

Word and Sound in Mongolian Culture

June 20-Jun 29, 2022



Course Instructors:

Dr. Simon Wickhamsmith, Rutgers University, simon.wickhamsmith@rutgers.edu

Dr. Sunmin Yoon, University of Delaware, syoon@udel.edu

Dr. Alimaa Ayushjav, Institute of Language and Literature of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, alimaaa@mas.ac.mn

Course Overview:

This course will introduce participants to the essential ideas of these literary and musical forms and styles of Mongolian culture in the context both of the rural lives of nomadic herders and of the urban literary and musical scene. Mongolia's culture is deeply rooted in the literature, language arts, and sonic expressions developed over centuries of nomadic herding. While cultural knowledge held in oral traditions such as legends, epics, blessings, various folk songs is expressed in literature, when realized as sound, it is expressed also in genres of music. Even today, the written literature is closely connected to these oral and musical forms, and nomadic identity continues to be seen in the formation of contemporary urban culture. Through this course participants will gain an immersive opportunity to understand how the landscapes and lifestyles of Mongolia are expressed in music and literature.

The course will take place in two main venues outside Ulaanbaatar - initially in Sainshand, Dornogovi province, and then in Töv province. In Ulaanbaatar, participants will first experience how the traditional/nomadic forms of the literary and musical arts are being kept alive, and adapted, in contemporary Mongolia. Participants will then travel in rural areas of Mongolia to gain a greater understanding of the cultural and geographic context that shapes music and language arts in Mongolia.

The region around Sainshand, where the nineteenth-century poet and monk Danzanravjaa (1803-1856) lived, will offer participants the chance to explore the character of Mongolian poetry in his work and in the work of more recent writers. Moreover, the bringing together of singers and poets will show the close connection between poetry and song, both in Danzanravjaa's work, and in the folk songs of the region.

Moving to Dundgovi aimag, participants will experience some of the traditional oral literary forms and customs, that are used in a variety of nomadic contexts, such as herding songs, prayers, and

other cultural forms used specifically in feasts and during celebrations. By incorporating into this practical hands-on learning from invited local singers and herders, participants will be able to experience not only the expressive cultural forms of poetry and music but also traditional aspects of herding life, such as milking, erecting gers, and the making of felt and dairy products.

This is an interdisciplinary course that incorporates aspects of geography, anthropology, folklore, and other disciplines. It includes approximately 40 contact hours, and is designed as a 3-credit course. Students seeking academic credit from their home or other institutions can request a more detailed course syllabus, and are encouraged to contact the course instructors and the institution where credit will be granted to ensure that unique institutional information and process requirements are met.

Participants will engage in site visits, discussions with faculty and guest speakers, and small group sharing sessions that allow for the exchange of ideas. Some evening sessions will be held and will include semi-formal performances (readings of literature in Mongolian and English; musical performances; or opportunities for participants to share the progress of their projects). Moreover, since the course will be based primarily on the experience of Mongolian tradition through direct interactions with local practitioners, we will have frequent contributions from Mongolian poets, singers, and lecturers in both more formal performances and informal sharing of music and stories. The course offers an immersive opportunity for participants to gain a feel for how the landscapes and lifestyles of Mongolia are expressed in music and literature.

Anticipated Course Activities

June 20 -June 21: Ulaanbaatar - Program and course orientation. Students will gain an introduction to Mongolian language, culture, history and contemporary issues. We will also hold an introduction to the course, learning methods, and travel plans.

June 22 : Travel to Sainshand.

June 22 - June 26: Stay in Sainshand in ger camp. Lectures and visits to the Hamarin Hiid Monastery complex, local sacred sites, and to visit the regional museum in Sainshand. Performances and discussions with local heritage practitioners. .

June 26 - June 28: Dundgovi aimag field site. Lectures, workshops and discussions on traditional customs and language arts with local musicians and writers

June 29 – Conclusion in Ulaanbaatar. Course debriefing and a chance to browse in Ulaanbaatar, and plan for further research and explorations in Mongolia and beyond. Visit to the Institute of Language and Literature Academy of Science.

About the Instructors:



Dr. Simon Wickhamsmith teaches in the Writing Program at Rutgers University, where he also teaches courses in Mongolian literature, and Manchu and Tibetan language and culture in the department of Asian, Language and Culture. He specializes in Mongolian literary history since 1921 and has recently published a monograph *Politics and Literature in Mongolia 1921-1948* (2020, University of Amsterdam Press). He is also a translator of Mongolian literature, and his translation of Ts.Oidov's poetry, *The End of the Dark Era*, was shortlisted for the National Translation Award in 2017. A book of his translations of Mongolian short stories, *Sun cranes and Other Stories*, was published this year by Columbia University Press. He holds a PhD from the University of Washington.



Dr. Sunmin Yoon is an ethnomusicologist, and currently teaches ethnomusicology/world music at the University of Delaware. Her research focuses particularly on the *urtyn duu* (long-song) genre, and singers' sensory music-making in relation to their ecological and musical environments, and in both rural and urban contexts. Her work has appeared in several journals, such as *Asian Music*, *MUSICultures*, *Musicology Research*, *Mongolian Studies*, and she is the co-editor of a forthcoming book, *Mongolian Sounds Word* (University of Illinois Press 2022). She holds a PhD from the University of Maryland, College Park.



Dr. Alimaa Ayushjav is head of the Folklore section at the Institute of Language and Literature, Mongolian Academy of Sciences. Her research focuses on a wide range of oral literature, intangible cultural heritage, and cultural studies. Her works include *Types, Distribution and Release Features of Long-songs* (2013), *Registration of Records of Magnetic tapes kept by Collection of Mongolian Folklore and Local Dialects in the Institute Language and Literature of MAS. Volume I & II* (2004), and other compilation volumes on epics, folk stories, and Mongolian traditional customs. She sits on the editorial board for "Mongolovedenie," the journal of the Kalmyk Science Center of Russia, and is a foreign correspondent for ICHCAP UNESCO. She holds a PhD from the Humanities University, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.