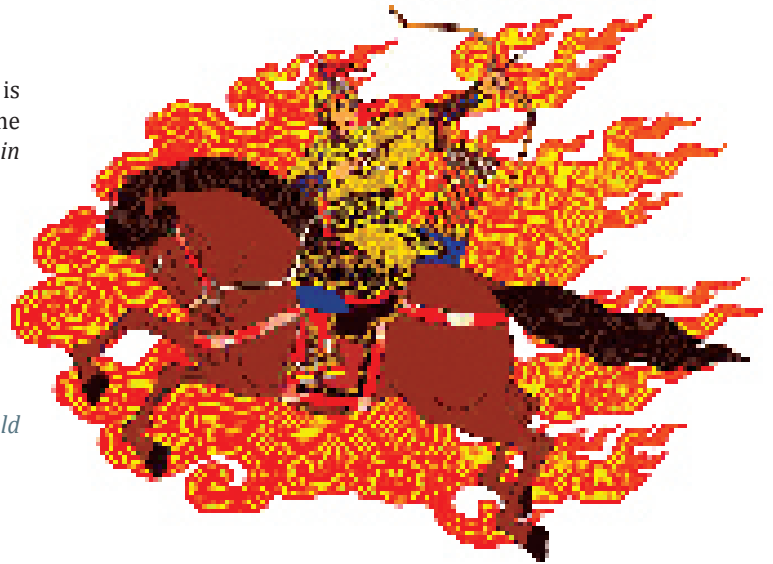
*Khan Kharangui  
Was born and  
Rebelled against  
The heaven,  
He also rebelled against  
The earth  
With the father of one thousand and five hundred years old  
The indomitable king,  
Who lived in the open meadow  
By the sheltered mountain  
With the queen Dūngee, the beautiful mother  
At the start of good time and  
At the end of bad time,  
Whose body is  
Made from bronze,  
Whose vertebrae  
Is made from steel  
With the fused ribs  
And innominate bone.  
Born as seven years old  
By vibrating seven mountains*

There is a description of the hero's weapons, clothing, and horse:

*With forty-four cinches,  
With bronzed-silver bridles,  
With big saddle-like mountain saddles,  
With elephant white bow  
Of great strength,  
Thirty fathomed handled  
Red spear with arrows  
Nine fathomed steel sword  
With glassy inlay  
With sterling gold helmet  
With three million, three hundred million  
Ten trillion subjects*

Another interpretation says:

*With big black horse  
That he rides during hunting  
And a small black horse  
That he rides close by,  
His war-horse  
Is brown coloured and slender  
With ninety fathomed  
And nine spanned ears...  
In such manner the epic continues.*



In the denouement of the epic '*Khan Kharangui*' the hero *Khan Kharangui* rode his brown horse and quested for a long journey. *Khan Kharangui* dreamed on the long journey that *Erkhem Khar*, the son of heaven, wanted to make the beautiful *Toli* "the fair" as his wife. She dreamed that *Khan Kharangui* was the trustful companion of her life. She sent the old man with the message that expressed that the other hero wanted to make her his wife.

The parents of *Khan Kharangui* knew that their son sought to marry the beautiful *Toli* and sent his brother *Ulaadai Mergen* to assist him. Both brothers met on the way and went to the birthplace of the beautiful *Toli*. Then they went to *Agi Bural King*. *Khan Kharangui* and *Erkhem Khar*, the son of the heaven, vied with each other for the beautiful *Toli*. They contested by racing horses, wrestling, and shooting arrows. Then *Khan Kharangui* won these contests. He said to *Erkhem khar*, the son of heaven: "these contests belong to me". *Khan Kharangui* took the beautiful *Toli* ...

They visited *Agi Bural's*  
Sable-paneled palace and  
They stayed in it.  
They sang like swans,  
They amalgamate like the coat colours of a wild horse.  
All of them lived happily ever after." By this, the action of the epic ends.

Mongolian epics *Geser*, *Jangar*, *Eriin sain Khan Kharangui* and others can be considered equal to the ancient Grecian epics, like the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*; the Indian *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*; the song of Normandy of France; and the words of *Igor* of Russia. In some cases, our epics exceed them by expressions and vocabulary.