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## FROM INEQUALITY TO DIFFERENCE: COLONIAL CONTRADICTIONS OF CLASS AND ETHNICITY IN 'SOCIALIST' CHINA

### Abstract

Through an historical ethnography of the imbrication of class and ethnicity in socialist China, this paper studies socialism as another kind of colonialism with its peculiar, contradictory ramifications of universalism and particularism. The 'colonial' cultural politics of socialism is explored in Inner Mongolia, the northern frontier of China, where the historical formation of the social and ethnic relationship defies any clear-cut dichotomy of colonizer and colonized. In the first half of the twentieth century, Inner Mongolia was colonized by Chinese warlords. Yet, at the same time, the majority of the Chinese population in Inner Mongolia were poor peasants leasing Mongol land. Nonetheless, the Mongols won a limited ethnic autonomy within China in 1947 by applying Leninist colonial liberation ideology, defining the Mongols as a collective group colonized by the Chinese. However, the socialist ideology based on class analysis of the social relationship during the land reform, effectively enabled the Chinese to designate many Mongols as class enemies, thereby justifying the redistribution of Mongol land among the Chinese who constituted the majority in Inner Mongolia. The ensuing ethnic violence forced Mongol leaders, who were both agents of the Chinese Communist Party and representatives of the Mongolian nationality, to press for an explicit nationality policy to defend the nominal ethnic autonomy of Inner Mongolia. Yet, this deployment of ethnic principle amid China's class struggle campaign was interpreted as betrayal of the socialist principle, thus leading to a collective Chinese violence against the Mongols during the Cultural Revolution. The paper suggests that, instead of a sterile debate of subaltern representation,

which often reflects the scholars' own 'position' devoid of social context, an historical ethnography may better illustrate the historical contingencies in the practice of subalternity in socialist China.

## Keywords

Mongols; land reform; nationality policy; class; ethnicity; colonialism; socialism

## Introduction

**I**START WITH A PROBLEM, both theoretical and practical: until 1947–8 many landless Chinese immigrant tenants in Inner Mongolia worked for Mongol pastoralists who possessed abundant pasture, thus forming a hierarchical ethnic relationship. Simultaneously, however, a group of Chinese effectively controlled Inner Mongolia after the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911. These were the warlords and the ruling Chinese Nationalist Party (GMD) government, from whose domination Mongols sought to escape. In 1947 the Mongols, with the 'help' of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), established their own quasi-autonomous power by overthrowing Chinese warlords and the GMD. Before they tasted the fruit of victory, however, the Mongols faced the challenge of Chinese peasants, who demanded an equal share of land and property in the so-called democratic reform movement carried out in 1947–8. Thus, we have here the following paradox, in short, the CCP helped 'liberate' Mongols from the GMD and warlords but, at the same time it also enabled Chinese peasants to wrest land away from Mongol 'landlords' in the name of revolutionary justice. In both cases, land was not just an object of economic domination in an emancipatory class struggle but also a symbol of identity in a postcolonial narrative of ethnic autonomy. The fact that the two processes overlapped poses a series of contradictory questions about the meaning of Liberation from class and ethnic perspectives. The conflicting outcomes force us to inquire whether the regime of socialist egalitarianism was indeed 'emancipatory' or just another form of 'colonialism'.

In many respects, the situation of Inner Mongolia should be an ideal case of 'internal colonialism' in Hechter's (1975) terms. Yet it is not so simple. No matter how one cuts it, colonialism presupposes the clear-cut (ethnic) identity of the colonial self *vis-à-vis* a colonized other, the (political-economic) domination of an oppressed subaltern by a ruling elite, as well as the confluence of these processes. The complexity of Inner Mongolian issues is further underlined by the fact that the Mongols are a minority even in their own ostensibly autonomous homeland – Inner Mongolia. This was the result of more than a century

of ethnic Chinese settlement of the territory. However, what happens when ethnic self-determination runs counter to the principle of class emancipation, specifically a process in which landless Chinese seek redress from landed Mongol elites? How do Mongol Communist Party leaders, who must negotiate between ethnic and class equality, resolve a situation which is beyond the clear-cut boundaries of 'colonialism'? Finally, how does the increasing ethnic and cultural hybridity that results from Chinese in-migration and changing Mongol lifestyles, influenced by political disruption, urbanization and economic displacement, affect the 'purity' of ethnic principles that Mongol Party elites claim to uphold throughout these struggles? The contradictions that come about on the surface of things are the result of a discrepancy (if not conflict) between ideology and practice as well as the fuzzy definitions of ethnicity and class that complicate the presumed boundaries between self and other. In effect, the struggle is not just political-economic but cultural as well, in the sense that purity of identity (as well as representations and interests thereof) become imminently problematic.

Thus, how do we study this dilemma and especially how can we represent it? The Mongols as 'subalterns' were 'liberated' by the Communists, including Mongol communists and yet, within a year or two, many were relabelled as an exploiting class by Chinese. The Subaltern Studies project is predicated on rescuing the voice of the subalterns and, 'speaking' on their behalf (Spivak, 1988). However, there are many uncomfortable situations with such a representation of the other. In criticizing the uneasy and shifting category of 'the people' in socialist China, Gail Hershatter notes that subalterns speak in the language of the state: 'this legacy of official subaltern-speak complicates enormously the search for subversive voices' (Hershatter, 1993: 108). When 'subalterns' did speak in the revolutionary narrative of 'speaking bitterness', they demonstrated tremendous destructive power (Anagnost, 1997). Recent studies show that the subaltern representation as deployed by intellectuals is often a self-empowering strategy, 'it produces a way of talking in which notions of lack, subalternity, victimization, and so forth are drawn upon indiscriminately, often with the intention of spotlighting the speaker's own sense of alterity and political righteousness' (Chow, 1993: 13).

Inasmuch as post-colonial critique borrows heavily from Marxist lexicons, there is now a need to study them 'post-colonially'. 'The people' in the subaltern analysis are the silent, the oppressed. However, in the Marxist or Maoist lexicon, they become the loud-speaking majority, the masses, the proletariat who rise to overturn the dominant minority landlord elite. The gallantry of the post-colonial critics intervening in this unequal relation on the side of the oppressed is laudatory, but 'the people', as a majority, could also be the dominant, majority ethnic group in a multi-ethnic state. Many current world problems derive from ethnic conflicts, more often than not in the form of majority violence against the minority. It may be appropriate to suggest that ethnic minorities are not just failures in the 'race for nation' but, that they are colonized by modern nation-states which

privilege the majority and sanction violence against minorities. Yet, ethnicity is now increasingly discussed in terms of multiculturalism, rather than within a framework of contemporary quasi-colonial relations. Even the notion of 'internal colonialism' has been retracted by some on the ground that, *inter alia*, the criteria of exploitation do not fit the state's affirmative action to ethnic minorities (Sautman, 1999).

All this suggests the need to problematize the violent nature of the classificatory concepts. In a recent volume, some historians and political scientists have examined development and application of three paradigmatic concepts: nation/nationality, class, and civil society (Mudimbe, 1997). According to Mudimbe, a paradigm dominated in a particular historical period and, the dominant paradigm, 'organized an intellectual configuration and a way of *thinking the political* by interpreting and reinterpreting the notion of social conflict, on the one hand, and of a community of interests, on the other' (1997: 3, original emphasis). The significance of this paradigmatic thinking is that intellectual representation of the other, the subaltern, ethnicity, class, or what not, should be premised on an awareness that class and ethnicity are ways of 'thinking the political'. There is also the implication of deploying such concepts especially when they are also used by the people they come to study. Without this awareness, a blind use of these concepts, especially propelled by the post-colonial instinct of 'resistance' could very well misread what happens on the ground. Bourdieu's warning is in order: 'When the dominated quest for distinction leads the dominated to affirm what distinguishes them, . . . do we have to talk of resistance? . . . when, on the other hand, the dominated work at destroying what marks them, . . . is this submission?' (1990: 155)

This paper discusses the changing boundaries of concepts as Communists responded to local situations in their attempt to apply their general but nonetheless sinicized principles, such as class struggle. This paper will keep these boundaries alive in order to show the violence of these concepts. This approach eschews an easy moralistic representation of the subaltern other. Instead, it attempts to problematize post-colonial neo-Marxist representation, drawing on materials from socialist China. Through an historical ethnography of class and ethnicity, the author will argue that colonialism lies in the discursive unpredictability of concepts embedded in socialism and its (mal)adaptation to the actual situation. Moreover, this is also a reminder that the limitations in the operating tools and convictions that are dear to post-colonial critique have very destructive power.

### **Socialism as class nationalism: from social liberation to ethnic colonization**

Inner Mongolia was a loose administrative unit created as a result of the Manchu conquest of the Mongols in the seventeenth century. It was part of the 'geobody'

of historical Mongolia, the other being Outer Mongolia. Inner Mongolia, by its very name, connotes internal and direct administration by the Qing dynasty. Although it enjoyed a significant degree of autonomy as Chinese were prevented from moving into Inner Mongolia, towards the end of the Manchu rule, the ethnic situation became increasingly complicated, which ran parallel to the changing patterns of pastoralization and agriculturalization. After more than a century of modest Chinese migration and cultivation, the 1902 Qing reform ushered in a new phase abolishing the earlier policy of immigration restraint, allowing Mongol banners to open unlimited land for cultivation. This started to transform the Mongolian concept of property, as the banner princes began to take the banner land as their private property, rather than communal land open to all of their subject herders. Numerous Mongol rebellions against princes took place in the early twentieth century. However, one fundamental change took place gradually: the Mongol princes-cum-landlords lost their rights to govern the Chinese tenants they had invited in, as the Qing court decided that the Chinese in Mongol banners should be administered by adjacent Chinese provinces and counties rather than by the Mongol princes. Eventually, administrations were set up within some banners to govern Chinese affairs independent of the banner populations. Therefore, by the early twentieth century, numerous Chinese counties were set up in the territories of Mongol banners. As more Chinese flooded in, demand for land increased; earlier Chinese immigrants often rented their leased land to newcomers, usually at much higher prices. As a result, in the late Qing, the beneficiaries of land transactions were usually not Mongols but, the original Han renters (Ba, 1980). In other words, the Chinese merchants and Chinese tenants had management rights, whereas Mongols, the proprietors, had the right to collect only a minimal topsoil tax (known as Mongol Tax, *mengzu*). Profound social and economic changes took place, as many Mongols also started to settle down to cultivate land. Thus, apart from some banners to the north, most of eastern Inner Mongolia became overwhelmingly agricultural, and in the southern banners, ethnically mixed villages thrived. In western Inner Mongolia, lands along the fertile Tumed plain received the bulk of the Chinese immigrants. By 1947, the population ratio between Mongols and Chinese in Inner Mongolia was already about 1: 5.

In other words, many of the complexities of the Communist-induced class/ethnicity struggles were already presaged by the long, ongoing history of 'ethnicity' leading up to socialism. Indeed, it was precisely this class/ethnic entanglement that triggered Mongol enthusiasm for national independence. In a sense, we do not need post-colonial theory to stress the significance of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994), when in fact hybridity, ethnic code-switching and multiculturalism were all commonplace phenomena prior to their temporary erasure by the monolithic nation-state and colonialism.

In this sense, we have a complex and hybrid social reality that renders difficult the definition of Inner Mongolia, whether to label it as a colony or an internal

colony. The declaration of independence of Outer Mongolia in 1911 and, the subsequent establishment of the Mongolian People's Republic with Soviet help in 1924 laid bare the logic that the other half of the historical Mongolia – Inner Mongolia – would have to be resolved in one way or another. However, Inner Mongolia was overrun by Chinese warlords and by 1928, the very name, Inner Mongolia disappeared from the Chinese map. After 1931, the eastern part of Inner Mongolia came under Japanese sway and, the western part was controlled by Chinese Nationalist forces led by Fu Zuoyi. Under these circumstances, some Inner Mongolian nationalists saw their struggle as a national liberation movement and they projected Mongols as an oppressed, small nation divided up, languishing under both Chinese and Japanese chauvinist and colonial rule. Mongol nationalists of various hues made numerous attempts, some pitting the Japanese against the Chinese, some vice versa, and some saw hope only in linking up with the formally independent Mongolian People's Republic.

Chinese political forces at the time had, broadly speaking, two different attitudes towards Inner Mongolian nationalism, split along ideological lines. The GMD, or the Chinese Nationalist Party, committed to Chinese nationalism and the unification of China, rejected all Mongolian demands for autonomy, let alone independence. Whilst, the Chinese Communists, locked in civil war with the GMD after 1927, viewed the Mongolian drive for autonomy sympathetically, seeing Mongols as struggling against the same oppressive GMD regime that the Communists sought to overthrow. Independence or freedom from oppression was viewed as just in Communist ideology. At the end of the Long March, as the Red Army in Yan'an was squeezed between the GMD forces to the south, invading Japanese to the east, and, unruly Muslims and Mongols to the north, ideological commitment and survival imperatives led Mao Zedong to make a declaration to the Inner Mongolian people in December 1935, on behalf of the Central Government of the Chinese Soviet People's Republic:

We think that only by struggling together with the Inner Mongolian Nation (*Neimenggu Minzu*) can we defeat our common enemies, Japanese imperialists and Jiang Jieshi quickly; simultaneously, we think that only by fighting with us can the Inner Mongolian Nation preserve their Chinggis Khan era glory, avoid the extinction of their nation, and march on the road of national renaissance, so as to achieve independence and freedom as did the Turkish, Polish, Ukrainian and Caucasian nations.

Furthermore Mao promised, *inter alia*, to return Inner Mongolia to the Mongols:

[This government] thinks that the original Inner Mongolian six leagues, twenty-four tribes (*bu*), forty-nine banners, Chakhar and Tumed two tribes, as well as the entire territory of the three special banners in Ningxia, regardless of whether they are already under county administration or

remain grasslands, should all be returned to the Inner Mongolian people (*Neimenggu Renmin*), as the territory of the Inner Mongolian Nation; the names and actual administrative organizations of Jehol, Chakhar, and Suiyuan provinces shall be abolished; no other nations should occupy or expropriate by any excuse land of the Inner Mongolian Nation.'

(Mao, 1935)

This seemingly generous declaration was made when the CCP was weak and it shifted toward united front strategy following the Long March.

Mao's statement was framed in terms of the 'class nation' concept, viewing Mongols as a small, oppressed, colonized nation or people. As is well known, class, the central concern of Marxism and Leninism, was often appropriated to explain the hierarchy between different ethnic groups or racial groups. Imbued with this concern, the anti-colonial liberation movement that gathered momentum from early in this century saw inequality between (ethnic) nations in class terms (Cf. Duara, 1995).

In the Marxist-Leninist view officially endorsed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), class has its domestic and international forms. Domestically, a nation has its own dichotomous antagonistic classes, and internationally, a nation may also be viewed as a class. Thus, we may argue that the Chinese Communist approach to non-Chinese nationalities before 1949 was deeply influenced by internationalist categories. The Mongols and other peoples were understood as oppressed and colonized nations, and they were promised self-determination as a way of achieving equality with the Chinese people. For the Chinese Communists, Inner Mongolia was also a cultural-cum-ethnic zone, somehow to be unified. Mao's 1935 declaration was perhaps the first Chinese Communist political statement to define Inner Mongolia as a unified political and ethnic entity. This recognition of the Mongols' 'subaltern' nation status was indeed the foundation for Mongol Communists to work with Chinese Communists to assure that they would deliver on their promises.

As is clear, the CCP viewed the Mongols as a weak, class ethnic group and, proposed to foster a united front against putative common enemies. In fact, both Mongols and the CCP presented the Mongols as a colonized class nation, thereby legitimating a future separate nation-statehood. There was indeed a remarkable conceptual unity and, this unity was expedient to both sides. For Mongols wanted decolonization, whereas the CCP wanted 'help' from the Mongols in their war against the Japanese invasion and, also, in their conflict with the GMD. In this curious unity, however, Mongols' decolonization from the Chinese was predicated on their ability to 'help' the Chinese (Communists), who then would supposedly deliver 'liberation' to the Mongols. This mode of thinking was possible only when class-nation and its various properties were the dominant ways of 'thinking the political' at the time. We thus have two kinds of subaltern talk here but, far from being equal, they stood in a hierarchical relationship. Leninist

morality is such that liberation from oppression is justified; but once the Communists positioned themselves as liberators, to separate from them would be morally unacceptable. Walker Connor outlined Lenin's three commandments which the CCP followed:

1. Prior to the assumption of power, promise to all national groups the right of self-determination (expressly including the right of secession), while proffering national equality to those who wish to remain within the state.
2. Following the assumption of power, terminate the fact – though not necessarily the fiction – of a right to secession, and begin the lengthy process of assimilation via the dialectical route of territorial autonomy for all compact national groups.
3. Keep the party centralized and free of all nationalist activities.

(Connor, 1984: 38)

Thus, Chinese leaders would begin to view the once 'progressive' force of Mongol class nationalism as 'reactionary'. Through a series of manoeuvres, the CCP established itself as simultaneously a liberator and a colonizer of Inner Mongolia. By 1947, CCP leaders envisaged only autonomy but, not a nation-state, for the Mongols after their 'liberation'.

The envisioned autonomy of the Inner Mongols was challenged on two grounds. First, the large number of Chinese immigrants in Inner Mongolia formed not just the elite but a significant group of working people. There was then an internal class issue. This was especially difficult and challenging, for class relations were intricately related to land, and through land to Chinese peasants, who were in most cases the tenants of the Mongols. In such a reversed internal colonial setting, it is difficult to find a native elite representation of class, without however entangling themselves ethnically.

Internal class relations in Inner Mongolia became a serious issue as soon as the external enemy threat diminished. A 'democratic' reform was waged among the Mongols, not only for the envisaged Communist project but also to ensure that the newly liberated Mongols would not pose a threat to the CCP. The founding of the 'Inner Mongolia Autonomous Government' under the auspices of the CCP in May 1947 raised a number of important questions, i.e. to what extent was the 'autonomous government' autonomous? Could it be led by the Mongols and their own party, or did it need to be led by the Chinese Communist Party? If the latter, then, there was at once the issues of class and ethnicity, for the CCP was a Chinese proletarian class party. Yet where was an Inner Mongolian proletariat? These questions pervaded the debates and intrigues between two rival Mongolian factions that negotiated Inner Mongolian autonomy between 1946 and 1947. Let me briefly outline the struggle between these factions.

After the Soviet-Mongolian declaration of war against Japan in August 1945, Ulanhu, a Mongol Communist, played a major leadership role in securing CCP



victory in Inner Mongolia. He took the initiative to set up an, 'Association of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Movement' (*Neimenggu zizhi yundong lianhehui*), a semi-party, semi-administrative entity cross-cutting the Chinese provinces, with substantial Mongol populations in an effort to provide a unified leadership to the Mongol autonomous movements. Curiously what Ulanhu had been advocating was not a regional autonomy (*quyu zizhi*), under a Chinese province, as all contemporary Chinese nationality theoreticians would claim its provenance to be but, a unified autonomy (*tongyi zizhi*),<sup>1</sup> above or equal to a province, aiming to bring about just what Mao had promised in 1935, although the unified autonomous Inner Mongolia could come under Chinese jurisdiction.

Meanwhile, Mongols in the recently collapsed Manchukuo or Manzhouguo (including what would later become Eastern Inner Mongolia) set up their own Eastern Mongolian Autonomous Government immediately after the Japanese surrender. Led by Mongol nationalists who viewed eastern Inner Mongolia as having been colonized by the imperialist Japanese forces and therefore, cut off from both the MPR and the western part of Inner Mongolia, this government aspired not only to unify Inner Mongolia but, also to join up with the MPR. It was led by a resurrected Inner Mongolia People's Revolutionary Party (IMPRP).

Communism as an ideology was compelling to many who held the 'double class' view that not only was there a class division within a nation but, that international relations could also be best grasped in class terms. The oppressor class within the oppressor nation was responsible for oppressing the smaller nationality but, the oppressor class of the smaller nationality would collaborate with the oppressor class of the bigger nationality. In this view, ordinary Mongols were victims of both Mongol oppressors and Chinese oppressors but the Mongol oppressor class was no match for the Chinese oppressor. Therefore, the smaller nation could initially be treated as undifferentiated and freed from the collective oppression of the bigger nation. Once that 'autonomy' was achieved, the oppressor elements of the society would have to be eliminated. The correct inter-ethnic or inter-nationality<sup>2</sup> relations, after the socialist victory, envisaged by Ulanhu, hinged on eliminating the oppressor classes of both Mongol and Chinese. The proletariats of the two nationalities, since they were assumed to have no exploitative relations, could then forge friendships and cooperation. This vision led Ulanhu to conclude that the leading force of the Inner Mongolian revolution must be the Chinese Communist Party, which he joined in 1925, becoming by 1945 an alternative member of its Central Committee, the party's highest ranking minority official. Only through what he believed to be a non-ethnic party, with its professed compassion for oppressed peoples, would it be possible to sort out the inter-nationality conflicts or differences between Mongols and Chinese. Through this example, we can see the efficacy of Communist ideology, as it had colonized the consciousness of some Mongol leaders such as Ulanhu, as seen by Comaroff and Comaroff (1992).

Ulanhu's insistence on this bifocal, ideological boundary was challenged by

the IMPRP but it proved no match for him and the CCP. The IMPRP as the leading party of this land, was an ethnic party, its membership open only to Mongols. The IMPRP had two concerns: firstly, the social structure of Inner Mongols lacked a proletarian class. Therefore, it concluded, there was no need for the CCP, whose real agenda concerned the industrial working class. Secondly, the IMPRP viewed the CCP as a Chinese party.

The IMPRP was thus crystal clear on the ethnic boundary: Mongol versus Chinese. Yet it was ambiguous about the internal boundary, i.e. the question of class divisions among Mongols. Ulanhu insisted that class exploitation in the Inner Mongolian social structure warranted a radical revolutionary Party, such as the CCP, to carry out democratic revolution so as to eliminate internal exploitation. Finally, Ulanhu won the debate and in May 1947 an Inner Mongolia Autonomous Government (having jurisdiction over only the eastern part of Inner Mongolia) was founded with Ulanhu as its chairman and military commander, as well as the general secretary of the Inner Mongolia Communist Party Work Committee.<sup>3</sup>

An interesting paradox can be discerned in Ulanhu's class discourse. In order to justify his own power base, i.e. the Communist leadership, he *exaggerated* the internal class conflict and emphasized common interests with the CCP. Class struggle in an ethnically mixed region, as on the national and international scale, is never an innocent proletarian ideology for the liberation of humanity. Class struggle often serves an important function of national integration. 'Class struggle was conceived as a nation-building enterprise on a *centrist* model of the state', in the pre-PRC period, according to Fitzgerald (1996: 162; emphasis original) and, we can say it helped to integrate Inner Mongolia into the new Communist Chinese state through a subaltern discourse of shared interests. However, this simultaneously rendered 'liberation' ironic, and ethnicity meaningless and moreover reactionary.

The triumph of Ulanhu's new class discourse had two consequences: firstly, by de-emphasizing the Chinese colonialism which he had long fought against, he rendered Inner Mongolia an internal colony of China. To be sure, as Ulanhu saw it, the need for CCP rule was justified in terms of liberating Inner Mongolia from the colonial oppression of the GMD. Yet, in so doing, he obscured the ethnic complexity of Inner Mongolia, thus fundamentally altering the nature of the Inner Mongolian polity, so that it became not *minzu zhengquan* (nationality polity), but rather *minzu lianhe zhengquan* (joint-nationality polity).<sup>4</sup> In other words, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Government was no longer a vehicle for an autonomous Mongolian political system. Under such a system, the equality that Mongols demanded from the Chinese now became a time-bomb that could explode in their faces, for in the newly established Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, the Chinese had to be granted the same status as Mongols. Moreover, they had to be given proper political representation, so that Mongols could not be charged with reverse colonialism, or what Arif Dirlik (1987) calls cultural

hegemony.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, Ulanhu's emphasis on internal class divisions as opposed to the earlier stance that the Mongols collectively constituted a class-nation, thus warranting autonomy, left Inner Mongolia ill-prepared for the large scale violence induced by 'class struggle' in the subsequent land reform movement.

### **Land reform in 1947–8: A prelude toward blurred boundaries**

One of the central features of Inner Mongolian ethnopolitics was the prominence of Ulanhu in all these struggles. In a sense, the unusual developments in Inner Mongolia were personified in the diverse vested interests he attempted to negotiate or compromise in the creation of this new socialist Inner Mongolia. As Inner Mongolia's highest official for the first two decades following the founding of the Autonomous Region and, China's highest minority official during much of that period, Ulanhu was in the thick of things. Pure ideology in many instances gave way to political machinations and compromises of various sorts. The complexity of the situation is magnified by Ulanhu's own sinicized 'Mongolness' as he tried to represent the ethnic nation and his compromising socialist views as well. This situation also complicates the post-colonial attempt to rescue the agency of the subalterns. Subaltern agency is often a legitimate moral device appropriated for intellectual representation against power. In due course, it is also essentialized in the sense of failing to differentiate the diversity within the subaltern agency. Here, one does not wish to privilege the voice of Ulanhu. His was only one among many, although, as the 'paramount leader' of the Mongols after 1947, his opinion carried significant weight. Even so, his voice was never consistent, constantly shifting to define a position against the dominant yet often conflicting voices from the Party central leadership.

As mentioned, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Government was not 'autonomous' as the name would lead us to believe. The territory under the jurisdiction of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Government was designated as a 'liberated region' (*jiefangqu*) along with Northeast China after the 1947 Liao-Shen military campaign in China's civil war, and land reform carried out in the liberated region also engulfed Inner Mongolia. The Inner Mongolia Communist Party Work Committee was subordinate to the Northeast China Bureau of the CCP and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Government, led by the Inner Mongolian Communist Party Work Committee, fully complied with the Land Reform Law issued by the CCP in October 1947. Ulanhu, whether carried away by revolutionary enthusiasm or under pressure from the CCP, implemented a policy in the agricultural region to thoroughly exterminate feudalism and distribute land according to the slogan 'land to the tillers'. The author would argue that it was the imbrication of his own class and ethnic position that left him practically no choice but to embrace class struggle. According to a retrospective

account by Liu Chun, who led the land reform in Inner Mongolia, Ulanhu was also responsible for implementing a 'leftist' policy in the pastoral region. Ulanhu stated that, 'The pastoral region will also exterminate feudalism.' Everyone in the leadership circle agreed with this suggestion (Liu, 1993: 132–3). In the purely Mongol pastoral region, the Mongol version of land reform was thus a division of animals among poor herders according to the slogans 'livestock to the herders', and 'exterminate feudalism'. Later, however, he felt uneasy and tried within his power to limit the damage to Mongol interests in both pastoral and agrarian regions.

The only right Mongols exercised in this land reform (1947–1948) was based on the principle that the land under the Inner Mongolian jurisdiction belonged to the Mongols collectively (*mengguzu gongyou*). Under such a collective Mongolian proprietorship, land in the agricultural region would be distributed equally to individuals, regardless of ethnic origin. 'Mongol Tax' (*meng zu*) paid by Chinese tenants to Mongol land proprietors was abolished. This was largely an ethnic-blind approach, with assumed confidence in a 'Mongolian' autonomous polity, under which canopy everybody would be treated equally and fairly in terms of shares of land. However, the 'hidden' agendas of the Inner Mongolian land reform and the Northeastern Chinese land reform differed and, that difference took a heavy toll of the even putative Inner Mongolian 'autonomy'.

The land reform in Manchuria was a mechanism to liquidate Japanese collaborators and GMD supporters, thus the economic class principle and the ethnic principle were juxtaposed in the movement. Land reform in the Northeast, from the Chinese point of view, had a de-colonizing connotation: land of 'local bullies', traitors, and landlords which constituted the greater part of the land was redistributed to landless peasants. Thus, land reform was a popular measure, not only among the Chinese but also among agrarian ethnic minorities such as the Koreans (Olivier, 1993: 55–7).

What then were the land tenure relations in Inner Mongolia? During the Manchukuo period (1931–45), the Japanese nationalized Mongol banner land, forcing banner princes to 'offer land to the Manchukuo emperor' (*tudifengshang*), thus relinquishing their monopoly of banner land. The Manchukuo regime then distributed Mongol land to Chinese peasants (Dawaochir, 1988). Nevertheless, Mongols in eastern Inner Mongolia were to some extent a privileged ethnic group within Manchukuo, enjoying somewhat better positions than the Chinese.

Since eastern Inner Mongolia had once been part of the Manchukuo regime, the de-colonizing agenda of the 1947–8 land reform inevitably affected the Mongols. The majority of nationalist leaders of the Eastern Mongolian Autonomous Government set up in 1946, who were co-opted into the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Government, were former high civilian or military officials of the four Hinggan provinces (later to be called leagues in Inner Mongolia) of Japanese controlled Manchukuo. They included Buyanmandakh, leader of the new Inner Mongolian Congress (*canyihui*), who was once the governor-general of four

Mongolian Hinggan provinces under Manchukuo. Even Hafengga, the most popular, left-leaning, leader of the eastern Mongols, once served in the Manchukuo embassy in Tokyo. These people were Mongol nationalists, who fought for Inner Mongolian independence or autonomy. However, since land reform sought to resolve the peasant problem by outright expropriation of land held by landlords and 'feudal institutions', the Mongol leaders, in the new class analysis, were not only traitors but also landlords and feudal elements who were to be 'liquidated'. Struggle against former Mongol rulers and securing Mongol landlords' land became a revolutionary activity. The violence was apparently so great that without 'protection', the top Mongol officials could have perished (Ulanhu, [1965] 1967).

Violence in Inner Mongolia took two forms: inter-ethnic and intra-Mongol. In the ethnically mixed agricultural region, land reform cadres used various means to spur people to violence. In an example, a party directive published on 21 December 1947 for guiding the mass struggle to eliminate feudalism in a banner of the Hinggan League read:

[A]t the beginning of the movement, *we did not emphasize policies*, instead we used the method of igniting fires, used the simple slogans of redressing injustice and taking revenge to mobilize the masses, encouraging the masses to mobilize in the extreme hatred and demand for immediate practical interests. This is right. In the near future, we will continue to do this in newly opened up and half opened up areas.

(Party Directive, 1993; author emphasis)

The same directive encouraged killing the accused, if so demanded by 'the people'. As is clear, there were no specific ethnically-based policies. Indeed, the party directive condemned the view that Mongols had no classes. Song Zhending, a Chinese party secretary of a Mongol banner reporting on the land reform in Hinggan, noted the intense 'class' consciousness of the Mongol peasants but, he disingenuously attributed it to their 'simple mind':

1. They [the Mongol peasants] did not start immediately after the movement began, as they did not trust our policies. But after being mobilized, they were more radical than the Chinese. The Chinese were easy to mobilize, but it is difficult to build momentum among them. The Mongols were more difficult to mobilize, but once mobilized, they would not hesitate, and their action would spare no one's feelings. . . . 4. They [the Mongol peasants] tend to be emotional and retaliatory, this is also due to heavy oppression and their simplicity.

(Song Zhending, 1993: 44–5)

Class analysis and class revenge proved to be attractive to many. One Mongol

who participated in the land reform recalled a Mongol military commissar who passionately stated in a meeting, 'Today, some people say there are no classes among Mongols, but I think this is complete nonsense. I saw with my own eyes how Mongol landlords cruelly oppressed and exploited my own national brothers' (Interview, 1996).

The result was that Mongols also struggled against so-called Mongol feudal elements, including beating and sometimes killing. Interestingly, Mongol peasants were persuaded to demand equal distribution of land to Mongols and Chinese. Song reported that before land reform, Inner Mongolian cadres were attentive to ethnic relations in ethnically mixed regions where Mongol landlords employed many Chinese labourers. However, once land reform began in 1947, the earlier policy [during the 1946 rent and interest reduction movement] of not dividing up Mongol land and no Chinese struggle against Mongol landlords was reversed:

We [land reform cadres] originally decided that Mongols maintained ownership rights even if their land was divided, and the Chinese should pay Mongol tax, one *sheng* (= litre of grain), two *shengs* or three *shengs* for one *shang* (= 15 *mu*) land according to the quality of land. This provoked discussion among Mongol peasants who wondered if Chinese here (in ethnically mixed regions) did not have ownership rights: what would happen to [us] Mongols if we [Mongol peasants] were not to be allocated land in predominantly Chinese counties? Since Mongol tenants elsewhere [in Chinese counties] were given land, here too the Chinese and Mongols should be treated equally.

(Song Zhending, 1993: 45–6)

Despite this friendship as portrayed above by the Communist officials, in ethnically mixed areas, violence was rampant and frequently ethnic in nature. Nonetheless, it was the violence in the pastoral region that had led to a rethinking of the land reform in Inner Mongolia. Land reform in the pastoral region did not involve distributing land to Chinese since there were few Chinese there but, its intra-ethnic conflict there developed an international dimension. Since class labelling was introduced in accordance with the number of animals one possessed, rich Mongols, in order to avoid being labelled as herdlords (hence feudal elements), both distributed animals to relatives and subordinates and slaughtered their animals *en masse*. A herdlord risked not only confiscation of property but physical elimination. Poor Mongols, who had been distributed animals, fearful that their share would make them into the category of herdlord, consumed as many animals as possible. Within a very short time, not only were many among the Mongol elite killed, but there was a catastrophic loss of animals.<sup>6</sup> Some put up stiff resistance and some even rebelled. They were put down by the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Government army. In February 1948, open rebellion

broke out in Ulanmod Township (*nutag*) in Hinggan League, in which more than 200 rebels killed land reform cadres and attempted to flee to the MPR with many followers and horses. The rebellion was brutally suppressed (Song Jiazhen, 1993). The violence in Inner Mongolia was so strong that even the MPR leadership expressed concern. The CCP central leadership also feared that continued ethnic violence might jeopardize the stability of Inner Mongolia (Liu, 1993: 138). In this sense, it was not so much the inter-ethnic violence in the ethnically mixed regions as the intra-Mongol violence with the prospect of escalation into international conflict that caught the eyes of the Chinese leaders, who then ordered a halt.

### **The ethnic nationality policy: reinventing traditional boundaries**

The gravity of the Inner Mongolian land reform fiasco is evident from the belated self-criticism issued on 23 June 1949 from the Northeast Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party which led the land reform. The document, after admitting a number of mistakes involving failure to distinguish Mongols from Chinese, suggests that:

*In the future, the central problem in the Mongolian area is to educate the cadres to understand nationality policy (minzu zhengce), to train new Mongolian cadres, to understand different policies that distinguish different regions (agricultural, semi-agricultural-semi-pastoral, pure pastoral), and to understand that in the Mongolian area a more cautious and steady principle has to be adopted, and only a gradual democratic policy be implemented.*

(CCP, 1991; author emphasis)

The necessity for such measures was not only to restore and develop pastoral and agricultural production, 'but we should also be specially attentive to stabilizing the Mongolian army' (*ibid.*).

The self-criticism specifically mentioned nationality policy, stating that the Mongolian inhabited area would be treated as separate, and a more lenient policy be adopted. It is especially interesting to note the concern over the instability of the Mongolian army. In other words, without a nationality policy, the consequences would have been more catastrophic.

The large-scale violence in Inner Mongolia clearly made a mockery of the Marxist-Maoist theoretical pretense that once the oppressor class was eliminated there would be no ethnic violence since ethnic violence embodied conflict of interest between oppressor classes. In other words, violence was not exclusively a matter of classes. I do not say that there was a deliberate policy on the part of Chinese Communists to discriminate against the Mongols. The violence, as

mentioned, was not a small one that could be excused as a deviation of policy, rather there was no policy that differentiated ethnicity; or it simply used the class struggle principle to resolve nationality problems. The essential difference between the Chinese and Mongol areas was that in the latter case it was not the economic loss but the ethnic and international relations that the CCP came to stress. Mongol Communists also, in light of this disaster, started to reconsider their positions. Consequently, measures and policies were introduced to redress the problems. These were then among the first comprehensive policies that specifically address issues regarding minorities under the control of the Chinese Communist Party.

As part of the rectification seeking to redress problems associated with land reform, Ulanhu urgently assessed the Inner Mongolian situation. In a meeting of high cadres of Inner Mongolia held in Harbin in 1948, Ulanhu pressed for a policy of 'Three Nos and Two Benefits' (*san bu liang li*) for Inner Mongolia (Boyanbat, 1993). He proposed that in the pastoral region there should be no property distribution, no class labelling, and no class struggle. Herders and herdlords were regarded as symbiotic with each benefiting the other (Zhao, 1998). This was not a rectification which endorsed the Land Law and only blamed deviations but, an explicit statement that the Law was not applicable among pastoral Mongols. Ulanhu thus introduced a new boundary. The Chinese method, drawing on the experience of agrarian China, was not to be applied in Inner Mongolia because Chinese agrarian relations differed fundamentally from Mongolian pastoral ones. Therefore, apart from the princes and high lamas who were to be stripped of their privileges, the so-called herdlords were redefined as different from Chinese landlords. Herdsmen who worked for them were neither serfs nor slaves, but salaried workers (*mu gong*); in a word, these herdlords were to be treated as national capitalists, that is, as progressive elements (Zhao, 1998).

Although no effort was made to stop land division in agricultural and mixed ethnic areas, as land had already been equally divided up, measures were adopted to prevent Chinese peasants from further struggling against Mongol landlords. Mongol farmers, however, were allowed to participate in struggle sessions against Chinese landlords and bullies in agrarian areas (Hao, 1997: 575). We can see that under this new principle, Chinese landlords in Inner Mongolia were projected as colonialists, while Mongol landlords had acquired an ideologically positive status, somewhat reminiscent of the colonial liberation discourse as mentioned earlier.

It was indeed ironic that ideological unity meant ethnic division, for unrestrained class struggle eventually developed into national confrontation once again, an outcome which Ulanhu had worked desperately to prevent. It was also ironic that Mongols, once in a Communist regime, came to be seen not as an oppressed small nation, an argument that initially won them a putative autonomy, instead, as the case in agricultural and mixed ethnic areas showed, internal class relation was prioritized, hence many became targets of class struggle. We



may also tentatively conclude that China's nationality policy was a testimony to the failure of Chinese Communist 'democracy'. The fiasco led to an affront to the moral authority of the Communist party and, nothing short of a total overhaul of the policy and nothing short of a complete separate policy, would restore the authority of Communist leadership.

### **Negotiating land rights and the competition for subaltern status**

Demarcating Inner Mongolian territorial boundaries for the purpose of autonomy, winning the relative autonomy of Mongol herdsmen from the Chinese universalizing class struggle in land reform and, prevention of Chinese peasants from struggling against Mongol 'landlords', all rested on the discourse of group difference as well as a revived subaltern identity. Taking advantage of conflict between class theory and practice with regard to ethnicity, Inner Mongolian Communist officialdom succeeded in framing a signifying strategy in which Mongols, especially pastoral Mongols, the symbolic center of Mongol identity, were recognized as a distinctive culture that warranted a boundary. This continued as a valid argument which Chinese leaders were prepared to accept not only because their universalized land reform and class struggle had produced great 'deviations', which Mao and other leaders came to deplore, but also because Inner Mongols, as a role model for soliciting support from other ethnic minorities in China and/or incorporation in a future 'unified China', had to be treated leniently. Ulanhu's three Nos policy achieved national status, becoming CCP policy in minority pastoral regions after the founding of the PRC.<sup>7</sup>

Should we then be optimistic about the limited but hard won 'nationality policy' in China? At stake is not only a theoretical issue but, direct responsibility for the subsequent majority backlash that cost Inner Mongolians their 'token' autonomy. I have already examined the process whereby the politics of difference had become a defining principle of Ulanhu's effort to draw boundaries to protect Inner Mongolian autonomy. This is not the end of the story, unfortunately. As long as the universalizing principle occupies the hegemonic position, the politics of difference will inevitably be criticized as the politics of privilege. In the West, conventional liberal democracy condemns minority rights as not only violating the principle of equality and citizenship but also undermining the stability of the nation-state. The rigid principle of conventional democracy and the movement for cultural recognition has produced an impasse. We need to examine further twists of this politics of difference, in an escalating milieu of class struggle, came to define the essence of Maoism.

Land tenure was one critical dimension of the Chinese-Mongol relationship, as noted. As the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region was established in the eastern part of Inner Mongolia, western Inner Mongolia, formerly colonized by

Chinese warlords, continued to exist as a Chinese province – Suiyuan – until 1954. We can look at it a bit more closely, especially the Tumed region in Suiyuan. Eastern Inner Mongolia had already gone through land reform before 1949, and the pastoral region in western Inner Mongolia followed the three Nos policy until the 1960s. The Tumed region as a part of the agricultural areas of Suiyuan province underwent a ‘peaceful’ land reform only in 1951 but, that reform was resented by both Mongols and Chinese. The situation was complicated by Ulanhu who had a personal stake there. Ulanhu was not only a native of the Tumed, he was also born into a rich peasant family. The Tumed case was important also because the banner is in the suburb of Huhhot, later to become the capital of a unified Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and, political conflict there would produce reverberations in the capital and beyond.

Nationality policy was certainly a powerful weapon in the hands of Mongol officials once it was made a national policy. Even before Suiyuan province was returned to Inner Mongolia, Ulanhu, as China’s Nationality Affairs Commissioner, managed to push and pass two documents specifically relating to land reform in purely agricultural Mongol banners in Suiyuan province in 1951.<sup>8</sup> Mongols would be entitled to possess twice as much land as Chinese. Different criteria were also used to determine class status among Mongol peasants. Their class status would be determined exclusively by the volume of exploitation, rather than the amount of land owned. This was specified in articles 3 and 4 of the land law for Suiyuan Mongolian banners:

Article 3. Because the Mongols are in the midst of the transition from pastoralism to agriculture, because they still lack familiarity with agricultural production and productive skills, and because cultivation of their land depended previously on renting, so in classifying Mongols, land renters should be treated differently in accordance with their land holdings, exploitative income, and standard of living. Article 4. Because the Mongols rent out land, in consideration of their special situation of being unable to collect land rent or to collect only low rent, classification should be based on their actual exploitative income.

(Neimenggu and Neimenggu, 1987)

Ann Anagnost, in recasting ‘speaking bitterness narrative’ in China, evokes Arif Dirlik’s analysis of Mao’s conceptualization of class located within hierarchies of power, ‘especially in terms of relations of exploitation’, rather than ‘in their relationship to the means of production’ (1997: 30). It appears in Inner Mongolia that the Chinese emphasized the means of production and that Mongols were land owners; Mongols, on the other hand, insisted that they were land owners in name, since Suiyuan was controlled by Chinese warlords and, seven counties were set up on the Mongolian banner territory. In fact, many Mongols were reduced to begging from the Chinese peasants.

In accordance with this reasoning, the Mongols' class status was consequently set one rung lower than that of Chinese with similar class statuses. Moreover, even if they rented out their land or employed hired hands, if their living standard was no higher than that of a Chinese middle peasant, they should be treated as 'small renters' (*xiao tudi chuzu zhe*), not as small landlords (*xiao dizhu*). Consequently, their land would not be confiscated. Landless or poor Mongols would also be given twice as much land as the Chinese in order to make up for their low-level farming skills. The measure effectively preempted an earlier more indiscriminate yardstick under which 20 per cent of Mongols would have been classified as landlords and many more as rich peasants (Su and Zhang, 1989: 117). Instead, of a total of 4,461 Mongol households (18,383 individuals) in six counties in western Suiyuan, Tumed banner, four counties in eastern Suiyuan and Urad Front banner, which were subjected to land reform in Suiyuan province, 240 households (5.4% of the total) and 1,344 individuals (7.3 per cent of the total) were classified as landlords while 94.6 per cent of households and 92.7 per cent of the individuals were classified as tenants, poor peasants, middle peasants and small renters. The number of landlord and rich peasant households and individuals appear to be substantially lower than the quota of 8 per cent of households and 10 per cent of individuals for China (Qinggeletu, 1992: 26). This policy was applied only to the Tumed and other agricultural Mongols in the former Suiyuan province but not adopted in eastern Inner Mongolia as a rectification of earlier radical actions against Mongolian landlords.

As can be seen, the achievement of Mongol dominance in Inner Mongolia resulted from a politics of difference based on a critique of Chinese discrimination, as well as a reassertion of their subaltern status. The effective way of exercising ethnic equality (*minzu pingdeng*) was to establish Mongol autonomy where Mongols could be relatively free from Chinese intervention, 'exploitation' or 'oppression'. The counties were abolished, and their territory was annexed into the Tumed banner. This process conforms to Charles Taylor's cogent argument: 'The politics of difference grows organically out of the politics of universal dignity . . . Where the politics of universal dignity fought for forms of non-discrimination that were quite "blind" to the ways in which citizens differ, the politics of difference often redefines non-discrimination as requiring that we make these distinctions the basis of differential treatment'. Such 'reverse discrimination measures', Taylor continues, 'has been justified on the grounds that historical discrimination has created a pattern within which the unfavored struggle at a disadvantage. Reverse discrimination is defended as a temporary measure that will eventually level the playing field and allow the old 'blind' rules to come back into force in a way that doesn't disadvantage anyone' (Taylor, 1994: 40). We may suggest that Ulanhu might have thought that the elimination of inequality and oppression could be achieved once Mongols achieved primacy in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Yet, would it work in multi-ethnic Inner Mongolia?

Ulanhu's new approach achieved several purposes. It made land available to Chinese tenants, hired labourers and the land poor generally. Moreover, separate criteria of class designation avoided a situation of branding huge numbers of Mongols as landlords, so making the reality congruent with the earlier Communist class-nationality principle whereby ethnic minorities are viewed as oppressed and exploited by the majority. Ulanhu's rationale for granting more land to the Tumed Mongols was to elevate their 'economic' status so that they could be equal to the Chinese in other arenas. This was his achievement of the land reform in Suiyuan in 1951. However, neither Mongols nor Chinese were satisfied with the outcome. Mongols were unhappy because they lost most of the land that was historically theirs, and the majority saw their living standard fall. The Chinese were unhappy because they thought it unfair not only that they received smaller portions and usually poorer land but, also that the Mongols' class status was improved in an ideological sense, i.e. lowered. Neither group saw the outcomes as embodying social justice.

New problems developed soon after the land reform was completed. In the Elementary Agricultural Producers' Cooperatives (*chu ju she*) set up in 1951, each member was paid a dividend according to his or her individual contribution of assets (*gu fen*), such as land, agricultural tools, and animals. In this way, by virtue of contributing double pieces of land, a Mongol was awarded twice the dividends of a Chinese. This practice angered the Chinese members who were not only in the majority but, also the main and the most skilled labour force in the agricultural cooperatives. They complained that Mongols exploited their blood and sweat money (*xue han qian*). Consequently, Chinese in the Tumed banner clamoured to oust Mongols from the cooperatives. After 1956, with introduction of the Advanced Agricultural Producers Cooperatives (*gao ji she*), income was no longer determined by assets invested in the cooperatives but, exclusively on the basis of one's labour. Mongols were quickly impoverished, due, according to Mongols, largely to their poor agricultural skill and, lack of labour force. Now Mongols sought to quit the cooperatives, complaining about the loss of their land to the cooperatives.

The response of the Mongol-dominated Tumed banner party committee was a programme of land compensation (*tudi baochou*) to make up for the drop in income by compensating about 30 per cent of the productive volume of Mongol land brought into the cooperatives. The programme was largely to benefit the Mongols who were a minority in mixed-nationality cooperatives (Tumote, 1987: 238).<sup>9</sup> After the 1958 communization movement and the anti-rightist movement began, not only were Mongols forced to give up 'voluntarily' their land compensation but, they were also criticized for their 'nationalism'. However, in 1962, in the heyday of liberalization after the catastrophe of the Great Leap Forward, as pressure mounted from Tumed Mongols for land compensation, their predicament was alleviated by a small fund made available to them. In March 1963, the Inner Mongolia party committee and government headed by Ulanhu adopted a

special measure to increase the private land allowance to the Tumed Mongols, doubling the size of their original private land plots (*zi liu di*), so that they could grow sideline products to make up for their poverty (Tumote, 1987: 955).

### The wrath of the Chinese 'subalterns'

The geopolitical position of the Mongols and the hostility between China and the Soviet Union that erupted from the early 1960s further weakened the possibility for a discourse of 'difference' in China. Class struggle again became the main approach to national integration; state unity and nationality solidarity were the criteria to judge a minority's loyalty to the Chinese State. After reinitiating the class struggle through his battle cry 'Never forget class struggle' in September 1962, in August 1963 Mao commented on the American Black liberation movement that the, 'nationality struggle is, in the final analysis, a question of class struggle'. This was quickly reformulated in Chinese propaganda as 'The nature of the nationality question is class struggle.' This reformulation, ostensibly equating the nationality question with class struggle, in fact replaced the nationality question with class struggle (Munohai, 1995). In other words, we witness the retreat of the Chinese Communists from nationality. This is rather similar to the liberal white retreat from race in the West (Steinberg, 1995). Chinese chauvinism was no longer the problem that caused minority resentment, the logic being that in a socialist country where everyone is proclaimed equal, everybody must be equal. That some continued to raise the nationality issue was nothing more than backward thinking and, more seriously, a manifestation of backward class consciousness. The nationality question, if there was any, then must be treated as a class struggle problem. However, now that the Chinese positioned themselves as proletarian preemptively, the problem focused on the minority and their continued backward (read feudal) class consciousness and practices.

This line of thinking was encouraged in the years from 1963 onward by the North China Bureau,<sup>10</sup> to 'make up for the missed lesson of democracy' (*minzhu buke*) in ethnically mixed areas such as Tumed. Generally speaking, 'making up for the missed lesson of democracy' was an euphemism for criticizing Ulanhu's 1948 Three Nos policy that had been carried out in the purely pastoral regions well into the early 1960s and the 1951 Tumed Land reform, which implied class struggle among Mongols in the pastoral region and class struggle against Mongols in ethnically mixed regions.

Difference, or nationality policy, was denounced as a mask to shield the class domination among the Mongols in the pastoral region and between the Mongols and Chinese in Tumed and other ethnically mixed areas. Interestingly, the Chinese subaltern or proletarian outrage against so-called class domination or privilege turned out to be none other than an assault targeting ordinary Mongols. Mao's anti-rightism emboldened the Chinese opposition in Inner Mongolia to

differentiate Chinese and Mongols; not only did some Chinese leaders of mixed-nationality communes refuse to give private plots to Mongols, they even called doing so a privilege (*teshu*), contrary to the socialist way of life. The land compensation and private land allowance to Mongols in the Tumed region, which was earlier justified as bringing about equality to the Mongols, became a target for the early phase of the Four Cleanups movement (*cu xiantiao siqing*) started in the winter of 1963. In this so-called 'second land reform' (*erci tugai*) which was characterized as 'Red Storm' (*hongse fengbao*) in Inner Mongolia, the Chinese leadership demanded redesignation of the class designations made in 1950 and 1951. They made an issue of the fact that the Tumed Mongols had extra private plots. Was this not class privilege, they asked indignantly. Many Mongols were consequently reclassified to higher (that is blacker) class labels, and some even were labelled landlords. As landlords, they were subjected to struggle and their property confiscated. Of the 219 households reclassified as landlords or rich peasants in the Tumed banner, 111 were Mongol households (Tumote, 1987: 224). While it is true that some Han also enjoyed an elevation of their class ranking, Mongols were not entirely helpless, especially when Ulanhu was still in power. In villages where Mongols were in the majority, they usually had the upper hand in counterattacks. There were also intra-Han struggles, as there were intra-Mongol ones.

Nonetheless, the Four Cleanups movement in the Tumed banner was largely ethnic in nature, focusing on the fact the Tumed Mongols had some extra land. This was in part in reaction to the perceived power of their Tumed political patrons in the party and government of Inner Mongolia. The target of the Chinese attack was Ulanhu and other high-ranking Tumed Mongolian officials in the Inner Mongolian government and Party. Ulanhu's wife's relatives suffered particularly badly: of the 44 households in her natal village Xiaoyingzi brigade, 11 were classified as landlords or rich peasants, all her close relatives, as an anti-Ulanhu Cultural Revolution report revealed.<sup>11</sup> The Chinese felt that they were losers precisely because Mongol (Communist) leaders of Inner Mongolia had suppressed the Chinese and supported Mongols.

What characterized Chinese indignity against the Mongols in the Tumed was essentially nationality 'inequality', i.e. why on earth should the Tumed Mongols enjoy privileges? Typical questions from the Chinese would be, for example, 'You are a person, so am I, then why do you have a large private plot than me?' (Li, 1966: 129) 'After liberation in the whole country, nationality oppression has been abolished and nationality equality realized, so why do we still need to draft a nationality policy?' Some denied there was any difference between Tumed Mongols and Chinese: 'What difference on earth is there between the Mongols and the Chinese in this place? I think their labor is identical, they all engage in agriculture; their life is identical, they all eat *yumian* flour; their clothes are identical, they all wear short coats; and they speak the same language. I don't see any difference, so why are there so many allowances (*zhaogu*) [for Mongols]?' (Li,

1966: 84–5) Frustration among the Chinese even led to foul abuse, characterizing Mongols as parasites: ‘The Chinese feed the Mongols, and the good people feed the bad people’ (Ulanhu, [1966] 1997: 55). A local Chinese leader said that he was for the Party but, ‘serving the people is contradictory to carrying out the nationality policy’ (Li, 1966: 157).

Throughout this struggle, to the annoyance of Ulanhu and his supporters, some eastern Mongolian officials rejected Ulanhu’s viewpoint. They were also convinced that the Tumed Mongol demand for double plots was a privilege or an exercise of inequality, not just because they thought it unfair to the Chinese but also because the eastern Mongolian peasants did not enjoy the same privilege. They joined with the Chinese, insisting that class was the central issue, and the Tumed Mongol privilege constituted a serious problem that should naturally be targeted in the four cleanups movement. Ulanhu was furious: ‘Chinese chauvinism exists not only among Chinese cadres, but also among Mongol cadres. If minority nationality cadres commit the mistake of [Chinese] chauvinism, then the harm is greater!’ (Li, 1966: 97)

The accusations spiraled out of control. According to Li Gui, a Chinese, Party secretary of Huhhot and, Ulanhu’s ardent supporter, some people in the Four Cleanups Team sent to Baishihu Brigade in suburban Huhhot, in order to dig out the ‘roots’, even resorted to a house-to-house investigation, asking who had kinship relations with the people in charge of leading organs such as the Inner Mongolia Party Committee and what gifts local people sent them. Some even openly clamoured, making challenges and questioning, ‘What flag is the Inner Mongolia Party Committee carrying with regard to the nationality question? What flag is Ulanhu carrying?’ (Li, 1966: 363) They challenged the very principles of the Autonomous Region on egalitarian grounds. More importantly, by association, these criticisms spiraled to the higher plane of principle, that is, suggesting that the Mongols, by enjoying a differential policy, were engaged in separatism. This was a charge that was particularly explosive in the tense international atmosphere of Chinese-Soviet polemics in the mid-1960s.

Instead of Mongol separatism, it was Chinese who started to exclude Mongols from some new ‘revolutionary’ organizations. In the Inner Mongolian class struggle surfacing in the context of the Socialist Education Movement of 1963–65, virtue, not birth or ethnicity became the basis for an emerging new social and political structure. As in the rest of China, in the rural Tumed region, the ‘poor and lower middle peasant association’ (set up on 12–17 December 1964) acquired political significance with membership signifying one’s standing in the entire social milieu. Membership was based on the virtue of low class status (as assigned in land reform). However, unlike in Chinese region of China, virtue in Inner Mongolia was deeply imbedded in ethnicity. Those deemed less virtuous, i.e. the majority of Mongols, for whom former land ownership now led to their re-classification as rich peasants or landlords, were excluded. The class virtue approach thus had an exclusionary function. In other words, subaltern

politics began to show its menacing efficacy. Class was dichotomous, as Mao conveniently divided the classes into two antagonist camps. To be labelled a class enemy meant becoming 'objects of the dictatorship of the proletariat', or 'deprived of civil rights and, in some cases, of their freedom, constantly under suspicion and almost permanently subjected to ideological reeducation' (Billeter, 1985: 152). This may be best illustrated by Ulanhu's resentment against the discrimination by the 'poor and lower middle peasant association' against 'the Mongolian labouring people':

Those holding a chauvinist viewpoint never conscientiously consider the demands of the Mongolian laboring people or patiently listen to their opinions. They regard the just demand of the Mongolian laboring masses, due to the improper treatment of some of their economic problems, as 'carrying out capitalism'; [they] regard the Mongols' demanding separate brigades caused by economic conflict as 'nationality separatism'; and they treat some ordinary disputes internal to Mongolian and Chinese peoples as enemy-us questions. They don't allow Mongols who withdrew from the brigade and who lodged complaints (*gaozhuang*) to Mongol leaders to join the 'poor and lower middle peasant association'; they are not allowed to join the army or to become cadres, and in some case, they have even been incarcerated. They have made the Mongolian poor and lower middle peasants unable to raise their heads, making them feel they have no future. This will inevitably cause conflict among nationalities, create tension in nationality relations, thereby diverting the main contradiction of class struggle.

(Li, 1966: 120)

Ulanhu did not complain about the abstract principle of class struggle but, objected to extending class struggle to ethnic relations, a direction that threatened his political survival. It appeared that the only strategy left for him was to declare that the problem in Inner Mongolia was not one of class struggle but one of nationality relations. The nationality problem needed a nationality policy, he reasoned. By positing the Mongols as 'poor and lower middle peasants', he was still working within the hegemonic discourse. Indeed he was treading a very thin line over an abyss. He waged a double strategy, simultaneously creating a boundary for the purpose of ethnic equality and, inclusion in the revolutionary process but as a lower, hence more virtuous partner. Ulanhu was thus a typical hybrid, both in and out, struggling to maintain breathing space.

However, rhetoric was no longer sufficient. Ulanhu's ideological and ethnic hybridity became suspect. There were already accusations from some Chinese officials that Ulanhu had personal territorial ambitions, thus challenging the very annexation of Suiyuan into Inner Mongolia, which had caused so much trouble for local Chinese immigrants. It seems that without this annexation the Chinese in the Suiyuan province would have had a free hand to carry out the class struggle



to the detriment of Mongols. They denied there was any nationality question in the Tumed region. Ulanhu retorted, ‘. . . some are even Communist party members, especially some CCP members holding power, they wantonly propagate that there is no nationality question, but if there is no nationality question, why do [we] want an autonomous region?’ (Ulanhu, 1966: 70) Angered by the Chinese challenge to Inner Mongolian autonomy, Ulanhu counterattacked in 1965 by reprinting and disseminating widely Mao’s 1935 declaration on Inner Mongolia. He argued that the reason that there was an Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region today was because of Mao’s declaration to the Inner Mongolian nation: ‘They should dig another root (apart from Ulanhu), the root is Chairman Mao’s declaration published in 1935; we have built the autonomous region based on exactly this declaration’ (Ulanhu, 1966: 55). This was tantamount to saying that if Chinese critics wanted to find a backstage master, they had best go directly to Mao. Ulanhu here used an interesting strategy: he occupied the strategic high-ground, taking a historicist line, claiming that Inner Mongolia was not just a Mongol nationalist creation, nor fought for by Mongols alone but, promised and delivered by Mao, himself. The retort served to justify the origins and continued validity of the autonomous institution but, also as an insult to the moral authority of Mao, who had long retracted his promise. This, however, led to the Chinese backlash during the Cultural Revolution, one that would cost many thousands of Mongol lives in a genocidal witch-hunt of the alleged conspiracy of the so-called New Inner Mongolia People’s Revolutionary Party fighting for Inner Mongolian independence (Tumen and Zhu, 1995). It also led to the truncating of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region in 1969, dividing up most of its territory among several Chinese provinces, only to be restored once again in 1979. That is not the end of history.

### Unfinished conclusion

In this paper I have tried to demonstrate the trajectory of Chinese nationality policy in terms of class and ethnicity. To be sure, China’s ‘nationality policy’ is richer in content than I have been able to present here. However, this paper is also meant to challenge both the Chinese Communist *a priorist* claim that Communism could deliver the liberation of the ethnic minorities, and its critique which tends to view Chinese ‘nationality policy’ in light of its bad faith. I argue that nationality policy was more a minority demand, with Ulanhu as the representative figure in Inner Mongolia and beyond, than a majority blessing. Moreover, the very demand for nationality policy suggested the failure of Communism in dealing with ethnicity. This failure came from both the internal dilemma of Communist theories of ethnicity and the social reality that did not always match, at times diverged far from, the theoretical recipe offered by Communism. Mao’s class struggle, for all its egalitarianism and ‘emancipationism’, reproduced a

power hierarchy, so the reclassification of Mongolian class status relocated many in the ranks of the enemy and thus subject to Chinese and class dictatorship, threatening the lives and livelihood of Mongols, individually and collectively. Without documenting the nature of domination and its resistance, silences, complicity and displacements, above all the hybridity of social reality, we risk naturalizing the Communist discourse of nationality policy. To say the least, as I have shown, China's nationality policy emerged out of the debris of conflict between class and ethnicity and, was predicated on the imbrication of class struggle and ethnic equity.

What we have seen from above is that Ulanhu was long writhing within the confines of a kind of universalism, i.e. the class struggle, which threatened to put many Mongols into the enemy camp. His insistence on a more group-differentiated nationality policy at various stages of his political career amounted to creating a boundary. His political career had been marked by a conflict between the notion of class and ethnicity, two irreconcilable concepts that dominate ethnopolitics in many countries. Put differently, this is a conflict between difference and universalism. Universalism or the difference-blind principle is usually cloaked in neutrality, equality, dignity, and individualism. Its critics, on the contrary, frequently point out its hypocrisy as imposing 'one hegemonic culture' and see it as 'highly discriminatory' (Taylor, 1994: 43). The violent provincialism of universalism has recently been criticized (Chakrabarty, 1992). In the Inner Mongolian case, Chinese class struggle violence towards Mongols may be best captured by a Chinese idiom *naoxiu chengnu* (fly into a rage from shame). As the Chinese Communists could not resolve the unsavory binary dichotomy of class struggle and ethnic entitlement without destroying one or the other, they chose the latter in the end!

To dispute whether Inner Mongolia in a socialist China is an autonomous region or an internal colony is a moot point; we need to expand our basic definition of colony, grounded not only in ethnographic details but, also taking up issues beyond representation. To understand this, we grapple with how certain western ideas, such as class and nationality, were introduced and how they left behind an ambiguous and politically explosive situation. In this sense, the seemingly bizarre complexity of Inner Mongolia defies any easy post-colonial representation.

The confusion over the class and ethnicity question may be better understood by applying Fraser's (1995) analytical distinction between class politics and identity politics or socialist/social-democratic politics and multiculturalist politics. She proposes to distinguish two analytically distinct understandings of injustice. One is socioeconomic injustice, another is cultural or symbolic. Justice requires both redistribution and recognition. 'Recognition claims often take the form of calling attention to, if not performatively creating, the putative specificity of some group, and then of affirming the value of that specificity. Thus they tend to promote group differentiation. Redistribution claims, in contrast, often call for abolishing economic arrangements that underpin group specificity. The upshot is that the politics of recognition and the politics of redistribution appear

to have mutually contradictory aims' (Fraser, 1995: 74). These two opposing remedies might work in the ideal cases of class and homosexuality. However, Fraser identifies what she calls 'bivalent' collectivities, such as gender and race that have both economic and cultural faces. The remedies, both distribution and recognition, however, 'are not easily pursued simultaneously. Whereas the logic of redistribution is to put gender out of business as such, the logic of recognition is to valorize gender specificity' (Fraser, 1995: 80). The imbrication of culture and economy, however, creates political dilemmas.

We may say that Mongol class-nation or class nationality poses something of a more acute problem than Fraser's bivalent dilemma. Fraser's theory is static or rigid, as it presupposes only one possibility, i.e. a discriminated cultural minority has to be one that also suffers from economic injustice. The Mongols, as a minority (both in Inner Mongolia and in China as a whole), were in danger of being recognized as inflicting economic injustice upon the majority Chinese. In this, the prescribed remedy envisaged by the majority Chinese was not distribution, upgrading their economic status for eventual 'equality' but 'physical' class struggle to put them, the Mongols, out of business as a group altogether. Given this choice of 'elimination' through 'distribution' as 'justice' and 'elimination' through 'violence' to redress injustice, Ulanhu naturally busied himself with either keeping the Mongols from class categorization altogether or lowering the class status or 'proletariatizing' the Mongols, trying to shield them behind a 'nationality policy'.

In recent years, revisionist neo-liberal scholars have begun painfully to abandon universalism, and now believe that 'equality' can only be achieved on the basis of 'difference'. Even practicing peace-makers in Israel, such as Daphna Golan, have confessed their confusion over universalism and particularism: 'On the one hand, my work in the human rights movement is based on universal norms of justice and an ideology which stresses that each person, regardless of nationality, deserves basic dignity and rights superseding nationalism; . . . but . . . I have come to the conclusion that the only viable political solution is to draw a clear border between an Israel and a Palestinian state' (1997: 76). However, merely 'exposing the parochialism of universality', argues Fredrick Cooper (1997), 'leaves a fundamental issue on the table.' Cooper writes, 'an anti-universalist argument allows no possibility for dialogue about moral issues across cultural borders (1997: 427). So we are still left with an impasse. What is the way out?

The main thrust of this paper is to show that issues of universalism/multi-culturalism apply within socialist states as well, a terrain toward which people have previously looked mainly in terms of hegemony/resistance. I have shown that 'the state' has its own dilemmas. It is not just a juggernaut. There are two messages in this paper. The first is that the underlying oppression by the colonial system is not simple. The second is that which exists in different forms in different societies. Inner Mongolia is a story of a majority/minority ethnic colonial situation, too. I have, however, tried to show that 'colonialism' is part of the sociopolitical system (socialism) and must be viewed in terms of its mutually

conflicting concepts, which are nevertheless the tools to *think the political*. It does not lie in superficial racial or ethnic conflicts *per se*. Given the heterogeneity of class and ethnicity documented in this paper, how can a post-colonial critic, especially one of a Marxist bent, represent class or ethnicity, singularly or in combination, without doing injustice to one or another?

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## Notes

- 1 *Tongyi zizhi* was a slogan in Inner Mongolia until 1957. The influence of this unified autonomy was such that many minorities started to emulate the Inner Mongolian example. The 1957 Qingdao conference on the nationality question devoted considerable ammunition to condemning alleged territorial expansion of ethnic minorities (see Wang, 1958/ 1971).
- 2 In both Mongolian and Chinese, nation and nationality are not distinguished; both are covered by one phrase, *ündesten* in Mongolian or *minzu* in Chinese. In this text, I use nationality to designate the status of the Mongols when under CCP control and, nation when their status was not entirely clarified before 1947.
- 3 The current name, Inner Mongolia in 1947 committee of the CCP, was adopted in 1954. The IMPRP was disbanded, and most of its members joined the CCP. Or the Communist youth league.
- 4 Of the 121 members of the Congress (*canyihui*) set up in 1947, 96 were Mongols, 24 Chinese and one Hui (Hao (ed.), 1991: 19).
- 5 Dirlik goes beyond simply debunking unequal relations between nations. He argues that a liberated nation very often develops its own cultural hegemony whereby its internal inequality is legitimized. Dirlik thus suggests an approach that smacks of Mao's continuing revolution: to analyse the unequal relations within a society to make it an ideal one (Dirlik, 1987). It appeared that reality was more messy than any class theory could handle. What characterizes Inner Mongolia is its hybridity, ideological and ethnic entanglement.
- 6 According to statistics from Joo Uda League, in 1946 the League had 1.43 million head of livestock. The number dropped to 0.93 million head by 1948, a loss of a third (Hao (ed.), 1997: 583).

- 7 His points were embodied in a document issued by the Nationality Affairs Commission and approved by the government on 15 June 1953. 'Neimenggu ji Suiyuan, Qinghai, Xinjiang deng di Muqu Muye Shengchan de Jiben Zongjie' in Ulanhu (1990).
- 8 One was 'Suiyuan Sheng Mengqi Tudi Gaige Shishi Banfa', another 'Guanyu Mengmin Huafen Jieji Chengfen Buchun Banfa', in Neimenggu Danwei Zhengce Yanjiushi and Neimenggu Zizhiqiu Nongye Weiyuanhui (eds) *Neimenggu Xumuye Wenxian Ziliao Xuanbian*, 2, (Huhhot: internal publication, 1987).
- 9 By April 1956, 91.3 per cent of peasant households had joined elementary or advanced cooperatives, of which seven were pure Mongol, and 293 mixed (Tumote, 1987: 207).
- 10 The North China Bureau was one of the six regional bureaus of the party whose power increased in the aftermath of disasters associated with the great leap forward. One of the concerns of the North China Bureau was to find ways to feed the hungry by increasing agricultural output. One approach favoured by the Bureau was to reclaim pastureland, which was deemed wasteland. As the second secretary of the Bureau, Ulanhu resisted the Bureau's penetration into Inner Mongolia. A concerted effort was then made by the North China Bureau leadership to undermine Ulanhu's authority in Inner Mongolia by cultivating loyalty from discontented Chinese leaders and even some Mongol leaders.
- 11 See '“Wulanfu Wangchao” de Suoying – Guanyu “Dangdai Wangye” Wulanfu zai Xiaoyingzi Dadui Dagao Zibenzhuayi he Fengjian Zhuayi Fubi de Diaocha Baogao' (1967), *Wen'ge Ziliao*, 27.

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