



Davaapil Purevdorj\*

# Observations on the Names, Descriptions, and Drawings of Musical Instruments, Named “Ekhlegch”, “Khuraagch” and “Uelegch”

<https://doi.org/10.1515/modi-2023-0010>

Received October 27, 2023; accepted December 20, 2023; published online May 8, 2024

**Abstract:** This article was written as a contribution to the study of Mongolian musicology, including court musicology. The musical instruments made of wood, named “Ekhlegch”, “Khuraagch” and “Uelegch” were a part of the court musical orchestra of the Great Yuan State of Mongolia although they are no longer used, their purpose is not always clear, the names, descriptions, and drawings of them have been recorded in some old sources and works of musicologists. It is believed that studying these instruments and clarifying their functions will contribute to the further development of Mongolian musical studies and the structure and composition of the orchestra. Also, it would be another interesting study to compare the hand drawings of musical instruments, which were recorded in old sources as part of the ancient Mongolian court orchestra, but have not been preserved today.

**Keywords:** “Ekhlegch”, “Khuraagch” and “Uelegch”; wooden musical instruments; eight melodies; musical instrument; hand painting; musical instrument crafting

## 1 Introduction

In scriptures of the Yuan Dynasty and the works of Mongolian musicologists have been recorded about wooden musical instruments named the “Ekhlegch”, “Khuraagch” and “Uelegch” as a part of the Mongolian court music orchestra. Researchers G. Badrakh, J. Badraa, and S. Soronzonbold included hand drawings and descriptions of these musical instruments in their research works. However, now few people know whether these musical instruments are used or not, and what is their purpose. Furthermore, there is no research comparing hand drawings. A comparison study of the hand drawings with the descriptions in the sources of the musical instruments

---

\*Corresponding author: Davaapil Purevdorj, PhD, Teacher of the Department of Literary and Art Studies, School of Art and Science, Division of Humanities, National University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, E-mail: [davaapilart@gmail.com](mailto:davaapilart@gmail.com)

would be important for determining the exact shape of these musical instruments and ways of their further reconstruction. For that reason, we intend to compare the names, descriptions, and drawings of these musical instruments, and then clarify the role they played in an orchestra and whether they are needed now.

First of all, the concept of eight melodies should be explained. In the old dictionary, which defines the categories, there are the concepts of five sounds and eight melodies, and the eight melodies are related to the fact that the musical instruments are named according to the material they are made of. Specifically, all musical instruments used in the Khan Courts orchestra were classified into eight categories according to the following principle: the category of the iron melody if it is made of iron, the stone melody category, if it is made of stone, the string melody category, if it is made of string (fabric, silk, thread), the bamboo melody category, if it is made of bamboo, the clay melody category, if it is made of clay, the leather melody category if it is made of leather, wooden melody category, if it is made of wood.

In this research, we have selected three musical instruments for study, named “Ekhlegch”, “Khuraagch”, and “Uelegch”, which belong to one of the above-mentioned categories, the wood melody category. We will try to clarify the role of these musical instruments in the court orchestra at that time and whether they are needed nowadays by comparing the names, descriptions, and hand drawings of wooden instruments, named “Ekhlegch”, “Khuraagch”, and “Uelegch”.

## 2 “Ekhlegch”

Research G. Badrakh in his book “From the History of Mongolian Music” writes: “This musical instrument is made of wood. The shape is like a square bucket, the top is wide, the bottom is narrow, the depth is 1 cubit and 5 “yamkh” (1. *A measure of length equal to one-tenth of a cubit.* 2. *The distance from the first joint of the finger to the fingertip; the name of the measure of length, one-hundredth of a pair of a fathom, equals 32 mm.*), the middle of the flat wooden panel on three sides is convex, and the middle of the flat wood panel on one side has a hole. It also has a racket. It is named the “Ekhlegch” because it is struck first of all when the orchestra starts to play” (2008: 38). From this explanation, first of all, it is possible to know the shape of the jar. The brim of this instrument is wide and narrows towards the bottom. Secondly, it is possible to determine the size. One cubit is equal to 10 yamkh, therefore the depth of this instrument is 15 yamkh. If 1 yamkh is approximately 32 mm long, the total depth is 480 mm or 48 cm. In the third, three of the sides connecting the upper brim and the lower bottom are convex or concentric, and the fourth side has a hole in the middle, which contains the racket. The convexity of the fourth side is not marked. Fourthly,

when an orchestra starts playing, it will be played beforehand, so the name and role are definite from the fact that it is named an “Ekhlegch”.

So, it is possible that the instrument was used as an alarm that sounded before starting any melody. However, to make it sound, it is not noted how to beat it and on which part to beat. Hand drawing in the book “From the History of Mongolian Music” by the researcher G. Badrakh was drawn by a person named Luvsanjamts and is shown below (Figure 1). If you look at the picture, and description, it is depicted with a wide upper brim, convex downwards of four sides, a base bottom widening in four directions, a round hole in the middle of the face panel, and a wooden mallet-like racket.

Researcher J. Badraa in his book “Mongolian folk music” wrote “It is a percussion instrument. The shape made of wood is like a square bucket, wide at the top and narrow at the bottom” (1998: 151). A three-sided flat panel of wood with a hole in the center from which the racket hangs. “It is named the “Ekhlegch” because it is the first beat to create music.” Researcher J. Badraa’s description is mostly similar to the description in G. Badrakh’s book “From the History of Mongolian music”. But there are some differences: firstly, the category based on the material as a category of wooden melody has been changed to a category based on the way of playing “Percussion musical instrument”. Secondly, J. Badraa noted that 3 of 4 flat wooden panels connecting an upper brim with a bottom base, have a hole in the middle. It is understood that there are holes on three of four sides. Thirdly, whether the four sides are convex is unclear. The fourth, researcher G. Badrakh in his book “From the History of Mongolian music” described that there is a hole only on one side. G. Badraa noted that “it includes the racket”, but J. Badraa noted that “The racket hangs on a hole”. It is also not noted whether the hole is round or not. Sixth, there is no



**Figure 1:** Page 49 of the book “From the History of Mongolian music” by G. Badrakh. The picture was drawn by Luvsanjamts.

explanation of what kind of racket is, how to beat it, and which part to beat for playing.

P. Baldandorj drew the musical instruments in the book “Mongolian folk music” by researcher J. Badraa (Figure 2). If you look at the picture, the top brim is wide and the bottom base is narrow. A circular hole was made on the front side panel connecting the brim to the bottom base. Three sides are described as having holes, but the picture shows two sides, one with holes, and the other without holes, and it is uncertain whether the other two sides have holes. The description of the musical instrument does not indicate whether the four wooden panels connecting the upper and lower brims are convex or not, but the picture shows them as convex. From this point of view, it seems that painter P. Baldandorj had read the book by G. Badrakh “From the History of Mongolian music” before painting. The base is drawn wider than the body bottom of the instrument. Researcher J. Badraa did not explain what kind is the base. A racket is described as a wooden mallet with a handle in a hole through the head.

There are no explanations or hand drawings of the musical instruments named “Ekhlegch” and “Khuraagch” in the book “Study of Mongolian traditional musical instruments” by J. Chuluuntsetseg, published in 2008, the books “History of Mongolian folk musical instruments” published in 2009, and “Heritage and Culture of Mongolian musical instruments” by L. Kherlen, published in null. However, in the fourth volume “Music” of the “Encyclopedia of Culture and Art”, published in 2018, Ekhlegch is defined as a category of percussion musical instrument. Here is the following definition: this musical instrument is made of wood. The shape is like a square bucket, the top is wide, the bottom is narrow, the depth is 1 cubit and 5 “yamkh”, the middle of the flat wooden panel on three sides is convex, and the middle



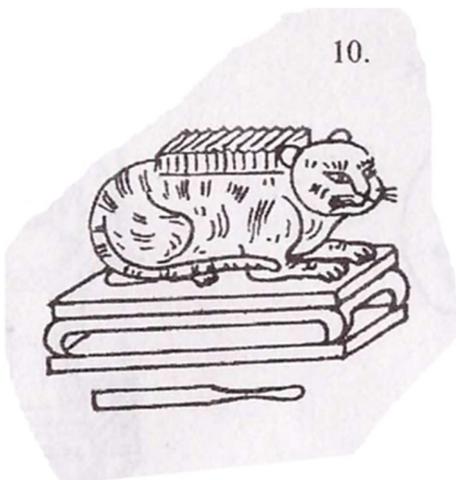
**Figure 2:** Page 168 of the book “Mongolian folk music” by J. Badraa. The picture was drawn by P. Baldandorj.

of the flat wood panel on one side has a hole. It also has a racket. It is named the Ekhlegch because musicians have to beat it to play first of all when the orchestra starts to play, but there are no drawings (2018: 359). This definition is taken from the book “From the History of Mongolian music” by G. Badrakh.

### 3 “Khuraagch”

Researcher G. Badrakh wrote in his book “From the History of Mongolian music”: “this musical instrument is made of wood. Its shape is like a recumbent tiger. It has 27 narrow incisions on its back. These incisions are carved on flat wooden board” (2008: 38). At the end of the music playing, it sounds, so it is named the “Khuraagch”. From this description, the shape and image of the instrument can be known. Its shape is like a recumbent tiger. Then, there are 27 narrow incisions on its back [apparently a tiger’s back], and those incisions should be carved on a flat wooden board. Thus, it is uncertain what is the purpose of making it in the shape of a tiger and having 27 incisions. It should be further studied from the documents and sources of the time when the musical instrument was created. Its name and role were clearly explained that it sounds at the end of the music playing, so it was named the “Khuraagch”.

There is no specific information about the size and ratio except that it has 27 incisions. Also, is not explained how it is sounded. A hand drawing in the book “From the History of Mongolian music” by researcher G. Badrakh was drawn by Luvsanjamts and is shown below (Figure 3). The painting depicts a flatwood tiger with incisions on its back laying on a four-legged table-like platform. The description says



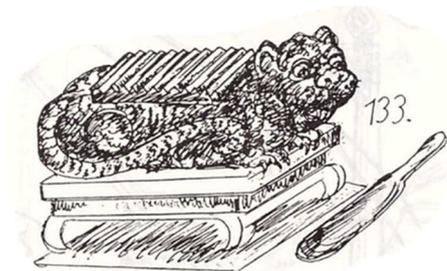
**Figure 3:** Page 49 of the book “From the History of Mongolian music” by G. Badrakh. The picture was drawn by Luvsanjamts.

it has 27 incisions, but counting the incisions on the tiger's back in the picture, it is about 10. It differs from the amount in the description. The description does not mention the racket, but the hand drawing shows a flat piece of wood with a handle that resembles a fine racket.

Researcher J. Badraa wrote this in his work *Mongolian folk music*: it is named *Huriyaagch* (Figure 4) and is a percussion instrument. Made of wood. Shaped like a recumbent tiger, with narrow incisions on its back, to be swiped the incisions with a flat piece of wood for playing. As soon as a piece of music ends, it will be sounded and stopped, so it is named “Khuraagch” (1998: 149). J. Badraa wrote that it is like a recumbent tiger and has incisions on its back, which is the same as the description in the book “From the History of Mongolian music” by researcher G. Badrakh. Also, it is not explained what the racket is and how it is played. But the differences are, firstly, a category of wooden melody has been changed to a category based on the way of playing as a “percussion instrument”. Secondly, it has narrow incisions on its back, but the number of incisions is not specified. Thirdly, in the book “From the History of Mongolian music” by G. Badrakh, noted that “the musical instrument is named the “Khuraagch” because it is sounding at the end of every music performance”.

Both the authors of the above-mentioned books wrote that the musical instrument is sounded when a musical performance ends, but researcher G. Badrakh's interpretation has a different idea: to sound at the end of the entire music performance, and researcher J. Badraa wrote that to sound at the end of each section of the music performance. In the hand painting, an incumbent tiger with incisions on its back is depicted on what looks like a four-legged table platform. The description of the researcher J. Badraa does not indicate the number of incisions on the tiger's back, but the picture shows about 12 incisions. The shape and image of the racket are also not described, but the hand drawing shows the racket as having a narrow handle and a wide, flat-sounding part.

There are no explanations or hand drawings of the musical instruments named “Ekhlegch” and “Khuraagch” in the book “Study of Mongolian traditional musical instruments” by J. Chuluuntsetseg, published in 2008, the books “History of

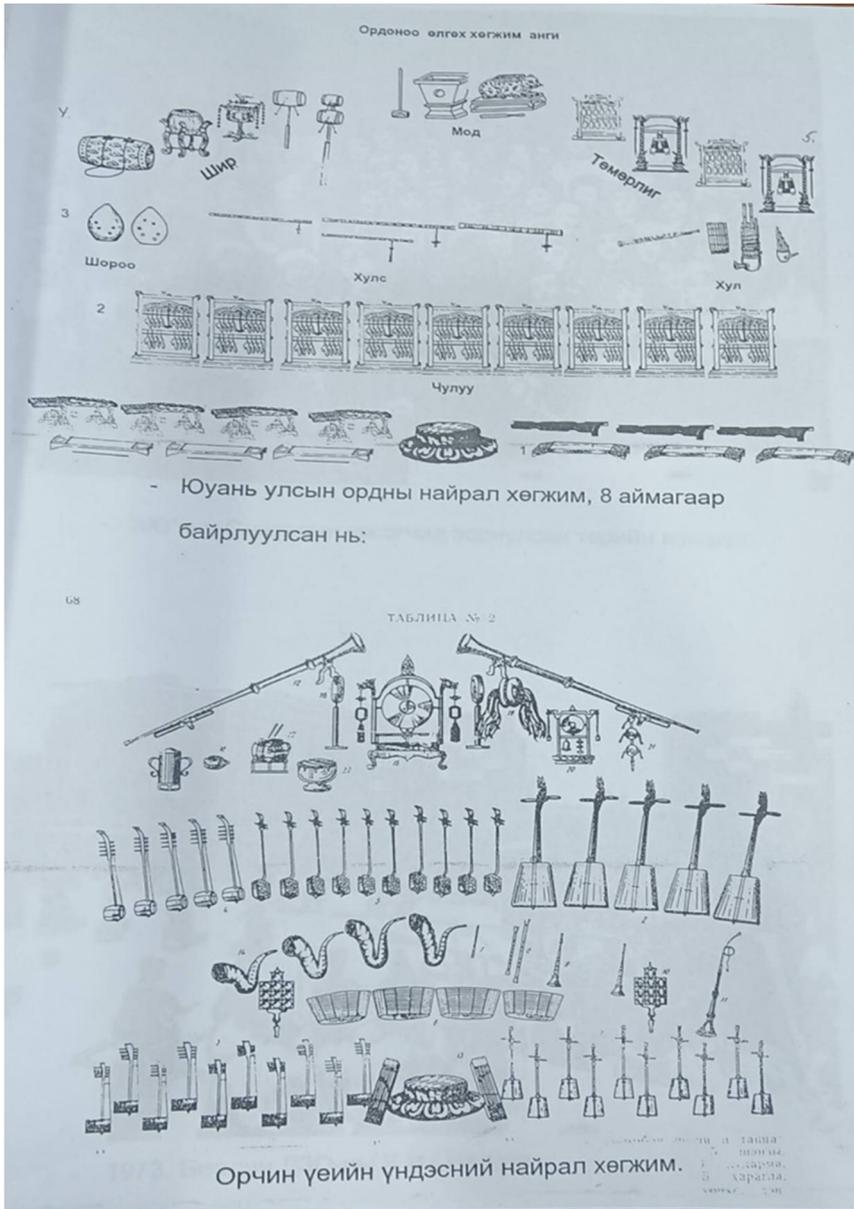


**Figure 4:** Page 166 of the book “Mongolian folk music” by J. Badraa. The picture was drawn by P. Baldandorj.

Mongolian folk musical instruments” published in 2009, and “Heritage and Culture of Mongolian musical instruments” by L. Kherlen, published in *nulla*. However, in the fourth volume “Music” of the “Encyclopedia of Culture and Art”, published in 2018, “Khuraagch” is defined as a category of percussion musical instrument. Shaped like an incumbent tiger, it has 27 articulated incisions on its back. At the end of any musical episode, these incisions are to be swiped for sounding (2018: 304). This definition is based on the explanation of researchers G. Badrakh and J. Badraa. Researcher S. Soronzonbold in his book “Mongolian music” wrote about the composition, costumes, and order of the “Singing Music Unit”, “Hanging Palace Music Unit”, and “Ceremonial Music Unit”, based on treatises of the Yuan Dynasty. Judging from these studies, can be concluded that each musical unit has musical instruments such as “Ekhlegch” and “Khuraagch”. It is not clearly explained how it was played and what its role was. “At noon, all 36 musical instruments will be arranged and joined to the four eyelids” (2013: 24). “Ekhlegch” is placed on the left and “Khuraagch” on the right, and the singer is placed in the middle of the hanging (music for hanging in the palace). There will be a road drum on the left and south–west sides of music ensemble, etc., it can be known that court music ensemble has a certain positional order (2013: 25). However, it is still uncertain what was the positional order of the court orchestra’s musical instruments in front, behind, to the left, and the right, and how and what kind of melodies were played. However, there is unclear information about a musical instrument named “Uelegch”. Researcher D. Chilkhaasuren, while studying the national orchestra, recreated how the musical instruments of the eight melody categories were located (Figure 5). In this picture, the “Ekhlegch” and “Khuraagch” of the wooden melody category are placed in the center and back of the orchestra.

Hand drawings of musical instruments are taken from the book by researcher G. Badrakh. Along with this, the position of the musical instruments in the modern orchestra is drawn. Here, the great “yatga” (harp) and tambourine are depicted in the positions of “Ekhlegch” and “Khuraagch”. Based on this, it may be considered that the role of “Ekhlegch” and “Khuraagch” in the modern orchestra is played by the drum or tambourine. In general, the common function of both the drum and the tambourine, “Ekhlegch” and “Khuraagch” is to signal, but the tambourine differs in that it plays an important role in the rhythm of the melody.

D. Enkhdavaa drew the hand drawings of the “Ekhlegch” (Figure 6) and “Khuraagch” (Figure 7) in the book “Mongolian music” by researcher S. Soronzonbold. If you look at the picture of “Ekhlegch”, it is very different from the hand drawing in the book by G. Badrakh and J. Badraa. The “Ekhlegch” is depicted as a cup, with something like a spoon or a racket inside. The “Khuraagch” is depicted as something like a talisman on a flat platform, and inside it is drawn something like a frame with two flaps. A mouse is depicted in the frame. In the book by G. Badrakh and



**Figure 5:** Appendix of the master’s thesis in art studies of Chilkhaasuren. D on the topic “Origin, development, repertoire of the national orchestra”.



**Figure 6:** Page 138 of the book “Mongolian music” by S. Soronzonbold. The picture of the musical instrument was drawn by D. Enkhdavaa. Note beneath the picture says “Khuraagch”, but it looks like an “Ekhlegch”.



**Figure 7:** Page 140 of the book “Mongolian music” by S. Soronzonbold. The picture was drawn by D. Enkhdavaa.

J. Badraa, the “Khuraagch” was associated with the image of an incumbent tiger, but here it is unclear what the meaning image of a mouse is. It seems that the incisions on the tiger’s back in the book by G. Badrakh and J. Badraa are depicted on the two flaps of the frame. However, it is also different from incisions in the book by G. Badrakh and J. Badraa. Specifically, these incisions are similar to carved hollows of a ritual sprinkling wooden spoon. The hand drawings in the books by G. Badrakh and J. Badraa are somewhat different from each other, but the general images and situations are the same, while the pictures of these musical instruments drawn by D. Enkhdavaa are completely different. It is worth to study and clarify what it means and what it is based on.

## 4 Uelegch

Researcher G. Badrakh in his book “From the History of Mongolian music” wrote: this musical instrument was made of bamboo from ancient times, and it was also made of wood during the period between the Jin Ju states and the Great Yuan State. Three pieces of flat wood boards are used for making the musical instrument named “Uelegch” (Figure 8) (2008: 38). Two boards are slightly thinner and another one is slightly thicker. After connecting by tying the 2 thinner parts, the upper end of the connected thick boards is tied to one end of the thin board and one is clapped with the other. It seems that musical instruments from other countries were included in the Mongolian court orchestra by making it of wood and developing further. It is also obvious that it consists of three pieces of wooden boards, two thin and one thick. If it was unclear how “Ekhlegch” and “Khuraagch” are played, then it is noted how the “Uelegch” is played. The picture was drawn by Luvsanjamts, and shows two flat wooden boards, shaped like the head of an axe, but quite elongated, with a knot between them. The description of the “Uelegch” says that it has three parts, but here it is depicted as two parts.

There is no description of the musical instrument named “Uelegch” in the book “Study of Mongolian traditional musical instruments” by J. Chuluuntsetseg, published in 2008, in the book “History of Mongolian folk musical instruments” by L. Kherlen, published in 2009, and in the fourth volume “Music” of the “Encyclopedia of Culture and Art”, published in 2018.



**Figure 8:** Page 49 of the book “From the History of Mongolian music” by G. Badrakh. The picture was drawn by Luvsanjamts.

## 5 Conclusions

The descriptions in the books of researchers G. Badrakh and J. Badrah are different. Hand paintings by Luvsanjamts, P. Baldandorj, and D. Enkhdavaa are also different. Therefore, it is necessary to study the interpretations and forms of these musical instruments further in detail. In G. Badrakh's book, the "Uelegch" is described and a hand painting is drawn, but there are no descriptions or hand paintings in other sources. From this point of view, it seems that the musical instrument named "Uelegch" did not have a special role in the Mongolian court orchestra and was not used much.

It can be observed that these musical instruments are responsible for signaling the beginning and ending of the musical melody rather than creating the main melody in the composition of the Mongolian court orchestra. Further attention should be given to studying in detail, including the shape, image, and playing style of musical instruments such as "Ekhlegch" and "Khuraagch" and to include them in the national orchestra, and study the possibility of restoring and popularizing them.

**Research ethics:** Not applicable.

**Author contributions:** The authors have accepted responsibility for the entire content of this manuscript and approved its submission.

**Competing interests:** The authors state no conflict of interest.

**Research funding:** None declared.

**Data availability:** Not applicable.

## References

- Badraa, J. 1998. *Mongolian National Music*. Ulaanbaatar: T&U Printing Co., Ltd.
- Badrakh, G. 2008. *History of the Mongolian Music*. Ulaanbaatar: Od Svit Printing Co., Ltd. (first print 1960).
- Chuluuntsetseg, J. 2008. *Study of the Mongolian Traditional Musical Instruments*. Ulaanbaatar: Printing of Mongolia.
- Kherlen, L. 2022. *Heritage and Culture of the Mongolian Musical Instruments*. Ulaanbaatar: Udam Soyol Printing.
- Soronzonbold, S. 2013. *Mongolian Music (Yuan Dynasty Court Music, Dance, Drama, and Costumes)*. Ulaanbaatar: Soyombo Printing.

## Bionote

### **Davaapil Purevdorj**

Department of Literary and Art Studies, School of Art and Science, Division of Humanities, National University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

**davaapilart@gmail.com**

Davaapil Purevdorj (Ph.D) works as a Department of Literary and Art Studies, School of art and science, National university of Mongolia. Conducts research in the field of Music and Mongolian folk art.