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Jamie N. Sanchez
Virginia Tech

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Following protests that erupted in May 2011, Mongols continue to protest against state development, which have been called “land grabs,” throughout Inner Mongolia. Protests are modes through which Mongols resist the loss of land and the loss of a distinct cultural identity. For Mongols, pastoralism, language, and Genghis Khan are essential markers of a distinct ethnic identity and tools through which Mongols resist Hanification. To understand how these three areas of cultural identity have become sites of resistance to Hanification, it is necessary to understand the changes that have occurred in Inner Mongolia. This article will trace the historical shifts in Inner Mongolia since 1947, the year that province was established as the first of China’s minority autonomous regions. I look to the work of other scholars, to cultural productions, and to my own experience of living in Inner Mongolia to analyze how historical shifts impact Mongolian cultural identity.

Keywords: Mongols, Inner Mongolia, history, cultural identity, ethno-politics

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The grasslands in Northern China are a “familiar and ancestral place” where Mongols continue to grapple with the reality that the connection between place and culture is broken.¹ Historically, the grasslands have been the space where Mongols lived as nomadic pastoralists. But, pastoralism in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, hereafter Inner Mongolia, and throughout China, is nearly extinct.² Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath’s *The End of Nomadism?*, which was published in 1999, explores the end of nomadism throughout Inner Asia and examines how Mongols have adjusted to market oriented policies that threaten the viability of mobile pastoralism.³ Although pastoralism has been in decline throughout Inner Asia for many years, the pastoral identity is still

¹ Akhil Gupta and James Clifford, *Culture, Power, Place* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 38.

² This essay uses “Mongolian” to refer to locations and institutions and uses “Mongol” to refer to people. It also uses “Inner Mongolia,” instead of “IMAR” to refer to Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

³ Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath, *The End of Nomadism? Society, State, and the Environment in Inner Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

important in maintaining ethnic boundaries so that Mongols are distinct from other ethnic groups in China. Mongols look to the reimagined pastoral identity and other cultural markers, such as language and Genghis Khan, as tools of resistance to the Hanification of a distinct Mongolian identity.⁴

This paper is situated within the ongoing Mongol resistance to state-driven urban economic development in Inner Mongolia which continues to transform the grassland areas and interrupt Mongol cultural identity. I lived in Inner Mongolia for eight years during 2001-2012. In May 2010, I witnessed Mongolian protests that began as the result of a hit-and-run death of a Mongol shepherd. Those protests were a catalyst for my doctoral research in which I investigate what other factors have contributed to the protests that have continued since May 2011 in Inner Mongolia. In order to understand ongoing Mongol resistance, it is necessary to understand the shifts in the Mongolian culture that have resulted from state driven policies. Thus, this paper examines the historical shifts within Inner Mongolia since it was established as an autonomous region in 1947.

In 1911, when the Qing dynasty ended, the entire Chinese territory was thrust into a period of political and economic instability. This left China vulnerable to other foreign powers such as Russia and Japan, which were both vying for the loyalties of the Mongols. In November 1924, the Soviet Union dominated Outer Mongolia and helped sponsor the formation of the Mongolian People's Republic, which despite its official title, was essentially a Soviet satellite state.⁵ The remainder of the Mongolian territory aligned with Japan from 1931 to 1945, when Japan invaded Manchuria and launched what would be known as the second Sino-Japanese War.⁶

⁴ This essay uses the transliteration "Genghis Khan" as opposed to "Chingis Khan," "Chinggis Khan," or any other variation used throughout Western scholarship.

⁵ Bruce A. Ellerman, "Secret Sino-Soviet Negotiations on Outer Mongolia, 1918-1925," *Pacific Affairs* 66, no. 4 (Winter 1993), 539.

⁶ Uradyn Bulag, *Collaborative Nationalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 13.

After the defeat of Japan, the Chinese Communists formed an official political relationship with the leaders of the Mongolian territory as part of a strategic move to gain Mongol loyalty and support. This exclusive relationship with China led to the establishment of an autonomous region for Mongols living in the Chinese territory on May 1, 1947. The Chinese state hoped that the newly formed autonomous region would create an “expectation of belonging” in which ethnic minority groups have ownership over territory.⁷ However, in reality, the autonomy inserted as part of the official name of the province was only meant to satisfy the Mongols so that they would align with Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communists, and thereby prevent any possible allegiance to the Chinese Nationalists or foreign powers. The Chinese state never intended Inner Mongolia to be a place of true political autonomy for Mongols living there.

Assimilation: Hanification and the End of Pastoralism

The expansion of the Chinese territory and the transition from dynastic rule to the nation-state model was not smooth. In order to establish itself as legitimate and powerful, the Chinese state needed to unite all the people living within its territory. Out of this shifting political environment, Louisa Schein suggests that two nationalisms were developed. She writes, “Han nationalism was concerned with boundaries between people within the shifting territory of the Chinese polity, specifically between Han and those designated as ‘barbarians.’ Chinese nationalism rose in response to foreign imperialist aggression....”⁸ Han nationalism was developed out of the promotion of Han as “modern” and all others living in China as “barbaric.” Chinese nationalism was created in order to build a strong political identity

⁷ Uradyn Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge: History and the Politics of National Unity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 9.

⁸ Louisa Schein, *Minority Rules* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 108.

in light of foreign powers that threatened the rule of the Qing Dynasty. In Inner Mongolia, Han assimilation into the Mongolian territory promotes both ideologies.

Before these two nationalisms could be developed, *Han* as a distinct ethnic category had to be created. Han are the largest ethnic group in China comprising more than 90% of the national population. Even in Inner Mongolia, there are more Han than Mongols. The reason for this can be partly explained by ethnic classification projects, which were developed in order to create a strong Chinese national identity. The broad category of *Hanzu ren* (Han ethnicity) was created as a new device which could be used to unite all the different people that lived throughout the Chinese territory. By creating this new ethnic category, the state was able to construct what Benedict Anderson calls an “imagined community” by “stretching the short tight skin of the narration over the gigantic body of the empire.”⁹ Thus, despite any other identity that different people living throughout the Chinese territory may have had, they were categorized into one large group and labeled *Hanzu ren*. Non-Han people were termed *minzu*, which can be translated in English as “people group,” “ethnic group,” “nation,” or even “nationality.” Prior to the import of this term from Japan, there was no Mandarin word to describe the different people living in the Chinese territory. At the time of its introduction into the Chinese language, the term was used both as a way to distinguish one group of people from another and to mobilize those in the Chinese territory. *Minzu* worked with *Hanzu* as a way to get all *zu* united together to form a new Chinese nation (Ch. *Zhonghua minzu*). Christopher Atwood argues that the fluidity of the term (Ch. *minzu*), having different meanings, “has proved to be one of the most important ways that the Chinese state allows members of minority nationalities to reconcile loyalty to their

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin an Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 87.

nationality as an ethnic community with loyalty to China as a state and country.”¹⁰

Fredrik Barth’s seminal essay about ethnic groups elucidates the function of ethnic boundaries. He writes, “...ethnic groups only persist as significant units if they imply marked difference in behaviour, that is, persisting cultural differences.”¹¹ Within the Chinese state, ethnic boundaries function in the same way. That is to say ethnic boundaries make a way for groups with distinct behavioral differences to be marked as different than others within China. But, the term *minzu* is not just a term that marks distinctions between China’s ethnic minorities. The term instead functions as a way of viewing each *minzu* through their relationship with the dominant *Hanzu*. In other words *Hanzu* are the lens through which China’s minority groups are viewed.

As mentioned above, there are more Han than Mongols living in Inner Mongolia. In 1947, there were four Han for every one Mongol in Inner Mongolia. But by 1960, the ratio had more than doubled.¹² The mass movement of Han to Inner Mongolia was not accidental, nor was it a new trend in Chinese politics. Early in the Qing Dynasty, the Manchu court prohibited the assimilation of Han Chinese to the Mongolian territory. This also included the protection of the Mongolian pasturelands.¹³ However, the Qing were soon challenged by internal problems which included the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) and external challenges to its stability which included the First Opium War (1839-1842) and the Second Opium

¹⁰ Christopher P. Atwood, “National Questions and National Answers in The Chinese Revolution; or How Do You Say *Minzu* in Mongolian?,” *Indiana East Asian Working Paper Series on Language and Politics in Modern China* (1994), 39.

¹¹ Fredrik Barth, “Introduction” in Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1969), 15.

¹² David Sneath, *Changing Inner Mongolia: Pastoral Mongolian Society and the Chinese State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 88.

¹³ Enze Han, “The Dog That Hasn’t Barked: Assimilation and Resistance in Inner Mongolia, China,” *Asian Ethnicity* 12, no. 1 (February 2011), 57.

War (1856-1860).¹⁴ These encounters with Western powers forced the Qing Dynasty to reevaluate their protection of Mongolian pasturelands. Xiaoyuan Liu asserts that the encounter with Western powers forced the Manchu court to recognize that “agricultural elements of sedentary Chinese society turned out to be the most effective forced in substantiating the Manchu court’s internal and external sovereignty in the vast and largely nomadic land of Inner Asia.”¹⁵ The Qing Dynasty’s quest for sovereignty and security over its territory created a self-propelled transformation into more of “nation-state” that could interact with the international community than that of an isolated body of power with limited contact with state powers outside its borders. But, before the Manchu court could westernize its empire, it needed to first “sinicize” it.¹⁶ As such Qing policies began to focus on the “modernization” of Inner Asia through Han population transfers and the introduction of Han agricultural practices in lieu of nomadism.¹⁷ In other words, the Qing Dynasty achieved a Manchu rule over Inner Mongolia through the sinicization of the region.

The assimilation of Han into Inner Mongolia continued during the Republican period (1912-1949). During this period, the Chinese state secured its border regions by moving Han into areas where there was a strong minority population. Owen Lattimore, who wrote about the state’s prevalent assimilation (Ch. *tong hua*) policies in Northern China during the 1930s, suggests that though *tong hua* means “to assimilate,” referring

¹⁴ Han, “The Dog That Hasn’t Barked,” 57.

¹⁵ Xiaoyuan Liu, *Reins of Liberation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 13.

¹⁶ For further discussion of the ethnonational identity of the Qing Dynasty see Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Mark C. Elliot, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); Ping-ti Ho, “In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski’s ‘Reenvisioning the Qing,’” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 1 (February 1998), 123-155; Evelyn S. Rawski, “Presidential Address: Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 4 (November 1996), 829-850.

¹⁷ Liu, *Reins of Liberation*, 13.

to the assimilation of Han and agriculturalism to Inner Mongolia, in practice *tong hua* actually means the “extermination of the Mongols, to make room for the Chinese.”¹⁸ In his article “On the Wickedness of Being Nomads,” Lattimore used other terms, such as “Chinese colonization” and “agricultural colonization” to explain, “All policies towards the Mongols, whether Chinese, Soviet or Japanese, appear to start from, a common premise: that something must be done about the nomadism of the Mongols.”¹⁹ The end of Mongol nomadism would further assimilate Mongols into the state approved Han identity. Further, moving Han to the region interrupted any potential ethno-nationalistic tendencies that Mongols may have harbored. The state’s perspective that a Han identity would balance out other ethnic identities in China is representative of the political ideology that affirms that to be Han is to be Chinese, and vice versa.

After the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949, it continued the strategy of balancing the Han and ethnic populations in China’s border regions.²⁰ Dee Mack Williams’ ethnographic study suggests that “Chinese rangeland policy initiatives are informed by a long history of antagonism with the grassland environment and its native inhabitants” and that this attitude was then adopted by the “Marx-Lenin-Mao line of political philosophy (which) viewed nomadic pastoralism as an evolutionary dead-end standing in opposition to national progress, scientific rationalism, and economic development.”²¹ As such, Mao began Han population transfers to Inner Mongolia by claiming that there was an urgent need to address population swells on China’s eastern coast and to take advantage of the available open land in Inner Mongolia. Between

¹⁸ Owen Lattimore, “On the Wickedness of Being Nomads,” *T’ien Hsia Monthly* 1, no. 2 (September 1935), 423.

¹⁹ Lattimore, “On the Wickedness of Being Nomads,” 415.

²⁰ Humphrey and Sneath, *The End of Nomadism?*, 91.

²¹ Dee Mack Williams, *Beyond Great Walls* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 10.

1958 and 1959, as many as one million Han settled in Inner Mongolia.²² Han repopulation not only shifted the demographics of the region, but the rapid increase of Han in the province also influenced its economy, political environment, and culture. This was because of the difference between nomadic Mongols and Han which were sedentary agriculturists. That is not to say that some Mongols were not farmers and that some Han were not shepherds. But generally speaking there is a distinction between the two ethnic groups along the lines of occupational identities because, “The emotion that pastoralism conjures up for Mongols derives from its importance as the quintessential historical cultural marker of Mongolness.”²³ In contrast to Mongol pastoralists, Han agriculturalists lived on farms with fixed boundaries and settled homes. The state preference for the Han identity to be the standard by which all other ethnic identities are viewed, combined with the influx of Han into Inner Mongolia, resulted in a preference for agriculturalism. As such, Mongols continued to find themselves marked as “backward” because they were “unable” to progress from the antiquated nomadic pastoral economy to a more modern sedentary Chinese agricultural economy.²⁴ This led to an emerging discourse that favored a “civilized” agricultural economy over a “primitive” pastoral economy.²⁵

The transition for many Mongol pastoralists from a nomadic lifestyle to a settled one was not immediate but, rather, a gradual and subtle normalization that occurred over time. In the 1950s and the 1960s, the state developed policies aimed at building settled Mongolian communities. Families were no longer nomadic, but lived in settled

²² Sneath, *Changing Inner Mongolia*, 88.

²³ Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge*, 7.

²⁴ This essay uses the term “backwards” which follows other scholars who use this term in reference to the Chinese view of ethnic minority cultural traits such as nomadism and language. See Lattimore, “On the Wickedness of Being Nomads”; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Williams, *Beyond Great Walls*.

²⁵ Williams, *Beyond Great Walls*, 66.

homes with only some family members moving with the herds to various pasture sites throughout the year.²⁶ The justifications for such policies were rooted in the notion that education and healthcare were more accessible in urban centers than in the grasslands. Around the same time, the state also focused on expanding the agricultural industry, a move which further impacted the amount of pastureland available to herders.²⁷ The result of these policies was astounding. In 1949, all the families in the Xilingol league were mobile, but, by 1962, 40% of the families living in that area had become “settled with moving herding.”²⁸

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) there were also a large number of Han population transfers to Inner Mongolia. Mao claimed that rural pastoral areas throughout Inner Mongolia were strongholds for ethnic nationalism, and in order to prevent any potential separatist movements, Han immigration and land reclamation was necessary. The logic behind this policy was that Han would be more loyal to the Chinese state than Mongols which is still a strong ideology within the Chinese state in which “The Party brands all challenges to Han rule, however oblique, as “splittism” punishable by a prison term or even death.”²⁹ Examples of this ideology is evident in the state’s relationship with Tibetans and Uyghurs who are still viewed, to varying degrees, as internal enemies fraught with ethnic nationalism and splittist tendencies.³⁰

By the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping initiated economic reforms that focused on modernizing China by developing the agriculture industry throughout the country. The plan was meant to benefit the national

²⁶ Sneath, *Changing Inner Mongolia*, 87.

²⁷ Humphrey and Sneath, *The End of Nomadism?*, 91.

²⁸ Sneath, *Changing Inner Mongolia*, 87.

²⁹ Gardner Bovington, “The Not-So-Silent Majority: Uyghur Resistance to Han Rule in Xinjiang,” *Modern China* 28, no. 1 (January 2002), 46.

³⁰ See Nasan Bayar, “Nation-building, Ethnicity and Natural Resources,” *Inner Asia* 16 (2014), 378; Bovington, “The Not-So-Silent Majority,” 46.

economy, but in Inner Mongolia, the push for an expanded agricultural economy resulted in the further demise of the Mongolian pastoral economy. Once again, the state preferred Han agricultural economy was promoted as a progressive method and as one of the keys to modernizing the country. The national focus on modernization resulted in new regional policies throughout the country as well. For example, the introduction of the household contract responsibility system meant herding communities would have to sell their livestock to private households and many pasturelands would be enclosed.³¹ Mongolian spatial identity has been negatively affected by the transformation from open to enclosed pasturelands.³²

By 1995, the increase in the rate of desertification in Inner Mongolia prompted the Chinese government to create new laws to protect the lands from over-grazing.³³ Because Mongols were no longer mobile, moving from one pastureland to another throughout the year, the land used to raise sheep was unable to naturally be replenished. Ironically, Mongol herders, who were forced to become settled citizens, were blamed for overgrazing the land. Williams captures the increased resentment about land degradation between Mongols and the state. He writes that Mongols “not only reject the Chinese national discourse that would scapegoat Mongol herders, they explicitly blame Beijing for causing (through colonialism) and perpetuating (through neglect) the land degradation that jeopardizes their livelihood.”³⁴ Mongols resent the blame for the emerging environmental issues and the social environment in which Han continue to be promoted as “scientific” and Mongols are still viewed as “backwards.” In the wake of the May 2011 protests, a rap song entitled “Song Dedicated to Mergen, Hero of the Grasslands” was written to honor

³¹ Bilik, “How Do You Say China in Mongolian?,” 71.

³² Williams, *Beyond Great Walls*, 67.

³³ Han, “The Dog That Hasn’t Barked,” 59.

³⁴ Williams, *Beyond Great Walls*, 195-196.

the memory of the shepherd who was struck and killed by a truck driver in the grasslands. The rap song was also an outlet that criticized various state policies in Inner Mongolia. In reference to the attempt by the state to blame Mongols for the above stated environmental issues, some of the lyrics read:

Once green Mongolian plateau turned to yellow
Beautiful grasslands turning to desert
The government says it is the herders' fault
Have you ever thought about it carefully?
Whose fault is it really?
Overgrazing is a myth and a lie
We have grazed animals here thousands of years³⁵

The song seeks to resist the legitimacy of the state's claim that the environmental issues within Inner Mongolia were due to pastoralism and instead posits this claim as a fiction created by the state.

By 2000, the state sought to repeat the economic success that Deng's economic reforms had in the eastern part of the country by launching the Western Development Program (西部大开发, Ch. *xibu dakaifa*, WDP). The highly aspirational plan focuses on narrowing the economic gap between those living on the eastern coast of China and those in the rest of the country.³⁶ The geographic focus of this new urban and economic reform covers more than 70% of the Chinese territory and includes Inner Mongolia. While the state's objective is that wide spread development will raise the living standards of the populations living in the western part of the country it also hopes that economic growth will quell splittist

³⁵ Staff, "Rap Song Dedicated to Mergen," *SMHRIC*, June 13, 2011, http://www.smhric.org/news_390.htm.

³⁶ V. Elena Barabantseva, "Development As Localization," *Critical Asian Studies* 41, no. 2 (June 2009), 233, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14672710902809393>.

tendencies that exist amongst ethnic minority groups living on the geographic and societal margins.

The WDP has also altered the infrastructure of existing cities in Inner Mongolia. In many cities, traditional courtyard homes have been replaced with high rise apartment complexes built to house the increased urban population. New airports and train stations have been added to accommodate the influx of citizens and travelers, and new shopping areas were constructed so that spending could help spur the economy.³⁷ I returned to live in Hohhot in late summer 2008 and found that many of the small, six-story apartment buildings that were commonplace when I left the city just three years prior, had been replaced by large apartment subdivisions. I moved into one of the new apartment neighborhoods because I knew that living in an older home carried the danger of soon being *chai'ed* (demolished).³⁸ Soon after I moved into the new complex, a Mongol family moved into the first floor apartment of the building in which I lived. First floor apartments had enclosed yards which were a relatively new feature in apartment homes in the region. Many others in the complex used the yard space to grow gardens, but my new neighbors used the space to keep their sheep. I later found out that the family was Mongols who had been displaced from their rural homes. Thus, it seemed to me, that the sheep they brought along with them were a reminder of their former life as pastoralists and a sign to others that they would not be displaced from that identity.³⁹

³⁷ From the time I first visited Hohhot in March 2000 until I left the city in July 2012, I flew in and out of three different airports.

³⁸ *Chai* means “to demolish.” The Chinese ideogram, 拆, is painted on buildings marked for destruction. During the time that I lived in Inner Mongolia, the foreign community in Hohhot adopted the word into English. In fact, the summer of 2001, at the beginning of the WDP, became affectionately known as “The Summer of Chai” because of the mass destruction of buildings that took place throughout the city.

³⁹ Personal story and observation also documented in Jamie N. Sanchez, “Cultural Colonization: The Dual-Displacement of Mongolians in Inner Mongolia,” *Spectra Journal* 2, no. 2 (October 2013), <http://spectrajournal.org/2013/11/18/2-2-5-cultural-colonialization-the-displacement-of->

The WDP also includes the development of coal mines and gas pipelines built to access the vast amounts of resources located throughout the Western provinces.⁴⁰ In order to gain access to the resources, the state compensates those that move into urban centers. However, the state compensation for land does not seem to satisfy many Mongols.⁴¹ On January 20, 2015, Mongol herders protested the state's construction of the Zhurihe Military Training Base. One protestor's banner, which was written in both Mongolian and Chinese, read, "Return our home, return our land, return our compensations, we want survival" and "We displaced herders from Zhurihe Military Training Base area have paid a heavy price to the state, yet no adequate compensation has been given to us."⁴² Although Mongol herders have been compensated for the land, no amount of compensation is adequate or can replace the self-autonomy and cultural identity attached to the land.⁴³

The end of pastoralism also means the end of *yurts* used as traditional homes. Instead, *yurts* have been transformed into hotels for the domestic and international tourists who travel to Inner Mongolia for an "authentic" Mongolian experience.⁴⁴ Evans and Humphrey's study examines a Chinese tourist camp in Inner Mongolia that romanticizes the

mongolians-in-inner-mongolia/.

⁴⁰ Barabantseva, "Development As Localization," 233.

⁴¹ The revised Law of Nationality Regional Autonomy which was passed on February 28, 2001, states in Article 65 that "When exporting natural resources out of the autonomous areas, the state should give them a certain amount of compensation." http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/china-autonomy_law.html.

⁴² Staff, "Mongolian herders held simultaneous protests," *SMHRIC*, January 21, 2015, http://www.smhric.org/news_555.htm.

⁴³ Arturo Escobar, "Culture Sits in Places: Reflections on Globalism and Subaltern Strategies of Localization," *Political Geography* 20, no. 2 (February 2001), 162, <http://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S096262980000640>.

⁴⁴ C. Evans and C. Humphrey, "After-Lives of the Mongolian Yurt: The 'Archaeology' of a Chinese Tourist Camp," *Journal of Material Culture* 7, no. 2 (July 1, 2002), 190, <http://mcu.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.1177/1359183502007002639>.

Mongolian culture. They write, “If the yurt-form does go on being produced in Inner Mongolia, it looks as though it will be an increasingly estranged structure, employed cynically by the Chinese and ever more alienated from the Mongols.”⁴⁵ This has come to be true in Inner Mongolia. Han tourists can stay a few nights in an “authentic” Mongolian yurt and ride camels through the Gobi Desert. This “interaction” with the Mongolian culture ensures tourists that the Chinese unified multiethnic nation is intact. But, for Mongols, the commodification of the yurts in the tourist industry has created further cultural anxiety. Dru Gladney posits, in reference to Chinese films, that “the representation of minorities in this exotic and romanticized fashion is more a project of constructing a majority discourse than of depicting the minorities themselves.”⁴⁶ In Inner Mongolia the romanticized tourist experience is more about satisfying the tourists than it is about depicting Mongolian culture. Further, the tourist experience simplifies the Mongolian culture and reifies the notion that Mongolian nomadic lifestyle has given way to Chinese modernization. As suggested above, natural factors have impacted the environment in Inner Mongolia, but not the same extent as human factor.

As suggested above, natural factors have impacted the environment in Inner Mongolia, but not to the same extent as human factors. One report claims that anthropogenic factors account for 94.5% of desertification in China and that “policies are the underlying forces driving other kinds of socio-economic activities (proximate causes) which directly lead to land use change, development of market economy and new enterprises, and exploitation of natural resources...”⁴⁷ In other words,

⁴⁵ Evans and Humphrey, “After-Lives of the Mongolian Yurt,” 208.

⁴⁶ Dru Gladney, “Tian Zhuangzhuang, the Fifth Generation, and Minorities Film in China,” *Public Culture* 8 (1995), 167.

⁴⁷ Weicheng Wu and Eddy DePauw, “Policy Impacts on Land Degradation: Evidence Revealed by Remote Sensing in Western Ordos, China,” in *Land Degradation and Desertification: Assessment, Mitigation, and Remediation*, eds. Pandi Zdruli, Marcello Pagliai, and Selim Kapur (New York: Springer, 2010), 231.

much of the human activity that has impacted the grassland areas can be linked to national policies. Tellingly, the state's response to the environmental issues further destabilizes Mongolian identity. Policies that forbid grazing or enclose grassland areas so that the land may recover continue to separate Mongols from a lived pastoral identity. Although many Mongols have now been far removed from their original pastoral identity marked by moving herds and living in a rural location, the pastoral identity in Inner Mongolia is not extinct. It remains a strong part of the Mongolian identity but it is also a part of the Chinese state imaginary that is used to maintain clear ethnic boundaries between Mongols and Han populations.

Modernization through Mandarin, not Mongolian

Language is a powerful tool that has long been recognized by the Chinese state as an effective means to absorb the identities of those living within the Chinese territory. Anderson writes that, in imperial China, Mandarin was used to sinicize barbarians as part of a loyalty building method and that “Chinese mandarins looked with approval on barbarians who painfully learned to pain Middle Kingdom ideograms. These barbarians were already halfway to full absorption. Half-civilized was vastly better than barbarian.”⁴⁸ By learning Mandarin, Mongols and Manchus could be accepted as “Sons of Heaven” and absorbed into the Chinese plan to fulfill the heavenly Mandate in an effort to achieve regional and global dominance.⁴⁹ The importance of the Mandarin language has not waned in modern China. This section of the article, examines shifts in language policies in Inner Mongolia since 1947. Despite policies that promote ethnic languages, many Mongols in China choose to learn Mandarin due

⁴⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

to what Bulag calls a “language anxiety” in which Mongols are faced with the choice to learn the language of the dominant society or to learn the ethnic language.

When Inner Mongolia was established as the first autonomous region in China, the PRC intended to make Inner Mongolia a model for policy implementation for all autonomous regions. Linda Tsung states that in 1947 more than 85% of Mongols were illiterate. In order to increase Mongolian literacy, new guidelines were established to “promote Mongolian newspapers and books, to research Mongolian history and to disseminate Mongolian language textbooks in schools and develop Mongolian culture.”⁵⁰ In order to achieve literacy, Mongolian language education was put in place from preschool to high school throughout Inner Mongolia in newly established Mongolian schools (蒙校, Ch. *meng xiao*) which taught in the Mongolian medium of instruction (MMI). Mongolian literacy grew at an average annual rate of 14.25% for primary schools and 21.84% for secondary schools between 1947 and 1965.⁵¹ However, while literacy was rising, so were racial tensions between Mongols and Han people due in part to the assimilation of Han people into Mongolian territory.

In 1957, the local Inner Mongolia government created a language unification committee to work with the Mongolia People’s Republic (hereafter Outer Mongolia) in an effort to build unity between the two languages. The plan was initiated so that the Mongolian language spoken in Inner Mongolia could follow the linguistic practices in Outer Mongolia. Ulanhu, a Mongol who was the chairman of Inner Mongolia, argued that language unification would allow Inner Mongolia newspapers and books to promote Maoist thoughts to Outer Mongolia.⁵² This interaction between

⁵⁰ IMAR Education Department, *Neimenggu zizhiq minzu jiaoyu wenjian huibian*, vol. 1, 1947-1957, (Hohhot: IMAR Education Press). Quoted in Tsung, *Language Power and Hierarchy*, 65.

⁵¹ Tsung, *Language Power and Hierarchy*, 65.

⁵² Uradyn E. Bulag, “Mongolian Ethnicity and Linguistic Anxiety in China,” *American*

Ulanhu and the PRC could be read as what James C. Scott would term a “public transcript.”⁵³ Scott writes that there is a “dialectic of disguise and surveillance that pervades relations between the weak and the strong,” and that a public transcript that is “in close conformity with how the dominant group would wish to have things appear.”⁵⁴ An analysis of the promotion of language unification between the two Mongolian territories through the lens of “public transcripts” it is evident that Ulanhu deployed a political maneuver that “disguised an Inner Mongolian aspiration for cultural unification with the MPR.”⁵⁵ In reality, Inner Mongolian Mongols wanted language unification because they looked to Mongols living in Outer Mongolia for a cultural connection because of an aversion to any new terms from Mandarin that were introduced to the Mongolian language in Inner Mongolia.⁵⁶ In other words, the contempt between Mongols and Han was so strong in Inner Mongolia that there was an official attempt to look to Outer Mongolia for an escape from the aggressive influence that Han had on Mongolian culture through language. Unfortunately, for Mongols living in Inner Mongolia, the plan to unify the two Mongolian languages did not work because of China’s national language policies that focused on making Mandarin the standard language for all citizens living within China.

In 1958, the *pinyin* system, which uses Latin letters to write Chinese ideograms, was introduced. This new writing system was fueled by “the belief that ideographic and logographic scripts were barriers to mass literacy and modernization...”⁵⁷ The *pinyin* system was established to

Anthropologist 105, no. 4 (2003), 757.

⁵³ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 4.

⁵⁴ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 4.

⁵⁵ Bulag, “Mongolian Ethnicity and Linguistic Anxiety in China,” 757.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Gulbahar H. Beckett and Gerard A. Postiglione, “China’s language policy for indigenous and

address this issue and propel China into modernization. During this time citizens throughout the Chinese territory spoke hundreds of different local dialects which made communication with others from region to region difficult. Not only would the *pinyin* system make *putonghua* (the official standard dialect of Mandarin) accessible to more of the country's population which would then facilitate the increase of both internal and external trade, but a common language would also become a tool to further unite local identities into the overarching, constructed Han identity. The focus on language unification was part of the PRC's new state building practices which looked to language as an instrument that could also absorb the identities of all non-Han people living in China. Mao recognized the important role language played in nation building and, thus, continued the tradition of what Anderson calls "alchemic absorption" through language that was prevalent in dynastic China.⁵⁸ Western scholars have come to agree that, in China, language policies are not always separate from political agendas and in Inner Mongolia this has resulted in Mongols who are pressured to learn Mandarin. Despite earlier policies to promote the Mongolian language, Mandarin had become the standard language of education. As a result, by 1963 even students in MMI schools could not be promoted to the next grade unless they passed a Chinese language examination.⁵⁹

During the Cultural Revolution, most Mongol schools were closed and the remaining ones were converted into schools that used Mandarin as the language of instruction.⁶⁰ Language unification had a negative impact on ethnic minority languages because through the process of standardizing *putonghua*, "the Han language was promoted to replace

minority education," in *China's Assimilationist Language Policy*, eds. Gulbahar H. Becket and Gerard A. Postiglione (New York: Routledge, 2012), 22.

⁵⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 15.

⁵⁹ Tsung, *Language Power and Hierarchy*, 67.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

minority languages as a shortcut for rapid linguistic convergence. This process was greatly accelerated during the Cultural Revolution when the dominant ideology became monolingual: one people speaking one language.”⁶¹ The aim for rapid linguistic convergence meant that the aim for standardizing the different dialects of Mandarin turned into a campaign which forced all the people living in China to speak the national language. In the case of Inner Mongolia, Mongols lost the opportunity to learn Mongolian through the education system. Another result of the stringent language policies during the Cultural Revolution was that those who did not learn Mandarin were further isolated from the constructed Chinese identity which made them a target for criticism from the state which was concerned with loyalty, especially during this time period.

As a result of the new language learning environment during the Cultural Revolution, minority cultural transmission through language essentially stopped. In the public sphere, the possibility of any expression of Mongolian identity in Inner Mongolia was halted altogether because of a genocidal campaign during the Cultural Revolution in which Mongols were accused of harboring ethnic aspirations that were anti-Chinese. This accusation stemmed from paranoia within the PRC that looked to non-Han peoples in the Chinese territory as liable to collaborate with external enemies. Bilik writes that Xie Fuzhi, the Minister of Public Security at the time, fabricated the claim that all Mongolian Communist Party members were also secretly aligned with the New Inner Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (NIMPRP).⁶² Thus, a campaign against the Mongols, which lasted between 1968 and 1969, was launched. The impact of the campaign halted Mongolian cultural expression and resulted in the death

⁶¹ Becket and Postiglione, “China’s language policy for indigenous and minority education,” 24.

⁶² Naran Bilik, “How Do You Say China in Mongolian? Toward a Deeper Understanding of Multicultural Education in China,” in *Minority Education in China: Balancing Unity and Diversity in an Era of Critical Pluralism*, ed. James Liebold (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014), 70.

of many Mongols. According to Bilik, an indictment was brought against the Gang of Four in 1980, citing the wrongful accusation of 346,000 and the death of more than 16,000 Mongols.⁶³ During my tenure of living in Inner Mongolia, years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, I heard many stories about this genocidal campaign.

Once the Cultural Revolution ended, Mongol cultural expression slowly reemerged and educational policies concerning Mongolian language instruction were reestablished, but in a social and political environment marked by paranoia and fear. Mongol students could once again receive education in Mongolian (MMI) and learn Mandarin as a class subject.⁶⁴ Mongol children who did not have any Mongolian language proficiency would attend schools where Chinese was the language of instruction with an option of taking Mongolian as a subject class.⁶⁵ The regional government worked to promote education policies that would reestablish minority language instruction. At the same time, there was also a push for all Chinese citizens to learn Mandarin, which Mongols cautiously resisted because of the recognition that the national stance to learn Mandarin was more of an attempt at cultural colonization by the Chinese state than one of just unifying the nation under one common language. Mongols, who had already experienced a harsh genocidal campaign during the Cultural Revolution, would now face a softer campaign aimed at Mongolian cultural identity.

Deng's economic reforms in the 1980s further affected Mongolian language use because of the national push to learn English along with Mandarin which was part of further modernizing the country. During this time, the Inner Mongolian regional government passed regulations that "Mongol schools must persist in teaching Mongolian language first and

⁶³ Bilik, "How Do You Say China in Mongolian?", 70.

⁶⁴ Tsung, *Language Power and Hierarchy*, 68.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

use MMI as the major model in order that students become Mongolian and Chinese bilingual at the same time as learning a foreign language (English).”⁶⁶ These regulations further pressured Mongol students to achieve trilingual literacy if they wanted any chance at competing with Han citizens, who only needed to achieve bilingual literacy, for jobs.

The pressure on Mongols to learn three languages was not well received by Mongol linguists. In 1981, Mongol linguist Chuluun Bagan asserted that bilingual regulations that forced Mongols to learn Mandarin but not Han to learn Mongolian was “tantamount to using a covert administrative measure to restrict and limit the development of the Mongolian language, and it can only accelerate the process of the loss of Mongolian.”⁶⁷ The concern about a “covert administrative measure,” or to use the term mentioned above, a “softer campaign aimed at Mongol cultural identity,” in which there is a decline of Mongolian language literacy because of a social environment that promotes Mandarin, remains amongst many Mongolian scholars today. For example, Bulag maintains that “because almost all jobs are controlled by Chinese, university-level knowledge of Mongolian is no different from illiteracy.”⁶⁸ As a result, Mongols may choose Mandarin as their marketplace language and, in doing so, they “naturally leave their minority language behind.”⁶⁹

Ironically, the historical push for the country to speak one language also poses a problem for the Chinese state because of the need to maintain strong ethnic boundaries in a way that would uphold the identity of China as a multinational country. In other words, the Chinese state is caught in a paradox of its own making. By promoting Mandarin as the *lingua franca*

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Chuluun Bagan, “Jianchi minzu yuyan wenze de pingdeng diwei,” in *Nei Menggu zizhiqu minzu yanjiu xuehui* [Inner Mongolian Prefecture Language Association] (Nei Menggu Ziahiq Minzu Yanjiou Xuehui Shoujie Nianhui Lunwen Xuanji, Huhehaote, 1981), 122-123.

⁶⁸ Bulag, “Mongolian Ethnicity and Language Anxiety in China,” 754.

⁶⁹ Stevan Harrell, “Linguistics and hegemony in China,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 103, no. 1 (January 1993), 110.

of China it has, whether inadvertent or deliberate, caused the demise of other languages spoken within its territory. But, if China's ethnic groups do not maintain distinct ethnic languages, then China will be challenged in its own identity. Instead of a nation comprised of other nationalities (*minzu*), the loss of ethnic languages that maintain ethnic boundaries pushes China one step closer to a mono-lingual and mono-cultural state.

Even though there have been policies to promote Mongolian language, many Mongolian parents today urge their children to learn Mandarin so that they will be better equipped to compete in the marketplace. The plight of Mongols concerning language is reminiscent of Bourdieu's analysis of French peasants who chose to learn the official language of the nation-state instead of maintaining specific dialects. This was essentially a choice to participate "in the destruction of their instruments of expression."⁷⁰ Mongols are forced to make the same choice because the official language of the Chinese state is a commodity by which competitive opportunities are gained, but at the expense of cultural expression.

Additionally, the connection between Mandarin and economic prosperity affirms that there is a language hierarchy in China and that Mandarin is at the top.⁷¹ In an effort to stave off any further criticism about the dissolution of the Mongolian language, the Inner Mongolia government developed a language policy in November 2004. The policy recognizes the need to "expand the use of the Mongol language" by offering incentives for students in Mongolian language schools, bilingual government workers, and Mongolian media broadcasts.⁷² A report in 2006 from the Congressional-Executive Commission on China stated that the

⁷⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 49.

⁷¹ Arienne M. Dwyer, *The Xinjiang Conflict: Uyghur Identity, Language Policy, and Political Discourse* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center, 2005), 14.

⁷² Human Rights in China, "China: Minority Exclusion, Marginalization and Rising Tensions," 2007, 27.

Inner Mongolian regional government earmarked significant funds to subsidize university fees for students who received their high school education in Mongolian and to support minority language teaching materials.⁷³ As one might expect, despite the regional policies, there still is a large gap between policy and practice. One reason for this is because of a lack of available teachers fluent in minority languages. There are simply not enough fluent teachers to staff language classes. Another reason of the dissonance between policy and practice is because of the discriminatory attitudes towards ethnic minority groups within regional education bureaus. As a result, Mandarin continues to be the language of preference throughout Inner Mongolia.

The state's efforts to preserve and promote the Mongolian language through education cannot challenge the social environment that demands Han fluency in order to secure economic and social mobility. Tsung posits that as Mongolian in the education system will continue to decline, the language "will become a token and commercial product in the tourist industry."⁷⁴ This is already occurring throughout Inner Mongolia's cultural tourist industry in which the Mongolian language is commodified in order to promote the illusion of a strong Mongolian culture in the region. But the performance of the Mongolian language in the cultural tourist industry does not reflect the reality of Mongolian use in daily life.

Genghis Khan or Genghis Han?

After more than 800 years since his reign, Genghis Khan still remains a central figure in Mongolian history and cultural identity. Khan united the widespread tribes and launched a campaign of global domination in the

⁷³ Staff, "Inner Mongolia Government Promotes Mongolian Language," *Congressional -Executive Commission*, August 20, 2006, <http://www.cecc.gov/publications/commission-analysis/inner-mongolia-government-promotes-mongolian-language>.

⁷⁴ Tsung, *Language Power and Hierarchy*, 89.

13th century. After his death, Khan's descendants established the Yuan Dynasty which ruled the Chinese territory from 1271-1368. Despite the brutality that is attached to Khan's memory, he remains a historical figure that continues to draw the loyalties of the Mongols as well as interest from journalists, historians, academics, and the entertainment industry. *The New York Times* journalist Nicholas Kristof wrote, "He may have killed people by the millions, but he was also a great nationalist and one of the most brilliant commanders in history."⁷⁵ In recent years, Khan has regained interest throughout the world. In Outer Mongolia, for example, one can find the *Chinggis Vodka* brand, which entices European consumers to "try Emperor Genghis Khan's No. 1 Vodka."⁷⁶ In the United States, Netflix recently produced a mini-series based on Marco Polo's interaction with the Khan court.⁷⁷ And "armchair archeologists" from around the world have joined the "Valley of the Khans," which is a crowd sourcing project, to scour satellite images in the search for Khan's tomb in Outer Mongolia.⁷⁸ Khan also remains of great political importance to the Chinese state in which Mongols in Inner Mongolia have been challenged by the Chinese state's rewriting of history that asserts that Khan is a *Chinese* hero and "the only Chinese to defeat the Europeans."⁷⁹

Alicia Campi writes that "China's absorption of Mongolia's founding hero has been a centuries-long process."⁸⁰ The Manchu, who

⁷⁵ Nicholas Kristof, "Ulan Bator Journal; With Genghis Revived, What Will Mongols Do?" *The New York Times*, March 23, 1990, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/03/23/world/ulan-bator-journal-with-genghis-revived-what-will-mongols-do.html>.

⁷⁶ "Mongolian Spirits," <http://mongolianspirits.com/eng/>.

⁷⁷ Lenika Cruz, "Marco Polo": Netflix's Critical Flop that Dared to be Diverse," *The Atlantic*, December 20, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/12/in-defense-of-marco-polo/383905/>.

⁷⁸ Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge*, 234.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Alicia J. Campi, "Mongolian Identity Issues and The Image of Chinggis Khan," *Woodrow Wilson Center*, October 4, 2006, 32.

ruled during the Qing dynasty nearly 300 years after the end of the Mongol-led Yuan dynasty, earmarked a special budget to maintain Khan's shrine located in what is now Inner Mongolia.⁸¹ By the 1930s, when Japan established control of Manchuria, it also looked to Khan as a way to rally the Mongols against the ruling Republic of China by establishing a Khan mausoleum in Ulaanhot, Inner Mongolia.⁸² In 1935, Mao started to strategically build alliances with non-Han living in China in order to battle outside aggressors. He also recognized the position that Khan held amongst Mongols. In order to rally the Mongols against Japan, Mao suggested that they needed to "cooperate with the Chinese Soviet regime and the Red Army" on the grounds that nobody would "dare entertain the thought that the sons and grandsons of Chinggis Khan can be humiliated!"⁸³ Thus Manchu, Japanese, and Chinese states have each deployed Khan as a means of gaining the loyalty of the Mongols and as tool of state building.

Since that time, the connection that Mongols have been allowed to have with Khan has gone through several phases. In 1954, following the political maneuver of the Japanese to use Genghis Khan to gain the loyalties of the Mongols, the PRC funded the construction of the Genghis Khan Mausoleum in Ordos, Inner Mongolia.⁸⁴ Even though Khan's remains have never been located, by building a mausoleum dedicated to Khan within the Chinese territory, the PRC attempted to pacify Chinese Mongols and, at the same time, began the reimagination of Khan as a *Chinese* hero. Khan's acceptance by the Chinese state took a downward turn during the 1960s and throughout the remainder of the Cultural

⁸¹ Campi, "Mongolian Identity Issues and the Image of Chinggis Khan," 32.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Almaz Khan, "Chinggis Khan: From Imperial Ancestor to Ethnic Hero." in *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*, ed., Stevan Harrell (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1995), 265.

⁸⁴ Campi, "Mongolian Identity Issues and The Image of Chinggis Khan," 32.

Revolution. Like other expressions of cultural identity, any loyalty to Genghis Khan at that time was seen as ethnic nationalism and reinforced the belief that the historical memory of Khan as a Mongol hero could pose problems to the Chinese state. As a result of the strict social-political control of thought and life during the Cultural Revolution, Mongols were forced to silence any cultural distinctions, including their historical allegiance to Khan, because of the risk of being labeled as ethnic nationalists working against the Chinese state.

Once China emerged out of the Cultural Revolution, Khan reappeared as a positive symbol that could once again be lauded as an ethnic and national hero, if for nothing else than to regain the trust of the Mongol people. In 1987, the year of the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of Inner Mongolia as an autonomous region, the Chinese government allocated significant funding to the restoration of the Khan Mausoleum in Inner Mongolia.⁸⁵ By that time, the Chinese government had already reclaimed Khan as one of China's historical leaders. Today, Khan remains for the Chinese state an essential symbol in the constructed history that claims that China is the world's longest continuous civilization. In this way Khan is not viewed as a barbarian who ruled over the Chinese people, but rather as a Chinese hero who ruled the world which, in turn, attributes the medieval Mongolian global dominance to China. Further, by rewriting the history Genghis Khan, establishing a strong national discourse, and promoting Khan in various public sites, Khan is also kept in China and out of Outer Mongolia. Whereas Outer Mongolia has capitalized on the search for Khan's remnants through archeological tourism connected to projects like "Valley of the Khans," mentioned above, the Chinese state has looked to Khan to promote the broader tourist industry in Inner Mongolia. Khan's Mausoleum in Inner Mongolia has been touted by the Chinese state as a "must see" tourist

⁸⁵ Khan, "Chinggis Khan," 267.

attraction. “The Mausoleum of Genghis Khan” website states that the Mausoleum is included on the list of “40 Best Places to Visit in China” and one of the nation’s “100 Patriotic Education” sites.⁸⁶ Thus the Chinese state has also managed to recreate Khan as a figure that can spur on the regional economy of Inner Mongolia through tourism while ensuring that Khan’s identity has a Chinese hero can facilitate proper patriotism.

In China, Khan remains an essential part of the Mongolian culture through which Mongols can be distinguished from others. Mongol scholar Almaz Khan writes, “For the Inner Mongols, Chinggis Khan has come up to serve specifically as a symbol of ethnic/cultural survival of their group in relation to the overwhelmingly dominant Chinese state and society.”⁸⁷ Like the commodification of other parts of the Mongol culture mentioned above, the commercialization of Khan is a quandary for Mongols. In one sense, Khan has become a figure that benefits the Chinese state but, at the same time, the export of Khan through the tourist industry allows Mongols to share their history and culture. The rap song dedicated to Mergen, which was mentioned above, captures the sentiment that many Chinese Mongols have about Khan. At the end of the song, the rap artist declares, “We are the Mongols, descendants of Chinggis Khan!”⁸⁸ This is an attempt to appeal to the Mongol connection to Khan, who, despite the official state discourse, remains essential to Mongolian cultural identity.

Between Real and Imagined: Representations of Mongolian Identity

This article has attempted to contextualize the historical shifts in Inner Mongolia since it was established as China’s first “autonomous” region.

⁸⁶ The Mausoleum of Genghis Khan, “A Brief Introduction of Khan’s Mausoluem,” <http://www.cjshl.com:81/en/>.

⁸⁷ Khan, “Chinggis Khan,” 248.

⁸⁸ Staff, “Rap Song Dedicated to Mergen.”

In no way is this article inclusive of every policy that has impacted Mongol cultural identity because the history of Inner Mongolia is much richer than can be captured in one article. But, this brief summary elucidates how various state-driven policies and ideologies have impacted Mongolian cultural identity in Inner Mongolia.

Mongols, caught somewhere between real and imagined identities, have been the focus of other scholars. Bulag considers the “language anxiety” felt by many Mongols due to a social and political hierarchy that favors Mandarin over any other language in China.⁸⁹ Liu traces the “Mongolian question” through China’s transition to a nation-state.⁹⁰ And Khan simply asks, “Who are the Mongols?”⁹¹ The common thread among these scholars is the issue of identity with which Mongols in China grapple. Although Mongols have not been as active in violent protests as other marginalized minority groups in China, they are resisting the loss of a distinct cultural identity in a heavily sinicized political environment. This ongoing tension has prompted some Mongols to protest “land grabbing” that is the result of the Chinese state’s development of the remaining grasslands. Protests are sites of contention through which Mongols resist further cultural colonization. There are also other modes of resistance amongst Mongols. Material productions, including songs, are important in the resistance of the end of a distinct Mongol identity. Songs can also be read as evidence of the “resourcefulness with which people use symbols to reassert community and its boundaries when the processes and consequences of change threaten its integrity.”⁹² The attempt to maintain the distinct ethnic identity and imagined community is once

⁸⁹ Bulag, “Mongolian Ethnicity and Linguistic Anxiety in China.”

⁹⁰ Liu, *Reins of Liberation*.

⁹¹ Almaz Khan, “Who are the Mongols? State, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Representation in the PRC,” in *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan*, ed. Melissa J. Brown (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 125-159.

⁹² Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1985), 28.

again represented by the rap song mentioned above in which some lyrics read:

No one can sever the bonds of souls and minds among us.
We stand together to protest.
We march together bravely.
Right Ujumchin, Left Ujumchin, plus Shuluun Huh, and Huveet Shar,
No matter where we are from, we are always together.⁹³

⁹³ Staff, "Rap Song Dedicated to Mergen."

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