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## The dog that hasn't barked: assimilation and resistance in Inner Mongolia, China

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As one of China's five autonomous regions, Inner Mongolia has not been highlighted in the international news, and the Mongols have not demonstrated significant political will for greater autonomy in the way the Tibetans and the Uighurs have in recent decades. Why haven't the Mongols mobilized? This paper argues that the Mongols' lack of aspiration for greater autonomy is in part due to the relationship between Inner Mongolia and Mongolia as an independent kin state. The different trajectories of national identity construction in these two places and the perception of better living conditions in Inner Mongolia have made the Inner Mongols less anxious about their current incorporation within the Chinese state.

**Keywords:** China; Inner Mongolia; ethnic minorities; nationalism; ethnic identity

### Introduction

Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR) is one of China's five autonomous regions.<sup>1</sup> With a territory of 1,183,000 square kilometers, it is the third largest provincial-level entity within China. According to the 2000 National Census, the IMAR has a total population of 23.3 million, of which Han Chinese represent 79.2% of the population while the titular nationality – the Mongols represent about 17.1%.<sup>2</sup> The IMAR was first established in 1947, two years before the People's Republic of China was founded. As the region's titular nationality, the Mongols were granted certain levels of autonomy, particularly regarding education, language and cultural expressions. The IMAR's fortunes have been, however, tied deeply to the political circumstances within China since 1949, and the Mongols suffered greatly during the politically turbulent years under Mao Zedong. Even in the post Mao years, while the legal status of the Mongols' autonomous region was recognized through the Chinese Constitution and the 1984 Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law, the Mongols have experienced great pressure from the Chinese state and society to assimilate both culturally and linguistically. Fast paced economic development and marketization within China during the past few decades has been particularly detrimental to Mongolian culture and language as they have been greatly pushed

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<sup>1</sup>The other four are: Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Tibet Autonomous Region and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

<sup>2</sup>China Data Online. <http://chinadataonline.org/eng/ereg/ceitgroup.asp>.

aside. The Mongols now face new challenges that threaten the survival of their language and culture.

Following Outer Mongolia's creation as a sovereign state after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, the other half of historical Mongolia – Inner Mongolia was increasingly integrated into China through both the Republican Era (1911–1949) and well into the People's Republic of China period. In contrast to Tibet and Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia has not demonstrated significant political mobilization for greater autonomy in recent decades.<sup>3</sup> Why, then, haven't the Mongols mobilized? It is this important question that this paper intends to answer. It argues that the Mongols' lack of aspiration for greater autonomy is in part due to the relationship between Inner Mongolia and Mongolia as an independent kin state. The different trajectories of national identity construction in these two places, and the perception of better living conditions in Inner Mongolia, have made the Inner Mongols less anxious about their current incorporation within the Chinese state.

This paper is organized into the following sections: first a brief political history of Inner Mongolia is provided. The paper then provides a detailed portrayal of the current situation in Inner Mongolia. Following that, it offers explanations for the lack of political mobilization among the Mongols, including both domestic and external factors. Sources of information and evidences include the author's field research in Inner Mongolia in 2008, such as interviews and questionnaires and secondary materials written by prominent scholars on Inner Mongolia.<sup>4</sup>

### **History of the Mongolian steppe and its relationship with political powers in China**

The great northern steppe and the various nomadic powers that rose from it have always been part of the historical and political narrative of the southern agrarian societies in what is today called China. Ever since the Western Han Dynasty of the third Century BCE, a series of nomadic powers played a tremendous role in Chinese history for over the span of two millennia: from the earlier Xiongnu (Hun), Xianbei (Northern Wei Dynasty), Kitan (Liao Dynasty), Jurchen (Jin Dynasty), and later to the Mongol (Yuan Dynasty) and Manchu (Qing Dynasty).<sup>5</sup>

The Qing, the last dynasty in China, maintained a deep alliance with the Mongols, particularly the Horchin and Harchin tribes of Eastern Mongolia.<sup>6</sup> Through intermarriage between members of the Manchu and Mongol nobles, the

<sup>3</sup>It is not this author's intention to oversimplify the situation in either Tibet or Xinjiang. Certainly not all Tibetans or Uighurs have mobilized for independence or greater autonomy. However, in both Tibet and Xinjiang, there have been consistent movements that make such demands in either peaceful or violent means. The purpose for this comparison with Inner Mongolia is simply to contrast the 'quietness' among the Mongols in Inner Mongolia regarding their lack of political mobilization.

<sup>4</sup>The only problem of using secondary materials on Inner Mongolia written in English is the limited number of academic writings. As a result, the works of a few scholars have been substantially quoted, which may allow room for bias.

<sup>5</sup>For an excellent discussion of the relationship between northern nomadic powers and southern agrarian societies in China, see Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes*.

<sup>6</sup>The Mongols are traditionally divided along tribal lines. For example, the independent country Mongolia is primarily composed of the Halh tribe. And in Inner Mongolia, there are Horchin, Harchin, Chahar, Barga and so forth.

Mongol aristocracy enjoyed high status during the Qing Dynasty, especially in imperial military.<sup>7</sup> The Manchu court was also important patron of the yellow-hat (Gelug-pa) sect of Tibetan Buddhism, which was prominent among the Mongols. The Manchu court introduced an administrative system to divide and rule the Mongols. The territorial division of Inner Mongolia and Outer Mongolia (Mongolia today) was a clear political distinction made by the ruling Manchu court.<sup>8</sup>

Earlier in the Qing Dynasty, the Manchu court had also prohibited the cultivation of Mongol lands and banned immigration of Han Chinese. This was intended to maintain the area as a military reserve.<sup>9</sup> However, due to both internal problems (the Taiping Rebellions 1850–1864) and external pressure (the First Opium War 1839–1842 and the Second Opium War 1856–1860), the Qing altered this policy, and gradually opened up the Mongol lands for immigration and cultivation by the Han Chinese. As a result, millions of Han Chinese flowed into these newly opened Mongol areas. These immigrations dramatically changed the demographic composition of Inner Mongolia, and led to increasing conflict over land ownership between the Mongols and Han Chinese.

In 1911 the Qing Dynasty collapsed. Revolutionary anti-Manchu forces gained power in China proper, leading the Mongol nobles and religious leaders in Outer Mongolia to seize the opportunity and expel the Manchu and Han Chinese officials and soldiers from their territory and declared the independence of Outer Mongolia (later named the Mongolian People's Republic [MPR]). Inner Mongolia, on the other hand, was intricately intertwined with the political developments in China due to its geographic proximity to Beijing and its nobles' close ties with the Manchu court. Inner Mongolian leaders found themselves caught between Japanese expansion in the area, and the power struggles between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Eventually, the inter-ethnic alliance between the Ulanhu forces and the CCP emerged victorious.<sup>10</sup> On May 1 1947, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Government was established with Ulanhu as the chairman.

In the early years of the PRC, Ulanhu managed to balance the intricate role assigned to him as both a Mongol nationalist and a member of the CCP.<sup>11</sup> He managed to tailor central policy guidelines toward the special circumstances of Inner Mongolia and the particular mode of production in its pastoral communities. However, Ulanhu's preferential treatment of the Mongols inevitably drew criticisms, especially from the Han Chinese cadres in the IMAR.<sup>12</sup> The Cultural Revolution

<sup>7</sup>Sneath, *Changing Inner Mongolia*, 8.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>9</sup>Jagchid, *Essays in Mongolian Studies*, 87.

<sup>10</sup>Ulanhu was born into a sinicized Tumed Mongol family right outside of Hohhot in 1906. He graduated from the Mongolian Tibetan Academy in Beijing, and in 1925 he became a CCP member. In 1941, he joined the CCP base in Yan'an and soon became directly involved with the CCP's strategies to win over various ethnic minorities in its power struggle with the KMT. By 1945, Ulanhu emerged as an alternate member of the CCP Central Committee. In 1947, he became the chairman of the newly founded IMAR. For a good account of Ulanhu's involvement in the CCP, see Liu, *Reins of Liberation*.

<sup>11</sup>At the time IMAR was founded, the division of ethnicity and class did not correspond very well: on the one hand, the establishment of IMAR was a result of the Mongols' aspiration to achieve self rule from the domination of the previous ROC government and various warlords, yet on the other hand, Han Chinese peasants demanded 'revolutionary justice' from their exploitative Mongol lords. See Bulag, *From Inequality to Difference*, 532.

<sup>12</sup>Sneath, *Changing Inner Mongolia*, 76–7.

(1966–1976) brought an end to Ulanhu's balancing act between the IMAR's regional interests and the Chinese central government, which also caused great havoc and ethnic violence in Inner Mongolia. During the Cultural Revolution, the Inner Mongolia Revolutionary Committee, under the leadership of General Teng Haiqing, accused Ulanhu and his supporters of organizing a new Inner Mongolian People's Party (Neirendang), with the aim of splitting Inner Mongolia from China to merge with the MPR.<sup>13</sup> During the anti-Neirendang movement, torture and extreme measures were used to extract confessions from suspects, and a vast number of people were killed or crippled, mostly Mongols. According to the official recount in 1979, 346,000 people were labeled Neirendang members. Of this number, 16,222 people were killed, 120,000 were injured or crippled, and over one million were affected.<sup>14</sup> According to unofficial statistics, about 100,000 people died either directly or indirectly as a result of the anti-Neirendang movement, and between 350,000 and 500,000 people were arrested.<sup>15</sup>

The only major pro-autonomy movement in Inner Mongolia occurred in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. On September 13, 1981, more than 3000 students marched in downtown Hohhot, the capital city of the IMAR, distributing leaflets that criticized government policies and demanded a stop to Han Chinese immigration into the region for the protection of the Mongols' interests.<sup>16</sup> Students picketed and besieged the IMAR government complex. They also sent representatives to petition the central government in Beijing. Their petitions, however, were simply rejected, and the students returned to school. This student movement in 1981 was perhaps the last large-scale movement in IMAR demanding greater autonomy, and was dubbed by William Jankowiak the 'last hurrah'.

### Current situation in Inner Mongolia

There have not been any large political movements emerging in Inner Mongolia since the student movement in Hohhot in 1981. In contrast to the situations in Tibet and Xinjiang, the Mongols in Inner Mongolia have not contested the PRC's sovereignty over Inner Mongolia by mobilizing en masse for greater autonomy/independence. As Uradyn Bulag comments, 'the Mongols apparently exhibit no such independent spirit . . . the Mongols aspire not only to maintain an ethnic political entity but also to live as normal citizens of the Chinese state'.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, currently, economic and cultural concerns of the Mongols in Inner Mongolia are the most pressing, rather than grand desires for self-determination. There are two interrelated issue-areas that are most prominent in the Mongols' consciousness, their ongoing negotiation between their ethnic identity and Chinese national identity, and their struggle against the challenges posed by globalization and economic integration. The

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 110–1.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 114–5; Hao, *Neimenggu Tongshi*, 610.

<sup>15</sup>Jankowiak, *The Last Hurrah?*, 276.

<sup>16</sup>Their main demands made by the students were: (1) save our motherland; (2) stop the immigration of Han Chinese; (3) promote the minority population interests by increasing the quota of minority students from 25% to 90%; (4) increase the proportion of Mongol officials; (5) in the future only Han Chinese expert should be allowed, for a short time, into IMAR; afterwards they should leave; (6) the party secretary and the regional commander must be Mongol; and (7) return to Ulanhu's policy of promoting livestock first. Ibid., 279–80.

<sup>17</sup>Bulag, *Inner Mongolia: The Dialectics*, 84–5.

first issue is the diminishing space of the traditional pastoral way of life. The second is the threat of fast-paced sinicization/assimilation among the Mongols, particularly the younger generation.

### *Environmental degradation and the diminishing pastoral way of life*

Every spring, northern China suffers from serious sandstorms. The blame is often laid on the fast-paced desertification taking place in the region. Although the land desertification rate in China was 1560 square km per year in the 1970s, this rate had increased to 2100 square km per year by the 1980s, 2460 square km per year by 1995, and 3436 square km per year in 1999.<sup>18</sup> This rapidly increasing rate of desertification is generally caused by the degradation of rangeland, particularly in Inner Mongolia. The Chinese government began issuing laws to protect these rangelands in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Over-grazing is blamed for this degradation, and herdsmen in Inner Mongolia, predominantly Mongols, are often singled out for their lack of 'scientific' knowledge of rangeland management.<sup>19</sup> As a result, the government designed policies to either ban grazing for several months throughout the year or to ban grazing all together. Furthermore, the government wants herding families to raise their animals in stables, or to resettle families in urban areas. These policies have inspired complaints and resistance from herdsmen across the IMAR. Below is an ethnographical narrative of the grazing bans in Da'erhan and Maomin'an Joint Banner (Damao Banner), where field research was conducted in Spring 2008.

Damao Banner is under the jurisdiction of Baotou Municipality. It borders Ulanqab Municipality in the east, Bayannur Municipality in the west, and shares border with Mongolia in the north. According to the 2000 census, the whole banner has a total population of 98,325 people, of which 82,595 (84%) are Han Chinese and 15,093 (15%) are Mongols. In August 2007, the Baotou Municipal Government issued a policy decision to totally ban grazing within its jurisdiction. Following this policy, the Damao Banner Government started to ban grazing in agricultural areas in August 2007 and in pastoral areas in January 2008.<sup>20</sup> When I arrived in Damao Banner in March 2008, the government was actively enforcing this policy in pastoral areas.

According to Batu, the head of Dulaan Aula Gacha (village) of Ulaan Khada Sum (township), the term of the grazing ban will last for 10 years and every year the government will compensate each household 4.8 yuan per mu.<sup>21</sup> After 10 years, herdsmen can come back but during this time grazing will be totally banned. The government encourages herding families to relocate to a herding community area in Bailingmiao, however, the government only subsidizes 30,000 yuan for the purchase of the housing unit and remaining costs would be borne by each household. The government also allocates 20 mu land for each household so that they can raise their animals in an enclosed space. Also, the government promises to give people over the age of sixty 200 yuan per month as part of a pension package. The deadline set by the government was the end of May 2008, by which time the full enforcement of the ban should have been accomplished. These policies were, however, considered

<sup>18</sup>Liu, *Control of Sandstorms in Inner Mongolia, China*, 269.

<sup>19</sup>Williams, *Beyond Great Walls*.

<sup>20</sup>[http://www.dmdj.gov.cn/llyj\\_article.asp?id=8](http://www.dmdj.gov.cn/llyj_article.asp?id=8).

<sup>21</sup>1 mu  $\approx$  0.165 Acre, and 1 yuan  $\approx$  0.143 US \$ (at time of writing).



inappropriate and unsatisfactory by most herding families, leading to quite a lot of complaints and resistance. Following are portraits of local herdsmen (women), their complaints, and coping strategies.

Chimüge 30-something Mongol woman. She and her husband live in a brick house with their daughter, who is 10 years old and goes to the Mongolian boarding school in Bailingmiao. They have about 8000 mu of pastureland and more than 200 sheep and goats. In recent years, due to the rising price of cashmere and mutton, they earned about 80,000 to 90,000 yuan (about US\$ 10,000) in annual income. In short, life is relatively decent. Although she said that overall she did not disagree with the grazing ban, she was very dissatisfied with the compensation policies.

First of all, she felt that 4.8 yuan per mu in compensation was too low. Their pasture is 8000 mu, so theoretically they would only receive about 30,000 yuan in compensation, much less than their current annual income. Furthermore, their pasture is collectively owned with two of her brothers-in-law. They both have jobs in Bailingmiao, but when the compensation money arrives they would certainly come to demand their share. So in the end, Chimüge's family may only receive around 10,000 yuan for their land, far lower than their current annual income. Second, the terms of the compensation plan are set for ten years but will not adjust for the inflation. With food prices rising quickly, the money they are due under the scheme might be insufficient in the future. Also, the money is to be given once every three months, and Chimüge is worried that the government could suddenly stop giving the money after a few years. It would be best if they could get all 10 years' compensation money at once so at least they could invest some of it. Third, although it might be possible to find a job in the urban sector in Bailingmiao, Chimüge and her husband were worried about employment in the future because, according to her, 'we have been herdsmen for all our lives and really we do not know anything about working in those jobs'. To Chimüge, the deadline for the grazing ban set by the government was also ignorant of pastoral conditions. In May, when the ban was slated to take effect, the sheep were still thin without a summer's pasturage, they will not fetch good price at market. Thus she hoped that the government would consider postponing the ban until at least after the summer so that the sheep can be sold at a higher price. Chimüge was also pessimistic about the idea of moving to the relocation community in Bailingmiao. Although the government promised to subsidize 30,000 yuan per household, they would still need to pay an extra 50,000–60,000 yuan to cover the costs for the purchase of the new housing unit. Furthermore, if they were to move to the relocation community, Chimüge's family would basically be abandoning their brick house on the pasture. In any event, the 20 mu of land provided at the relocation community is too small to sustain any significant number of animals. These herdsmen do not really know how to farm, and would have no way of feeding their animals if they decided to keep any. For Chimüge, her complaints were mostly economic in nature. She was indignant about the financial loss her family would suffer but was resigned to taking some form of approved action. In her own words, 'as an ordinary citizen what can we do?'

Bayantala is a 50-something Mongol male living together with his wife on the pasture. All their children have already moved to urban areas, with one living in Bailingmiao, and the other in Baotou. He believes the younger generation would never come back to lead a herdsmen's life since it was too boring for them. For him, the ban on grazing signaled the end of the pastoral life style, a strong marker for Mongol identity. Bayantala's family owns about 5000 mu pastureland and more

than 100 sheep and goats. Like Chimüge, Bayantala was also indignant about the financial loss they would suffer. However, he was totally resistant to the idea of moving to the resettlement community in Bailingmiao. He said that Mongols grow up eating meat. By his logic, moving to the resettlement community would mean having to buy meat from the market, which they cannot afford, so how would they survive? Bayantala and his wife have lived on the pastureland for all their lives. Although they would occasionally visit their children in urban areas, they have never liked city life: ‘too many people and too noisy. It is not like here very quiet and the air is fresh...’. What was saddest for Bayantala is the idea that the Mongol culture will soon disappear following the grazing ban:

we Mongols are historically herding people. If we do not herd animals any longer and move to urban areas, we would not be Mongols anymore but become the same as the Han Chinese? My grandson grows up in Baotou, and already he cannot speak the Mongolian language anymore. If we all move to the urban area, sinicization (*hanhua*) will only intensify. In the future there would no longer be any Mongols.<sup>22</sup>

When I asked him what he plans to do when the government people come to ban grazing, he said, ‘I am not going to move. What else they can do to an old couple like us?’

Öljei is a Mongol male in his forties. He lives in a brick house with his wife. He has two children, both of whom study in the Mongolian middle school in Bailingmiao and come back home only on weekends. His family owns more than 4000 mu pastureland with more than 200 sheep and goats. Öljei was completely opposed to the grazing ban. He says that, although in early years there were times when quantity was emphasized over quality, now people have started to reduce their herds and improve the breed quality. Since many herdsmen already realized that over grazing was a problem, they had started to take actions. Öljei could not understand why the government wanted to cut off their economic lifeline and he was most angry about the way the local government conduct business. He said, ‘they only care about fulfilling the quota from above and do not care a bit about the life and death of ordinary herdsmen. We have no say at all, and the local government never ever came to consult with us about the best strategy to preserve the pastureland’. According to Öljei, a total ban on grazing all year long is actually not necessarily good for the pastureland. For grasslands to flourish, he said, animals need to tread on them occasionally and they also require fertilization from animal manure. Without these conditions, the grazing ban will not achieve its intended goals of pastureland protection. The best strategy, to his mind, was to only ban grazing for a few months in the summer, rather than the current draconian measure.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Öljei pointed out the hypocrisy of local government concerning environmental protection. Although they want to ban grazing in the name of environment, they still allow and even encourage mining companies to invest in the pastureland. These mining activities pose much graver threat to the pastureland than animal grazing. Öljei was also indignant about the corruption of the local government officials; although many of these officials are Mongols, Öljei called

<sup>22</sup>Bayantala, Interview conducted by author, 2008.

<sup>23</sup>This opinion is also echoed by many Mongolian herdsmen that I interviewed. Also see Gegengaowa, ‘Guanyu Neimenggu’.



them ‘bad Mongols’. When I was visiting his house, Öljei and some other herdsmen of the same gacha were in the process of writing a petition letter. He said they would first go to Hohhot and then to Beijing to petition.

The stories of these three herding families are examples of the challenges that pastoral communities face all across Inner Mongolia.<sup>24</sup> Ordinary Mongol Herdsmen have suffered greatly during this process, both economically and culturally. No consistent strategies have been adopted by herdsmen to cope this challenge, however. Many have simply given up and moved to resettlement communities. Others perhaps have resisted and petitioned, but it is questionable whether they would get much response from the higher levels of government.<sup>25</sup> The grazing ban is still an unfolding process and its total impact on Mongol pastoral society waits to be seen.

### *The Mongols’ struggle against sinicization*

Diminishing space for the Mongol’s pastoral society and the government’s policies aiming at restricting – or even eliminating – the pastoral way of life, constitutes a great assault on Mongol’s cultural identity.<sup>26</sup> However, only a minority of Mongols still lead this pastoral lifestyle. The majority of Mongols have either switched to agricultural farming or have already lived in urban areas for quite some time. Indeed, these days one often hears about the three groups of Mongols in Inner Mongolia: pastoral Mongols, agricultural Mongols and urban Mongols. As mentioned previously, the Mongols have already become an absolute minority of about 17.1% of the total IMAR population. Swamped in a sea of Han Chinese, keeping their cultural integrity and resisting the forces of sinicization/assimilation are not easy.

When visiting any big cities in the IMAR, such as Hohhot, one cannot fail to notice the ubiquitous bilingual street signs. All government buildings and most private businesses post their signs in both Mongolian and Chinese. Under this façade of bilingualism, however, it is common knowledge that many urban Mongols, especially the younger generation, do not read or speak Mongolian at all. Despite the official recognition of the Mongols’ titular status in the IMAR and certain efforts devoted to demonstrate the government’s concern for multicultural diversity and sensitivity, it is undeniable that the Mongols in the IMAR are rapidly losing their cultural repertoire. We have already visited the diminishment of pastoral Mongol society, but the more pressing issue facing the Mongols is how to deal with the intensifying assimilative forces coming from the Chinese state and the increasingly marketized economy. There have been great worries among some Mongols, particularly certain intellectuals, about the survival of Mongol culture and language and whether the Mongols are on the path to total sinicization just like the Manchus before them. According to Uradyn Bulag, ‘as more Mongols lose their language, arguably the last bastion of their “nationality” status, they face the prospect of becoming a deinstitutionalized, depoliticized, and deterritorialized “ethnic group” in a racialized “Chinese nation”’.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup>The grazing ban is not carried out uniformly in every locality.

<sup>25</sup>One common fate is that those herdsmen who want to petition would seldom reach Hohhot let alone Beijing. Oftentimes they would be stopped by local officials before they embark on the petition trip.

<sup>26</sup>Almaz Khan, for example, talks about the political process of making pastoralism the symbol for Mongol’s ethnic identity in China. Khan, *Who are the Mongols?*

<sup>27</sup>Bulag, ‘Mongolian Ethnicity’, 753.

In a China Language Usage Survey published by the PRC State Council Language Commission in 2006,<sup>28</sup> the percentage of Mongols within the sample that could speak the Han Chinese language was 71.38%. The same survey, however, also reported that 75.52% of people interviewed could speak some Mongolian as well. Despite this, the uneasy bilingualism among Mongols is increasingly trending towards Han Chinese monolingualism. Two surveys conducted by Yamin Hao in four Mongol villages, one in 1996 and the other in 2005, reported that all four villages witnessed a decline in Mongolian language capability and an increase in Han Chinese language capability over the 10 year time span.<sup>29</sup> Hao's findings confirm the general perception that the Mongolian language is fading quickly among the younger generation. Better education and thus more exposure to Han Chinese environment, since Chinese is taught throughout schools in the IMAR, also lead to the same outcome – linguistic assimilation.

This trend of linguistic assimilation can also be seen in reports on student enrollment in the IMAR and the number of Mongolian schools. From 1980 to 1995, for example, the total number of students enrolled in Mongolian language primary schools decreased by 25,643 people.<sup>30</sup> Also, if one controls for population growth and expansion of the education system, the percentage of Mongol primary school students studying Mongolian decreased from 73.3% to 49.6% in 1995.<sup>31</sup> The same can be said about middle and high school enrollment. By 1995, half of the Mongol students in the IMAR attended Chinese schools. By the end of 2005, the percentage of Mongols enrolled in Mongolian schools was 38.2%.<sup>32</sup> There are two important questions we can ask in this context. Firstly, why are so many Mongol families 'discarding' their own language by sending their children to Han Chinese schools? And secondly, what implications does this 'linguistic assimilation' pose for the Mongols as a minority group in China?

The first question will be examined from two angles: government policies and economic interest. In the IMAR, the choices of colleges and higher education for Mongolian-educated students are generally much narrower than for those educated in Chinese. Most Mongolian educated students can only apply to colleges and universities within the IMAR as other universities within China generally do not accept students that do not have a good command of the Chinese language.<sup>33</sup> Even within the IMAR, many university programs either restrict the number of students educated in Mongolian or do not accept Mongolian-educated students at all. In addition, Mongolian-educated students who do gain admittance to a university program are able to enroll in far fewer programs, being able to choose from education, Mongolian medicine, agriculture and husbandry and so forth as their majors. More popular disciplines, such as economics, law, and engineering are only

<sup>28</sup>The China Language Usage Survey can be accessed online at <http://www.china-language.gov.cn/LSF/LSFrame.aspx>.

<sup>29</sup>Hao, 'Xiangcun Mengguzu'.

<sup>30</sup>Wulantuke, 'Neimenggu', 12.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Neimenggujiaoyuting, *Neimenggu Zizhiqiu Jiaoyu Tongji*.

<sup>33</sup>Although in recent years, some top universities in China have started to enroll Mongolian educated students. Some restrictions still apply. They usually recruit from certain top high schools in the IMAR, and Mongolian educated students would have to go through one year of prep-school in Chinese to be fully enrolled in regular university courses, which means those students need five years instead of the regular four years to finish university.

available for those Chinese educated students.<sup>34</sup> Related to these educational policies are also changes within the Chinese state society relationship in general. During the prime time of the planned economy, higher education institutions were completely controlled by the government. The government not only funded those universities but also established quotas and targets that all universities were required to fulfill. During the 1980s in the IMAR, the quota for minority students was set at between 20 and 25% and the specific quota for Mongolian educated students was set at 12%.<sup>35</sup> Since higher education reforms in the mid-1990s, government support for universities has diminished and as a result these institutions have had to find other sources of funding. It has become common to raise tuition and expand enrollment numbers. Because of these changes, the quota systems have become less stringent and the percentage of students educated in Mongolian language enrolled in universities dropped to 6.45% in 1994.<sup>36</sup> With the expansion of university enrollment, the percentage of ethnic Han Chinese students has also increased. For example, at Inner Mongolia University for Nationalities, which is supposed to be an institution dedicated to training ethnic minorities – particularly the Mongols – more than half of the student population was Han Chinese and the percentage of Mongolian educated students was only 24% in 2006.<sup>37</sup> The percentages of Mongol students in other ‘regular’ IMAR universities are much lower. We can argue that Mongolian language education has become more difficult to sustain in higher education. Its quality is also supposed to be declining.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, under the planned economy, the government was also responsible for allocating jobs to university graduates. Even if the jobs might not be completely satisfactory, at least one needed not worry too much about the prospect of post-graduation employment. With the increasing pace of market reform and the gradual retreat of state from involvement in society and economy since the 1990s, the government is no longer responsible for meting out jobs to university graduates. This change hit the Mongolian-educated students the hardest, because they have had to compete head-on with Han Chinese students and other Chinese-educated Mongol students in a job market that predominately favors people who have good command of the Chinese language. So far, the government has not issued any legislation to guarantee or at least provide quota for employment of these Mongolian educated students. The prospect for employment after graduation for these Mongolian educated students is increasingly poor.

These days Inner Mongolia is also deeply integrated economically with the rest of China. Given that the Mongols are already an absolute minority within the IMAR, most business and trade is dominated by Han Chinese and require a proficiency in Chinese. Everywhere in the IMAR, although shops might have a Mongolian script written outside, the commodities sold inside the stores are the same sold everywhere else in China and in most cases do not provide bilingual packaging. Modern media, such as TV and radio, are also dominated by Chinese programs. Although there are a few Mongolian language TV channels in the IMAR, the programs usually have limited air-time and many shows are simply Chinese ones dubbed in Mongolian. An

<sup>34</sup>Wulantuke, ‘Neimenggu’, 13; Li, ‘Neimenggu’, 108.

<sup>35</sup>Wulantuke, ‘Neimenggu’, 13.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Chen, *Neimenggu Menzu Gaodeng Jiaoyu*, 16.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 27.

even more alarming case is the Internet. Particularly germane to the younger generation, many Internet games operate in Chinese. Thus one has to learn Chinese in order to have fun and be cool. Pop culture too is starting to be dominated by Han Chinese stars, no matter whether are from Hong Kong, Taiwan or the Chinese mainland. Although there are some popular ethnic Mongolian singers, they also generally perform in Chinese.<sup>39</sup>

Because of these government policy changes and the inadequacies of current government legislations to protect the use of the Mongolian language in the job market, the decline in popularity of the Mongolian language translates into an economic issue. Given that Mongolian language does not bring good educational prospects or employment opportunities, and that the society is dominated by the use of Chinese language, more and more Mongol families send their children to Han Chinese schools in order to better prepare them for the future. As Naran Bilik points out:

[w]ith business booming and spreading from metropolitan areas into remote areas, a language hierarchy is forming in Inner Mongolian region, whereby English or some other foreign language rank at the top, Chinese comes second and Mongolian at the bottom. It is a long-standing view among the Mongols, especially intellectuals, that knowing Mongolian, Chinese and a major foreign language has different implications for social advancement or achievement: i.e. Mongolian is mainly used in local areas and for much less challenging public and private functions like ethnic symbolism and family chat; Chinese is the omnipotent medium across the country for political promotion and economic procurement; whereas foreign languages represented by English are for top ranking accomplishments all around the world.<sup>40</sup>

In this way, the Mongolian language situation mirrors what David Laitin describes in his study of language choice in post-Soviet countries. In his study, Laitin explains how a language change cascade occurs when people believe that it is their economic interest to switch languages and when members of a community recognize that others have made that advantageous language change.<sup>41</sup> If Laitin's assessment is correct, we can perhaps predict that the Mongols of Inner Mongolia will lose their language repertoire in the near future and be linguistically assimilated by the predominant Han Chinese.

One Mongolian intellectual, Professor Bater, related a story of his son's experience.<sup>42</sup> When his son was very young, Professor Bater sent him to a Mongolian language kindergarten. His rationale was to provide a Mongolian language environment for his son when he was young so that he would not grow up forgetting the Mongolian language. However, because they lived in an ethnically mixed apartment complex, his son's playmates were either Han Chinese or other Mongol children who spoke only Chinese. As a result, his son picked up the Chinese language much faster than Mongolian. Later, to avoid placing his son at a disadvantage relative to his peers, Professor Bater sent him to a Chinese primary school. His son eventually matriculated into a top university in Beijing. According to

<sup>39</sup>For example, the popular Mongolian band Ergüne recently released an album, Hongyan, which includes three songs in Mongolian and the other nine songs are in Chinese.

<sup>40</sup>Bilik, 'The Mongol-Han Relations', 73.

<sup>41</sup>Laitin, *Identity in Formation*.

<sup>42</sup>I met Professor Bater at a university in Inner Mongolia. He is a renowned scholar in Mongolian literature and history.

Professor Bater, his son now speaks perfect Mandarin Chinese, and although he still understands some basic Mongolian he usually does not like to speak it. When Professor Bater shared his story about his son, it was clear that the experience was bittersweet. While he lamented the fact that such stories are becoming commonplace in Inner Mongolia and that the younger generation of Mongols would lose their mother tongue, he also took comfort in the fact that his son was receiving a well regarded education and had a bright future in Beijing.

This story is symbolically significant in reflecting the situation of the Mongolian language in Inner Mongolia. Professor Bater is an intellectual studying and teaching Mongolian language and history. Thus, in a way he represents defender of the Mongolian language and culture. However, if people such as these intellectuals are moving with the tide and switching to the Chinese language, what can we expect from the ordinary Mongols?

### **Resistance?**

With the political pressure to end the Mongol's traditional pastoral way of life and the intensifying pace of sinicization, what strategies have the Mongols in Inner Mongolia adopted for resistance and protection/promotion of more autonomy? Are there any mass-based mobilizations by the Monogls?

There are indeed several political organizations that claim to represent the Mongols in Inner Mongolia, and almost all of them are based overseas – in the United States, Japan and Europe. Two of the most prominent organizations are the Inner Mongolian People's Party (IMPP) and the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center (SMHRIC). The IMPP was founded on 23 March 1997, in Princeton, New Jersey. According to its constitution: 'The IMPP upholds the principles of democracy and peace in fighting to end the Chinese Communist Party's colonial rule in Inner Mongolia'. Its ultimate goal is to achieve independence for Inner Mongolia, and the immediate goal is to establish a 'confederated union with China in the course of the future social development in China'.<sup>43</sup> The SMHRIC is an organization based in New York City with the following principles:

To gather and distribute information concerning Southern (Inner) Mongolian human rights situation and general human rights issues; to promote and protect ethnic Mongolian's all kinds of rights, such as basic human rights, indigenous rights, minority rights, civil rights, and political rights in Southern Mongolia; to encourage human rights and democracy grassroots movement in Southern Mongolia; to promote human rights and democracy education in Southern Mongolia; to improve the international community's understanding of deteriorating human rights situations, worsening ethnic, cultural and environment problems in Southern Mongolia; and ultimately, to establish a democratic political system in Southern Mongolia.<sup>44</sup>

Every year these groups organize campaigns and protests, for example, the campaign to call on Chinese authorities to release Mongol political prisoners from

<sup>43</sup>IMPP's constitution can be accessed online at [www.innermongolia.org](http://www.innermongolia.org).

<sup>44</sup>SMHRIC's mission state can be accessed online at [www.smhric.org](http://www.smhric.org).

jail.<sup>45</sup> One has to point out, however, the small scales of these activities and their lack of visibility, particularly if we compare them with those large organizations and social movements associated with the Tibetans or the Uighurs. Why have these pro-Inner Mongolia autonomy/independent movements not garnered greater support?

### Explaining Mongols' lack of resistance

In order to explain the lack of large-scale resistance put up by the Mongols, there are several factors to consider. The first is the dispersed nature of the Mongols in Inner Mongolia and their absolute demographic minority status. Only in the eastern part of the IMAR are there a few areas with high concentration of Mongols – Tongliao Municipality (previously Jirim League), Hingan League, and Chifeng Municipality (previously Juuda League). And even in these places, the Mongols represent less than half of the local population. For example, in 1995 Mongols were about 36.6% in Tongliao Municipality, 17.6% in Hingan League, and 19.5% in Chifeng Municipality.<sup>46</sup> Even so, these Mongols in these eastern areas of the IMAR are the ones who came into contact with Han Chinese quite early on, and many have already adopted an agricultural way of life and had been quite heavily influenced by the Han Chinese linguistically and culturally. Elsewhere, scholars have talked about the positive correlation between group concentration and propensity for political mobilization – that is, ethnic groups that are territorially concentrated are more likely to mobilize around separatist demands.<sup>47</sup> The low concentration level of the Inner Mongols thus perhaps explains their lack of coordinated group mobilization.

The second factor is the lack of prominent Inner Mongolian leadership. The Mongols do not have a charismatic international celebrity leader such as the Tibetans' Dalai Lama or the Uighurs' Rebiya Kadeer. The leaders of the overseas Inner Mongolia organizations possess much lower profiles. The only person that had tremendous leadership authority in the IMAR over the past half century was Ulanhu, but he was also a staunch communist leader. And in the post-Ulanhu IMAR, even government leadership at the regional level is imbued with factional fights between the eastern and western Mongols, which can be traced back to pre 1949 animosities.<sup>48</sup> The position for the chairman of the IMAR is usually rotated between eastern and western Mongols and this constant flux has been detrimental to any efforts to build Mongol influence within the ruling regime. In any event, the Mongols in the IMAR are geographically divided and an overarching ethnic leadership has not yet emerged.

A third factor is that the Mongols in Inner Mongolia do not have a strong religious identity that would help them resist the assimilative power of Chinese state and society. Although historically the Mongols practiced Tibetan Buddhism, the lamaist church was quite effectively removed in both Inner Mongolia and Mongolia

<sup>45</sup>For example, there is Hada, who was the organizer of the Southern Mongolian Democracy Alliance. He and some other Mongols organized several peaceful demonstrations in Hohhot in 1995 and was later arrested and jailed by the Chinese government.

<sup>46</sup>Jingjitongjijiaoyanshiketizu, 'Neimenggu', 11.

<sup>47</sup>For an argument that emphasizes the role of group concentration in ethnic group mobilization, see Jenne et al., 'Separatism as a Bargaining Posture'.

<sup>48</sup>Atwood, *Ethnic Autonomy Law*.



during various revolutionary movements.<sup>49</sup> And perhaps because of the Qing court's policy of using Tibetan Buddhism to 'pacify' the Mongols,<sup>50</sup> some Mongols have blamed Tibetan Buddhism for the lag in their development in the past. In recent years, there has been a revival of pre-Buddhist shamanism in Inner Mongolia, but this resurgence is not nearly powerful enough to provide the Inner Mongols a strong religious faith that could be wielded as a weapon for resistance.

The fourth factor is the geographical proximity of Inner Mongolia to Beijing, the political center of China. Most Inner Mongolian cities, such as Hohhot, Tongliao, Chifeng, Ordos or Baotou, are about 10 hours by train away from Beijing. Compared with the more remote Tibet and Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia's geographic proximity to the China proper makes it more susceptible for influence from Han Chinese as well as makes it relatively defendable by Chinese forces.

Related to the geographical proximity is the historical connection of the Mongols with central dynastic powers in China. Mongols, together with Manchus, are the only existing minority groups that historically ruled China and produced emperors claiming to be the Son of Heaven. Even the current Chinese capital Beijing was initially established by the Mongols. As we have seen in our earlier discussion of Inner Mongolian history, the Inner Mongols, in particular the Horchin and Harchin of eastern Inner Mongolia were very closely affiliated with the Manchu court and had contributed greatly in building the Qing Empire. One can argue that it would be much easier for the Mongols to accept the concept of the Chinese state and its claims to sovereignty over Inner Mongolia than other peripheral groups such as the Tibetans or the Uighurs. Even during the turbulent Republic of China (ROC) period, Inner Mongolian leaders such as Prince Demchudongrub (De Wang) never called outright for Inner Mongolia's independence and always sought the more moderate claims of Inner Mongolia autonomy.<sup>51</sup>

Inner Mongolia was also 'liberated' by the Inner Mongol communists themselves, and the Inner Mongols participated actively in the state building process during both the ROC and PRC period. One interesting story conveyed to me during my field research in Inner Mongolia was that many Mongols were quite proud of their military prowess and of how the Inner Mongolia cavalry defeated the Dalai Lama's uprising in Tibet in 1959. Rumor has it that until this day the Mongol and Tibetan students do not get along very well at the Central University for Nationalities in Beijing due to lingering feelings over this victory/defeat.

All of these factors, in one way or another impact the Inner Mongols' lack of formal resistance and organized mobilization for greater autonomy against the Chinese state. That being said, I argue we also need to look for explanations outside of the Chinese domestic arena, and one particular factor requires special attention: the relationship between Inner Mongolia, as an autonomous region, and Mongolia,

<sup>49</sup>In Mongolia, the lamaist church was dismantled in the 1930s during Stalin's Great Purge, although in recent years there have been a revival of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia. In Inner Mongolia, the lamaist church was eliminated during the Cultural Revolution. Although the government started to allow certain religious freedom by restoring Buddhist monasteries, the scale of influence of the lamaist church is very limited.

<sup>50</sup>See for example Sechin Jagchid's discussion of the history of Buddhism in Mongolia. Jagchid, *Essays in Mongolian Studies*, 136–7.

<sup>51</sup>For a good account of Prince Demchudongrub and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Movements, see Jagchid, *Wo Suo Zhidao De De Wang*.

as an independent sovereign state.<sup>52</sup> The perception of the Inner Mongols towards Mongolia, their ethnic kin state, plays a significant role in affecting how they perceive their relationship with the Chinese state.

### The relationship between Mongolia and China

When the Qing Empire collapsed in 1911, Outer Mongolia took the opportunity to declare its independence by setting up a theocratic state with the Eighth Jebtsundamba Hutagt as its monarch. In 1915, however, the Outer Mongols were forced to sign a treaty with the ROC government to secure their 'autonomy', after numerous rounds of negotiations between the Russians, the Mongols and the ROC government. In 1921, Outer Mongolia was to declare independence again and in 1924 it proclaimed the founding of the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR).<sup>53</sup> Following its declaration of independence, the MPR was effectively incorporated into the Soviet sphere of influence and remained a Soviet satellite state until 1991. During World War II, the MPR joined force with the Soviet Red Army fighting against the Japanese. It was after a referendum in MPR where the Mongols voted in favor of independence that the ROC government finally recognized the independent status of the MPR in January 1946.<sup>54</sup> After CCP's victory on the mainland, similar communist ideologies and feelings of brotherhood under Soviet leadership, the MPR maintained a quite cordial relationship with Beijing. However, after the Sino-Soviet split in 1960, MPR joined the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), and aligned itself very closely with the Soviet Union. As a result, the MPR-PRC relationship turned hostile and remained so for nearly 20 years. Gorbachev's announcement that Soviet troops would withdraw from Mongolian territory in July 1986 at Vladivostok signaled the normalization of relations between the MPR and PRC.<sup>55</sup> During the Soviet era, the MPR was heavily dependent upon its northern neighbor, and its economy relied heavily upon massive Soviet loans and aids.<sup>56</sup> The collapse of the Soviet Union was thus tremendously painful for Mongolia. As a landlocked country sandwiched between Russia and China, Mongolia had little alternative but to look south for economic support. This also coincided with a period of explosive growth in the Chinese economy in the early 1990s. As a result, the economic vacuum left by the collapse of the Soviet Union was soon filled by China. Mongolia now exports most of its natural resources to China and China provides electronic appliances, agricultural products, clothes and other daily necessities. Since 1999, China has been the largest trading partner of Mongolia; China is the largest recipient of Mongolian exports and is the second largest source of imports for Mongolia.<sup>57</sup>

Within close economic relationship, it is critical to point out the extremely important role played by Inner Mongolia. Ever since the 1980s, trade between Inner

<sup>52</sup>For arguments about the important role of external kin, see Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*.

<sup>53</sup>Madhok, *Sino-Mongolian Relations*, 37.

<sup>54</sup>I thank the anonymous reviewer for this information. Although the ROC government recognized the independent status of the MPR in 1946, this recognition was revoked in 1953. See <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2002/08/20/164873>.

<sup>55</sup>Soni, *Mongolia-China Relations*, 193.

<sup>56</sup>Blagov, 'Mongolia Drifts Away'.

<sup>57</sup>Nalin, 'Mengzhong', 37.

Mongolia and Outer Mongolia has always mounted more than half of the total share of Mongolia-China trade. Much of the Mongolia-bound investments from China also originated in Inner Mongolia. The IMAR has actively pursued better economic cooperation with its northern neighbor. For example, the IMAR has provided loans and financial support for the mining and energy sectors in Mongolia. It also opened up 11 trading ports along its long border with Mongolia, with Erlianhaote as the hub. The IMAR has also been actively promoting infrastructure investment in Mongolia to better connect the two via rail and road. In addition, there has been a high level of cultural exchange between the two.<sup>58</sup> For example, in 2005 Mongolia and China jointly were awarded Intangible Cultural Heritage for the Mongolian traditional Long Song – *Urtiin Duu* from UNESCO.<sup>59</sup>

### Inner Mongols' perceptions of Mongolia

The Sino-Mongolian border was heavily guarded and almost all communications between Inner Mongolia and MPR were cut off while the Soviet military was stationed in the MPR prior to rapprochement in the mid 1980s. As a result, the Mongols in Inner Mongolia had literally no contact with their ethnic brethren in the north. Put into the context of the tremendous suffering that the Mongols in Inner Mongolia underwent during the Cultural Revolution, there were strong desire among them to communicate with the Mongols in Mongolia and Inner Mongolians had developed a very idealized image of Mongolia 'where Mongols live in happiness, where genuine Mongolian culture is developed without restriction, and Mongols can walk shoulder to shoulder with any nation in the world'.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, in Uradyn Bulag's words, Mongolia was like Mecca to many Inner Mongols prior to the 1980s.

As the two sides came into more frequent contact following the Soviet withdrawal, the previously imagined transnational pan-Mongol affiliation on the part of the Inner Mongols did not bear fruit. There are two main reasons for this unrealized idealization of Mongolia: one is the divergent conceptualization of national identity and citizenship in both places; and the other is the economic advantages Inner Mongolia possessed in comparison to Mongolia. These two factors combined contribute to incite a reassessment of what means to be Inner Mongol and a reevaluation of the relationship between Inner Mongolia and China.

The Inner Mongols first had to deal with their sense of rejection by the Mongols in Mongolia. This has to do with the different processes of national identity construction in Mongolia and China. In China, per its self-image as a multiethnic society, the Chinese state has been constructing the national identity issue on a diversity-but-unity basis – 'China is a unified multinational state'. Despite the increasing tendency of the Chinese state to assimilate its various ethnic minorities, institutionally the Chinese state still allows certain room for various ethnic minority groups to express and assert their ethnic identities.<sup>61</sup> In Mongolia, however, the state has constructed itself more along the lines of a traditional nation-state, which equates the majority Halh Mongol as Mongolian. As a former tribal denominator, Halh Mongol has been designated as the most authentic Mongolian in Mongolia. In

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 43–5.

<sup>59</sup><http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?RL=59>.

<sup>60</sup>Bulag, *Nationalism and Hybridity*, 2–3.

<sup>61</sup>See Harrell, *Civilizing Projects*.

his study of the nationalism of modern Mongolia, Uradyn Bulag writes, ‘Halh is generally accepted as coterminous with Mongol in Mongolia . . . The idea that Halh equals “proper Mongol” is further facilitated by the adoption of the Halh dialect as the standard language enshrined in the Cyrillic Mongolian script adopted in the 1940s’.<sup>62</sup> This exclusive construction of the Mongolian national identity based on the core Halh Mongol has effectively shut off the chances for other Mongol people, outside of Mongolia, to be considered as proper Mongols. As a result, many Inner Mongols who were not of the Halh group and went to Mongolia initially with a strong passion of pilgrimage and Mongol co-national-ship faced with great shock and disillusionment. As Bulag remembers about his first trip to Mongolia as an Inner Mongol in 1990, ‘there in Mongolia, for the first time I realized I was not Mongol, but an Inner Mongol and a citizen of China. Worse still, I was sometimes regarded as Chinese’.<sup>63</sup> It is the emphasis of the purity of the Halh Mongol that dissociated Mongolia from other Mongols. Inner Mongolia as well as other Mongol inhabited regions are considered as ‘lost land, not much different from any other distant territory of the old Mongolian Empire’.<sup>64</sup>

The Mongolian rejection of Inner Mongols and the denial of their Mongolness have in fact strengthened Inner Mongols’ identity of being ‘Inner Mongol’. For example, Wurlig Borchigud points out that ‘among many Inner Mongolia Mongolian-speaking urban Mongols, the present ethnicity based Obor Mongolcuud<sup>65</sup> regional identity has already replaced their previous pan-Mongolian transnational dream’.<sup>66</sup> This separation of the Inner Mongol identity from the independent Mongolia has in a way ‘enhanced the national boundary of the Chinese state to which it belongs’.<sup>67</sup> The following narrative, which was conveyed to me by an Inner Mongol businessman who travels between Mongolia and China, illustrates this dynamics of interaction:

I first went to Mongolia in 2000. To be frank, at that time I was very excited to have an opportunity to go there, because as a Mongol it’s a wonderful thing to travel to Mongolia to see how, as an independent country, Mongolia is doing. Also, I had great expectations to feel the common cultural bond with my brothers and sisters in the north, because after all, we are all descendents of Genghis Khan. Certainly there are good things in Mongolia, for example, the environment is much better and there is not as much pollution as here in China. And everywhere people speak Mongolian, which to a Mongol growing up in Inner Mongolia was also emotionally touching. However, soon after interacting with the Mongols there, my initial warmth towards them diminished. I sensed that people over there do not like me very much. For example, whenever I talked to people and when they hear my accent, their attitude towards me would change and became very strange. In general the Mongols in Mongolia are not very friendly towards people from China, including Inner Mongols. To them, I am already like Han Chinese and I certainly cannot tolerate that. At least here in China we still use the traditional Mongolian scripts, and to me those people in Mongolia have been very heavily influenced by Russia and do not behave like Mongols any more. At dinner tables we would get into those arguments about who are real Mongols and what is real Mongolian culture, and they would accuse us of being sinicized and we would call them russified. It is sad. These days I am not that enthusiastic about going to Mongolia

<sup>62</sup>Bulag, *Nationalism and Hybridity*, 54.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 4–5.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 183.

<sup>65</sup>Obor Mongolcuud is Mongolian for Inner Mongol people.

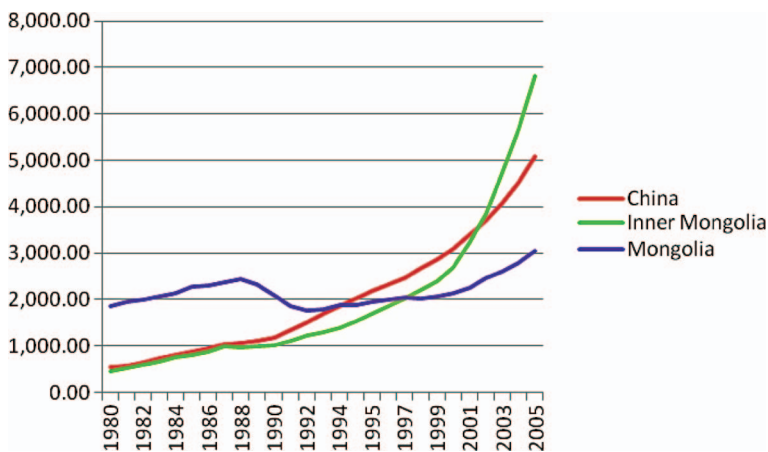
<sup>66</sup>Borchigud, *Transgressing Ethnic and National Boundaries*, 179.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

anymore. If I have to go, it is just work, and I don't think I would want to stay there for long.

The second factor is economical and utilitarian. Mongolia to this day remains a poor and less developed country while Inner Mongolia has enjoyed high levels of economic development within China over the past few decades (see Table 1). Below is data on GDP per capita PPP of Mongolia, China, and Inner Mongolia from 1980–2007. As is evident, Mongolia's economy has been quite stagnant, and its GDP growth rate is very low and has remained so over the past two decades. On the other hand, although China in the mid-1990s was similar to Mongolia in terms of GDP per capita, by 2007, China's GDP per capita had grown to about twice that of Mongolia's. The same can also be said about Inner Mongolia. Since 2004, Inner Mongolia's GDP per capita has been growing very rapidly and has already surpassed China's national average. In 2007, Inner Mongolia's GDP per capita was more than twice that of Mongolia's. The different levels of economic development between Mongolia and Inner Mongolia are reflected in Inner Mongol's perception of differences in economic wellbeing between the two places. For example, Wurlig Borchigud reports, 'most Inner Mongolia urban Mongols have come to realize that their own regional economy is much better than Outer Mongolia's. Because of their regional economic perspective, an increasing number of urban Mongols in inner Mongolia hold a more flexible attitude toward both local Inner Mongolian regional identities'.<sup>68</sup> We can also see Inner Mongol's view of Mongolia's economy from the

Table 1. Comparative GDP per capita PPP (in constant 2005 international dollars) 1980–2007.



Note: GDP data for China and Mongolia is from World Bank World Development Indicators Database, which is accessible online (<http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org.proxygw.wrlc.org/ext/DDPQQ/member.do?method=getMembers&userid=1&queryId=6>). Inner Mongolia's GDP data is estimated from Inner Mongolia Statistical Yearbook 2008, accessible online at China Data Online (<http://chinadataonline.org/eng/ereg/ceitgroup.asp>).

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

following personal account. Böke, who is the head of the village that I stayed for my field research in Damao Joint Banner recalled his trip to Mongolia:

Our banner is a friendship region to one region in Mongolia, so we local government officials were invited to visit them in 2005. It was quite poor there frankly, especially in the rural areas. In Ulaanbaatar the road conditions were really bad, and the whole city's level of development was almost like a second-tier city in Inner Mongolia, much worse than Hohhot. I heard everything is imported to Mongolia, and people cannot afford enough food sometimes. It is not like here we produce everything, they do not produce anything other than dairy products. People in general say corruption is bad in China, then they should go visit Mongolia because it is much worse there. The gap between rich and poor in cities like Ulaanbaatar is astonishing.

### Conclusion

Faced with challenges to their traditional pastoral way of life and tremendous pressure to sinicize, the overall resistance of the Mongols is at best restricted within local boundaries, if not political acquiescence at the individual level. So far, there have not been any major groups or movements mobilizing for greater Mongol autonomy in Inner Mongolia. This paper has presented an argument of how both domestic and international factors combine to make the Inner Mongols less politically mobilized than either the Tibetans or the Uighurs. Low group concentration, lack of political leadership, weak religious affiliations, and geopolitical and historical proximity to China proper have all made the Inner Mongols less prepared for political mobilization. Furthermore, relations between Inner Mongolia and Mongolia have also impacted on ordinary Inner Mongols' view and understanding of their lives in China. Changing perceptions of Mongolia, as the kin state for the Mongols in Inner Mongolia, have effected how the Inner Mongols perceive their own ethnic and national identity and the relationship between Inner Mongolia and China. With the development of an Inner Mongolian identity located within China, and the general perception of that China offers better economic conditions and life opportunities than Mongolia, the Inner Mongols have been more relaxed about their national identity. More and more Mongols have joined the linguistic assimilation process and the survival of the Mongolian language and culture is of great concern, particularly to certain Mongol intellectuals. Yet, without political mobilization and large scale support for such movement, it is unlikely that this limited cultural autonomy will be preserved for the Inner Mongols in the future. The case of the Inner Mongols is a classical example of how modernization and nation building processes go hand in hand in creating huge pressure for assimilation. Without sufficient state regulations to protect the cultural rights of minorities, market competition and economic interest prove to be of tremendous power to make people conform. And sadly this might be the future for the Mongols in Inner Mongolia.

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