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Analyzing the performative aspects of Mongolian wedding rituals

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Abstract. This article explores Üzemchin Mongol wedding rituals through the perspective of Performance Theory. It draws on Richard Bauman's idea of Verbal Art as Performance. It treats ritual not as a fixed rule but as a social act that people bring to life through performance. The discussion focuses on two key practices: Ekhiin Tsagaan Süü Khariulakh Yos ("Repaying the Mother's White Milk") and Üüd Darakh Yos (the door-barring rite). Ekhiin Tsagaan Süü Khariulakh Yos carries deep emotion. It expresses a child's gratitude for a mother's care. A poet recites a blessing in rhythmic, expressive verse. The blessing functions as both moral guidance and cultural education within the community. The door-barring ceremony opens the wedding. It sets two family spokesmen in a ritualized verbal duel. Their exchange becomes a form of oral artistry and a display of ceremonial verbal duel. By examining these practices, the study shows how Üzemchin weddings function as active performances. They blend verbal art, social interaction, and tradition. This perspective offers a fresh way to understand Mongolian ethnographic materials and the living nature of local customs.

Keywords: ritual performance; oral poetry; participant; tradition bearer

Introduction

Customs and rituals are key components of traditional culture. They shape the oral poetic traditions of every ethnic group's heritage. To distinguish elements of oral tradition, one must clearly understand the difference between ritual and custom. As noted by S. Dulam and Ts. Nandinbilig, "Custom (Zan aali) is a broad concept directly linked to the unique characteristics of national cultural tradition and oral literature that distinguish one ethnicity from another. An ethnicity is a unified whole of people who, having relatively stable features of language, culture, and mentality, recognize their differences from others, possess their own designated name, and have coalesced over history in a specific territory through generations. No ethnic group has an identical culture and customs to another. If it loses these unique traits, it loses its

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designation as an ethnicity.” (Dulam & Nandinbilig, 2007). In contrast, “a ritual (Zan üil) is an act that, for its performers, carries legal significance and, in daily life, a celebratory significance” (Dulam & Nandinbilig, 2007). A wedding ritual, then, is a ceremonial practice that legally and socially affirms the union of a marrying couple in a festive context. Therefore, to study the oral literature of an Üzemchin Mongol wedding, we must first understand the wedding rituals themselves. Üzemchin wedding rituals have been described in prior studies by L. Amarmend, Ch. Shuushingaa, N. Danzan, and others. In this study, we build on that foundation by analyzing a specific wedding case through the lens of Performance Theory.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of “performance” has been established by American folklorists and anthropologists as a crucial element in the study of oral tradition and verbal art. The development of Performance Theory owes much to works like Richard Bauman’s *Verbal Art as Performance* (1977), which laid important theoretical groundwork. Performance-focused folklore research shifts attention from purely textual analysis to observing oral expressive acts in the context of lived rituals. According to Nandinbilig & Dulam (Nandinbilig & Dulam, 2020), a performance-centered study of oral literature - especially in ritual contexts - emphasizes several key aspects:

- It focuses on the actions of the tradition-bearers or participants in the ritual.
- It examines the speech arts, aesthetic techniques, and dramaturgical methods that shape the interaction between participants and audience.
- It considers the spoken texts – oral poetry and other verbal art – produced by the participants.
- It highlights practical actions and processes, taking into account the unique spatial and temporal setting of the performance.

From a Performance Theory perspective, a traditional wedding can be viewed as a unique form of performance or theatrical enactment. For example, the initial *Bér guikh yos* (“bride-requesting” ceremony) serves as the inciting incident or trigger for the “performance” of the wedding. Subsequent ceremonies – such as drinking symbolic liquor, presenting a khadag (ceremonial scarf), gifting livestock, and erecting a new ger (yurt) for the couple – form the rising action of the wedding performance. The arrival of the groom with his party at the bride’s home to receive his bride is the climax of this wedding drama. Finally, the resolution of the performance includes the bride bowing to the fire and to her new parents-in-law, followed by post-wedding feasts (the tohmyn nair and ergeltiin nair celebrations) and the ritual of khüühen törhömlöh (escorting the bride back to her natal home after the wedding). Together, these events constitute the concluding acts of the performance.

In this study, we focus on the wedding rituals of the Üzemchin Mongols as a case for applying Performance Theory analysis. In particular, two rituals within the Üzemchin wedding tradition – Ekhiin Tsagaan Süü Khariulakh and Üüd Darakh – are examined in depth as performative events with their own structures and characteristics.

Methods

Within Üzemchin wedding customs, the ritual known as Ekhiin tsagaan süü khariulakh – literally “repaying the mother’s white milk” – is performed to symbolically repay a mother’s nurturing kindness. This ritual is a form of blessing that expresses gratitude to the bride’s

mother for raising her daughter. It is traditionally observed among many Mongol groups, such as the Khalkha, Tümed, and Sönid. The Üzemchin distinguish themselves by performing the Ekhiin Tsagaan Süü Khariulakh rite after the bride has arrived at the groom's home, whereas in the Chakhar tradition (Baldanm Dalantai, 2009) and Sönid tradition (Tsagaan, 1991:131) it is done at the bride's home before she departs for marriage (in Chakhar weddings, it occurs prior to the bride's departure).

In the Üzemchin wedding sequence, the Ekhiin Tsagaan Süü Khariulakh ritual takes place immediately after the new bride has been led into the groom's home and has bowed to the household hearth (fire). At this point, the groom's family asks an elder yeröölch (blessing performer) to perform a special benediction addressing the "three mothers." These three women typically include the bride's mother, the groom's mother, and a respected elder woman who symbolically "received" the bride at the door (sometimes called the ceremonial milk-mother). The three mothers are seated at the place of honor, slightly to the east of the center of the ger. The yeröölch stands facing them, holding a blue khadag scarf spread on his outstretched hands and a silver bowl of milk on his right palm. An attendant from the groom's side stands behind the yeröölch, holding prepared gifts for the mothers (such as fine cloth, brick tea, a carpet, etc.). The newlywed bride and groom stand behind their mothers. In this formal posture, the yeröölch begins to recite the blessing of the mother's milk.

It is evident that in contemporary Üzemchin weddings, this ritual is faithfully carried out. For instance, on August 23, 2020, we observed this rite at a wedding in Shiliin Gol, Inner Mongolia. The wedding was between Tulga (groom, from Bayandelger village, Bayan-Uhaa gatsaa) and Otgonchimeg (bride, from Bayan-Kholt village, Bayan-Uhaa gatsaa). At that wedding, yeröölch S. Altansükh performed the Ekhiin Tsagaan Süü Khariulakh blessing. The ritual took place during the Hour of the Snake (mid-morning, around 11:30), as recorded in our field notes:

- 11:30 (*The Hour of the Snake*): *The groom's mother, the bride's mother, and the honorary "milk mother" are seated together on the east side of the ger interior. Yeröölch Altansükh, wearing a chestnut-red deel (Mongolian traditional robe), a red silk waist sash and an ulzii (decorative knot) hat with a red finial, stands before them holding a blue khadag with a silver bowl of milk on top. Behind the yeröölch, the groom's elder brother holds the prepared gifts (bolts of cloth, tea bricks, a carpet, etc.). The newlywed bride stands behind her mother, and during this moment she has changed out of the dress in which she arrived from her parents' home and is now wearing a new bridal deel provided by the groom's family. Everything is arranged for the blessing to begin.*

- 11:00 (*The Hour of the Snake*): *The blessing master opened the Ekhiin tsagaan süü khariulakh yos, the ritual of "repaying the mother's milk." This act expresses a daughter's gratitude for her mother's care. The tone is tender and melodic. The blessing moves through each stage of nurturing, from the mother's lullabies in early childhood to the guidance given before the daughter leaves for her new home. The verses frame this gratitude as part of life's natural course, as the daughter enters marriage and seeks to honor the kindness she has received.*

- 11:40 (*The Hour of the Horse*): *When the yeröölch began the blessing, the ger fell completely silent. Everyone put down their cups and tea bowls. All attention turned to the recitation. The yeröölch spoke in a soft and steady cadence. He did not shift his voice dramatically. His delivery remained calm and dignified. He kept a composed expression and directed his words respectfully toward the mothers.*

The blessing itself was deeply emotional. It listed the mother's care from infancy through adulthood. It described how she nurtured, taught, and protected her daughter. The yeröölch used an uyaruun tone — gentle, moving, and expressive - especially when he spoke of maternal

love. The effect was immediate. The bride's mother and the bride both wept. Many of the women around them also cried quietly, moved by the intimacy and truth of the words.

During and after traditional Mongolian rituals, there are often customs of tasting and sharing, symbolizing the reception of blessings. In this context, after the Ekhiin tsagaan süü khariulakh yos, the mothers each receive a bowl of milk from the blessing performer. They take a sip and then pass it to the bride and groom so that the couple may share in the blessing. However, not everyone present participates in this act - only specific, acknowledged participants are permitted to partake of the blessed milk.

During the Ekhiin tsagaan süü khariulakh yos, people often fall into deep contemplation. Their hearts are touched by sorrow as they sense the intertwined meanings of parting and renewal – separation and creation as natural rhythms of life. The blessing itself is performed in a tender, melodic tone with many subtle variations. It moves all listeners – especially parents and siblings – who quietly weep as they listen with genuine emotion. The blessing typically includes verses such as:

*“Agar zandan modond ni
Aya tavaaraa jargagch
Angir gech shuvuuni
Angaakhai zulzaga ni bolovch
Öd söd ni бүрдekhдөө
Agaart nisen odokh
Argagüi negen yoson bii”* (Erdemt, 2012)

Translation: *“In a wood of fragrant sandalwood,
a mother swan raises her cygnet in comfort and joy;
but once its feathers have fully formed,
it inevitably takes flight into the sky –
there is a law of nature that compels this.”*

Thus, this verse articulates a universal principle of life: all living beings, including human, grow up, reach maturity, and inevitably depart from their place of origin. This is the natural order of existence. The blessing then proceeds to the next part with lines like:

*“Elbeg tsagaan süügee
Eneren khairlaj shimüülen
Erkhem ariun achiig tan’
Edügee ailtgan khariulmuu ...”*
Translation: *“The abundant pure milk
that you lovingly nourished her with,
that most honorable and sacred debt –
today we offer to repay it...”*

The blessing begins with these lines and then goes on to recount, in rhythmic and poetic form, the mother's sacred and devoted care for her child. It describes how the mother carried her child for ten months in her pure womb, endured pain to give birth safely, swaddled and welcomed the newborn, and taught her to crawl, walk, and speak. Each year of the daughter's life up to the age of thirteen is described in careful detail, following a measured melodic cadence. For example:

*“Khonin arisan mantsuidaа
Khumин khuchij аваад*

*Bulgiin tungalag usaar
Butsan butsan ugaagaad
Buural bolson nastnaar ni
Buyantai neriig ni khairluulaad
Khonog ödrig toolon baij
Sariin oig ni düürekhleer
Saakhalt khotoo zalj ireed
Bayaryn tsai uulgaj...” (Erdemt, 2012)*

Translation: “In a swaddle of sheepskin
you were wrapped snug and warm.
With crystal spring water
you were bathed again and again.
By a revered elder,
a blessed name was given to you.
The days were counted, and
when a month had passed,
the neighboring encampments gathered
and a celebratory milk-tea was served....”

In this stanza, the blessing verse systematically recounts the early childhood rituals - the washing of the newborn, the conferral of a name by a respected elder’s blessing, and the one-month milk-tea ceremony. These lines poetically reflect core elements of Mongolian child-rearing tradition: swaddling the infant, seeking a name from a revered elder, and the communal celebration marking the child’s first full month of life. Through such verses, the blessing continues year by year - from infancy up to the age of eighteen - commemorating the mother’s enduring devotion and the hardships she endured in raising her child. During the recitation, all participants remain silent. The gentle rhythm and emotional resonance of the blessing evoke deep empathy, often moving the listeners, especially family members, to quiet tears.

The content of the Ekhiin tsagaan süü khariulakh yerööl (“blessing of repaying the mother’s milk”) centers on the daughter’s expression of gratitude as she departs from her maternal home to join her husband’s household. It embodies reverence for maternal love and an acknowledgment of a mother’s nurturing virtue symbolized by her “white milk.” An examination of the poetic stanzas reveals that, within the nomadic cultural environment, this blessing serves not merely as an emotional farewell but also as a reflection of traditional Mongolian family pedagogy. It systematically enumerates, at each stage of childhood, the practices and moral teachings through which daughters were raised and educated in the pastoral way of life.

Within the wedding customs of the Üzemchin Mongols, the ritual known as Üüd Darakh yos (“door-barring rite”) occupies a distinctive place for its performative and poetic qualities. Its central component, the Üüden Darlagyn Üg (“words of barring the door”), is a dialogic verse exchange characterized by quick wit, ornate language, and improvisational artistry — an embodiment of Mongolian oral performance.

Elements of performativity are visible throughout the traditional wedding ceremony. Although both families have already agreed upon the marriage, the bride’s household theatrically resists the groom’s party as they come to escort the bride. They bar the door, engage in witty verbal duels, and delay the bride’s entry into the groom’s home. These ritualized acts, including the Üüd Darakh yos and similar exchanges such as the “stirrup contest” on the groom’s side, function as

symbolic dramas that stage negotiation, humor, and social reciprocity between the two families.

While not universally practiced among all Mongol groups, the *Üüd Darakh yos* was once widespread among the Khalkha, Chakhar, Urat (1959), and *Üzemchin* lineages. Due to social change and modernization, it largely disappeared in many regions. However, the *Üzemchin* people have revived and maintained this tradition, both in Inner Mongolia and in eastern Mongolia (notably in Dornod Province), where ethnographers recorded performances of the *Üüden Darlagyn Üg* as late as 1987 (D. Batbayar & T. Ariunaa, field report).

The act of barring the entrance with a pillar or beam carries deep symbolic resonance in Mongolian cosmology. In the *ger* (yurt), the two central pillars (*bagana*) represent the world's vertical axis and the union of husband and wife. It is taboo to pass between or hand objects through these pillars, as they are believed to connect the household with ancestral spirits. To lean on, embrace, or especially lift the pillars is considered impious, since they are thought to "bear the family's burdens." This belief underlies the folk saying that a child who clings to a *ger* pillar "takes on the household's sorrows." Hence, when a pillar or beam is used to block the doorway in the wedding rite, the gesture symbolically invokes the protective and ancestral power of the household's sacred axis - momentarily suspending entry until the proper verbal exchange of wit and blessing is completed.

According to a well-known legend, the origin of this custom dates back to the era of Chinggis Khan. When the Great Khan sought to marry a princess from the Chinese Emperor Tavan, his envoy, Chandaya Setsen, was challenged to identify the true princess among five hundred identically dressed maidens within three days. By wisdom and cunning, he succeeded. Later, when a false bridal party attempted deception, Chandaya blocked the entrance with a pillar, questioning the visitors about their lineage, gifts, and intentions until the appointed hour of the Khan's arrival had passed - thus averting the trick. From that episode, it is said, the tradition of "barring the door" at weddings was born (Bökhkhad & Saransükh, 2008).

In practice, the *Üüd Darakh* rite begins when the groom's party arrives near the bride's home. A member of the bride's family stands to the left of the doorway, holding a forked wooden pole adorned with a *khadag* (ceremonial scarf) across the entrance, thereby initiating the verbal exchange. This interaction - sometimes called *Naiman onisgo* ("Eight Riddles") - follows a traditional structure of questioning and response, enriched with poetic allusions to kinship, landscape, and ancestry. Two *helmerch* (spokespersons renowned for eloquence) represent each side, engaging in spontaneous yet formulaic repartee until one side concedes. If the bride's side is satisfied, they announce, "The sun has risen in the east—let us now invite you in," and remove the pole, signaling permission for the groom's party to enter.

As described by Ch. Shuushingaa (2016:123), the *Üüden Darlagyn Üg* transforms the threshold into a stage of poetic dialogue. These dialogues represent a performative contest where eloquence, humor, and ritual symbolism converge. In the contemporary *Üzemchin* tribe, this custom continues to serve as a living expression of oral artistry, social negotiation, and cultural continuity within Mongolian wedding traditions.

To illustrate the contemporary performance of *Üüd Darakh yos*, we draw on a field observation from October 11, 2019. On that day, at a wedding in Ereenbulag gatsaa, Gakhil sum, Eastern *Üzemchin* Banner (Inner Mongolia), the family of Zorigbaatar performed the door-barring ritual as they sent off their daughter to be married in Khatavch town. Local *yeröölch* Böh-Erdene took on the role of the bride's side spokesperson, and *yeröölch* Nasanmönkh spoke for the groom's side.

- 05:30 (The Hour of the Tiger, pre-dawn): The groom's party arrives at the bride's home

at the agreed early morning hour. They find the main entrance barred: a wooden pole with a khadag tied at its tip is held across the doorway from the left (eastern) side of the door-frame, blocking entry. On the bride's side, Böh-Erdene, the designated witty speaker, stands at the door holding the pole. He is dressed in full traditional regalia – wearing a blue silk deel under a burgundy sleeveless brocade coat, a circular brimmed hat, a traditional dagger at his side, and embroidered leather boots – presenting an imposing figure in the gray light of dawn. Behind him stand several young male relatives of the bride (her paternal cousins and others), lending support as his “team”.

• Meanwhile, the groom's party halts outside the yard. The leading representatives – the khud (groom's father or senior in-law) and the official matchmakers (ner zaagch or name presenters) – adjust their attire (hats, belts, and deel collars) properly before approaching. The groom's spokesperson, N. Nasanmönkh, comes forward to stand on the right side of the barred door. He too is dressed impeccably in a dark blue silk deel with a maroon trim and an ornate üzemchin vest, a red-bordered hat, and boots. A crowd of onlookers from both sides surrounds the scene at a respectful distance. At this point, two young men from the groom's side step forth holding up blue khadag scarves and announce in unison: “Tör tömbögör, yos yombogor”, meaning “The law of the state may change, but tradition remains unbending.” and it serves to ceremonially open the Üüden Darlaga dialogue. With this, the door-barring verses begin.

“Chiglezh irsen khud nar mini,

Chileerkhelgüi saatna uu?

Sür javkhaa badarsan

Süld bie chin' amarkhan uu?

Süün dalaig tsalgiulsan

Süreg mal chin' mend üü?”

English translation:

“My dear in-laws who have come with purpose,

please tarry here without growing weary.

Your noble persons, radiating majesty – are you in good health?

Your herds that churn the milky ocean – are they thriving and well?”

One side greets the other with these words of well-being, and the other side responds in kind:

“Urag khud tani min'

Saatan morilzh suugaa

Bie lagshin amarkhan uu?

Saya bumaar belchsen

Mal süreg chin' mend üü?”

English translation:

“O respected in-law of our new kin,

who pauses here on your journey,

is your body and health in good condition?

Your herds grazing in their hundreds of thousands – are they safe and sound?”

Thus, they reply. The helmerch of each side, entrusted with the hopes of both families and the expectations of the wedding guests, conducts the exchange of wit and eloquence on behalf of the community. They aim to make this part of the ceremony lively and engaging.

“Aldar neriig min' asuuwal

Avralt lamaar üzüüled

Altan shoodon orkhiulaad

Aav l eejee see zayaasan

Nasanmönkh gedeg mini ner"

English translation:

"If you inquire about my name,

I showed it to the merciful lama,

Who blessed it with a golden thread;

From my father and mother I was fated

To bear the name Nasanmönkh."

As he speaks, Nasanmönkh places his right hand upon his chest and bows slightly in respect.

With these words of mutual greeting, the Üüden Darlagyn helmer - the door-barring dialogue - formally begins. The participants then exchange questions concerning the visitors' purpose. For example, they ask: "For what reason have you come? Why are you so finely dressed with a robe and a belt?" If the answers are evasive, the hosts respond playfully: "How was your journey? Did the hunt go well? Have a cup of tea to quench your thirst, and then be on your way." This teasing exchange continues until the guests disclose their true purpose. By this point, the onlookers crowd around with keen anticipation, eager to hear each clever response.

As the verbal duel reaches its climax, the rhythmic repartee grows increasingly spirited. The bride's side delivers their lines with composed smiles, while the groom's side stands upright and proud. Bökh-Erdene, representing the bride's family, poses his final questions in a strong voice, raising his right hand with each line. Nasanmönkh, speaking for the groom's side, responds by extending his open palm slightly forward as he recites his answers. The tone of the Üüden Darlagyn üg alternates between soft inquiry and emphatic response, following a deliberate rhythm in which each "yes" (za) punctuates the dialogue.

At the conclusion of the duel, the groom's representative announces to all present: "The hour of the Snake has passed – the hour of the Horse has come." Then Bökh-Erdene, the spokesman of the bride's side, delivers the closing verse:

"Khaan töriin yosoora,

Khaalga üüdee darlaa bi,

Uran tsetsen ügiin chin',

Uchriig lavlaj medlee bi,

Dotno ikhemsseg khud naraa,

Dotogshoo odoo zalyaa aa "

English translation:

"In accordance with the law of the Great Khaan,

I have barred this door;

Through your eloquent words,

I have learned your true intent.

My honorable in-laws,

Now, please come inside."

With this, he lifts away the wooden pole that had been barring the doorway. The leading in-law of the groom's party steps forward first, placing the groom's bow and quiver to the right of the entrance - a gesture marking peace and respect - before all participants enter the ger, signaling the ritual's completion.

For the two yeröölch (blessing performers) who revived and recited the long-forgotten Üüden Darlagyn üg after more than thirty years of silence, their foremost responsibility lies in transmitting and sustaining the tradition. Their manner of speech, gestures, and performance

serve as a model for participants and as a living reference for the next generation of tradition bearers. Furthermore, by performing in a deliberately prepared and spatially defined setting, they transform the rite into a form of staged reenactment that captivates contemporary audiences. As Hubin (2002) observes, such practices represent the re-manifestation of traditional custom as a unified expression of practical and intellectual culture. In this context, the two yeröölch embody the composure and dignity characteristic of traditional blessing reciters, faithfully fulfilling the ceremony and assuming the socially recognized role of cultural transmitters within the ritual community.

Results and Discussion

Having examined these two wedding rituals - the Ekhiin tsagaan süü khariulakh yos ("ritual of repaying the mother's milk") and the Üüd Darakh yos ("door-barring rite") - we can now consider them as forms of performance. Below is a comparative overview of their temporal setting, spatial setting, atmosphere, performers, and participants:

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of the "Üüden Darlagyn yos" and "Ekhiin tsagaan süü khariulakh yos" from a Performance Theory Perspective

Performance Aspect	Üüd Darakh Yos (Door-Barring Rite)	Ekhiin Tsagaan Süü Khariulakh Yos (Repaying Mother's Milk Rite)
Time	At dawn, when the groom's party arrives at the bride's home (typically during the Hour of the Rabbit).	After the bride's arrival at the groom's home and completion of her bridal preparations (e.g., unbraiding of hair), typically around midday (the Hour of the Horse).
Place	Outside the bride's family ger (at the threshold).	Inside the groom's family ger (home interior).
Primary Purpose	To engage in a verbal contest of wit – the bride's side playfully blocks entry, while the groom's side strives to "gain entry" using eloquence.	To repay and honor the mother's kindness – expressing gratitude for the mother's nurturing love through a formal blessing.
Atmosphere	Humorous, lively, competitive: a jovial mock-battle of wits with laughter and fun.	Emotional, reverent: a moving and respectful mood, often bringing participants to tears.
Interaction Pattern	Two sides are pitted against each other: the bride's side feigns refusal ("you cannot come in"), the groom's side pleads entry; both exchange challenges and barbs in verse.	Focused and respectful: The yeröölch directs the blessing to the mothers with calm intention. The mothers receive his words quietly. The other guests remain still and attentive. Their silence and emotion show shared respect for the ritual.
Role in Overall Ritual	Displays and transmits folk wit and verbal artistry; serves as entertainment and a test of the groom's party, showcasing the community's rich oral tradition in a celebratory way.	The blessing pays solemn tribute to the mother's role. It conveys a ceremonial transfer of goodwill to the new couple and underscores filial gratitude as a central value.

Oral Poetry Form	Üüden Darlagyn Üg – the “door-barring verses,” performed as a rapid-fire spoken duet by two interlocutors (the helmerch).	Ekhiin Tsagaan Süü Khariulakh Yerööl – the “mother’s milk repayment blessing,” performed as a chanted solo by a single yeröölch.
Performer(s)	Two helmerch (spokespersons) duel verbally. Both are in full traditional attire (hats, deels, boots). They use dynamic delivery – raising and lowering their voices for effect – and employ hand gestures (e.g., raising a hand when posing a question).	One yeröölch (blessing performer) chants the blessing. Dressed in full traditional attire as well. Delivery is steady, even-toned, and dignified, with little to no dramatic gesture, reflecting deep respect.
Participants & Audience	The community splits into two sides (bride’s side vs. groom’s side). All present are curious and entertained, eagerly watching to hear the next witty line. Participants try to maximize humor and cleverness to amuse the crowd.	All attendees stay silent and solemn. Many people, especially the bride’s mother and the other women, are moved to tears. The audience listens quietly and absorbs the emotion of the moment, while only the mothers, the bride, and the groom take part by sipping the blessed milk.

In Mongolian wedding traditions, each ritualized act – each “performance” – is defined by a clear purpose and a structured sequence of ceremonial stages. The Ekhiin tsagaan süü khariulakh yos is directed toward an intimate emotional exchange between the yeröölch (blessing performer) and a specific participant: the mother of the bride. In contrast, the Üüd Darakh yos centers on a verbal duel between the helmerch (spokespersons) of both families, in which wit and eloquence are playfully tested to assess the groom’s worthiness. In this sense, both rituals embody distinct yet complementary modes of performativity – one inward and reverent, the other dialogic and competitive.

The positions and roles of the yeröölch and the helmerch differ significantly, and these differences shape the spatial arrangement of participants and audience. Inside the ger, the traditional seating order is strictly observed: the host sits in the khoimor (the honored northern side), elders sit to the west, and women sit to the east. When a blessing or yeröölin duu (benedictory song) is about to be performed, everyone must be seated properly. If anyone remains standing, they are asked to take their place with the words, “Please be seated, the blessing is about to begin.” In some rituals, movement within the space itself carries meaning. For example, during the Lunar New Year (Tsagaan Sar), elders recite blessings while seated at the center of the ger. In the Aman khüzüün yerööl (“Blessing of the oral threshold”), the host kneels, holding his collar as he listens. During the Chagtagany yerööl (“Blessing of the saddle bow”), the host stands facing the yeröölch while holding the saddle bow by its tip.

The yeröölch intentionally commands the space and captures everyone’s attention through introductory formulas such as:

“Now, one of the most important rituals of our wedding shall commence. I ask everyone to remain silent.”

Or

“Let us now, according to ancient custom,
Repay the loving kindness

Of our honorable mother.”

Such openings define the performer’s authority and establish the ritual’s solemn atmosphere. For both the performer and the audience, these acts embody shared values and meaning. The performance becomes a living synthesis of ritual and oral art, uniting moral sentiment, cultural memory, and aesthetic form. As Bauman argues, “performance constitutes a special mode of communicative interaction” - a distinctive social relationship enacted through artistic expression (Bauman, 1992). Likewise, Bauman emphasizes that performance carries both an aesthetic responsibility (to display skill) and a social responsibility (to serve the audience) (Bauman, 1977). Viewed through this lens, Mongolian wedding performances reveal cultural and historical particularities through their embodied oral expression.

Bauman further notes that the intrinsic power of performance lies in its ability to merge social structure with communicative practice (Bauman, 1977). In such moments, participants and spectators become fully absorbed in the event; the performer’s artistry transforms communication into a heightened form of social experience. The audience, in turn, responds to and evaluates the performance, granting the performer a temporary position of authority determined by skill, composure, and rhetorical mastery.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, several conclusions may be drawn:

- Performance Theory as interpretive framework: Performance Theory views ritual not as a fixed text but as a living social act. It treats ritual as an interactive process that connects performers, participants, and the surrounding setting. Under this approach, Mongolian wedding rituals appear as structured performances with defined roles, purposes, and forms of oral artistry. The *Üüd Darakh yos* and the *Ekhiin tsagaan süü khariulakh yos* show two distinct modes of performance. One relies on humor and verbal contests. The other expresses reverence and emotional depth. Together, they shape the wedding as a meaningful social drama.

- Oral poetry as the core medium of ritual performance: Verbal artistry stands at the heart of these rituals. Poetic blessings, dialogic verse, and musical intonation communicate emotion and bind participants together. They carry cultural values across generations. The verses praising maternal virtue in the *Ekhiin tsagaan süü khariulakh* rite offer moral guidance. They also preserve memories of traditional child-rearing practices.

- Co-creation between performers and participants: The wedding performance is a shared act. The attire, gestures, and vocal style of the *yeröölch* and *helmerch* define their ritual roles. The audience contributes through its responses — tears, laughter, or quiet attention. These reactions complete the performance. Because of this reciprocity, the ritual becomes a genuine social event rather than a static custom.

- Performance as a medium of cultural continuity: Both rituals help transmit cultural identity and ethical values. They reflect *Üzemchin* ideals of maternal care, verbal skill, and family harmony. Their revival in contemporary settings shows more than simple preservation. It shows active renewal. The rituals continue to function as living symbols of Mongolian cultural identity.

In conclusion, viewing Mongolian wedding rituals through Performance Theory shows them as dynamic and interactive cultural practices. This perspective treats ritual as a living form of expression. It highlights how people actively shape meaning through performance. It also offers a useful framework for studying Mongolian oral literature. Under this view, oral art and ritual

appear as closely connected forms of communication. They express aesthetic creativity and sustain collective memory. This approach helps us understand how tradition continues to live in social practice.

Contribution of the authors:

Sulungaowa – developed the theoretical and methodological framework of the study, analyzed Mongolian wedding rituals through the lens of Performance Theory, prepared the descriptions of the “Ekhiin Tsagaan Süü Khariulakh” and “Üüd Darakh” rituals, and carried out the major part of the interpretation of ethnographic materials.

Orchlon J. – conducted field observations in Central and Eastern Inner Mongolia (2019–2020), transcribed ritual texts, described the structure and function of the rituals within the context of oral performance traditions, and prepared the empirical data and photographic documentation.

Harii S. – performed a comparative-historical analysis of ritual variations among different Mongolian groups (Khalkha, Chakhar, Sönid, Üzemchin), verified the empirical materials against previous scholarship (Baldanm Dalantai, Tsagaan, Amarmend, etc.), contributed to manuscript editing, and participated in shaping the analytical conclusions.

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Анализ перформативных аспектов монгольских свадебных ритуалов

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются свадебные ритуалы узэмчинских монголов с позиций Теории перформанса. При этом используется подход Ричарда Баумана, трактующий устное словесное творчество как перформанс. Ритуал понимается не как фиксированная норма, а как социальное действие, которое оживает в процессе исполнения. Анализ сосредоточен на двух ключевых практиках: Ekhiin Tsagaan Süü Khariulakh Yos («Воздаяние за белое материнское молоко») и Üüd Darakh Yos (обряд «запирания двери»).

Ритуал Ekhiin Tsagaan Süü Khariulakh Yos отличается высокой эмоциональной насыщенностью и выражает благодарность ребёнка матери за её заботу. Благословение, произносимое поэтом, имеет ритмическую и экспрессивную форму; оно служит одновременно моральным наставлением и элементом культурного воспитания внутри общины.

Обряд «запирания двери» открывает свадебную церемонию и представляет собой ритуализированное словесное состязание между двумя представителями семей. Их обмен репликами превращается в форму устного искусства и демонстрацию церемониального вербального поединка.

Проведённый анализ показывает, что узэмчинская свадьба функционирует как активный перформанс, в котором переплетаются словесное творчество, социальное взаимодействие и традиция. Такой подход позволяет по-новому осмыслить монгольские этнографические материалы и живую природу локальных обычаев.

Ключевые слова: ритуальный перформанс; устная поэзия; участник; носитель традиции.

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Моңғол үйлену дәстүрлерінің перформативтік аспектілерін талдау

Андатпа. Мақалада өзэмчин моңғолдарының үйлену дәстүрлері Перформанс теориясы тұрғысынан қарастырылады. Бұл тұрғыда Ричард Бауманның ұстаздық сөз өнерін перформанс ретінде түсіндіру тәсілі қолданылған. Ритуал тұрақты ереже ретінде емес, орындау барысында өмірге келетін әлеуметтік әрекет ретінде қарастырылады. Талдау екі негізгі тәжірибеге бағытталған: Ekhiin Tsagaan Süü Khariulakh Yos («Ана сүтінің ақтығын өтеу») және Üüd Darakh Yos («Есік тұтқасын жабу рәсімі»).

Ekhiin Tsagaan Süü Khariulakh Yos ритуалы эмоционалды мәнге ие және баланың анасына алғысын білдіруді көрсетеді. Поэзиялық үлгіде оқылатын баталау ритмдік және экспрессивті сипатқа ие болып, бір мезгілде моральдық нұсқау мен қауым ішіндегі мәдени тәрбие құралы болып қызмет атқарады.

Есік тұтқасын жабу рәсімі үйлену тойының басталуын белгілейді және екі отбасының өкілдері арасындағы ритуалдық сөздік сайыс ретінде өтеді. Олардың диалогы ауыз әдебиетінің көркем формасына және рәсімдік вербалды поединкке айналады.

Зерттеу көрсеткендей, өзэмчин үйлену рәсімдері белсенді перформанс ретінде қызмет етеді, онда сөздік шығармашылық, әлеуметтік өзара әрекеттестік және дәстүр үйлеседі. Бұл тәсіл

моңғол этнографиялық материалдарын және жергілікті дәстүрлердің тірі табиғатын жаңаша түсінуге мүмкіндік береді.

Түйін сөздер: ритуалдық перформанс; ауыз әдебиеті поэзиясы; қатысушы; дәстүрдің сақтаушысы.

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