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Final Report

I. RESEARCH TOPIC & GOALS

As a fellow of the Title VIII Combined Research and Language Training program, I spent three months in Kyzyl, the capitol of the Republic of Tuva (Russian Federation) in the summer of 2011. My research topic looks at how *khöömeizhi* (master throat-singing musicians) actively shape and present an indigenous Tuvan voice through performances for international, regional, and local audiences at public festivals and performances in post-Soviet Russia (1991 until the present). In particular, I focus my fieldwork on individual musicians' concerns and beliefs about musical timbre, language, aesthetics, pedagogy, and improvisation in order to understand what it means to produce a distinctly "Tuvan" sound as differentiated from regional throat-singing styles in the neighboring republics of Khakassia, Altai, and Western Mongolia (where I have also conducted some fieldwork). Through interviews and lessons with musicians, I sought to investigate how musical decisions in public performances carry political import and resonance for post-Soviet Tuvans living within the Russian Federation, especially when these performances take place outside of Tuva.

My goals in this research project were to examine expressive practices associated with *khöömei* throat-singing in the Republic of Tuva in order to study ways in which people assemble themselves in and around these practices, as well as how individuals negotiate senses of belonging, collective action, and political change through them. Methodologically, I proposed: 1) to conduct an investigation of four indigenous music festivals in Siberia along with their associated circuits, 2) to take voice lessons and attend throat-singing workshops with both professional and non-professional musicians, and 3) to examine and compare the politics of various musical-aesthetic decisions in Tuvan music performances at these events.

II. RESEARCH ACCOMPLISHMENTS & PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, many artists, writers, and musicians in the Turkic and Mongol republics of Siberia have sought to revive and redefine traditional practices. Performing arts festivals have become a practical way for modern-day indigenous musicians and their communities to assemble the old and the new, interact horizontally between nearby republics, and represent indigenous culture for both Russian and international audiences alike. The current trend of cultural revival has also prompted a reevaluation of the institutions that support transmission, preservation, and innovation in the performing arts. Political decisions related to musical aesthetics influence this feedback loop between performance practice and pedagogy — critical engagements that affect the vitality of traditional expressive culture.

The four major festivals that I attended in Russia during the term of the fellowship included: 1) the VII International Jew's Harp Congress-Festival (combined with the

Ysyakh national celebration) in Yakutsk, Sakha Republic; 2) the Sayan Ring Festival of Ethnic Music in Shushenskoe, Krasnoyarskij Kraj; 3) the Ustuu Khuree Festival of Live Music and Faith in Chadaana, Tuva; and 4) the Naadym National Celebration in Kyzyl, Tuva. At each festival, I examined the representation of Tuvan music as presented by Tuvan performers on stage (or, in the case of the festival in Yakutsk, by an ensemble from Europe performing Tuvan songs) as well as audience reception. I made video and audio recordings, and interviewed musicians, audience members, and organizers.

Whenever possible, I took voice lessons or enrolled in workshops with various *khöömeizhi* in order to elucidate more nuanced aesthetic preferences and opinions as well as how they shift based on the performance context. Through the Internet, I also traced circuits that musicians and ensembles used to travel between these festival sites and other local and international performance venues where I was not able to attend performances this summer.

In addition to the major festivals, my research activities included library and archival work along with field trips to various rural regions of Tuva. My home base was at the Tuvan Institute for Research in the Humanities in Kyzyl, where I spent a considerable amount of time examining and translating rare books, historic recordings, fairy tales, and newspaper clippings. This proved to be a very productive way to interact regularly with Tuvan and Russian visiting scholars also working in the institute's sector of culture. Having built connections through musicians, friends, and students at the Tuvan State University in Kyzyl, I organized several significant fieldwork trips to Western Tuva. Some of my most fascinating conversations and voice lessons that I had took place in the regions of Bai-Taiga, Barun-Khemchik, and Dzun-Khemchik, where I

found significant variation in teaching styles, aesthetics, and opinions related to throat-singing as compared to urban-dwelling musicians living in Kyzyl. As prominent local music scholars have noted, the “professionalization” of Tuvan throat-singing began during the Soviet period, and many music education models in Tuva to this day continue to teach European music theory and Western music notation alongside traditional Tuvan music practices.

Given that my fellowship involved combined research and language study, I was also regularly involved in studying Tuvan language at the Tuvan State University with the head of the International Studies Department. These language classes focused primarily on phonetics and conversational Tuvan (a Turkic language related to Kazakh and Kyrgyz), but we placed considerable emphasis on Tuvan traditional culture (for example, shamanism, animism, customs and rituals) the politics of contemporary Tuvan language usage, and the translation of song lyrics. As I relied on my Russian language skills for daily conversations and most interviews (using a Tuvan-Russian interpreter when available), it was a great experience to incorporate fieldwork material into my language lessons as a way to practice both Russian and Tuvan languages, analyze the material, and better understand linguistic and cultural connections in musical repertoire and recordings involving throat-singing. In addition to regular private meetings at the university, I also had the opportunity to do a home stay with a Tuvan family from Chadaana and practice conversational skills with a visiting student from Japan who was also learning to speak Tuvan.

III. SCHOLARLY & POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Cultural revival of traditional expressive practices in the Turkic republics of Siberia has been viewed as a phenomenon happening mostly during the post-Soviet period, as have horizontal inter-republic relationships and political alliances — both of which were previously tightly controlled by the Soviet state. As my research continues, I hope to show that a closer examination of the complex networks created by indigenous music festivals and their genealogies may reveal that something altogether different was (and is) happening “on the ground.” I have chosen to enter into this project without too many preconceived notions about particular flows of power, sites of agency, and ways in which they become manifested. But I do feel strongly that musical practices and performing arts festivals are particularly fascinating sites in which to find politically loaded actions, attitudes, and strategic maneuvers.

Central aspects of my project which may provide contributions in academia or beyond include: 1) the nature of my fieldwork taking place in a remote, bilingual region of south-central Siberia which has often been ignored by (or erroneously thought to be irrelevant to) the Russian nation-state, 2) the investigation of ways in which indigenous politics do indeed feed back into national politics, and 3) the focus on complex inter-republic relationships between Turkic and Mongol republics in the Russian Federation (and Siberia in particular). As Russia seeks to create a distinct “Eurasian” identity for its nation and people — separating itself both rhetorically and strategically from that which is perceived as “Western” or “Eastern,” I believe that it is imperative to understand who is actually being mobilized under this “Eurasian” label. How are the descendants of traditionally nomadic, shamanist-animist herders reacting to, enabling, and revaluing

their role in the Russian government's vision for the 21st Century? In what ways do Tuvan people claim aspects of their traditional culture and value systems as assets for the Russian Federation in order to share in its vision for the future of the nation-state? These are matters of concern for me, and I believe they are as well for researchers or policy-makers based in the United States.

Methodologically, my focus on public music performances and festival events as points of encounter between Tuvan musicians and musicians from nearby Turkic republics opens up productive policy-relevant inquiry into inter-republic relations as well as how traditional culture becomes mobilized in order to make indigenous claims to a shared Turkic (or Turkic-Mongol) past. Through a detailed examination of informal pedagogical strategies, my research is aiming to illuminate alternative narratives to those recorded by institutions concerning the teaching and shaping of contemporary Tuvan musical practices. My particular emphasis on Tuvan musicians' engagement with cultural politics through micro-level musical gestures and vocal utterances in live performances provides a useful way to examine post-Soviet and Turkic relations. To consider musical sound as participating in the articulation of the political as a means of defiance as well as an assertion of Tuvan distinction will, I hope, open up new angles of inquiry and insight into indigenous post-Soviet experience.

IV. FUTURE PLANS

In discussions with Russian, Tuvan, and Khakas colleagues, I have been excited about the possibilities of disseminating results of my dissertation research at future conferences in Tuva, Khakassia, the United States, as well as in several collaborative bi-

lingual and multidisciplinary publication projects. In November of 2011, I am presenting a paper at the Society for Ethnomusicology's annual conference in Philadelphia related to research conducted during the Title VIII fellowship. In spring of 2012, I plan to submit a paper to an international conference on the topic of musical geographies of Central Asia. In addition to the three months of research on the Title VIII fellowship, I plan to conduct six more months of fieldwork in 2012, all of which will be incorporated into my forthcoming doctoral dissertation in ethnomusicology at U.C. Berkeley. After receiving my Ph.D. degree, I plan to seek a teaching and research-oriented job at a post-secondary institution in the United States. In addition to scholarly work, I also plan to use relationships gained during the Title VIII fellowship to produce a collaborative intercultural music performance with musicians from Tuva and Khakassia that would be filmed and presented in both Russia and the United States. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to pursue this vision!