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The Dialectics of Colonization and Ethnicity Building

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Chinese minority policies emphasized assimilation during the 1960s and 1970s, but it is often debated whether China still openly practices such a policy today. Has the Chinese regime given up its ambition to assimilate its minorities and moved toward more tolerance and democracy in governing them, or has it simply adjusted its strategy to ensure its own survival? The question of whether China is a *minzu* (ethnic group) builder or a *minzu* destroyer is an important one because it has implications for assessing China's human-rights record. Because some minority ethnic groups in China, such as the Hui, the Zhuang, and others, were creations of the Chinese state, one is reluctant to consider any nationalist resurgence among them as a human-rights issue.¹ Indeed, this is the case with the Western attitude toward ethnic issues in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

Inner Mongolia presents a paradox for understanding contemporary ethnic politics in China. Unlike the Tibetans and the Uygurs, whose ethnic nationalist movements have attracted great attention and invited speculation about an ethnic challenge to the Communist regime, thus anticipating a Soviet-style scenario of national disintegration, the Mongols apparently exhibit no such independent spirit. There is a great disjuncture between the historical image of the Mongols as some of the most ferocious conquerors the world has ever seen and their current "peacefulness" or "sheepishness." Despite its link with the Republic of Mongolia, Inner Mongolia seems to be a quiet backwater. The following passage is typical of many Western reports on Inner Mongolia. It expresses disappointment and perhaps still more, a search for hopeful signs of Mongol resistance to Chinese rule:

Inner Mongolia, a large Chinese region southeast of Mongolia, has only a minority population of ethnic Mongolians. A small number have expressed ambitions to reunite the Chinese-controlled territory with Mongolia, which shed Communist rule and became

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a democracy in 1990. But there has been little sign of anti-Chinese unrest since the early years after the 1949 Communist takeover and the 1966–76 Cultural Revolution when dissent was crushed. Inner Mongolia has been less restive than Tibet and Xinjiang, western regions with strong movements seeking independence from Chinese rule. However, in late 1995, authorities in Inner Mongolia arrested 12 people who had demanded more democracy and greater autonomy. In December 1996, China jailed two Mongolians for up to 15 years on charges of separatism and espionage.²

The purpose of this chapter is not to portray Inner Mongolia as either pro-China or pro-Mongolia but rather to point out that the Chinese regime, which has granted unified autonomy to the Mongols, has also instituted various mechanisms to undermine the Mongols as a viable community. The Mongol ethnicity generated by these mechanisms is so perplexing that the Mongols aspire not only to maintain an ethnic political entity but also to live as normal citizens of the Chinese state. Furthermore, they simultaneously emphasize group cohesion and individualism. Contrary to the current dominant view that the Chinese regime is a builder of *minzu*, in fact, it builds in order to destroy.

MAPPING A MONGOLIAN AUTONOMY?

One looks in vain for Inner Mongolia on the map of the Republic of China in Taiwan. There, Inner Mongolia does not exist at all; rather, Outer Mongolia substitutes for Mongolia as a whole, and Inner Mongolia, along with Tibet, constitutes a special administrative zone under the Mongolian-Tibetan Affairs Commission.³ The map demonstrates the *raison d'être* for the beginning of Inner Mongolian nationalism in the early years of the twentieth century. Maps are emblematic of nationalism, for ultimately, the existence of a nation must be certified by occupying a space on the Earth, marked with a logo. The appearance of a regional-cum-ethnic entity named the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region on the map of the People's Republic of China has led to both an arduous struggle against colonial erasure and a continuing battle for the maintenance of Mongolian identity. However, the logocentric aspect of the map may be seriously at odds with what is hidden from its artistic surface; behind the Mongol place-names on the map are different realities.

The Qing conquest and division of Mongolia into Outer and Inner Mongolia is a familiar story. The disappearance of Inner Mongolia from

the Chinese map was indicative of a long process of interaction rather than a sudden takeover. In fact, so-called Inner Mongolia was never a "unified" administrative unit, even in the Qing, as was Outer Mongolia. By contrast, Outer Mongolia gradually began to attain a unified identity thanks not only to its having a more homogeneous population based on the Han and a unified Buddhist church (since the seventeenth century) under the various incarnations of Jetsundamba Hutagt but more importantly to the objectifying effect of the Qing administration.⁴ On the other hand, Inner Mongolia was fragmented into various mutually exclusive leagues and banners directly controlled by the Qing court. Instead of allowing a native unified church that would serve as the focal point for all the Mongols in Inner Mongolia, the Qing court controlled the Buddhist churches directly by placing them under the Jangjiya Hutagt, the imperial teacher. After two and a half centuries of stringent divide-and-rule policies that not only imbued each Mongol banner with a territorial location in which Mongols exercised a high degree of autonomy but also made Mongols pledge fealty to the Qing,⁵ various Inner Mongolian banners began to bear the brunt of unrestrained Chinese migration as the Manchus identified more closely with Chinese interests. A new style of colonization was initiated in 1902 to officially reclaim Inner Mongolian pastures for agricultural development in order to raise funds that the Qing could use to pay for the Boxer Indemnity. This pitted the Mongols against both the Qing and the Chinese, as Mongols could no longer control the land, nor could they tax the incoming Chinese settlers. The wave of Chinese migration provoked a host of Mongolian rebellions, some led by banner princes, culminating in the massive but unsuccessful attempt of the Inner Mongolian princes to join the independence movement initiated by Outer Mongolia in 1911.⁶ However, this did not prevent some Mongol aristocrats from selling land to Chinese. Their loss of salary following the demise of the Qing, together with their need to pay for the modern amenities they enjoyed in Beijing and other cities, required their finding a source of extra income. As a result, popular Mongol nationalism targeted two enemies: externally, land-grabbing Chinese, and internally, land-selling Mongol aristocrats.

One of the first signs of Inner Mongolia's incorporation into Republican China was the setting up of Chinese administrations on Mongol territories. As early as 1914, the three Chinese "special administrative zones" of Suiyuan, Chahar, and Rehe were created in the central part of Inner Mongolia, areas with high concentrations of Chinese settlers. By 1928, after Chiang Kai-shek "unified" China, the three special administrative

zones were dissolved, their western parts apportioned to Gansu and Ningxia and their eastern parts to Fengtian, Jilin, and Heilongjiang Provinces, thus completing the Chinese administrative colonization of Inner Mongolia and erasing Inner Mongolia completely from the map of the Republic of China. The precise number of Chinese in Inner Mongolia in the early nineteenth century is difficult to gauge but may have been approximately 1,000,000. In 1912, it exceeded 1,500,000, and in 1937, there were over 3,000,000 Chinese in the former Inner Mongolia. In comparison, there were more than 1,000,000 Mongols in Inner Mongolia at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but by 1912, their number had declined to 877,946. By 1937, they had further dwindled to 864,429 because of wars and venereal diseases.⁷

The Chinese colonization of Inner Mongolia had many of the characteristics of the American opening up of the native Indian frontiers, though it less frequently involved either ethnic cleansing or genocide. The reclaimed "wasteland" (pasture) was settled by Chinese farmers, who were administered by specially established county governments. The counties soon expanded, separating banners and leagues from each other. For instance, Linxi, Lindong, and Jingpeng Counties effectively divided Inner Mongolia down the middle, into western and eastern parts. Kailu and Lubei Counties were wedged between Jirim and Jo'uda Leagues, Wuchuan County separated Tumed Banner from Da Muminggan and Durben Huhed Banners, and the Hourao region (north of the Yellow River) formed a buffer between Yekeju and Ulaanchab Leagues.⁸ Moreover, many historic monastic centers were inundated with Chinese settlers, and they became "towns" or "cities," thus rapidly transforming the political, economic, and cultural landscape of Inner Mongolia. This reflected increasing demographic disparity. Thus, by 1947, the Chinese had become the overwhelming majority, constituting over 85 percent of the total population of 5,617,000 people. Mongols numbered only 832,000.⁹

The establishment of the provincial administration and the abolition of the banner and league systems were predicated on the principle that the Mongol system was anachronistic and feudal and hence should be eliminated. In destroying Mongolian "feudalism," Chinese republican revolutionaries may have thought they were doing the Mongols a service, but it provoked violent resistance, not only from Mongol aristocrats but also from Mongol intellectuals, who vowed to defend Mongolian "autonomy" or achieve "independence," redefining Manchu-imposed institutions as "Mongol." This was ironic, for Mongol nationalism was also "democratic" and "progressive" in character and aimed to modernize the "feudal" char-

acteristics of Mongol life. The Chinese assault on the Mongols put on hold the internal reform by Mongol nationalists; the priority of the nationalist imperative demanded abolition of the Chinese provincial establishment, defining it as colonialism. What can therefore be said is that Inner Mongolia, which was the creation of a Manchu colonial administration that separated it from Outer Mongolia and colonized it and which was targeted for destruction by Mongol nationalists seeking reunification with Outer Mongolia, took on a life of its own precisely because of the Chinese colonial onslaught. Inner Mongolian nationalism was thus energized, and its ultimate objective was "restoration" of lost Mongol territory.

Mongol nationalist movements can be divided into three periods: 1911–1913, 1925–1929, and 1931–1947. Briefly, 1911–1913 saw a pan-Mongolian movement, led by Mongol nobles, to reunite Inner Mongolia with Outer Mongolia. The increasingly sedentary habits of the population facilitated the growth of this movement, as nationalist leaders capitalized on the fixed presence of larger numbers of people. In 1925, an Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party demanding independence for Inner Mongolia was launched under the influence of the third Communist International (Comintern). Though based, unwittingly, on the Manchu and, later, Chinese colonization efforts, this was the first "Inner Mongolian" institution, but it proved to be short lived.¹⁰ The Japanese occupation of Manchuria and eastern Inner Mongolia turned out to be more significant for Inner Mongolian nationalism. For some Mongols, desperate to escape Chinese colonization, Japan was a necessary evil. Conversely, the Japanese cultivated the Mongols' anti-Chinese nationalism but fell short of supporting them wholeheartedly.

This third period requires more elaboration to illustrate Inner Mongolian territorial nationalism. Three nationalist groups were active during this period; differences notwithstanding, they were unified in their common goal of removing Inner Mongolia from Chinese provincial administration. The most important group was led by Prince Demchugdongrob,¹¹ who initiated an autonomous movement as early as 1931 in the Silingol region, in response to the establishment of the provincial administrations. Demchugdongrob was increasingly drawn to the Japanese, whom he hoped to use to curb Chinese colonization. However, the Japanese defeat in 1945 deprived him of his political legitimacy.

The Mongols in Manchukuo did not have a leader like Demchugdongrob, but they proved to be politically savvy after the war. One can say that Manchukuo played an important role in creating an "eastern Mongolian" identity, thanks to the Mongols' common experience of colo-

nization and unified administration. Moreover, the military organization of the Mongolian Hingan Army in Manchukuo provided the Mongols with an organizational structure. After a failed attempt at unification with the newly independent Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) in late 1945, the eastern Mongols organized an Eastern Mongolian Autonomous Government in early 1946, a force that had to be reckoned with by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang, or KMT).

There was also an active resistance force consisting mostly of Communist Tumed Mongols led by Ulanhu. The Tumed, a numerically insignificant Mongol group that had played a prominent role in supporting the Dalai Lama in Tibet, had once occupied the most fertile ground in Inner Mongolia. However, by the early twentieth century, the Tumed were largely Chinese speakers because of massive Chinese migration into their region starting as early as the late eighteenth century. Nonetheless, many became staunch Communists, fighting not only the Chinese Nationalists, but also the Japanese.

When the CCP and its Red Army moved to northern Shaanxi, which borders on the Ordos region of Inner Mongolia, in late 1935, the Mongols became strategically important to the very survival of the Chinese Communists. Desperate to win over the Mongols, Mao made a historic declaration in December 1935 in which he promised to return Inner Mongolia to the Mongols and called upon them to join in the common struggle against both the Japanese and the Chinese Nationalists.¹² It was this statement that persuaded Ulanhu and his Tumed cohorts to move to the Communist base in Yan'an in 1941; by 1945, Ulanhu would emerge as an alternate member of the CCP Central Committee, the highest rank achieved by any minority in the Communist movement.

The establishment of the pro-independence Eastern Mongolian Autonomous Government and the KMT's occupation of Manchuria after the Anti-Japanese War were important considerations in the CCP's ultimate decision to support Inner Mongolian autonomy. An autonomous Inner Mongolia, it was reasoned, would fight to defend itself from KMT penetration. Though motivated by strategy rather than by unconditional support for Mongolian autonomy, the CCP sent Ulanhu and Mongol Party members to eastern Mongolia, where they successfully founded an Inner Mongolian Autonomous Government in May 1947. Based on the territorial jurisdiction of the Eastern Mongolian Autonomous Government, its capital was Wangiin Sume, now called Ulaanhot.

The CCP support for Mongolian autonomy was attractive to the Mon-

gols, especially when the eastern Mongolian quest for unification with the MPR was rejected and when the Eastern Mongolian Autonomous Government was threatened by the Chinese Nationalists. It was attractive also because the CCP supported Inner Mongolian autonomy, which, though short of complete independence or unification with Mongolia, was predicated on the future unification of fragmented Inner Mongolia. Surely the Mongols were intoxicated by the prospect of eastern and western Mongolian unification, but few predicted what kind of autonomy it would be under the Chinese Communist leadership.

The Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region was a product of the Chinese Communist need for Mongol support in the Civil War rather than simply an example of Chinese Communist support for Mongol "nationalism"; the Chinese Communists did not promote or create Mongolian nationalism.

REMAPPING INNER MONGOLIAN AUTONOMY

Did the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region encourage a sense of separate nationhood for Mongols or did it in fact contribute to the integration of Mongols into the Chinese state? This question echoes recent debates among Sovietologists regarding the effect of the Soviet nationality policy in destroying the Soviet Union. Yuri Slezkine, for instance, blamed Soviet policy and what he calls "compensatory 'nation-building'" for fostering the localism and nationalism that eventually brought down the Soviet Union.¹³ Francine Hirsch, on the other hand, argues that for Soviet policymakers, colonization and "making nations" went hand in hand, through a process of what she calls "double assimilation"—the assimilation of diverse peoples into official nationality categories and the assimilation of nationally categorized groups into a unified political, economic, and ideological whole. This is a participatory process: "As new dominant nationalities and national minorities used a common vocabulary and standardized administrative procedures to fight for resources and assert their rights, they also become increasingly anchored in the Soviet state and society."¹⁴

The territorial-administrative demarcation of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region resulted in the Mongols becoming increasingly integrated into the Chinese state. Ironically, it was their ambition to "recover" Inner Mongolian territory that resulted in closer integration. The Mongols have not been able to solve the demographic imbalance within Inner Mongolia. From the outset, when the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Gov-

ernment was founded with the support of the CCP, Mongol nationalism was curtailed by the class-nation concept, in which the Chinese peasants were rendered class victims of the KMT and thus could not be treated as colonialists. Therefore, the Mongol efforts to recover lost territory and dismantle the Chinese provincial administration did not result in a Mongol majority within the autonomous territory, nor did it result in the expulsion of the Chinese migrants, who by 1949 numbered more than 4,000,000. On the contrary, the more territory the Mongols recovered, the more Chinese were incorporated into Inner Mongolia.¹⁵

The Inner Mongolian Autonomous Government began its westward expansion from eastern Mongolia as soon as the People's Republic of China was proclaimed. In 1949, Jirim League of Liaobei Province and Jo'uda League of Rehe Province were incorporated into Inner Mongolia, and the Inner Mongolian government moved from Ulaanhot to Zhangjiakou, the capital of Chahar Province. In 1952, three ethnically mixed counties were incorporated into the autonomous region when Chahar was dissolved. However, it proved difficult to move further west into Suiyuan Province. Suiyuan, an overwhelmingly Chinese province, had two prefectural-level autonomous Mongol regions, Yekeju and Ulaanchab. Since the Chinese leaders of Suiyuan were mostly locals, who had strong ethnic prejudices, conceding to Mongolian power was an affront to them. For Ulanhu, this constituted at best a partial success; his homeland Tumed region, located in the center of Suiyuan, was precisely the area that had been most colonized by Chinese. Determined to reclaim his homeland for the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, he moved the Inner Mongolian government seat to Guisui (renamed Hohhot in 1954) in 1952. Only through a protracted negotiation and because he feared Mongol discontent during the Korean War did Mao personally intervene on behalf of Ulanhu. However, the so-called autonomy of Inner Mongolia was compromised by mutual concessions—in a schema called the "two doors" by Mao, Suiyuan was persuaded to open its door to the Mongols, and the Mongols agreed to allow the Chinese to stay in an enlarged Inner Mongolia. In 1956, the two westernmost Mongolian banners in Gansu Province were also incorporated into the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. In the same year, six banners and counties, including Chifeng, which was previously part of Rehe Province, were taken over by Inner Mongolia. At long last, an Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region took the shape that we know today; however, some large chunks of Mongol land were lost to neighboring provinces, though in some cases, they were organized as Mongolian autonomous counties.¹⁶

This territorial expansion increased the existing demographic disparity between Mongols and Chinese, causing further unforeseen problems for the Mongols in terms of their cultural survival. Particularly problematic for many was the choice of Hohhot as the capital of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. Hohhot, once a monastic center, became a Chinese trading town at the beginning of the nineteenth century. With few Mongol residents in and around the city, and with no Mongolian ethnic "enclave," the Mongol administrators who were newly arrived from eastern Mongolia and who had been recruited from pastoral areas were dispersed in various residential units throughout the city, together with members of their work units; there, they comprised a minority. Within a few years, the children of Mongol cadres lost their Mongolian language, and thus began a voluntary assimilation process.¹⁷ The same thing happened in lower-level league and banner centers.

The territorial expansion of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region was soon accompanied by a severe reduction in autonomous rights as the Party's program of land reform, agricultural collectivization, and nationalization of industry proceeded throughout China. A massive influx of Chinese migrants arrived in Inner Mongolia; they came as a result of land reform and collectivization, as well as the transfer to Inner Mongolia of large- and medium-size factories from coastal and inland China. Inner Mongolia was a favored spot for Soviet aid, especially in the building of heavy-industrial plants, and the new plants were mainly staffed by an influx of workers from north and northeast China. The implications were profound for the creation of a Mongolian working class, so much desired by Mongols as a sign of socialist modernity. Between 1950 and 1957, 1,536,100 Chinese migrated into Inner Mongolia. An additional 1,926,600 Chinese moved in between 1958 and 1960 as a result of famine.¹⁸ More pastures were reclaimed for agriculture during this period than at any other previous time.

Faced with the loss of a wide range of autonomous rights so recently won or promised, Mongol cadres and intellectuals began to call for implementation of autonomous rights, the right of equality, and so on. But these demands were rebuffed by the Party in 1957-58 in the Antirightist movement that followed the Hundred Flowers campaign, in which many Mongol intellectuals were labeled "ethnic rightists" (*minzu youpai*). The increasing demand for autonomy coincided with the escalating tension between China and the Soviet Union in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Soon, Inner Mongolia was at the forefront of border clashes between China and the Soviet Union (and its ally, the MPR). The historical association

between Inner Mongolian Communists and the Soviet Union and Mongolia, hitherto the Mongolians' strategic credential in obtaining autonomous rights, now became a liability. Mongols were forced to choose either to unequivocally support Chinese national unity, a route that would require the drastic reduction of Mongol autonomous rights, or to insist on ethnic difference to resist Chinese state penetration, thereby risking Chinese repression. Ulanhu and his Mongol supporters chose the latter and were thus accused of siding with the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People's Republic in their confrontation with China. Their demand for autonomy was then attacked as treasonous to China and as undermining Chinese national unity. Chinese officials accused Mongols, especially Mongol Communist officials, of conspiring to create a pan-Mongolian state. More than twenty thousand Mongols were killed and more than three hundred thousand injured during the turmoil in Inner Mongolia from 1967 to 1969. This is by far the highest number of officially acknowledged casualties among any single ethnic group during the Cultural Revolution.¹⁹

In 1969, as Sino-Soviet tension escalated, the territory of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region was drastically reduced, and several leagues were turned over for administrative purposes to Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning, and Gansu Provinces and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. It was only in 1979 that these territories were returned to Inner Mongolia. But this territorial adjustment never resolved the demographic disparity. It remains an insoluble problem for the Mongols, who are today a small minority in their own homeland.

WHOSE AUTONOMY IN INNER MONGOLIA?

The post-Cultural Revolution era has seen Mongols playing a minor role in Inner Mongolian "autonomy." The irrelevance of the Mongols in the political domain may be observed in the changing ethnic composition of members of the Political Consultative Congress (PCC). The PCC is part of the state's United Front apparatus, which encompasses non-Party elites, such as nobles and senior monks, as well as intellectuals. In recent years, however, it has become what one Mongol figuratively calls a "concentration camp" of discredited Mongol Communist officials. For instance, the chairman of the PCC is Qian Fengyun, a prominent Mongol who wielded considerable power in Inner Mongolia in the early 1980s before falling afoul of Zhou Hui, the Party secretary of Inner Mongolia, in 1981-82, when he refused to obey Zhou's order to punish Mongol stu-

dent-protest leaders. His deputy is another prominent Mongol leader whose opposition to attempts to divide the historic Ordos tribe and relocate its western banners to Wuhai, a coal-mining city, led to his "promotion" in the mid-1990s. In other words, if in the past, the Party treated the non-Party elites as United Front allies, today, they have placed their own Mongol Communist officials in such roles. As "traditional" Mongol elites decline in number, two groups staff the PCC: discredited Mongol officials and Chinese economic elites, who increasingly pursue political power to protect and promote their interests.²⁰

The most serious challenge to Mongol autonomy lies in the People's Congress of the autonomous region, the highest organ of self-government. While the Law on Regional National Autonomy stipulates that the chairman of the regional government must be a member of the titular nationality, Article 16 is ambiguous as to the ethnic identity of the chairman of the People's Congress: "Among the chairman and vice chairmen of the standing committee of the People's Congress of a national autonomous area shall be one or more citizens of the nationality exercising regional autonomy in the area." Given the fact that the People's Congress is the highest political organ exercising autonomous rights, the ambiguity opens the door for Chinese, as members of a nontitular nationality, to become chair of the People's Congress of the autonomous region. After two Mongols served as chairmen from 1982 to 1992, Wang Qun, a Chinese and the former Party secretary of Inner Mongolia, assumed the chairmanship. It has apparently become a rule for the Party secretary to be concurrently chair of the People's Congress. The incumbent Party secretary, Chu Bo, a Chinese from Anhui, succeeded Liu Mingzu, another Chinese, in December 2001 as Party secretary and in January 2003 as chairman of the People's Congress of Inner Mongolia.

Mongols do not even constitute the majority of the deputies of the People's Congress. According to a senior Mongol leader working in the People's Congress of Inner Mongolia, when Ting Mao, a Mongol, was the leader of the People's Congress (1982-1984), only 40 percent of the seats were held by Mongols, the highest number to date. Because Chinese form the majority in the People's Congress, it is not surprising that it has not drafted "regulations on the exercise of autonomy and separate regulations in light of the political, economic, and cultural characteristics of the nationality or nationalities in the areas concerned," as required by the Law on Regional National Autonomy. There have been no legally binding regulations defining the exercise of autonomy in Inner Mongolia, despite the efforts of two Mongol chairmen, Ting Mao and

Batubagan (1984-1992), who were known for their strong pro-Mongol sentiments.

We now see an interesting development in Inner Mongolia: the Mongols seek the rule of law while the Chinese emphasize majoritarian "democracy." As more Chinese are represented in the Party Committee, the government, the People's Congress, and the PCC, the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region becomes increasingly a misnomer. The autonomous region now emphasizes "region" as opposed to "ethnicity." In a recent major policy-oriented publication, Beijing-based sociologist Ma Rong and anthropologist Zhou Xin redefined the relationship between autonomous regions and the state this way:

The great majority of the "minority group regions" or "ethnic regions" are in actual fact multiethnic regions par excellence; ethnic regional autonomy is not an ethnic autonomy separate from the designated territory, rather it is an ethnic regional autonomy that takes account of the interests of both the self-governing ethnicity within the autonomous region and all other non-self-governing ethnicities within the autonomous region. Those ideas that aim to establish independent ethnic "economic" or "political" systems not only misunderstand ethnic regional autonomy but are also ignorant of the basic condition of China. The unhealthy trend that exists today, that is, understanding ethnic autonomy to mean, or mainly to mean, the ratio of cadre allocation or positions, is good neither for the healthy growth of minority cadres nor for the unity between self-governing ethnicities and non-self-governing ethnicities in an ethnic autonomous area.²¹

MANAGING MONGOLIAN OFFICIALS

In June 2000, learning that Deng Nan, the daughter of the late Deng Xiaoping, would arrive in Silingol League with funds to invest to "cure" the desert that had been caused by overgrazing, Yun Bulong, the chairman of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, drove to meet her. But on the way, a local train rammed into his car, and he was killed. This immediately posed a problem for the political succession in Inner Mongolia. Seeking to balance Chinese and Mongol interests, the central government took more than two months to appoint an acting chairman.

The first reaction to Yun's death was disbelief. Various political jokes and stories circulated.²² His death seemed to have surprised even central leaders such as Premier Zhu Rongji. Zhu was known to have angrily

remarked that this was unprecedented in Chinese history (*kuanggu qiwen*). People interpreted this as Zhu merely expressing his alarm at the poor security protection of even a provincial-level leader. But his concern went further: Yun's untimely death had caught the central government unprepared. Since he was halfway through his five-year tenure, the central government had not yet thought out his replacement. According to the Law on Regional National Autonomy, the successor had to be a Mongol. The real issue was that the central government had to determine from which Mongol tribal group the chairman should be picked.

Yun Bulong was a "western" Mongol, and his predecessor was an "eastern" Mongol, so the politics of tribal balance appeared to determine that his successor should be an "eastern" Mongol. However, since Yun had not completed his term, the possibility remained that a western Mongol could be appointed interim chairman until the formal reappointment of a chairman two years later. Various names were circulated. Some speculated that Baatar would be a strong candidate. The son of Jargal, a prominent eastern Mongolian leader, Baatar was a former chairman of the Inner Mongolian Youth League. Others insisted that Bayanchuluu, an Ordos Mongol, had a better chance. He was the first deputy chairman of the All China Youth League in Beijing. Talented and seen as having powerful connections with the central leadership, he seemed to have a strong chance. His only disadvantage was that he lacked leadership experience at the local level; but others insisted that experience is secondary and a political network is primary. Three more names were circulated. Bayin, an eastern Mongol who followed closely the Party line, was not known to be sympathetic to the Mongols. Wang Fengqi, another eastern Mongol, was the favorite choice for legalists because he was the Mongol vice-chairman next in rank to Yun Bulong; he was known to be intelligent and articulate. The third was Oyunchimeg, a woman and eastern Mongol, who was also a vice-chairman and was famous for propaganda work. No names of "western" Mongols were circulated.

The political division of "eastern" and "western" Mongols is a relatively recent configuration. The so-called western Mongols consist almost entirely of the Tumed Mongol Communists who came to political prominence in Yan'an during the Anti-Japanese War. The eastern Mongol leaders are Nationalists and Communists who were once colonial subjects under the Japanese in Manchukuo. These two Mongol political groups, together with the Chinese, constitute the three political factions in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region; they are united in some respects but also divided along ethnic and tribal lines. Mongols from other leagues

and banners have been marginalized because of their lack of Communist credentials. After the Cultural Revolution, the Ordos Mongols formed a third Mongol faction, though they have often been considered allies of the Tumed Mongols because of their geographical proximity.

This tribal and ethnic configuration could clearly be seen in the structure of the Inner Mongolian CCP Working Committee formed in May 1947. Ulanhu, the secretary and a Tumed Mongol, had a Chinese deputy, Liu Chun; in addition, the members of the Party Standing Committee were one eastern Mongol, one western (Tumed) Mongol, and two Chinese.²³ The tribal and ethnic balance was even clearer in the structure of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region People's Government formed in December 1949, a government not elected by people's deputies but appointed by the central government. The chairman of the government was Ulanhu, and the deputies were Hafenga, an eastern Mongol, and Yang Zhilin, a Chinese. This pattern continued to the eve of the Cultural Revolution.

For the first fifteen years of the autonomous region, the leadership position of the Party and the government were dominated by Communist veterans, appointed by the central government and reflecting their regional and ethnic origins. The small number of senior Tumed Mongols such as Ulanhu, Kuibi, and Biligbaatar were undisputed leaders because of their Communist credentials; so were Hafenga and other senior eastern Mongols such as Tomorbagan and Jargal, who played prominent roles in unifying eastern and western Inner Mongolia. Yang Zhilin and Su Qianyi, two senior Chinese Communists, were leaders of Suiyuan Province. This triangular balance began to crumble in the early 1960s. As a result of the Socialist Education campaign, class factors assumed increasing importance in one's political career. Up to 1964-65, Ulanhu, in his effort to maintain Mongol supremacy in Inner Mongolia, had relied on many young eastern Mongol Communists, who were far better educated under Japanese rule than the majority of the Tumed Mongols, many of whom, except for some senior leaders, such as Ulanhu, Kuibi, and Biligbaatar, had been trained in Yan'an. Moreover, the eastern Mongols, who spoke both Mongolian and Chinese fluently—some even spoke Japanese—were a formidable force; many were intellectually superior to their Chinese counterparts. The new class emphasis suddenly undermined their political credentials, however; their experience of having served in the Japanese-controlled Hingan Mongolian Army became a liability. Because of this, the junior Tumed Mongols, trained in Yan'an and, up to the early sixties, holding middle-ranking positions in the Party and government,

began to be promoted. As a result of Ulanhu's new maneuver to strengthen his own power base by building up trusted Tumed officials, many senior Chinese leaders, such as Su Qianyi and Yang Zhilin, were also removed from Inner Mongolia although they were given higher positions elsewhere.

In February 1966, in an administrative reshuffle to abolish various departments, Ulanhu formed five encompassing commissions, all headed by Tumed Mongols. A thirteen-member acting standing committee of the Inner Mongolia Communist Party formed in January 1966 (to strengthen Ulanhu's control of the increasingly volatile situation in Inner Mongolia) had seven Tumed Mongols, three eastern Mongols, and three Chinese. This effectively destroyed the ethnic and tribal balance among Communist leaders in Inner Mongolia. Ulanhu's installation of his Tumed Mongols in the face of increasing Chinese political penetration, together with the worsening international relations between China and the Soviet Union and its ally, the MPR, was resented by both eastern Mongols and Chinese and was considered a political coup d'état. The Cultural Revolution initially targeted the Tumed Mongols for their "tribalism" and "nationalism" and resulted in the permanent removal of Ulanhu from Inner Mongolia, but it soon turned toward uprooting an alleged Mongol conspiracy against China.

The legacy of the Cultural Revolution has been both negative and positive. Some of the *minzu* practices have been institutionalized. For one thing, the CCP has become a Chinese "colonial" institution, represented by a "Chinese" Party secretary appointed by the central government. Moreover, the position of the Organizational Department (Zuzhibu) of the Party Committee has been in the hands of Chinese since the Cultural Revolution. The sinicization of the Party institutionalized the subordination of and distrust toward ethnic minorities.

On a more positive side, Ulanhu, who was removed as Inner Mongolia's preeminent leader in 1966 and subsequently sent to Beijing, in the early 1980s, in his capacity as a vice-chairman of the National People's Congress, led a team to draft the Law on Regional National Autonomy. This was an effort toward constitutionalizing autonomy for minority ethnic groups. As far as Inner Mongolia was concerned, the law initiated sharp struggles over the nature of national autonomy.

According to the Law on Regional National Autonomy, the people's congresses and people's governments are "organs of self-government." Chapter 2, Article 17 stipulates that "the chairman of an autonomous region, the prefect of an autonomous prefecture, or the head of an autonomous county shall be a citizen of the nationality exercising regional

autonomy in the area concerned." One would have expected that, in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, Mongols would be more united than previously because of their common experience of persecution. They did attain a degree of internal unity, but only briefly. Rehabilitated Mongol leaders, with Ulanhu's support from Beijing, managed to reclaim the lost territories in 1979. But with the appointment of the chairman subject to manipulation by the central government, the historic eastern and western divide between the Mongols quickly deepened, with a devastating effect on Mongol unity. Buhe, the eldest son of Ulanhu, served as chairman from 1982 to 1992; he was succeeded by Ulji, an eastern Mongolian, who was followed by Yun Bulong. In August 2000, Yun was succeeded by Oyunchimeg.

What are the criteria used to select a specific candidate? None of the above-mentioned leaders was known to have been effective or decisive in leadership style. All were known for their obedience to the central government, if not for their lack of ability. The central government's repeated appointment of leaders who are popularly deemed weak reinforces the impression that Mongol leaders are genuinely of low quality because of their cultural upbringing, if not their genetic makeup. And since Mongols are perceived to be incapable of governing their autonomous region effectively, they deserve only to serve as symbols of autonomy, for which the quality of obedience is an asset. As a corollary, since the post-Mao priority in Inner Mongolia is economic development, "smarter" Chinese leaders have to be promoted. As a result, in the past decade, the vice-chairman who runs the day-to-day affairs of Inner Mongolia has been a Chinese; so has the vice-chairman in charge of finance and planning.

The Mongol officials' incapacity can be seen more clearly in contrast to Tibet. Tibetan officials have consolidated their power vis-à-vis the Chinese central government through upholding China's Law on Regional National Autonomy and manipulating China's morbid opposition to the Dalai Lama. They have successfully presented themselves as the only alternative to the Dalai Lama, a role that cannot be hijacked by Chinese cadres. This unique position enables them not only to protect some of the rights accorded to minority ethnic groups under China's laws but also to bargain for economic benefits from the central government.²⁴

Inner Mongolian officials had earlier played a similar role because of the geopolitical position of Inner Mongolia between China, the MPR, and the Soviet Union. Ulanhu's and other senior Mongols' special credentials as revolutionary veterans were important factors in their success in securing relative "autonomy" for the Mongols. However, this was a danger-

ous position, requiring careful management. Indeed, the Sino-Soviet rift ultimately deprived the Mongols of their political capital. As the Soviet Union and the MPR emerged as powerful enemies of China, the links between the Soviets and Inner Mongolian officials became a liability for the latter; they were perceived as a threat to the Chinese government. Since the Cultural Revolution, and with Ulanhu gone, the second generation of Mongol officials has not been able to influence the Soviet Union (or its successor, the Russian Republic) or the MPR (or its successor, the Republic of Mongolia). Moreover, the Mongolian "people," in general, have not been able to form any autonomous constituency outside of the state power and are in no position to put any pressure on Mongol officials.

The Chinese government employs Mongol officials whose main function is not to govern Inner Mongolia but to secure Mongol loyalty to the Chinese government and oppose any Mongol dissidence. Many Mongols, then, do not respect them. Because they do not command a constituency, Mongol officials face obstacles in bargaining with the Chinese state.

HOW SHOULD INNER MONGOLIA BE DEVELOPED?

The history of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region has been punctuated by a struggle on the part of the Mongols and their leaders against both agricultural expansion and the concurrent Chinese immigration. The emotion that pastoralism conjures up for Mongols derives from its importance as the quintessential historical cultural marker of Mongol-ness (as opposed to Chinese-ness, which is associated with agriculture). As one of the most important criteria in defining Mongolian ethnicity, pastoralism informs a Mongol sense of morality in resisting further attempts to introduce agriculture, despite or because of the fact that the majority of the Mongols in Inner Mongolia are already farmers.²⁵

The initial concession to the Mongol resistance to agriculture that resulted in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region was soon rescinded. Land reclamation in Inner Mongolia began in earnest in 1957 to produce grain for northern China. In 1958, without the approval of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, the Ministry of Land Reclamation pushed into Hulunbuir. By 1960, one million *mu*²⁶ of pasture had been reclaimed for agriculture; this was followed by massive Chinese immigration. Criticism of land reclamation became politically risky as Chinese took charge of frontier defense, which was aimed at the Soviet Union. In 1958, Mongols who opposed land reclamation were denounced as "ethnic rightists." By 1962, however, the escalation of border tension between Mongolia and

China led some Mongol herders who lacked pasture lands to flee to the Mongolian People's Republic; the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region then closed some of the newly opened fields and restored them to pasture. This Mongol resistance was suppressed, however, during the Cultural Revolution, when land reclamation resumed in earnest.

Chinese land reclamation was justified because the pastoral economy was considered to be of less significance than agriculture. Grassland, upon which Mongol herders made their living, was considered wasteland, subject to "development." The advancement of the Mongol ethnic group was deemed possible only by their adopting Chinese agriculture. In this pursuit for "modernization," the Chinese state not only legally and openly reclaimed pastureland but sent in millions of Chinese immigrants.

In the face of this new socialist drive, Mongol officials developed new strategies for defending their land and their ever-shrinking pastoral economy. First, they argued that pastoralism and agriculture were not two stages of social evolution; rather, they were complementary sectors of a national economy. Moreover, the kind of agriculture practiced by Chinese in Inner Mongolia was denounced as *younong*, or nomadic agriculture, a kind of slash-and-burn agriculture that moves to a new location whenever a field becomes infertile. *Younong* was considered an anomaly, in violation of the basic characteristic of agriculture, which, in the Mongol view, must be sedentary and intensive. Mongol officials did not support pastoralism for the Mongols alone; rather, they promoted it as a contribution to the Chinese national economy. They argued in environmental terms, attributing the worsening desertification in Inner Mongolia to agriculture. Most of the soil of Inner Mongolia is known to be unsuitable for agriculture; the thin topsoil, when exposed to wind, quickly turns to desert. The promotion of ecologically unsustainable agriculture at the cost of environmentally appropriate pastoralism was thus denounced as destructive of the Chinese national economy rather than the Mongol economy.

Second, a number of cultural initiatives were launched to improve the image of pastoralism in the early 1960s. Ushenju, a pastoral area of Ordos facing desertification, became the center of a model effort, led by a Mongol woman, Boroldoi, to grow shrubs to control the desert. Ushenju thus became the pastoral counterpart to the agricultural model Dazhai. In addition, two little sisters were crowned with heroic titles for saving the commune's flock of sheep by braving a blizzard.²⁷ A mobile cultural troupe was developed in the same period to propagate the socialist spirit, not only among dispersed herders but also in other parts of China. Pastoralism began to attain a new life as the ultimate cultural marker of Mongol

identity and a barometer to measure the degree of autonomy Mongols could exercise in their autonomous region.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, two Mongolian epic poems extolling the Mongol struggle against Chinese land grabbing in the 1920s and 1930s became popular. The historical events depicted in these poems—Sine Lama's Duguilong movement and Gada Meiren's anti-land grabbing struggle—must be appreciated not so much for themselves but for their ideological significance in presenting Mongol identity in class and ethnic terms. The story of Gada Meiren is particularly emblematic; a song about his struggle titled "Gada Meiren" has become the unofficial anthem of the Inner Mongolians. For a long time, the epics and the song were promoted to remind people not only of the "revolutionary" genesis of the Mongolian Communist struggle but also of the CCP's role in helping the Mongols to regain their land.

Because of this campaign, the pastoral areas of Inner Mongolia bore the brunt of the Cultural Revolution. Denounced as a Mongolian cultural stronghold, the pastoral areas became the sustained target for land reclamation and immigration. According to an official description, initially young male peasants from inland China pioneered in migrating to Inner Mongolia:

Some of them moved in in teams, concentrating in one place or dispersing in several. Sometimes, a production team, a brigade, or even an entire commune moved in. They chose lush grassland as their destination; there, they reclaimed wasteland and grew crops, built roads and houses, and built a village. Then, they sent all their household records to the local government for registration in order to obtain the status of legal residents.²⁸

Many of these migrants participated in attacks against Mongol herders accused of plotting independence. They formed the "poor- and middle-peasant propaganda teams" to struggle against alleged Mongol class enemies. These immigrants were not limited to those coming from the rural areas of inland China. Large numbers of demobilized soldiers and urban sent-down youth were also dispatched to rural Inner Mongolia to establish military farms.

There was no Mongol "backlash" against the Chinese immigrants until after the Cultural Revolution, when Mongols attempted to repatriate them. The Chinese central government abruptly halted this effort and denounced the Mongols for having waged a movement to "fan Han pai wai" [oppose

the Chinese and reject outsiders]. In the 1980s, in an attempt to protect the remaining Mongol pastureland and preserve the Mongol cultural heartland, Mongol leaders adopted the Chinese agricultural reform method, namely, allocating pastureland to individual households. The official rhetoric was similar to Chinese developmental rhetoric, that is, it provided an incentive to individuals, who, as property-holders, would be more interested not only in raising productivity but in protecting the pastureland from degradation. Naturally, the settlement of Mongols onto permanent pastureland and the division of the pastures among households would prevent Chinese from entering the pastureland. Granting clear, individualized entitlement to pastureland, the Mongols thought, would reduce the likelihood of the arbitrary administrative reallocation of pasture to outsiders, who were mostly Chinese immigrants.

The proponents of land division inadvertently violated one important principle of pastoral production: that ecologically balanced pastures are achieved only through nomadic culture, which requires larger grasslands. The household system, combined with the market-economy principle of exploitation for maximum profit, quickly degraded pastureland. It placed Mongol households in a constant battle between a market logic driven by profitability and the limit set by ecological constraints. This, to no small degree, contributed to the accelerated desertification of the pastureland, thus sabotaging the earlier Mongol ecological argument. In other words, static market-economy pastoralism, unlike nomadic pastoralism, worked to produce environmental degradation.²⁹

Simultaneously, this household pastoralism became a venue to reintroduce agriculture through the back door by creating new demands for fodder. Fodder was necessary to make up for the lack of grass within the restricted pasture allocated to each household. Since Mongols were not used to agriculture, many pastoral households invited migrant Chinese farmers to become resident laborers. Increasing numbers of Mongol households also leased their pastures to Chinese peasants indefinitely for quick cash, and some lost their land as a result. Thus fodder production reintroduced not only agriculture but also migrant Chinese peasants from neighboring provinces. In recent years, while the Inner Mongolian grassland has been swamped with Chinese settlers, many Mongols, in turn, have become "nomads." The modern-day Mongol nomads do not herd animals, though; nor do they ride horses. Rather, they roam the cities in pursuit of glamour and pleasure, which is often missing in the dismal countryside. A new kind of Mongol migrant class is quickly forming. Many Mongols are low-wage workers in Chinese factories, and many young

women work as singers or waitresses in restaurants or as prostitutes. Many middle-aged parents or grandparents move to the banner centers with their children or grandchildren to avoid sending them to boarding schools; they hope that one day, the children will be able to escape the grassland. Some of these middle-aged Mongols also hope to find jobs in the banner centers. Thus, the market mechanism has induced some Mongols voluntarily to sell their land. Admittedly, the transition is not so smooth; historical memories and cultural values continue to inform the Mongol sensibility toward land and pastoralism.

Let me use the municipality of Ordos (formerly known as Yekeju League) to illustrate this. In recent years, Ordos has moved from being one of the most economically "backward" areas of Inner Mongolia to being its most developed region; this is partly due to its abundant natural resources. Since the early 1980s, the league has developed three major industries: cashmere, coal mining, and chemical products. By the late 1990s, all three were represented in the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock markets, thereby signaling the economic success of the region. To the west of Ordos is the coal-mining city of Wuhai; to the east, the steel-producing city of Baotou. The municipality of Ordos boasts the largest open-pit coal mines in the world. They are a major source of conflict between Inner Mongolia and the Chinese central government. The mines are directly controlled by the Ministry of Coal in Beijing, which recently built a large coal-mining town with workers coming mostly from outside of Inner Mongolia. Local Mongols and Chinese not only lost their land, they were not even compensated with jobs in the mine.

With the clarion call to "develop the western regions" [xibu da kaifa] in early 2000, major tensions began to develop. In the spring, some developers in Ejen Horoo Banner, close to the Chinggis Khan Mausoleum, bulldozed a large stretch of fertile grassland for cultivation. It turned out that the land is a Mongol cemetery, thus causing organized protest from Mongol herders. To placate the herders, the banner administration paid ¥1 million to a Mongol lama from Kumbum Monastery to build a stupa in the middle of the cemetery. Meanwhile, the banner administration plans to lease the land surrounding the mausoleum to some Chinese tourist agencies to build an international airport and theme park. Mongols fear that they will be evicted from their historic homeland.³⁰

The grasslands, over which the Mongols have struggled for much of the twentieth century, have now begun to be opened up for further "development" according to market conditions. In 1997, Otog Front Banner

leased several hundred thousand *mu* of grassland to a Shenzhen developer for agricultural development, without even compensating the evicted residents. In the first half of 1998 alone, Dalad Banner leased 320,000 *mu* to people outside Inner Mongolia, attracting ¥125 million (\$25 million).³¹ Other banners designated various "development zones" or "experiment zones," many of which are of dubious value. Lured by short-term benefits, officials at various levels have been more eager to sell or lease anything valuable. In this process, the Mongol administrative units of banner and league have been considered a hindrance. In summer 2000, people in Yekeju League were enthusiastic about the prospect that soon it would be renamed Ordos Municipality.³² As municipalities, the local officials could bypass any reference to Mongol minorities. Since then, Jirim League and Jo'uda League have changed their names to Chifeng and Tongliao Municipalities, thinking that Chinese rather than Mongol names, and "municipality" rather than "league," would provide more of an "advanced" flavor of development.

This current desire to erase the Mongolian characteristics of the banner and league system stands in sharp contrast to the strenuous fight to preserve them in the first half of the twentieth century. Even as late as the early 1990s, when the former premier Li Peng recommended splitting up Yekeju League and giving the western two Otog banners to the newly built coal-mining city of Wuhai, a predominantly Chinese municipality in Inner Mongolia, the governor of Yekeju League opposed the decision, insisting that the historical integrity of the league must not be undermined. He was subsequently removed from his position and, as Party secretary of Wuhai Municipality, assigned to carry out the division. But he refused. So he was again removed.

Given these dramatic changes, it is not surprising that the two epic poems and the song mentioned above have attained new lives and meanings. In 1993, during my visit to Inner Mongolia, many Mongols confided to me that it was no longer politically correct to sing "Gada Meiren" when Chinese were present. In summer 2000, I had hoped to collect some local Ordos revolutionary histories, particularly regarding Sine Lama and his Duguilong campaign, but such materials were then considered "top national secrets." Not only were books I mailed through the post office intercepted by state security personnel, but when I protested that such materials were Party history, I was reprimanded and told that studying the history of the Duguilong was intended to incite Mongols to rebel against China. Clearly, the two epics have acquired new significance in legitimating potential resistance. In summer 2000 two volumes of the

selected works of Ulanhu were published. Instead of imbibing the intended propaganda message that Ulanhu helped Inner Mongolia become part of China, some Mongols read between the lines and told me that Ulanhu had protected Mongolian interests against encroachment. Indeed, Ulanhu now enjoys a reputation among Mongols as the only Communist Mongol to champion pastoral economic development in the face of the Chinese onslaught. His 1950s slogan "Developing pastoralism is the number one priority of Inner Mongolia" has become a mantra for those who defend the pastoral economy and way of life.

Ethnic conflicts have not been limited to those between Mongols and Chinese. Every autumn, beginning in the 1990s, the Inner Mongolian grassland has been subjected to attacks by gangs of poor Muslims from the neighboring Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Chinese peasants from surrounding provinces. They are attempting to dig moss or *facai*, a vegetable whose homonym means "to get rich," that is in great demand in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and development-crazy Guangdong Province in south China. Often the gangs consist of hundreds or thousands of people. Since they use rakes for efficiency, they pull out the roots not only of *facai* but of all the vegetation. Since Mongols live dispersed throughout the grasslands, and each plot of land is now separated by wires fencing off pastures, they can protect neither the grasslands nor themselves from such invasions. According to a recent American Embassy report, most of the grassland areas that have been raided have become desert.³³ There have even been "turf wars" between Mongols and Hui, with both sides using whatever weapons available, including guns. The hardest hit areas have been the Ordos, Ulaanchab, and Silingol regions.

However, the development of the pastoral industry in recent years in Inner Mongolia has not benefited the Mongol herders. The industry has been divided into two sectors according to ethnicity: Mongols are the providers of the raw materials, such as cashmere and wool, and Chinese control the industrial plants that process the materials. Ordos boasts the world's largest cashmere processing plant, producing more than one million cashmere sweaters a year. However, the plant does nothing to help pastoral Mongols protect their pasture. The demand for cashmere has encouraged Mongols to breed more goats, but that in turn has resulted in severe grassland degradation, as well as disputes between neighbors. Goats have been banned by local governments in most of the Ordos region so that the pastures can recover. But instead of focusing on how to improve the pastures and ensure a sustainable local source of supply, the Ordos cashmere plant has abandoned Ordos herders and turned to the Repub-

lic of Mongolia for raw cashmere. The Republic's cashmere plants cannot compete with the Ordos group and have lost their raw cashmere to the latter. Thus, Chinese industrialists have managed to destroy not only cashmere production in the Ordos region but also the Republic of Mongolia's budding cashmere industry, thereby causing international conflict.

The events of spring 2000 dramatized the consequences of grassland degradation in ways that could no longer be ignored by the central government. About a dozen sandstorms swept across Inner Mongolia, striking nearby Beijing, Japan, and even the United States.³⁴ Ignoring the fact that the roots of the problem were in the land-distribution program, Chinese officials were quick to heap the blame on Mongol herders and to impose measures that had devastating effects on their livelihood. In Ordos, for instance, government directives were issued to close off the fenced pastures to animals, and animals were allowed only in walled pens. In Bayanbuur, mountain goats in the Daqing Mountains were driven out of the mountains, ostensibly to protect the mountains. If this bizarre measure remains in force, we may reasonably predict that more Mongols will either be forced to turn to agriculture or to give up their grassland and move into cities.

UNIMAGINING INNER MONGOLIA;
OR, CAN MONGOLS BECOME JEWS?

For the Mongols, the socialist revolution promised territorial autonomy, which was supposed to bring about the regeneration of the Mongol people, but over the past fifty years, this high hope has been compromised by the ethnic, territorial, political, and administrative considerations. Instead of forming a strong *minzu*, Mongols have become further fragmented internally and integrated into Chinese society in all aspects. This has been brought about both by the growing demographic disparity between Mongols and Chinese and more importantly, by the intolerance of the Chinese regime to any sign of Mongol dissent. The Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region has become in fact a region of Han autonomy, although the Mongol veneer will continue to serve a useful political function for some time to come.

For a few years, from 1978 to 1981, former Mongol officials who had survived being purged during the Cultural Revolution returned to power and controlled some of the key areas, such as the finance, planning, and education departments, of the Party and the government. Today, Mongol officials look back with nostalgia to those few years; one told me that

he felt for the first time he could make decisions without having to defer to the Chinese. There is also nostalgia for the period from 1947 to 1966, when Inner Mongolia enjoyed some form of autonomy despite many problems. However, the good times did not last long. In 1981, Inner Mongolia was rocked by a month-long strike by regional-college and middle-school faculty and students opposing Document 28, a central-government directive increasing the number of Chinese immigrants to the area. The strike revealed the basic cause of tension in Inner Mongolia, that is, ethnicity. It was suppressed with severe repercussions for the Mongols. Not only were the student leaders punished, more than two hundred high-ranking Mongol officials were sacked or demoted for being sympathetic to the student demands. They were replaced by either more "obedient" Mongols or Chinese.

The 1981 crackdown has had two far-reaching consequences: First, Mongol officials were further convinced that Mongolian autonomy could not be guaranteed by Marxist principles. Autonomy, many came to believe, could only be guaranteed by law. The sacking of Mongol officials in 1981, according to some accounts, incensed Ulanhu and other high-ranking Mongol cadres in Beijing, prompting them to draft the Law on Regional National Autonomy to legally protect minority rights. Second, the crackdown alienated many Mongol students and intellectuals, who no longer placed their hopes on Mongol officials to protect their rights. In recent years, some Mongols have repeatedly criticized Mongol officials for placing their own interests above Mongol interests, and in some cases, they have even been denounced for betrayal of the Mongols. However, demands for autonomy from outside the Party have not been tolerated by the Chinese regime. In 1991, two cultural organizations in Ordos were criminalized and their leaders imprisoned for several years. In 1996, a Mongol democratic organization was crushed, and two of its leaders were sentenced to fifteen and eleven years' imprisonment respectively on charges of secessionism.

Sustained Chinese colonization through agricultural expansion, the drastic reduction in the right of autonomy, the difficulty of Mongol cultural production, given the demographic disparity between Mongols and Chinese, and the eagerness of the Chinese state to criminalize the assertion of ethnic identity have all given rise in the last decade to two Mongol sentiments. The first is the feeling of living in a diaspora in their own homeland. Inner Mongolia, as it stands, can no longer be thought of as "Mongolian." The independent Republic of Mongolia offers some Mongols a beacon of hope as a nation where Mongols can live and reproduce

as "pure" Mongols in a "pure" Mongolian cultural milieu. The normalization of relations between the Republic and China in 1989 unleashed an unprecedented desire on the part of Inner Mongolians to go and visit Mongolia. But this enthusiasm was soon dashed. Though Mongols from China flock to Mongolia in search of a glimpse of pure Mongol-ness, instead of being greeted as brothers and sisters, they have been seen as a source of cultural pollution and a threat to the sovereignty of Mongolia.³⁵ A frosty relationship between the two Mongol groups has ensued, each accusing the other of being non-Mongol in behavior and ethics. This has led to the immigration of many disillusioned young Mongols to Western Europe and the United States and to the growth of a nationalism that agitates for farther-reaching objectives, including full nationhood for the entire Mongol region.

The second sentiment is the call to establish Mongolian "reservations" (*baoliudi*) similar to those of the native Americans in North America. This is, of course, a very much romanticized notion, out of context with history. And it is ironic because the fate of the American Indians used to figure prominently in the Mongol imagination as a worst-case scenario. Refusing to be confined to their banner enclaves within the Chinese provinces, Mongol nationalists and Communists dismantled the provinces and reclaimed Mongol sovereignty over certain counties that had formerly been banners. In recent years, however, problems of cultural survival have pushed many Mongols to question the very structure of Inner Mongolian autonomy.

The idea of "reservations" came not from Mongol cadres but rather from the ranks of Mongol dissidents. In 1995, the mood I sensed from my fieldwork in Inner Mongolia was that the basic problems confronting the Mongols derived principally from the fact that they had been dispersed widely and there was no viable community in which they constituted a majority. Some Mongols suggested that given the severe environmental degradation in western Inner Mongolia and the small number of Mongols there, the Mongol population should be relocated to the better pastureland of Silingol³⁶ and Hulunbuir Leagues. Moreover, some argued that the eastern Mongols, who have long been disparaged for their adoption of agriculture, which is regarded as proof of their sinicization, might actually prove to be the bulwark of resistance to assimilation, thanks to their compact communities of Mongol villages. It is not agriculture but communal village life, which is lacking both in pastoral areas and cities, that is seen as offering a glimpse of hope for long-term Mongol cultural survival. Not surprisingly, this small-and-compact-is-beautiful sentiment is accompanied

by strong criticism of Ulanhu. Ulanhu, it is argued, did more harm than good to the Mongols by moving the capital of Inner Mongolia from Ulaanhot to Hohhot, thus further dispersing the Mongols in that vast expanse of land, with no consideration for the logistics of such an enterprise.

So whither the Mongols in Inner Mongolia? In the face of such overwhelming assaults on their ethnic rights, what have been the new Mongol strategies, if any? As stated in the beginning of this chapter, Inner Mongolia has not seen large-scale ethnic violence in recent years, although the Chinese state has not ceased being paranoid of potential Mongol nationalist movements. Nor have Mongols become sullen pacifists, trying to hide and nurse their wounds in monasteries; indeed, they have no such retreats. Buddhism, unlike in Tibet or the Republic of Mongolia, has not become a rallying point for an Inner Mongolian identity. Indeed, Inner Mongolian nationalism has been antithetical to Buddhism, which has long been defined as alien and held responsible for reducing Mongolian prowess. There has been no single Buddhist church or leader identified with Inner Mongolian interests; rather, Buddhist leaders have historically served Manchu or Chinese interests, helping the latter to pacify and control Mongols.

Nor has Chinggis Khan become a banner Mongols can carry to rally for their interests. Ironically, the Chinese have co-opted Chinggis Khan as a pan-Chinese hero and ancestor whose military feats purportedly brought glory to the Chinese nation. Numerous novels about Chinggis Khan have been published in recent years, often portraying him as the only Chinese to defeat the Europeans. In 1999, a movie titled *Chinggis Khan* was shown in New York to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. In 2000, Chinese archeologists announced that they had found the tomb of Chinggis Khan in Xinjiang, thus sabotaging Mongolian efforts to find his tomb in Mongol territory.³⁷ In this competition, Mongols in China are in a dilemma. As a minority, they are happy to see their ancestral hero hailed, even worshiped, by the Chinese, but they are also unhappy because their cultural heritage is being appropriated by the Chinese state, which leaves them unable to claim exclusive rights to their national hero. By supporting Mongol claims, they risk accusations of treason from the Chinese state; by supporting Chinese claims, they betray their ancestral roots.

If neither Buddha nor Chinggis Khan is their role model or savior, who is? The buzzword today is *jinghua* (cream, or elite). Who are the elites of the Mongols? Who is to shoulder responsibility for the Mongols in the new millennium? The devaluation of Mongol officialdom comes not only

from ordinary Mongols but from Mongol officials themselves. Many high-ranking officials have devoted themselves after retirement to promoting education and scholarship among the Mongols. Batubagan, the former chairman of the Inner Mongolia People's Congress, now the most widely respected Mongol official, has become the patron of two monumental publishing projects: a series of Mongolian literary classics and an encyclopedia of the Mongols. Other former officials admonish young people to devote their energy to academic study and to take pride in achieving excellence outside of Inner Mongolia or better yet, outside of China. Politics is seen as a dangerous zone.

In the classificatory scheme of a former official, there are now three kinds of *rencai* (talented individuals), who together constitute 30 percent of the Mongol population: 10 percent are high-ranking officials, 10 percent are scientists and scholars, and the remaining 10 percent are ordinary cadres. The official singles out scientists and scholars as *minzu jinghua* (ethnic elites), whereas the others are just *rencai*. The difference, he explains, lies in the different contributions *rencai* make for the Mongol *minzu*. Whereas officials have to be "in agreement with" the central government, helping China rule the Mongols, and working little on behalf of the Mongols per se, scholars and scientists can act as "individuals" and win "glory" for the Mongols.

Mongol scholars and scientists are urged to demonstrate to the Chinese that the Mongols have intellectuals and some of them are world class. Mongol intellectuals are also supposed to serve as an inspiration to the many Mongol youth who have developed inferiority complexes and see no hope for the future, either for themselves or for the Mongol people. Not only can they be successful in Inner Mongolia, they can also achieve prominence abroad. Some prominent internationally known Mongol scientists are the ultimate role models. They are used to illustrate what Mongol scholars can do; not only do they make Mongols shine (*loulian*) in the eyes of the Chinese, they also, through their intellectual networks, achieve more for the Mongols than the officials have ever dreamed of in the way of improving educational possibilities for Mongols. More importantly, as prominent scientists, they cannot be denounced as "ethnic splitters" (*minzu fenliezhuyi fenzi*) because of their activities. Thus, their scholarly careers are considered politically safe. This is the politics of "knowledge is power" par excellence. Being a scientist not only leads to individual achievement but contributes to the *minzu's* fund of knowledge, and only knowledge can transform the Mongols from being powerless today to becoming a major force in the future.

The inspiration for such a new individualism derives from the Jewish diaspora. Many Mongols marvel at the Jews' putative ability to influence American political and economic policies, including securing powerful support for Israel. Jews represent an enigma for the Mongols, especially given their geographical dispersal, which is deemed analogous to the Mongol situation in the world. Some Mongols explained to me that without having to worry about maintaining territorial boundaries, a native language, or a separate economy, the Jews thrived in interaction with other peoples. They marveled that after a dispersal of over one thousand years, the Jews, partly through their religious faith, were able to come back to their homeland and build a nation-state on Jewish cultural foundations and with Hebrew as the national language.

In this new drive to salvage the Mongol people through individual intellectual effort, the "traditional culture" is deemed an obstacle. What is needed is no more than a consciousness of being a Mongol. Whether a successful and cosmopolitan "Mongol" with little or no cultural grounding would still fight for Mongol rights is a moot question for the new apostles of "knowledge is power." What is certain is that there has been a general relaxation of efforts to retain Mongol-language educational programs. This attitude accelerates the loss of Mongol culture. Convinced that a Mongol education would devalue its recipients or make them unemployable in the modern (Chinese) market economy, the overwhelming majority of urban Mongols, and even many rural Mongols, send their children to Chinese schools.

There is a naive romanticism in this new endeavor, and one cannot help but ask whether every Mongol will be able to compete on unequal terms with the Chinese. What is clear is that the Mongols are pursuing a passion for "the Jewish path" as a means to gain power in modern times. A question that remains is whether they can be "superior" within a Chinese cultural framework without destroying their own cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have discussed the processes of Mongol assimilation into the Chinese state and society despite or because of the kind of autonomy they have been allowed to exercise. Mongols have suffered enormously. Ironically, socialism, once the Mongols' best hope for survival, has led to greater pressure for them to assimilate. And yet, the socialist principle of equality still remains an ultimate ideal. At the core of the problem is the fact that China is a nationalizing state in which minori-

ties such as the Mongols have been torn between two mutually conflicting needs: the need to be recognized as citizens and the need to maintain their *minzu* identity.

The fact that the Mongols insist on the Chinese honoring their promise to uphold minority autonomy even as the Chinese attempt to undermine Mongolian autonomy defies any simple dichotomous understanding of China as either a *minzu* destroyer or a *minzu* builder. Nor can ethnic violence be addressed as simply a human-rights violation. The attitude of the Mongols in China cannot easily be pigeonholed into any preconceived analytical category as either pro-China or anti-China.

Whatever hopes Tibet or Xinjiang may have for achieving independence from the People's Republic of China, it is difficult to imagine any similar success for the Mongols. To cling to such hopes would only mean further frustration and danger for the Mongols. Nevertheless, despite the increasing despair Mongols feel as to whether they can maintain a viable community, there is no reason to accept this gloomy scenario at face value and come to the conclusion that the Mongols are indeed doomed.

We ought not to treat China's ethnic minorities, including the Mongols, as "problems" for the state. As a result of the misdiagnosis of the ethnic dimension of the Soviet collapse, minorities everywhere are seen as a potential source of trouble or a threat to regional stability or national sovereignty. Many Westerners, influenced by the Soviet experience, have credited China for preserving a multinational state and have criticized it merely for violating "human rights."

In light of the Soviet collapse, the Chinese state has adopted a new way of managing its multinational empire. Despite its multicultural guise, China is actively reviving the notion of a single Chinese people (*Zhonghua minzu*), which the Chinese Communists earlier condemned as Han chauvinism. In this scheme, ethnic minorities would be depoliticized and their cultures appropriated as part of "Chinese" culture. It is not surprising therefore that a systematic effort has been made to strip the minorities of many of the rights guaranteed by the Law on Regional National Autonomy.³⁸ In recent years, Chinese scholars, including anthropologists, have sounded alarmist warnings against an affirmative-action policy, insisting that a poor country like China cannot possibly mete out favorable treatment to one hundred million minority people. Moreover, efforts have been made to reduce ethnic consciousness (*ruohua minzu yishi*) and increase the minority peoples' self-identification as citizens of the Chinese state.³⁹ The diminution of minority rights in China does not come from a regime that wishes to emphasize a civic political culture; rather, minorities are to be

assimilated and brought under the rubric of a new Chinese nation that, like Japan in World War II, defines itself racially as opposing so-called imperialists.

NOTES

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1. See Gladney, *Muslim Chinese*, and Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*.
2. Reuters, "Hijack Foiled."
3. Although a legitimate question can be raised with regard to the status of independent Mongolia and the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region in the event of unification of Taiwan and mainland China, I leave it to the constitutional experts to answer that question.
4. See Bawden, *Modern History*, for additional details.
5. See Atwood, "'Worshipping Grace.'"
6. See Onon and Pritchatt, *Asia's First Modern Revolution*.
7. Song, *Zhongguo renkou*, 50–54.
8. Chindamani, "Shi lun Menggu minzu," 31.
9. Hao, *Nei Menggu Menggu minzu*, 55–56.
10. See Atwood, "Revolutionary Nationalist Mobilization."
11. See Jagchid, *Last Mongol Prince*.
12. See Schram, *Mao's Road to Power*; for more detail.
13. Slezkine, "USSR as a Communal Apartment."
14. Hirsch, "Toward an Empire," 225.
15. What was curious about this expansionist autonomy was that it dismantled the local autonomy enjoyed by the Mongol banners. Eager to overturn what was called the *yi di er zhu* (one land with two masters) system, the Mongols fought to restore "sovereignty." They were convinced that under a generic Mongolian autonomy, local autonomy was no longer necessary.
16. Whether or not this territorial expansion of Inner Mongolia was a success depends on the criteria by which we judge it. Compared to the Tibet Autonomous Region, it may be considered a success. The Dalai Lama's map still includes areas that are now parts of Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces. For the Dalai Lama, including Qinghai (historically, Amdo) is emotionally important because both he and the late Panchen Lama were born there.
17. See Bao, "When Is a Mongol?"
18. Song, *Zhongguo renkou*, 66–67.
19. Asia Watch, *Crackdown*. See also Tumen and Zhu, *Kang Sheng*.
20. For an incisive analysis of the new social structure in China, see He, "China's Listing Social Structure."

21. Ma and Zhou, *Zhonghua minzu*, 458.
22. According to one story, Yun Bulong, as chairman of the autonomous region, should not have driven to meet Deng Nan, who had a lower official position; he should have sent a deputy instead. By making this gesture, it was argued that Inner Mongolia had devalued itself politically. The investment to control the desert was the duty of the Chinese government; it should not have been treated as a bestowal of favor on the poverty-stricken people of Inner Mongolia.
A second story claimed that it must have been an alien invader with a laserlike weapon who killed the chairman. How could the grassland train, which runs only three times a day across Shuluun Höh (Zenglan) Banner kill a heavily protected chairman driving in a motor cavalcade? The fault must have lain with the chairman's driver, who was renowned for ignoring all traffic controls in Hohhot. He may have assumed that the train would stop to make way for his car.
Another story had it that as the chairman's motorcade passed by Shuluun Höh Banner, local Mongols lined the road, holding ritual scarves and wine cups to bless him. However, he responded, "E mo sijiān" ["I don't have time"], and rushed off. Mongols were angry, for the banner is the site of Khubilai Khan's summer capital, Shangdu. How dare he refuse to accept blessings from the Mongols who safeguard the old capital? Had he stopped for only a minute, he would have missed the deadly collision.
23. *Zhongguo Gongchandang Nei Menggu*, 81.
24. See Wang, *Tianzang*.
25. See Khan, "Who Are the Mongols?"
26. 1 *mu* is equal to 0.165 acres.
27. See Bulag, "Municipalization and Ethnopolitics."
28. Song, *Zhongguo renkou*, 177.
29. Cf. Humphrey and Sneath, *End of Nomadism?* For a critical analysis of the contribution of fencing to desertification in Inner Mongolia, see Williams, "Barbed Walls."
30. Already, some Darhad Mongols, the priestly people who officiate in the rituals dedicated to Chinggis Khan at the mausoleum, have been dismissed and replaced by outsiders in order to better control the content of Chinggis Khan worship. Recently, the Xinhua News Agency reported that Inner Mongolia plans to invest ¥200 million to build the area of Chinggis Khan's Mausoleum into "a world-class tourist destination." The project will take two years to complete and cover eighty square kilometers. See Xinhua News Agency, "Genghis Khan's Tomb."
31. Chen and Wang, *Zhongxibu*, 89.
32. Yekeju League changed its name to Ordos Municipality on 28 September 2001.
33. U.S. Embassy, Beijing, "PRC Desertification."
34. Sandstorms originating in China and reaching the United States were documented even before spring 2000. According to research conducted by California-based meteorologists in 1998, "Huge volumes of dust from the Gobi Desert in Mongolia and other Asian deserts . . . traveled in a cloud across the Pacific, reaching as far east as Texas" (Verrengia, "No Real Public Health Threat"). As environmental destruction and predatory "development" intensify in Inner Mongolia,

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there may be major regional or ethnic conflict or even famine lying ahead (see Brown, "Dust Bowl").

35. Bulag, *Nationalism and Hybridity*.

36. Much of the best pasture in Silingol League has been turned into desert in recent years. Many settled Mongol herders, long touted as a poster child for China's modernization of the Mongols, began wandering again in 2001 in pursuit of pasture for as many as one million head of livestock.

37. See "Chinese Tomb."

38. The Law on Regional National Autonomy was amended on 28 February 2001 to provide a legal framework for resource extraction and major infrastructure construction, which are now the main priorities for minority areas.

39. See Ma and Zhou, *Zhonghua minzu*.