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Who Are the Mongols? State, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Representation in the PRC

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Many recent anthropological studies on ethnicities of China have been focused on problems of the official *minzu* identification project whereby apparently different ethnic groups have been lumped together under one minzu in a way that does not seem to make scientific sense.[1] One aftermath of such arbitrary state identification has been the contestation and resistance carried out by groups who reject the classification imposed on them and work toward recognition as a separate minzu.[2] In our effort to highlight cases of problematic state identifications (which is highly needed and valuable), however, we may have paid less than sufficient attention to identity processes among groups that are recognized as having well-established, "clear-cut" minzu statuses accepted both by themselves and by the Chinese state. Such groups include, among others, the Tibetans, Mongols, Manchus, Uighurs, Koreans, and even the Han Chinese.[3] There also seems to have

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[1] There is no English equivalent for "minzu," which has several usages. For example, it can mean "ethnic" in the Western sense of the word or "nationality," as in *Falanxi minzu* (French nationality). Also, a minzu in reality can contain several different ethnic groups in the Western sense of the concept (see Harrell 1990, 552). Lastly, a group cannot be a minzu if not recognized by the state. Thus, I shall use the Chinese term *minzu* when talking about problems of ethnicity in the context of China.

[2] This important focus has produced a body of impressive literature in the past few years. See, e.g., Harrell (1990, 1995a, 1995b), Gladney (1991, 1994), and Cheung (this volume). The issue explored in these works is who belongs to which category rather than the problem examined in this essay: who represents whom. For another recent study on ethnic representations in China, see Litzinger (1994).

[3] See, for example, Crossley (1990) and Duara (1993).

been a tendency to approach identity issues of such well-established minzu groups largely as a process in which the expression, shape, and maintenance of minzu identity are determined solely by the minzu's interaction with a significant Other or Others consisting of other, separate minzu and/or the Chinese nation-state: "We are Tibetans and you are Han."

Here I show that such an analytical framework cannot cover the whole phenomenon of minzu identity processes in China; it does not address the equally if not more important and intricate role that intragroup relationships play in shaping identity processes and landscapes. I illustrate how, in the case of the Mongols, minzu identity and its expressions are not as transparent, innocent, or static as they appear on the surface from the long-established, stable title *Menggu zu.*[4] To help with my analysis, I employ a semiotic approach that pays close attention to the various historical reactions to power that inform and shape the web of signs through which the minzu subjects travel and traffick. It will become clear that Menggu minzu is far from unproblematic as a signifying entity; it is in fact a site for negotiation and contestation not only between the Mongols and the Han and the Mongols and the Chinese state but, what is more interesting, between the different regional and occupational subgroups that constitute the Mongol population of Inner Mongolia. Each party involved in this arena has its own ideas about what being Mongol means or, indeed, should mean; these differing signifiers in turn inform and affect the expression and configuration of the overall Mongol group identity. What emerges from this complex web of relationships appears to be a homogenizing "Mongolness" for the *public* domain, an essentialized identity grounded in a historical pastoral ecology and maintained at the suppression of intragroup variations. As is shown by the case of the Tibetans (Upton, this volume) and the Miao (Cheung, this volume), the Inner Mongolian

[4] *Menggu* is Chinese for "Mongol" or "Mongolia"; *zu* is the short form for minzu. I shall use the Chinese term "Menggu" when discussing Mongol identity issues as they relate to Han Chinese subjectivity. In this way I hope to bring out the sense of imposition of a mode of representation on the Mongols by the Han. In other words, I am using the word "Menggu" as a sign of discourse with all its sentiments, imaginings, visions, portrayals, perceptions, values, knowledge, and historical memories, and the power of these to capture, evaluate, and fix the Mongol Other in relation to the Han Self. So defined, the term "Menggu" carries in itself the Chinese Self, something that cannot be embodied in its Mongolian or English equivalent.

case does not stand alone and indeed represents a crucial aspect of the identity processes among many of the various minzu groups of China: the tensions and contentions under the seemingly smooth facade of supposedly unproblematic, long- and well-established minzu statuses. In short, a mere exposure or refutation of the "unscientific" minzu classification project of the Chinese state is no longer enough and as an object of inquiry is easily exhaustible. What we need more of is the unraveling of the microprocesses of the "cultural politics of alterity" (Taussig 1993). Such an approach requires that we move away from viewing the minzu identity phenomenon as simply a "one-on-one" interaction toward viewing it as a "hierarchy of alterities."

Beyond the Fortresses: Menggu as an Age-old Object of Chinese Imagination

Historical memory plays an important role in how the Mongols are perceived and represented today. This is true both in terms of Mongol self-imaging and representation and their perception and representation by other parties—particularly by the Chinese, with whom the Mongols interacted for centuries in trade and war. As early as about a thousand years ago, well before the emergence of the powerful Mongol nation, a poet vividly depicted the lands of the nomads to the north of the Middle Kingdom as follows:

> On the Chi Le plain
> at the foot of the Yin Shan Mountains,
> the sky is like a huge yurtlike
> roof over the wilderness.
> The sky is immense, the wilderness boundless;
> When wind sweeps across bending the grass,
> one sees cattle and sheep grazing.[5]

Although not about the Mongols per se, the poem nevertheless conveys accurately how the Mongol landscape and nomadic existence looked to the Chinese literati of the time. This well-known poem has become a quintessential example of how Mongolia, its people, and its land have been perceived by foreign peoples, particularly by its age-long neighbors, the sedentary, agriculturalist Chinese. It has been time and again included in textbooks

[5] Quoted in Shi et al. 1989, 362; my translation. The Chinese original is as follows: "Chile chuan, yinshan xia, tian si qionglu, longgai siye. Tian cang cang, ye mang mang, feng chui cao di jian niu yang."

used nationwide for Chinese language courses (*yuwen*) and has become one of those household classics from which many Chinese can recite lines.

Another example of the historical Chinese perception of the Mongol land and people is a thirteenth-century travel account in which the author tells us what he saw and felt while standing on top of a mountain range that separated Mongol territory from the Middle Kingdom:

> While northbound crossing Mount Wild Fox, I took a bird's-eye view back at the many peaks of the Taihang Mountains. The view was clear and lovely. Looking ahead northward, however, I could see only cold smoke and fog and withering grass—I have reached where the winds of Zhong Yuan [Middle Kingdom] are halted![6]

What is significantly common about these two eyewitness accounts is the fascination with the pastoral and the focus on the absence of the familiar agricultural landscape. For the second author particularly, this dominance of *huang* (wilderness) and grass and absence of cultivated fields stood graphically as the sign and substance of an alien existence, signifying the fundamental gap between Chinese civilization and Mongol barbarism, between Self and Other.[7]

Evidence of such Chinese perceptions of Mongolia abounds in official chronicles and travel books, both contemporary and historical.[8] Together with folkloric historical narratives (such as *Yue Fei*

[6] Quoted in Jagchid 1986, 2; my translation. The Chinese original is as follows: "Beidu yehuling, denggao nanwang, fushi taihang zhu shan, qinglang ke'ai; beigu, dan hanyan shuaicao, zhongyuan zhifeng, zhici ge jue yi!"

[7] The Chinese perception and concept of *huang* (wilderness) is a direct product of their tradition of great agriculturalism. In general, huang is land that is uncultivated and therefore unutilized and wasted. In addition to such moral and practical deficiency, huang also suggests the absence of domestication and civility and the presence of danger. In short, the overall image is negative. Consequently, activities that correct such deficiencies embedded in huang are regarded as positive. Thus, the positive term *kai* (open) is used to refer to the action of preparing a virgin land for farming: *kai huang*—"open up wasteland." For the Mongols, however, exactly the same activity is called *gajir hagalahu*—"breaking/shattering the land." Another such conflicting sign is "grass," an archenemy for an agricultural tradition but a lifeline for pastoralists. The critical point here is that the agricultural ideology of the Chinese has not only guided popular mind and practice but has also become an important factor in state politico-economic policies that have in turn affected Mongols of Inner Mongolia tremendously.

[8] For example, such classics as *Heida shilue* (Peng 1962) and *Mengda beilu* (Zhao 1962) and, during the Nationalist period, *Menggu gai guan* (He 1932), *Sui Meng jiyao* (Suiyuan Provincial Government 1937), and *Meng qi gai guan* (Kong 1937).

zhuan [The story of Yue Fei]) and anecdotal, informal accounts that spread through word of mouth, they have in time contributed to the construction of a representational paradigm firmly grounded in ecology and historical memory.[9] In this paradigm, Menggu, also well known in China as Sai Wai (beyond the fortresses), is where the Mengdazi reside, the people who live on horseback "following grass and water," who, led by the awesome Chengjisihan, conquered Zhongguo to establish the Yuan dynasty. They are robust, tough, free-spirited, and honest, but also barbaric, lazy, dirty, smelling of sheep, and somewhat low in intelligence.[10]

The essentializing image of Menggu or Mongolia as beautiful, wild, mysterious, strangely fascinating, frightening, barbaric, dangerous, and simply "Other" has remained into modern times. More important, this popularized, essentially bifurcated historical image has been reinforced with time and has acquired new meanings in the twentieth century. It has found its way into PRC state politico-economic policy and practice and has affected the process and shape of the Mongol's minzu identity.

Tracking the "Horseback Nation"

If the idea of *youmu* (nomadism) has some semantic merit as a referential term for (Nei) Menggu, it is only so in the past tense.[11]

[9] In reading an earlier draft of this essay Stevan Harrell offered the following insights: the Mongols today seem to be defined explicitly by a new, linguistic criterion and implicitly by one old criterion of descent (i.e., sons and daughters of Chinggis Khan) but envisioned by a different old criterion (ecology).

[10] *Mengdazi* is a derogatory Chinese term referring specifically to the Mongols. The term is still occasionally heard today—not as much in Inner Mongolia as in other parts of China (esp. southern China). *Chengjisihan* is Chinese for Chinggis Khan, more popularly known in the West as Genghis Khan. In an ironic twist in recent Chinese cultural politics, Chinggis Khan has gone through a rebirth to emerge as a "hero of the Chinese nation" (*Zhonghua minzu de yingxiong*). The concept of *Zhonghua minzu* (Chinese nation) is an increasingly well known official discourse in China today. Traditionally a term the Chinese used to refer to themselves, *Zhonghua* has been redefined by the PRC as the name of a new political category, *Zhonghua minzu*, which is in turn officially made up of fifty-five different *shaoshu* (minority) minzu in addition to the Han Chinese. Thus, in effect, the name of the dominant Han is imposed onto non-Han groups. For a detailed analysis of the symbolic manipulation of the figure of Chinggis Khan by various groups through history, see Khan (1995).

[11] *Nei* is Chinese for "inner." Here I put it in parentheses to indicate the popular Chinese perception of Inner Mongolia as simply Menggu (Mongolia)—an indication of their lack of awareness of the political separation of Inner and Outer Mongolia.

The historical changes that empirically invalidate it started on a drastic scale around the turn of the twentieth century. Inner Mongolia embarked on its "modernizing" path with the coming of massive waves of Chinese state- and warlord-backed in-migration of Chinese peasants into its territory. Out of this colonizing project came profound social, political, and economic changes in the region. Vast areas of pasturelands were opened up to Chinese cultivators; Chinese administrative structures, such as counties, sprang up in no time to exist side by side with and independent from the Mongol banners.[12]

With the overwhelmingly large numbers of Chinese pouring into a country that traditionally had been sparsely populated, the Mongols of various locales soon found themselves becoming a minority in their own homeland.[13] As the land appeared virtually boundless to the excited farmer-settlers, they practiced a style of farming known as *guangzhong boshou* (lit. "to sow widely and harvest thinly"). When the soil was exhausted, a process that took only two or three years, they abandoned the fields and moved on to open up new pieces of land—a practice that has survived into the PRC era and is dubbed by Chinese official scholars as *liaohuang* (abandoning to become wasteland) (Song 1987, 422). The process repeated endlessly. Such reckless "nomadic farming,"[14] coupled with the rocketing size of the population, resulted in a severe imbalance of the delicate local ecology, as shown by the extensive disappearance of vegetation (resulting from farming and fuel collecting) and the desertification of vast areas of former grasslands.[15]

The massive colonization not only altered the traditional topography, it also changed the composition of the hitherto homogeneous pastoral economy and demography. In addition to the changes wrought by the settlement of large numbers of Han peasants, many Mongols were forced to give up animal husbandry and adopt agriculture as a result of decrease in or even loss of their pastureland. Still many others became destitute and turned into hired hands for Chinese and Mongol farmers who had since established themselves in the new mode of subsistence (see, for example, Stuart, Jirimutu, and Khasbagan 1991; Khan 1988, 1991). Many took up arms and became rebels of various sorts, an unprecedented phenomenon known in Chinese historiography as *Mengfei* or Mongol banditry (see Underdown 1980 and Jagchid 1988). By the late 1940s the percentage of Mongols in the total population of Inner Mongolia was at best 30 percent (Song 1987, 54, 59). In short, "nomadism" as a nomenclature had lost its referential value in terms of both demography and ecology by this point in history. Today, in Hinggan Aimag alone the majority of the 468,730 Mongols (34.3 percent of the *aimag*'s total population) are rural dwellers under the administration of 421 *gachaa* and living in roughly 1,085 *ail* similar to Bayanhad, the Mongol farming village of Hinggan where I did my fieldwork.[16] There are even more such Mongol farming villages with much larger Mongol populations in the southern aimags of Jirim and Joo-ud (today's Ulaanhad city), both of which were exposed to agriculture much earlier because of their proximity to the Chinese provinces of Hebei and Liaoning. Jirim has the largest Mongol population by aimag, numbering 886,674 (36.39 percent of the 2,436,588 total league population), with 1,283 gachaa that are predominantly agricultural. Taking the total 1982 Mongol population of 2,489,780 for the whole Autonomous Region, we can see that only 18.43 percent live in pastoral areas (Song 1987, 348). Disregarding the ethnic parameter, we see that the slant toward agriculture in the whole Autonomous Region is equally overwhelming. According to the 1982 census, agriculturalists make up 90.61 percent of the total population engaged in both agriculture and animal husbandry.

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[12] A banner (M. *hushigu*) is the Mongol equivalent of a Chinese county.

[13] From 1912 to 1949, for example, the Chinese population in Inner Mongolia jumped from 1.5 million to about 5.2 million (Song 1987, 53–54). Such massive immigration with Chinese farmers outnumbering and displacing indigenous people is by no means a phenomenon unique to Inner Mongolia. Besides the better known similar attempts with regard to Xinjiang and Tibet, a similar process also has happened in Taiwan (see Brown, this volume).

[14] A term used in Song (1987, 422) to refer to the practice of the past forty years.

[15] Between 1960 and 1980, for example, 10,670,000 hectares of land became desert in Inner Mongolia (Shi et al. 1989, 336).

[16] An *aimag* (league; C. *meng*) is a Mongol administrative unit similar to the Chinese prefecture. Gachaa (administrative village; C. *cun*) in official definition usually implies a Mongol majority in the population. An ail is the Mongolian equivalent of the Chinese *zirancun* (natural village). There are no ready statistics on the actual numbers of ail in Hinggan, so I have estimated the number as follows. If we suppose each gachaa has three ail on average (IMARDCA: 126), then the total would be 421x3=1,263. Extract from that total the 178 pastoral ail belonging to the Khorqin Right Middle Banner (IMARDCA: 133) and we have 1,263–178=1,085 Chinese-style Mongol farming villages in Hinggan Aimag alone. "Bayanhad" is a fictitious name.

(Nei) Menggu Petrified

Despite such hard facts to the contrary, (Nei) Menggu continues to be perceived the way it has always been: as an exotic and wild region where all is boundless blue sky, grassland, herds, and nomads. To this day, it is not uncommon for a resident of Beijing, a city only four or five hundred kilometers away from the closest part of the Nei Menggu Dacaoyuan (Inner Mongolian Great Grasslands), to ask a Mongol such ill-informed questions as "In Höhhot, do you go to work on horseback?" or "Is it true that you eat mutton and drink milk every day?" In Guangzhou, the Chinese city farthest from Inner Mongolia, a young tour guide exclaimed incredulously upon hearing that his new acquaintance was a teacher at Inner Mongolia University, "Are you telling me you actually have a university there?" Another example showing how timeless certain things about (Inner) Mongolia are for the general populace is that, even to this day, many people outside Inner Mongolia still cannot or do not distinguish the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region from the independent country of Mongolia.[17] The linguistic expression *nimen Menggu* (lit. "you Mongolia") is a standard term of reference a Chinese person uses when talking to a Mongol from Inner Mongolia. The ahistorical quality of the imagined pastoral (Nei) Menggu is also reflected in the belief of it as exclusively "the land of the Mongols." An American friend of mine teaching in Xining recently told me that, whenever he mentions Inner Mongolia to his students, they assume that only Mongols live there. "They really don't believe me when I say eighty-five percent of the province is Chinese."

This archaic image of the pastoral Menggu has been reinforced and propagated to an unprecedented extent since the founding of the PRC, largely through the spread of state-controlled modern means of mass communications, arts, literature, and popular entertainment. In the early 1950s, a feature film titled *Caoyuan shangde renmin* (People of the grasslands) was produced by the August First Film Studio and released nationwide; in the late 1950s, another movie, *Caoyuan chenqu* (Morning song over the grasslands), was released all over the country. The same period saw numerous literary works set in Inner Mongolia, or rather, on the

[17] For further examples of the misconceptions of Inner Mongolia by Han who live elsewhere and for a discussion of the confusion of an Inner Mongolian ethnic identity with a national identity of the independent country of Mongolia, see Borchigud (this volume).

"grasslands," the best known of which is *Caoyuan fenghuo* (War smoke on the grasslands), written in Chinese by a Mongol novelist under the name Malchinhuu (lit. "herder's son")—even though his personal background is agricultural. In the 1960s, two teenage herders' adventure in trying to protect a commune sheep flock against a snowstorm was widely publicized as an example of the new socialist citizen and was soon made into dramas and films all entitled *Caoyuan yingxiong xiaojiemei* (Heroic little sisters of the grasslands). During the Cultural Revolution, a *muqu* Dazhai (pastoral Dazhai) was discovered for Inner Mongolia from which the rural sectors of Inner Mongolia were to learn.[18] In the 1980s, the drama *Zhao Jun chu sai* (Zhao Jun exits the fortress)—the historical story of a "Chinese" imperial concubine who was married off to a Hun chief "beyond the fortresses" as part of a peace treaty—rekindled and reinforced the Chinese imagination of the exotic landscape and people of Menggu.

Since the 1980s, television has become an even more powerful means of perpetuating and reinforcing the eternal story of a pastoral Menggu by bringing into people's homes visual images of "Mongolia" as it "actually" looks—grasslands, animal flocks, and nomads. The CCTV (China Central Television) station has done the best job of this by broadcasting nationally from time to time documentaries and entertainment featuring pastoral Inner Mongolia, particularly in its regular feature program "Xiongdi minzu" (Brother minzu). Within Inner Mongolia, both the Chinese- and Mongolian-language channels feature various programs on the theme *caoyuan* or *tal nutug* (grassland). On NMTV's (Nei Monggol Television) Mongolian channel, we have, for example, "Taliin duulal" (Songs of the steppes) and "Malchidiin hani" (Herders' companion).

In the domain of education, the same theme is emphasized. Standardized Mongolian-language textbooks invariably feature on their covers pictures of children in the traditional *deel* (the Mongol traditional dress: a long robe worn with a sash at the waist) and boots, even though the majority of the total student population are not children of pastoral families (fig. 1). The Mongolian teaching

[18] Dazhai was an agricultural production brigade in Shanxi province. During the Cultural Revolution it was set up as a model for all rural China (particularly the agricultural sector). "Nongye xue Dazhai" (lit. "in agriculture learn from Dazhai") became one of the best-known slogans and campaigns throughout the decade, and Chen Yonggui, leader of Dazhai, was later chosen to be one of the top-level officials of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in Beijing.

program at a dual-system high school in Höhhot is generally referred to in Chinese as *muqu ban* (lit. "the pastoral class") even though many of the students are from agricultural areas. At official functions in Inner Mongolia, traditional Mongolian dress has become so "fetishized" that at inaugurations, conferences, banquets, and protocols involving domestic and foreign visitors, young women (it does not matter if they are Mongol or not) dressed in deel and boots are almost invariably brought in as waitresses or assistants holding the ribbon to be cut or presenting the *hadag* (ceremonial scarf) and bowl of liquor and singing the toasting songs to guests of honor.

The pastoral theme also runs conspicuously in the domain of urban architecture. In almost every major city of Inner Mongolia there is at least one statue of a horse (always untamed and galloping), a building with a roof that suggests a yurt's roof, or some other structural variation along the pastoral theme. This practice reaches its peak in Höhhot, capital of Inner Mongolia. A rough count citywide reveals at least seven horse statues, one of which depicts a set of eight horses; four important buildings featuring yurtlike roofs (the People's Congress, the Story-telling Hall, the office building of the Inner Mongolia Horse-racing Ground, and a modern hotel; figs. 2 and 3); a statue of a young Mongol woman in deel and boots with her outstretched hands holding a welcoming hadag and a bowl of liquor (erected in front of the city hall); a statue of a herdswoman pouring freshly drawn milk (in a street-side park); and, at the entrance to the sports stadium, a sculpture of a muscular wrestler dressed in the traditional wrestling gear and dancing the customary eagle dance.[19] The irony of this symbolic extravaganza, of course, is that Mongols make up only 5 percent of the population of the city (total population 724,000).

In sharp contrast to the highlighted pastoralists, agriculturists are thoroughly banished from the minzu and national social space, so much so that not only are they invisible in arts and literature, mass media, advertising, tourism, teaching materials, and any other forms of expressive culture, they are also not treated as a viable topic for inquiry within the academic circles of China or the international community.[20] This neglect has practical consequences

[19] Wrestling is traditionally one of the three "manly sports" among the Mongols (today women also participate), the other two being archery and horse racing. At a wrestling match, the wrestler enters and exits the ring dancing a traditional wrestling dance that imitates an eagle taking off.

[20] On more than one occasion I met skepticism and incomprehension from both

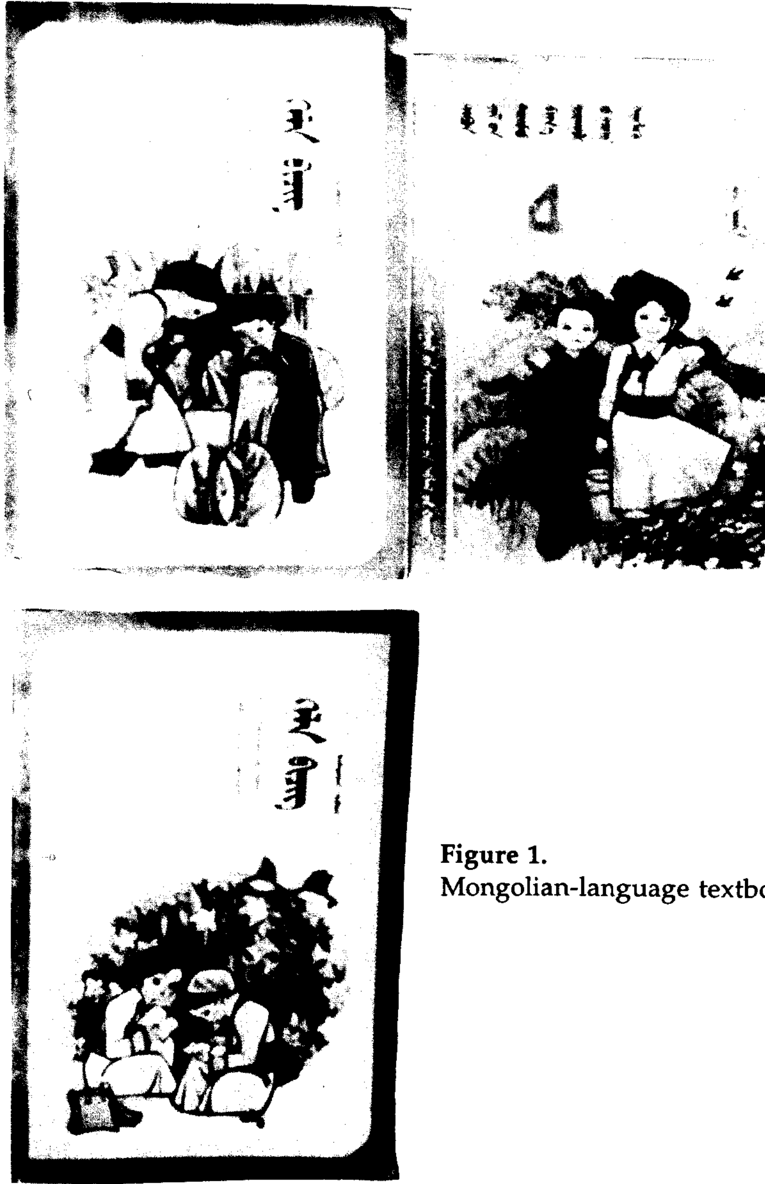

Figure 1.
Mongolian-language textbooks.

Mongol and Han scholars in Inner Mongolia over the subject of my research: agricultural Mongols. The usual comment was: "Why don't you go study the pastoral Mongols, who are more authentic in their traditional Mongol way of life?"

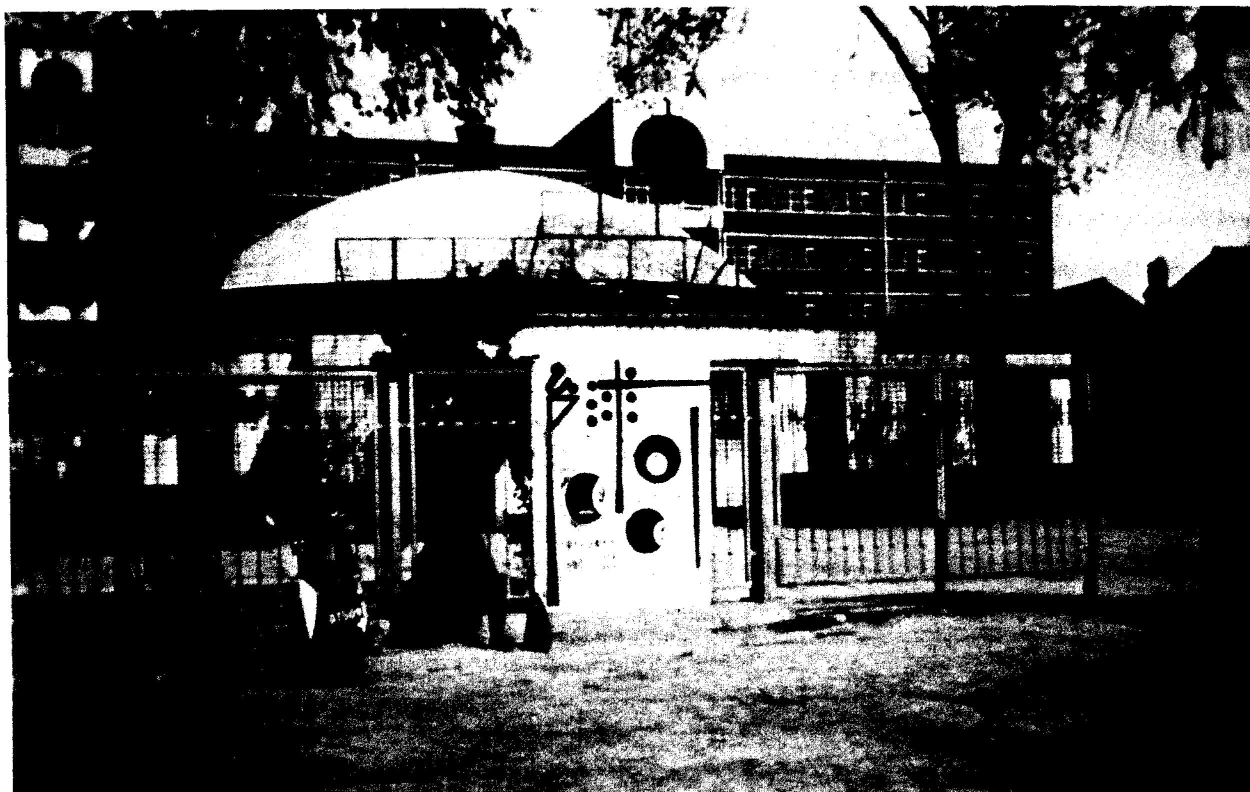

Figure 2. Story-telling Hall.

Figure 3. Inner Mongolia horse-racing ground.

detrimental to the life of the agricultural Mongols as a whole. For example, although there are such television programs as "Malchidiin hani" (Herders' companion), which features educational topics on hygiene, science, and technology in animal husbandry or tips and advice from pastoralists who have become successful pastoralist entrepreneurs, nothing similar exists for agricultural Mongols. Of course, there are quite a few such programs in Chinese, but that fact itself indicates the assumption that either no Mongols need to know about agriculture—that is, no *Menggu nongmin* (C. for "Mongol farmer") exist, or that those two million or so Mongol agriculturalists are all fluent in Chinese. Neither, of course, is true. The majority of the people in Bayanhad, for example, can speak only limited Chinese. The literary and technical Chinese used on television is far beyond their "kitchen Chinese."[21]

In short, the implicit and explicit message via all these media is that (Nei) Menggu equals Mongolian equals pastoral. Given the reality today that 84 percent of the total population of Inner Mongolia are Han Chinese, that about 90 percent of the total rural population are agricultural, and that 82 percent of the 2.4 million Mongols in the region are not pastoralists (Song 1987, 348), why is the pastoralist alone singled out as representative of the whole Mongol population, and why does the image of the grassland greatly override the diversity of landscapes in portrayals of Inner Mongolia?

Why the Pastoral? Or, the Symbolic Death of the Agriculturalist

Despite all the romanticization about it, pastoralism as a mode of production and way of life does not rest easily in today's China, whether in terms of the dominant culture or the dominant political ideology. In fact, it could well be a source for stigma and indeed has been under some circumstances. So why has it succeeded so remarkably as the dominant public image of the occupationally diverse Mongols and of topographically variegated Inner Mongolia? Why has it succeeded so remarkably that it even overshadows the Han majority of the region as the sole public

[21] Another consequence is that, because all the available programs on the few hours of daily Mongolian channel are done in the standard Mongolian (based on the pastoral speech), which the villagers find hard to understand, they switch to Chinese-language channels, a factor that is already producing sociocultural consequences, particularly among the young in the village.

image presented to the national and even the international public?[22] No one single factor has determined all this. To fully answer the questions posed above, we must first examine the Chinese state's socio-political policies and practices of the past four decades. These policies and practices have created a new historical context and imperative for the continuing but symbolic dominance of the pastoral in configuring the shape of Mongol identity in the latter half of the twentieth century. Characterized by an unprecedented ethnic-political control and greatly hastened disintegration of a coherent Mongol culture and society, this larger sociopolitical context has served to awaken a stronger sense of Mongol ethnic consciousness and a keenly felt need for, and attempts at, cultural revival and identity reinforcement. This reinforcement centers on the symbolism of pastoralism in opposition to the agricultural, as represented by the farming Mongols as well as the Chinese nation.

The Chinese state's policy toward the Mongols has been characterized both by tradition (great Han agriculturalism) and by modernity (as expressed through the quest for a strong, modern, unified China). As part of this Janus-faced project, the state has strongly pushed the gradual sinification of non-Han minzu under such legitimizing discourses as the "socialist big family," in which all the members are equal siblings but the Han is the "older brother" (*lao da ge*) who takes it as his natural duty to help minority younger brothers become "advanced" like him.

Under such a policy, since the incorporation of Inner Mongolia into the newly founded PRC about four decades ago, the age-old strategy and practice of *yimin shibian* (lit. "pacifying the frontier by populating it") has been greatly extended and intensified in ideologically less offensive and practically more effective manners. During the brief period between 1949 and 1960, about 3.5 million Chinese were moved into Inner Mongolia to "aid in constructing the frontier minority region," as the well-known slogan stated.[23] In 1960 alone about 1.1 million Chinese were admitted into the region from various provinces (Song 1987, 166). Often, whole

[22] Wurlig Borchigud (this volume) looks into this issue from a different angle: the emergence of Inner Mongolian identities that seem to want to cut across national and ethnic borders.

[23] Again, this recent practice is by no means unique to Inner Mongolia. The same has happened to varying degrees in Xinjiang and Tibet, but the practice has been the most drastic in Inner Mongolia, labeled by Zhou Enlai as the "model autonomous region" (Uyunqimeg et al. 1992, 67).

factories (such as metal, chemical, mining, and machinery operations) were transplanted complete with the original administration, machinery, workforce, and their families (Song 1987, 172), creating sometimes de facto Chinese cities/towns in the midst of traditional Mongol pasturelands.[24] Most of the immigrant population, however, remained Chinese peasant-farmers (Song 1987, 194).

A specific content of the modern Chinese nation-building project, as it relates to Inner Mongolia, is the state's efforts at advocating the "advanced" state of a settled way of life (echoing great Han agriculturalism) and readily allowing pasturelands to be turned into farm fields even at the risk of desertification.[25] Since the founding of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, three major waves of kai huang (see n. 7) have been carried out following state plans for the pastoral areas, where people eat *kui xin liang* (lit. "ill-conscienced grain"),[26] to end for these areas the phenomenon whereby "one only hears the sounds of cattle and sheep but never smells the fragrance of the five grains" (Song 1987, 422). Thus, the age-old tradition of kai huang is accelerated under state sponsorship. Between 1947 and 1982 about 45,000,000 *mu* of grassland were "opened up" for agriculture (Song 1987, 422).[27]

Such political and ecological imperatives have forced more and more Mongols to shift to agriculture. As their economy becomes more agricultural and less pastoral, the material life of those increasingly settled Mongols has been moving closer to that of their Chinese counterparts. In the village of Bayanhad, where I recently did fieldwork, *chagaan idee* (dairy foods) were still a major source of food and protein for the villagers as recently as the

[24] Between 1959 and 1966 about fifteen major factories were transplanted to the major cities of Höhhot, Baotou, and Jining (Song 1987, 172–73).

[25] In both Chinese socialist ideology and popular mindset, industrialization is more advanced than agriculture, agriculture is more civilized than pastoralism, and settled pastoralism more advanced than nomadic pastoralism. Official reports, for example, often cite increased numbers of pastoralists settling down as evidence of success of the socialist modernization project. One article in the *People's Daily* tells us in a celebratory tone: "Reform and the open-door policy have awakened the Inner Mongolian Grasslands. . . . Ninety-eight percent of the region's pastoral population have said goodbye to a life of 'following water and grass' and moved into permanent brick or mud houses" (Teng and Wang 1991).

[26] Implying the perceived moral and technological "deficiency" of pastoralists, who are regarded as living off grains they have never grown and do not know how to grow.

[27] One mu equals 1.6 acres (0.067 hectares).

1970s. When visiting their relatives in the city, they invariably took with them as presents such homemade dairy products as cheese, butter, and cream. Many older people (particularly women) were still wearing the traditional deel. Today, no one there wears deel any more, and only two or three of the 160 households of the community have dairy cows. Cheese is no longer being made, either because people are "too tired after a day's hard work in the fields" (an explanation offered by one of the milk-cow-owning families) or because the younger generations have simply forgotten how to make it. Pigs have replaced sheep and dairy as the main source of protein. Indeed, many of the younger generation find dairy food unpalatable and mutton smelly. The village of Bayanhad is not alone in this. Hundreds of Mongol farming villages in today's Inner Mongolia have gone through similar processes and are presently in a similar situation— officially labeled as either *chun nong* (purely agricultural) or *ban nong ban mu* (semipastoral, semiagricultural) but in actuality predominantly agricultural or fast becoming so.[28]

Just as the "affirmative action" policies (*youhui zhengce*) of the Chinese nation-state carry with them an overtone of ethnic politics, the tumultuous Cultural Revolution (CR) proved to be far more than a "struggle between socialism and capitalism" for the Mongols of Inner Mongolia. Under the name of protecting the motherland from *minzu fenlie zhuyi* (minzu split-ism),[29] the state waged an unprecedented, systematic campaign of persecution of the Mongols known as "digging the New Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party" (IMPRP). The purge, which affected the majority of the adult Mongol population, proved to be disastrous to the Mongols and served as a wake-up call to them about where they stood and about their group survival. Moreover, the CR era, with its pronounced overtone of ethnic persecution, has become an important part of the habitus of the generation who grew up during the period witnessing the sufferings of

[28] According to the villagers of Bayanhad, they increasingly choose to do more farming (even though the area is officially designated as "semiagricultural, semipastoral") because (1) pastureland is declining, and (2) livestock destroy crops in the fields, causing conflicts among the villagers, but there is not enough labor to supervise the livestock and prevent the confrontations. As in the rest of rural China, land at Bayanhad has been assigned to individual families.

[29] The term "minzu" in such a context carries vague and multiple connotations. It could mean the official Zhonghua minzu, or it could mean "ethnic" (in the Western sense of the word) as in *shan dong minzu qingxu* (incite ethnic discontent).

their parents and other relatives and themselves experiencing humiliation and stigma because of their family backgrounds. This younger generation was to become one of the most important players in the ethnic revival movement of the 1980s. If indeed the level of ethnic consciousness and maintenance directly corresponds to the degree of adverse ethnic experiences, then the CR undoubtedly has functioned as the most personal as well as social factor in bringing about a heightened sense of Mongol group solidarity for the 1970s and 1980s (for more on the purge, see Jankowiak 1988).

In addition to the bitter memories of the purge of the IMPRP, post-CR Mongols have become more keenly aware than ever before of the drastically increased Han Chinese dominance in Inner Mongolia in social, political, and demographic spheres. Despite a louder official discourse on "preserving and developing minority cultures and traditions," the post-CR era has seen a continuing, steady acceleration of the process of disintegration of the various structural boundaries that have so far served to separate the Mongols from the Han. More people are giving up wearing traditional dress. The second generation of urban Mongol dwellers is in general unable to speak Mongolian. Intermarriage with the Han is becoming more common.[30] As already shown, ecology and economy, once the most salient markers of opposition, are no longer empirically dominant realities. Mongol political representation in the regional government has dropped from 50 percent in 1947 to approximately 10–15 percent today. In short, the Mongols of Inner Mongolia are faced with the real, pressing issue of group survival.

Experiences of social, political, and cultural subjugation have brought forth a stronger Mongol ethnicity, in the sense of a highly self-conscious opposition to the dominant Chinese state and society and a heightened concern with group survival. Beginning from the late 1970s, numerous works of art and literature have been produced that express strong ethnic sentiments, the majority of these being in Mongolian. They are characterized by invocations of a proud past represented by Chinggis Khan and resistance against sinification by turning those weakening markers (dress, language, foods and drinks, dwelling style, traditional mode of

[30] A "ten percent sampling census" of Inner Mongolia in 1982 shows 15 percent of the 86,127 Mongols with spouses are married to non-Mongols, of which 95.89 percent are Han Chinese (Song 1987, 372).

subsistence, etc.) into potent symbols. In 1981, the movement culminated in a massive student protest that lasted about a month.[31] What is interesting about this ethnic revival movement as it relates to our discussion here is its exclusive emphasis on the image of pastoralism as a rallying point and as the essence of being Mongol. A telling example of this symbolic discourse is a late 1980s hit song, "I Am a Mongol." What is being a Mongol? The song's answer is, "Born in a herder's yurt with dung smoke rising from it—that is a Mongol person: a human being who loves his native land" (Tenggri 1989). Examples of such nature are numerous. The important point is that they all show an attempt to assert a universal(izing) pastoral identity for the whole Mongol population of Inner Mongolia.

Adverse sociopolitical experiences and the threat of group extinction gave rise to ethnic resistance, while ethnic resistance demands foremost assertion of identity and reinforcement: this is a major constituent of the larger political-historical context that has paved the ground for the interrelated absence of the agriculturalist and the "synecdochic" dominance of the pastoralist in the public identity of today's Mongols in the PRC. For us, the yearning and option for the pastoral is not simply a result of some innocent romanticism or nostalgia for the idyllic. In our efforts to resist sociocultural subordination and assimilation, the imagery of pastoralism has inevitably become the most salient rallying point and identity marker because, as a mode of economy and way of life, pastoralism is not only the most effective distinguishing marker of opposition to Han Chinese, it is also intimately connected to the Mongols' proud past as a powerful nation that once ruled over the Middle Kingdom and beyond.

State, Ethnicity, and the Cultural Politics of Alterity

In the preceding section I examined the relevant sociopolitical processes that have created the imperative on the part of the Mongols to opt for and reinforce the pastoral as *the* symbol of Mongol identity in the latter half of the twentieth century. In the remaining pages I will show in further detail how, within the larger, historically informed sociopolitical environs discussed in the preceding sections, the symbolic death of the agricultural

[31] For a specific study of the student movement in question, see Jankowiak (1988); for more detailed discussion and examples of Mongol ethnic revival movements, see Khan (1991, 1995) and Borchigud (1995).

Mongol and the rebirth and omnipotent presence of the pastoralist are realized through the workings of a complex web of social, political, and cultural relations steeped in a hierarchy of identity and alterity and channeled through a set of signs with differing significance to the different parties involved.

According to Taussig (1993, 144), who evokes David Stout, the "cultural politics of alterity" should be seen as composed not simply of a one-on-one interaction between parallel couplets (Mongols versus Han, etc.), but as a "hierarchy of alterities within a colonial mosaic of attractions and repulsions, in which some alters exert positive, and others, negative charges."[32] In other words, we may examine the central issues raised in this essay within the framework of alterity and identity, Self and Other, at the same time situating these in the specific relations of power found in the context of today's Chinese modern(izing) nation-state. An idea of "contact continuum" (Taussig 1993, 144) characteristic of complex social interaction enables us to construct an analytical framework in which the interacting parties (the nation-state, the Han, the minority minzu and the subgroup or subgroups therein) are situated not only parallel to each other but also, and more often than not, along a continuum of interwoven power hierarchies worked out through the principles of alterity and identity and expressed via a web of significant signs.[33] With such a paradigm, we can now tackle in further depth and detail the problem why and how, in Inner Mongolia where the overall population is predominantly Chinese and agricultural, the imagery of the pastoral has dominated as *the* configurating element of Mongol public identity and, indeed, of regional identity as well. Let us again start by looking at the Chinese nation-state.

For the Chinese nation-state, the motivation in promoting the pastoral (or minzu traditions in general) lies above all in the state's long-term strategy of cultural politics, which can be characterized as identity through a neutralized alterity. The key to such an agenda is to objectify and neutralize difference and opposition by wrenching minzu traditions out of their meaningful and potentially dangerous (that is, in terms of ethnic politics) context and

[32] Here the term "alterity" is used to refer to the idea of difference and the opposition of Self and Other.

[33] Similarly, Tsing (1993) provides a sophisticated analysis of how, within the context of the Indonesian nation-state, the ethnicity of the marginalized Meratus has been shaped by the "contact continuum" formed among the Javanese, the Chinese Indonesians, the Banjars, and the Meratus themselves.

framing them within the state's dominant discourses and projects of modern nation building. As evidence, the state has, in the past four decades, sponsored campaigns to settle down the migratory pastoralists, to adopt modern science and technology in animal husbandry (*kexue yangxu*), to reform the Mongols' traditional antipathy toward commerce and the "backward" practice of spending money on religious donations rather than investing it in (re)production, and the like (for examples, see Tao 1990). Juxtaposed to such transformative campaigns, however, is a simultaneous effort to promote and develop "minzu tradition." Thus, since the late 1970s, we have seen an impressive flourishing of such examples of "minzu tradition" as singing and dancing, arts and crafts, dress, religion, festivals, and the like.

We see in these two seemingly mutually contradicting trends a process of achieving identity through neutralized alterity, or put differently, achieving the assimilation of the Other through neutralizing the *ethnic* oppositions embedded therein.[34] The "minzu traditions" thus promoted become little more than items displayed in the national cabinet of curiosities, deprived of their original empowering cultural core and cut off from their nurturing home base. The resultant "minzu tradition" is an invention, a classic case of the functional and semantic displacement that can happen to a sign.

In Inner Mongolia, examples of such neutralized alterity include the newly revived lamaist monasteries, which are in reality more like tourist attractions, staffed with aging monks who, on a monthly government payroll, are more like state cadres or, worse, part of the minzu items on display. Another, particularly revealing example of such cultural displacement is the 1991 Inner Mongolia Regionwide Naadam Fair, held in the capital city of Höhhot, where a mere 5 percent of the roughly one million inhabitants are (registered as) Mongols.[35] The goal of the fair, stated explicitly by the governor of the autonomous region (a Mongol who does not speak Mongolian), was "Wenti datai, jingji changxi" (Culture and sports construct the stage, while economy performs the drama) (Uyunchimeg et al. 1992, 80). What happened here

[34] Here I use the term "identity" to mean "identification of," "similarity," and "assimilation of."

[35] In the first half of 1982 alone, about 310,000 people changed their minzu registration to Mongolian (Song 1987, 342). Among these, 230,760 were formerly registered as Han (343).

was not only a physical dislocation of the traditional site—the grassland—but also a functional recoding of the *naadam* as a system of signs. Naadam, traditionally a local trade and entertainment fair, is now an event that signifies a striving toward modernization, one that represents an "active transaction between the past and future" (Spivak 1988, 198) in the agenda of the Chinese nation-state. The present, as well as the past, as represented to (and indeed thrust upon) the visitors and businessmen from other parts of China and other countries as well during the festival, was not surprisingly dominated by the imagery of the pastoral. "Minzu tradition" is thus not only modified or recodified, it is also commodified.[36] More specifically, the "positive charges" of the pastoral are harnessed and used to attract domestic and foreign investment in the drive toward modernizing Inner Mongolia.[37] After the end of the CR era, the state's need and tolerance for only neutralized alterity was again shown to the Mongols of Inner Mongolia when several young intellectuals were thrown into prison in 1991 on charges of "instigating separatist tendencies under the name of researching and promoting Mongolian traditional minzu culture." Another, almost absurd case happened during the Cultural Revolution and involved the statue of a galloping white horse on top of the Inner Mongolian Museum (in Höhhot). Having long served as an icon of the city, the statue was knocked down (as were the lamaseries in the Autonomous Region) on charges that the horse, galloping in the direction of the north, expressed a veiled wish that Inner Mongolia secede from the "motherland" to join Outer Mongolia. Such cases abound;[38] the

[36] Such phenomena of recodification and commodification of minzu tradition has also been going on in commercial tourism in Inner Mongolia. On the effects of tourism on minzu tradition and representation elsewhere in China, see Chao's essay and Cheung's essay in this volume.

[37] Another highly telling case of neutralized alterity is the naadam fair held annually by the Mongol residents of Beijing. Unlike naadam in Inner Mongolia, naadam in Beijing was granted legal status, and all the Mongols in Beijing get a day off work on that day. The reason the festival was allowed the status of a legal holiday is precisely the perception on the part of the state that, held in Beijing by some thousands of Mongol residents, naadam is not only nothing to worry about but also a convenient showcase of its "progressive" minzu policy. Tracing the evolution of *naadam* in both its meaning and function is one of my ongoing projects.

[38] Such incidences of suppression are also experienced by other non-Han minzu groups. Apart from the well-known Tibetan case, in Xinjiang in early 1990s, for example, a Uigur historian was incarcerated for publishing a history monograph that was regarded as having pan-Turkic tendencies.

message is clear: "minzu traditions" are allowed to "flourish" (*fan rong*) only as long as they are at the same time paradoxically *not* minzu traditions. The implication of such a cultural politics is obvious and worrisome to most non-Han intellectuals: the gradual, apparently unnoticed assimilation into the dominant population—from alterity to identity.

On the part of the Chinese general populace, the need for a pastoral Menggu (or, for that matter, an Other that is drastically different from Self), lies in their desire to be different in a way that ultimately suggests a superior Self. By fixing and promoting (Nei) Menggu as merely pastoral, they are in fact engaged in a process of "self-consolidating." The Mongols are and should be all that they (the Han) *think* they once were but have long since "developed" out of. The Mongols should handle animals, be dirty, and be *yumei* (unenlightened)—in stark contrast to the civilized and advanced Han nation.

It is no accident, then, that most Chinese tourists and business visitors coming back from an empowering trip to the grassland seem to gain a sense of pride, having been assured of the value of their Han identity. The manner in which I repeatedly observed many Han visitors interact with Mongol herders testifies to such an effect. During a reception in a yurt hosted by a local herding family, for example, it is common for a Chinese urban visitor to behave in a way that implies his sense of superiority: to order the host or hostess around for this and that, or, in a milder form, to express shock and dismay at the lack of adequate sanitary conditions, the lack of greens in the diet, and so on. Local urban Han, particularly, enjoy making excursions to *muqu* (pastoral areas) to take advantage of pastoralists' hospitality, such as in the form of a free meal and/or dairy foods.[39] In recent years, as state control over the print media has been relaxed, such popular ethnocentric and ethno-chauvinistic representations or creation of inferior Others is being formalized in popular literary productions.[40] It is

[39] This type of attitude seems to be more common among Chinese of Inner Mongolia—particularly those who are not first-time visitors to the pastoral areas. In a similar vein, a Chinese businesswoman comments on her impressions of Lhasa and the Tibetans: "Lhasa is one of the most interesting places I've been to in China. But I don't like the Tibetans. How can they be like that? So dirty, stupid; seeing them curled up or lying in street corners, you want to think they are just like the many stray dogs in the city" (dogs, of course, are not a flattering metaphor in Chinese).

[40] For example, the controversial short stories "Liangchu nide shetai kong dangdang" (Ma 1987) and "Xing fengsu" (Ke and Sang 1989), the novella *Yaoyuan de bai*

worth pointing out here that the need for such positive construction of the Chinese self in relation to domestic inferior Others has intensified in the past decade as China opens up more and more to the world to be confronted with what it calls "the world's advanced nations," a process that has resulted in a general self-negation and a sense of international inferiority—an acute identity crisis best demonstrated in the controversial *Heshang* (River elegy) discourse that signaled an end to the late-1980s cultural debates.[41] This international factor has added a greater significance to the symbolic role of the non-Han, "backward" minzu in China as a foil to the more "modern" and "advanced" Han Chinese national identity.

However, the need of the Han Chinese as a nation for a pastoral Menggu does not stop here. It is also the manifestation of a desire to achieve identity with the marvelous (in the sense of similarity to or identification with it)—a longing for what is missing in their own subjectivity (Greenblatt 1991, 82). After all, Mongols are excellent horse riders and (ex)warriors, a quality most admired and romanticized by a sedentary people. Expressions commonly used to describe Menggu ren (Mongolians) include *haofang* (broad-minded and uninhibited), *qiang zhuang* (robust and tough; they drink milk and eat meat every day), *yonggan* (brave), and *chunpu* (pure and simple). All are qualities admirable and yet perceived as lacking in the Chinese themselves.[42] Viewed in such light, the reason for the Chinese popular lack of interest in the imagery and, indeed, even the possibility of an agricultural Mongol becomes apparent. Not only do agriculturalists offer no "alters" or differences that "exert positive charges" as pastoralists do, they also, by contiguity with the Chinese peasantry, rank the lowest in the social hierarchy of China, a stigmatized element to be actively expelled from the Self. That they speak Mongolian becomes irrelevant in identity attribution. Thus, at the mentioning of agricultural Mongols, disappointed or discrediting remarks such as the following are often heard from Han visitors: "There's really nothing interesting about those Mongols—they have become just like us!" The irony in such remark is usually unnoticed. In short, the pastoral, together with other non-Han "living fossils" of China, has become for the Chinese nation-state and the Han populace something akin to a "marvelous possession"; in Greenblatt's words (1991, 22), it has become a "central feature in the whole complex system of representation, verbal and visual, philosophical and aesthetic, intellectual and emotional, through which people . . . apprehended, and hence possessed or discarded, the unfamiliar, the alien, and the hateful."

In this alterity-identity, Self-Other relationship Mongol intellectuals have played a crucial role. Within "intellectuals" (*zhishifenzi*) I include college students, professors, science workers, artists, fiction writers, journalists, publishers, editors, government cadres, and the like. It is important to emphasize the role of these people because, in addition to their ideological and organizational capacity and their access to officialdom and the tools of mass communication, they make up a significant 13.04 percent of the total Mongol population.[43] Many of them are able to work within the official minzu discourse and practice and use mass media in trying to express ethnic sentiments and assert their group identity (e.g., the scholar Muu Nohoi, who specializes in Marxist-Leninist minzu theories). In interacting with the Chinese nation-state, the Chinese general populace, the pastoral Mongols, and the farming Mongols, the Mongol intellectuals occupy a key position of danger, ambivalence, and limited yet significant sociocultural capacity—a situation common among intellectuals of many non-Han minzu in China.[44] They dance carefully between identity and alterity. They may be accused of being "minzu traitors" by their own com-

fangzi (Gao 1987), and *Strange Tales from Strange Lands*, a collection of short stories by Zheng Wanlong (see Louie 1992).

[41] This identity crisis, which can be be read on both the national and individual levels, is by no means a new phenomenon but the continuation of a process that has been going on since late in the last century.

[42] Such masculinized Other is by no means limited to the Mongols; other such non-Han groups may include the Yi as studied by Harrell, the Uighurs and other Turkic minorities, the Tibetans, the hunting/herding peoples of Orqin and Ewenki (Louie 1992), and some other "wild" non-Han mountain groups in southwest China. The same quest for the masculine was reflected also through the phenomenon of the "northwesterly winds" (*xibei feng*) in arts and literature in China in the later half of the 1980s, characterized by a longing for the untamed and rough. Such construction of a virile, robust Other that represents a lack and therefore a desire in the Han to be like such an Other, however, is carried out only to an effect that Han cultural superiority is retained and reassured. On this latter point I thank Jonathan Lipman for his instructive comments on an earlier draft of this present essay.

[43] In contrast, only 5.95 percent of the Inner Mongolian Han population are intellectuals (Song et al. 1987, 359).

[44] See also Upton (this volume) on the Tibetan intellectuals and Cheung (this volume) for the case of the Ge/Miao group. Lipman (forthcoming) presents an intriguing parallel case in which the Hui as a minzu group functioned as an ambivalent mediator between the Han and the Turkic peoples of Xinjiang.

patriots or "minzu split-ists" by the state. Their position is further complicated because they comprise people of several different backgrounds: pastoral, agricultural, and urban. As a group of individuals, they are acutely aware, through personal experiences, of both the stigma (cultural and ideological) and the attraction embedded in the imagery of the pastoral in relation to the state and the Han Other.

The attraction here can be read in multiple layers of significance and relationship. Neither pastoralism nor agriculturalism is inherently either unattractive or superior. The attractiveness of the pastoral is nothing essential; it is realized and motivated in a mutually defining Self-Other relationship informed by history and contemporary politics between the Mongols and the Han. As recently as about forty-six years ago, when Inner Mongolia was incorporated into the emerging PRC, agriculturalism was not perceived as negative by Mongol intellectuals of the time: the flag of the new autonomous government had on it both an *urga* (a Mongolian-style lasso) and a hoe.[45] And pastoralism was in fact considered by the pre-Communist Mongol intellectuals of the time as a "barrier to modern independence" and therefore something to be drastically reformed (Atwood 1992, 12). This positive attitude toward agriculture is also evidenced in the publication of a journal called *Mongol Peasants.* In short, it is the changes in the power relationship and the consequent dissolution of traditional structural boundaries between the Mongols and the Han in the PRC era, as delineated earlier, that have motivated the need, on the part of Mongol intellectuals, to attribute significant sociocultural values to the sign of the pastoral and attach "repulsion" to the figure of the peasant, a figure that traditionally signifies the Han, but that has now come to signify an alarmingly real possibility for the "disappearance" through wholesale sinification of the Mongols as a group.

The attraction to the pastoral by Mongol intellectuals and their active invocation of it is grounded in the same historical specificity. In contrast to the Chinese nation-state and the general populace, the signifying process of the sign of the pastoral versus the agricultural for Mongol intellectuals is more complex and problematic. First, Mongol intellectuals' embracing of the sign of

[45] An instructive case here is Outer Mongolia, where agriculture has been promoted by the government as part of its modernization project and apparently has had no negative symbolic value attached to it. See Jagchid (1988, 179).

the pastoral is nothing "innocent." For one thing, the value of the pastoral emanates from a relationship of negation and alterity: the pastoral signifies everything that is not Chinese and therefore is the best marker of group identity at a time of increased sinification. Second, put simply, it is attractive to Mongol intellectuals precisely because it is attractive to the dominant Han state and society. To actively promote the imagery of the pastoral in response to the desire of the Han Other is a way to situate the Mongols as a subject, a way of capturing the Other by reducing them to the position of a passive receiver—in short, it is an act of "co-operation that is also a co-optation" (Greenblatt 1991, 114). Yet the ambivalent and precarious position of the intellectuals becomes more obvious when they also feel compelled to advocate the collaboration of the minzu in complicity with the state's nation-building campaigns of minzu unity and modernization.[46] By acting from such a position, they indirectly take part in the construction of a neutralized Mongol alterity for the nation-state and a cultural garden for the desire of the general Han populace. This strategic and yet tragic positionality can be viewed as the result of an "epistemic violence" that "constituted/effaced a subject that was obliged to cathect (occupy in response to a desire) the space of the Imperialists' self-consolidating Other" (Spivak 1988, 209).[47]

The tragedy involved here is further manifested in the fact that, by embracing the pastoral, the non-pastoral-by-origin intellectuals, who constitute the majority of the intellectual elite, must go through a self-denial of sorts—negating what they are most familiar with and what they are sentimentally attached to and adopting a cultural/ideological identity more or less strange in its physical and cultural expressions. Many of them do not feel at home, for example, in donning the traditional deel or speaking in the standard dialect based on the pastoral speech. For urban-born

[46] Many of the more radical-thinking younger generation of the intellectual elite, for example, hold the bitter view that the elites of their parents' and grandparents' generations were or have been PRC collaborators who were/are responsible for bringing Inner Mongolia under the newly emergent PRC (for a historical study on the process of the incorporation of Inner Mongolia, see Atwood 1992) and for the subsequent rapid demise of the sociocultural strength of the Mongols as a people. In this view, Ulanfu, a Mongol Communist and the first governor of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, is one of the chief guilty culprits.

[47] By stressing the tragic position of the intellectuals, I do not mean to imply that the Mongol masses are better off.

intellectuals, particularly, embracing the pastoral comes as a sort of "Self-Othering." To begin with, they do not suffer as much from the stigmatized identity or the position of inferiority as the agriculturalist-intellectuals, pastoralist-intellectuals, and general Mongol populace often do; their urban background places them in every sense on a par with the Han Chinese in the social and political arenas, although it also means an inability to speak Mongolian, among other things. Their quest for the pastoral is thus manifested as a search for or a return to their ethnic *ündüs* (Mongolian for "root"), which is nevertheless a constructed identity rather than an essential or natural Self.

Thus, for both the agricultural- and urban-by-origin intellectuals, appropriating the sign of the pastoral can be viewed as an act of mimesis. Mimesis, according to Taussig (1993, 129), is a process that "registers both sameness and difference, of being alike, and of being Other.... All identity formation is engaged in this habitually bracing activity in which the issue is not so much staying the same, but maintaining sameness through alterity." Indeed, in the agenda of Mongol intellectuals, constructing Mongol identity in relation to the figure of the pastoral is (as it is with the Han) maintaining sameness through alterity. In other words, for them, to uphold the pastoral is to maintain and strengthen Mongol identity through highlighting the alterity of the Other (i.e., Han Chinese [agri]cultural tradition and its embodiment and representative, the Chinese state); for the Chinese, to do so is to maintain and consolidate Self (modern, advanced, intelligent, etc.) through the symbolic and complementary opposition of the pastoral Other.

Spivak (1991) argues that in a colonial context the subaltern class has no ability to represent or express itself. Viewed in such a light, the agricultural Mongols of rural Inner Mongolia are a sub-subaltern group with a doubled impotence in self-representation. Their lack of public identity and of capacity for self-representation is informed and determined by the larger context of power relations expressed as a hierarchy of alterities. In this hierarchy, the agricultural Mongol is at the bottom, just below the Chinese agriculturalist, for even though Han peasants are ranked at the bottom of Chinese society, they are regarded as superior to Mongol agriculturalists. Thus, agricultural Mongols suffer a multiple stigma: from Chinese elites and urbanites (who traditionally belittle peasants), from the Chinese peasants themselves (who consider themselves more advanced technologically

and as belonging to a more superior minzu), and from their own compatriots in different socioeconomic occupations.

The ordinary farming Mongols, as in the village of Bayanhad where I worked, have no collective voice of their own. They occasionally wonder why among the numerous movies, story books, and pictorials there is nothing about *zhuanja hün* (local term for "farmer"), why there has never been anything on television catering to their particular interests and needs as farmers, and why there are no programs broadcast in their dialect so they can easily understand what is being discussed. Their experiences with urbanites and Chinese farmers and their awareness of their own symbolic absence have made them keenly aware of their marginal position in the larger society:

> "We speak a nothing language. It's got *Irgen üg* [local expression for "Chinese words"] as half of its vocabulary but is not Chinese because no *Irgenhün* [Chinese person] can understand it; it's not Mongolian either, because it's not understood by people of *Monggol gajir* [lit. "Mongolian area"]. People call it *sheheyu*,[48] you know. We can't speak in *chol* [pure] Mongolian; neither can we speak Chinese. The pastoralists call us *Odang Monggol* [lit. "short Mongols"] because we don't wear the long deel, and they make fun of our speech saying it's not real Mongolian. We farmers are really the lowest—just a little above the animals we use in the fields." (from my field notes)

A closer look into the above discourse reveals several interesting points. First, the common use of the term "Monggol gajir" by Mongols in agricultural regions in referring to pastoral areas indicates a negation of their own native places as not being Mongolian, even though there has not been significant Chinese presence in the Hinggan region for long (sixty to seventy years) and despite the fact that today it is still one of the most heavily Mongol-populated areas of Inner Mongolia (30 percent of the aimag total). The village of Bayanhad, for example, has only three or four Chinese households out of the 160 total. By contrast, the neighboring Hülünbür Aimag, called Monggol gajir by the villagers and

[48] This is a phrase that I heard repeatedly from the villagers who, visibly embarrassed, talk about their dialect in a self-mocking manner. The Chinese original, *xieheyu* (lit. "harmony language"), dates back to the Manchuguo period when Japanese was made an obligatory course in schools and dubbed as the "language of harmony" between the Japanese and the populations of the occupied territory. Given the term's less than positive origin, we cannot help wondering if the villagers are making a political statement by using the term.

where some of them have relatives, has a Mongol population that makes up only 5.56 percent (Song et al. 1987, 351) of the aimag total of 2,293,716 (1982 census). The difference is that almost all the rural Mongols of Hülünbür engage in animal husbandry. In short, the villagers' perception of their region as non-Mongol suggests that to them, to be a Mongol place means to be *maljih oron* (a standard term for "pastoral area"). By the same implication, they are themselves Mongols living in a Chinese area leading a Chinese way of life.

Second, the above quote also reveals the by now well established mutual stereotyping between the agricultural and the pastoral Mongols. The image and appellation "Odang Monggol" is only one such example. In general, the pastoralists regard the agriculturalists as having become like the Khyatad (standard Mongolian for "Han Chinese"). The half-jesting declaration "Humans eat meat, animals eat grass [vegetation in general]" is often used by the pastoralist to comment in contempt on the agricultural way of life. In the mind of the pastoralist, agricultural Mongols, like the Khyatad, are manipulative, untrustworthy, cowardly, and narrowminded. The agriculturalists view the pastoralists as simpleminded, less civil, and ignorant, but admire them for their free and less strenuous life. Such internal polemics, however, are usually localized and do not enter the general philosophical discourses over Mongol group identity in the national public space—thereby providing further proof of the lack of ability for self-representation on the part of the average Mongols.[49]

In short, it is their specific position in the hierarchy of alterities, rather than any supposedly inferior essence embedded in an agricultural and therefore Chinese way of life, that has made it impossible for Mongol agriculturalists to be included in the configuration of Mongol identity as presented to the national and international public cultural space. As long as the present power relations and cultural politics in China stay the way they are, agricultural Mongols will remain to the external world an anonymous sector of the Mongol population of Inner Mongolia: despite their demographic and economic weight, they have no (positive) symbolic values to offer to the nation-state, the Han Chinese, or the Mongols as a whole.[50]

[49] Space limitations prevent a detailed discussion on this topic.

[50] This is not to say, though, that they are forgotten or denied by the other sectors of the Mongol population. The Mongols themselves know and accept the agriculturalist Mongol. Only when it comes to Mongol identity as represented and

After this examination of the seemingly petrified figure of the pastoral and the spatialized story of Menggu as it has been invented and reinvented in China and of how this tenuous construct has lasted into the late twentieth century, it should be evident that what is at issue here is not whether the pastoral Menggu is a real or an "imagined community."[51] Rather, as a semiotic Object, the being of pastoral Menggu is clothed in layers of signifiers; it "betokens not material existence... but a circulation of signs that makes material existence meaningful, comprehensible, resonant" (Greenblatt 1991, 36). In other words, what is at issue here is more the simultaneous, imagined nonexistence of a (sub)group whose strong physical existence has nevertheless failed to ensure them a share in the overall identity of the larger group as displayed to the national and international public, on the one hand, and the constructed existence of a pastoral (Nei)Menggu, on the other. The idea of the pastoral resulting from this dissonance serves as an object of both wonder and contempt for the Chinese populace, providing as it does a showcase of successful ethnic policy and a model of "minzu tradition" and thereby an economic resource for the Chinese nation-state and a symbol of resistance for the ethnicity-minded Mongols. The symbolic death of the agriculturalist is made possible and necessary by the specific sociohistorical and political context in which the Mongols have found themselves in the past century—a context that has injected into the figure of the agriculturalist new but negative significance. And here, the important task for us (native) anthropologists is not so much to verify the authenticity of the pastoral image/identity but to disrupt the seemingly smooth, unproblematic surface of the identity of today's Mongols to expose a history of social disintegration and individual-personal losses—a painful history that has been easily glossed over under the cozy images of flowery grasslands and exotic horse riders. In this sense, the pastoral (Nei) Menggu remains a strategically important "imagined community," and the identity of the Mongolian minzu as a whole

presented to the external is the figure of the agriculturalist resolutely erased in favor of the construction of a "unified purposeful subjectivity" (Gunew 1993, 103).

[51] After all, Inner Mongolia boasts the best and largest pastureland of China, totaling 880,000 square kilometers (74 percent of the total area of Inner Mongolia). Of that, 67 percent is found in the region's "pastoral areas" (Shi et al. 1989, 5–6).

remains problematic, its topography and meaning constantly shaped by the evolving webs of relationships.

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