

The Hills Are Alive

This seems like an enormous undertaking, the attempt to write down in a brief report an experience in China that has affected my life. Perhaps delaying this very act is significant. How can I possibly set it all into words without wanting it become larger, which it already is? And sitting down to write brings back all the memories of really good days and really good people that I met along my journey and how a part of me longs to be back there among them. Right now. But, I owe it to those who provided for this trip for their generosity in allowing me this experience. And I owe it to those who have never been to Asia, who have never traveled alone, who have or never will see the Altai mountains, in one of the most remote areas in China. When I think of where I actually got to, I feel lucky. In fact, all along the way, I felt this fortunate. What I saw and encountered is changing. Not too many years from now, many of the dirt roads into the mountains will be paved, electricity will have reached every village. Logging has already become an issue. The romance about a remote quiet life is already just that. Pop music icons have found their way into the log cabins in Akkaba, kids can't wait to pile into the yurt to see action film videos on TV monitors powered by generators. China is buzzing with activity, construction of roads and buildings overwhelm. Beijing awaits the introduction of the Universal Studios Shopping Center, now under construction. I mention this and I will again because the very nature of the changes happening in China have affected the many cultures that live there and in turn have made it so that what I set out to find has for the most part died out.

My proposal was to go in search of khoomei, a style of vocalizing in the throat that produces multiple sounds, harmonics, all at once, and is a traditional practice among people of Tuvastan and Mongolia. I proposed to go to the northwest region of China, the Xinjiang province, most specifically the Altai mountains, a tiny tip on the map, an area bordering Mongolia to the east and Kazakstan to the west where borders were established officially in 1884. It seemed very far, and I had no context in which to imagine this region. All I knew was that farther to the northeast in Tuvastan, Southern Siberia, which borders Outer Mongolia as well as in Mongolia itself, khoomei was being revived. The music group, Huun Huur Tu, from Tuva, have already made half a dozen albums and have toured the West. Particularly because of the interest by Westerners, khoomei is having this new life. And also due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, republics like Tuvastan can reclaim their heritage. I figured that the Altai mountains which cross all the above borders was the home to such a musical practice which has shamanistic roots, and a relationship to herding, horsemanship, and nature. This has also been a hypothesis for anthropologists studying the region. So I set out to find surviving khoomei singers on the Chinese side of the Altai, perhaps individuals originally from Tuva or Mongolia who still reside within the Chinese borders. Alas, the last khoomei singer died in 1996. As it stands, the ones who still carry on any traditions are not passing them on; what I heard repeatedly was 'the young really don't care about this stuff' when I asked about these music practices. As strains of the hit song from 'Titanic' and the Brazilian theme song for the World Cup '98 floated by in bus, car, shop or on someone's boom box, I understood this to be true. Still, I found many lotuses in the mud, many gems, hidden but there and shining. And it is for them particularly that I write this account, for they all affected my

life. The answer that traveled with me when I would periodically ask myself what this trip was really all about was... 'it's about people, connecting with people' . And it is as follows....

I arrived in Beijing Monday June 15 and went straight to the taxi stand cursing my luggage. It was hot but still bearable. I showed the driver a xerox copy of a hotel recommended by a friend, Liz Bernstein, a chiropractor studying Chinese medicine, who I had met only two weeks before in the Bodhi Tree bookstore in Los Angeles. We met discussing zafus. It turned out that she too would be in Beijing at the same time. I don't speak Chinese and didn't have enough time to become even the slightest bit conversational before I departed. So showing the driver the address, we nodded at each other and we were off down the expressway; it could've been the outskirts of Paris at that point. It hadn't registered that I was in Beijing, in China. Even seeing the Chinese characters on the billboards. Albeit, the flight on Air China was an initiation of sorts, with hardly any 'laowai' (foreign devil) aboard. Chinese in-flight movies, Chinese food, Chinese youth athletic club members. Suddenly I felt awkward, like a 'Gap' ad, wishing I didn't look so awkwardly Western.

The cabbie took me to a hutong near Dongzhimen Dajie in the northeast corner of the city. And we got a bit lost. He got out several times to ask where the hotel was. It turned out to be inside the Traditional Medicine compound and soon I was being greeted by the staff of the Beijing Acupuncture hotel, tucked in an alley way. I met Liz and we then went to eat with a few other medical students in a local restaurant, complete with loud roaring cartoons, smoke, garbage on the floor and dozens of delicious dishes piling onto our table. Still, nothing registered.

The very next morning I had the unusual opportunity to witness a C-section with acupuncture as part of the anesthesia at the Beijing Obstetrics Hospital. Try that as a antidote to jet lag. By 8 am, we were on a minibus, driving through traffic; I was silently stunned seeing all the bicycle commuters. And then more so as I watched a baby being birthed by surgery, a nice eye-catching line for my first batch of post cards.

I spent a total of 4 days in Beijing, acclimating, traveling by subways, thanking God for my wrist compass. One of those days, I went to the Central Conservatory of Beijing to see Professor Du Yaxiong, who teaches music history and ethnomusicology as per the recommendation of an American ethnomusicologist, Nathan Light. I was told that this professor might be able to enlighten me as to the nature of music making in China, and I wanted to know if I could even find khoomei in Beijing. First I had to find the school itself and that was an adventure, taking the public bus, getting lost, having 10 or so men ogle me and gather round as I whipped out my pocket dictionary and pointed to 'music' and 'school', smiling for help. Then came the rainstorm. But we found the professor. When I told him about my proposed endeavor, this became my first encounter with Chinese disinterest in the promotion of ethnic minority cultural arts. Even though this particular conservatory is not as focused on Western classical music styles as the other one (Beijing Conservatory), and does incorporate Peking opera style along with other older traditions of music making, it is still not a place of varied cultural exchanges.

Although he knew about khoomei, Professor Du Yaxiong said I wouldn't find it in Beijing at all. By the end of the week this was the case. What I did find at the school was a very impressive group of young women singing Chinese opera as preparation for their upcoming exams. I got an inside peek at how a school like this operates and where these young people are able to go after they graduate. Many end up preparing auditions for the Beijing Opera.

I bought my ticket to Urumqi, the 'capital' city of the Xinjiang province and Uigher Autonomous Region. Many asked me why I'd want to go there. "There's nothing there", I often heard. On June 20th, I boarded a Soviet made jumbo heading northwest with the friendliest air staff I'd ever encountered. Periodically I'd hear over the loud speakers, 'We hope you like it' in reference to the flight. A large wide bodied plane, two aisles, wood paneling. And a tote bag as a gift. Not a Westerner in sight on the whole journey. And when we arrived, I thought maybe there was nothing here; it looked a bit like Lebanon.

I was met at the airport upon arrival by Margaret Sun, an English professor in the Foreign Languages Department at Xinjiang University. It was at the urging of a friend, Saul Gitlin, that I meet Margaret. We went by taxi into the city of Urumqi where she had made arrangements to have me housed on campus in the foreign guest hostel, next to a manmade lake and not far from where she, her husband and daughter reside, in the buildings where all the professors live. And Margaret was an incredible help. She is a spry quick-witted woman in her 60s who has been to the States twice and has helped many of her own students go abroad. Over the course of the week that I was in Urumqi, I became quite close to Margaret, who opened up her house to me, who shared her couch with me so we could watch Clinton arriving in Beijing and who introduced me to my first home-cooked Chinese meals; her husband is a chef par excellence. She also shared with me her life, which had been printed out on over 300 hundred pages of computer paper and which I carried with me during my 3 1/2 weeks up in the Altai. By reading her life, I gained insight into the development of Xinjiang, the conflicts among the Han, Hui, Kazak, Uigher and Mongolian who inhabit the region. Margaret, a Cantonese who had moved after the Liberation from Shanghai to Xinjiang, met her husband, started to work but then was accused of being a spy for the CIA because of her facility with English. She speaks it like a native, complete with all the expletives and slang, ... 'you're damned right!'. At that time however, this ability led to an unemployment period of 16 years. After the Cultural Revolution and much suffering she applied to Xinjiang University as a teacher and has been there ever since.

Getting my bearings in Urumqi, I noticed the chaotic blend of traditions, Uigher women donning scarves on their heads, kebabs smoking road side, bagel-like bread, bowls of noodles mixed with mutton and vegetables. Arabic characters over Chinese ones. Trying to figure out who's Chinese, who's Kazak and who's Uigher. Mongolian hot pot at the night market. Like Beirut, on the verge, being rebuilt, some new skyscraper construction abandoned midway while next door is the brand new Bank of China branch or the latest new department store. Bazaars. Dirt, dust. Spitting, hacking, a wet thick grey strand of the stuff hitting my leg as I walked, thinking it was a puddle I stepped into. Thanking myself for bringing the Wash'n'Drys. Eating ice cream that tastes like cantelope. Getting

used to all this. Then, figuring out how to get to the Altai, who to go with, the logistics, being introduced to many people and to how things operate.

It started with a visit to Mongolian Teacher's College in search of Turgun, a Tuvan student who comes from Akkaba, a small village in the Altai. Kamelbek, a Kazak relative of Talant Mawkanuli (who gave me some important contacts for this journey, he is currently a professor of Kazak language in Wisconsin and former student of Margaret's) and Bater, a Mongolian professor met Margaret and I at the school. Turgun came out to greet us; sweet, shy, pretty, she would be returning to the Altai at the end of the month, by bus to Burqin, and then by horse to her village. Was this an option? Well, I hadn't really traveled by horse so extensively; my last bout on horseback 10 years ago ended with back sprain in Poland, not to mention lingering terror. And then there was the obvious communication gap; I would be in need of a translator. So we told Turgun I would think about it. Then with the World Cup playing in the background, we drank cokes at the Holiday Inn with Jiger Janabel, who I had talked to prior to coming to China (upon the recommendation of ethnomusicologist Ted Levin who is widely recognized for bringing Central Asian music to the West, specifically 'Huun Huur Tu'). Jiger helped a great deal in telling me about the region and in trying to put me in touch with people here. By coincidence he happened to be coming to Urumqi at the same time as I to visit his family, directly from Harvard University (he was also a student of Margaret's) and on his way to his new post in Kazakhstan at a UN Development Office. It also happens that his father is Janabel, the 'big potato' or former president of Xinjiang, representing the minorities for the Chinese government. (I mention him because he will figure again later in this account.) Also at the table was Gulner, who works as a travel guide for CITS. She was also a student of Nancy Walter (a cultural anthropologist who lived and taught in Urumqi for over a year) at Xinjiang University in the foreign languages department. Here, I was presented with ideas about how to travel, how to find a translator/guide willing to travel with me for over three weeks, alone. I discovered that things take time, that everyone has an idea and my plans seemed probable or improbable depending upon who I talked to. And no one was sure what *khoomi* was until I presented the music to them. What I brought with me everywhere was the CD cover of Huun Huur Tu's '60 Horses in My Head' album and various recordings of their work. Fascinated as people were, they remained unsure.

Through Jiger, I met Turbair, the Mongolian representative in the Xinjiang regional government and an expert in animal husbandry. This became my first introduction to Mongolian hospitality complete with milk tea, fried bread and assorted sweets. Lunch lasted several hours. During this time I met Turbair's wife and daughters, Tuya and Darina and all conversation was translated by Mr. Ding Xu, a very cordial Chinese guy who had married into the family. Again, they were fascinated by the recordings of *khoomi* and offered that if I wanted to go to Bortala, they could try to help me. Bortala is directly west of Urumqi on the lower Kazak border in the Mongolian Autonomous region. Meanwhile, they invited a young and famous Mongolian pop singer to come by who proceeded to demonstrate her incredibly vibrant voice for us all, and who knew the older traditional melodies but was now making a good living singing Western style pop music. After she sung, it was my turn. With phlegm in my throat at having drunk too

much dairy, I was suddenly nervous. But they insisted. What would I sing that I could just whip out like that? And then it came to me, 'Amazing Grace' ...which would become my theme song, American, spiritual, with some high notes thrown in for splash. It went over well...phew. Then we took photos, and as I left, Turbair sent me off with a letter of introduction which I later presented when I reached Kanas.

Amidst the meetings, I managed a day trip to Tianshan (Heavenly Lake), a beautiful scenic spot, which is about 3 hours from Urumqi. This became my second encounter with cable cars, vendors, photographers and music blasting around the serenity. So this is how a day of 'nature' can be in China. The first encounter was at the Great Wall in Simatai, hearing Celine Dion singing over the valley and the Macarena playing near vendors selling water. For the trip to Tianshan I was accompanied by Mr. Ding; during our minibus ride together, he became less reserved and started to describe his observations about women, what Uigher women were like as opposed to Kazak, the cultural differences. And he became more inquisitive about American women, asking who they prefer, asking me to confirm or refute stereotypes Hollywood solidifies. As much as I tried to dispell some of the myths, it looked to be a huge task so part of me preferred to look out the window and not miss a single moment of what we were passing by.

In searching for a translator/guide, I had several candidates. Most could not speak enough English as was discovered from the many 'yes' responses and large pauses on the other end of the line. One night I was the honored guest at a Chinese restaurant around a table full of scholars. The dinner was organized by Talimu Zhao, Vice Director of the Xinjiang Art College. Through him and the translator Mr. George, they had invited two editors of a cultural journal, a Mongolian man who works at the radio station, Tohan, a well-known Kazak singer and teacher, and an ethnomusicology teacher. All were very interested in what I was proposing in the Altai; in fact they had done some research on the 'irgil' (horse head fiddle) and khoomei. They said that they knew of several throat singers in the city of Altai - Tuvent, Brunkacick and Butunashen (father and son) but that all had passed away. They wanted to help me. First we toasted...and toasted. 'Gambai' and clink to the chinese spirits in hand. And we ate. Then came the discussion of what I should do. After some haggling, they decided that for a very large monetary sum, I should take the two journalists at the table up to the Altai with me and we would be sure to find the khoomei singers and they could guarantee the trip would be hassle free. I was a bit surprised...how to graciously decline the offer? I just couldn't afford it and I had envisioned a more discreet solitary journey. Meanwhile, Mr. George asked if I'd give an English lesson to classroom full of children before I left to go north. So on Saturday morning at the campus of the Art College, I went into the clamour of giggling and smiles as I began the technique of play acting to teach 'hello, my name is...'

What finally did occur was that through Gulner, I met Jiaohar (it means 'diamond' in Kazak), a 27 year old woman who had been working freelance doing translations for the Xinjiang TV Station as well as teaching at a vocational school, who speaks good English as well as Chinese, Kazak and Uigher and could become available simply by telling her employer that she must go visit her mother for a couple of weeks. Although Jiaohar had grown up in the countryside, she had never been to the Altai. So this trip we were about to take would be a first for both of us. It had been Gulner's idea that if Jiaohar

successfully fulfilled her duties with me, she could then be considered as a future travel guide and that it could be more lucrative than her current jobs. Gulner is strong and clever, with almost an American air about her which comes from having guided Westerners for the past 8 years. Very protective of her guests, for example, when we had lunch one day and she discovered cockroaches climbing the wall next to our table, she made us promptly get up and leave, exclaiming to the owner that this establishment would be shut down if the roach problem wasn't resolved immediately. Gulner introduced me to kebabs and the night market and to the night bus which she dissuaded us from taking. "Even for us it's disgusting..." in reference to the closed windows, cigarette smoke and sunflower seed shells everywhere. When we were ready to head north, we hired a car and for the first two days of the trip, Gulner accompanied Jiaohar and I. Gulner had grown up in the Altai so having her with us was very helpful as well as being a lot of fun.

The drive from Urumqi to Burqin is about 11 hours north through blazing heat and desert. No air conditioning, intermitten rain storms, a flat tire, and over 60 km of dirt road detour due to paved road construction. The driver chain smoked. Jiaohar and Gulner sat in the back chattering away in Kazak as I floated off into a driving stupor. We passed Karamay, a town existing solely for the oil industry and 'ghost city', not really a city but a formation of sand sculpted by the wind to seem like one. We arrived in Burqin about 10 pm at night, the sun just starting to set and I was surprised at how quaint, alpine and clean it seemed. New buildings, no garbage or chaos. Only large mosquitoes with greenish bodies. As a foreigner, I got introduced to the Chinese governmental policy on the Altai. I could only stay in one of two hotels in this town. Priced accordingly. The next morning, despite my worrying and the stories I had heard about how difficult it is to go to Kanas Lake, we managed to smoothly acquire the necessary documents to allow for me to go. Two different permits. And my visa extension. Then we left the mosquitoes behind in a hired jeep which slowly bounced along the unpaved road for 7 hours before we reached Kanas. Perhaps this was the most glorious day yet for me. As the terrain changed from flat desert to rolling slopes and we climbed into the mountains, I became jubilant. Dots of white representing yurts in a wash of deep green. I kept thinking this had been the ocean floor long long ago. I felt so lucky to be here; I wanted to cry...how many ever get this chance? It was peaceful. It was beautiful. How I wished everyone I knew could be with me at this moment, drinking it all in. It felt yet unmarred, no fences. We stopped along the way and had tea with a Kazak family. This was definitely Kazak country now and my new friends Gulner and Jiaohar were introducing me to their culture with pride.

Climbing yet higher and noticing the sparkling stones, the river a sea green foam color, we finally approached Kanas. 2 km beyond the village proper is the lake and the Chinese operated 'Kanas Mountain Villa' where I was obligated to stay. We were greeted by young women in turquoise blue ensembles and heels. 'Big potatoes' (meaning 'important officials') were due any moment. So the greeting it turned out was for them. The picture of a potential Shangri-la faded as I was sequestered to a freshly painted cabin, smelly and toxic next door to buzzing construction on new A-frame accommodations going up. I would then awake to the sound of a gagging hacking throat...something I would never get used to. I became immediately disappointed. I wanted to stay among the Kazaks and Mongols in the village, in their guest homes, but I couldn't. No foreigner can. As

beautiful as it is, the lake remaining commercially undisturbed, I had the feeling of being trapped. Every two days a new load of Chinese tourists would appear, many in Land Cruisers, to take stock of their 'land', have their pictures taken, drive up the side of the mountain, eat and drink a lot, and then leave. This is where I felt cultural difference. One afternoon, for example, Gulner, Jiaohar and I had found a very vigorous trail leading up to the top of a mountain overlooking the lake. When we reached the top after 3 hours, we were amazed to see so many people congregating up there. Then we saw the Land Cruisers on the other side of the peak. Exhausted from our travails, we had hoped that maybe they'd offer us a ride back down. Instead they just waved at us and turned their backs. It was at this moment that I felt an impasse between Chinese culture and my own, how locked out of theirs I felt. And yet at the same time, I felt a growing affinity for the Kazaks, their connection to the land, their hospitality and warmth.

Although I couldn't stay in the village proper of Kanas, I went immediately to visit Munk Buren, Mayor of Kanas/Kom township, representing the local community of Kazaks and Tuvan, who I was told would help us find the music. We had tea with him and his wife Sangden and they gave us freshly made cow's milk wine. Then, after some discussion about khoomei (introducing Huun Huur Tu's music), Munk advised us that we'd find what we were looking for in Akkaba, about 40 km from Kanas or about 4 hours by horse. He informed us that most Tuvans live there. Munk described himself as part of the Munchak tribe and that there are several other Tuvan tribes: Erket (koloby, erket), Koyck (koyck and ha-koyck) and that Tuvans living in Kanas and Akkaba are different. Sangden is from the Erket, who characteristically are musically proficient.

In China, Tuvans are considered part of the Mongolian minority group, even though their roots go back to Tuva. Supposedly, it was Genghis Khan who brought the Tuvans into China and what is now Outer Mongolia (there is a substantial population of Tuvans in Bayan Olgii, too) as soldiers to defend against the dynasties. 'Tuva' in Mongol means 'shoo,shoo' (ie; go back). In 1987, researchers from Beijing inquired about Tuvan culture and language and it had been hoped that the Chinese government would find reason to list Tuvan as one among the over 50 minority groups recognized in China. But it is assumed that because there are less than 3000 Tuvans living there, it does not justify creating another 'minority' group. So in school, Tuvans learn the Mongolian alphabet and language which can sometime cause confusion because Tuvan language has turkic roots. And then at the age of 8, they start to learn Chinese. The language that, for example, Sangden speaks is a dialect, a blend of Mongol, Tuvan and Kazak. In addition, in such remote villages in the Altai, music and art are not part of the curriculum. As for music in Kanas, the only one known to be practicing it is Yerdish Mayang. So with gifts, video and tape recorder in tow, we met with him several times; it turns out that he is visited regularly by tourists (from the West, Japan...when they are able to come) and this helps support his family. And he makes the music his father passed down to him using a flute called the 'Mandalish Chor'; mandalish means the name of the grass/reed the flute is made from which grows near the river and at the top of the mountains. It has three holes which sound the intervals 1, 4, and 6. Also, the flute is placed at one side of the mouth and when played, tones from the voice are also sounded to harmonically mix and

vibrate with those of the flute. I also met Yerdish's daughter Meihua Yerdish and a friend of hers, Gawa Hojamjar (Mongolian) who also sing.

After spending sufficient time with Yerdish and Munk, we felt it was time to move on to Akkaba as suggested. The 'big potatoes' had arrived, one of them being Janabel (who I mentioned before) and his entourage and I was longing for quieter environs where I could be with those indigenous to the region. I was concerned that the officials might start to become suspicious of my visits to the village because they weren't what tourists normally did on their own. Even with Jiaohar as my guide, we were both like 'babes in the woods' because of our lack of experience. Munk offered to write a letter of introduction for Akkaba and to arrange horses for Jiaohar and I; then Sangden sang a song in Tuvan, tears coming to her eyes. So packed up and ready (Gulner had left us by this point), we hopped on supposedly gentle horses (with the Mongolian alcohol-free horse guide) and headed out. And right into a police official. Who wanted to see my passport. Well, it was okay for me to be in Kanas and to go to Kom, another village farther away, but nowhere on the permit did I have permission to go to Akkaba. Uh oh, now what? If I wanted, I would have to go all the way back to Burqin first, get a new permit and then drive up to Akkaba, which would require another jeep hire, more time, and more money. And no adventure on horseback! Thinking of the 'big potatoes' back at the 'villas', we got off the horses and spent the next 24 hours trying to get permission right there. Even my reprise performance of 'Amazing Grace' at the 'big potato' party the night before (this was Jiaohar's doing, rousing me from bed in my pajamas, telling the manager I was a singer from America) could not help us get out of Kanas to Akkaba and this is because as big officials as they are, they are still not Chinese and it is the Chinese that make these rules. Another big lesson about 'landscapes' here. So patience dwindled, we hired a jeep and left for Kom with a Chinese driver Liuyong Dong who we nicknamed 'Leo' in honor of Leonardo DiCaprio, to go along with the Titanic frenzy all of the world seemed to be caught up in; 'Leo' became a welcome and ever faithful addition to the cast of characters.

On the eve of the 4th of July, a 6 hour drive from Kanas, we arrived in Kom. Tucked into a valley next to the river and in between mountains, Kom felt like a relief from bustle of Kanas. Because of the logging industry, there is electricity here but still no phones and no running water. The official guest house, consisting of a small row of concrete room blocks was filled with teachers from the region participating in a learning seminar on how to teach, many of whom we found out were from Akkaba. In the dark, we were pointed to the guest house across the way consisting of two rooms; we gave Leo the one with the TV as he was going to have to stick around until we were ready to leave Kom for Burqin and try to get to Akkaba thereafter. And for Leo, fun involved getting very drunk most nights on beer or spirits, smoking and watching TV. This guest house was run by Dooling, a Mongol/Russian woman and she was also an exceptional cook. By this point I was becoming well adapted to the staples of milk tea, bread and noodles with mutton. In fact, I began to look forward to the singular regularity of every bowl, to my surprise, as a former vegetarian of over 15 years. Once we got our bearings in Kom, we went over to meet the teachers from Akkaba. We again played the music of Huun Huur Tu and watched faces come alive with recognition of the music and the language. Not all was understood but enough. And then in asking about khoomei, we got a mild

acknowledgment and the attempt to sing a traditional folk song in Tuvan. One man, Jiamsur, offered to accompany us all the way to Akkaba because he seemed to know where we'd find the person. He also seemed very kind and serious about helping. So we decided to wait for him to finish the seminar. Meanwhile, I finally got to wash my clothes at the river as well as my body. At some parts, the river was so clean and clear, we drank directly from it. We went to a dancing party and moved to the beats of cheesy electronic 'popcorn' music coming from the boom box while a colorful mirror ball went round and round from the ceiling. I got to witness the bleating of a sheep, which although made me gasp at first as it continued to jolt and jiggle even after its jugular vein had been slashed and all the blood had been drained, I appreciated the fact that the entire sheep is used, not just the shoulders or rack thereof. And, we met Jumai, a Tuvan (Telengut tribe) living in Kom for 13 years and the most well-known singer here; she had been singing since childhood, and had applied to music college but couldn't get in because they said she was too short. And now she had a drinking problem. Later on in Akkaba I was to hear a woman outside yelling fiercely at a man in the pouring rain, only to discover it was Jumai.

On the eve of the full moon, we drove back to Burqin and spent the night in the other official hotel because the 'big potatoes' were occupying our first choice. It was this night where Jiaohar and I, becoming much closer as friends, had to reevaluate our relationship. For her, this experience was very challenging. To translate constantly and be the respectful conduit while trying to comprehend the Western analytical mind were things she wasn't accustomed to. And for me, to be left out of many conversations, worried that some of what Jiaohar was hearing wasn't being translated back...all this came to the fore that evening so we hashed it out. It also came down to being in each other's faces for days on end without a break, boundaries becoming a bit blurred between friendship and job.

The following day we got new permits to allow us to go to Akkaba. I was very much looking forward to this because it had been built up to be the place where most Tuvans live. I had also been told about Orzohor, a baksa ('shaman' in Kazak) who everyone was sure sang khoomei. He had become mythic to me by then and I intended to meet him wherever he was living. This journey back up into the mountains took all day along a route closer to the Kazakstan border, and passing through the prefecture town of Habahe in Kaba County. And it afforded another spectacular viewing/ride. Akkaba is within a stone's throw of the river that borders Kazakstan which makes it a high security place, access made difficult to visitors. Over the village sits the Chinese border patrol housing young military officers. The village consists of 90 families, 60 of whom are Kazak and 30 Mongol/Tuvan. Because there are no facilities for guests in the town, Jiaohar and I were free to stay with a family, finally. And because we were traveling with Jiamsur, he offered his house to us. At first it felt like a very nice gesture but after seeing his wife, harried, overworked with three little boys to take care of, distraught at having unannounced guests and the fact that she would be giving up their bedroom for us, I felt a bit awkward. And then came disappointment that after having made such an effort to reach Akkaba, Jiamsur told us that the journey to see Orzohor would in fact be a very dangerous, life-threatening 15 hour long ride on horseback that we could not possibly manage.

What to do? After a night of fitful sleep against the sound scape of action films being watched by the kids, Jiaohar and I decided to walk around and find out more about Akkaba. Our discovery was that the Kazaks live 'uptown' and the Mongol/Tuvans live 'downtown' and that there is an inherent separation in lifestyle and relationships. Even in such a small town, the cultures view each other from behind their own 'fences'. As we walked up the village path along the stream, we met a Kazak woman who just happened to have available space in her own home. It felt less chaotic up there so we decided to move. Bardoalit and Chukor Khan became our hosts for the week in Akkaba along with Murkyat and Ahar, their eldest son and his wife, Bakash, their eldest daughter and her husband Dosjan and Einur, Cirque and Janar, the younger children. I still think deeply about how warm they were to us, how hospitable and protective. And I think about Dosjan's daughter's 5th birthday party where while all the children played outside, we older folk gathered indoors for sweets, freshly slaughtered and boiled mutton (I steered clear of the entrails) and an overflow of beer while the dombra was passed and everyone had to sing or dance. It didn't matter that I could only say 'rachmet' ('thank you' in Kazak). Being present was most important.

That first morning in Akkaba was a strange one because as we came back down to Jiamsur's to get our things, he was being taken away to Habahe for questioning most probably because he was a teacher at the Mongolian school (they have a separate school from the Kazaks), and there had been a fight in the village months ago where a Mongol boy had been accused of beating up a Kazak and the police were investigating. Meanwhile, Jiamsur's wife was very upset that we were leaving as she worried that her husband would return and be very angry with her for not being a good enough hostess. In this reaction, I saw the fear that women go through there, beholden to the judgment of the husband, and made to work extremely hard for the upkeep of the home. And this was milking season; the women had to be up very early milking cows for hours as well as at night as the sun was setting.

From our new vantage point, we set out to find out more about Orzohor. And we discovered that Jiamsur had lied. That in fact, Orzohor was only 2 hours away by horseback. While making arrangements to visit him, we met with Solungu, the educational officer for the region who currently lives in Habahe during the winter and Akkaba during the summer. Meeting with him gave me more information about the history of Tuvan culture in China. Solungu, 46 years old, Tuvan/Mongol, originally from Kom, attended Altai Teacher's college, taught children for 20 years there, is also well known in the Altai as a composer and accordion/flute/violin player. He is self taught and writes songs in Tuvan; then teaches them to his students. Very interested in preserving Tuvan culture, for 4 years he worked on and wrote a book to document it in hopes that the Chinese would recognize the value in this and help to promote the culture in the school system. When he was finished with the work, he gave his only two original copies (there isn't a Kinko's yet in the Altai) to professors who promised to get to back to him. It has been over 2 years and still no word.

From Solungu, I learned that the Tuvan music in China has two main melodies while using different phrases and words. I asked him about khoomei; he said it comes directly from Tuva, not Mongolia (in Mongolia, however, they believe the opposite). The renowned throat singer would arrive in the village and the inhabitants would gather to hear him as a form of entertainment. It continued in China as a tradition until the Liberation; then it started to fade. At that time and thereafter, having no encouragement to continue customs, there was a move towards natural modernization, cutting the hair, wearing work clothes and no longer practicing religious rituals. Solungu also gave me the names of khoomei singers he recalled who lived in Altai: Chowjuk, Akkaba (d. 1960), Kergan, Akkaba (d. 1960), Bombye, Kanas (d. 1996), Manjin, Akkaba (d. 80's). Also there were: Sanjap (flute player, d. 80's), Darun and Kokos (irgil players, d. '90s). Again the echo of a refrain was heard... 'they are all dead, there is no one to pass these traditions onto, nobody wants to know now...the young people don't care.'

'The only ones left are too old now' was also heard referring to those like Orzohor and Zolva, 72, who plays an irgil she made herself and is being taken care of by Meeger, her granddaughter. When I met Zolva, the bow for her irgil was broken but she told me she'd repair it if I promised to return the next day. Which I did and it was great to hear her play. And I finally got to meet Orzohor. By horseback through a vast green valley and then forest, we came upon two small yurts tucked into the side of a mountain. In one resided Orzohor's son, his wife and their three children along with Orzohor who was out when we arrived. We had been told he wasn't quite 'with it' anymore. At 82, he was losing his faculties, going in and out of a state where he would just mutter to himself. So I shouldn't expect much, I was forewarned.

Solungu told me about the tradition of the baksa. When Solungu was young he had seen Dugghe Kam ('kam' in Mongolian means shaman or an extraordinary person with inner abilities) beat his drum and head until blood came out along with the spirits. A spectacle for all to see. One anecdote about Dugghe was that when a villager couldn't find his gunpowder, Dugghe prayed and through a hole in the yurt, hay fell down and within it was the gunpowder. As for Orzohor, from the age of 17, he suddenly was a baksa. It just happened one day. He didn't have a teacher. He would disappear and come back saying he had ridden a deer. No one ever saw. He would put snakes and insects in his coat; then he'd take them out and eat them. He would travel and in a few minutes he'd be on the top of a mountain. However, after Liberation, his spirits advised him to stop practicing openly as a baksa. And since that time, he has always helped Tuvans but his power was diminished and his focus returned to farming as he had been doing all along.

We spent almost the entire day in the yurt with Orzohor when he finally came down from the mountain. He hadn't chanted in a while so at first he was shy. He would speak in Tuvan dialect or in prayer. Sometimes it was incomprehensible to even the family. He mentioned the fact that the last foreigner to visit him was a girl named Maria from Tuvastan 2 years ago (she was researching Tuvan linguistics throughout the region and apparently it had been that long since another foreigner, me, had come here). He was happy to have me, coming from such a far strange land, in his home. Especially since he wouldn't be here 'the next time' referring to his own death. We exchanged several toasts

and ate fresh bread. Orzohor's daughter-in-law felt slightly ashamed of the conditions in which they lived and how they couldn't provide much of a meal for us. I tried to make her understand that I was just so grateful to be there and felt so lucky to be among all of them. Orzohor knew khoomei but was not an 'expert'. What he sang had strains of khoomei in it but was really a long string of chanted prayers. One of them was for Jiaohar and I. And that felt truly special. A lump formed in my throat as I waved goodbye to this quiet odd man, a gnome in his green drell and brown cone-like hat. Something precious was departing. How to live with the changes? In a year, Akkaba is promised new roads and electricity.

'Leo' our driver returned to pick Jiaohar and I up and take us back to Burqin. As we left Akkaba, I felt excited to get back to a city....for me it was a challenge to be in such a quiet idyllic place for this long...but I also felt a tremendous sadness because I found great peace here as well. No, I didn't find khoomei but I found things that I hadn't planned for or envisioned and it was equally revealing, equally enriching. Invited into people's homes, sharing songs, conversation. Among and listening to so many voices, understanding without having to know the verbal language. I noticed my restless mind, I noticed the difference in vantage points, how the aggressive, fix it right now mentality which seems very American doesn't operate very well where I was. I had to learn to relax and let things occur. Traveling with Jiaohar facilitated an intimate peek inside a culture which might have been less hospitable had I not been with her. I don't wax nostalgic about the romantic notion of preserving something pristine. There is no such thing really. People want electricity, phones, VCRs the world over. And an American Standard toilet. But what doesn't come with the new devices is an instruction manual on how these things affect us, the changes wrought, the consequences. From the West, we can look back and analyze how TV affects the home life. And try to pull on the reins. But after the fact. In a place like Akkaba, there is no analytical forewarning of, per se, the influence of videos on little kids. When I asked Dosjan how he feels about the proposed new road to be built very close to Akkaba, he thought it would be good for his village, for his people. More money will come for them. He wasn't concerned or had thought about how this would destabilize the village. When I asked Solungu about how he feels about logging, he answered that the locals weren't allowed to log so it wasn't his concern. He didn't have some global ecological view about it as we might in the West.

For those weeks up in the mountains, I heard songs being sung not by professionals but just by those in the villages trying to remember the words, proud of the those words that refer to what they call home. It was sharing, simply. In many voices, many timbres. It wasn't a national anthem but a cultural anthem, a testament to what still attempts to live on.

When Jiaohar and I returned to Urumqi, via Altai City (and a visit to the Relics museum, and Gulner's father's home), I reconnected with Margaret and Gulner and then said goodbye to them all. Again sadness, because I had never expected to meet such people, the kind that feel like long lasting friends of the heart. Will email suffice? For now. I left Urumqi alone on July 20, for Turpan, a main tourist stop on the 'Silk Road' route, and the hottest place in China. For the first time since I left Beijing, I was without any help in

terms of language and comprehension. Thus began another kind of adventure as I made my way back to Beijing. I witnessed the building of a what looks like an 'autobahn' linking Urumqi with Turpan. I took the whirlwind day tour of Turpan (Flaming Mountains, the ancient city of Gaochang, Grape Valley Amusement Center, the Quiche Caves, the Jiaohe ruins) on a minibus that during the afternoon, ran into a bicyclist who was carrying way too heavy a load of empty green bottles. This was a scene...and there are no personal injury lawyers this way yonder. It would be for a traffic official to decide once he finally arrived. From Turpan, I took my first overnight train ride to Liyuan. A hard sleeper on a new train car, complete with the patriotic music piping into the cabin in the morning. It was also the first and only time I got sick and had to spend almost a half hour in the WC, head to an open window feeling the cold wind hit my overheated face. From Liyuan, I shared a ride with a Swiss couple to Dunhuang, the site of the Mogao Caves, an extraordinary display of Buddhist art, and the Singing Sand Dunes and Crescent Moon Lake. Again another Silk Road spot. From here I went to Lanzhou on another overnight train and then took a hellacious bus ride (they were going way too fast around the cliffs' edges and wanted to rip me off at the same time...) deep into the Gansu province to Xiahe, a Tibetan town with the largest monastery, Labrang, in China. The mountains around and pastureland recalled spectacular scenes from the Altai. Here I met more incredible people, Tibetan, Westerner, Chinese. With just a few days to spare, I again took another squeamish bus ride back to Lanzhou with Ani Lodro Palmo, an American Tibetan Buddhist nun who recited prayers every time the driver pulled the parking brake or went into neutral going downhill. From there, we actually accompanied each other back to Beijing where I arrived in time for Liz's birthday. Exhausted, completely overwhelmed by the big city again, I couldn't believe I had been in the dreamy land of 3 foot high flowers and grasses. And this concluded my journey under the auspices of the Durfee grant.

On August 1st, I took the train to Ulaan Baatar in Outer Mongolia to visit my cousin, Mike, who was just finishing his Peace Corps. Service. I proceeded to spend the next month there and returned to China via Datong, Wuteishan and Beijing; I returned to the States on September 2.

As I write I realize I have left so much out and that this could turn out to be much more extensive and much more anecdotal. Perhaps it will be in the future. With this, I submit an edited video tape of some of the musical encounters I had (and I will also be forwarding a tape cassette of the music I recorded) - people's voices, their instruments, and their poetry. I have slides, color prints as well as black and white ones that can be presented/shown upon demand.

This trip has had a profound affect on me and shifted my vision of how I want to live in the world now and what may or may not be important anymore. I had had anxiety about traveling alone in a land I had never been, with no language skills to speak of. But I loved being on my own; I felt safe and supported the entire time. This was a great teacher. I would go back to China in a flash. In fact I intend to but I vow that it will be with Mandarin under my belt.

Finally, I want to thank from my heart the Durfee Foundation for providing me this experience. If there is anything I can do to help in sharing it, please let me know. I also want to thank all those mentioned in this report. And to the many many individuals I came across, who haven't been mentioned here like the man who helped carry my bags across the platform at 4 in the morning, and the girl who brought me hot water every day at the hostel, and the woman who helped me buy my train ticket in Lanzhou. And so on...

Julie Adler
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