

## The Impact of Urban Ethnic Education on Modern Mongolian Ethnicity, 1949–1966

*Wurlig Borchigud*

Ethnic identity is the product of forces operating on the individual and group from within, and those impinging on them from without. In other words, identity has both a subjective and an objective dimension.

Kuen Fee Lian, "Identity in Minority Group Relations"

In modern China, "ethnic unity" (*minzu tuanjie*) is the basis upon which the state seeks to build a multi-ethnic nation. In this project of "creating putative homogeneity out of heterogeneity" (Williams 1989: 439), the state-controlled education system is assigned an important role. But even though Chinese national education emphasizes communist and socialist ideologies and Han traditions as bases for a unified national culture for all Chinese ethnic groups, in practice education is divided into regular and ethnic programs. Han students are part of the regular education (*zhenggui jiaoyu*) network; minority students in areas where they are concentrated attend ethnic education (*minzu jiaoyu*) schools. The essential result of ethnic education is thus paradoxical: intended to promote "ethnic melting" (*minzu ronghe*), in practice it creates a visible ethnic boundary within Chinese society. Thus special education for ethnic minorities has created a contradiction between the goal and the concrete result. The discussion here of the aims of ethnic education, and the presentation of practical examples from pre-1966 Inner Mongolia illuminate the ways in which ethnic boundaries are created and show how interaction in diverse contexts in and out of school heightens Mongol students' ethnic awareness. (See map 5, p. 249.)

### THE AIMS OF ETHNIC EDUCATION

In order to unify all ethnic minorities into a single nation, the Chinese state has tried to find a historical attachment to legitimize its

This chapter is based on studies of Chinese official documents, personal interviews, and the author's twenty-years' living experience in Inner Mongolia.

Chinese national culture (*Zhonghua minzu wenhua*) by including all Chinese ethnic groups. The state uses its educational system to formulate a common Chinese culture in terms of shared descent. In schools and through news media and publications, people learn that all modern Chinese ethnic groups are natives of China's common territory; that throughout history ethnic integration has been an important trend in the nation's development; that according to history, the modern Han group is an ethnic mix of various ancient and modern ethnic groups, as are the minority ethnic groups; and that therefore, all these groups are able to trace back their origins to the founding father of China—the Yellow Emperor. Symbolically, this version of common culture has been further explained in terms of a family relationship. The state is directly responsible for taking care of the whole nation-family; the relationship of the state (the Communist Party) to the people is that of parents to child and that of the Han majority to other minorities is that of older brother to younger brother with the older brother responsible for helping the younger.<sup>1</sup>

Since the Chinese state maintains that authentic ethnic integration can be realized only after the achievement of communism throughout the world (Chen Yongling 1987:353), assuring that individuals adopt communist ideology is essential during the socialist period. In order to retain political power and prestige after the Communist victory in 1949, the Party put large amounts of effort into training loyal cadres. Throughout China, training schools for state cadres sprang up overnight, as did nationalities institutes (*minzu xueyuan*), which trained ethnic minorities for the same purpose. By means of such training, the Party has been able to normalize its homogeneous model into institutional practice among both Han and minorities.

The institutional establishment of national ethnic education was an attempt to implement this ethnic integration policy in light of Chairman Mao's mandate: "It would be impossible to solve the nationalities problem and completely isolate the reactionaries among the minority nationalities without a strong contingent of minority cadres committed to communism" (quoted in Kwong 1989:8). In 1951, the First

1. Since the inception of China's post-Cultural Revolution open-door policy to the Western world and domestic economic reforms, this particular version of Chinese national culture has been emphasized more than ever because of the state's desire for international economic benefit through its historical and cultural ties with Taiwan and Overseas Chinese populations.

National Ethnic Education Conference concluded: "The revolutionary content of ethnic education 'should be adopted with advanced and appropriate ethnic forms from the people of all ethnic groups,' and ethnic education 'should be taken to nurture ethnic minority cadres as its first task'" (quoted in NMZJT 1981:24). In 1957 Premier Zhou Enlai also emphasized the significance of ethnic languages: "We should respect all ethnic minority languages and help those whose languages do not have written forms by creating their written languages according to their own will. In the minority autonomous areas, the first language should be the language of the main ethnic minority group" (quoted in NMZJT 1981:19). Accordingly, ethnic language teaching initially played a vital role in the system of national ethnic education. However, in 1957 and 1958, when Han regions experienced the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the movement toward communist distribution of production (*gongchan feng*), minority areas were subjected to the Anti-Local Ethnic Chauvinism Campaign (Fandui Difang Minzu Zhuyi) and the implementation of "ethnic melting." Since then, the state has carried out a bilingual training (*shuangyu jiaoxue*) policy—using Mandarin Chinese and the ethnic minority language—by following another of Mao's orders: "The Han Chinese cadres working in the minority areas must learn the local minority's language. Minority cadres should also learn Chinese language" (in Zhang Gongjin 1980:46). This language policy has been interpreted by state-oriented intellectuals as an egalitarian practice leading toward the natural transforming process of ethnic melting.

The state thus sees ethnic education, both in its linguistic medium and in its substantive content, as an ideal tool with which to implement the model of ethnic melting in local practice among all minority ethnic populations. This analysis of educational practice in Inner Mongolia serves as a concrete example of the way this policy has been carried out, and of its unintentional result—the heightening of ethnic consciousness among minority peoples.

#### GUIDELINES FOR ETHNIC EDUCATION IN INNER MONGOLIA

Ethnic education has been carried out formally in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region since 1953.<sup>2</sup> Before then, except in some

2. In 1953 a complete official set of Mongolian teaching materials was finally available to elementary-level Mongolian-speaking students (NMZJJ 1979, vol. 1:3).

pastoral areas, there were no separate official Mongolian schools, and Mongolian students in regular schools at all levels comprised less than 30 percent (NMZJJ 1979:2). Mandarin was the primary teaching language for Mongol students.

In the new ethnic education project, the state model of ethnic integration was reinterpreted in more detailed guidelines and rules, which remained in effect until 1966. These guidelines addressed both the general goals and the specific methods of the ethnic education project. The basic aims of the project were clear:

It is crucial that education with socialist content be carried out in ethnic forms for the development of Inner Mongolian ethnic education. (Ibid.:24)

The development of ethnic education is an efficient tool for overcoming economic and cultural backwardness due to ethnic minorities' long-term suffering and past oppression. (Ibid.:31)

The only way to wipe out actual economic and cultural inequality between ethnic groups is through the achievement of nationwide socialist industrialization. (Ibid.)

In order to change the backwardness of ethnic minorities, we must make ethnic education serve the socialist construction of the Chinese nation. (Ibid.)

To meet these goals of socialist development, national integration, and the elimination of "backwardness," the state proposed ethnic education with heavily ideological content:

Political, literature, and history courses and textbooks for ethnic education should emphasize government policies toward *minzu*, patriotism and internationalism, real-life stories symbolizing national unity and great historical contributions from every ethnic group to the Chinese motherland, and criticism of the ideas of nonhistorical materialism and narrow-minded local ethnic chauvinism. (Ibid.:12)

We should educate students to understand the class nature of ethnic problems, the relationship between the ethnic group and

the nation, and the distinction between the proletarian national perspective and the bourgeois national perspective. (NMZJJ 1979, vol. 3:71)

The linguistic tools of this education process were also specified, with a heavy emphasis on the use of Chinese:

Chinese is the primary language of China and is also one of the most important languages in the world. It is the language used not only by the Han but also by brother-ethnic groups for interethnic communications. For this reason, all ethnic minority schools should set up Chinese-language study programs. (Ibid., vol. 1:106)

In order to enrich and develop Mongolian culture, Mongols should learn from the advanced [Han] ethnic culture and its experience with production. Therefore, fifth graders in Mongolian elementary schools should start learning Mandarin. (Ibid.:80)

Through the study of the Han language, Mongolian students will clearly understand that the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region is an inseparable part of the People's Republic of China, and that the Mongolian ethnic group is a member of a big family in which all the ethnic peoples of China love and cooperate with each other. Moreover, if the Mongolian people want to achieve an advanced level of social status, they should understand the significance of assistance from the Han people. (Ibid.:112)

In general, Mongolian textbooks in social sciences, arts, sports, biology, and geography should accept special terms from the Chinese language. However, loan terms in chemistry and mathematics should follow common international usage. (Ibid.:102)

Through these and other specific guidelines, the regional Inner Mongolian government intended to direct future generations of modern Mongols toward a new, unified development of their homeland.

There were, however, practical problems to be solved. By 1953 the Inner Mongolian population was about six million (NMR, October 19, 1959), but Mongols in the region numbered only 1.46 million, or

24 percent of the total, with Han Chinese constituting the majority (Zhao Hongci 1976).<sup>3</sup> At that time, the regional Mongolian population inhabited economic areas of four different types: pastoral, semi-agricultural/semipastoral, agricultural, and urban (NMZJJ 1979:21). Most Mongols made their living in a semiagricultural/semipastoral economy, living in compact villages. Pastoral Mongols usually knew little Mandarin or the local Han dialect. The Mongols from semi-agricultural/semipastoral areas were almost all bilingual but spoke one language better than the other. Mongols from agricultural areas could neither speak nor understand Mongolian, since their older generations had lost their native tongue centuries before; the local Chinese dialect was their only language for daily communication. For urban Mongols, Mandarin was the basic language for public communication. Most adults could understand and speak both Mongolian and Chinese, and some could even write both languages, while others could speak and write only Chinese. Almost all members of the younger generation were good at speaking Chinese, and some could understand Mongolian but could not speak it; very few spoke both Mongolian and Chinese well (NMZJJ 1979, vol. 1:114; vol. 2:21, 132).

Due to these different linguistic configurations, it was impossible for the state to conduct ethnic education in a uniform way, so the Inner Mongolian government established four types of practical programs: (A) separate Mongolian schools for Mongol students who could speak only Mongolian (Mongolian as the basic teaching language at both elementary and junior-secondary levels); (B) separate Mongolian schools for Mongol students who could not speak Mongolian (Chinese as the basic teaching language at both elementary

3. In 1902 the Qing government officially opened Mongol land to Han immigration. According to incomplete figures, during the high tide of the Han migration (1902-1908), over 7.57 million *mu* (1.24 million acres) of Mongol land were converted into farmland in western Inner Mongolia, as were over 2.45 million *shang* (6.05 million acres) of Mongol land in eastern Inner Mongolia (Wang Tingdong 1985). Han immigration continued in the Republican period:

In 1914 the Peking government declared that all Mongol lands belonged to China and that consequently all Mongol land titles were invalid unless ratified by its local authorities. . . . it was not now applied to lands held by Han, and the net result of the 1914 decision was to deprive Mongols of their land. This led to the land booms of 1916-1919 and 1926-1928, at the end of which Han had come to outnumber Mongols in the Mongols' own homeland. (Dreyer 1976:19)

and junior-secondary levels, with Mongolian learned as a second language); (C) classes of Mongol students in Mongolian-Han joint schools (Mongolian as the basic teaching language for Mongolian-speaking students at both elementary and junior-secondary levels); and (D) classes of Mongol students for both Mongolian-speaking and Chinese-speaking Mongol students in Mongolian-Han joint schools (Mongolian as the basic teaching language for Mongolian-speaking students, Chinese as the basic teaching language and Mongolian as the second language for the Chinese-speaking Mongol students) (ibid. vol. 2:112). The Type A program was normally found in pastoral and some semiagricultural/semipastoral areas, Type B in urban and a few agricultural areas, and Types C and D in urban and many semiagricultural/semipastoral areas. By drawing a line between Mongolian and Chinese schools and classes, the Inner Mongolian government guaranteed the practice of regional ethnic education as well as the creation of visible boundaries between Mongols and Han, and between Mongols from diverse economic areas.

#### EXAMPLES OF INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE IN AN URBAN SETTING

Examples from different schools should give us an idea of how the state model functions in actual practice and how students react to the state-proposed "work of culture." The state's aim is to achieve ethnic integration among the younger generations by translating an idealized national culture into a set of coherent messages in the curriculum. The following portraits of three urban secondary schools as they operated before the Cultural Revolution are derived from interviews and documentary materials. (Type A schools, which do not exist in urban areas, are not considered here.) The first case is a Type B program in which the majority of Mongol students came from nearby agricultural areas. The second includes Type C and D programs enrolling Mongol students from pastoral areas and both Han and Mongol students from the city. The third is a Type B program enrolling Mongol students from elite urban social backgrounds as well as ordinary urban and suburban backgrounds. In this city, the Han are an overwhelming majority. Public interactions between city residents of different ethnic identities are conducted in either Mandarin or the local Chinese dialect. Therefore, the ethnic educational programs have created opportunities for non-Mongolian-speaking

Mongol students to practice their unfamiliar or forgotten native tongue outside the home.

#### *Temut Secondary School*

Temut Secondary School<sup>4</sup> was officially converted from two regular schools into a special Mongolian school which also accepts students from other ethnic groups. By 1953 the school had 13 classes with 584 students, of whom 428 (73 percent) were Mongol, 113 (20 percent) Hui, 29 (4.7 percent) Manchu, 13 Han, and 1 Korean. There were 31 teachers, of whom 6 were Mongol, 3 Hui, and 22 Han (NMZJJ 1979:10).

Being a majority of the student body, the Mongol students played an important role distinct from those of students from other ethnic groups. After 1956 most Mongol students came from the city's nearby agricultural areas, and ate and lived on campus while school was in session (NMJCB 1987:39-40). Most students from other ethnic groups lived in the city and spent their time after school at home. Courses were taught in Mandarin; Mongol students also took a Mongolian language course. This special treatment for Mongol students unintentionally caused differential attention to their unequal ethnic status and to the awareness of ethnic identities among the students.

Most of the Mongol students identified themselves as Temut Mongols, the original residents of the area. Centuries ago, as a result of losing wars against Han conquerors, market trade with Han merchants, and farming by Han immigrants, the Temut Mongols had gradually transformed their way of life from animal husbandry to agriculture. As the Han population encroached further, the Temut Mongols also lost their native language. However, during the pre-Liberation days, a few young Temut Mongols were the first Inner Mongolian Mongols to join the Communist Party, and later went on to become the highest representatives of the modern Inner Mongolian government. As fellow natives and kin of these modern Mongol VIPs, the Temut Mongols shared in their revolutionary glories and ethnic prestige. Before the Cultural Revolution, many Temut Mongol students in this secondary school were also

4. The description of this school is based on documentary studies and on personal interviews with three urban Mongols in 1990.

graduates of the Temut Elementary School in the city, the history of which went back to 1724, when it was established as a Mongolian official school (Yu 1986:49). During the Republican period many of the earliest Mongol communists graduated from and later led Inner Mongolian revolutionary movements in this school (ibid.). After Liberation, Temut Secondary School was established as a higher level extension of the original Temut Mongolian School. The families of all the Temut Mongol students were better off economically than the local Han villagers. Because of their special contribution to the revolution, the Temut Mongols had not only achieved power and glory, but had also gained more personal land than their Han neighbors in the same villages. Outsiders who went to visit the Temut rural area often heard Han farmers complain about this. Although the Temut Mongols were recognized by the Han Chinese as acculturated, they still thought of themselves as Mongols. Many Temut Mongol farmers had retained their traditional belief in Tibetan Buddhism, for the ancestral Temut Mongols were the first Mongolian carriers of Buddhism from Tibet. Since many counties in the Temut area did not have their own Mongolian schools or separate classes of Mongol students before the Cultural Revolution, most Temut Mongolian families persisted in sending their children to the city's two Temut Mongolian schools, saying, "We should let our children regain our own language, which we lost in the past when we suffered" (NMZJJ 1979, vol. 3:20).

The young Temut Mongol students were proud of being close ethnic relatives of the earliest Inner Mongolian communist leaders, yet they were somehow uncomfortable about the special practice in school of their lost Mongolian language—many felt that it lowered their otherwise equal social status with the Han and other ethnic groups. Moreover, they felt less confidence about their practice of their lost native tongue outside the school. In the larger society of Inner Mongolia, many official organizations used only Chinese language in their daily business. Some organizations and enterprises refused to hire Mongolian-school graduates, and some even treated as illiterate the Mongol cadres who were literate in their own language and culture but not in Chinese (NMZJJ 1979, vol. 1:26). Compared with those Mongols who could speak only Mongolian, many Temut Mongol students felt that they were better off, since Chinese was their first language. Therefore, under the influence of the state's ethnic integration model, some Temut Mongol students concluded

that "the Mongolian language is a backward language—we should not use it," "without learning Mongolian, in the future we still will find jobs no differently from the Han," or "it is no use learning Mongolian in order to get into higher education—on the contrary, learning Mongolian actually causes a conflict with promotion to higher learning" (ibid.:11).

The Hui students constituted the second-largest ethnic group in the school during the early and mid-1950s. In their eyes, they had not received equal treatment from the Inner Mongolian government, so some Hui students asked the school to offer Arabic language courses taught by *ahongs* (priests) from local Hui mosques (ibid.:11). By 1956 the city government had set up a separate Hui secondary school, which solved the problem of equal treatment for the local Hui people, but the school did not offer Arabic (NMJCB 1987:45).

Many of the local Han, on the other hand, were dissatisfied with the local government's letting the Mongols use and study their own language. Some complained that "minorities do not have many special characteristics. To emphasize their ethnic characteristics is to offer them privileges" (NMZJJ 1979, vol. 2:32).

#### *The Joint Boarding School*

This secondary school was a Mongolian-Han joint boarding school.<sup>5</sup> During the first six years after its establishment in 1956, the school had separate classes at every grade level for Mongol and Han students. All students were from the same city, however, many Mongol students had spent their childhood in pastoral or semiagricultural/semipastoral areas before their parents were assigned official jobs in the city. Because these students were bilingual, with better knowledge of Mongolian than of Chinese, they were required to take most of their junior-secondary level courses—such as Chinese history, philosophy, biology, chemistry, and physics—in Mongolian, with only Chinese and mathematics taught in Chinese. Nevertheless, the requirements for the senior-secondary level Mongol students heavily emphasized instruction in Chinese. In contrast, the Han students could speak only Chinese, and took all their courses in Chinese. The school did not require that Han students learn Mongolian or any

5. This case study is primarily based on personal interviews with four former Mongolian students of the school in 1990.

other Chinese ethnic language as their second language; they instead learned Russian or English. At the junior-secondary level, the Han students were divided in separate classes by gender in each grade. When they were promoted to the senior-secondary level, their classes were rearranged into sexually mixed classes, but they were still separated from Mongol students; even the boarding arrangement had kept them separate. There was only one sexually mixed class of Mongol students in each grade at both the junior- and senior-secondary levels.

In 1963 the school started enrolling one hundred Mongol students from pastoral and semiagricultural/semipastoral areas each year for both junior- and senior-secondary level classes. Except for Chinese language courses, all courses for these students were taught in Mongolian (ibid.:20). Unlike the urban Mongol students from families of cadres and intellectuals, most of these new students came from ordinary herding families. They were selected through the regional examinations from Mongolian elementary and secondary schools at lower administrative levels. Since their lifestyle and eating habits were different from those of both urban Mongol and Han students, the school offered them a separate dining hall.

By adding another group of Mongol students at each grade level, the school created a visible triadic structure as well as a dynamic hierarchical relationship between the three kinds of students. Because of this arrangement, each group functioned as an independent unit and acted diversely upon a cognitive hierarchical order under the regular routines of institutional practice. The students of each group formed a separate cultural circle, within which they gradually built up mutual trust by sharing similar experiences of language, ethnicity, and economic status. As for their outside status, the students of each peer group first developed a sense of otherness because of their experience of ethnic and class divisions within the school structure.

In 1963 almost all the first-year students in classes for urban Mongols were city-born. Their language ability in Mandarin was much better than in Mongolian. Since most of their parents originally came from pastoral or semiagricultural/semipastoral areas and some had long been engaged in professional and special technical work—such as Mongolian linguistic and historical studies, and Mongolian-language journal and newspaper editing—these urban Mongol students had opportunities to practice Mongolian language with their

parents, but they always spoke Mandarin outside the home with the local Han and their young urban Mongol friends. Even at school, they spoke with their classmates in Mandarin outside the classroom. Unlike the earliest urban Mongolian students of the school, they preferred to label themselves as “modernized” or “advanced,” rather than “traditional,” Mongols. On the other hand, many Mongol students from pastoral areas liked to label themselves as “pure” or “authentic” Mongols, in contrast to urban Mongols, whom they saw as “impure” or “inauthentic.”

This distinction between urban and pastoral Mongols caused painful experiences for many of the latter. Before they came to the city, ethnic identity had never been an important issue in their daily lives. To them, to be a Mongol was to live, as they had for generations, the herding life. Although ethnic education in their homeland had interrupted their lives in certain ways, the idea that Mongols should learn Mongolian encouraged them to stay in the boarding schools in their local areas.<sup>6</sup> But after 1958, when the Inner Mongolian government changed its language policy in ethnic education from stressing Mongolian-language practice to Mongolian-Chinese bilingual training (*Meng-Han jiantong*) for all Mongols, the total time spent studying Mongolian language was reduced from three thousand to one thousand hours per year in all Mongolian schools for Mongolian-speaking students (ibid.:37). The Mongolian-Han joint schools also increased in number (ibid.:24). Some Mongolian schools offered all courses for Mongol students in Chinese, except for Mongolian language (ibid.:25). As a result, the dropout rate in pastoral Mongolian schools increased from 50 percent to 70 percent (ibid.:24). Examples are numerous:

In the No. 2 High School of Alshan Left Banner, 40 students in each class in 1960 dropped to 20 in each class in 1962; in Wushen Banner High School, Yehzhao League, 34 freshmen dropped to 8 sophomores the following year . . . ; in Jingpeng Second

6. These pastoral Mongolian children had some experiences similar to those of Native American children in boarding schools. School life, including meals and daily activities, was completely different from their nomadic lifestyle. The major difference between the two boarding systems is that Mongolian children were taught to read and write in their own language, whereas Native Americans were forbidden even to speak their own language.

High School of Zhouwood League, 100 freshmen dropped to 49 sophomores the next year . . . ; in No. 2 High School of Hulendor League, 330 freshmen dropped to 180 seniors . . . ; in Ethnic Minority High School of Wujim League, 50 freshmen in each class dropped to 20 or 30 graduates from each class; in Yellow Banner High School of Shilingol League, 34 freshmen dropped to 17 sophomores. . . . In many pastoral areas the main reason that Mongol students dropped out was that they could not handle the difficulty of learning Chinese without help in their native language. (Ibid.:26, 34)

By 1963, when the regional government realized the actual results of its bilingual training policy, teaching Mongolian was restored for both Mongols and local Han cadres. It was in this new situation that pastoral Mongol students came to the Joint Boarding School from their remote homes. Compared with their previous Mongolian schools, where they had visualized the larger society through their own imaginations of the "proposed world" in their textbooks, this new school was an unfamiliar world. Their sense of togetherness changed into a sense of alienated otherness in their new city school and its surrounding world. In this real and new living world, they felt like strangers to the urban Mongols and Han. Outside their school they had to use Mandarin, which they could not speak at all well. City people often laughed at their heavy Mongolian accents and called them "old Mongols" (*lao Menggu*).<sup>7</sup> Their treatment in this new, changing world made them doubt their self-worth and caused painful feelings of stigmatized identity. At the same time, they strongly perceived the special meaning of their Mongolian identity.

In contrast to the pastoral Mongol students, most new urban Mongol students had grown up in the city and thought of it as their home. They had been used to living with a large number of Han since childhood. In addition, they all had graduated from the same Mongolian elementary school (not the Temut Mongolian school) in

7. Charles Keyes defines this "proposed world" as "one known not through the experience of actual social relationships but through a set of coherent messages presented through . . . a 'work of culture' that open up in the possibility of engaging in relationships that may be established in the future" (1991:90).

8. This is a popular derogatory term applied by the local Han to express their disdainful feelings toward the Mongols.

the city. The new peer-group tie of the class of Mongol students was in fact a heritage from their previous school experience. Their sense of Mongolian identity was produced by communicating with their parents about the history of the Mongols and by their mutual experience in the present world. When they encountered the pastoral Mongol students, they admired their ability to speak perfect Mongolian, but felt awkward at being unable to share experiences and feelings with their pastoral brothers and sisters. They realized that to them, the meaning of Mongolian tradition was only a memory of the past, but to the pastoral Mongols, it was the true life of the present world. At the same time, the urban Mongols developed a sense of superiority based on the state model of ethnic integration, which contrasted the "modernized" urban Mongols with the "traditional" pastoral Mongols. The relationship between the two had come to be viewed in a new hierarchical order.

In the eyes of Han students, Mongols as an ethnic groups were categorized as "backward," although they felt they had more in common with urban Mongols than with pastoral Mongols in language and cultural behavior. However, they saw their commonalities with urban Mongols as resulting from sinification at an individual level. They considered themselves to be ethnically superior to all Mongols, but in practice treated them differently depending on individual degrees of acculturation.

#### *The Elite Mongolian Boarding School*

As a result of the local government's restoration of the Mongolian Language Learning Movement in 1963, a new elite Mongolian secondary boarding school was founded in 1965.<sup>9</sup> Before the Cultural Revolution nearly half of the school's students were the children of local high-ranking Mongolian officials and professional intellectuals, and nearly half were the children of ordinary Temut Mongols from the city and its suburban counties. In addition, between 1 and 2 percent were Han students who lived nearby. Most of the Mongol students had graduated from the local Han elementary schools. Since most of their parents were either bilingual with better knowledge of Chinese language or monolingual in Chinese, the Mongol students could not

9. This case study is based on personal interviews in 1990 and 1991 with three Mongol former students of the school.

speak Mongolian, although a few perhaps understood some of their parents' daily conversations in Mongolian. (Many high-ranking Mongolian officials were Temut and other non-Mongolian-speaking Mongols.) Before 1965 most high-ranking Mongolian officials had sent their children to the best local Han schools. When the new elite Mongolian boarding school came into being, the local government ordered the transfer of these students to the new school. Mongolian-Chinese bilingual training was to be the key link in operating the whole school system. All students were required to take ordinary courses in Chinese and Mongolian language in Mongolian. Students were promised advanced political and governmental training after their secondary education, but, due to the arrival of Cultural Revolution in 1966, this goal never was realized.

Before this political movement, the students from high-ranking families often unconsciously related their ethnic pride to their superior family status and public acknowledgment of their capable performance in the larger Han society. Because of this and their better academic achievement compared to Temut Mongol classmates from ordinary families, they tended to despise the latter. To many of them, the Temut Mongol students were unintelligent, lower-class people.

This situation changed during the first three years of the Cultural Revolution, when the school was accused of being a "revisionist black nursery"<sup>10</sup> for modern Mongol anticommunist elites. After high-ranking parents of Mongol students were purged from the local government, the lower-class Temut Mongol students played an important role within the school. They identified themselves as the descendants of proletarians, in contrast to the students from the previously high-ranking families, who were the descendants of the bourgeoisie. By the end of 1968 a political purge of the so-called Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (IMPRP) was launched throughout the region. This dramatically transformed the class struggle between proletarian revolutionaries and bourgeois revisionists into an ethnic struggle between local Han and Mongols. Consequently, almost all Mongol students' families had at least one member accused of being an IMPRP member (counter-revolutionary) and many had close relatives brutally

10. In contrast to the color red, which symbolized luck, loyalty, and the proletarian revolution, black represented evil and the bourgeois spirit.

tortured or killed during this particular purge.<sup>11</sup> In the face of this tragedy, Mongol students from different family backgrounds finally confirmed their common identity in opposition to ethnic discrimination and Han chauvinism.

In these three cases, we have seen how interactions in specific social contexts within the schools affected Mongolian students' perceptions of the state-proposed work of culture. We have also seen how in each case the ethnic division of school programs influenced identity awareness of Mongol students in various ways. This school-based ethnicity often conflicted with Mongolian family identity.

#### THE ETHNIC BOUNDARY BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

Due to early education at school, the superethnic image of the modern Chinese state and its communist ideology became a fundamental part of modern Mongolian children's worldview.<sup>12</sup> However, the Chinese nationalism they learned in school contradicted the mythical history of Mongols learned at home. What they learned from textbooks were in fact the traditions of the Han.

For instance, many school textbooks presented ideas such as: people from different ethnic groups in China all are called Chinese, and China is their motherland; the main trend of ethnic relations in Chinese history has been the peaceful coexistence of various ethnic peoples; and all the suffering, conflicts, and struggles in history were due to class relations rather than ethnic relations. The military hero Yue Fei (1103-1141), for example, is known to every student as a national hero. But many Mongolian children learned from Mongolian adults that this heroic figure was a Han killer of Mongols. According to school textbooks, Yue Fei was a loyal twelfth-century marshal who bravely led troops in defense of the Southern Song dynasty against invasion by a northern regime, the Jin or Jurchen. Later, at the instigation of a

11. Ten years after the purge was stopped by a document from the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on May 22, 1969, a report in *People's Daily* indicated that over 10,000 Mongols had died and over 100,000 were injured in the purge of the IMPRP in Inner Mongolia (Ulanfu 1979). In 1981 at the third Chinese National Ethnic Education Conference, a government official announced that as many as 340,000 had been harmed (NMZJT 1981:12).

12. This section is based on the memories of many urban Mongols of myths learned and shared at home in contrast to the state culture learned in school.



traitor, the Southern Song emperor had Yue Fei killed. In his own time, Yue Fei was seen as a dynastic loyalist, but in modern China he symbolizes national patriotism. In contrast, among many Mongols, Yue Fei is considered a representative of the Han and a symbol of the Han humiliation of Mongols. In their eyes the Jin was a multi-ethnic nation whose army included many Mongols, so the war between the Southern Song and the Jin can be seen as a Han-Mongol conflict. Some claimed that Yue Fei was the reason Mongols do not celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival. They told their children that on the evening of a big victory on the fifteenth of the eighth lunar month Yue celebrated his victory with Mongols' heads under the light of the full moon. Although the Han now display or eat watermelons and moon cakes instead of Mongols' heads on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month, the symbolism for many Mongols remains clear.

Similarly, a Chinese myth about the Mid-Autumn Festival, though it does not concern Yue Fei, also mentions killing Mongols. This is a story about southern Han led by Zhu Yuanzhang (who later became the first emperor of the Ming dynasty), who killed Mongols during one Mid-Autumn Festival at the end of the Yuan dynasty:

After the usual festival activities had been completed, midnight struck and the whole city lit up the lanterns, raised flags, and beat drums and gongs. Breaking open their moon cakes, they all found slips of paper bearing the message: "Kill the Dazi [a humiliating term for Tartar Mongols]." The people armed themselves with kitchen knives and wooden sticks, and just at that moment, Zhu Yuanzhang's army, which had stealthily approached the city, filled the air with deafening battle cries, beat on their drums and gongs, and lit a multitude of torches. The Yuan defenders had no idea of the strength or numbers of their attackers; they saw only the brightly burning lanterns, the fluttering flags, and heard the wild beating of drums and gongs. They fled in fear and confusion. Those who lingered were killed or made prisoners. (Latsch 1984:80)

Reflecting upon this Han myth, some modern Mongols still do not celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival, even though it has become a Chinese national celebration of family reunion.

In school, everything Mongolian children learned about Han culture or the history of China was labeled as unified Chinese culture and history. It was hard to find Mongolian or other minority stories

in school textbooks, even those written in Mongolian. At home Mongolian adults often told their children that all the modern Mongols were the offspring of Chinggis Khan and that the expanded territory of modern China was due to his contribution. Although whenever they talked about him they expressed their feelings with pride and admiration, they could hardly find this Mongolian historical figure in their children's school books.

In the eyes of Mongols, Chinggis Khan expanded land through wars against others, whereas the Mongol hero Gada Meilin (1893–1931) defended Mongol land against Han immigration and conversion of pasture into cultivated farmland (Lu Minghui et al. 1981). Gada Meilin was an officer of Prince Zasaak's army at Darhan Banner, in northeastern Mongolia. (Meilin was an official title for the commander of the army.) When Zhang Zuolin, the northeastern Han warlord, came to northeastern Inner Mongolia, he forced Prince Zasaak to give up three quarters of the land in Darhan Banner to the Han rulers. As a result, more and more Mongolian herding families were driven out of their homeland, and in 1929 Gada led an uprising of Mongol herdsmen. His force was finally defeated by Han warlord troops in the spring of 1931, and Gada himself was killed. Many myths and legends of this hero rapidly spread among the Mongols, and for years a paean to Gada has been the most popular Mongolian song, the refrain of which is: "Gada Meilin who led the uprising was for the land of Mongolian people / Gada Meilin who led the uprising was for the benefit of Mongolian people." But no matter how great and popular the image of Gada is in the hearts of Mongols, this Mongolian ethnic hero is still unable to share the stage with Han ethnic heroes in formal education.

#### THE DOMINATION OF HAN CHAUVINISM IN INNER MONGOLIA

Whether in the specific arrangements of ethnic division between local Mongolian and Han schools, or in the classes of Mongol and Han students in a joint school, the only readily visible difference between Mongol and Han students was that Mongols had to learn Chinese, but Han did not have to learn Mongolian.<sup>13</sup> One often

13. The general information and most examples in this section are from NMZJJ *Nei Menggu Zizhiqu minzu jiaoyu Wenjian huibian* (Selected documents of ethnic education in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region), vols. 1, 2, and 3.

heard Mongol students and teachers ask: "Why do we have to become bilingual, when they [the Han teachers and students] have never bothered to learn Mongolian?" (NMZJJ 1979, vol. 2:32). Although the local government's new language policy in 1963 also encouraged the local Han cadres to learn Mongolian for better communication with the Mongolian populace, the regional regular education programs have applied the policy to only a few classes of Han students in joint schools. The socialist idea of nationalism has not been introduced to the Han students in the name of ethnic integration, but in direct connection with the historical civilization of the Han Chinese nation.

During the first seventeen years after the founding of the People's Republic, the domination of Han chauvinism played an essential role in the ethnic education and larger society of Inner Mongolia. Within the ethnic education system, actual leadership of Mongolian and joint schools often was in the hands of Han cadres. In Mongolian schools, headmasters were Mongolian, but the school Party secretaries were Han. Everyone in China knows that the Party is the true ruler of the entire nation, and therefore of every single unit within it. In most Mongolian-Han joint schools, both headmasters and Party secretaries were Han, Han students outnumbered Mongol students, and the management of school activities stressed Han styles (ibid.:35). Many Han headmasters and Party secretaries paid great attention to classes of Han students, but did not like to deal with ethnic questions, and gave little attention to classes of Mongol students. For instance, when a Han Party secretary in a joint school found a Mongol teacher using Mongolian to introduce the school background to his new Mongol students, he unhappily questioned the teacher's use of Mongolian with students who could understand Chinese. Some joint schools required announcers at student performances to speak only Chinese. The Han leaders and faculty in joint schools generally felt that it was a symptom of backwardness when Mongolian faculty members could not speak Chinese (ibid.:39), and the Education Bureau of Inner Mongolia encouraged such teachers to learn the language:

At present, we do not have enough supplementary teaching and reading materials in Mongolian. Therefore, learning Chinese is the way to open the door for the Mongol teachers to broaden their sources of knowledge. (Ibid.:130)

The quality of Mongolian teaching materials is poor. The main problem is that the contents of texts lose contact with present social and political reality. The teaching materials of Mongolian literature inadequately adopt too many works from the People's Republic of Mongolia. Because of this, the ideas of "ethnic nationalism" and "uniqueness of Mongolian art and literature" are emphasized to a certain extent. (Ibid.:127-28)

Mongol students—especially those who spoke only Mongolian or Chinese—suffered greatly with unexpected policy changes in Inner Mongolian ethnic education. When Mongolian language training came into favor, non-Mongolian-speaking Mongols were often forced to transfer from higher-grade Chinese classes to lower-grade Mongolian classes. On the other hand, when the teaching policy emphasized Mongolian-Chinese bilingual training, Mongolian-speaking Mongols came under attack for their language and cultural behaviors in everyday life. When they realized that what they had learned in school was not based on the needs of their daily practice but on the needs of a larger and unfamiliar social sphere, they tended to drop out of school.

Mongolian-speaking graduates of separate Mongolian elementary and secondary schools could usually go on to Mongolian teachers' training schools or Mongolian language and literature departments of ordinary colleges in Inner Mongolia (ibid.:36). Since there was no college in the whole region with only Mongol students, almost all disciplines except Mongolian language and literature were taught in Mandarin. For this reason, most Mongolian-speaking graduates from secondary Mongolian schools were excluded from the higher education system. Those students were often viewed by the authorities and Chinese faculty as low-quality or problem students. Very often, such students even had a hard time finding jobs as accountants, work-point recorders, or storekeepers in their pastoral or rural communities. For example, when 396 Mongolian-speaking high school graduates in Holenbor League applied in 1961 for these jobs in different pastoral communes, only ten of them were successful. Many parents of Mongolian graduates complained that their investment in selling ten cattle to send their children to Mongolian schools gained them nothing in return. As a result, more and more local Mongol cadres started sending their children to local Han schools (ibid.:36).

In consequence of these educational policies, the Mongolian lan-

guage was neglected in the larger social domain. Some Han leaders thought that Mongolian translation work was only a "form of decoration" for the government's minority policies, and did not carry it out. In fact, many local translation offices at various administrative levels existed solely in name, while carrying out irrelevant tasks such as maintaining archives, delivering official documents, providing secretarial assistance, and writing reports. In the entire year of 1956 one administrative district, one league, and over six banners translated only a handful of Chinese official documents into Mongolian (NMZJJ 1979, vol. 1:51). By the end of 1963 there were still compact Mongolian areas in which the Mongolian language was seldom used in regional official documents and orders. In some pastoral Mongolian production teams, work-point records and accounts were kept only in Chinese by Han accountants, rather than by literate local Mongols. Some communes even held meetings in Chinese for Mongols who did not understand the language, and some local government offices and official organizations refused to accept official documents and public letters written in Mongolian (NMZJJ 1979, vol. 3:3).

The direct cause of the above phenomenon was the influx in the early 1960s of numerous Han immigrants. According to the immigration figures for 1960, 945,000 Han settlers moved into the region that one year (Liu and Zheng 1979), and "Mongols soon found themselves outnumbered in their autonomous region by a ratio of one to ten" (Schwarz 1979:144). This unbalanced population ratio caused various problems for the political management of the region. In many pastoral areas, the division of labor differentiated by assigning Mongols to herding and Han to building houses, digging wells, and administration. It was impossible for Mongols to enjoy their autonomous rights with an overwhelming majority of Han living on their land.

#### CONCLUSION

In the cases presented here, ethnic school programs helped unorganized Inner Mongolian Mongol youth form their own ethnic entities under the protection of ethnic education in school. In particular, the boarding school system increased opportunities for peer group activities and for coherent ethnic experiences outside the classroom. Unlike some Native American boarding schools (McBeth 1983), most

Mongolian or joint schools did not set strict after-school rules for the students. For this reason, the students gradually set up their own residential routines based on ethnic-oriented age or grade peer groups. Such groups were "much more important than the family as a principal mediator of social identity. The peer group is certainly a most exacting socializer, which demands continual symbols of allegiance from those participating" (De Vos 1982:31).

We have seen that the Mongolian language played a crucial role in the learning process of Mongol students at school. Although the state and the local governments' language policies highlighted the significance of ethnic minority languages in achieving national ethnic integration, actual language practice varied even within a single ethnic group. We have also seen that programmed Mongolian-language learning for young Mongols in school was discouraged by the fact that Mandarin was dominant and Mongolian was rarely used officially in the larger society of Inner Mongolia. The political authority of Mandarin in fact laid down the dividing line between the acceptable and the unacceptable, so that Mongol students who spoke only Chinese were often reluctant to learn Mongolian and did not take the language as an important marker of their Mongolian identity. Those who had better knowledge of Mongolian, especially students from pastoral areas, were eager to learn the language as a part of their way of life, and later many of them also took it as an essential marker of their Mongolian identity in competition with the Han and with non-Mongolian speaking Mongols. Therefore, when we talk about the ethnicity of modern Mongols in China, various social contexts have to be taken into consideration.

Carter Bentley accurately observes:

Since ethnic identity derives from situationally shared elements of a multidimensional habitus, it is possible for an individual to possess several different situationally relevant but nonetheless emotionally authentic identities and to symbolize all of them in terms of shared descent. (1987:35)

According to these case studies, the meanings of Mongolian identity to the young Temut Mongols were closely related to the idea of shared descent through their place of birth, their older generation's historical contributions to the revolution in Inner Mongolia, and the class division in landholding between themselves and the local Han.

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To the pastoral Mongol youth, their nomadic way of life was a basic foundation of Mongolian identity. However, only when they found themselves alienated in their own land and unaccepted by the larger society was their sense of Mongolian identity formed. Very often they took the Mongolian language as a crucial boundary between themselves and both non-Mongolian-speaking Mongols and the Han. As for the young urban Mongols, ethnic education created a cultural space for their own ethnic peer groups and evoked visions of family ties shared through common mythical history with the entire Mongolian group.