Singing Mongolian: Language Preservation, Cultural Representation, and Resistance

Jamie N. SANCHEZ
Biola University, USA

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Abstract

Language serves as an important ethnic boundary marker in China. Additionally, language holds significant value for national and ethnic identity. Yet, despite its value, Mongolian language use has been in decline while Mandarin and English are promoted. This linguistic hegemony is upheld by an unofficial ideology in which China's ethnic minority groups are labeled as *backwards*.

Still, Mongolian language remains a symbol of identity even for Mongols who do not speak Mongolian. As such, Mongols look for modes through which the state will allow, and even promote, the preservation of the Mongolian language.

In this article, I suggest that Mongols have created spaces through which the Mongolian language will continue. I analyze lyrics in songs by the Mongolian language band *Anda Union* as evidence of a language of resistance launched in response to the destruction of the Mongolian cultural space and the ongoing threat to Mongolian cultural identity.

Keywords: Inner Mongolia, Mongols, cultural identity, resistance, language

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Jamie N. SANCHEZ*
Biola University, USA

Introduction

I lived in Inner Mongolia for eight years between 2001-2012. During that period of time I witnessed many changes throughout Hohhot, the capital city in which I lived. There were changes in the city's physical infrastructure, in the population surge, and in the daily interactions I had with the ethnically diverse people that lived in the city. The changes I noticed were partly due to my extended period of living in Hohhot in which I developed cultural intelligence concerning the many cultural, historical, political, and social layers throughout the city. For example, over time I began to understand the complex nature of the relationship that Mongols, the city's largest minority group, and the Chinese state have concerning everything from the demise of Mongolian grasslands to the fear of the loss of Mongolian language.

Fears about the loss of Mongolian language use in daily lives is well founded. Language serves as an important ethnic boundary marker.[1] Addi-

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* Jamie N. Sanchez is Associate Professor and Program Director of the PhD of Intercultural Studies in the Graduate Department of the Cook School at Biola University. Prior to her career in academia, Jamie lived and worked in China. Her research interests include China area studies and refugee studies.

tionally, it holds significant value for national and ethnic identity.[2] So much so that it remains one of the official criteria for defining an ethnic group in China. However, despite the importance of Mongolian language to cultural identity and its seemingly inherent political value to the Chinese state, Mongolian language use in daily life has long been in rapid decline, a phenomenon which is telling of the social and political environment in Inner Mongolia.

Rapid urbanization coupled with historical assimilation policies throughout the province has displaced Mongols from rural grasslands to sprawling urban centers. Forced migration, which Mongols have had no other choice but to leave a nomadic lifestyle for a settled one, has also displaced them from cultural identity markers including pastoralism and language fluency. The result has been a "dual-displacement," one that displaces Mongols from both a physical space and a cultural space which has created what Bulag termed linguistic anxiety and what I have termed cultural identity anxiety.[3]

Linguistic and cultural anxiety are intensified by the hierarchy of languages in China which situates Mandarin at the top of the hierarchy as the nation-wide standard language.[4] That is not to say that the state does not *officially* promote ethnic languages through various policies. For example, in Inner Mongolia there are Mongolian language newspapers, radio programs, television programs, and schools. Street signs and public announcements are in both Mandarin and Mongolian. Policies ensure there is a bilin-

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1 See: Fredrik Barth, "Introduction" in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (1969); Andre Tabouret-Keller, "Language and Identity," in *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics,* ed. F. Coulmas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997): 315-26. Bucholtz, M and Hall, K., "Language and Identity," in *Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, ed. A. Duranti (Malden, MA: Blackwell), 369-94.

2 Stephen May, *Language and Minority Rights: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Language* (New York: Routledge, 2012): 135.

3 Uradyn Bulag, "Mongolian Ethnicity and Language Anxiety in China," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 4 (2003): 753-63; Jamie N. Sanchez, Tumultuous Times: Shifts in Mongolian Cultural Identity Since 1947," *Journal of Northeast Asian History* 12, Issue 2 (Winter 2015): 148.

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

gual presence throughout the province. Yet, policy does not always uphold practice. The decline of Mongolian language use in the daily lives of Mongolians throughout the city demonstrates that there is a constructed "hegemony of language."[5]

This hegemony is perpetuated by an unofficial ideology in China in which ethnic minority groups are labeled as backwards.[6] Additionally, English and Mandarin are promoted as the languages that carry scientific progress and provide marketplace opportunities. Yet, because Mongolian language still holds ideological and cultural value for Mongols, it is a symbol of identity even for Mongols who do not speak Mongolian. In light of Mongolian language decline, and of the value it still holds for Mongols, there is an ongoing negotiation with the state concerning the Mongolian language. Mongols are seeking modes of expression through which the state will allow, and even promote, the preservation of Mongolian language and cultural identity.

The Chinese state continues to exert a direct role in how ethnic identity is constructed. Several studies have explored the history, intervention, and modalities of the state's construction of the identity of its minority ethnic people.[7] Additionally, other studies have suggested that some ethnic minority groups have, at various points in recent history, been allowed to exercise agency in how they are represented, or at least a negotiation with the state in how they are represented.[8]

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5 Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995): 29.

6 Bulag, "Mongolian Ethnicity and Language Anxiety in China," 759.

7 See: Paul Clark, "Ethnic minorities in Chinese films: Cinema and the exotic," East-West film Journal, 1, 2 (1987): 15-32. Dru Gladney, "Representing nationality in China: refiguring majority/minority identities," *Journal of Asian Studies* 53, 1: 92-123. Stevan Harrell, "Ethnicity, local interest, and the state: Yi communities in Southwest China," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, 3: 515-48. 1994.

8 Melissa J. Brown, editor. *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan*. Berkeley: Institute of East Asia Studies, University of California, 1996; Gladney, Dru, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Council on East Asian Studies, 1991. Schein, Louisa, "Multiple alterities: the contouring of gender in Miao and Chinese nationalism," 79-102, in *Women Out of Place: The Gender of Agency and the Race of Nationality*, ed. Brackette F. Willams. London: Routledge, 1996.

Mongols, in response to the decline of Mongolian use in daily life throughout Inner Mongolia, have negotiated new spaces for the Mongolian language and a distinct cultural identity to be preserved and expanded. Such spaces are Mongolian language songs which represent a distinct cultural identity and are modes of resistance against the ongoing Hanificiation by the Chinese State.

Because this article is situated in Inner Mongolia, I provide a brief contextual introduction to the province, the recent history of language decline, and a discussion about other modes of resistance in which Mongols have engaged. It should be noted as well that this article is also situated within the larger discussion of the impacts of rapid urbanization and economic growth on China's ethnic minority groups and the resistance amongst China's marginalized minority groups, which include Tibetans and Uyghurs. Contemporary issues of the state's management of ethnic minority groups and ethno-politics in China's frontier regions are the backdrop for what follows.

In this article, I highlight the Mongolian language band *Anda Union* and some of their songs that were included in a performance at the Lied Center of Kansas in 2013. I chose this performance program to analyze because it is in English; it includes song lyrics in English, and includes information about the band and the songs they performed. The lyrics included below are artifacts through which I assert claims about the language of resistance in Mongolian music. I will demonstrate how the song lyrics are used to construct a distinct cultural identity, to maintain ethnic boundaries in which they are distinct from Han, and to resist the total Hanification aimed at lines that demarcate a distinct Mongolian cultural identity.

Methodology: Material Culture Analysis

In the introduction of the edited volume, *Handbook of Material Culture*, it is stated that "Empirically material culture studies involve analysis of a domain of things, or objects, which are endlessly diverse: anything from a packet of fast food to a house to an entire landscape, and either in the past

or in the present…."[9] Additionally, Appadurai and Breckenridge have posited that cultural forms are everywhere and have emerged as "films, packaged tours, specialized restaurants…."[10] As such, because the field of material culture is flexible artefacts can include just about anything including songs. In the same vein, Berger asserted that "The process of analyzing artifacts to find out about the culture in which they were made works two ways: the objects tell you about the culture, and the culture tells you about the objects."[11] In this article I analyze lyrics from different songs by the band *Anda Union*, giving special consideration to the historical and political environment in which the songs were produced, to posit notions about the historical and contextual relationship Mongols have with the Chinese state. Additionally, I demonstrate how song lyrics reify a distinct Mongolian cultural identity which resists the Hanification of Mongolian culture. In sum, material culture analysis allows for a deeper discussion of ethnopolitical themes which include resistance, ideologies, and discourse.

Understanding Inner Mongolia

In order to understand the song lyrics included below, and my assertions that they are modes of resistance by which Mongolians reify a distinct cultural identity, it is necessary to understand some of the context in which the songs were written. In this section of the article, I will give a brief introduction to the geographic context of Inner Mongolia, followed by some history of the decline of the Mongolian language throughout the province. I will also provide an overview of other modes of resistance in Inner Mongolia.

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[9] Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, "Debates and Controversies: Why Public Culture?" *Public Culture* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1998): 5.

[10] Appadurai and Breckenridge, "Debates and Controversies: Why Public Culture?" 5.

[11] Arthur Asa Berger, *What Objects Mean: An Introduction to Material Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge Publishers, 2014): 22.

Geographic Context

Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, referred to as Inner Mongolia throughout this article, was established as an autonomous region for Mongols living in the Chinese territory on May 1, 1947, more than two years prior to the establishment of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949. Its vast size comprises roughly 12% of China's land mass. By the end of 2017 the population was estimated to be roughly 25 million people.[12] Major cities in Inner Mongolia include Hohhot, the capital city and where I lived, and other notable cities like Baotou and Ordos.

Inner Mongolia's population is comprised of many different ethnic minority groups. Han are the most populous ethnic group in the country and in Inner Mongolia. The most populous ethnic minority groups are Mongols. Over time, state-directed assimilation policies, economic development, and rapid urbanization have increased the Han population throughout the province.[13] According to the most recent national census conducted in 2010, Han comprise 79.5%, Mongols comprise 17.1%, and other ethnic groups comprise 3.36% of the population.[14]

Mongolian Language Decline: A Reflection of a Political Ideology

Language ideology is loaded with political interests.[15] Although "language seems straightforwardly a piece of culture," it is simultaneously a result of "politics and power interplays."[16] That is not to say that language is only a

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[12] Staff, "China: Nei Menggu," *City Population*. Accessed November 6, 2019, http://www.citypopulation.de/en/china/cities/neimenggu/.

[13] See: Jamie N. Sanchez, "Tumultuous Times: Shifts in Mongolian Cultural Identity since 1947," *Journal of Northeast Asian History* 12, no. 2 (Winter 2015): 133-68.

[14] Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Bureau of Statistics, 2010, May 17, 2010, Accessed March 27, 2014, http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/rkpcgb/dfrkpcgb/201202/t20120228_30397.html.

[15] Judith T. Irvine, "When Talk Isn't Cheap: Language and Political Economy," *American Ethnologist* 16, 1989: 255.

[16] Manning Nash, *The Cauldron of Ethnicity in the Modern World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press,1989): 6.

political tool because it is also connected to cultural identity. The ideological divide between cultural and language practices in China cannot be exaggerated. Language practices in China display linguistic and hegemonic interplays.[17]

Another symbol of identity for Mongols is the pastoral identity. Bilik asserted that a division over the use of Mongolian language is rooted in the division between the two culturally based economic practices, something Bilik termed as "the right to move" and the "right to camp."[18] The connection between language and pastoralism and the simultaneous decline in both is due, in part, to geography. Indeed, Mongols who once lived in pastoral regions no longer practice pastoralism in cities for reasons that are self-evident. Additionally, Mongols living in cities find themselves forced to choose between learning Mongolian and learning Mandarin, which remains to be the marketplace language. Mandarin fluency promises to afford China's citizens social and economic mobility in addition to educational and professional opportunities.

In addition to the change in physical geography there is a simultaneous decline in both pastoralism and Mongolian language use which is also a function of political ideology. The state has regarded language as a marker of modernization since the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Hanses stated that, since the Qing Dynasty many Chinese leaders "have regarded institutionalized education as a means of integrating, controlling, and civilizing the various peoples who inhabit the border or peripheral regions of what was the empire, then the Republic, and now is the People's Republic of China (PRC)."[19] The education system, for example, is one of the institutions through which the state has sought to deny "significance of the mi-

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[17] Stevan Harrell, "Linguistics and Hegemony in China," *International Journal of Sociology of Language* 103 (1993): 97-114.

[18] Naran Bilik, "Language Ideology and semiotic negotiation in Mongolian use," in *Cotemporary Chinese Discourse and Social Practice*, eds. Linda Tsung and Wei Wang (Sydney: John Benjamins, 2015), 82.

[19] Mette Halskov Hansen, "Introduction," in *Lessons in Being Chinese*, ed. Mette Halskov Hansen (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), xi.

norities' own languages, histories, religions, and cultural values…."[20] There are clearly distinct challenges concerning cultural and identity preservation for ethnic minority groups in China.

In the same way that Mongol pastoralists were, and still are, termed *barbaric* or *backward* and in need of state-led modernization, the Mongolian language is also framed as "not suitable for modernity and should be replaced by Chinese at the earliest convenience."[21] The state ideology embedded in China's hierarchy of languages is detailed in a study about language policy and use in Xinjiang.[22] Dwyer has argued that while official language policies in China have remained consistent, covert language policies have sought to assimilate Mandarin throughout China's border regions. Further, she suggested that Mandarin is the national standard in China, with minority languages ranked below it.[23] Power is communicated in the hierarchy of languages. In other words, those that speak Mandarin may have more power in all realms of social life than those who are only fluent in minority languages.

Following Dwyer, Bilik asserted that "Mongolians in China will continue with their uphill struggle to revive and maintain their native language while trying to keep their life going in a commercialized world where Chinese (Mandarin) and English are dominant communicative media in every sector of public life."[24] However, the vast changes in Inner Mongolia's social and economic environment do not necessarily aid Mongolian language use development. The reality is that Mongols who want to maintain native language fluency and who want as many opportunities for economic and social mobility as Han speakers must become fluent in three languages. The struggle to attain fluency in Mongolian, Mandarin, and English may cause some to forgo native language fluency.

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[20] Mette Halskov Hansen, "Introduction," xiii.

[21] Bilik, "Language ideology and semiotic negotiation in Mongolian use," 84.

[22] Dwyer, *The Xinjiang Conflict*, 14.

[23] Dwyer, *The Xinjiang Conflict*, 14.

[24] Bilik, "Language ideology and semiotic negotiation in Mongolian use," 97.

Inner Mongolia's changing social environment is also telling of the political ideology that directs Mongolian language use. The decline of Mongolian language use in Inner Mongolia is due, in part, to state policies, concerted efforts to assimilate more Han into the province, and the focus on modernization and development. The view that acculturation of ethnic minorities is necessary to build a Chinese civil society remains strong in Inner Mongolia.[25] Fluency in any language is "accompanied by explicit and implicit values, beliefs, purposes, and activities…."[26] As such, fluency in Mandarin promotes the ideology that it is *the* modern language, and that by extension, the Han culture is *the* modern culture.

Although the Chinese state posits that minority languages are not suitable for modernity, this view is not accepted by Mongols, at least not in an ideological sense. Bilik stated that "Mongolian elites are extremely proud of their own language and culture."[27] The political stakes are too high for Mongolians to fully give up any language expression. If they did, they would be yielding to state ideologies and become yet another embodied evidence of the state's power to homogenize and sinicize. Instead, Mongols are developing alternative modes of language preservation and transmission. As already stated, one mode through which Mongols have sought to preserve language use, and thus promote the symbolic ideology that language holds for cultural identity, is through Mongolian language songs.

Ongoing Resistance: Mongol Protests in Inner Mongolia

While this article asserts that Mongolian language songs are evident of

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[25] Bilik, "Language ideology and semiotic negotiation in Mongolian use," 85.

[26] Naran Bilik, "Language education, intellectuals and symbolic representation: Being an urban Mongolian in a new configuration of social evolution," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 4, Issue 1-2, 1998: 47.

[27] Naran Bilik, "Language education, intellectuals and symbolic representation: Being an urban Mongolian in a new configuration of social evolution," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 4, Issue 1-2, 1998: 86

Mongol resistance against state ideology and cultural identity anxiety, they are not the only forms of resistance throughout the province. Rapid urbanization that has displaced Mongols and turned grasslands into sprawling cities has prompted continuous land-based protests in Inner Mongolia.

The emotional connection between the loss of cultural space and perceived threats to cultural identity has been elucidated by other scholars. For example, the term "domicide" was developed to express the deep sense of loss that is felt when one's living place is destroyed.[28] Indeed, there is a "sheer emotional and psychological trauma associated with forced displacement."[29] Thus, the loss of the grasslands due to aggressive urbanization and development policies has resulted in a cultural identity shift and prompted some resistance in the form of protests.

This article is, once again, informed by my personal experience of living in Inner Mongolia during a time of political upheaval in China's borderlands. The Mongol protests that took place in Inner Mongolia in May 2011 prompted my initial interest in conducting this research. On May 10, 2011, a Mongolian herdsman was struck and killed by a Han coal truck driver near Xilinhot, Inner Mongolia. Mergen, the Mongol herdsman, was trying to block the Liaoning Chencheng Industry and Trading Group from driving vehicles onto his pastureland. Li Lindong, a Han truck driver who worked for the Liaoning Group, struck Mergen with his vehicle and then dragged him to his death.[30] The Mongolian community living in the surrounding area responded to Mergen's death by organizing protests. On May 24, the local government in Xilinhot, which had become aware of the organized protests, attempted to stop the demonstrations by announcing the arrest of the truck driver and ensuring that there would be "a series of mea-

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[28] Douglas Porteous and Sandra E. Smith, Domicide: *The Global Destruction of Home* (McGill-Queen's Press, 2001).

[29] Steven Hess, "Nail-Houses, Land Rights, and Frames of Injustice on China's Protest Landscape," *Asian Survey* 50, no. 5 (September/October 2010): 919.

[30] Jonathan Watts, "Herder's death deepens tensions in Inner Mongolia," *The Guardian*, May 27, 2011, Accessed February 22, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jun/08/ chinese-trucker-killing-mongolian-herder.

sures" taken regarding coal and mineral extraction in the grasslands.[31] But the state's efforts were too late. On May 25, Mongols protested at various government buildings in West Ujimqin Banner near Xilinhot. That same day, more than 2000 Mongols protested in Xinlingol and in East Ujimqin Banner. By that time, the sentiments of the protestors had evolved from centering on the unjust death of Mergen to focusing on the issues of land degradation throughout Inner Mongolia.

Perhaps because the protests were gaining momentum, on May 27, the state declared martial law in several areas of the region. By this point, although I was living in Hohhot, I still had not heard of the protests taking place in and around Xilinhot because the state closely monitored any discussion about the situation including mention of it on the internet, in any social media, and through phone calls and text messages. But, on the morning of May 29, murmurings of university closures began to spread throughout Hohhot. The next day, on May 30, Mongols protested throughout the city. By that time, all universities, large public spaces, and public parks were closed.

The incident that launched the protests is a good point of departure to explain both the ethnic tensions and historical shifts I witnessed in Inner Mongolia: A Han truck driver, who worked for a large Han owned corporation, was driving through the Mongolian cultural space, and was perceived to be destroying the land in the process. A Mongol shepherd, which is the quintessential Mongolian occupation, was protecting his land and his livelihood. The standoff was between a Mongol and a Han. What happened next is even more telling of the plight of Mongols. Lin Lidong, the Han truck driver, ran over Mergen, crushing his body and dragging him to his death. Though a crude analogy, this situation mirrors the overall situation in Inner Mongolia. That is to say, Mongols have been dragged by state-driven policies throughout the province, often resulting in the "death" of some parts of the Mongol culture.

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[31] Translated from Staff, "In Inner Mongolia 2000 students protest the death of a herdsman that was crushed by a coal truck," *BBC*, May 25, 2011, Accessed February 24, 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/simp/chinese_news/ 2011/05/110525_inner_mongolia_protest.shtml.

These protests are part of a narrative of Mongol resistance to cultural destruction. Together with a decline in Mongolian language, they provide a greater context of the political climate in which Inner Mongolian Mongols live.

Ethnic Songs: State Intervention, Ethnic Participation

In the years leading up to 1949, the Communist Party deployed Han musicians to minority areas throughout the country so that they could become familiar with the local culture. This was in effort to train musicians to write new songs which combined cultural norms with socialist messages.[32] Most orthodox minority songs were aimed at legitimizing state control and perpetuating state ideologies like national unity.[33] By 1964, Vice Premier Lu Dingyi delivered a speech at the national festival of amateur minority performances.[34] He stated, "The revolutionary cultural art of the national minorities must pay attention to using ethnic forms, for thus it can be more easily accepted by the people of the national minorities. The cultural art of each nationality must be revolutionary in content and must be beneficial to socialism."[35] In the 1950's, many regional song and dance troupes were also established in minority areas. In Inner Mongolia, a dance troupe known as the *wulanmuqi* was established in 1957 to travel throughout the region in order to spread Maoist thought to the countryside. The expectation that the dance troupe members to be loyal to the Chinese state is evident in the name *wulanmuqi*. These cultural troupes are still in operation throughout Inner Mongolia today.

In 1952, the China Central Nationalities Song and Dance Troupe,

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[32] Nimrod Baranovitch, "Between Alterity and Identity: New Voices of Minority People in China," *Modern China* (July 2001): 364.

[33] See: Nimrod Baranovitch, "Between Alterity and Identity: New Voices of Minority People in China," and Nimrod Baranovitch, *China's New Voices: Popular Music, Ethnicity, Gender, and Politics, 1978-1997* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 208-19.

[34] Helen Rees, *Echoes of History: Naxi Music in Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 124.

[35] Quoted in Helen Rees, *Echoes of History: Naxi Music in Modern China*, 124.

hereafter referred to as CNSDT, was established.[36] The CNSDT is a Soviet-style state run troupe that specializes in the collection, arrangement, and promotion of minority song and dance traditions.[37] Mackerras asserted that the CNSDT is *also* a highly politicized cultural organization, which displays state policies through the performance of ethnic minorities.[38] Given the politicization of cultural organizations, it can be understood that cultural expression is presented through the state's constructed framework whereby ethnic minority groups must be of benefit to national policies. One academic inquiry about music in Inner Mongolia suggested that, when Inner Mongolian music artists aim to create and produce songs about Mongolian culture, there must not be any overt ethnic pride that could disrupt social harmony or debunk Chinese nationalist ideology.[39]

Singing Mongolian: Songs as Spaces of Cultural Preservation

Ethnomusicologists, sociolinguists, and anthropologists agree that the revitalization of songs is key to ensuring the ongoing vitality and viability of endangered languages.[40] Further, scholars have written about the connection between songs and cultural distinction and preservation. For example, in *Methods and Nations*, Shapiro highlighted the attempt of native Hawaiians to use music to both resist the ongoing colonial projects and preserve a distinct Hawaiian culture.[41]

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[36] Rees, *Echoes of History*, 20.

[37] Rees, "Writing Lives in Chinese Music," in *Lives in Chinese Music*, ed. Helen Rees (University of Illinois Press, 2009), 20 and 206.

[38] Colin Mackerras, "Folksongs and Dances of China's Minority Nationalities: Policy, Tradition, and Professionalization," *Modern China* 10, no. 2 (April 1984): 208-17.

[39] Wing-Wah Law and Wai-Chung Ho, "Music education in China: In Search of Social Harmony and Chinese Nationalism," *British Journal of Music Education* 28, no. 3 (2011): 380-83.

[40] See: Catherine Grant, "The links between safeguarding language and safeguarding musical heritage," *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 5 (2010): 46-59; Suzanne Romaine, "Preserving endangered languages," *Language and Linguistic Compass* 1, Issue 1-2 (2007): 115-32.

[41] Michael J. Shapiro, *Methods and Nations: Cultural Governance and the Indigenous Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2004): 100.

He stated:

> "Activist musicians, who constitute one dimension of a growing, multi-dimensional
> Hawaiian sovereignty movement, have recently produced a set of songs that convey an indigenous political initiative aimed at reconvening a Hawaiian nation that was destroyed at the time of the U.S. annexation at the end of the 19th century."[42]

In Inner Mongolia, the increase in the number of Mongolian language music groups can be attributed, in part, to a response to linguistic and cultural identity anxiety. Songs have become one mode of language preservation. These songs are created spaces through which Mongolian cultural distinction may be expressed. In her extensive study on Mongolian music of Inner Mongolia, D'Evelyn posited that:

> "A rising interest in cultural heritage and preservation in China and Inner Mongolia has led musicologists, government authorities, and media producers alike to look outside the professional conservatory system for models of great artists, whom they promote in scholarship, commemorative events, festivals or television programs."[43]

Whereas music groups were once formed through the official CNSDT system, they now are formed under the direction of other musical professionals like musicologists and media producers. However, it should be noted that Chinese government authorities are still one of the key actors involved in the promotion of Mongolian music through events, festivals, and television programs.

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[42] Shapiro, *Methods and Nations*, 100.

[43] D'Evelyn, "Music Between Worlds," 137.

Anda Union

One popular Mongolian language commercial band is *Anda Union*, which hails from Inner Mongolia and was formed in 2003. They explicitly state on their website, one reason to form the band was, in part, so that their music could help to preserve the Mongolian culture: "Keenly aware of the threat to the Grasslands and their age old Mongolian culture, *Anda Union* is driven by their fight for survival of this endangered way of life, by keeping the essence of the music alive."[44] Additionally the band's website states that "They are on a mission to stimulate their culture and reengage young Mongols, many of who can no longer speak their own language" and that "our culture is broken and needs to be mended."[45] The fact that many young Mongols can no longer speak Mongolian drives *Anda Union*'s musical "mission" to sing and produce songs in Mongolian.

A picture of *Anda Union* is showcased on their website. The picture demonstrates that *Anda Union* has constructed its image with the use of traditional Mongolian elements which include band members wearing traditional clothing. In addition, their music is played using traditional Mongolian musical instruments including the horse-head fiddle, Mongolian lute and Mongolian drum. Additionally, *Anda Union* incorporates traditional Mongolian throat singing into many of their songs. The constructed image of traditional Mongolian musicians promotes an image of an intact Mongolian culture to the audience. In some ways, this mitigates the cultural identity anxiety that permeates Mongol life in Inner Mongolia. The image also works in tandem with the language of resistance that is subtly embedded in some of the band's songs, something that will be further discussed below. This is especially true because part of the "mission" is also to educate the Western world about Mongolians and their quest to preserve cultural distinction. Thus, the band needs to "perform" its "culture" for *Western* audiences as part of the message of resistance.

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[44] Anda Union, Accessed August 1, 2019, http://andaunion.com.

[45] Anda Union, Accessed August 1, 2019, http://andaunion.com/about.php.

Anda Union's first commercial album is *The Wind Horse*, which was released in 2011 and features 13 songs. All of the songs on the album are old Mongolian folksongs that have been "updated" for a modern Mongolian audience. For example, *Altargana* was produced based on a Buriat folksong and *Boomborai* is a folksong about ancient shamanistic traditions.[46] *Anda Union*'s performances at international venues affirm that Mongolian bands are "sometimes engaging in new meanings and subtle discourses of resistance at the same time."[47] In other words, the promotion of Mongolian culture through music is one way in which they resist the end of cultural distinction that is felt in everyday life in Inner Mongolia.

Singing Mongolian: Songs as Language of Resistance

Mongolians are not the only ethnic minority groups to have songs of resistance. Throughout the world, ethnic minority groups have been known to use songs as modes of political resistance against an oppressor.[48] Commonly known examples are the pantheon of songs in which Black slaves sung various songs as a resistance to the dominant ideology that pervaded America in order to justify slavery.[49] Additionally, in South Africa, songs were one mode of expressing resistance and endurance through the long years of Apartheid.[50] And Bob Marley reminded his fellow Jamaicans that they should "Get Up, Stand Up."[51]

Like the examples above, *Anda Union*'s songs can be understood as

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[46] Anda Union, http://andaunion.com/docs/Anda_Union_History_&_Music.pdf, Accessed August 1, 2019.

[47] D'Evelyn, "Music Between Worlds," 58.

[48] Lakeyta Bonnette, *Pulse of the People: Political Rap Music and Black Politics* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015): 32.

[49] Bonnette, 32.

[50] Michaela E. Vershbow, "The Sounds of Resistance: The Role of Music in South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Movement." *Inquiries* (2010): 2, no. 6, Accessed September 17, 2019, http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=265.

[51] Mike Alleyne, "Positive Vibration?: Capitalist Textual Hegemony and Bob Marley," *Carribean Studies* 27, no. 3 (1994): 224-41.

modes of resistance. The band regularly performs throughout various venues in the United States and Europe. Each venue generally posts a performance program which introduces the band members, the traditional Mongolian instruments, and some information about the different singing styles.

As mentioned above, in this article, I analyze lyrics from songs that *Anda Union* performed at the Lied Center of Kansas in 2013. I chose to only analyze these particular song lyrics because the performance program included English lyrics and was readily available online. Thus, this article does not compare songs *Anda Union* may have performed in other venues throughout the United States, Europe, or in China.

Tellingly, the introductions of some of the songs demonstrate a language of resistance that *Anda Union* mobilizes in order to educate international audiences about the plight of Mongols in Inner Mongolia. For example, the introduction to the song *Ode to Mongolia* stated, "The mighty Mongolian Empire and Genghis Khan are of central importance to Mongolian culture and a source of immense pride for Mongolians today."[52] This song directly references the ongoing importance of Genghis Khan and the storied Mongolian Empire to modern-day Mongols. The reference may be viewed as null but those familiar with the ongoing political maneuvering of the Chinese state may read the reference as a reification of Genghis Khan as a *Mongolian* hero, which resists the state's normalization of Genghis Khan as a *Chinese* hero.[53]

The lyrics for this song include:

To be the world's master O Genghis Khan's Mongolia
The ancient history of Mongolia
Urlan is the mother of Genghis Khan and Mongolia
The Mongolians have 800 years of history

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[52] Lied Center of Kansas, "Anda Union: The Wind Horse," October 1, 2013. Accessed August 1, 2019, https://issuu.com/liedcenter/docs/anda_insert-press.

[53] Uradyn Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge: History and the Politics of National Unity* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002): 243.

The lyrics above demonstrate a "pan-Mongolian" ideology which essentially posits that there is solidarity of Mongols worldwide. Although, Liu argued that the notion of a "pan-Mongolia" is a political tool and has been a "central theme in any spontaneous Mongolian nationalist movement of the 20th century."[54] In contrast, Bulag asserted that the notion of "pan-Mongolia" has developed over time to become more of an identity concept than one meant to position one nation-state against another.[55] Either way, the connection that Mongols throughout the world have demonstrates Anderson's assertions that communities can be connected, even without ever meeting one another.[56] In other words, the notion of "pan-Mongolia" is a concept that connects Mongols culturally without the need for a nation-state demarcation. Given this brief discussion about "pan-Mongolian" ideology, it can be argued that *Anda Union*'s song lyrics communicate the connection Mongols have to one another.

While *Mongolia* is positioned as a significant cultural marker in the song, there is also some hints of resistance embedded in the last line of lyrics included above. The state touts China as having 5000 years of history, a maneuver that has attempted to build a strong sense of nationalism. This rhetoric is contingent on assimilating Genghis Khan into the history of China, broadly speaking. The logic is that because Mongols are one of China's officially categorized ethnic groups, then Mongol history becomes China's history. Yet, in the song above, *Anda Union* intentionally touts *Mongolian* history, resisting any discourse the Chinese state attempts to secure.

Another song often included in the performance program is *Hometown*, a song about the destruction of the grasslands in Inner Mongolia.

The program stated:

"This song is inspired by the steady destruction of the grasslands as

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[54] Liu, *Reins of Liberation*, 6.

[55] Uradyn Bulag, *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 62.

[56] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1991.

> farming and mining encroach ever further combined with the effects of global climate change.
> The lyrics were written by *Anda Union*'s Urgen, who left his home in the grasslands when he was 13 years old to train at a music school in the city. He has never returned but his heart remains there, as do all the hearts of *Anda Union*'s performers. But the grasslands are no longer the grasslands of their childhood. This song appeals for the grasslands to be saved and preserved."[57]

This description is replete with a language of resistance against the Chinese state's modernization efforts. For example, *Anda Union* expresses the "steady destruction of the grasslands as farming and mining encroach...." This is a direct reference to the state's assimilation policies, the state's preferences for agriculturalism (described as *farming* in the program) over pastoralism and to economic development in general. Rather than explicitly criticize the state, the description passively, but effectively, posits that farming and mining have "encroached" upon Mongolian space and culture.

In addition to the song introduction, the song lyrics also contain a language of resistance, albeit subtle and indirect. Some of the lyrics are:

> *My hometown the place where I was born was far away from here*
> *My close family, how is your health?*
> *My missing hometown is far away from here, my missing relatives how is your health?*
> *There is no water in the river, I am sad about that from my heart*
> *There is no water in the spring, I am sad about this from my mind.*[58]

Hometown's lyrics express a lament about the destruction of the

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[57] "Anda Union and the Wind Horse," *The Clarice*, September 20, 2013, Accessed March 11, 2016, https://theclarice.umd.edu/sites/default/files/program-notes/cspac_092013_AnDa.pdf.

[58] Lied Center of Kansas, "Anda Union: The Wind Horse," October 1, 2013. Accessed August 1, 2019, https://issuu.com/liedcenter/docs/anda_insert-press.

grasslands. But the lyrics are also a critique of the negative impacts of modernization and of a stated preference for sedentary economies, which have driven Mongols away from their hometowns. The modernization ideology, in which pastoralism is typically viewed with contempt, means that "roads are built, trees cleared, wetlands trained, common property parceled, multiple land uses eliminated, settlement patterns reorganized, and everywhere, new boundaries are erected."[59] This is reflected in the lyrics, which describe the grasslands and the people that once lived there are now *missing*. There is recognition that the transformation of the grasslands and the transplantation of the people from the grasslands are a permanent phenomenon.

The song lyrics included above articulate the struggle of Mongols in the internal colonial projects of the state. The state has confiscated history, heroes, and hometowns. Yet, as marginalized actors which have been displaced from hometowns and from cultural distinction in daily life, *Anda Union* reasserts a Mongolian cultural identity and history. These songs are symbolic and cultural spaces in which *Anda Union* resists state modernization projects that aim to render the Mongolian culture sinicized and modernized. *Anda Union* connects modernization to the destruction of the environment, which further prompts the audience to question the methods of the Chinese state's economic expansion.

As already mentioned, these songs are not included in the commercial album that is available in China. Presumably, *Anda Union* intentionally performs these songs, and perhaps other songs with similar themes of resistance, at international venues but not in domestic performances.

Singing Mongolian: Spaces of Negotiation

Anda Union is mobilizing the Mongolian language through songs. The songs mentioned above are sung in Mongolian. Though they are traditional

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[59] Dee Mack Williams, *Beyond Great Walls: Environment, Identity, and Development on the Chinese Grasslands of Inner Mongolia* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002): 11.

Mongolian cultural songs, *Anda Union* has mobilized them in response to the local political environment which impacts distinct expressions of cultural identity. Because Mongolian language use is in decline, there is more at stake to the proliferation of Mongolian language music bands than mere cultural expression. The social environment in China in which Mandarin fluency is key to economic opportunities is not likely to change any time soon. The waning use of Mongolian language in daily life, which is juxtaposed to the state's ideology of modernization in which Mongolian is posited as a backward language that should be left behind, has resulted in a criticism of the state as destroyer of ethnic identity.[60]

The tension between Mongols and the state is evident in the language ideology of the state. As such, Mongolian language songs become a space of tension and ideological negotiation. Songs facilitate the preservation of Mongolian language and allow for the expression and transmission of cultural identity. Coupled with language is the emphasis on traditional Mongolian folksongs and the reemergence of traditional instruments. These elements work together to construct an imagined reality in which ethnic boundaries are reconstructed and that "Mongolness" can be seen, heard, and celebrated. Thus, songs create a symbolic and cultural space through which Mongols who have been displaced from rural geographies can now exist.

But, the state also needs Mongolian language songs to remain in order to dispel criticisms that indigenous cultures in China have no chance to survive. Songs, then, also work to help the state to promote the notion that China remains a multiethnic state. This means, however, that there are limits that Mongols must recognize as demonstrated by *Anda Union*'s decision not to include songs of resistance on its commercial album. If Mongol songs are perceived to be tinged with hints of separatism, their songs will be censored.

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[60] Bulag, "Mongolian Ethnicity and Linguistic Anxiety in China," 753.

Summary

Mongols continue to grapple with cultural identity anxiety in the face of factors such as language decline. Material culture is one vector through which Mongols can represent and preserve a distinct cultural identity. The songs included in this article remain essential in the development of a shared Mongolian history for generations of Mongols who may have never lived in the grasslands or do not speak Mongolian. Current and future urban Mongols will likely look to art, performances, songs, and other forms of material culture as representations of a past reality.

Ethnic minority groups in China are aware of the shifting limits of cultural identity expression. There is awareness in China that those who cross the blurred boundaries of the state which determines how a group may or may not resist, will run the risk of being labeled as a separatist. If Mongols want to continue to be able to express their distinct cultural identity on the national and global stages, they will also need to continue to collaborate with the state.

Thus, Mongols are constantly negotiating ethno-political challenges in China, the impacts of economic expansion, urban policy shifts, and their own ethnic minority status. Because Mongols' daily lives are undergoing constant changes due to urbanization, assimilation, and economic development policies, songs by bands like *Anda Union* may well be one source of identity making for Mongols.

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