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Mongolian Dance in the Face of Globalisation: A History of Interacting Local, National and Global Dance Forms¹

Raphaël Blanchier

When I started my fieldwork in Mongolia in 2010, I already knew something about Mongolian dance. It was performed in the theatres of Ulaanbaatar every day at six o'clock from June to September by professional dancers in colourful silky dresses, with broad smiles, many jumps and turns – very similar to the dances choreographed by the Russian Igor Moiseev² (see Figure 1). As I watched the Mongolian dancers, I tried hard to see beyond the stage and look for the “authentic” “dance-in-the field”³ that was known to have inspired and nourished this vivid display of folklore, the “*bii bielgee*” dance of the Oirad Mongols (known also as Western Mongols) of the Altai Mountains.⁴ Before I went to Mongolia I had contacted travellers, tourist companies and even scholars, but hardly anybody seemed to have witnessed a performance of *bii bielgee*. Only the anthropologist Carole Pegg gave some information about this dance form, but the data she published in 2001 were mostly drawn from interviews which suggests that it was not easy to see a performance by the 1990s when she did her fieldwork.⁵ Was there no authentic, rural Mongolian dance form such as *bii bielgee* left, apart from shows for tourists? Was there no hope even of finding an elderly person who could perform this kind of dance as learned from a grandparent, perhaps, rather than at a socialist academy of folkloric dance?

That *bii bielgee* is an art form on the brink of extinction is the impression one gets also when reading the 2009 UNESCO report of the registration of *bii bielgee* as a “Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need for Urgent Safeguarding” on the grounds that the number of transmitters is decreasing rapidly as their age increases.⁶

¹ Fieldwork research for this paper was conducted thanks to financial support from the International Research Group (GDRI) ‘Nomadismes, société et environnement en Asie centrale et septentrionale’.

² Igor Moiseev (1906–2007) was a Russian choreographer whose main achievement was the foundation and direction of the State Academic Ensemble of Popular Dance, also known as the Igor Moiseev Ballet, from 1937. He is attributed with the creation of the ‘national dance’ genre, based on virtuoso figures and character dance styles mingled with folkloric elements borrowed from the many ‘nationalities’ of the USSR and neighbouring countries. See for instance Mary Swift, *The Art of Dance in the USSR*. (Notre Dame (IN): University of Notre Dame Press, 1968).

³ For a discussion of this expression, see Anthony Shay, *Choreographing Politics. State Folk Dance Companies, Representation and Power* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), p. 16.

⁴ *Bii bielgee*, sometimes spelled *biy biyelgee* or *biyelgee* in English, sometimes also (*bi*) *bielgee*, *biileg* or *bieleg* in Cyrillic Mongolian, is a recently stabilised expression derived from an Oirad dialect word, *bii*, meaning dance (*büjig* in Halh Mongolian), and commonly employed with a verb derived from the same radical, in such expressions as *bii biileh* or sometimes *biigee biileh*, “perform the *bii*”. The etymology connecting it to the Halh *bie* “body, person” is probably invented.

⁵ Carole Pegg, *Mongolian Music, Dance, & Oral Narrative. Performing Diverse Identities* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 2001).

⁶ Decision 4.COM 14.09, U2: “The Biyelgee finds itself threatened by the reduced number and advanced age of its practitioners as well as diminished interest among young generations”.
<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&USL=00311>.



Fig. 1. A performance of *ardyn* Mongolian dance, featuring the gaiety of Mongolian youth and life in the countryside at *Tümen Eh*, Ulaanbaatar, 21 August 2010 © R. Blanchier.

However, this fear of the loss of Mongolian heritage was also being applied to the dance form I described earlier, which I propose to call “stage Mongolian dance”. As a matter of fact, it too was perceived as typically Mongolian and as definitely threatened by “Western” or “global” cultural influences. Summoned to help preserve the inherent Mongolian character of Mongolian dance from the damaging influence of globalisation, the young apprentice ethnographer that I was had not much to propose, but many things to observe.⁷ First, I realised that not only stage Mongolian dance but also performances of Oirad *bii bielgee* could still be seen, although many people were not aware of it and often unable to recognise the difference between the two. Second, I realised that whereas discourses would enhance the perception of globalisation as a threat to Mongolian culture, the practices would rather display adapted responses through the dynamics of choreographic creations. But the third and most interesting thing I observed was the mutually supportive and strongly cohesive adaptation of the two dance forms that have emerged in response to processes of globalisation.

It is by now widely recognised by scholars in the field of globalisation studies that any anthropological analysis of globalisation should avoid taking for granted the discourse of threat, but rather focus on the study of local adaptations to global cultural phenomena, in order to not to fall into the temptation of defining the complex and multilevel process of globalisation as an abstract monster. Whether scholars adopt a static view or a dynamic one, they generally agree on one point: the processes of globalisation are best observed in very located cases, where adaptations or responses to globalisation take the form of observable economic, cultural and social processes.⁸ However, the question remains: what is to be considered a relevant “local” level for analysis?

In Mongolia, the history of the socialist construction of the nation state would encourage us to consider the national level as sufficiently relevant. This is a view encouraged by Peter Marsh’s comprehensive work on the horse-head fiddle and Mongolia’s national construction under the lead of cosmopolitan cultural elites and Soviet-Russian influence.⁹ However, the post-socialist valorisation of authentic artistic culture, vector of the authority of the “deep past”,¹⁰ as well as the recent inclusion in UNESCO lists of many cultural items referring to peripheral ethnic groups rather than to Mongolia’s national cultural characteristics, such as the Oirad *bii bielgee*, seem to support Robert Holton’s assertion:

⁷ Both aspects, the threat and the expectation that the scholar should be able to provide solutions, are presented together in the discourse of many people, including professional dancers (B**, September 2010), *bii bielgee* dancers (Durmaagiin Balgan, August 2012), or people in the street (G**, June 2013).

⁸ For the static view, see for example: Jan Nederveen Pieterse, ‘Globalization as Hybridization’, *Sociology of Globalization*, ed. by Keri E. Iyall Smith (Boulder: Westview Press, 2013), 39–60; and Robert J. Holton, *Globalization and the Nation State*, 2nd edition. (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). For the dynamic view, see among others: Arjun Appadurai, ‘The Production of Locality’, *Sociology of Globalization*, ed. by Keri E. Iyall Smith (Boulder: Westview Press, 2013), 107–14.

⁹ Peter K. Marsh, *The Horse-head Fiddle and the Cosmopolitan Reimagination of Tradition of Mongolia* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁰ Caroline Humphrey, ‘The Moral Authority of the Past in Post-Socialist Mongolia’, *Religion, State and Society*, 20, 3 & 4 (1992), 375–389.

According to him, in many places of the world, the recent global processes, such as the valorisation of local cultural items by the UNESCO, have helped peripheral cultural elements, neglected during the nation-state construction period, to find a new international legitimacy to the detriment of the previously dominant national cultures.¹¹ Yet notwithstanding general theoretical objections, Mongolian dance seems to challenge these two general models, which were created, perhaps, either for music or for other situations in the world. In Mongolia, national dance has definitely played a role in the promotion of local forms of this art even during the socialist period, and is now building on the recent international promotion of the authentic *bii bielgee* to continuously respond creatively to global trends and develop according to international standards. I thus argue that Mongolian dance invites us to reconsider simple models of national construction and local responses, and, by observing the processes of globalisation at play at the local level, to examine the important dialectic between the local (which is peripheral within the nation) and national levels. In our study of Mongolian dance we may even go further and consider that the national and local levels together are a relevant but complex form of “local”, as opposed to “global”. In the first part of my article I argue that *bii bielgee* and stage Mongolian dance have developed alongside one another during the socialist period, to make way for the recent promotion of *bii bielgee* through UNESCO. In the second part I examine cases of choreographic hybridisation of *bii bielgee*, national dance and global forms, including modern dance and pop-rock, in contemporary Mongolia.

Bii bielgee, Mongolian dance and ballet: The folklorisation of the ethnic dance

Giving a clearer description of *bii bielgee* and national Mongolian dance forms, as well as some indication of their history, I first argue that neither form is pushing the other to the brink of extinction, but that, on the contrary, they mutually support each other in their need to be represented internationally.

Bii bielgee and Mongolian dance

Registered in 2009 in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage as in need of urgent safeguarding, *bii bielgee* is a genuinely Oirad dance form, performed by the Bayad (Bait), Dörvöd (Dörbet),¹² Zahchin, Ööld, Torguud, Hoshuud, Urianhai and Hoton ethnic subgroups of the Oirad Mongols who live mainly in Western Mongolia (Hovd, Uvs, and Bayan-Ölgii provinces) and in Xinjiang, China. Its formal characteristics include brisk and swift shoulder-shaking and wrist-propelling movements, expressive motions of the torso, and imitation of the gestures of nomadic daily life activities and festivals. The activities imitated include caring for cattle, milking, felt- and leather-making, horse riding, and the “Three Manly Games”.¹³ Some dances also reflect the group’s homeland, legendary places, and ancient heroes of the Oirad.¹⁴ Sociologically speaking, *bii bielgee* is commonly performed among and by herders during after-work leisure periods or on special and festive occasions, such as weddings, the arrival of a guest, religious or lay ceremonies, and private or public festivals, to the accompaniment of a solo *ekel* fiddle, *morin huur* horse-head fiddle, *tovshuur* lute or *shanz* lute.¹⁵ Dance movements and styles are passed down within the family

¹¹ Holton, *Globalization*, pp. 8–9.

¹² Bait, Dörbet are alternative spellings used, for example, by Pegg.

¹³ *Eriin gурvan naadam*, the “Three Manly Games” of the nomad summer festivals, traditionally include archery, horse race and Mongolian wrestling. Having developed since the late nineteenth century, anklebone shooting was integrated into the official games as late as in 1998 (See Gaëlle Lacaze, ‘Le Naadam, la fête mongole de l’été’, *Nomadismes d’Asie central et septentrionale*, ed. by Charles Stépanoff *et alii* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2013), 118–121 and Gaëlle Lacaze, ‘Le tir d’osselets: entre tradition et modernité (III)’, *Anda*, 19 (1995), 4–7). To make it three, the *bii bielgee* dance called *Eriin gурvan naadam* actually displays anklebone shooting, archery and wrestling (in this order), while horse-riding situations have always been evoked in other dances with specific rhythm and gestures.

¹⁴ Pegg, *Mongolian Music*, p. 16.

¹⁵ The *ekel* fiddle is a two-string bowed instrument, made out of a goatskin-covered wooden frame, held by the knees of the performer, common among the Western groups of the Oirad. The horse-head fiddle, namely *morin huur* or *moriny tolgoitoi huur* is the Halh version of *ekel*. According to legend, its sound box was made out of a horse’s skull, but scholarly works suggest that it has rather been named after the horse heads which were commonly carved on the heads of the instruments. Although ancient pieces were also covered with goatskin, the sound boxes of contemporary horse-head fiddles are usually made of wood (see below). The *tovshuur* is a two-string plucked lute whose body takes various forms; it is usually played in accompaniment to epic (*tuul*) or praise (*magtaal*) recitations and *bii bielgee* among Oirad performers. Mostly used by Torguud to perform melodies or accompany dances or songs, the *shanz* lute, also called *shudraga*, is a three-string plucked instrument with a long handle, whose round-bodied box is specifically covered by snakeskin. See Marsh, *Horse-head Fiddle*, pp. 28–29 and 67–68 and Pegg, *Mongolian Music*, pp. 67–82 (see Figures. 2, 3).

from elders to the younger members and outside kin relations from master to pupil. All *bii bielgee* dancers, called *biich/bielech*, are non-professional specialists whose talent and mastery are highly valued in their community and generally recognised by their peers or even by state awards. *Bii bielgee* thus corresponds to the category *ugsaatny soyol*, literally “ethnic culture” that is “identified with particular regions or ethnic groups in Mongolia” which Marsh uses when talking about ethnic music.



Fig. 2. The Torguud Buyanhishig plays the *shanz* lute to accompany *bii bielgee*. Ulaanbaatar, 21 September 2013 © R. Blanchier.



Fig. 3. The Bayad Gombojav dances the *bii bielgee* he learned from his uncle. He is accompanied by the Dörvöd Idesh playing a modernised horse-head fiddle. Hyargas (Uvs), 21 July 2013 © R. Blanchier.

On the other hand, the Mongolian dance I have so far called stage Mongolian dance is commonly known as *Mongol ardyn бүжиг* (Mongolian popular/folk dance) in Mongolian. *Ardyn* literally means “popular” or “of the people”; it can be translated by “folk” as in “folk arts” (*ardyn urlag*), but the ambiguity is always present between the political sense (when it refers to the Marxist notion of the “popular” or of the “people”) and the folkloric one. It is worth noting that whereas the term mainly refers to state-controlled, nationally standardised folk art, it can sometimes be used to refer to any “ethnic” art form, including *bii bielgee*. Thus, confusions between the nationally instituted Mongolian dance and the *bii bielgee* commonly arise when one talks of *ardyn бүжиг* (popular/folk dance). Thus my choice to talk of stage Mongolian dance should be understood as the “national” Mongolian dance of the theatres’ professional dancers, as opposed to the local *bii bielgee*.

Dancers of stage Mongolian dance are, in fact, professionals working full-time in the public and private theatres of Ulaanbaatar, as members of troupes such as the National Song and Dance Academic Ensemble (*Ündesnii duu бүжгийн ердмиин чуулга*, in short ‘Academic Ensemble’), the *Tүмен Еh* Ensemble,¹⁶ or in theatres in the provinces. These performers have been highly trained in ballet technique from an early age in vocational schools, such as the College of Music and Dance (*Hөгжим бүжгийн коллеж*) or the National

¹⁶ *Tүмен Еh*, one of the first private ensembles of Mongolia, founded in 1989, took its name from a common expression meaning literally “Leader of Multitudes”. It is also the title given to the winning horses of the *naadam* races and is the name of a long song that is usually sung at the opening ceremony of the state *naadam* festival.

University of Culture and the Arts (*Ulsyn Soyol Urlagiin Ih Surguul'*, in short SUIIS) or in the provincial colleges. The dances they perform have been choreographed by Russian and Mongolian masters of the socialist period, such as the famous Tserendulamyn Sevjid, or composed by their teachers in accordance with the aesthetics of "national dance".

The origins of a Mongolian "Great Tradition"

The professional *ardyn* Mongolian dance has developed continuously since the 1940s in socialist Mongolia and reached its apogee in the 1960s and 1970s under Sevjid, the chief choreographer of the National Song and Dance Academic Ensemble. Of course, there were dances performed on stage in Mongolia before this period. From the early years of the 1921 revolution,¹⁷ cultural centres and clubs were already putting on amateur plays. Those would include songs and dances that had an ideological content including themes and narratives that would illustrate the construction of Mongolia as a socialist nation.¹⁸ Yet, in order to develop according to the Marxist ideology of popular cultural development, popular (*ardyn*) culture needed to reach the standards of a "Great Tradition"¹⁹ that could match the strongly institutionalised, world-influential European academic art forms, such as opera or ballet. This goal could only be achieved with the help of the "elder brother", Soviet Russia. In the 1930s though, Mongolia was subjected to a series of politically motivated purges with the aim of "rooting out the feudal, religious reactionary ideology", in consequence of which the realisation of the cultural development of the people was postponed.²⁰

The Tenth Congress of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) held in 1940, declared it was time to accelerate the *soyol gegeerel* or "cultural enlightenment"²¹ of the Mongolian people, so as to make Mongolia a modern and civilised nation of the socialist world.²² Mongolia took advantage of its relationship with the Soviet Union to invite the Russian ballet masters N. V. Kuznetsova (in 1942) and Ya. V. Romanovskii (in 1946) to help develop centralised artistic institutions, such as the Committee for Entertainment (*Estrad Kontsertyn Tovchoo*) in 1945 (renamed the Popular Song and Dance National Ensemble, *Ardyn Duu Tantsyn Ulsyn Ansambl'* in 1950). This organisation became the central state-controlled institution for the creation and diffusion of official national folk (*ardyn*) artistic culture,²³ and it continues to exist as the National Song and Dance Academic Ensemble (*Ündesnii Duu Būjgiin Erdmiin Chuulga*), as it was renamed in 2002.

Moreover, the prestige of the World Festivals of Youth and Students (*Delhiin Zалуу Оууутнуудын Naadam* or *Festival'*), which were organised every other year from 1947, mostly, but not exclusively, in and with Soviet-sympathising countries, should not be underestimated. Mongolia never failed to send groups of dancers to these international events. As my research in the National Film Archives of Mongolia in April 2014 proves, the dance concerts were given special attention compared to other artistic displays; same as the official discourses and sporting competitions, they were systematically video-recorded to be broadcasted all over the country. In this context of national cultural modernisation, artistic competition and the desire for international recognition, two things were necessary: 1. that the artistic standards be raised to an international level in order to produce dancers capable of matching the highly-trained ballet and folklore professionals of Russia and other developed countries; 2. that there should be a distinctly Mongolian dance style, that would be easily recognised at international folklore competitions and festivals. The national *ardyn* artistic culture was to present Mongolia both as socialist and modern and as an independent and distinct nation-state.

¹⁷ The revolution of 1921 brought the Mongolian People's Party to power. Under the growing influence of the USSR and its communist party, it became the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party in 1924 and began to construct a socialist regime. It very soon enhanced the main goals of the revolution: to eradicate traces of "reactionary ideology" of the "feudal" past and to "set the task of enlightening and educating the people and providing them with opportunities to develop their talents and capabilities". *Cultural Policy in the Mongolian People's Republic. A study prepared under the auspices of the Mongolian National Commission for Unesco* (Paris: UNESCO, 1982), p. 14.

¹⁸ Dunjaagiin Nanjid, *Mongolyn бүжгийн түүхэн уламжлал, хөгжлийн shine handлага* [New Trends in Mongolian Dance's History and Development] (Ulaanbaatar: Soyolyn Deed Surguul', 2009), pp. 36–40.

¹⁹ Marsh, *Horse-head Fiddle*, pp. 13–15.

²⁰ *Cultural Policy*, p. 15.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 10, and Marsh, *Horse-head Fiddle*, p. 49.

²² It is noteworthy that this aim had been previously asserted as early as 1924 in a meeting of the Party, and then regularly mentioned, especially in the XIVth Congress held in 1961, a Congress which, according to Marsh, could even be considered as the turning point towards a "Cultural Leap Forward". Marsh, *Horse-head Fiddle*, pp. 49–51.

²³ Nanjid, *Mongolyn бүжиг*, pp. 38–39; Zdragchaagiin Lhagvasüren, *Jaran jarnaar duursagdah av'iaстнууд* [Commemorating sixty years of talent] (Ulaanbaatar, n. pub., 2005), pp. 11–14.

Sevjid (1916–1984), a choreographer from Dornogov’ province, was the most prominent figure in Mongolian dance. Although he later developed a strong interest in Oirad dances, he was a member of the central ethnic group of the Halh Mongols. He had studied ballet technique and choreography with Romanovskii and went on to elaborate an efficient national synthesis of ethnic *ugsaatny* folk dances from rural Mongolia and the Russian ballet. The programme of the dances presented at a large concert of the National Ensemble in 1963 gives an idea of the state of the art of dance in Mongolia at that time.²⁴ It was a joyous mélange of “fun-in-the-village”²⁵ or politically neutral pieces such as *Zuny üdesh* (A midsummer night) and *Erdenes* (Jewels), ideological ones that celebrated collective work such as *Hadlanchid* (Harvesters), ethnic pieces referring to other nationalities, borrowed from Moiseev’s repertoire, such as *Uzbek* and *Oros* (Russian), pieces reflecting Mongolian national folklore including historical and religious themes (*Ertnii büjig* “dance of the old times” and *Böögiin hengeregt* “The shaman’s drum”), and six dances inspired by the folk dances of various ethnic groups of Mongolia. Far from the expected “national in form, socialist in content”, many of the dances displayed typically Mongolian themes, Mongolia being understood as a nation with a unified culture, while the form was that of ballet and character dances with the inclusion of Mongolian dance movements.

The new syncretic form of Mongolian dance is well exemplified in the famous choreography *Jalam Har* (Jalam the Black [Stallion]), created in 1967. The title comes from a *bii bielgee* in which the dancer mimes both the movements of a rider, whose shoulders are joggled by the horse’s pace, and the movements of the horse itself. The dance has been choreographed for three dancers in a character dance fashion and was probably inspired by Moiseev’s national dances. It includes legs raised high in the air (such steps known as *développé* and *pas-de-cheval* in ballet terminology), large strides across the stage, spectacular jumps, and of course movements of the arms that are far more fluid than those in the *bii bielgee*. At the same time the choreography also displays many recognisable elements typical of *bii bielgee*, such as torso emphasis, shoulder movement, proud stance, and the typical recurrent arms-akimbo-and-legs-crossed posture. Sevjid is said to have conducted unique field research in different regions of Mongolia, especially in the western provinces, in order to collect various forms of “authentic” (*jinhene*) and “traditional” (*ulamjalalyn*) Mongolian dance movements. Under his influence the “reimagined” national dance would take movements from *ugsaatny* dances and reshape them in ballet and character dance fashion.²⁶ National dance was expected to reflect the colourful variety of local costumes and popular dance forms, within the unity of the nation state, thus enhancing the socialist dialectic between regional ethnic culture and national nomadic culture, while decidedly avoiding the risk of cultural Russification.²⁷ This process, often called folklorisation in that it makes a folkloric display out of “dances-in-the-field”, is well known and has been studied in other socialist countries. Anthony Shay lists the typical characteristics of nation state academic dances as: stereotypification (essentialism and folklorisation), research and claims of authenticity, classical ballet training, choreographic strategies of the “suite” and the “ethnic dance”, the hierarchical organisation of national state-supported ensemble, music specially composed by state-approved composers for a Western-style orchestra of folk instruments, and colourful costumes.²⁸ Beyond the notion of folklorisation, Shay also points out something that, to me, is particularly salient in the history of Mongolian dance: by overstepping Stalin’s slogan “national in form, socialist in content”, national dance definitely integrates national elements in the content as well and proposes in form a synthesis of international dance technique (ballet and character dance) and typically ethnic (*ugsaatny*) movements. The global pressure here was therefore not so much evident in terms of orthodox ideology, but in terms of formal influences from prestigious international forms, such as ballet and character dance.

Oirad *bii bielgee* at the heart of national Mongolian dance

Another striking element of Mongolian national dance should be highlighted here: although the choreographies frequently include Buryat, Kazakh and sometimes Tsaatan dances, Oirad *bii bielgee*-like dances are by far the most common. In the concert programme of 1963 mentioned above, half of the Mongolian ethnic dances were references to Oirad *bii bielgee*: *Tsatsal* (ritual libation), *Agsal* (the dance of a legendary Torguud hero), and *Oirad Mongolyn bielgee* (“*Bielgee* of the Oirad Mongols”, a mixture of

²⁴ Lhagvasüren, *Jaran*, p. 15.

²⁵ Shay, *Choreographic*, p. 9.

²⁶ Nanjid, interview, August 2010.

²⁷ Marsh, *Horse-head Fiddle*, p. 100.

²⁸ Shay, *Choreographic*, pp. 38–56.

Oirad-styled dances). An even greater proportion of Sevjid's famous choreography *Mongol бүжгийн чуулбар* (Suite of Mongolian dances) includes the following six ethnic dances: Torguud, Buriat, Hoton, Bayad (or perhaps Zahchin), Kazakh, and Ööld, of which all but Buriat and Kazakh are Oirad. This fact is not exceptional in *ardyn* Mongolian dance, which commonly displays such suites of dances of ethnic groups (a good example could be Dunjaagiin Nanjid's *Ardyn бүжгийн тсоморлиг* – Potpourri of popular dances) and a large proportion of Oirad-named pieces.²⁹ This predominance of *bii bielgee* from western Mongolia in what could have been expected to represent Mongolia's ethnic diversity and folkloric dances with more equality, can be partly explained by the history of the Oirad tribes in Mongolia. The Oirad Mongols were heirs to the Zungar (or Jungar) confederation which resisted Halh and Manchu domination from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. They were finally settled in the far west of Mongolia which was one of the most marginal and remote regions under Manchu (Qing dynasty) control. In the eyes of the first Mongolian socialists, that history made the Oirad excellent models of resistance to feudal domination, while their remoteness protected their linguistic and cultural features from Halh acculturation. Unlike what happened with music, few other ethnic groups in Mongolia were able to preserve their local dances as untouched as the Oirad did.³⁰ A good example of old (which means a-temporal) nomadic Mongolia, the western mosaic of ethnic subgroups also offered an ideal repertoire of *ugsaatny* gestures and variety of costumes and customs that choreographers like Sevjid could use. These elements helped make *bii bielgee* a central ingredient of national dance.

A side effect of folklorisation was, of course, the separation of local arts from their pre-revolutionary context of performance and from their religious and socio-political implications. At the same time, the purely aesthetic aspects of local arts – colourful costumes, joyous dances, and traditional-flavoured tunes – were emphasised. However in dance, unlike in other cultural fields such as music, this essentialism and national themes seem to have worked in favour of the survival of the local dance forms on the long term.

Bii bielgee and UNESCO: the authentic flavour of Mongolian traditions

Although he did not valorise *bii bielgee per se*, but only as an element of his national dance, Sevjid definitely contributed to put Oirad dances at the forefront of the national stage, both in the theatrical as well as the ideological sense. In a world where global demand (represented by the UNESCO) required more and more “authenticity” and fewer virtuoso displays of suspiciously Russian-looking national folklore, it just made sense that *bii bielgee*, the “authentic” source of Mongolian national dance, should become the internationally recognised emblem of Mongolia's “authentic” (*jinhene*) nomadic artistic culture.

Apart from the administrative team and political personalities, the people who secured UNESCO registration for *bii bielgee* in 2009 were professional dancers and choreographers from the academic dance milieu. They include a former dancer of the Academic Ensemble, Zadragchaagiin Lhagvasüren, who founded the Association of Mongolian National Arts and Folk Dance (*Mongol ardyn yazguur urlagiiin Bii Bieleg* [sic] *Holboo*) in 2005 and is now the president. The association worked closely with the Mongolian National Committee of UNESCO to secure the registration of *bii bielgee*.³¹ Lhagvasüren organised many of the first festivals that were dedicated exclusively to *bii bielgee* in the 2000s; for example she dedicated the International Dance Day of 2008 to *bii bielgee* and organised the R. Samjid *Bii Bielgee* Festival (*Rigmediin Samjidyin neremjit bii bielegiin naadam*) held in Bayan-Ölgii province in 2010. However, the most prominent and authoritative figure remains Nanjid. Born into a provincial family in Hövsgöl in 1930, she began studying Mongolian dance the professional, standardised way and gained international recognition when she took part in the World Festival of Youth and Students on three occasions, a rare achievement for a Mongolian dancer in those times. In the 1990s, Nanjid renewed her interest in *bii bielgee* carrying out fieldwork research and publishing many authoritative books on the subject. Through the Association for the Transmission of the Original Mongolian *Bii Bielgee* (*Mongolyn yazguur bii bielgee övlüüleх holboo*) she transmitted her passion to many disciples, renowned choreographers and teachers, such as Dash-Yaichilin Enhgerel, Mönhbaataryn Mөngөнтseteg, Davaasürengiin Bayarbaatar, Jam'yaangiin Erdenehorloo, all of whom work in close association with the University of Culture and the Arts (SUIS) or the private theatre

²⁹ Dunjaagiin Nanjid, *Bii biilegiin gaihamshig* [Wonders of *bii biileg*] (Ulaanbaatar: Soyolyn Deed Surguul', 2009), pp. 85–86.

³⁰ Marsh, *Horse-head Fiddle*, pp. 44–46; Françoise Aubin, 'Oirat' (2005), *Encyclopædia Universalis* [online], <http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/oirat/> [accessed 25 July 2014]; Urgunge Onon, *Mongolian Heroes of the Twentieth Century*. Edited translations (New York: AMS Press, 1976).

³¹ Here I follow the translation of the name of the association as it appears in UNESCO documents.

Tümen Eh. None of them are Oirad themselves. Their commitment to *bii bielgee* stems first from their careers through which they were exposed to Sevjid's national synthesis. They also share a certain interest in field research, by which I mean observing and learning *bii bielgee* in its Oirad context, as a way of gaining a direct and therefore a better understanding of this dance.

However, it would be incorrect to attribute all credit for the preservation of *bii bielgee* solely to the academic school of stage Mongolian dance. During the socialist period, *bii bielgee* did not survive only along the "bridge over history"³² while its national folklorised version was performed in every socialist capital. In fact, the recent national valorisation of *bii bielgee* is also the consequence of a personal interest on the part of Mongolian elite and sometimes decision-makers for "authentic" traditional arts (*ardyn yazguur urlag*) as such. In fact, talented Oirad *bii bielgee* dancers were valorised from the very beginning of the socialist period in the local cultural clubs of the western districts, many of which were run by Oirad *bielgee* dancers who had considerable influence on the preservation and transmission of the local culture. A significant example is Magsaryn Pürevjal, a Torguud who developed dance and music classes and taught Torguud *bii* to many inhabitants in Bulgan *sum*, Hovd province.³³ All recognised Torguud *bielgee* dancers alive today refer to him as their parents' or grandparents' master. Gendengiin Bayartai, a Bayad from Tes *sum* in Uvs province, was able to make her career as a professional dancer thanks to the *bii bielgee* she learned from her father who had many pupils and was the director of the Tes cultural centre. However, it is only since the early 1980s, when the minister of culture and famous composer Natsagiin Jantsannorov introduced a policy to revitalise *ugsaatny* artistic culture, that Oirad *bii bielgee* as performed by non-professional, family-trained Oirad dancers was given a real audience on the national stage at the Traditional Arts Festival (*Ardyn Urlagiin Ih Naadam*).³⁴ Mönhiin Dar'süren, a Torguud born in 1931 in Bulgan *sum*, Hovd province, told how she, a *bii bielgee* master, was invited with her peers to teach the Oirad dance movements to the professional dancers of the National Ensemble in the 1980s.³⁵ The process slowed down in the 1990s because of a shortage of funding, but it was given a new lease of life in the 2000s, when it benefitted from new credits allocated to cultural development (see Figure 5).³⁶ Yet it was only under the influence of national dance professionals who have long considered Oirad dances to be the main local dances of Mongolia, that *bii bielgee* was perceived as a relevant national response to the new national and global conditions. In this sense they represent a *mutatis mutandis* continuity of Sevjid's cosmopolitanism.

³² The phrase is coined by Laurent Legrain to describe the fact that composers of the socialist period in Mongolia used to make reference to an idealised past deprived of any historical dimension (hence the image of the bridge/tunnel) and used as a way to legitimate contemporary creations. Laurent Legrain, 'Le tunnel sous l'histoire. La musique et le poids moral du passé en Mongolie socialiste et postsocialiste.' [The Bridge over History. Music and the Moral Burden of the Past in Socialist and Post-socialist Mongolia], *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* [online], 40 (2009) [accessed 16 August 2014], <http://emscat.revues.org/1498>.

³³ Nanjid, *Bii biileg*, pp. 16–18.

³⁴ Marsh, *Horse-head Fiddle*, pp.102–103. Note that in this context, *ardyn* refers to "traditional arts" prior to "national folklore".

³⁵ Interview, September 2013.

³⁶ Durmaagiin Balgan, interview, April 2014.



Fig. 4. Urianhai *bii bielgee* dancers at the Second Ih Högsüü Festival, Ulaanbaatar, 14 September 2013 © R. Blanchier.

In Mongolia, national policies that negotiate between international conditions and the cultural construction of the nation state have been of great influence in preserving and promoting *bii bielgee*. As Thomas Eriksen suggests, global pressure is, in the long term, more supportive of the local (i.e. regional or peripheral) culture than it is of the national;³⁷ however, the local dance did not grow up in opposition to the national culture, as in Holton's view,³⁸ but because of it and together with it. In return, Mongolian dance found in *bii bielgee* both a safeguard against a possible dilution of Mongolian culture, caused by the influx of globalising forces, and a source of inspiration for new creations.

Cases of hybridisation: Mongolian dance in the face of contemporary globalisation

It is understandable that in the post-1990 period Mongolians are afraid of losing their distinct culture as global influences increasingly penetrate the country. Many blame young people in particular for lacking interest in what is regarded as typically Mongolian culture and for showing far more interest in "foreign" (*gadaadaas irsen*, especially *Evropyn* [European], *Amerikiin* [American] and *Solongos* [South-Korean]) popular tunes and clip-dances, a mix that includes many pop genres. B**, a former ballet dancer, goes even further when she asserts that new dance creations lack the "poetic" qualities of Sevjid's dances, *because* they contain no genuine Mongolian elements.³⁹ The fear of cultural "Russification" that was expressed by Jantsannorov and his followers in the early 1980s is replaced today by the fear of the influx of Western artistic culture. Nevertheless, at the same time, Mongolian dance shows great creativity: in order to adhere to new global standards and aesthetics as well as respond to the changing tastes of the Mongolian audiences, artists have adopted innovative strategies combining the Mongolian "essence" of dance, mostly found in *bii bielgee* and Sevjid's tradition, with new trends, such as modern, jazz and contemporary dance, or pop elements of rhythm, gesture and style.

Nanjid's *taizny* (stage) *bii bielgee*: an essential ingredient in contemporary Mongolian dance

³⁷ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 'Re-embedding Identity Politics as a Response to Globalization', *Sociology of Globalization*, ed. by Keri E. Iyall Smith (Boulder: Westview Press, 2013), 99–106.

³⁸ Holton, *Globalization*.

³⁹ Interview in French, 2010.

Nanjid, whom we have already met, was a disciple of Kuznetsova and Sevjid, and she worked for many years as a dancer and choreographer in various ensembles until 1992, when she was appointed Mongolian dance teacher in the dance section of the SUI. Taking her inspiration from Dolgorsüren's exercises, an adapted character barre blended with Mongolian dances' gestures and moods,⁴⁰ Nanjid designed her own *bii bielgee* training method. However, instead of resorting to ballet technique as in the previous teaching system, she based her pedagogy on a comprehensive approach in which ethnic variants or "formal styles" (*namba törh*) have become a powerful tool for describing and comparing the "basic movements" (*ündsen hödölgöön*) of *bii bielgee*. Her system is now used by academic students, Oirad masters and scholars alike. For example, she states that in Hoton dance you hold "your palm upwards, suddenly draw each hand alternately towards the torso, make the flexed phalanx slightly tap the breast; look alternatively to the fingers of one hand, then of the other when it is stretched out upwards",⁴¹ and Pegg also readily produces the same kind of discourse: "Baits [sic] use vigorous, deep, 'dropping-down' movements of the shoulders and consequently of the chest (*tseej sugсарah*)".⁴² Nanjid's standardised *bii bielgee* is difficult to classify. Although formally standardised and clearly designed for professional purposes, it does not have the classical ballet flavour of Sevjid's or Dolgorsüren's styles. By keeping much closer to the *bii bielgee* movements and squatting posture, Nanjid's system also presents a more accurate image of the ethnic base of the national dance. Some Oirad dancers refer to this dance style as *taizny bii bielgee*, literally "stage *bii bielgee*".⁴³ When people say "*Nanjidiin* [sic] *hev mayag baina*" ("there is a distinct Nanjid style"),⁴⁴ this is far more than simple admiration; one can see what Nanjid actually achieved: her exercises provide technical training and gestural vocabulary for future creations and, at the same time, they emphasise the relevance of the ethnic distinction by identifying the movements with ethnic terms. But, more than a source of inspiration, *bii bielgee*, together with its standardised versions (including those of Sevjid and Nanjid), provide today's choreographers with an unmistakable Mongolian element that is essential if Mongolian dance is to absorb and integrate with global influences without becoming culturally diluted.

Has modern dance replaced ballet?

Since 1990 Mongolian choreographers have been able to draw on more international forms of dance in addition to ballet. For the elite choreographers, most of them disciples of Nanjid, the time has come to "modernise" Mongolian dance by drawing on "modern" dance which has great international prestige. When they describe this modernised dance form, Mongolians seem to prefer to use the English terms, rather than the Mongolian *orchin üyeiin* or *orchin tsagiin бүжиг* ("contemporary dance" or "dance of the present-time"),⁴⁵ to subsume many genres into one: historical modern dance proper, modern-jazz and various jazz styles and techniques, contemporary dance, and even the neo-classical ballet style.

Modern dance arrives in Mongolia mostly through direct transmission by two main routes, just as ballet was introduced. One way is through foreign choreographers who come to Mongolia for short or long-term collaboration. There are three good examples of this, all French. The contemporary dancer and choreographer Kilina Cremona has collaborated with Bayarbaatar and the Academic Ensemble. In addition, Mongolian dancers regularly perform with Cremona's company in France and she also gives regular master-classes or devises new choreographies in Mongolia. Pascale Michelet, a dancer in William Forsythe's company, conducted master classes for the *Tүмен Eh* Ensemble in 2009, and Marie-Aude Ravet also did the same in 2012 for the College of Music and Dance, *Tүмен Eh* Ensemble, and *Sarny Chuluu* (Moonstone) Ensemble. The second route is through Mongolian dancers who undergo special training abroad, especially in Korea. Among them are Altantsetsegiin Hosbayar, a professor in his forties, who now teaches Mongolian dance as well as *orchin üyeiin бүжиг* (contemporary dance) in the Music and Dance College, and Erdenechuluugiin Enhtaivan, a young dancer of the Academic Ensemble, who is now able to

⁴⁰ Garamyn Dolgorsüren, *Mongol ardyn бүжгийн дагал* [National Mongolian dance exercises] (Ulaanbaatar, n. pub., 1985).

⁴¹ "Биилх байдл н' гарын алгыг дөвш харуулж теежин бие рүүгээ [sic] еелжэн хуртс ойтсом дагалан татаж/доруос дөвш н'/сарвуугаар нугалан теежинд тшилх хөбөрөөр биилхдээ гарын хурууг еелжэн харна." Nanjid, *Bii biileg*, p. 36.

⁴² Pegg, *Mongolian Music*, p. 91.

⁴³ Interview with Gatavyn Lhagva, Höhöögiin Chuluun, Nosonboryn Battulga, and Ts. Buyanishig, September 2010.

⁴⁴ Jam'yangiin Erdenehorloo, Editor's foreword to Nanjid, *Bii biileg*, p. 6.

⁴⁵ Used mostly in official institutional or theoretical contexts where Mongolian terms are required. As far as I know, the only paper dedicated to "contemporary dance" in Mongolia is mainly a summary of Russian handbooks on the philosophical concept of "modernity" as applied to the arts: T. Tsetsegjargal, 'Orchin tsagiin бүжгийн setgelgee хаана хүрчиhev ee' [Where the spirit of contemporary dance is reaching], *Soyol sudlaachdyn үндэсний семинар*, 9–10 (2010), 332–34.

teach jazz and modern dance at Firebird (*Galyn Shuvuu*), a private dance studio. Boldmaagiin Jargal, a bilingual Mongolian who grew up in France, was trained at the Conservatory of dance in Lyon, one of the most prominent contemporary dance schools, which gives him considerable authority in matters of contemporary dance teaching in Mongolia. Tömörhuyagiin Tögsöö, who is also a performer of stage Mongolian dance, studied some musical and jazz techniques when he lived in the United States, which enables him to work on innovative artistic projects hybridising ballet, modern dance, and Mongolian dance. Although the examples above are by no means exhaustive, it is clear that very few people, mostly Ulaanbaatar’s avant-garde choreographers, show a real interest in modern dance as an international source of inspiration.



Fig. 5. “Fire Worship”, Ulaanbaatar, 9 July 2010 © R. Blanchier.

Themes based on ancient history and legends, such as the Hunnu (Xiongnu), Chinggis Khaan, the Börte-Chono legend, or on shamanist worship, started to flourish in the choreographies from 1989. When I began studying Mongolian dance in 2010, the dances based on themes of this kind often included modern and jazz-type movements such as progressive transfers of weight while squatting, crouching attitudes, and exaggerated facial expressions that were intended to convey a sense of antiquity and primitive religiosity. An example from a performance of *Fire Worship* in 2010 (choreographer unknown, the title was given in English only) can be seen in Figure 5. In such cases, new yet clearly national themes in Mongolian dance are illustrated by one definite technique, but the interpretation lacks finesse or a good understanding of jazz dynamics beyond mere sequences of movements borrowed from a foreign technique. Indeed, despite their Mongolian themes, these performances rarely include the motions and postures of Mongolian dance. On the other hand, in Enhgerel’s *Hoshuud*, which is based on the theme of the Mongolian Oirad ethnic group of the same name that lives in Xinjiang, the academic style is dominant, but now and then the bodies of the dancers display a modern-dance style. This is due to the particular training of the dancers of the Ulaanbaatar Ensemble, where the barre exercises of classical ballet are combined with intensive daily modern-jazz and acrobatic training. In Bayarbaatar’s *Bie chin’ bol’yo* (Let me become yours) the complex choreography displays clearly recognisable Mongolian gestures in a duet of seduction and love which also borrows elements from neo-classical composition. In this dance, the traditional figure of *ats* (astride) from Hoton *bii bielgee* and the typical Oirad brisk movements of shoulder and wrist merge with a very modern use of vertebral spiral and pelvis/shoulder opposition, weight and counterweight-based figures of partnering.⁴⁶ In such cases, a genuine hybridisation of style, composition, and dynamic quality of movements happens, sometimes through the use of typically Mongolian dance elements such as shoulder shaking. However, these moments are rather rare, and most of the time choreographers prefer a simple juxtaposition of modern-dance pieces and scenic *bii bielgee* in the same programme.

⁴⁶ This choreography was awarded the Grand Prix at the Sevjid Second National Competition for Choreographers in 2005 (*Ts. Sevjiin nerenjit büjig degleechdiin Ulsyn II uraldaan*) and is regularly performed in the Academic Ensemble.

Another choreographer, Lamjavyn Ganchimeg, who is generally very faithful to the academic style, states that *bii bielgee* and modern dance have much in common: they deal with everyday matters in a non-narrative way, they are performed close to the audience and not necessarily on a theatrical stage, and they allow for improvisation.⁴⁷ This assertion actually draws attention to aspects of modern or contemporary dance yet unexplored by Mongolian choreographers: improvisation, scenic presence, natural movement, personal sensitivity and proprioception, experimentations committing the audience in the performance, urban aesthetics, contemporary political and social problems, and matters of gender. As a matter of fact, Mongolian choreographers have interest in modern dance styles as far as the technical aspects, new gestures and sequences of movements can be inserted and juxtaposed with ballet or Mongolian dance elements without modifying them. Other aspects of modern dance seem to be either misunderstood or left apart. The choreographers and their dancers agree that they lack both the technical training and the familiarity with choreographic and aesthetic principles necessary to really appropriate and adapt modern dance forms in Mongolia. Even for experienced choreographers it is more difficult to develop Mongolian dance by introducing elements of modern dance than it was for Sevjid to introduce the standards of ballet into national dance. Is it that rigid standards inherited from the socialist period are yet too strong to let modern and contemporary dances penetrate today's Mongolian dance? Or is it that modern dance forms, although they have inherited the international prestige enjoyed by ballet in the socialist period, are characterised by a lack of standardisation and uniformity that prevent them to provide a sufficiently cohesive model of global standard to replace the authority of ballet? In any case, the importance of modern dance for contemporary choreographic developments in Mongolia may be elsewhere: by constant reference to globally prestigious models of artistic creation such as modern dance, Mongolian choreographers adopt global models not only of dance but of what a contemporary artist who aspires to performing on the national or international stage should be. If cosmopolitanism is "the imagined connection that people sense they have with a broader translocal or international community but which is manifest in distinctly local ways",⁴⁸ then they are, as Sevjid was, the artistic cosmopolitan elites of Mongolia.

Pop-rock influences

Another aspect of globalisation, which is more popular, concerns a wider range of audience and artists. Pop musical and choreographic culture, contrary to modern dance, is not introduced by direct transmission, but is mainly self-taught from videos, clips, tutorials circulating on the web, or from friend to friend among the younger people, whether professional within the dance milieu or not. Together with the pop rhythms comes a total aesthetic paradigm including body attitudes, clothing and clip-montage choices. That pop styles convey totalising models somehow preventing artists from borrowing and transposing separate sequences of movement, raises anxiety among the traditionalists: what place will be left for essentially Mongolian characteristics in these overtly global forms of art – music and dance alike? Nevertheless, here as well, in practice formal and structural negotiations take place. In such cases, the most important thing is that the dance strictly follows the accents of the pop music; less attention is paid to the reproduction of pre-existing sequences of movements, so that any dance movement can be adapted on the music.

This is well illustrated in the work of the Mongolian choreographer Mōngōntsetseg. She studied Nanjid's *taizny bii bielgee*, whose bank of gestures she commonly uses in her own choreographies. In *Domog bielgee* (*bielgee* of legends), movements and sequences from various *bii bielgee* are easily identifiable. However, the dynamic qualities of *bii bielgee* are dismantled to fit the rhythm and accents of the variety song *Tolin Hul* (Glossy Buckskin [Horse]) arranged by Ts. Chuluunbat in the manner of rock.⁴⁹ The same kind of decomposition of basic Mongolian dance movements on contemporary rhythms can also be observed in Sevjidiin Sühbaatar's choreographies (see Figure 6) or in other contexts where Mongolian dance is included as background dancing, for instance in pop-rock concerts or video clips: sequences of movements from Mongolian dance, especially the shoulder-shake, are then performed in "national" ethnic costumes, which are easily recognised, but also quite different in style and quality from the academic or

⁴⁷ Ganchimeg, interview, June 2013.

⁴⁸ Marsh, *Horse-head Fiddle*, p. 7. The idea that there is a distinctive aspiration to cosmopolitanism among dance elites was kindly suggested to me by my advisor, Michael Houseman, while discussing a draft version of this paper.

⁴⁹ To compare the two versions and watch the dance: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oow7Fnni-88https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzN8J9l\]tv4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oow7Fnni-88https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzN8J9l]tv4) [accessed 25 July 2014].

traditional ones. Therefore such dance sequences appear as preserved icons of traditional Mongolia within a definite pop style that nevertheless transforms the dancing: pop artists and audience alike are thus required to maintain their Mongolian classical references and so reduce the risk of dilution of Mongolian culture. A significant example of an icon of re-imagined traditional Mongolia embedded in a pop piece can be found in *Mongol Style*, a clip-parody of the Korean pop-star Psy's world-famous *Gangnam Style*. The original pop-choreography of the chorus is said to derive from the arm-over-the-head gestures of lassoing in Sevjid's *Jalam Har*.⁵⁰ In this case the globalised pop forms are no longer perceived as a threat to Mongolian culture but as potential vehicles to export some aspects of Mongolian dance worldwide.

Differences between the role of modern dance and that of pop culture in contemporary Mongolian dance are due to the way they were introduced into Mongolia, and of course to the age of the audience: avant-garde cultural elites in their thirties and forties or twenty-year-olds. Both dance types allow cultural hybridisation of Mongolian dance forms, which parallel a renewed interest in the most "authentic" form of Mongolian dance, the genuine Oirad *bii bielgee* as an ideal. However, such a thing as Sevjid's synthesis is hardly visible in contemporary responses to globalisation: modern dance is yet too strange a model to match academic Mongolian dance, while in pop-like forms the Mongolian substratum is reduced to mere icons of nationalised tradition. Hybridisation takes place in ways that are structurally different from those of Sevjid's synthesis. Only the outlines of these new forms of hybridisation can be discerned at present.



Fig. 6. The pop star Amraa, Sevjid's grandson, singing with his group Har Sarnai (Black Rose) in a hard rock show. In the background dancers are performing *Döröö*, a piece choreographed by Amraa's father Sühbaatar, who is the son of Sevjid and his artistic heir. Broadcast on Eh Oron television channel, Ulaanbaatar, 24 October 2013 © R. Blanchier.

Conclusion

At various times in its recent history, Mongolia encountered global influences, which have provided opportunities for achieving the country's ambitions in the international arena. At the same time these external influences have posed a threat to Mongolia's cultural identity. In the socialist and post-socialist periods Mongolian dance has responded to globalisation in ways that challenge preconceived ideas, such as the replacement of local ethnic art forms by nationalised folkloric standards, the revival of *bii bielgee* as being detrimental to the national artistic forms, or the pop-rock culture as a threat to Mongolian cultural integrity. We should particularly reconsider the mutually supportive roles that *bii bielgee* and national folkloric dance play in Sevjid's synthesis as well as in contemporary artistic developments, establishing a subtle dialectic between the need for international standards and recognition and the preservation of an essential Mongolian substratum. If Marsh's "national re-imagination" model for Mongolian music fails to account for this dialectic, it is probably because, unlike Mongolian music, national dance was built on the Oirad and not the majority Halh cultural basis, and thus allows a peripheral ethnic culture to constitute a

⁵⁰ The original: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CH1XGdu-hzQ> and the parody *Mongol Style*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVLE_IDUIuc [accessed 25 July 2014].

preserved stock of authenticity besides the national art forms, instead of detrimentally moulding it into the nation-state limit. Folklorisation led to the promotion of national as well as local (peripheral) dances in Mongolia as well as in the world. This seems to be in agreement with Elisa Kohl-Garrity's approach to *soyol*, "culture", according to whom the moral authority stems from the contemporary reconsideration of the moral values carried by elements of locally preserved "culture" (see her paper in this volume). What Mongolia borrowed from the USSR was not only a socialist model of culture but efficient tools to display regional cultures at a global level. In return, the local (peripheral) *bii bielgee*, instead of developing in opposition to the nationally folklorised art form as in Holton's model, provides a Mongolian legitimacy to the cosmopolitan, international aspirations of contemporary artists.

Our two forms of dance, *bii bielgee* and stage Mongolian dance, are actually well represented today in Mongolian responses to contemporary global models such as modern dance trends and pop-rock influences. The new artistic forms, ways of transmission and of circulation introduced in the post-1990 period tend to make the socialist process that gave birth to Sevjid's synthesis obsolete. Yet, of this process two elements remain: first, the aspiration to integrate Mongolian dance traditions with a global artistic cosmopolitanism; second, the use of the local form *bii bielgee* as a way to anchor choreographic creation in Mongolian traditions. The changes mostly appear in the various modalities of hybridisation that challenge the exclusiveness of an academic dance form and are produced as many responses to globalisation. One could be tempted to ask: will these new forms manage to conciliate the two trends, that of nationalist reduction as well as that of dilution in global culture, and provide durable balance between the local, the national, and the global? Part of the answer may be that the multiplicity and adaptability found in a myriad of hybridisation modalities, rather than the strength of a rigid standardisation, are the best of possible responses to new, increasingly rapidly changing global influences in Mongolian dance.

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