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# State Service, Lineage, and Locality in Hulun Buir

## **Disciplines**

Arts and Humanities | East Asian Languages and Societies

## **Comments**

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## STATE SERVICE, LINEAGE AND LOCALITY IN HULUN BUIR

 Christopher P. Atwood

In teaching Mongolian history to graduate and undergraduate students, I will at some point have to give a general survey of Mongolia—Inner and Outer—within the Qing 清 empire. The process of learning about banners, zasags, ambans, leagues and so on is, as a rule, painful, but I have learned to brace myself for the inevitable moment when I must tell my students that such a general description is still in fact a gross-over-simplification. There was not a general banner system, but rather two quite different banner systems: the Eight Banners of the imperial garrisons, and the autonomous Mongol banners of the Mongolian plateau. Thus Mongols within the Mongol “Eight Banners” were quite different legally and socially from the Mongols of the autonomous banners in greater Mongolia itself. Even within the latter, Khalkha’s 86 banners differed in organization and status from the 49 banners of Inner Mongolia’s six leagues, while each banner ruler had his own title and rank. Finally, to complete the confusion, there is the presence of strange hybrids in Chakhar and Hulun Buir, territorial and semi-autonomous, but part of the Eight Banners system. The fact that in Hulun Buir there were four to five different separate peoples all using Manchu—the spoken language of none of them—adds the *coup de grâce* to the confusion.

This multiplicity of organizations under the term “banner” strikingly illustrates the Qing empire’s reconciliation of a deeply personalised particularity and universal rule through an architectonic structure of legal rights, titles, sumptuary laws and ritual. While this diversity of rights/rites has been interrogated for its complicity in later ethno-national identities, its central focus at the time was not identity but loyalty. To put it differ-

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A note on transliteration: In the footnotes, I have used the standard transcription system for the Mongolian language, which is based on thirteenth-century pronunciation. In the text, however, I have transcribed Mongolian more in line with modern pronunciation, as well as using more familiar English spellings such as Barga and Hulun Buir, rather than Bargo or Kōlōn Buyir.

<sup>1</sup> See Christopher P. Atwood, "Worshipping Grace: The Language of Loyalty in Qing Mongolia," *Late Imperial China* 21.2 (December 2000): 86–139, and James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Hulun Buir is here defined as it was from 1732 to 1949, to mean the largely steppe area between the Greater Khinggan Range to the east and Lakes Hulun and Buir in the west. The forested Daur and Ewenki lands on the western slopes of the Khinggan, the former Butha or Naun Muren area, were only merged with Hulun Buir in 1949. It is this combined area which is now Hulun Buir municipality.

ently, the issue was not so much the horizontal relationship between persons placed within the same ethno-legal category as it was the vertical relationship of service devoted to the Qing emperor who embodied the state. This vertical relation was then plotted in a spatial and chronological metaphor of "inner" (those who joined the Great Enterprise earlier and voluntarily), and "outer" (those who joined later and under compulsion). To be sure, this diversity of services was overlaid with a single language of striving and loyalty found throughout the empire, and the Qing emperors gloried in their belief in their own impartiality between near and far.<sup>1</sup> Yet the particularity of service shows that some questions we frame today as being to do with ethnic identity had their origin in issues of state service.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the status of Hulun Buir (Mong.: Khölön Buir) became one of the central issues of the "Mongolian Question."<sup>2</sup> Situated at the corner of Russia, Inner Mongolia, Outer Mongolia and Manchuria, and crossed by the Russian-controlled Chinese Eastern Railway, Hulun Buir was obviously a strategic area. At the same time it was inhabited by a diverse native population whose unity could not be underwritten by common history or ethnic markers such as language. They included speakers of Mongolian dialects (New Bargas, Old Bargas, Öölöd) and a strikingly aberrant Mongolic language (Daur) and two different Manchu-Tungusic populations (Solon Ewenkis and Orochens). To complicate matters, the Dairs, Ewenkis and Old Barga were tightly linked administratively into eight Solon banners, and frequently intermarried. The lifestyle of most of these peoples was based on Mongolian-style pastoral nomadism, but the written *lingua franca* was Manchu.

Under the Qing, the people of Hulun Buir were organized into a hybrid banner system mixing some of the features of the Eight Banner system with those of the autonomous banner system. Linguists have noted that they spoke languages or dialects of both the Mongolic and Manchu-Tungusic families. That of the Bargas was dialectologically close to the Buriat Mongolian of Russia, but when actual Buriat refugees migrated to Hulun Buir in 1918, together with some Khamnigan Ewenki, they remained separate from their Barga hosts, legally and socially. Yet despite the ethnographic diversity, the Hulun Buir bannermen had close connections to each other, solidified by frequent inter-ethnic marriage within the banner community (particularly between Solon Ewenkis and Dairs) and a common administration under the Deputy Lieutenant Military Governor in the city of Hailar.

From the late nineteenth century, local Hulun Buir scholars debated whether their identity was Manchu, Mongol, or a *tertium quid*. From 1912 to 1949, several pan-Mongolian movements demonstrated the importance of the constituency, hoping for union with the Khalkha Mongols of Outer

Mongolia. At the same time, Hulun Buir's connection with Inner Mongolia (usually defined as the six leagues) remained ambivalent, even when those ties were encouraged by outside forces.<sup>3</sup> The genealogical metaphor at the base of Mongolian ethnicity in Inner and Outer Mongolia threatened to exacerbate the rivalries between ethnic groups in an area that had used ethnicity for classification but not for unification.<sup>4</sup> The final nationality (*minzu* 民族) definitions ratified in 1957 divided the Daur, Ewenkis and Orochens as separate nationalities, but left the Barga and the immigrant Buriats as a part of the Mongols. These definitions remain controversial to this day.

Yet the competing markers used to argue for rival identities all had their origin in the Qing state's formation of Hulun Buir as a garrison community. Hulun Buir's separate identity as a directly administered group, 'inner' in comparison to the autonomous 'outer' Mongol banners, lay in the area's designated position within the Qing hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> As part of that position, their land had been at first a gift of the Qing monarchy, granted to the several Hulun Buir banners as a reward for service. Likewise the lineages and ancestries traced by nationalists, which were eventually used to break up the Hulun Buir people into numerous nationalities, had in the beginning been intended not as expressions of bottom-up ethnic identity, but rather as compliance with the Qing moralists' identification of patrilineage as the proper mode of social organization.

The Qing resettlement of Hulun Buir began in 1732 with the resettlement of Butha Solons onto Hulun Buir territory.<sup>6</sup> The Butha Solons consisted of three separate ethno-linguistic communities: the Solons proper or Ewenkis, the Daur, and the Old Barga. The Solon Ewenkis and the Daur had, since the late sixteenth century at least, been closely associated with each other as moieties (intermarrying halves) of a single political entity along the northern Amur Valley in the present Russian Far East. This close connection between the Daur and the Ewenkis prevented any specifically language-based identity gaining purchase until it was imposed by the state in the 1950s. In 1734, a body of Bargas called New Bargas were transferred from the Outer Mongolian Khalkha territory (where they had been under the rule of the nobility) to Hulun Buir. Their relation to the Old Barga was ambivalent. The dialects were relatively close and they shared some family names, but the New Bargas had considerably more Khalkha influence in their folk culture (as seen, for example, in their dress). The New Bargas and the Solons (in the broad sense) formed the two halves of Hulun Buir, to some degree rivals for primacy within the region. Small in number and secondary in influence were the Öölöds, a body of Zünghars who had surrendered to the Qing in 1697 and were resettled in Hulun Buir in 1732.

A striking feature of Hulun Buir official and intellectual life was the dominance of the Manchu language. For members of the Eight Banners,

<sup>3</sup> Jirim, Josotu, Juu Uda, Shiliin Gol, Ulaanchab and Yekhe Juu. The areas of Chakhar and the Höhhot Tümed (both administered as part of the Eight Banners system) and the far western special autonomous banners of Ejene and Alashan were generally treated as part of Inner Mongolia in the twentieth century despite their somewhat different status.

<sup>4</sup> See especially Munkh-Erdene Lhamsüren, "The Mongolian Nationality Lexicon: From the Chinggisid Lineage to Mongolian Nationality," forthcoming in *Inner Asia* 8 (2006).

<sup>5</sup> 'Inner' versus 'outer' had many different levels in the Qing hierarchy. What were called "Inner" and "Outer" Mongolia were both composed of "outer" (autonomous) Mongol banners compared to those banners in the Eight Banners system garrisoning China proper (Manchuria, and areas like Hulun Buir). Among these "outer" Mongol banners, Inner Mongolia's banners were called the "inner rulers" (*dotogadu jasag*), while the Mongol banners of Outer Mongolia, Kökenuur, and Xinjiang were "outer rulers" (*gadagadu jasag*).

<sup>6</sup> The current territory of Hulun Buir had been settled by Khorchins in the sixteenth century. By the mid-seventeenth century, some of these had moved south to what was later Jirim territory in eastern Inner Mongolia, and others were settled in Ulaanchab in southwest Inner Mongolia, leaving Hulun Buir temporarily vacant, at least of the formerly predominant groups.

<sup>7</sup> On the importance of such fundamental images in the articulation of Neo-Confucianism, see Donald J. Munro, *Images of Human Nature: A Sung Portrait* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988, p.22–41).

Manchu was the daily administrative language, but not for the ‘outer’ or autonomous banners of Inner and Outer Mongolia. Moreover, biographical materials suggest that relationships between teacher and students were one of the main structuring features of Hulun Buir political life, again more so than in the autonomous banners where hereditary aristocracy played the most powerful role. The result was a Manchu-language literary-didactic culture that lasted almost whole right up until 1949, despite the defection of writers like Merse (Guo Dafu) ... the famous Hulun Buir Daer intellectual to the Chinese journalistic idiom. While most of this Manchu tradition has been made available in printed versions only in Mongolian translation, what has been preserved shows the powerful role in Hulun Buir identity of basic cosmological concepts—Heaven, Earth, and Man; Mountains and Lakes, Trees and Rivers—transmitted as aphoristic wisdom.<sup>7</sup> This powerful awareness of the natural world around them fitted not only the Neo-Confucian conceptions transmitted in elementary forms by the Manchu literary tradition, but also the situation of a multi-ethnic population isolated in an unusually rich area.

Yet the inhabitants of Hulun Buir were also strongly aware that they were immigrants, newcomers, resettled in 1732–34 on land that had previously had different inhabitants. They had been placed there to serve the Qing state, and the duty of state service remained the dominant conception of political life among the Hulun Buir literati up to the New Policies of the early twentieth century and a powerful alternative up through the 1940s. With the disillusionment of the New Policies and Mongolia’s independence in 1911, Hulun Buir thinkers entered into a search for new objects of loyalty and belonging. Many transferred their loyalty from the Qing empire to the newly independent governments of Mongolia, expressing their loyalty to either the Buddhist theocratic ideology of the 1911 Restoration or the populist revolutionary ideology of 1921.

Bitter experience with failed pan-Mongolist movements, however, brought into being a new autonomous Hulun Buir identity, one that redefined the previous vertical loyalty to the Qing empire as a horizontal loyalty both to the ancestral legacy of over two hundred years of settlement in Hulun Buir and to the regional environment itself. A few writers, including the multi-talented Merse, rejected the Manchu literary tradition and made their peace with Hulun Buir as a part of the Republic of China, while preferably maintaining an autonomous status. Yet, until 1949, Merse’s redefinition of the issue entirely in secular, horizontal terms proved less persuasive than the reconstructed regional loyalty expressed in classic Neo-Confucian images. By 1945, this local loyalty was underpinning the attempts of the region’s leaders to maintain Hulun Buir as a separate land, even a nation—one that would merge with the larger Mongolian community only on its own terms.

### Güberi 古柏禮 (1831–90) on Hulun Buir

Güberi of the Dalanggud family name was the son of a *sumu* captain, and from 1856 on was himself successively *sumu* captain, commandant general of the New Barga Left Banners, and frontier commissioner for the Mohe and Qiqian areas charged with closing the frontier against Russian gold-miners.<sup>8</sup> His father, Dorjijab, had arranged for his education, inviting the local savant Gernibatu to teach him Manchu and Mongolian in his seventh year, the lama Jibdzanggombo to teach him Tibetan in his sixteenth year, and the Shanxi schoolmaster Li Tang to teach him Chinese in his twentieth year.<sup>9</sup> His writings, exclusively in the Manchu language, show a love for easily remembered aphorism, a special interest in calendrical systems, and a thorough familiarity with both the Qing's systematic works of colonial ethnography and historiography and the documentary history of the settlement of Hulun Buir.

Güberi's vocabulary distinguished carefully between groups of people on the one hand and sovereign states on the other. Güberi used the term "tribe" or people (Manchu *aiman*) indiscriminately for all people-groups, regardless of their size, whether Mongols, Russians, or the Barga (a tribe within the tribe of Mongols).<sup>10</sup> While the Russians as a people or the "people of the modern tribes" (that is the currently powerful European nations) were referred to as a tribe, with their own distinct religion and calendrical system,<sup>11</sup> they were also—as states outside of Qing control—referred to as *gurun* (Mongolian translation *ulus*) or country/empire.<sup>12</sup>

To Güberi, his Barga people were first and foremost only a component of the multi-national Qing empire. He praised "our great Daiching empire" as a land where "ten thousand chariots have but a single road, and the ten thousand types of men found in all four seas are included within the brilliant net of the great empire."<sup>13</sup> All of these people were properly distinguished according to the three teachings (the Buddha's teaching, Laozi's 老子 teaching and literary teachings), each of which, he emphasized, had its own founder and calendar dated therefrom.<sup>14</sup> This multinational empire he temporally identified with the successive dynasties of China from the three sovereigns (*San Huang* 三皇) to the Qing. Identifying the Qing with China, he deplored how among the "Mongol tribe beyond the Great Wall" the Chinese books explaining the successive dynasties were unknown, although the Mongols and the Tanguts (that is Tibetans) had their own dating of the Buddhist religion, based on the succession of 60-year cycles. This view of his own land as a peripheral part of the great Qing empire was accentuated by his occasional use of the term *Zhongyuan* 中原 ("Central

/at any time, and 100 men in reserve.

<sup>9</sup> Biographical data from the preface of Dalanggud Güberi, ed. Khuwasai Dugarjab, *Olan Mong-golcud-un ugeki-yi temdeglegesen bicig orosiba* [A book recording the origin of the various Mongols] (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 1989), pp.1–2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.260.

<sup>12</sup> In this context, the word "tribe" must be emptied of its anthropological, "kin-based society" baggage. Chinese *bu* 部, Mongolian *aimag*, and Manchu *aiman* are standard translations of each other in Yuan and Qing-era material, and refer primarily to social groups seen as units under a single leader (that *bu* is used for military units in Chinese is not an accident). In the Qing, *aimag/aiman* were used for the various sub-ethnic groups among the Mongols, translating Chinese *bu*. These can be referred to as "tribes" only in the same sense that, for example, Bavarians are considered a "tribe" of Germans, or New England Yankees a "tribe" of Americans. Güberi's use of *aimag* for greater and smaller units indiscriminately recalls that of *ulus* in pre-Qing writings; see Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism, and the State in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), pp.17–39.

<sup>13</sup> Though it is from Chinese Da Qing "great Qing," Daiching also comes into Mongolian as a word; its meaning is enhanced by the (chance) similarity to the Mongolian daichin "martial" as an adjective. Güberi, *Olan Monggolcud-un ugeki-yi temdeglegesen bicig orosiba*, p.25. The reference to 10,000 chariots having a single road is a cliché based on the unification of chariot axle widths under the Qin dynasty.

<sup>14</sup> On Mongol and Qing calendars, see Johan Elverskog, "Mongolian Time Enters a Qing World," in *Time and Temporality in the Ming-Qing Transition*, ed. Lynn Struve (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), pp.69–88.

<sup>8</sup> The *sumu* was a small militia unit in the banner system. It was (on paper) a unit of 150 /households, headed by a *janggi* or captain, responsible for keeping 50 men on active duty

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Güberi, *Olan Monggolcud-un ug eki-yi temdeglegsen bicig orosiba*, pp.256, 259.

<sup>16</sup> See the list in *ibid.*, pp.304–311.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.260. On the growing importance of Shambhala as a defender of embattled Buddhist orthodoxy, see Elverskog, *Our Great Qing*, pp.140–2, 144.

<sup>18</sup> Güberi, *Olan Monggolcud-un ug eki-yi temdeglegsen bicig orosiba*, p.259. See his poem, “A Dream of the Rolling Wheel,” on pp.277–9; he quotes the first verse in the preface to his “Record of the Lineage and Origin of the Many Mongols” at 26.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.25–26.

Plain”) or *Zhongguo* 中國 “Middle Kingdom” for China.<sup>15</sup>

This same contrast of administrative identity and tribal origin was at work within Hulun Buir itself. Hulun Buir was a geographical and administrative unit created and maintained solely by the Qing, but the Barga—more specifically the New Barga—were Güberi’s own people. Thus his own works covered separately the documentary record of Qing military, frontier and administrative measures taken in Hulun Buir, while the writings of others traced the origins of the region’s constituent tribes or peoples. Under the Qing, Hulun Buir’s Deputy Lieutenant Governors were virtually all Manchus from Beijing or Manchuria, with only an occasional Daur from Qiqihar or Butha thrown in, and this militated against a sense of the peoples in Hulun Buir forming a single community.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Güberi’s sense of the Qing as an multi-ethnic empire was far more true for Hulun Buir’s daily life than for many other areas of the empire.

Güberi was somewhat ambivalent about the validity of ethnic and religious diversity. He believed in the “three teachings” idea (that the Buddha’s teaching, Laozi’s teaching, and literary teachings all had a positive place), yet like most adherents of this viewpoint he thought deviant forms of religion were best abolished. Reviewing the Chinese novel *The Journey to the West* (Xi you ji 西游記) he speculated that halting shamanistic teaching and establishing Buddhism as the one religion in the same way that Xuanzang 玄藏 and Sun Wukong 孫悟空 (Pilgrim Monkey) had repressed evil cults in the novel would be quite easy, yet he wondered where, in a secluded place like Barga, he could find such a harmonious duo. The scientific miracles of the modern nations raised his hopes that the hidden Buddhist kingdom of Shambhala’s magical struggle to suppress the evil magic of demons and return all to the “central way” might some day be fulfilled.<sup>17</sup> Yet in poems he reflected on the ever-changing nature of human life, and in his “Criticism of the Three Teachings” he counseled resignation to the existence of erroneous currents within these teachings:

It seems that a being in one place producing and transmitting a single type of custom is in the beginning wonderfully helpful, yet in the end, as the currents diversify further and bring along evils in their wake, what is the use of saying in criticism that men drive the tiger out by the front door only to let the wolf in through the back door? We will all roll in the world’s red dust together.<sup>18</sup>

Yet among his own people, despite their differing calendar and religion, he worried that “the tribes and sorts being crowded promiscuously together might in later generations even find their lineage obscured and their origin forgotten.”<sup>19</sup> For this reason he wrote his history of the origin of the Mongols from the Tang onwards based largely on the Manchu translation of the *Outlines of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* (Zizhi tongjian gangmu 資治通鑑綱目), the arranged biographies of the Qing genealogical register (*Iledkel sbastir*), and other official sources, so



that “our Barga tribe ... might know a little what their origin is,” that is, might properly appreciate their cultural diversity.<sup>20</sup> This properly trained cultural diversity was one solely transmitted by patrilineal descent. Güberi thus ignored the links of common Siberian pattern of preferential marriage ties and moiety organizations, the considerable evidence of heterogeneity of different ethnic groups such as the New Barga, and the similarly strong evidence that much of the family or clan organization was not ancient at all but had been imposed by the Manchu banner system.<sup>21</sup> While his loyalty to the Qing was notably multi-ethnic, it was a multi-ethnicity formed by Neo-Confucian ideas of proper lineage formation, based solely on common descent along the male line.

To inculcate this properly ancient and patrilineal cultural diversity, Güberi wrote a “Record of the Lineage and Origin of the Many Mongols” (among whom the Barga were one part) together with a “Book of the Lineage and Origin of the Three Tribes of Hulun Buir.” The “three tribes” he generally divided, following the larger administrative divisions, as the Solon (in the broad sense), the (New) Barga, and the Öölöd, but sometimes as the Barga (Old and New), Daurs, and Solon (Ewenkis, in the narrow sense). In any case, these tribes differed in origin: the Barga he traced to the Tang 唐 records (where they appear as Bayegu 拔野古), the Daurs to the Kitans of the Liao 遼, the Solon to the Murong 慕容 and Tuoba 拓跋, and the Öölöd to the western Mongols under Esen.<sup>22</sup> The Barga tribe itself was divided into several “sorts” (Manchu *duwali* or Mongol *nam*).<sup>23</sup> He had some ethnographic curiosity, citing a Qing memorial that identified the Old Barga and Solon Ewenkis as nomads used to living in tents and the Daurs as sedentary people. Furthermore, he questioned Russian border officials about the Buriat relatives of the Barga and the Khamnigan relatives of the Solons.<sup>24</sup> In general, however, his normative model of cultural diversity discouraged great interest in the real religious and social lives of the more parochial Hulun Buir residents.

Güberi’s ethnic identity as Barga and his administrative identity as a Hulun Buir man were explicitly linked in two poems: one dedicated to the cult of the mountain Sümbür and the other on the history of the Barga. Written for the imperially-sponsored mountain cult, the poem to Mount Sümbür brings together the many themes of Güberi’s work. He envisions the land of Hulun Buir as an imperial court, with Mount Sümbür as the emperor, Buir Lake as a minister, Orshon River as his mount, the river’s turquoises and pearls as his saddle, and Güberi himself as an officiant receiving the decrees of Indra through the interpreter swans. The mountain evinces traces of many peoples (*olan ugsag-a aimagtan*), yet from 1740 was the site of sacrifices and the three manly games carried on by “my ancestors.”<sup>25</sup> Mention of ten years of trouble from “bandits” (ending in 1882, and referring to Russian gold miners) and guarding against “jealous enemies” underline the dangers surrounding this “joy of men and horses,”

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.26.

<sup>21</sup> See David Sneath, *Changing Inner Mongolia: Pastoral Mongolian Society and the Chinese State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.204–210. The people of Hulun Buir call their surnames *bala*, a Manchu word which is translated as *obog* in Mongolian.

<sup>22</sup> On the Barga (Barghu) and Bayegu, see Güberi, *Olan Monggolcud-un ug eki-yi temdeglesen bicig orosiba*, pp.40, 111; Daurs, see pp.112–3; Öölöd, p.113, Solons, pp.112, 185. Interestingly, Güberi identified the Tibetans not only with the Western Xia 西夏, but before that with the Tujue 突厥 (Turks) of the Tang.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp.92, 111, 112, 184.

<sup>25</sup> The three manly games are wrestling, archery, and horse-racing. They were regularly performed at all Mongolian summer festivals, regardless of the occasion, whether sacrifices to cairns (*oboos*), libations of first fruits of fermented mare’s milk, or religious ceremonies honoring incarnate lamas (*dansbug*). Since 1921 they have become part of the secular, national day celebrations in Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, and other Mongol lands.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.281. The following twelve lines in the published version were clearly added later, probably by a pupil or successor. In translating *öreng-un tala* (green-grassed steppe), I have followed Güberi's note on p.47 where he reads *öreng*, found in certain historical records of the Barga, as being a variant of *öleng* (soft grass, lawn).

while contrasts between the “four tribes of Khalkha” who call the mountain Khüiten Khargatu (“Cold Peak with *Kharga* Mushrooms”) and the “eight tribes of Barga” (that is the eight banners of New Barga) who call it Bayanmöngkhe (“Rich Eternal”) simultaneously situate the New Barga within a Mongol context and point out their differences from their Khalkha neighbors.

Likewise the poem on Barga history plays on the themes of imperial loyalty, a bountiful refuge in danger, standing guard against enemies, and differences with the Khalkha. Opening with an image of the emperor responding to the clamor of powerful dragons (*luu*, a pun on Locha, the common name for Russians) by issuing edicts as if moving chess pieces, it continues with images of a people moving through hard lands while guarding against evil enemies and bandits. Güberi then touches on the troubles of the Barga, without mentioning them by name, as they were being oppressed by the Chinggisid lords of the Khalkha before being transferred to Hulun Buir. In the last stanza, he finally names the Barga:

The Barga who had been vomited forth  
From the steppes of Lord Oidobdorji [a Khalkha noble]  
Found a cradle eternally safe  
In a rich and green-grassed steppe.<sup>26</sup>

While the Qing emperor emerges implicitly as a protector of the Barga against the Russians and the aristocratic Khalkha, the image of the emperor moving peoples like chess pieces on a board could hardly be comforting. Güberi illustrated how the Barga had suffered for the dynasty and come to rest in a rich and fertile land; but what security of tenure would they have on the emperor's chessboard?

### *Khalkha Regimes and Pan-Mongolian Ideologies: Theocratic, Nationalist, Chinggisid*

<sup>27</sup> The New Policies or “new administration” (instituted, Mong.: *shine jasag*) were begun by the Qing government as a comprehensive effort to modernize the empire's government and society. In Inner Asia, administrative conversion to Chinese-style counties and immigration of Han Chinese farmers were the centerpiece of the New Policies.

With the application of the New Policies (*xinzheng* 新政) to Hulun Buir from 1901, the bannermen were removed from their position as trusted bodyguards in 1908 and replaced by Han Chinese.<sup>27</sup> A program of colonization was initiated and the administration was placed under Han officials. In the end, the response was a successful rebellion led in the winter of 1911–12 by the Daur chief of the Öölöd banner, Shengfu 胜福, in support of the independence of Mongolia. From 1912 to 1915, Hulun Buir was an integral part of the new Khalkha, or Outer Mongolian, state.

The theocratic nature of the new government which Hulun Buir was joining resulted in a major shift in the rhetoric of independence. The new leaders addressed the new theocratic state in predominantly religious terms, speaking of themselves as praying to and receiving blessings and

teachings from the incarnate lama, the Jibzundamba Khutugtu. Previously non-political Buddhist connections were given new political significance. One *sumu* captain, in a letter accompanying a delegation to Khüriye (modern Ulaanbaatar), summarized the history of New Barga as being situated on the land by the Qing, but laid most stress on how a temple within the *sumu* territory had in 1904 received a patent on yellow silk from the Jibzundamba Khutugtu.<sup>28</sup> Daur, however, who were not Buddhist, sought other ways to link themselves to the new government. The Daur commander in Butha emphasized that his ancestors had long ago fought the Chinese Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644), fleeing with the heir apparent northeast from Yingchang 應昌 in Inner Mongolia when the last Yuan 元 emperor died there (in 1371), preferring to live by hunting rather than surrender. Moreover, his own Onon family name he linked to the Onon River, thus giving an ancestral link to the territory of the Khalkha.<sup>29</sup> All letters mentioned the change of heart in the Qing court that led it to trust the Han Chinese more than the frontier bannermen, but the merger with Mongolia accentuated the religious and ethnic differences between the Hulun Buir bannermen as each group tried to highlight, in different ways, its own special tie to the theocratic regime in Khalkha.

Russian diplomatic pressure, however, forced Hulun Buir to forgo unification in a pan-Mongolian state and accept the status of a special region with guaranteed autonomy in 1915. This Russian-guaranteed autonomy was eventually cancelled by the Chinese authorities in 1920, but from then on, Hulun Buir remained semi-autonomous under a deputy lieutenant military governor (*fudutong* 副都統). In contrast to the Qing, when these military governors were Manchu bannermen from outside the area, now they were always local Daur. Through controlling the local court (*fudutong yamen* 副都統衙門), the Daur rose to a position of dominance in Hulun Buir in the Republican period.

From 1922 on, revolutionary pan-Mongolism was also a major movement in Hulun Buir, one which was dominated by young Daur—often sons or nephews of the Daur officials in the local court and its subordinate offices. These young Daur formed the “Eastern Border People’s Party,” (*Doronadu Khizagar-un arad-un nam*) thus designating themselves as only the eastern frontier of the revolutionary Mongolia established by Soviet occupation in 1921. Many revolutionary petitions expressed these young Daur’s transference of their loyalties to the new government in Khüriye (soon renamed Ulaanbaatar). Recalling the religious language of the 1912 theocratic pan-Mongolian movement, Hulun Buir nationalists avowed that they “praised and revered the principles of your People’s Party and followed its teachings implicitly” and “had faith” in the liberation of the Mongolian race from the hands of aliens. Some young Daur, like Fumingtai 福明泰, eventually moved permanently to Mongolia or Moscow, never returning to their homeland. One petition in 1925, in

<sup>28</sup> Urgunge Onon and Derrick Pritchatt, *Asia’s First Modern Revolution: Mongolia Proclaims Its Independence in 1911* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), p.23; *Mongolyn ard түмний 1911 оны үндэсний эрх чөлөө, тусгаар тогтнолын төлөө тэмцэл: баримт бичгийн эмкбтгел (1900–14)* [The Struggle of the Mongolian people in 1911 for national liberation and independence: a collection of documents (1900–14)] (Ulaanbaatar: *Ulsyn kbewleliin gazar* [State Publishing House], 1982), pp.266–7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.268.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher P. Atwood, *Young Mongols and Vigilantes in Inner Mongolia's Interregnum Decades* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002), vol.1, pp.273, 166–7.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.275–7.

<sup>32</sup> Güberi, *Olan Monggolcud-un ug eki-yi temdeglegsen bicig orosiba*, pp.281–2. While these lines are not separated from the body of Güberi's work in Kh. Dugarjab's edition, the language and sentiments are completely foreign to any other works in Güberi's oeuvre and must be a later interpolation. The word *ündüsüiten*, as opposed to *ugsagatan* for "nationality," was introduced to Khalkha in 1921 and only became common in Inner Mongolia after 1945. See Christopher P. Atwood, "National Questions and National Answers or, How Do You Say *Minzu* in Mongolian?" in *Indiana East Asian Working Paper Series on Language and Politics in Modern China* 5 (July 1994): 36–73. Available at <[http://www.indiana.edu/~easc/pages/easc/working\\_papers](http://www.indiana.edu/~easc/pages/easc/working_papers)>.

which the revolutionaries asked to become Mongolian citizens, stated that "As we are Mongols like you, we do not feel right being considered foreigners." Parochial loyalties were explicitly to be subsumed under larger principles: "For the great principle, even kin may be destroyed."<sup>30</sup> For the Eastern Borders People's Party, as for Güberi and the pan-Mongolist leaders of 1912, the tradition of state loyalty and service checked excessive devotion to the parochial interests of Hulun Buir.

The revolutionary movement also prompted assertions of Hulun Buir's unique local situation. Traditionally, Hulun Buir had not been considered part of the "six leagues" of Inner Mongolia, an area defined by its autonomous banners under a Chinggisid nobility. Administratively, it was simply another bannerman district of Heilongjiang 黑龍江. Yet as Manchuria's own administration was transferred to civilian rule, and as the aristocratic institutions of Inner Mongolia underwent sporadic reform, Hulun Buir looked less and less Manchurian and more and more Inner Mongolian. Soon it was increasingly being treated as just another league. By 1930, it was common to speak of the "eight" leagues of Inner Mongolia, adding Chakhar and Hulun Buir to the traditional six. From 1924, Hulun Buir students in Mongolia had to compete with petitioners from Inner Mongolia's other regions for the limited amounts of aid coming from Ulaanbaatar. Soviet advisers in 1925 moved to merge Hulun Buir's party organization into a pan-Inner Mongolian revolutionary party. Fighting these trends, a petition of 20 January 1925, signed by twelve Bargas and Daur, emphasized how Hulun Buir was a uniquely favorable region to be given assistance, separated from the rest of Manchuria by the Great Khinggan Range, crossed by the Chinese Eastern Railway, and the site of a flourishing wool trade whose profits, once nationalised, could fund state-building. Yet precisely as they sought to highlight Hulun Buir's differences from Inner Mongolia, the petitioners emphasized that Hulun Buir was truly Mongolian land, and that its inclusion in China was "shameful for Mongolia with its great history famous throughout the world." The writers laid the cornerstone of their argument on the "heavenly principle and earthly rule" of self-determination, the history of Mongolia's previous claims to Hulun Buir, and Hulun Buir's fraternal ties to Mongolia.<sup>31</sup> Thus they insisted that Hulun Buir was not like other areas in Inner Mongolia, only to argue more persuasively for its immediate absorption into Khalkha.

A striking facet of the strength of pan-Mongolist ideology in Hulun Buir was the eager adoption of an ersatz Chinggisid identity by peoples who had never been part of the Chinggisid system. Some time in the twentieth century, probably after 1945, an anonymous writer added to the text of Güberi's poetic history of Barga a paeon to Hulun Buir as the land of "Brilliant Holy Chinggis Khan, ancestor of the Mongolian nationality," and as the "spring camp of his brother Qasar."<sup>32</sup> The question of the Daur's link to the Chinggisid era became a major issue among the Butha Daur,

across the Greater Khinggan Range from Hulun Buir. The Daur writer Guo Kexing 郭克興 in 1926 contended that the Daur were people branching off from the ancient Chinese (*huaxia* 華夏). More popular, however, was the view of the Butha Daur writer Altangata who, in his 1933 *A Study of the Daur Mongols* (*Dawoer Menggu kao* 達斡爾蒙古考) linked the Daur to the Mongol empire, etymologizing their name as a corruption of “Tatar.” Others preferred the identification with *dagakbu*, meaning “to follow,” making the Daur ‘followers’ of Chinggis Khan, while others played with the idea of the Daur as being actual descendants of Qasar, just like the Chinggisid nobility of Hulun Buir and Butha’s southern neighbor, Jirim league.<sup>33</sup>

### *Merse’s Modern Defense of Hulun Buir’s Special Identity*

According to Owen Lattimore, Merse was once an adherent to the “Daur as descendants of Qasar” theory. Yet Merse stood out from his early political associates by his unwillingness to sink his Hulun Buir identity into a larger pan-Mongolian identity. In September 1925, he spoke out strongly against the Soviet embassy’s merger of Hulun Buir’s covert party organization with the new People’s Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia.<sup>34</sup> As we have seen, pan-Mongolists also preferred to keep Hulun Buir separate from Inner Mongolia. Yet for Merse the new situation of Hulun Buir’s semi-autonomy under its own native officials, however accidental in origin, was a good worth preserving—not just against Chinese assimilation, but against pan-Mongolian ideologies as well. Already implicit in his actions during his time as a pro-Soviet, pro-Mongolian People’s Republic pan-Mongolist from 1922 to 1928, this support for a separate Hulun Buir identity within the larger Mongolian and Chinese constellations became explicit during Merse’s phase as an anti-Soviet, pro-Chinese reformer from 1928 to 1931.<sup>35</sup>

Merse published extensively in Chinese on both general Mongolian issues and about Hulun Buir. His *The Hulun Buir Question* (*Hulun Bei’er wenti* 呼倫貝爾問題), written in 1930 but not published until late 1931 in Shanghai, was the first systematic discussion of Hulun Buir’s history and prospects since the time of Güberi. Hulun Buir’s new situation, Merse’s differing perspective as a Daur, and his commitment to a secular version of modernity all influenced his presentation. In his survey of Mongolian history in *The Hulun Buir Question*, Merse emphasizes how “the region of Hulun Buir, one can say, was the Mongol nationality’s cradle where they first began their rise.”<sup>36</sup> Later it became “the foundation for Chinggis Khan’s founding of the state,” and he assigned it to Chinggis’s brother Qasar as the “best memorial to his high regard for Qasar.”<sup>37</sup> Yet Hulun Buir was not the real origin of the Mongol state, a role Merse assigned to the Khentii Mountains in Outer Mongolia.<sup>38</sup> Hulun Buir had often been under the control of

<sup>33</sup> See the discussion in Uraldyn E. Bulag, *The Mongols at China’s Edge: History and the Politics of National Unity* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), pp.148–56.

<sup>34</sup> Atwood, *Young Mongols and Vigilantes*, vol.1, pp.439–441.

<sup>35</sup> In the memorials Merse wrote himself, he preferred the name “Barga Mongol People’s Revolutionary Party” and never used the term “Eastern Border People’s Party,” despite it being the party’s official name. See *ibid.*, vol.1, p.440; vol.2, pp.835–36.

<sup>36</sup> Guo Daofu [Merse], *Hulun Bei’er wenti* [The Hulun Buir question] (Shanghai: Dadong Shu ju, 1931), p.3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.5, 6.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3. he saw the Onon and Kherlen rivers as two great outlets for the Mongols from this Khalkha homeland, leading directly into Buriat and Barga territory.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp.3–5. The numerous legends of the Qasarids' rivalry with the true Chinggisids may also have been in his mind here.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp.34–8.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>42</sup> See the chapter, "The Rise of the Barga People," in *ibid.*, pp.10–11; on the distinction of inner and outer eight banners, see p.12. Güberi mentions the theory that the New and Old Barga do not have a common origin in *Olan Monggolcud-un ug eki-yi temdeglesen bicig orosiba*, p.108.

<sup>43</sup> Guo, *Hulun Bei'er uenti*, pp.35–8.

people hostile to the Mongols of the Khentii Mountains: first the Tatars and then Chinggis's great rival Jamugha.<sup>39</sup> Merse thus treated the relationship between Hulun Buir and Outer Mongolia as one of interdependence and tension. Hulun Buir needed Mongolia as pasture land, and was attracted alternately to Mongolia's ideologies first of traditional Buddhist monarchy and then of a common people's republic; while Mongolia needed Hulun Buir as a defense buffer.<sup>40</sup> Ironically, whereas New Barga authors always stressed their historic grievance against the arrogant Khalkha lords, Merse saw the Buddhist New Bargas as people particularly sympathetic to Outer Mongolia, indeed hardly different from them at all.

This suspicion of the New Bargas reflected Merse's clearly Solon-Daur-centered view of Hulun Buir. Like Güberi, Merse in his literary works used only a single term for "people" or "nationality" (*minzu* 民族 in Chinese) to include both the Mongols and the various sub-groups thereof. Yet he had a much more flexible and less strictly patrilineal view of ethnic identity. Whereas Güberi always emphasized the three different "tribes" of Hulun Buir, Merse was sympathetic to the idea that all the Hulun Buir bannermen had really become one "Barga" people. Moreover, adopting a theory previously dismissed by Güberi, Merse believed the New Bargas were not really Bargas at all; rather it was the Old Bargas (part of what he pointedly reminded his readers were called the "eight inner banners" of the Solon) who were the "genuine Barga" and relatives of the Buriats, and who had anciently become associated with the Daur Mongols and the Solons before migrating west and "entering the ranks of the Manchu banners." The New Barga, or "outer eight banners," were simply ordinary Mongols who were attached to these real Bargas in 1734. Reversing Güberi's respect for Buddhism and disdain for shamanism, Merse wrote that the Old Barga and Solon-Daurs "pursued the original shamanism of the Mongols." Emphasizing their consonance with Mongol values, only a "minority" of Daurs (including his own family), he claimed, were not nomadic herders.<sup>41</sup> All Daurs, however, were considered by outsiders to be Barga, and all were treated by the Manchus according to the banner system, a system which was "the origin of the rise of the Hulun Buir Barga people"—something Merse plainly intended to be an expression that covered all Hulun Buir bannermen.<sup>42</sup>

For Merse, while the Hulun Buir people were right to demand a unified autonomy within China, they had too often been misguided by both ideological prejudices and ancestral loyalties in the past. In 1912, it was their feeling of weakness and their "monarchic thinking and bureaucratic habits" that made them all willing to join the theocratic Mongolia (aided, he implies, by the New Bargas' Lamaist predilections). After 1921, the popular government of revolutionary Mongolia exerted a similar fascination.<sup>43</sup> That Outer Mongolia's interests in Hulun Buir could be quite selfish was the burden of Merse's description of the failed 1928 pan-

Mongolian insurrection which had led to his own disillusionment with both the Comintern and the Mongolian People's Republic.<sup>44</sup> Thus Merse's history lesson contained the implicit moral: responsible Daur leadership, and not ideological enthusiasms or New Barga Lamaism, was the real defender of Hulun Buir's autonomy. Merse's American friend Owen Lattimore made this moral explicit in 1934 when he wrote of "such valuable elements as the Daur" being essential for the success of Mongol autonomy under Japan.<sup>45</sup>

While Merse has been an important and controversial figure in the subsequent history of Hulun Buir, his views have held less currency than those of others.<sup>46</sup> His rejection of the literary tradition of Manchu writing and his adoption instead of a Chinese journalistic style contributed to his fame in China but left him somewhat alienated from his homeland, as did his long-term residence outside Hulun Buir. While his vision of Hulun Buir as a separate star in a constellation of autonomous Mongolias was to prove widely popular, his rooting of this vision in a secular, modernist paradigm proved to be much less so. Future Hulun Buir thinkers would continue to place Hulun Buir identity in the context of cosmological spirituality and filial piety nurtured by the Manchu-language literary tradition.

### *Autonomous Hulun Buir, 1932 to 1949*

Despite the temporarily thrilling resistance of the Chinese generals Ma Zhanshan 馬占山 and Su Bingwen 蘇炳文 in Heilongjiang, Hulun Buir came under Japanese rule in 1932. Merse fled to the Soviet embassy hoping bygones would be bygones in the face of the Japanese threat, but was arrested as a counter-revolutionary and died in the Gulag. Until 1936, the Daur oligarchy maintained control over Hulun Buir, now renamed Khinggan North Province. In that year, the Japanese arrested twenty leading officials, mostly Daur, as Soviet spies and executed three of them, including Lingsheng 凌升, the provincial governor.

In place of the Daur, who had been seen by outsiders since the 1920s as being sympathetic to radicalism, the Japanese turned to the more "monarchist" New Bargas and selected the New Barga official Erkhimbatu 額爾欽巴圖 as the Khinggan North Province governor.<sup>47</sup> After the Soviet invasion, Erkhimbatu served as the head of the Hulun Buir Autonomous Government under Soviet-Mongolian Peoples Republic sponsorship, and as head of Hulun Buir League in the Chinese Communist-supported Inner Mongolian Autonomous Government from late 1947 to 1949, when he retired.

In 1945, Erkhimbatu found himself in a difficult situation. On the one hand, he desired unification of Hulun Buir with Mongolia, something

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp.27–30.

<sup>45</sup> Owen Lattimore, *The Mongols of Manchuria* (1934; reprint, New York: Howard Fertig, 1969), p.191.

<sup>46</sup> On the controversy over Merse in post-1949 Inner Mongolia, see Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge*, pp.157–76.

<sup>47</sup> Atwood, *Young Mongols and Vigilantes*, vol.1, p.139.

<sup>48</sup> See Tabuchi Yoko, “1945 ‘Monguru dokuritsu mondai’ o meguru Monguru Jinmin Kyōwakoku to Chōka Minkoku: Chō So yōkō dōmei jōyaku kara dokuritsu kōmin tōhyō e” [The dispute over the question of Mongolian independence between the Mongolian People’s Republic and the Republic of China in 1945: from the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance to the citizens’ plebiscite on independence] *Gendai Chōgoku Kenkyō* Research on modern China 11 (2002): 74–97; Christopher P. Atwood, “Sino-Soviet Diplomacy and the Second Partition of Mongolia,” in *Mongolia in the Twentieth Century: Landlocked Cosmopolitan*, ed. Stephen Kotkin and Bruce A. Elleman (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), pp. 137–61; Atwood, *Young Mongols and Vigilantes*, vol. 2, pp. 997–9.

<sup>49</sup> This memorial is cited in full in the text by Eldengtai (Eldengge) in *Bargu ayimag-un tobci teūke* [A short history of the Barga tribe], handwritten copy made on 15 March 1982, from a manuscript kept in the Inner Mongolian Academy of Social Sciences, pp. 20–42, at 20.

<sup>50</sup> See N.N. Poppe, ed., *Letopisei Khorinskikh Buriat* [Chronicles of the Khori Buriats], vol. 1, *Khroniki Tugultur Toboeva i Vandana Iumsunova* [Chronicles of Tugultur Toboev and Vandan Iumsunov], Trudy Instituta Vostokovedeniia, vol. 9 (Moscow: Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1935).

<sup>51</sup> See also Güberi, *Olan Mongolcud-un ug eki-yi temdeglesen bicig orosiba*, p. 46; Eldengtai, *Barguayimag-un tobci teūke*, p. 22. Eldengtai himself later cites Güberi’s list; see *ibid.*, pp. 45–6.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32–3.

which propagandists from the MPR had advocated during the first days of the war but which was now blocked by the recently ratified Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty. On the other, he insisted that the plans of some young people to emigrate from Hulun Buir and leave their land behind were misguided. Unification must, he insisted, involve the land as well as the people.<sup>48</sup> In this context he wrote a fascinating memorial to Ulaanbaatar, attempting to explain how the Barga were actually part of the Mongolian people, yet also how they had a separate identity as well—and also a history of grievance against the Khalkha.

He began the memorial by placing the Barga “tribe-race” (*aimag ugsaa*) firmly within the Mongol peoples or *obogtan*, a word that puts the Mongolian word for family name, *obog*, in the plural. Following Güberi, he linked the Barga to the Bayegu found in Tang dynasty records, thus giving the Barga a separate identity as old as the Mongols themselves.<sup>49</sup> Unlike Güberi, however, he also linked the Barga origins to the Barguzin Buriats and the Tümed, and to the legend of the origin of the eleven Barga peoples from eleven brothers—thus forming a complete and coherent genealogy of the Barga family names that was separate from, but linked by marriage to, the Mongols. This material was unknown to Güberi and was presumably taken from the Buriat chronicles, particularly that of Tugelder Toboev (c. 1795–c. 1880), and published by Nicholas Poppe in the interwar period in the Mongolian script and with Russian translation.<sup>50</sup> Thus whereas Güberi’s list of the New Barga family names included some, such as the Yüngshiyebü, which were of purely Mongolian origin, the family names in Erkhimbatu’s list are of purely Barga ancestry.<sup>51</sup>

The same desire to make it clear that the Barga have a separate identity from the Khalkha emerges in Erkhimbatu’s discussion of how the New Barga were taken from the Khalkha aristocrats by the Manchu authorities and stationed in Hulun Buir. He begins this account by assuring his Khalkha recipients:

There was no instance of the mutual friendship between the Khalkha and Barga people deteriorating or breaking up, but not only were the ruling nobles’ authority, legal punishments and requisitions very burdensome; even worse, they despised the Bargas and indulged themselves in hatred of them.<sup>52</sup>

Yet he followed this avowal of good relations with stories of how the Khalkha grand duke Janchubdorji cursed the Barga as “stupid oxen who nurse an evil mind,” and how the Barga in return cursed them in reply as “Khalkha who wear down their stupas and Buddha images with their kowtowing”—whereupon the Khalkha grand duchess squatted down and pissed on the ground before them to show her contempt, but the Barga replied that a woman is a symbol of childbirth and pissing fertilises the land, so they would certainly have a prosperous land.<sup>53</sup> The vividness of



these stories, collected from Barga folklore, overshadowed his brief and formulaic avowal of inter-ethnic Khalkha-Barga friendship. Despite his statement that only interfering foreigners had turned it into a fighting issue at the time of the battle of Khalkhyn Gol (1939), Erkhimbatu's treatment of the sensitive Khalkha-Barga border issue was even more explosive, making it clear that he agreed with the Japanese contention that the border ran along the river, rather than the Soviet-Mongolian contention that the border had been several miles east of it.<sup>54</sup> Despite his polite disavowal of conflict, Erkhimbatu clearly placed an independent—and quite anti-Khalkha—narrative at the center of Hulun Buir's identity.

The works of the prominent Daur intellectual Eldengtai 額爾登泰 (1908–1981) show that the New Barga-style “monarchist” view of Hulun Buir's past and future still retained its ability to convince, even among Daur. Eldengtai (Manchu name Eldengge) had studied at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow and the Central Party School in Ulaanbaatar and joined the fiasco of the 1928 pan-Mongolist movement. As with Merse, the futile bloodshed of the movement disillusioned him. In his 1949 *Short History of the Barga People* (Bargu aimag-un tobchi tetikhe), he already saw himself as an old fuddy-duddy, who at best was like an old fox who covers himself with the skin of a young tiger.<sup>55</sup> Even more than Güberi's, Eldengtai's style was pervaded by aphorisms and famous sayings and he defined history as the study of the deeds of state and religion (Buddhism) and the history of one's own ancestors.<sup>56</sup> Eldengtai cites in full the long memorial written by Erkhimbatu to the Mongolian government in 1945 as well as an extensive passage from Güberi.<sup>57</sup> Although his survey of Hulun Buir history was prepared at the behest of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Government, it was in this way a successor to the long tradition of Manchu learning in Hulun Buir which Merse had rejected in the 1920s.<sup>58</sup>

Like Güberi, Eldengtai was powerfully aware of the transience of human affairs, extending that transience explicitly to links between people and land. He wrote:

Although I am now advanced in years, were I to examine the Manchu-script histories preserved for many generations by my own ancestors, then Heaven and Earth are the home where the ten-thousand living beings reside, while Man is but a guest who moves on.<sup>59</sup>

He demonstrated this point by enumerating all the people who have successively inhabited Hulun Buir. Merse had done the same, but Eldengtai's focus is on transience, not on the perennial significance of Hulun Buir for Mongolia. Eldengtai saw the peoples stationed in Hulun Buir by the Qing as receiving the nourishing grace (*shime keshig-i khürtejü*) to live quietly on the rich land of Hulun Buir during the 217 years since the days of the Yongzheng 雍正 emperor 1723–35.<sup>60</sup>

The weapon that nations use to fight this transience is, for Eldengtai,

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp.35–7.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp.5–6.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp.20–42 and pp.42–58 respectively.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.15. Here, Eldengtai appears to be referring to a famous couplet from the Tang writer Liu Yuxi's *Loushi ming* (Inscription on a lowly dwelling). However, he did not acknowledge his source (either Liu's work itself or an intermediary text) and, of course, wrote in Mongolian, not Chinese. I would like to thank Geremie Barmé, editor of *East Asian History*, for identifying this citation of Liu Yuxi's lines.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp.7, 11; see also Zhu Xi's statement: "Where there is a root, the branch and foliage will naturally be lush," cited in Munro, *Images of Human Nature*, p.141. See Winston George Lewis, "The Cheng-kuan cheng-yao: A Source for the Study of Early Tang Government," MA thesis, University of Hong Kong, 1962, p.114.

<sup>64</sup> Eldengtai, *Bargu aymag-un tobci teüke*, pp.4, 9 and elsewhere.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.18

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.11.

history: "Now at this very time, the world's powerful countries are writing their own national histories [*ündüsün teükhe*], clearly in deep hopes of confirming the land their feet stand on and of remaining long there."<sup>61</sup> Citing the lines that even a mountain that is not high will be famous if it has spirits, and even a lake that is not deep will be famed if it has dragons, he states that it is knowledge of its own national history which will make even an obscure people such as the Barga famous like a spirit-protected mountain or a dragon-inhabited lake.<sup>62</sup> Elsewhere he compared forgetting one's history and expecting a country's stability to hewing a tree's roots or blocking a river's springs and still expecting them to flourish, borrowing a metaphor from the dialogues on government in the Tang-era *Essentials of Governance in the Zhengguan era* (*Zhengguan zhengyao* 貞觀政要).<sup>63</sup>

The use of the term "national" (*ündüsün*) is something new in Eldengtai. Probably borrowed from contemporary usage in the Mongolian People's Republic, it gave him a term to use above the *aimag* or *minzu* which Güberi and Merse had used for people-groups at all levels. Eldengtai always referred to the "tribes" of Hulun Buir as plural: "our various tribes [*aimag*] such as Solons, Daur, Barga and Öölöd" or "the people of our several tribes [*aimag*]."<sup>64</sup> Even so, these tribes together formed a nation (variously *ulus ugsaatan*, *ündüsüten*, or *izagur ündüsüten*) which had its own history, one that was separate from Mongolia or Inner Mongolia and rooted in its receipt of an ancient grant of land in Hulun Buir. Hulun Buir was already well known to foreign nations, but history would glorify its "tribes and banners" yet more.<sup>65</sup> Although he mentioned the liberation of Hulun Buir by the Mongolian People's Republic and also the request by the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Government to summarize Hulun Buir's history, his purpose in writing was to strengthen this separate nation of Hulun Buir, and not a pan-Mongolian cause:

At present, if our Hulun Buir people strive with a single mind and unanimous forces and diligently endeavor together to compose our national history, will we not march as equals with the other foreign nations, in ranks shoulder to shoulder, clasping hands, and solidify the freedom of our land?<sup>66</sup>

Thus more clearly even than Merse, Eldengtai built a strong sense of Hulun Buir as a nation among nations on a traditional proverbial rhetoric very reminiscent of Güberi's. The experience of ethnic continuity under rapidly and catastrophically changing regimes and the bitter experiences of Erkhimbatu and others with reliance on Mongolian promises in 1928 and 1945 had given the Barga-centered narrative, with its traditional centerpiece of stories of New Barga oppression in Khalkha, purchase even on the thinking of his Daur subordinates.

## Conclusion

Despite Eldengtai's optimism, 1949 marked the end of Hulun Buir as a separate national community. The Manchu language soon disappeared from the curriculum and the rapid integration into Inner Mongolia forced the Hulun Buir peoples to see themselves as only part of Inner Mongolia. Meanwhile the "nationality" (*minzu*) viewpoint of the 1950s introduced unaccustomed new divisions into the people of Hulun Buir. Not only the New Barga, but the Old Barga as well were confirmed as being just part of the Mongol nationality, while the Solons were split on the basis of language into a separate Daur nationality and a renamed Ewenki nationality. Each of these three nationalities was firmly linked to related peoples outside Hulun Buir, thus giving them a cross-cutting supra-local identity. Meanwhile Hulun Buir itself was merged with the Butha banners of Naun Muren in 1949, and with Khorchin-dominated Khinggan league in 1954. In 1969 this expanded Hulun Buir was broken up and transferred to Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces; with their return to Inner Mongolia a decade later, Hulun Buir was restructured as the traditional Hulun Buir area plus Naun Muren. In 2001, this Hulun Buir league was changed to a municipality, as part of the controversial administrative conversion movement in Inner Mongolia.<sup>67</sup>

Despite these upheavals, the old Manchu culture somehow survived into the 1980s, albeit in a new, almost purely Mongolophone fashion. When not suffering persecution in the Cultural Revolution, Eldengtai and his son Ardajab investigated Manchu roots for disputed terms and Hulun Buir locations for disputed place-names in the Mongolian classic *The Secret History of the Mongols* (Mongghol-un ni'ucha tobchiyan). The 1985 survey "Historical Origin of the Bargas" (*Barguchud-un teükben irelte*), written by Tübshinnima of the Galzuud family name, a late Cultural Revolution "worker, peasant, soldier" (*gong nong bing* 工農兵) class graduate of Inner Mongolia University, drew heavily on the writings of both Güberi and Eldengtai, both of whom he admired greatly. In the countryside and administrative towns and villages, native Barga still resent the Khorchin immigrants who play a disproportionate role in local administration.<sup>68</sup>

Certainly this adds up to much less than the autonomy once enjoyed in Barga. Perhaps the biggest change has been the break up of the intellectual and environmental prerequisites of the previous focus on Hulun Buir as the "joy of men and horses." Already around the turn of the twentieth century, the building of the Chinese Eastern Railway and the opening of gold mines in northern Hulun Buir had changed the area, although such economic change was something only Merse found himself able to incorporate into his view of Hulun Buir. Since 1949, the massive immigration of Chinese, the clear-cutting of the forests of the Greater Khinggan Range, the

<sup>67</sup> See Uradyn E. Bulag, "From Yeke-juu League to Ordos Municipality: Settler Colonialism and Alternative Urbanization in Inner Mongolia," *Provincial China* 7 (2002): 196–234.

<sup>68</sup> See Alexandra Marois, "The Squaring of the Circle: Identity and Changes of the Domestic Sphere among Mongolian Mobile Herders," paper presented at the "Annual Meeting of the Mongolia Society," 27–30 March 2003, New York City.

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opening of several massive coal mines, the expansion of farming, and the gradual fencing of the pastures have fundamentally reworked the human relationship to the environment, while materialist views of the world have eliminated the previous cosmological spirituality. Though the historical and geographical works of Hulun Buir's Manchu writers are now being republished in Mongolian translation (drawing on the long tradition of bilinguality in the area), environmental change, no less than the change in ethnic definitions and political context, has made obsolete the intellectual heritage from which they sprang.

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